

Brontë and the Bookmakers:
Jane Eyre in the Nineteenth-Century Marketplace

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Abstract

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Interactions with books—as historical objects, manuscripts, merchandise, and sacred scripture—were central both to Charlotte Brontë’s development as an author and to the formal structures of her novels. Yet, perhaps owing to her frequent characterization as a visionary or “trance” writer, Brontë and her writings have often been studied in ways removed from bibliography and the materiality of texts.

The following study shows how Brontë came to define literary art in opposition to “bookmaking,” or unscrupulous, profit-driven publishing and trade practices, which are satirically emulated in her early Glass Town and Angria writings. These extant artifacts—small manuscripts imitating printed books—provide new, important evidence about Brontë’s own attempts to “manufacture” literature that parodied (and perpetuated) the avaricious exploits of publishers, writers, and advertisers. Brontë’s turn from popular romance, often dated to her “Farewell to Angria,” originates in this prior engagement with the commercialization of literature, and consequently informs her reception of works by bestselling authors Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, as well as by her contemporary William Makepeace Thackeray.

Brontë's first novel, *The Professor*, was never published during her lifetime, in part owing to the ways in which it resisted mainstream publishing conventions. Her subsequent work, *Jane Eyre*, pursued an alternative form of "profitable reading." Crafted as a three-decker novel fit for sale to circulating libraries, *Jane Eyre* incorporates strands from two seemingly antithetical genres: popular romance and the moral tale of the evangelical tract. The inclusion of such discourse appealed to contemporary, mainstream readers, even while the dialogic nature of their critique designates Brontë's literature as one that stands apart from the mass market. Finally, the religious and philosophical concept of the Book of Nature and the analogy of painting "from life" provide important alternatives for Brontë to Mammon and the marketplace for fiction, allowing her to distinguish "original" art from derivative copies, or authentic literature from those books consumed as commodities.

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A Note on Texts and Sources

Scholarly editions of Charlotte Brontë's writing vary greatly in their rigor and comprehensiveness. In addition to working with Brontë's original manuscripts, I have primarily relied on the Clarendon Edition of *Jane Eyre*¹ and Christine Alexander's multi-volume work, *An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*.² When afforded the opportunity to study Brontë's original manuscripts, I have attempted to verify the basic information presented in Alexander's *Bibliography of the Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë*, including the date, content, and page size of individual manuscripts. In addition, I have tried to: date and identify the paper Brontë used, by examining watermarks, chain lines, and wire lines (when present); analyze the physical format of manuscripts, by examining their bindings and sewing structures, and by taking into consideration the likely size of the original sheet; describe design features, such as paratexts and ornaments; note any peculiar characteristics in the presentation of letterforms; and document any other bibliographical evidence that seems notable or useful for future study. This aspect of my research is still very much an ongoing project. I hope to produce a document containing these findings in the near future.

¹ The relative advantages and disadvantages of this edition are already familiar to many. See Bruce Harkness's review, "Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*, Jane Jack and Margaret Smith, eds." in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25, no. 3 (December 1970), to which Ian Jack and Margaret Smith responded a year later.

² Although indispensable for any Brontë scholar, Christine Alexander's edition of Brontë's early writings silently "corrects" Brontë's spelling, punctuation, line breaks, and justification, and, in this respect, should be used with caution.

Introduction

CHAPTER ONE. John Reed discovers that his cousin, Jane Eyre, has been reading his family's copy of Bewick's *History of British Birds*.¹ "I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves," John tells her, "for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years." He hurls the copy of Bewick at Jane's head. Bleeding, Jane confronts him: "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!" If we might liken words to ammunition, Jane's taste for ancient history reminds both us and her cousin that, while she might not own books herself, she is entirely capable of mastering their contents and of using them against her enemies. As Jane explains to her reader, "I had read Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, &c. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud" (7–8). We realize that Jane has not merely been reading Goldsmith, but also the character of her cousin, who seldom reads books at all, and who prefers to treat his family library as mere property, accumulated goods that serve as an index of his future personal wealth. John Reed is not a reader; John Reed does not *read*. In effect, Jane's reply has turned her cousin's weapon on him: though she is poor, she will master and reinterpret the books that he will merely own.

I begin with this famous and rather violent scene, because it readily calls to our attention Charlotte Brontë's preoccupation with the ambiguous nature of

¹ The following introduction has been adapted from my article, "Authors and Bookmakers: *Jane Eyre* in the Marketplace," which appeared in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 106.4 (2012).

books themselves: their forms are physical, while their reading and interpretation, much like Jane's silent "parallels," are intangible. Books are weapons of oppressor and oppressed alike—in this case, literally and figuratively—as well as of writers vying for power and prestige. While books can serve as a means of intellectual advancement, they are also, finally, property to be bought and sold, not unlike the slaves Jane likens herself to when she accuses her cousin of being a "slave-driver." And the marketplace for books is driven by profit, sometimes at the expense of providing readers with substantial content. This divide is meaningfully treated in the work of Charlotte Brontë: an ongoing battle of books that reflects competing views of books as commodities and as indices of literary, intellectual, and moral taste.

Most scholars of nineteenth-century British literature are strangers neither to Charlotte Brontë's works, nor to descriptions of books as they appear in her novels. Since 1857, biographers, editors, and critics alike have traced Brontë's development as an author along with the many influences that shaped her writings.² In recent years, critics have increasingly developed intertextual readings of Brontë's novels drawing on publications that she was known to have encountered, such as the annuals of the 1820s and '30s (e.g., the *Friendship's Offering* for 1829), issues of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Fraser's*

² Ever since its initial publication in 1857, Elizabeth Gaskell's biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, has been a seminal work not just for those studying Brontë's authorship, but also for standard studies of the careers of nineteenth-century female authors. These studies range from Elaine Showalter's highly influential feminist study, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) to more recent studies, including Linda H. Peterson's *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (2009).

Magazine, and—of course—Bewick’s *British Birds*.³ In addition, current studies have included interpretations that focus on scenes of reading and storytelling in *Jane Eyre*,⁴ and also reception histories, which trace and examine the afterlives of the Brontës’ writings through their various adaptations.⁵

Despite these notable studies, as of yet, no one has written a comprehensive publishing history of Charlotte Brontë’s work.⁶ This could be explained, at least in part, by the fact that the early ledgers maintained by Brontë’s publisher, Smith, Elder and Company, containing information about the initial publication of *Jane*

³ For readings of *Jane Eyre* and the annuals of the 1820s and ’30s, see Christine Alexander’s essay, “Educating ‘The Artist’s Eye’: Charlotte Brontë and the Pictorial Image,” in *The Brontës in the World of the Arts* (2008), or chapter five of Heather Glen’s study, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (2002). In the first chapter of her monograph *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller’s Audience* (1992), Carol Bock interprets *Blackwood’s Magazine* as a model for the Brontës’ early literary productions/performances. She also usefully explores the influence of *Fraser’s Magazine* on the Brontës in her essay, “Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser’s Magazine*: ‘Coming Forward’ as an Author in Early Victorian England,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, no. 2 (2001). Jane W. Stedman’s essay, “Charlotte Brontë and Bewick’s ‘British Birds,’” first appeared in *Brontë Society Transactions* 15 (1966), and it has been subsequently republished within the “Contexts” section of the third edition of the Norton Critical Edition of *Jane Eyre*, edited by Richard J. Dunn (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001). A touchstone for most readers of *Jane Eyre*, Bewick’s *British Birds* appears in countless other essays, but remains especially pertinent for critics studying Victorian visual and material culture. See, for example, Jane Kromm’s essay, “Visual Culture and Scopic Custom in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*,” published in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1998).

⁴ For instance, see Carol Bock’s *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller’s Audience* (1992), Leah Price’s section “Unread Books (*Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss*)” in *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (2012), or Antonia Losano’s “Reading Women/Reading Pictures: Textual and Visual Reading in Charlotte Brontë’s Fiction and Nineteenth-Century Painting” in *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, edited by Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley (2006).

⁵ Patsy Stoneman’s *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights* (1996) has been especially influential in this area, as has Lucasta Miller’s book, *The Brontë Myth* (2001).

⁶ Book-length publishing histories have been written on nineteenth-century authors contemporary with Brontë. Take, for example, Robert L. Patten’s excellent study, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (1978), or Peter L. Shillingsburg’s *Pegasus in Harness: Victorian Publishing and W. M. Thackeray* (1992). In contrast, those book historians who have worked on Brontë have tended to conduct studies with a more specialized focus. For example, see Cree LeFavour’s article “‘Jane Eyre Fever’: Deciphering the Popular Success of Charlotte Brontë in Antebellum America,” *Book History* 7 (2004).

Eyre, *Shirley*, and *Villette* most likely no longer exist.⁷ Even so, the fair copy manuscripts for these three novels survive, and are annotated in pencil with markup by the compositors who set the type for them. In addition to these materials, we have a vast body of literary manuscripts made by Brontë before the publication of *Jane Eyre*. Very little bibliographical (or paleographical or codicological) research has been conducted on these artifacts, despite their availability in publicly accessible research collections. Why is this the case, when we take into account Brontë's stature as a writer and also the rich opportunities that such materials-based research can afford?

D. F. McKenzie once noted that bibliography has “an unrivalled power to resurrect authors in their own time” (*Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* xix). As McKenzie writes, “it is the only discipline which has consistently studied the composition, formal design, and transmission of texts by writers, printers, and publishers; their distribution through different communities by wholesalers, retailers, and teachers; their collection and classification by librarians; their meaning for, and [...] their creative regeneration by, readers” (12).

Even so, a divide has for a long time existed between the work of literary critics and bibliographers. This was evident in 1958, when Fredson Bowers delivered his Sandars Lectures, “Textual and Literary Criticism,” at Cambridge

⁷ All of the Smith, Elder ledgers known to survive are currently held in the John Murray archive at the National Library of Scotland. The first record pertaining to the publication of *Jane Eyre* in the Smith, Elder ledgers there begins on 1 July 1853 with respect to the fourth edition of *Jane Eyre* (see 272 ledger MS 43200), carrying over a balance from O. F. Ledger folio 12, which is not present in the collection. When I conducted this research at the NLS in 2011, any earlier ledgers pertaining to the publication of Brontë's novels could not be traced.

University. At the beginning of his published lectures, Bowers characterizes literary criticism's relation to bibliographical and textual investigation as a "thorny subject, not from the point of view of bibliography but from the point of view of literary criticism" (1). Bowers argues that literary criticism should be "directly dependent" upon expert textual criticism, and he provides a rationale for why this is so, distinctly defining the basic duties of the textual critic (vii).⁸ However, it seems that the polemical tone of this and other similar critiques did not win bibliography many new friends among literary critics. Indeed, the problem persisted. In 1979, G. Thomas Tanselle noted in his address to the Bibliographical Society of America that "a gap often exists between the analytical bibliographer and the literary critic. Repairing this rift is an important task for the future; and because neither side is blameless, both will have to mend their ways" (548).

Jerome J. McGann began to address this "rift" in 1981, when he gave his talk, "Shall These Bones Live?," at the inaugural conference of the Society for Textual Scholarship (STS). That paper, which explored the polarization of literary criticism and bibliographical scholarship, laid the foundation for another conference: "Textual Studies and Their Meaning for Literary Criticism," which McGann subsequently organized at the California Institute of Technology in 1982. That meeting resulted in the collected volume *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation* (1985), in which McGann characterized the disconnect between

⁸ Bowers defines the "expertise of the textual critic" as required for four "basic situations": "(1) the analysis of the characteristics of an extant manuscript; (2) the recovery of the characteristics of the lost manuscript that served as copy for a printed text; (3) the study of the transmission of a printed text; and (4) the presentation of the established and edited text to the public" (vii–viii).

textual and literary studies as a “crisis in methodology” that stemmed in part from precisely the same division of labor and scholarly expertise that textual editors, such as Bowers, had for so long insisted upon. The result, as McGann writes, is a “widespread dysfunction in general hermeneutics, where the split between textual and interpretive studies has permitted literary criticism to slip loose from its ground and to dissipate its analytic rigor in a variety of speculative and unselfcritical procedures” (x). Within the same volume, McGann persuasively argues in his essay, “The Monks and the Giants,” that both textual criticism and bibliography are “conceptually fundamental rather than preliminary to the study of literature” (182). According to McGann, the problematic reception of bibliographical and textual scholarship has much to do with the unexamined assumption, perpetuated by Bowers, that the aim of such work is purely “the editing of texts” (184). Instead, McGann offers a more capacious view of the ways in which scholars might approach the “originary textual moment” and subsequent “secondary moments of textual production and reproduction.” Such methods include not only an analysis of the physical “materials, means, and modes” of initial production, but also the “psychological” and “ideological” aspects of that work (193).

In short, McGann and others (including McKenzie), have seen the activities of the literary critic and bibliographer as necessarily interrelated. And so they should be. Yet, in Brontë scholarship, these intellectual protocols have often operated apart, with bibliographical practice at a distinct remove from literary

interpretation. The present state of affairs is not attributable to any lack of interest in Brontë's authorship, nor to any indifference with respect to the circumstances under which she created her writings. In fact, these areas have been subjects of great interest to readers and scholars of Brontë's works. What has happened instead is that a certain history about the making of Brontë's manuscripts has been created, shaped, and received (and for the most part unquestioned) so as to explain away, as it were, the details of their actual manufacture.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously maintained in 1979 that Brontë was "essentially a trance writer" (311). This long-held (and still popular)⁹ notion is frequently based on the mistaken assumption that automatic or "visionary" writing is incompatible with materiality. For example, Gilbert and Gubar unfold the concept of trance writing to assert in their reading of *Villette* that "the very erratic way Lucy tells the story of becoming the author of her own life illustrates how Brontë produces not a literary object but a literature of consciousness," and that "*Villette* is not meticulously crafted" (439). More recently, Angela Hague has argued that Brontë "was indeed a trance writer who relied on nonrational, unconscious modes of knowing and rendering experience," and that

⁹ In her introduction to *Tales of Angria* (2006), Heather Glen comments on the fact that Brontë's early writings have often been interpreted as "artless 'trance-writings'" (xiv). This is certainly the case. For example, in Alexander's widely circulated essay on Brontë's juvenilia, "Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head" (collected in the Norton edition of *Jane Eyre*), Alexander discusses Brontë's compositional process at Roe Head as follows: "She writes rapidly with her eyes shut, describing in detail the scene before her 'mind's eye,' as if she were analyzing a painting. This means that the lines of her characteristic minuscule script slope at different angles on the page, several lines running into each other. In her haste, Charlotte made very few corrections and splattered her dashes in lieu of punctuation [...]. Her creative process, which she describes in biblical phrases, was essentially trance-like" (397). Alexander makes reference to "several lines running into each other," but does not provide specific information about where she has seen this occur in the manuscripts, which would be useful to have for the purposes of this study. I have not thus far encountered this pattern in my study of Brontë's manuscripts.

Brontë “believed that her artistic gift was based upon an intuitive relationship with the world around her” (126).

There is, indeed, some historical evidence suggesting that Brontë wrote in this fashion—a substantial part of it coming from Brontë’s own Roe Head journal, which she wrote “all wondering why I write with my eyes shut” (as quoted by Gilbert and Gubar) (ibid.). Brontë’s personal account of her own writing-performance supplies us with a Romantically charged image of the genius writer at work, even as it also inadvertently betrays her own covert interest in eccentric self-display. As such, Brontë’s journal should merit at least something of a skeptical reading. Instead, this account has very often served as the basis for histories about Brontë’s manuscript making.

Winifred Gérin dramatically emphasized this history in her 1971 edition, *Five Novelettes*, which presented new transcriptions of five untitled literary manuscripts made by Brontë in the 1830s. Gérin’s analysis draws heavily on the Roe Head journal—and Brontë’s very Romantic self-representations therein—as evidence of Brontë’s writing process, claiming that she was “like a medium through whom a spirit worked without control, and who could at the same time register the sights and sounds, though not the significance of what she saw” (17). In her study, Gérin proceeds to develop a number of readings wherein she conflates musings of Angrian narrator-author Charles Townshend with the facts and history of Brontë’s own composition methods (e.g., Gérin’s introduction to “Passing Events” [33–4]). The two are not unconnected; but neither is the latter “clearly revealed,” as Gérin

claims, by the former. What is characteristic of Gérin's analysis, and so many other interpretations of Brontë's early manuscripts, is that it does not analyze the physical documents themselves for information about their origin and manufacture. Instead, Brontë's own heady version of her writing process is treated as a complete account of that history, with the actual documents playing only a supporting role (at best).

In her edition, Gérin turns to the details of Brontë's manuscripts almost as an afterthought, only to justify Brontë's account. For instance, in the introduction to "Passing Events," Gérin writes: "the appearance of [Brontë's] manuscripts [...] where the lines are frequently broken and overflow into each other, confirms her method of writing with her eyes closed, which she did to preserve the inward vision from interference without" (33).¹⁰ Such characterizations can be misleading for the many critics who have neither studied nor handled the artifacts themselves. Despite the small size of Brontë's letterforms, her manuscripts are actually remarkably clean and easy to read (as compared, say, to manuscripts created by Dickens). Although Brontë's sentences run to the edges of her pages and are hyphenated or thus "broken" (perhaps the "overflow" Gérin speaks of), they

¹⁰ There are other instances of this pattern in Gérin's edition. For example, in her introduction, Gérin maintains that, although Brontë habitually wrote in "microscopic script aimed at an imitation of type," she also wrote "at a feverish speed which nothing was allowed to impede, even to the detriment of sense. Paragraphing is minimal, capitalisation is eccentric and haphazard [...], spelling aberrations are frequent, and punctuation (where it exists) consists largely of dashes" (23). Gérin's analysis fails to take into account an important factor: Brontë's accidentals (that is, her capitalization, spelling, and punctuation) were unorthodox even in her most polished and deliberately crafted manuscripts. For example, the fair copy manuscript of *Jane Eyre* contained many such irregularities, as Brontë herself acknowledged in a letter to Smith, Elder in 1847 (*Letters*, vol. 1, 542). For more detail about the precision with which this fair copy manuscript was prepared, see "Authors and Bookmakers."

promptly begin on the next line, and, as far as I have seen, neither tend to overlap nor cross at points. In fact, as the opening pages of the manuscript for “Passing Events” demonstrate, Brontë’s lines often follow the very same shape and contour of those sentences immediately above them (even when those lines are sometimes irregular or slightly curving and arced).¹¹ In addition, it is worth noting that when Brontë’s manuscripts (“Passing Events” included) exhibit crossed-out lines and corrections, these revisions are, for the most part, not owing to mistakes attributable to the actual process of committing writing to paper, but instead to alternative choices of language and phrasing. Perhaps most importantly, from very early on, Brontë did not write her prose fiction in blank books, but almost certainly drafted her early stories on scraps; she copied from these to make the fair copy folio sheets that many of her bound extant manuscripts comprise. (I describe this process of copying and manufacture in the second chapter of this study.) Taken together, this evidence suggests that Brontë wrote her extant manuscripts with her eyes wide open. (Whether or not she drafted her early scraps with her “eyes closed” would be very difficult to determine, as only a handful of such scraps remain.)

Instead, it is we who have been reading Brontë’s manuscripts with eyes wide shut. We have remained entranced by the image of the writer as “medium,” and have merely repeated the story of Brontë’s own idealized self-representation as a visionary writer—an inspired poet-novelist divorced from the business and

¹¹ The manuscript of “Passing Events” (Brontë O2) is part of the Literary and Historical Manuscripts collection of the Morgan Library & Museum.

materials of her craft. There is, however, another side to the story that helps explain this received history.

The analysis that follows draws on my ongoing research into Brontë's relationship with books as physical objects, and is informed by her correspondence, her own early activities as a maker of manuscript books, her relationships with the books housed within the Brontë family library, her preparation of texts for professional publication, and developments in nineteenth-century book production. Interactions with books—as historical objects, manuscripts, merchandise, and sacred scripture—were central not only to Brontë's development as an author, but also to the formal structures of her novels.

As Robert Darnton has observed, the activities of writing and book production are interrelated as part of a larger “communications circuit” that “runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader.” Darnton writes:

The reader completes the circuit, because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition. Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style and a general sense of the literary enterprise, which affects their texts, whether they are composing Shakespearean sonnets or directions for assembling radio kits. A writer may respond in his writing to criticisms of his previous work or anticipate reactions that his text will elicit. He addresses

implicit readers and hears from explicit reviewers. So the circuit runs full cycle. (“What Is the History of Books?” 67)

This kind of insight into the social history of the book, combined with the power of bibliographical analysis, allows us to study Brontë’s works afresh, and also to understand how the production of books and the writing of literature mutually inform and shape one another. As we will see, Brontë came to define literary art in opposition to bookmaking, or profit-driven trade—but this did not mean that she was entirely removed from such business practices. Indeed, this was precisely the kind of publishing model that first attracted Brontë when she began to write, creating a virtual marketplace of her own, perpetuated by the publishers, printers, and booksellers of her early Glass Town and Angria writings.

This dissertation’s first chapter, “Shaping Volumes,” begins with a careful examination of Brontë’s early correspondence as it is informed by the broader trends taking place in nineteenth-century publishing. Books, as we discover in Brontë’s letters, are metaphors for minds; but this in no way makes them easily legible or accessible. Instead, Brontë must struggle to access and translate other people’s thoughts and sentiments, which are like “sealed volumes” written in strange languages that cannot be readily interpreted nor trusted. Such analogies parallel Brontë’s own fascination with publishing and the attendant difficulties that she faced when trying to adapt her writing for the literary marketplace, as her manuscripts and surviving correspondence with both authors and publishers reveal. These latter interactions had important implications for Brontë’s ongoing

manuscript production and rhetorical style. Even as Brontë adapted her work to suit mainstream publication, we find in that writing defensive discourse anticipating accusations of romance and melodrama in her novels. The resulting language and design of *Jane Eyre* combine to make a case for “plain truth” and plain style—a strategy that situates *Jane Eyre* apart from potboilers—even while allowing its narrator, Jane, the license to explore the kinds of romantic themes endemic to “escapist” or “frivolous” novels.

The foundations of Brontë’s ambivalent relationship to mass-market fiction are explored in this study’s second chapter, “Authors and Bookmakers,” which takes as its subject her early writings—small manuscripts written and bound to imitate the look of printed books. These documents provide new, important evidence about Brontë’s own attempts to “manufacture” literature that parodied (and perpetuated) the avaricious exploits of publishers, writers, and advertisers. Brontë’s turn from popular romance, often dated to her “Farewell to Angria,” originates in this prior engagement with the commercialization of literature—a move that consequently informs Brontë’s reception of works by bestselling authors Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, as well as her contemporary William Makepeace Thackeray. The example of Sir Walter Scott is of particular importance, for he straddled the realms of “high art” and mainstream fiction. On the one hand, Scott was seen as raising the romance novel to new levels of respectability, in part through an emphasis on history and antiquarianism. On the other, Scott was himself accused during his lifetime of “bookmaking”—in this case the editing and

republishing of works for mere financial gain. The 1826 bankruptcy of Archibald Constable following the Panic of 1825 infamously reduced Scott to the role of debtor, highlighting the real dangers that authors faced when they became too closely entangled with trade.

These competing pressures informed Brontë's evolving concept of authorship, and complicated what was already the very socially charged question of whether a female author could maintain her respectability when writing for pay. Such concerns contributed not only to Brontë's adoption of a pseudonym, but also to representations of novel-writing in her fiction. As Brontë began to market her fiction to real publishers, her "scribbling" narrator-bookmakers fell away; notably, *Jane Eyre* does not provide any account of the writing of her own autobiography. Even so, the larger question of trade does not entirely disappear, but instead resurfaces in the quest for respectable employment. Writing for pay is set aside in favor of teaching, which allows Brontë's narrators to secure their income through meaningful work motivated by purposes apart from that of financial gain.

Chapter three, "Profitable Reading," pursues both the moral implications of this apparent transition from romance to realism and also the perceived spiritual rewards of intellectual labor as opposed to the mere financial gains of trade. Brontë's first novel, *The Professor*, written in one volume, explores these questions while resisting mainstream publishing conventions, both in terms of format and literary theme; the book was never published during her lifetime. Brontë's subsequent work, *Jane Eyre*, constitutes an alternative form of "profitable"

reading. Crafted as a three-decker novel fit for sale to circulating libraries, *Jane Eyre* incorporates strands from two seemingly antithetical genres: popular romance and the moral tale of the evangelical tract. The inclusion of such discourses appealed to contemporary, mainstream readers, even while the dialogic nature of their critique designates Brontë's literature as one that stands apart from the mass market.

Evangelical fiction provides a particularly important touchstone for Brontë, whose work was deeply influenced by the writings of her father, an Anglican clergyman. Drawing on various aspects of Patrick Brontë's religious tale, *The Cottage in the Wood* (1815), *Jane Eyre* subjects providential interpretations and devices to critique, even while incorporating evangelical thought to help distinguish "real" romance from that of materialist enterprise. Brontë's writing critically engages these discourses to harness the more authentic forces animating them. Thus, *Jane Eyre* provides moral instruction that absorbs mainstream, genre-driven narratives, even as it corrects them.

Chapter four, "The Book of Nature," develops the religious and philosophical implications of these concepts through an analysis of Brontë's activities as an amateur visual artist. Nineteenth-century vocabularies for painting and drawing provided important criteria for evaluating not only visual materials, but also literature, especially as means of distinguishing "original" art from derivative works. Even as the practice of drawing "from nature" designated artistic mastery in the fields of painting and literature, it went hand in hand with the

belief, held by Brontë, that the production of visual and verbal artworks were essentially acts of interpretation, not creation.

These ideas are unfolded in *Jane Eyre*, which invites, through its ekphrases, parallel readings of books and images. Even as Jane is seduced by Rochester's "hackneyed" romantic tale, she attempts to interpret her own fate (and the fate of others) by evaluating appearances according to aesthetic standards consonant with marketplace evaluations of beauty. Such conventional readings are challenged by alternative representations of emotional and imaginative landscapes that seemingly resist self-display. Finally, the religious and philosophical concept of the Book of Nature provides an important alternative to Mammon and the marketplace for fiction, as Brontë employs both it and the analogy of painting "from life" to distinguish "original" art from derivative copies, or authentic literature from those books consumed as commodities.

The following study thus attempts, in each chapter, to trace histories of the manufacture and marketing of books and prints as they directly pertain to concepts embodied in Brontë's writings. Historical objects allow us the unique opportunity to read not only the content of verbal or image-based texts, but also the evidence of production practices, which simultaneously inform and shape the meanings of works. We thereby gain a better sense of how authors envision literature as a form of production and as a kind of art—and how their own particular contributions engage the possibilities and limitations of such processes.

Chapter 1: Shaping Volumes

GENTLEMEN,—The six copies of ‘Jane Eyre’ reached me this morning. You have given the work every advantage which good paper, clear type, and a seemly outside can supply;—if it fails, the fault will lie with the author,—you are exempt.

Charlotte Brontë to Smith, Elder & Co.
19 October 1847

“What were you doing behind the curtain?” he asked.
“I was reading.”
“Shew the book.”

Jane Eyre
The Clarendon Edition

From the opening chapter of *Jane Eyre*, books are dynamic sites for competing social, physical, and imaginative engagement. Bewick's *British Birds*, whose vignettes give rise to Jane's "strangely impressive," "shadowy," and "half-comprehended" notions, is as mysterious in its intangible effects as it is crude in its physical effects, when employed as a weapon by John Reed to subjugate Jane. Even when treated merely as missiles, books are not simply physical objects or the works they contain; rather, characters give shape to the books they read, and, in turn, are shaped and read by the books with which they are associated. In Jane's mind, John becomes the Nero and Caligula of Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, so that she really sees in him "a tyrant: a murderer" (8). The pamphlet entitled the "Child's Guide," which Mr. Brocklehurst deposits with Jane, is simultaneously an indictment of her so-called "falsehood and deceit" and an attempt to mould her into an ideal that she, in response, will actively refuse. Eliza Reed single-mindedly relies on the Common Prayer Book, whose rubric she adopts and refers to three times a day—her constant reference to the book literally dividing her time, even as she attempts to break her experience into useful parts with "clock-work regularity" (294). And Georgiana Reed's story of her experiences in London resembles to Jane "a volume of a novel of fashionable life"—presumably of the same variety that Georgiana peruses while lying on the sofa while waiting for her mother to die (293). Finally, at the end of the novel, St. John Rivers is directly identified with the author of the Book of Revelation, John of Patmos (Saint John the Divine). In *Jane Eyre*, there is a danger of merely reflecting the books one

handles or reads, instead of refracting them; of becoming a character of a particular genre, instead of studying character. Why is this so? And is Jane Eyre herself in any similar danger? In a novel titled after its heroine, how do we distinguish Jane Eyre as narrator/character from *Jane Eyre* the book?

Disentangling one Jane from another has proved a maddening task for many critics, perhaps because there is so much communion among Jane's versions of herself. Karen Chase writes that Jane's "I" "represents a vanishing point which can never be reduced to its various manifestations. It dutifully records feelings, acknowledges duties, registers impressions, bestows energies, but it remains always at a remove from its own attributes" (*Eros & Psyche* 74). The present chapter revisits the question of *Jane Eyre's* narrative construction through an investigation of its initial physical format as a three-decker novel, as well as through a study of Charlotte Brontë's turn from Angrian romance and its bookmaking (characterized by Brontë as "that burning clime") to professional publishing and the "cooler region" of realism. I argue that *Jane Eyre* was written, out of necessity, as a three-decker novel for circulating libraries but that, paradoxically, it was also a reaction against the marketing of popular fiction. In doing so, I make a case for an emerging literary taste—specifically, a taste for respectable, plain book design—that reflected the values of publishers of elite literature who sought to distinguish their productions from those of the newsstand.

...

Starting with her experiments for the Glass Town saga and its tales, Charlotte Brontë's early impulse was to make books that were eccentric, private affairs but also intertextual ones that imitated the contours of print culture as she knew it. The manuscripts that she made, along with those fashioned by her sisters and brother, were privately circulated and shared among themselves and written in a hand too minuscule for the eyes of their aunt or father to read. Yet, at the same time, Brontë simulated the look of popular, professional publications. To take just one example, her first number of "BLACKWOODS YOUNG MENS MAGAZINE"—"EDITED BY THE / GENIUS / CB / PRINTED BY / CAPTAIN / TREE / AND SOLD BY / CAPTAIN CARY SERGEANT Blood / CORPORAL LIDELL &c. &c. &c" (MS Lowell 1 (6), Houghton Library, Harvard University)—is modeled on the periodical from which it derives its name. As such, it contains serial fiction, poetry, dramatic dialogue, and advertisements. This "publication" and all but two of her early extant manuscripts appear in Brontë's "Catalogue of My Books, with the Period of Their Completion up to August 3rd, 1830."¹² The latter is a remarkable document; listing twenty-two manuscript "volumes," including magazine numbers, histories, "romantic tales," drama, and poetry, it proudly gestures, for a girl of fourteen, toward a large body of work that imitates the scope of the professional publishing world. The plethora of these early volumes is in sharp contrast to the later creative output of Brontë, who would insist in 1849

¹² The original manuscript of Brontë's "Catalogue" (Brontë 15) is part of the Literary and Historical Manuscript collection of the Morgan Library and Museum. It was first transcribed by Elizabeth Gaskell, and was later transcribed by Christine Alexander for her edition of Brontë's early writings. This document and Brontë's manuscripts are discussed at far greater length in the second chapter of this study.

that Currer Bell “could never march with the tread of a Scott, Bulwer, a Thackeray, or a Dickens [...] calculate low when you calculate on me” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 207). As is well known by many, *Jane Eyre* was published by Smith, Elder and Company in 1847; it took two years until *Shirley* was published in the autumn of 1849, and more than three before *Villette* appeared in January of 1853. Harriet Martineau explains this “long interval” between each of Brontë’s works in her April 1855 obituary for Brontë: “She said that she thought every serious delineation of life ought to be the product of personal experience and observation of a normal, and not a forced or special kind. ‘I have not accumulated, since I published *Shirley*,’ she said, ‘what makes it needful for me to speak again’” (*Daily News* 5).

The rapid flood of Brontë’s early manuscript books was fueled, in part, by her creative rivalry with her brother, Branwell. Their small manuscript books, which were designed to resemble commercial, print-based forms, enacted a kind of mock “print war.” Charlotte and Branwell’s books satirized the regularity, predictability, and downright absurdity of the publishing world’s formats, genres, and commercial dealings by making them strange and, at the same time, giving working, real-world contours to the shape of their private, fantastical productions. Clearly, part of the pleasure of imitating the look of the everyday publishing industry was also in transforming and situating it within another familiar network: the private, familial, and very exclusive artistic relationship that Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne shared with one another. When the Brontës’ Angrian and Gondal manuscripts were discovered, this intensely idiosyncratic aspect of

their early experiments with bookmaking and language seemed almost nonsensical to outsiders. Elizabeth Gaskell famously characterized the contents of Charlotte's early manuscripts as "purely imaginative," "wild weird writing," and contrasts them with her later works: "While her description of any real occurrence is, as we have seen, homely, graphic, and forcible, when she gives way to her powers of creation, her fancy and her language alike run riot, sometimes to the very borders of apparent delirium" (71). As Heather Glen has shown, this is not the simple case. Glen usefully identifies and traces the relationship of Brontë's Angrian narratives to contemporary literary genres, including silver fork, Newgate, and Gothic novels. She locates in these stories an "ironizing of 'heroism' and of the clichés of literary Gothic," and a "questioning of narrative authority and play with narrative voice" that offers insight into the "relation between the passionate intensities and subversive ironies of 'romanticism' and the social realism of an emerging 'Victorianism'" (xlii).

This tension between Romanticism and social realism identified by Glen coincides with a series of other important shifting relationships that influenced the future shape of Charlotte Brontë's writing. Notably, there was Brontë's move from lyric poetry to prose, which was likely motivated, in part, by the initial commercial failure of her and her sisters' first book in print: *Poems* by "Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell" printed in an edition of 1,000 copies in May 1846.¹³ Then there was her transition from idiosyncratic publishing formats to the remarkably popular and

¹³ See Walter Smith's *Brontë Sisters: A Bibliographical Catalogue* for a detailed account of the first issue.

stable form of the three-decker novel (the format in which *Jane Eyre* was first published). This change was accompanied by Brontë's passage from literary partnership to sole authorship of *Jane Eyre*—and to what Brontë would later refer to as the “silent workshop” of her “own brain” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 255). Such developments were informed by the changing nature of Brontë's audience, which expanded from intimate coterie to a large (and somewhat anonymous) reading public. And, of course, there was the notable transformation in Brontë's literary style, described by Brontë herself in her often cited and reproduced “Farewell to Angria,” in which she leaves “that burning clime” in favor a “cooler region, where the dawn breaks grey and sober,” the “coming day [...] subdued in clouds” (q.v. the Norton edition of *Jane Eyre*, ed. Dunn, 424–5; the manuscript is B125[1], part of the collection of the Brontë Parsonage Museum & Brontë Society).

These developments took place even as book manufacture and design were in a state of remarkable transition. The nineteenth century marked the end of what bibliographers and book historians commonly refer to the hand-press period, a time span ranging from approximately 1450 to 1830, or, roughly, from the invention of moveable type (attributed to Gutenberg) to the advent of mechanized printing.¹⁴ Starting in 1798, paper was able to be made by machine, an innovation that allowed it to be produced more quickly and in greater quantities—factors that sharply decreased its price. As manufacturers found ways to create paper from wood fiber instead of rags, the price of paper would continue to drop. Meanwhile,

¹⁴ For a concise account of these developments, see James Mosley's chapter, “The Technologies of Print,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Book* (2010).

the first half of the century witnessed the successful introduction of cloth bookbindings in the 1820s, followed by case bookbindings and the Imperial Arming Press in the 1830s, which made possible the rise of large quantities of relatively inexpensive hardcover books in decorated cloth bindings. Illustration technologies also flourished. Before the invention of lithography and steel engraving¹⁵ and the revival of wood-engraving (i.e., blocks made of end-grain wood) at the very end of the eighteenth century, intaglio prints could be manufactured in only relatively small numbers before exhibiting wear caused to the surfaces of the copper plates from which they were made. Meanwhile, the tone that could be achieved using relief woodcuts was limited. The new technologies of lithography and steel engraving, along with the rediscovery of wood-engraving, allowed for significantly larger print runs (including color printing) with greater ease and at lower costs.

Even as book manufacturing boomed, the novel continued its struggle for respectability. The status of literary fiction hinged on the efforts of those publishers, authors, and circulating libraries who strove to distinguish their novels from the dross of the marketplace. Appropriately vetted circulating library fiction came to adopt certain generic characteristics. Most scholars of nineteenth-century

¹⁵ Lithography was invented in Germany around 1798 by Aloys Senefelder; it began to be used widely for commercial printing. Steel engraving was invented in the late eighteenth century for bank-note engraving, and was adopted for the manufacture of prints and illustrations in the 1820s and '30s. The later made possible the "boom industry" of ladies' annuals. See Bamber Gascoigne's *How to Identify Prints*.

literature are familiar with the story of the “three-decker” novel¹⁶ and its mutual financial advantages for both publishers and circulating libraries. However, there were also implications for book design. As a reaction to the flood of cheaply printed downmarket fiction, publishers sought to create an identity for upmarket novels, and so cultivated a class of fiction presented in three volumes containing well-set and expertly printed type and bound in sober, durable cloth bindings.

For the most part, three-deckers would not contain advertisements, except for publishers’ catalogues and information pertaining to the subscription rates of the circulating libraries through which they were loaned. Nor would they contain prices on their bindings to advertise their cost. In this sense, three-deckers stood apart from a great deal of serial fiction and, later on, from the bright penny fiction that emerged in the 1830s and the so-called “yellowbacks” that began to appear in the 1850s. The reserved but distinguished appearance of three-decker bindings stood in contrast not only to the paper wrappers and bindings of inexpensive fiction, but also to bright, ornamental gift books and annuals, such as Rudolf Ackermann’s *Forget-Me-Not*, which was first launched in 1822 and began to appear in decorated bindings stamped in gold in the 1830s. Whether cheaply manufactured in illustrated wrappers or bound in ornately gilt boards, such books called attention to themselves as merchandise. Three-decker novels, however, were not fashioned to appeal to prospective buyers as consumable goods for individual

¹⁶ Three-decker novels were three volumes of prose fiction published in post-octavo format and priced at £1. 11s. 6d. Anthony Rota records Thomas Hope’s *Anastasius*, published in 1818, as the “first novel in this format at this price,” but also notes that it was Sir Walter Scott’s *Kenilworth* (1821) that “made the format and the price fashionable” (163).

purchase, but rather were designed to blend in with other vetted fiction in “select” libraries, such as that of Mudie’s, Limited. (Toward the end of the century, such lending libraries had even been dubbed “Circulating Morals” [Rota 176].) Priced at £1. 11s. 6d., the high cost of three-deckers prevented their sale to general consumers. Indeed, Anthony Rota notes that nineteenth-century publishers tended to list circulating libraries instead of bookshops in their advertisements for new three-decker fiction, as it was generally assumed that such books would be borrowed, not purchased (167). This was the case for *Jane Eyre*, which was advertised by Smith, Elder with “NEW NOVELS / Now ready, at all the Libraries” (*The Era*, 24 October 1847).

Of course, individuals did sometimes purchase three-decker novels—and, as the marks of provenance on extant copies suggest, purchasers were often people with titles of honor and rank, who were probably also quite wealthy. It is also the case that the expense and sober appearance of three-deckers did not by any means guarantee the quality of their written contents, which, however “respectable,” were also frequently labeled as “frivolous,” “romantic,” and “melodramatic” by discerning reviewers. Nevertheless, the high production values of three-decker novels and the corresponding restraint of their design were meant to designate a class of literature apart from that of vulgar fiction.

Such distinctions in the publishing world provide an important parallel to the emphasis on conservative, “plain” dress and reserved manners in *Jane Eyre* and in Brontë’s other published novels. As Marjorie Garson writes, “for whatever

else they represent, Brontë's heroines always personify Good Taste: good taste in clothing, in food, in interior decor, in reading, in painting, in writing, in art criticism—in whatever aesthetic area they enter" (*Moral Taste* 241). As I have been suggesting, this "good" or "moral" taste is embodied in the material construction of *Jane Eyre*, and in apparent opposition to the marketplace. Yet *Jane Eyre* is a book also complicit with that market, just as the three-decker novel itself contributed to both the acceptance of the novel as a respectable literary form and also to the financial success of publishers, libraries, and authors.

1. (Un)sealed Letters: The Crafting of Brontë's Authorial Identity

It cannot be overstated how strongly Brontë's sensibility was shaped and formed through her early reading of periodicals, books, and manuscripts. In a letter written to her close friend, Ellen Nussey, in June 1834 and at the age of eighteen, Brontë compares the mind to a book: "I know my own sentiments, because I can read my own mind, but the minds of the rest of man and woman-kind are to me as sealed volumes, hieroglyphical scrolls, which I can not easily unseal or decipher" (*Letters*, vol. 1, 128). Brontë continues the analogy, with reference to her proper understanding of Nussey's character:

Yet time, careful study, long acquaintance overcome most difficulties; and in your case, I think they have succeeded well in bringing to light, and construing that hidden language, whose turnings, windings inconsistencies and obscurities so frequently

baffle the researches of the honest observer of human nature. [How many after having, as they thought, discovered the word friend in the mental volume, have afterwards found that they have read false friend! I have long seen “friend” in your mind, in your words and actions, but now distinctly visible, and clearly written in characters that cannot be distrusted, I discern true friend.] (*Letters*, vol. 1, 128)

What exactly is the nature of the “mental volume” that Brontë describes here? The minds of other men and women are “written” in “hidden,” “hieroglyphical” languages encased within the inaccessible forms of “sealed volumes” and “scrolls” that must be researched. Brontë’s own mind is itself an open text, which she can easily “read,” while she elaborates on the dangers of misreading the words in the “mental volumes” of others.

If Brontë compares human character to literal “written” characters, perhaps it is, in part, owing to the fact that this is the form through which the minds of her closest companions were made known to her. From an early age, Anne, Emily, Branwell, and Charlotte thrived on the mutual creation and reading of manuscripts. The Haworth stationer John Greenwood recalled walking ten miles to Halifax on many occasions to ensure that he had a ready supply of paper for the Brontë sisters: “When I was out of stock, I was always afraid of their coming; they seemed so distressed about it, if I had none” (Gaskell 229). Perhaps this helps one to understand why the Brontës’ attempted transition from their own intimate circle to the public publishing sphere had such a tremendous impact on them: they

spoke fluently in a language too private for outsiders. Branwell was devastated by the process. In his correspondence with sculptor J. B. Leyland, Branwell painfully characterizes the “almost hopelessness of bursting through the barriers of literary [...] circles, and getting a hearing among publishers” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 468).

Branwell’s failed artistic endeavors and efforts at publishing a three-volume novel and other writings contributed to his deep depression, substance abuse, and untimely death of tuberculosis.¹⁷ Indeed, by the time Charlotte, Anne, and Emily eventually published *Jane Eyre*, *Agnes Grey*, and *Wuthering Heights*, their artistic circle had narrowed to exclude Branwell, who, as Charlotte claimed, “never knew what his sisters had done in literature—he was not aware that they had ever published a line.” She writes, “we could not tell him of our efforts for fear of causing him too deep a pang of remorse for his own time misspent, and talents misapplied” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 123). Even after Branwell’s death, Emily remained particularly guarded with respect to outside knowledge of her authorship; she had sworn both Charlotte and Anne to secrecy regarding her true authorial identity—a pledge that Charlotte solemnly upheld as long as she could, continuing to conceal the truth from her best friend, Ellen Nussey, even after Ellen had discovered the fact through another source. This secrecy famously resulted in some great confusion over the identities of Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell, which the publisher

¹⁷ See Branwell’s correspondence with J. B. Leyland, especially his letter dated 10 September 1845: “I knew that in the present state of the publishing and reading world a Novel is the most saleable article so that where ten pounds would be offered for <the> [sic] work the production of which would require the utmost stretch of a man’s intellect—two hundred pounds would be a refused offer for three volumes whose composition would require the smoking of a cigar and the humming of a tune” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 423).

Thomas Cautley Newby fostered by indirectly suggesting, in his advertisements, that the author of *Jane Eyre* had also written *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* (*Letters*, vol. 1, 587). This fraud prompted Brontë to write a preface to the third edition of *Jane Eyre*, which asserted Currer Bell's authorship of only that one novel. Subsequently, in July 1848, Charlotte and Anne visited London, where they revealed themselves to George Smith and W. S. Williams, and separately to Newby.¹⁸ Yet so strong was the authors' working relationship, that the ensuing deaths of Emily in December 1848 and of Anne in May 1849—also to tuberculosis, “the galloping [sic] consumption” that “merited its name” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 195)—enforced upon Charlotte an almost unbearable sense of artistic isolation. Of Emily's loss, she writes: “Worse than useless did it seem to attempt to write what there no longer lived an ‘Ellis Bell’ to read” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 203).

Even when she had been surrounded by her nurturing coterie, Charlotte (like Branwell, who wrote to Wordsworth without reply) sought contact with famous, published writers. These early efforts were hampered by her awkward shyness with outsiders (those “hieroglyphical scrolls” and “sealed volumes” mentioned earlier) and by her over-passionate, eccentric language, too closely mirroring the private language of her family circle. The replies that Brontë received only reinforced her suspicion of what she once described to Ellen Nussey as the “dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 144).

¹⁸ See Brontë's letter to Mary Taylor, dated 4 September 1848 (*Letters*, vol. 2, 111–15).

If we continue to adopt Brontë's analogy of minds as "sealed volumes," Robert Southey's reply to her letter of 1837 supplies a painful testament to Charlotte's inability to read one such tome. Southey writes:

What I am, you might have learnt by such of my publications as have come into your hands: but you live in a visionary world & seem to imagine that this is my case also, when you speak of my "stooping from a throne of light & glory." Had you happened to be acquainted with me, a little personal knowledge wd. have tempered your enthusiasm [...]. Many volumes of poetry are now published every year without attracting public attention, any one of wh [sic], if it had appeared half a century ago, wd. have obtained a high reputation for its author. Whoever therefore is ambitious of distinction in this way, ought to be prepared for disappointment [...]. The daydreams in wh you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind, & in proportion as all the "ordinary uses of the world" seem to you "flat & unprofitable", you will be unfitted for them, without becoming fitted for anything else. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 166)

Southey's observation that Brontë lives in a "visionary world" of "daydreams" soundly serves to distinguish her imagined impressions of him, which were based solely on her reading of his writings, from a more complete understanding of his character, which "a little personal knowledge" would afford. Southey proceeds to deflate not only Charlotte's impression of both him and his role as a published

author, but also her view of the publishing world. Finally, he characterizes her efforts at writing as impractical and even dangerous indulgences that might leave her unfit for any useful work (a comment that foretells Branwell's later vexed relationship with writing).

Southey's criticisms deeply impressed Brontë, and they seem to have provided the initial impetus for her development of a more carefully constructed and far less impetuous representation of her authorial self, as we see in the reply she sent to him. Here she writes of the "shame" she feels at troubling him with her "crude rhapsody." She writes: "I felt a painful heat rise to my face, when I thought of the quires of paper I had covered with what once gave me so much delight"; and, of her first letter, "I am not altogether the idle dreaming being that it would seem to denote. My father is a clergyman of limited, though competent, income, and I am the eldest of his children. He expended quite as much in my education as he could afford in justice to the rest." She continues: "I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print; if the wish should rise, I'll look at Southey's letter, and surpass it." But this remark is qualified by a statement appearing earlier in her reply: "You do not forbid me to to write; you do not say that what I write is utterly destitute of merit. You only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties, for the sake of imaginative pleasures; of writing for the love of fame; for the selfish excitement of emulation" (*Letters*, vol. 1, 168–9). Indeed, Brontë would continue to write poetry, as well as prose, but she would be more circumspect with regard to the manner in which she discussed her writing with outsiders, as well as

with her actual identity. Over time, this early shame likely contributed to the use of a pseudonym that Brontë justified in terms of her commitment to high literary standards. In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell written in November 1849, Brontë, still publishing under the pen name “Currer Bell,” writes that her “chief reason for maintaining an incognito” is that, without one, she “should ever after shrink from writing the plain truth” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 288).

Along the way, Brontë experimented with other noms de plume. In 1840, she consulted Hartley Coleridge (eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge) with respect to a sample from her Angrian saga (possibly “Ashworth”), which she characterized as a “demi-semi novelette of an anonymous Scribe.” Sending her letter under the initials “CT” (most probably derived from the name of her Angrian narrator, Charles Townsend—the name “Charles” itself being the masculine form of “Charlotte”), Brontë was “pleased” that Coleridge could not determine whether she was of the “soft or the hard sex.” In a draft reply to him, she writes:

Authors are generally very tenacious of their productions but I am not so attached to this production but that I can give it up without much distress [sic]

You say the affair is begun on the scale of a three volume novel I assure you Sir you calculate very moderately—for I had materials in my head I daresay for half a dozen—No doubt if I had gone on I should have made quite a Richardsonian Concern of it [...].

I am sorry I did not exist fifty or sixty years ago when the lady's magazine was flourishing like a green-bay tree—in that case I make no doubt my aspirations after literary fame would have met with due encouragement—and I should have had the pleasure of introducing Messrs Percy & West into the very best society—and recording all their sayings and doings in double-columned-close-printed pages side by side with Count Albert or the haunted castle—Evelina or the Recluse of the lake—Sigismund or the Nunnery & many other equally effective and brilliant productions [...].

The idea of applying to a regular Novel-publisher and seeing Mr West and Mr Percy at full-length in three vols is very tempting—but I think on the whole from what you say I had better lock up this precious manuscript—wait patiently till I meet with some Maecenas who shall discern and encourage my rising talent—& Meantime bind myself apprentice to a chemist & druggist if I am a young gentleman or to a Mantua maker & milliner if I am a young lady [...]. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 236–7)

There are several things to note in this letter: Brontë has received another rejection from a writer whom she admires, and in this early draft of her reply, she immediately adopts a defensive, cavalier tone, which she perhaps initially thought to be offhand and playful. As with her second, sober letter to Southey, she wisely altered her actual reply to express herself more moderately. Instead of beginning

her letter with respect to herself and her work, Brontë acknowledges Coleridge's station and thanks him for his politeness and "candour":

I was almost as much pleased to get your letter as if it had been one from Professor Wilson containing a passport of admission to Blackwood—You do not certainly flatter me very much nor suggest very brilliant hopes to my imagination—but on the whole I can perceive that you write like an honest man and a gentleman—and I am very much obliged to you both for the candour and civility of your reply. It seems that Messrs Percy and West are not gentlemen likely to make an impression upon the hearts of Christendom? well I commit them to oblivion with several tears and much affliction but I hope I can get over it. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 239)

In both versions of the letter, Brontë still expresses a capacity for expansive, loquacious writing, and, mockingly compares herself with Samuel Richardson, whose *Clarissa* and *History of Sir Charles Grandison* both originally appeared in seven octavo volumes—a far cry from her later warning to W. S. Williams in the aforementioned letter ("calculate low when you calculate on me"). Here Brontë seems to have no interest in conforming to the commercial demand for three-decker works of fiction. Instead, she wryly claims a place for herself in the publishing world of "fifty or sixty" years ago,¹⁹ and so jokes about needing a literary patron (a "Maecenas"). Brontë's commentary calls to mind Southey's

¹⁹ This is the figure in Brontë's draft letter; in her actual letter to Coleridge, the span is reduced to "forty or fifty" years.

statement about the imitative, belated, and rather banal quality of much published poetry, which Brontë anticipates and echoes with respect to her own prose. But in her final response to Coleridge, she expands to add the following:

I am not quite certain of the correctness of the titles I have quoted for it is long, very long since I perused the antiquated print in which those tales were given forth—I read them before I knew how to criticize or object—they were old books belonging to my mother or my Aunt; they had crossed the Sea, had suffered ship-wreck and were discoloured with brine—I read them as a treat on holiday afternoons or by stealth when I should have been minding my lessons—I will never see anything which will interest me so much again—One black day my father burnt them because they contained foolish love-stories. With all my heart I wish I had been born to contribute to the Lady's magazine. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 240)

In this revised response, Brontë emends her draft with a vivid, poignant account of her early, childhood passion for the “foolish love-stories” of the *The Lady's Magazine*. Perhaps anticipating Coleridge's further displeasure with her writing, she recounts her own father's disapproval and censorship, and implies that her abiding will to read and write in this style are intractable. Brontë's own Angrian romances may be considered as an attempt to respond to the loss of that literature, the small size of the manuscripts a preemptive measure to allow for their concealment and to prevent a similar fate of destruction. At the same time, it is a

literature of the past—a past century and a past childhood—and Brontë willingly casts herself as a latecomer to that outmoded arena of writing.

Finally, Brontë's revised response to Coleridge also contains a passage that might be characterized as both a celebration of and apology for her Angrian world:

It is very edifying and profitable to create a world out of one's own brain and people it with inhabitants who are like so many Melchisedecs—"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." By conversing daily with such beings and accustoming your eyes to their glaring attire and fantastic features—you acquire a tone of mind admirably calculated to enable you to cut a respectable figure in practical life—If you have ever been accustomed to such society Sir you will be aware how distinctly and vividly their forms and features fix themselves on the retina of that "inward eye" which is said to be "the bliss of solitude" [sic] Some of them are so ugly—you can liken them to nothing but grotesque things carved by a besotted pagan for his temple—and some of them are so preternaturally beautiful that their aspect startles you as much as Pygmalion's Statue must have startled him [...]. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 240)

Brontë disparages and treats with sarcasm her fatherless, motherless inventions along the lines of Southey's earlier remarks, for she is well aware that the "tone of mind" that she has acquired has made her somewhat unfit "to cut a respectable

figure in practical life.” And yet, she also celebrates the color and contrast, the “grotesque” ugliness and “preternatural” beauty, of her own inventions, and she indirectly likens her imaginative vision to the “inward eye” of Wordsworth’s poem, “I wandered lonely as a cloud.” The allusion, on first reading, seems forced and inappropriate, given that Wordsworth’s images are inspired by visions from the natural world, while Brontë’s visions spring from her experiences through reading; however, as we will see in the final chapter of this study, “The Book of Nature,” the readerly imagination may be represented as its own kind of “landscape.”

It was most likely in 1839 (i.e., some time after her response to Southey and before this correspondence with Coleridge) that Brontë wrote in her Roe Head journal what is commonly referred to as her “Farewell to Angria,” in which she characterizes her authorship of the Angrian tales. She begins by asserting “I have now written a great many books”—a statement of which she seems unashamed. Even though her early correspondence with Southey had alerted her to be suspicious of the language that came most easily to her, here Brontë does not denigrate the quality of her writing, as she will later dismiss it (e.g., her contributions to the Bells’ collected volume of poetry).²⁰ Indeed, she does not even offer criticism of her Angrian writing along the lines of what we read in her later response to Coleridge. Instead, Brontë argues, “we must change, for the eye is tired

²⁰ See Brontë’s undated letter to W. S. Williams date, most likely written in early September 1848 (*Letters*, vol. 2, 118): “I am glad the little vol. of the Bells’ poems is likely to get into Mr. Smith’s hands. I should feel unmixed pleasure in the chance of its being brought under respectable auspices before the public, were Currer Bell’s share in the contents absent—but of that portion I am by no means proud—much of it was written in early youth—I feel it now to be crude and rhapsodical.” Indeed, this last language clearly echoes that of Brontë’s reply to Southey, in which she apologizes for her “crude rhapsody.” (See discussion above.)

of the picture so oft recurring and now so familiar” (425). Even so, she quickly follows: “Yet do not urge me too fast reader. It is no easy thing to dismiss from my imagination the images which have filled it so long [...]. When I depart from these I feel almost as if I stood at a threshold of a home and were bidding farewell to its inmates” (ibid.). This last analogy of Brontë leaving home marks not only her intention to leave behind the Angrian saga, but her move from her exclusive circle of readers, Branwell, Emily, and Anne. She concludes the writing with an analogy related to color: “Still, I long to quit for a while that burning clime where we have sojourned too long—its skies flame; the glow of sunset always upon it. The mind would cease from excitement and turn now to a cooler region, where the dawn breaks grey and sober and the coming day, for a time at least, is subdued in clouds” (ibid.).

If this “Farewell to Angria” fragment, which is untitled and undated, were, in fact, written in 1839, Brontë did not easily dismiss her “burning clime” of fantasy and romance for the “cooler region” of realism that she welcomes. Her attraction to former Angrian scenes is evident in her letter to Coleridge. However, by 1847 and the time of *Jane Eyre*’s publication, it seems that Brontë had resolved to maintain the distinction she had previously laid out. When George Henry Lewes wrote to Brontë in November of 1847, he apparently cautioned her against melodramatic writing. Brontë responded as follows:

You warn me to beware of Melodrame and you exhort me to adhere to the real. When I first began to write, so impressed was I with the

truth of the principles you advocate that I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides and to follow in their very footprints; I restrained imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement: over-bright colouring too I avoided, and sought to produce something which should be soft, grave and true.

My work (a tale in 1 vol.) being completed, I offered it to a publisher. He said it was original, faithful to Nature, but he did not feel warranted in accepting it, such a work would not sell. I tried six publishers in succession; they all told me it was deficient in “startling incident” and “thrilling excitement”, that it would never suit the circulating libraries, and as it was on those libraries the success of works of fiction mainly depended they could not undertake to publish what would be overlooked there—“Jane Eyre” was rather objected to at first [on] the same grounds—but finally found acceptance.

I mention this to you, not with a view of pleading exemption from censure, but in order to direct your attention to the root of certain literary evils [...]. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 559)

Note that, in her response to Lewes, Brontë asserts that when she “first began to write,” she “determined to take Nature and Truth as [...] sole guides.” What has become of the “great many books” that she acknowledged in her “Farewell to Angria”? Brontë overlooks the authorship of these once prized works (certainly full

of the kind of “imagination,” “romance,” and “excitement” that she now claims she eschews), and, instead, shapes the history of her writing career with her respectable first attempt at publishing something sensible, “soft, grave and true”—and unmarketable: her one-volume novel, *The Professor*. She attributes any “startling incident” or “thrilling excitement” in *Jane Eyre* as necessary “literary evils” imposed upon her by her need to conform to the standards of the marketplace.

Brontë does not openly acknowledge any competition between her “grey and sober” “subdued” writing and that old writing, glowing with “flame”—the sober language of her domestic novels, as opposed to the imaginative writing of Angria. However, that “flame” is irrepressible, Brontë seemingly cannot help herself, and, by the letter’s end, she asserts: “Imagination is a strong, restless faculty which claims to be heard and exercised [...]. When she shews us bright pictures are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them?” (559). A more complete picture of Brontë’s dilemma emerges in the full context of her responses to Southey, Coleridge, and Lewes: Brontë was devoted to “Nature and Truth” (a subject that is explored at length in the last chapter of this study), but she also sought to depict the “reality” of the imagination—in other words, to represent as objectively as possible the workings of a subjective sensibility. One of the challenges that Brontë faced was how to frame this imaginative reality, which was heavily inspired by reading, so as to distinguish it from the overly imitative, affected trappings of the publishing marketplace.

2. The “Plain Truth” about Plain Jane

Jane Eyre introduces a new kind of narrator and heroine: a well-educated female reader, herself fluent in the manipulation of image and word, but who deliberately draws a plain, realistic portrait of herself in order to deliver a respectable and believable romance. As Marjorie Garson has pointed out, Jane’s plain appearance reinforces the tastefulness of her “credibly unselfconscious” narrative, which “displays her excellence without attributing to her any desire to display herself” (242). As we will see, Jane’s assertion of “plain truth” pervades her representation as a character and her speech as a narrator, and also parallels Brontë’s characterization of *Jane Eyre* as a novel, as well as the circumstances of the book’s manufacture.

When *Jane Eyre* was published in the autumn of 1847, it was authored/“edited” under the name of the published poet “Currer Bell.” As we have already seen, Brontë had increasingly shaped and managed her authorial identity—first, by dramatizing her own reading/writing past (e.g., in her letters to Southey and Coleridge), and later, by deliberately distancing herself from that past, as well as from the mainstream romances that she once professed to enjoy. While some reviewers, most notably Elizabeth Rigby, responded negatively to the melodramatic aspects, “inconsistencies,” “coarseness,” and professed artlessness of

Jane Eyre, Brontë's narrative strategy generally met with critical success.²¹ Jane's character—even name—seemed to separate her from what Lewes would refer to as the “empty phantasmagoria of the library” (“Recent Novels: French and English” 691). In November 1847, a critic for *The People's Journal* comments: “The very selection of so homely a name for the heroine is an omen of good. It indicates a departure from the sickly models of the Minerva Press” (collected in Allott, 81). As Lewes writes in his review for *Fraser's Magazine*: “We never lose sight of her plainness; no effort is made to throw romance about her—no extraordinary goodness or cleverness appeals to your admiration; but you admire her, love her [...] a woman, not a pattern.” This effect is in contrast to the many affected productions Lewes routinely finds in circulating libraries that attempt to reflect real experience: “All the craft in the circulating-library will not make that seem true which is not true” (“Recent Novels: French and English,” 691–2).

Although *Jane Eyre* on its surface may seem simply “a plain tale with few pretensions” (as Bell/Brontë characterized the novel in the preface to the second edition), clearly there is an art to appearing objective. It does not suffice merely to tell the truth: one must prepare oneself and one's audience for the sound and appearance of truth in order to receive its effects. That is, the truth and its cool

²¹ Elizabeth Rigby's unsigned review appears in the December 1848 issue of the *Quarterly Review*, 153–85. Miriam Allott notes that there were only a “few really hostile attacks” on *Jane Eyre*, and that Rigby's “celebrated attack on *Jane Eyre* in no way reflected editorial opinion, since [the editor of the *Quarterly Review*] Lockhart was enthusiastic about the Brontës and seems not to have foreseen that his reviewer, Elizabeth Rigby, would find the book offensive.” Allott also notes that “it is impossible to separate the reasons for early misgivings about ‘Currer Bell's’ moral values from those which made her work so attractive to the majority of her readers [...]. Whatever the political or religious leanings of individual reviewers, there was general agreement about the new writer's ‘extraordinary freshness and originality’” (Allott 20–28).

language of objectivity is as much a mask as any other. Indeed, Brontë uses the rhetoric of “plain truth” as a cover for her own narrative compulsion: an unflagging allegiance to the same “fiery imagination” that fed her early Angria saga and that drew her to the “foolish love-stories” of *The Lady’s Magazine*.

Jane’s strategic, sober account of herself is not unlike the “restrained and simplified” treatment that she gives to her account of her childhood at Gateshead. That “most moderate” and “most correct” telling of a tale, which she previously conveyed in more dramatic ways to Mr. Lloyd and to Helen, results in a story that “sounded more credible” to Miss Temple at Lowood: “I infused into the narrative far less of the gall and wormwood than ordinary [...]. I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me” (83). Indeed, this art strongly resembles Brontë’s own practice, which she describes in a letter written to W. S. Williams of Smith, Elder. Brontë modeled the character of Helen Burns on her own older sister, Maria Brontë, but claims: “I abstained from recording much that I remember respecting her, lest the narrative should sound incredible” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 553). Another like instance occurs in a scene in *Jane Eyre* at Marsh End: when St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers want to know the causes of Jane’s state of distress, she tells them that she “cannot and ought not to explain: it would be useless—dangerous; and would sound incredible” (443).

But what happens when sharing incredible information is necessary? (Again we think of Brontë’s robust “Imagination.”) Here we find that Brontë systematically frames her most indignant, overly romantic, or melodramatic

passages with defensive rhetoric: cool, objective language that reassures readers that they are still in the realm of “plain truth.” Take the following notable example. After describing her arrival at Thornfield Hall and her meeting of Mrs Fairfax and Adele, Jane comments:

This, *par parenthèse*, will be thought cool language by persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children, and the duty of those charged with their education to conceive for them idolatrous devotion: but I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth. (131)

This dismissal of “cant” and “humbug,” and then Jane’s insistence on “merely telling the truth,” is immediately followed by the passage beginning “Anybody may blame me who likes,” and then by another passage, which starts with a reformulation of the statement into a question: “Who blames me?” These are the lines that so famously caught Virginia Woolf’s attention and vexed her, and which she includes in *A Room of One’s Own*.

Who blames me? Many no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature [...]. My sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story [...] and allow my mind’s eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and certainly there were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by exultant movement which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was

never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (132)

Shortly after this, Jane recalls “Grace Poole’s laugh” and her appearance:

“Sometimes I saw her [...] (oh, romantic reader, forgive me for telling the plain truth!) bearing a pot of porter. Her appearance always acted as a damper to the curiosity raised by her oral oddities” (133).

For Woolf, this aside constitutes an authorial intrusion that mars the fabric of Brontë’s fiction. Commenting on the passage, Woolf writes: “She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance” (73). Woolf rightly points to the anger and defensiveness of these passages, but it is not entirely clear that Brontë “left her story.” Rather, Brontë’s regular narrative strategy is exposed in a more exaggerated fashion than usual. Jane’s speech concerning her “mind’s eye,” glowing “bright visions,” and “tale that was never ended” seems almost as if it has been lifted from her letter to Coleridge—the Wordsworthian “inward eye” having transformed into an “inward ear.”²² The passage is flooded with early, Angrian images. But the vivid images are framed by what we are told is “cool language”: first, an insistence of “merely telling the truth” and later, by the aside: “oh, romantic reader, forgive me for telling the plain truth!”

²² Wordsworth writes of an “inward ear” in his poem, “Yes, it was the mountain Echo”: “Have not *we* too?—yes, we have / Answers, and we know not whence; / Echoes from beyond the grave, / Recognized intelligence! / Such rebounds our inward ear / Catches sometimes from afar— / Listen, ponder, hold them dear; / For of God,—of / God they are” (*Poems*, vol. 2, 266).

What is the “truth” of the Angrian passage, if not the resentment that Woolf indicates? The desire for “incident, life, fire, feeling” is real with respect to emotion, even if it is not actual in terms of any easily narratable event; and such desires are urgent, even if they are not particularly respectable. Brontë was wary of the implications of such passages and the risk that they entailed—that such scenes would be interpreted as melodrama, instead of truth; as discontentment, rather than impartial observation. But these were calculated risks and in service of the psychological and emotional reality that she insisted on conveying. Brontë and her narrator, Jane, seem to anticipate the accusation, introducing the idea of “cool language” in advance to temper the warm prose to come. Though the “Who blames me?” passage begins in the present tense and voice of Jane as narrator, the ardent language of Angria is focalized through Jane’s younger, figured version of herself, as if to protect the older Jane-as-narrator from being too closely identified with the passionate ideas expressed. Afterwards, Jane lovingly addresses her audience, “oh, romantic reader,” implying that romance, if any, resides with her public and not with her. In this way, “plain truth” serves as a means of delivering information that would otherwise seem outrageous, incongruous, and unbelievable.

Even as Jane must learn the art of appearing objective while describing events otherwise sordid, fantastical, or incredible to outsiders, Brontë herself sought respectability through a carefully guarded publication strategy. She did so, in part, by maintaining an incognito whose cover, as previously discussed, she claimed was necessary for conveying “plain truth.” The pseudonym protected and

distanced her own name from becoming a household word among the reading public, another concern of Brontë's. As she writes to Ellen Nussey in May of 1848: "The most profound obscurity is infinitely referable to vulgar notoriety; and that notoriety I neither seek nor will have" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 62). We find that, again and again, Brontë defines her authorial role in opposition to the consumerist tendencies of common readers and publishers. In a February 1848 letter to W. S. Williams of Smith, Elder, she frames these ideas as follows:

Have you not two classes of writers—the Author and the bookmaker? And is not the latter more prolific than the former? Is he not, indeed, wonderfully fertile—but does the Public, or the publisher even make much account of his productions? Do not both tire of him in time?

Is it not because Authors aim at a style of living better suited to Merchants, professed gain-seekers—that they are often compelled to degenerate to mere bookmakers—and to find the great stimulus of the pen in the necessity for earning money?

If they were not ashamed to be frugal might they not be more independent? (*Letters*, vol. 2, 27)

Brontë's distinction between authors and "bookmakers" is compelling in its attempt to associate the latter with mere material stuff. "Bookmakers" are not much more than "Merchants," their writings likened to mere commodities—they generate physical merchandise, and nothing more. As we will see, Brontë too was

not as far removed from this aspect of the literary marketplace as she claimed (or hoped).

3. Shaping *Jane*: Publishers and Formats²³

Brontë's distaste for "bookmakers" and novels as wares is not surprising when taking into consideration the changing nature of the literary marketplace during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Hers was a world increasingly suffused with books. The flood of novels began after their relative drought during the late 1820s, which had resulted from the stock market crash of 1825. That crash and the ensuing panic led to the bankruptcy of many publishers, including Archibald Constable.²⁴ Sparked by the success of Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* in 1821, the three-decker novel, priced at a guinea and a half, became the dominant format for binding novels published in England from the 1830s through the 1880s (Rota 163). J. A. Sutherland writes that the three-decker novel was "arguably [...] the most important single development in the history of the nineteenth-century novel" (12). The great expense of the three-volume format privileged publishers, who found a steady and lucrative market among circulating libraries, which, in turn, were able to lend each novel to three subscribers at a time, or charge higher

²³ The following section adapts and builds on original research from "Authors and Bookmakers": 449–85.

²⁴ See Frank Comparato's chapter, "England: The Book Beautiful" in *Books for the Millions*, as well as "Novel Publishing 1830–1870" in J. A. Sutherland's *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*.

subscription rates for the ability to check out multi-volume novels.²⁵ Cheap, one-volume versions of novels originally issued in three volumes typically would be published only after a novel had been in the circulating libraries for two or three years.²⁶ The first one-volume edition of *Jane Eyre* published by Smith, Elder and Company appeared in 1850, approximately three years after its debut in 1847; *Shirley*, first published by Smith, Elder in 1849, was re-issued in one volume in 1853; *Villette* was first published in 1853, and was re-issued in one volume in 1855.²⁷ Thus, libraries were able to maintain a steady clientele of subscribers who could not afford or who were not otherwise willing to pay the high prices for new, literary fiction. This system spurred and helped nurture a market for literary fiction that was subsidized by the arrangement made between publishers and circulating libraries. As Sutherland suggests, “it might be argued that a safe, stable commercial framework was no bad thing for literature. The generous margins of the three-volume system sustained the long, expensive lines which brought a constant supply of fiction to the public” (16).

Although the three-decker format was pervasive, it did not meet with universal approval. By the mid-1840s, it was precisely the three-decker novel that

²⁵ Rare Book School’s copy of George Meredith’s *Beauchamp’s Career* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876) contains a W. H. Smith label that reads as follows: “NOVELS are issued to and received from Subscribers in SETS only.” Subscription rates were based on the number of volumes an individual was permitted to check out at a time. Those who subscribed to check out one volume at a time were prohibited from checking out novels in multiple volumes; those who subscribed to check out two volumes at a time were unable to check out three or more volumes, &c.

²⁶ This was often the case in the 1840s and ’50s; over time, this figure decreased, as publishers were increasingly pressured to produce one-volume editions more quickly.

²⁷ It is important to note that what I have described are English publishing conventions. American editions of Charlotte Brontë’s novels originally appeared in one volume. Meanwhile, on the Continent, Tauchnitz typically published novels in two volumes.

helped circulating libraries earn the distinction of being “the monster-misery of literature.” So, in *Blackwood’s* we find that circulating libraries, “besotted by the mystic charm of three volumes, immutable as the sacred triad of the Graces or Destinies, would negative without a division such a work as the ‘Vicar of Wakefield’ were it now to undergo probation.” We read that “no bookseller would publish” a “Vicar” or “Crusoe” owing to the fact that “no circulating library would take them’ [...] these bibliopoles know to a page what will be taken”: “Several of them have got [...] the conduct of a circulating library on their hands; and so far from venturing to present a single-volumed or double-volumed work to their subscribers, they would insist upon the dilution of the genius of Oliver or Daniel into the adequate number of pages ere they risked paper and print.”²⁸

Perhaps it comes as no surprise that Charlotte Brontë’s brother, Branwell, turned to composing a three-volume novel for financial reasons. Writing to a close friend, L. B. Leyland, in 1845, Branwell quips: “I knew that in the present state of the publishing and reading world a Novel is the most saleable article so that where ten pounds would be offered for a work the production of which would require the utmost stretch of a man’s intellect—two hundred pounds would be a refused offer for three volumes whose composition would require the smoking of a cigar and the humming of a tune” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 423).²⁹ Branwell conspicuously failed in his mercenary attempt to write a bestseller, even as his sisters quietly went about

²⁸ A Mouse Born of the Mountain, “The Monster-Misery of Literature,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 55, no. 343 (May 1844): 556–560.

²⁹ See also Barker, *The Brontës* (475–477).

composing their own poetry and tales, which would eventually meet with successful publication.³⁰ Although he had already published a number of poems in local newspapers, Branwell turned to the three-decker format as the most obvious mechanism for finding a market for his writing, while his sisters meanwhile idealistically undertook projects shaped more by their desire for creating authentic works of literature than by the practical demands of the publishing marketplace.

This is not to say that Brontë did not take an interest in publishing formats; but she was slow to adapt her writing to the standard requirements for professional publication. After she took on the principal responsibility of preparing and negotiating her own and her sisters' work for publication, according to her first biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë purchased a "small volume, from which to learn all she could on the subject of preparation for the press" (231). Even so, Brontë most likely purchased the manual only after she had already miscalculated her work and her sisters' work in her early attempts to market it.³¹ She had greatly overestimated the size and length of their poetry collection, even as she zealously gave instructions for its publication. In January 1846, she wrote to Aylott and Jones, whom Clement Shorter later described as "booksellers and stationers rather

³⁰ It is not known when Brontë first began writing *The Professor*, yet Smith and Rosengarten believe that it was likely "at some time in late 1844, or early in 1845, probably in consultation with Emily and Anne" (*The Professor* xiv).

³¹ It is unclear exactly when Brontë purchased the manual, though Gaskell suggests that she acquired it in February 1846. Editor Andrew Easson gives a very brief note that the long primer type that Brontë specifies in her letter to Aylott and Jones on February 21 is recommended in the manual. Building on this observation, one might add that Brontë clearly did not possess this vocabulary in her earlier letter, written on February 16, in which she struggles to articulate her preference for how the book should appear: "I cannot name another model which I should like it to resemble, yet, I think a duodecimo form, and a somewhat reduced, though still *clear* type, would be preferable" (quoted in Gaskell, 231).

than publishers,” to see if they would “undertake the publication of a Collection of short poems in 1 vol. oct—” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 445). The firm accepted, and Brontë followed up with a request that the poems be “printed in 1 octavo volume of the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon’s last edition of Wordsworth” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 449). Brontë was most likely referring to the 1845 one-volume, revised, collected edition of Wordsworth’s *Poetical Works*, a royal octavo bound in blind-stamped cloth over boards with gilt lettering on the spine. These instructions clearly suggest Brontë’s desire to place her work and her sisters’ work within a class of respectable, tastefully published literature. But the book that she had anticipated as filling 200 to 250 pages came in only at 165, and, as a foolscap octavo, it was far less impressive in appearance than she had expected.

A few months later, on 6 April 1846, Brontë wrote to Aylott and Jones to announce a new project by the sisters:

C. E & A Bell are now preparing for the Press a work of fiction—
consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales which may be
published either together as a work of 3 vols. of the ordinary novel-
size, or separately as single vols—as shall be deemed most advisable.
(*Letters*, vol. 1, 461)

Brontë wrote again on 11 April 1846 to inquire further about what form of fiction might most likely appeal to a publisher:

It is evident that unknown authors have great difficulties to contend
with before they can succeed in bringing their works before the

public, can you give me any hint as to the way in which these difficulties are best met. [sic] For instance, in the present case, where a work of fiction is in question, in what form would a publisher be most likely to accept the M.S.—? whether offered as a work of 3 vols or as tales which might be published in numbers or as contributions to a periodical? (*Letters*, vol. 1, 462)

Brontë's initial instinct was to modify the three-decker formula for fiction to accommodate the shorter writings of Emily, Anne, and herself—each occupying a separate volume. Her April 11 letter to Aylott and Jones inquires more generally about other (serial) formats would most likely meet with successful publication, which suggests that she was willing to consider adapting the sisters' work to suit the demands of the marketplace. However, there is little evidence that she pursued that course. In July 1846, Brontë marketed the trio again, unsuccessfully, to the publisher Henry Colburn as “three tales, each occupying a volume and capable of being published together or separately” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 481). Finally, Charlotte's plan to alter the three-decker formula did not meet with success.

Indeed, her approach was quite possibly an afterthought. At 340 manuscript pages, ranging from 24 to 28 lines per full page, with an average of between 11 and 12 words per full line,³² *The Professor*, when set in type, would

³² For the purposes of this calculation, I counted words for 85 full lines from the manuscript. The exact average of the sample was 11.7, with a sample standard deviation of 1.94. The true average, at 95% confidence, assuming a normal distribution with standard deviation equal to the sample standard deviation, is between 11.33 and 12.15.

most likely have exceeded the length of a standard volume of fiction.³³ While Brontë was still composing *The Professor*, she acquired (probably during the middle of February 1846)³⁴ the aforementioned manual briefly mentioned by Gaskell and published by Saunders and Otley. In this manual, which was either *The Author's Printing and Publishing Assistant* or, more probably, *Advice to Authors*,³⁵ Brontë would have found guidelines for preparing novels for professional publication. In *The Author's Printing and Publishing Assistant*, she would have read that the “ordinary Page employed in Works of this kind contains Twenty-two Lines, each line containing, on an average, Eight Words. Three hundred such Pages are considered the proper quantity for an ordinary size Volume” (50). According to these calculations, each volume of a three-decker novel would average about 52,800 words. In *Advice to Authors*, Brontë would have read slightly different advice: that each volume would consist of “about twenty-six lines, each line containing, on an average, eight words,” and that a “volume averages from three to three hundred and twenty-four pages” (14). Per these calculations, a volume could range from 62,400 to 67,392 words. At approximately 88,000

³³ For this study, I examined the manuscript of *The Professor*, catalogued as Brontë O3 in the Morgan Library & Museum.

³⁴ See Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (231, 526).

³⁵ Andrew Easson notes that Gaskell recorded in her manuscript the name of the publisher as “Saunders & Otley,” and the name of the book as “Hints to Authors.” Easson identifies the work as *The Author's Printing and Publishing Assistant* (1839). If the Brontës read this manual, it seems unlikely that they read the edition Easson mentions, as this manual was reprinted throughout the 1840s (viz. the fifth, sixth, and seventh “editions,” as issued by the publisher and undated, but advertising books published by the firm during this time; the seventh edition is the first published with information about the Copyright Act of 1842). It is perhaps more likely that Gaskell was referring to Saunders and Otley's *Advice to Authors* (n.d.), whose title more closely resembles Gaskell's “Hints to Authors.”

words, *The Professor* would have been significantly too long a volume to constitute one volume of a standard three-volume work.³⁶

When *The Professor* was eventually published by Smith, Elder in 1857, it appeared in two volumes owing to its length, as had *Wuthering Heights* when Thomas Cautley Newby published it along with *Agnes Grey* in 1847.³⁷ (The first volume of *The Professor* consists of approximately 46,600 words, and the second volume of 41,300 words—with 294 and 258 pages of text, respectively.³⁸) Indeed, if both *The Professor* and *Wuthering Heights* had been published along with *Agnes Grey*, per Charlotte's tentative suggestion, the manuscripts would most likely have resulted in five, not three, printed volumes. In July 1847, Brontë mailed *The Professor* to Smith, Elder, who sent her a polite two-page rejection that discussed the work at length, but who also suggested that a work in three volumes would be welcome for their review (*Letters*, vol. 1, 533–5).

She was well prepared to meet the request. Brontë meticulously constructed *Jane Eyre* as a three-decker novel that would be attractive to circulating libraries and their audiences. She had started writing *Jane Eyre* as a three-volume work in

³⁶ In their critical edition of *The Professor*, Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten write that the manuscript contains “approximately 24,000 words” (xxix). This is clearly a mistake, given the numbers of lines and word per page I record above. I conducted an electronic word count on a text file of the first printed edition of *The Professor* (London: Smith, Elder, 1857) to establish the more exact total of 88,000 words. For more on this calculation, see my note below.

³⁷ Volumes one and two of *Wuthering Heights* consisted of 348 and 416 pages of text, respectively. *Agnes Grey* included 363 pages of text. For collations of these works, see Walter E. Smith's *The Brontë Sisters: A Bibliographical Catalogue* (Los Angeles: Heritage Book Shop, 1991).

³⁸ The word counts were conducted on txt files derived from digitized copies of Smith, Elder's 1857 edition of *The Professor*, which are available via Google Books, and which I accessed on 31 August 2012. Volume one: <<http://books.google.com/books?id=k7MBAAAAQAAJ>>. Volume two: <<http://books.google.com/books?id=xjQJAAAAQAAJ>>. I retrieved the Google Book OCR-derived text in EPUB format, and ran a word count on the text extracted from it.

August of 1846 while her “one-volume tale was plodding its weary round in London.”³⁹ She began making a fair copy of *Jane Eyre* on 16 March 1847, and sent it to Smith, Elder on 19 August of the same year, within weeks of the firm’s rejection of *The Professor*.⁴⁰ The holograph manuscript that Brontë sent to Smith, Elder comprises three separate volumes, which served as the printer’s copy for the first edition. Whereas she had simply written *The Professor* in one volume, Brontë took pains to determine each division break for *Jane Eyre*.⁴¹ Indeed, such planning would have been unusual for Brontë, if we consider the preparation of her earlier compositions. Although it was the case that Brontë had imitated and played with division breaks in the “multi-volume” works of her juvenilia, she had exercised full control over the format. Now she had to anticipate where her publisher would naturally expect to divide her fiction. In addition, sustaining *Jane Eyre* over three volumes and the length of more than 700 manuscript pages must also have been a

³⁹ Charlotte Brontë discusses this in her ‘Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell’ in the second edition of *Wuthering Heights* (1850).

⁴⁰ These dates are recorded in the fair copy manuscript sent by Brontë to Smith, Elder. See Charlotte Brontë, “Jane Eyre,” George Smith Memorial Bequest, Add. 43474–6, The British Library.

⁴¹ Charlotte Brontë, “Jane Eyre,” George Smith Memorial Bequest, Add. 43474–6, The British Library. The catalogue record for Add. 43474–6 suggests that Brontë composed the manuscript as a single volume: “the manuscript was originally written as one volume, the folios being numbered consecutively throughout, viz. 1–255 (= vol. 1), 255 (lower half of page)–503 (= vol. II), and 504–768 (= vol. III), and the chapters being similarly treated (vol. II opens with the original chap. 16, vol. III with chap. 27).” However, Brontë clearly ends volumes one and two with a similar statement on the verso of both pages: “End of Vol. 1st”; “End of Vol. 2nd.” In addition, she wrote “Vol. 2nd” in the upper righthand corner of the first page of the second volume. These three statements appear in the same hand that Brontë used for the various titles throughout her manuscript (e.g., “Jane Eyre / by Currer Bell / Vol. 1st” on page one of volume one; the “Conclusion” of volume three, which begins on page 259; and “Finis” which appears on the last page of volume three). In addition, the verso of page 212 in the second volume reads “End of Vol. 2nd” in tiny letters, which have been crossed out. (Brontë chose to end volume two at page 255, instead.) This evidence confirms that Brontë deliberately organized the manuscript into separate volumes before sending it to Smith, Elder.

challenge for her. Although Christine Alexander notes that “Charlotte’s [unpublished] manuscripts alone contain more words than all her published novels together,”⁴² *Jane Eyre* greatly exceeded in length any single work Brontë had previously written.

Instead of letting a publisher arbitrarily divide her work into three parts, Brontë, true to form, determined the breaks herself. It seems likely that she had a ruled surface upon which she carefully measured and composed each page; while the leaves of the manuscript themselves are not ruled or scored, most of the lines appear to be perfectly and uniformly registered all the way through, with the exception of a few leaves.⁴³ In the first volume of the manuscript, 24 lines appear in precisely the same location on all full pages, with an average of ten words per full line. The first printing, by comparison, contains 28 lines per full page, and an average of about eight words per full line, so that the 255 pages of the manuscript of volume one work out to 304 pages in the first printed edition.⁴⁴ Volumes two and three work out to approximately the same size, with the 249 and 265 manuscript pages of volumes two and three published as 304 and 311 printed

⁴² See Christine Alexander, “Autobiography and Juvenilia,” in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, 166.

⁴³ The number of lines ruled per page seems to depend, in part, on the stationery that Brontë used for her fair copy manuscript. Volume one is entirely composed on Extra Satin (pp. 1–144) and Universal Letter Paper (145–255) measuring 22.85 cm tall. While pages 1–212 of volume two are also written on Universal Letter Paper and also have 24 lines per full page, Brontë shifts to Satin Post, a paper measuring 23 cm, at page 213; the slightly longer paper seems to have given her the room to add an extra line (25 per page). I have not yet had a chance to examine the paper of the third volume, whose numbers of lines per full page range from 25 to 29; Brontë added extra lines toward the end of the manuscript, whose final leaves are not registered per her usual practice.

⁴⁴ For the purposes of this calculation, I counted words for 105 full lines from the first volume of the manuscript. The exact average of the sample was 10.2, with a sample standard deviation of 1.41. The true average, at 95% confidence, assuming a normal distribution with standard deviation equal to the sample standard deviation, is between 9.93 and 10.47.

pages, respectively.⁴⁵ This evidence suggests that Brontë employed a system, somewhat akin to our own modern electronic automatic word count, to regulate the size of her document, and to calculate with accuracy the breaks between its volumes. This, in turn, allowed her to write “endings” for each volume, which each occasion an interruption for readers of her novel.

Jane Eyre was published shortly before 19 October 1847 (*Letters*, vol. 1, 552). Smith, Elder had at least one batch of the novel bound into three octavo volumes by Westleys & Clark, whose binder’s ticket can still be found in copies.⁴⁶ The binding of *Jane Eyre* would have appeared distinguished but restrained in its design. It was made in a conventional style. The dark purplish brown colored cloth (sometimes referred to as “claret”) in which the book was first bound was very popular in England from 1845–1850. The boards were covered in vertically ribbed cloth and were blindstamped with a conventional rectangular, trellis-design border. By this time in the nineteenth century, blindstamped arabesques or gilt titles and vignettes were common on the upper covers of bindings (Ball 43). The spines were decoratively blindstamped with rules and four diamond-shaped bands, with the title stamped on the spines in gold. Bookbinding historian Douglas Ball points out that this practice, imitative of hand bookbinding, was more

⁴⁵ One can find ratios gauging the page counts for Brontë’s manuscript and that of the printed copy on the backs of a number of the holograph manuscript’s leaves, so that the actual length of each volume could be ascertained by the compositors, who set the type to reflect Brontë’s desired endings for all three volumes. For example, calculations appear in volume one on the versos of pages 73, 161, 187, and 199.

⁴⁶ In March 2010, the English bookseller Sims Reed Ltd listed a copy online with a binder’s ticket (description accessed 8 March 2010 via Advanced Book Exchange): <<http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/SearchResults?bi=0&bx=off&ds=30&pn=smith%2C+elder&recentlyadded=all&sortby=1&tn=jane+eyre&x=30&y=3&yrl=1847>>.

frequent toward the end of the 1840s and was often used for “more ‘serious’ works and series such as the publications of learned societies” (ibid.). The books contained plain yellow coated endpapers.⁴⁷

In short, *Jane Eyre* made a respectable debut, its binding and design appearing very much like other contemporary, upscale three-decker productions. In this sense, there was nothing especially remarkable about it.⁴⁸ However, as a group, three-deckers presented a class of sober, durable, and expensive books that stood in contrast to the decorated cloth covers that became increasingly fashionable from the 1830s onwards with the rise of gold stamping used for emblematic or pictorial vignettes.⁴⁹ The 1840s marked the rise of what Ball refers to as “conscious individual cover design in publishers’ bindings, and the involvement in these designs of significant figures such as Owen Jones, Noel Humphreys, Sir Henry Cole and John Leighton” (44). Publishers’ gift books and their colorful cloth covers, frequently decorated in gold, invited display and emphasized the book’s status as a desirable good. Color-printed covers arrived with the “Home Treasury” series for children. And Noel Humphreys and Owen

⁴⁷ In his catalogue, Walter E. Smith notes two binding variants, both extremely plain: one in a dark green horizontally ribbed cloth, with plain upper and lower covers, a printed paper spine label, and plain white endpapers; the second variant is half-bound in pale olive-gray boards with a reddish brown, diaper-pattered cloth spine with a paper label and containing pale yellow coated endpapers (22).

⁴⁸ It is important to recognize that today, first editions of *Jane Eyre* in its original cloth are extremely scarce. Many of the first editions were rebound, as was often the custom of book collectors. A general awareness of and appreciation for books bound in their original cloth did not develop until the twentieth century.

⁴⁹ My ongoing research into this area thus far suggests that three-deckers began to appear occasionally in pictorial cloth beginning in the 1870s and onwards. Thomas Hardy’s *The Trumpet-Major*, published by Smith, Elder, & Co. in 1880, is a notable example.

Jones helped to introduce papier mâché and relieve bindings, respectively (Ball 44–5).

Nineteenth-century instructions and manuals pertaining to binding design are quite scarce. Certainly the remnant archives of Smith, Elder, and Company do not contain any documents that provide insight into this area, other than payments for bookbindings made in the company's ledgers. However, manuals from later periods present distinctions with respect to design in keeping with the trends already observed. For example, Joseph Cummings Chase's *Decorative Design: A Text-Book of Practical Methods* (1915) instructs designers toward two chief points when developing designs for book covers: "1st. Is the book intended for news-stand sale, or for a library edition? 2nd. What is the story contained in the text? The first fact can be ascertained from the publisher, and the second can best be learned by reading the manuscript of the book" (37). Chase goes on to distinguish between books intended to be sold as "news-stand sellers" and those for libraries:

If the book is to be a 'news-stand seller,' the cover-design should be a striking poster-scheme, as simple in arrangement as can be devised, with lettering as evident and legible as lettering can be. Color-contrast is preferable to color-harmony because of its stronger appeal to the attention. The publisher is looking for a cover that will make his book the first to be noticed upon the book-stand. This type of cover is necessarily of simple design. [...]. This kind of cover ought to

suggest to the casual glance the character of the book itself, viz.: the detective story, the story of adventure on sea or in the deep woods, the historic romance, the story of sport, ad infinitum. (Chase 38)

Chase adds that “No experienced maker of book-covers would be willing to begin his design until he had become thoroughly acquainted with the contents of the book. Any stupid blunder on the part of the designer will not be forgotten by the publishers.” Meanwhile, books for libraries received different treatment:

If the book is for the library table, depending for its sale, not upon the news-stand display, but upon its literary value and the acknowledged reputation of its author, then the designer’s problem is entirely different. The color-contrast and poster-effect of the news-stand book are not wanted here, but rather color-harmony and the quiet treatment befitting the appearance of one about to step modestly into the library and shortly to take a place upon the shelves beside the best of literature. A design for such a book frequently consists only of well-planned masses of distinguished lettering placed in a dignified position upon book-cloth carefully selected.

(Chase 39)

He comments that “the real demand is for cover-designs intended for book-stand display and sale” (ibid.).

The manner in which Chase distinguishes library bindings from those of the news-stand is compelling. The “character” of the newsstand book is genre-driven—

anything from detective story to sport. The library book, on the other hand, already has a life of its own, seemingly independent of its publisher; indeed, it is literally personified as “one about to step modestly into the library and shortly to take a place upon the shelves beside the best of literature.” Chase seems to be implying that “the best of literature”—that is, literature with an “acknowledged reputation” for “literary value”—speaks for itself. Dramatically illustrated book covers were likely to be associated with plot-driven genres and short-lived fiction, not classics.

Such opposing strategies in bookbinding design would have likely emerged, as previously stated, in the 1830s, and become more pronounced just as *Jane Eyre* was being published by Smith, Elder. The late 1840s marked the rise of railway fiction and forerunners of “yellowbacks,” which appeared on the scene in the 1850s.⁵⁰ Yellowbacks were one-volume books bound in colorful, glazed paper-covered boards with “poster-style” images that were often titillating. They were inexpensively priced, usually at a cost between one and two shillings and sixpence apiece. In addition to having prices printed on their bindings, the back and inner covers of yellowbacks tended to feature advertisements. The publisher Chapman and Hall used this kind of distinctive, eye-catching binding in 1854 to advertise its “Select Library of Fiction”; Chapman and Hall later joined W. H. Smith in 1859 to market its books in railway bookstalls. Other publishing firms, including Routledge and Ward and Lock, published yellowbacks in the 1850s. By the 1860s,

⁵⁰ Forerunners of yellowbacks emerged from sales of fiction in railways in the late 1840s. Simon Eliot writes that “sometime between December 15 and 29, 1848” George Routledge published James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Red Rover* in “boards covered with glazed paper on which was printed a picture” (“The Business of Victorian Publishing” 50).

major firms that specialized in supplying fiction for the circulating libraries, such as Smith, Elder and Sampson Low, were also issuing works as yellowbacks.⁵¹

A three-decker and yellowback presented side by side is a study in contrast: the former is stately, large, and generally bound in a conservative style—its printed contents heavily leaded, with generous margins and chapter headings, and printed on very good paper—while the latter is light, portable, colorful, and loud, with covers explicitly tied to contents as well as general advertisements, and with the text printed often somewhat poorly on cheap paper. Not all fiction that appeared in yellowback bindings was salacious, however. Simon Eliot points out that novels published in yellowback bindings ranged from cheap reprints of “high-status” novels to first editions of fiction “aimed at a less sophisticated market” (“The Business of Victorian Publishing” 51). Notably, however, Smith, Elder never published *Jane Eyre* as a yellowback; nor did the firm market the works of Anthony Trollope, William Thackeray, or Elizabeth Gaskell in the format. In the fifth volume of his vast study, *Victorian Yellowbacks and Paperbacks, 1849–1905*, Chester W. Topp surmises that Smith, Elder “showed their respect” for the work of these authors “by never issuing them as yellowbacks.” Topp continues: “As a result, there are no yellowback editions of three of Trollope’s most respected titles: *Framley Parsonage*, *The Small House at Allington*, and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, nor do we have a yellowback of *Jane Eyre*.” Yet, as Topp also notes, “Smith, Elder was not loathe, however to issue yellowbacks of lesser-known

⁵¹ For more on the rise of yellowbacks, see M. Sadleir’s *Collecting ‘Yellowbacks,’* C. W. Topp, and Graham Law.

authors such as Mrs. Hungerford (Margaret Argles), Holme Lee (Harriet Parr), William E. Norris, and Sabine Baring-Gould” (vol. 5, xxiii).

Notably, when Smith, Elder published inexpensive editions of *Jane Eyre*, the bindings remained conservative, and did not depict the novel’s scenes nor characters. Smith, Elder’s “Uniform Edition” of *Jane Eyre* appeared in 1850 in a single volume⁵² selling for six shillings, and was bound in dark purple morocco-grained cloth with both its upper and lower covers deeply blindstamped with a decorated rectangular panel of an abstract Moresque pattern within a double-ruled border.⁵³ In the center of this pattern is a diamond, also in relief, with the title blindstamped within. This binding’s generic design was used for other books by the Brontës in the “Uniform Edition” series (including *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* as one volume in 1850, *Shirley* in 1852/3, and *Villette* in 1855) and possibly as generic bindings for other books. Later, when *Jane Eyre* was issued in Smith, Elder’s “Cheap Edition” series in 1857, also in one volume (priced at half a crown, or two shillings sixpence each), it appeared in bright orange glazed cloth (see Figure 1), with the text for the covers and spine printed in black, and, in some instances, advertisements for other works by the Brontës printed on the endpapers and pastedowns. As with the glaringly bright covers of yellowbacks, the vivid orange cloth would have denoted the book’s status as a cheap edition and readily

⁵² This was the first one-volume iteration of the novel, except for the two American editions published by Harper (New York) and Wilkins, Carter (Boston) in 1848.

⁵³ Walter E. Smith includes an excellent photograph of this somewhat scarce edition in his catalogue, as well as other extremely useful descriptions of the book’s price, format, and binding.

caught the attention of potential customers passing the bookstall. However, the covers, again, were not pictorial.

These and other later covers on Smith, Elder's cheap editions stand in contrast to those created for *Jane Eyre* by publishers when the novel fell out of copyright in 1889. That year, Routledge published *Jane Eyre* as a two-shilling yellowback (see Figure 2), as well as a paperback in its "Sixpenny Novels" series, in which the works of Dickens, Charles Lever, Lytton, Captain Marryat, W. H. Maxwell, Radcliffe, Scott, Smollett, and Eugene Sue also appeared. Routledge's first illustrated

cover for *Jane Eyre* depicts Rochester's riding accident on the road to Hay. Both the hard cover yellowbacks and their softcover counterparts contained numerous

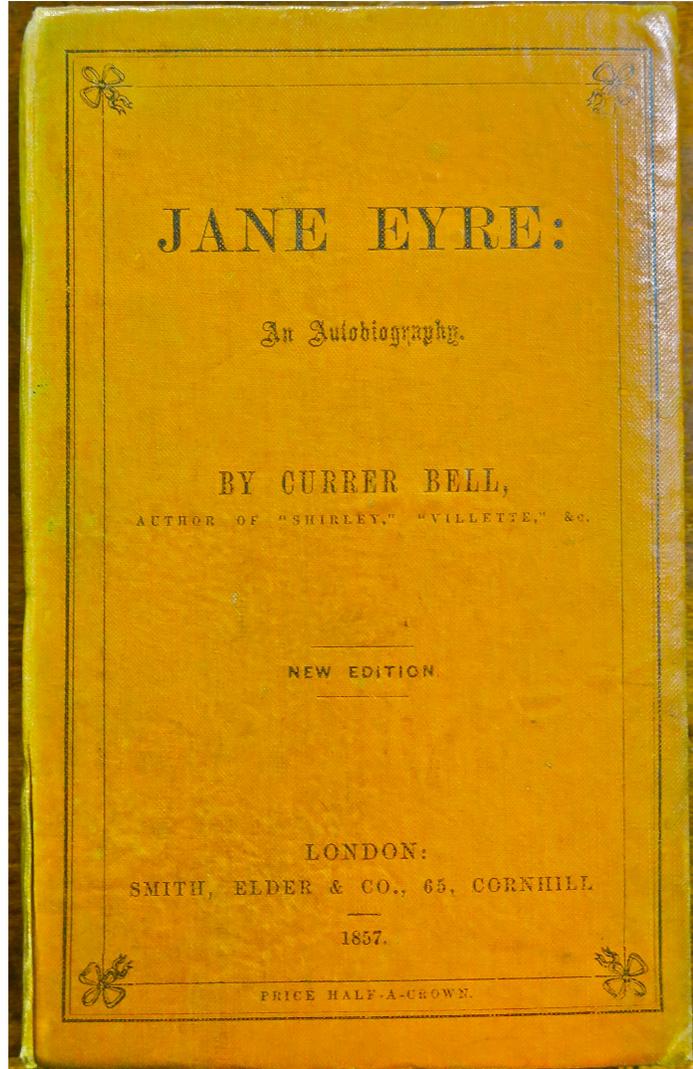


Figure 1: *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* (London: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1858). (N.B.: The date of "1857" on cover differs from that of 1858 on the title page.)

Jane Eyre Collection, Rare Book School, Charlottesville, Virginia.

ads: Brooke's "Monkey Brand" Soap; Keating's "Best Cough Cure" Lozenges; Keating's bug and flea powder; *Mr Barnes of New York* (a Sixpenny published by Routledge); *That Frenchman! Mr. Potter of Texas* (a Routledge yellowback)—and, of course, Pears' Soap. An ad for Eno's Fruit Salt has a particularly rhythmic jingle: "What higher aim can man attain that conquest over human pain?" (included in British Library 12624.f.8).

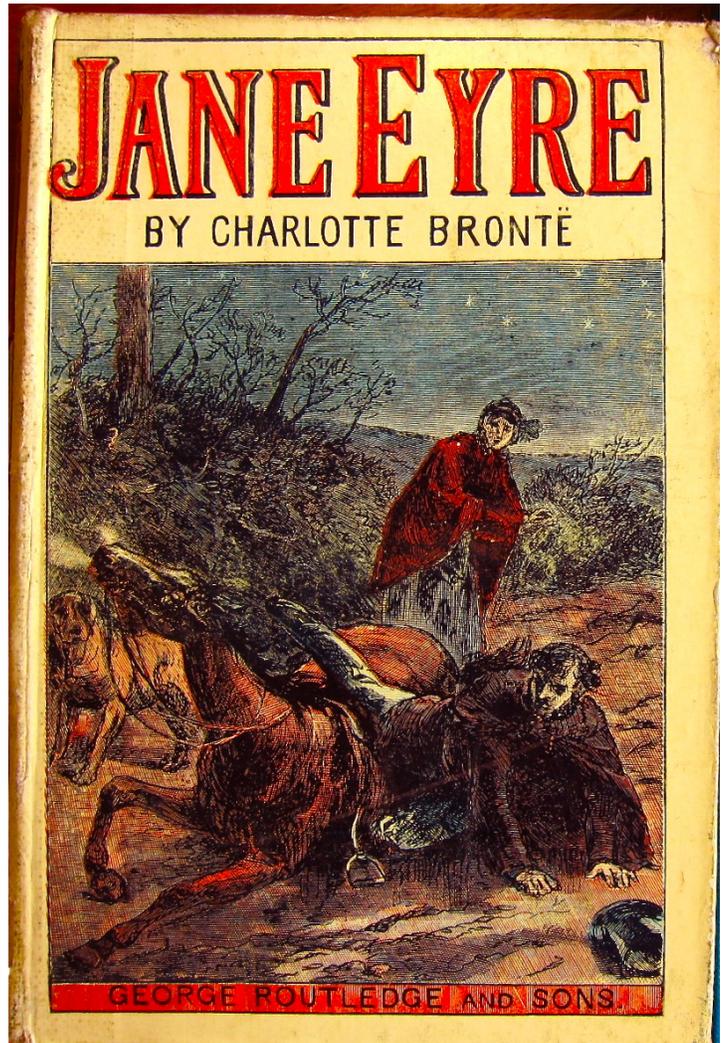


Figure 2: *Jane Eyre* as a yellowback (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1889).

BOD 256 e.4634. Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

Ward, Lock proceeded to bring out *Jane Eyre* as a paperback in its "Select Library of Fiction" in 1890. Its lurid cover (Figure 3) depicts Rochester and Jane standing over Richard Mason, who reclines, insensate and bloodstained, in a chair next to a basin. This cover, doubtlessly, would have registered as a thriller. Yet perhaps the most outrageous of these covers is the 1892 paperback cover (Figure

4) that Routledge brought out for its “Caxton Novels” series. Depicted within a central vignette, Bertha, draped in folds of white fabric, falls in mid-air. In the background, Thornfield burns and Rochester, seen only in silhouette, frantically reaches out to save her. Thornfield’s battlements and Bertha’s dress suggest a gothic romance with thrilling content. After the publication of *Lady Audley’s Secret* in 1862, Margaret Oliphant noted in 1867 that *Jane Eyre* had unfortunately initiated a new “flood of contemporary story-telling” of sensational nature: “We

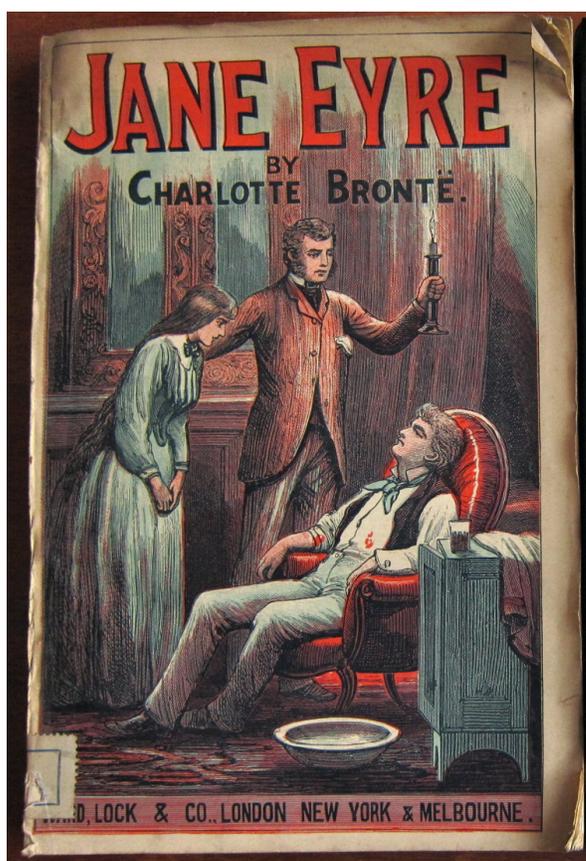


Figure 3: *Jane Eyre* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1890).

BOD 256 e.4859. Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

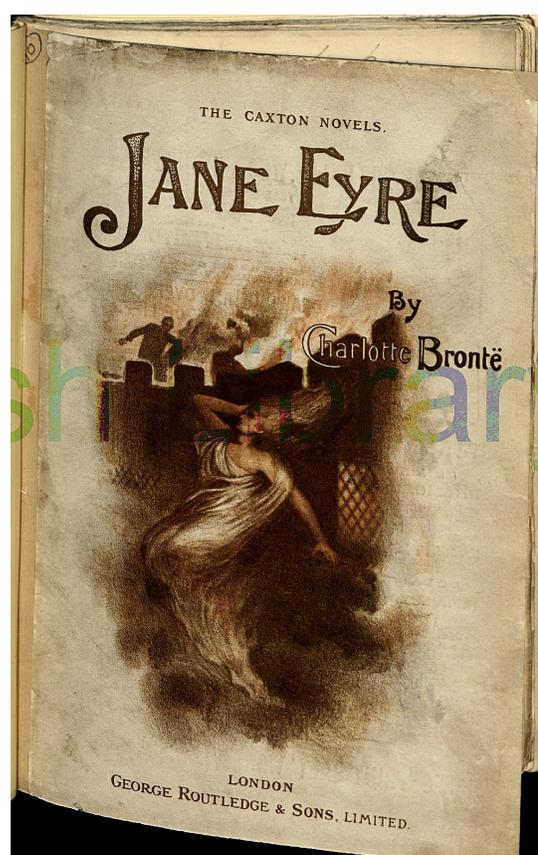


Figure 4: *Jane Eyre* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1892).

© The British Library Board, HMNTS 012611.k.24.

have grown accustomed to the reproduction, not only of wails over female loneliness and the impossibility of finding anybody to marry, but to the narrative of many thrills of feeling much more practical and conclusive” (quoted in Allott, 391). Such covers of the 1890s confirm that *Jane Eyre* has fallen victim to its own mass-market, genre-driven success.

Of course, not all copies of *Jane Eyre* published at this time were so sensational. In 1889, Routledge also issued an edition of *Jane Eyre* modestly bound in black cloth. This volume seems to have been part of Routledge’s “Florin Novel” series—octavo volumes sold for two shillings and advertised to the library market as follows: “Strongly bound in CLOTH, cut edges; well suited for NAVAL, MILITARY, and PUBLIC LIBRARIES” (see British Library copy 012611 i4). Meanwhile, Smith, Elder continued to issue even inexpensive copies of *Jane Eyre* in unillustrated covers. The Pocket Edition of 1889, priced at one shilling and six pence per volume, was quarter bound in cloth, with a plain green and black cover. Its only ad was Smith, Elder’s own for the “Pocket Edition.”

There is a marked contrast between the sensational, illustrated covers appearing on *Jane Eyre* in the 1890s and the tasteful, restrained designs of Smith, Elder (as well as those volumes of other publishers geared toward libraries). This trend, described in the epilogue of this study, would continue to play out over the next century. Turning to the story of *Jane Eyre*, the melodrama of the illustrated covers described here seems out of keeping with the “plain” rhetoric of Jane’s narrative. Indeed, Jane is a borrower, not a purchaser, of books; and she loathes

ostentation. Brontë's novel is very much concerned with both aesthetics and the class markers associated with the study and connoisseurship of books, fine art, and fashion, and it is Jane's ability to inspect (and perhaps admire) but ultimately refuse commercial and luxury goods that sets *her* apart from other women (and heroines). Such tendencies parallel Brontë's own professed inclinations and habits.

This was not always the case. Portions of Brontë's early Angrian writings obsessively catalogue in great detail the rich clothing, furnishings, and books of its aristocrats. Take for example the following scene from "Passing Events," a manuscript that Brontë began on her birthday in 1836 while she was engaged as a teacher at Roe Head:

the Queen of Angria was sitting close by a large bright fire. her sofa was covered with many beautiful little volumes, bound in white & crimson & green & purple Russia. Some were open, displaying exquisite ivory engravings on silver paper & fair type on a smooth surface almost like ivory. One had dropped from her hand & lay at the footstool at her feet & she was leaning back with her eyes closed & her thoughts wandering in day-dreams either of bliss or mourning. (MS Brontë 02, The Morgan Library & Museum; transcribed in *Gérin's Five Novelettes* 55)

The scene is one of extravagance and extremes. The Queen of Angria, surrounded by "beautiful little volumes," daydreams of bliss or sorrow, resembling, in some fashion, Georgiana Reed, who will languidly languish on the sofa at Gateshead

with her novels. Unlike many of the books and other printed materials depicted in *Jane Eyre*, the emphasis placed on these books is not on their contents, but instead on their luxurious forms. They are bound in “Russia,” a deluxe leather that was made of calfskin (the smoothest of all leather binding materials) treated with birch tar oil. Here, the richly colored dyes—“white & crimson & green & purple”—also indicate expense, as do the “ivory engravings on silver paper.”⁵⁴ This is much in contrast to Bewick’s *British Birds*, whose black-and-white wood engravings cannot compete with the more powerful emotions they evoke.

In her monograph, *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Marjorie Garson discusses how Brontë moves away from her color-drenched Angrian world to those scenes of her novels, where color is selectively treated for the purposes of constructing a character’s cultural and sartorial taste. Jane’s simple, “Quakerish” dress and abnegation of ostentatious clothing provide her a “positive moral valence,” as does her refusal of the brightly colored, costly silk gowns that Rochester tries to buy her after their engagement. Such decisions, on Jane’s part, demonstrate “her difference from the ordinary governess” (Garson 254). But, as Garson also notes, “the binary system by which she constructs herself allows [Jane] [...] no more nuanced alternative, and the paradoxicalness of her position suggests how desperate is the attempt to use taste as a mark of her essential nature” (255). Garson concludes: “The almost

⁵⁴ Though the reference to “ivory engravings” is obscure, the mention recalls Jane Eyre’s portrait of Blanche Ingram, painted on a “piece of smooth ivory” with “finest, clearest tints” and in “softest shades and sweetest hues” (201).

frantic emphasis in Brontë's novels on the authentic inner self registers anxiety about the degree to which the self is constructed by others" (ibid.).

As we will continue to see throughout this study, such anxieties parallel the ways in which Brontë herself reckoned with the demands of the literary marketplace. The published appearance of Brontë's writing, which remained unillustrated during her lifetime (at her special request, made to her publisher),⁵⁵ reinforces the thematic divide in the story of *Jane Eyre* noted by Garson. Similarly, Brontë's own sharp distinction of "Authors" from "bookmakers," a binary formulation that will be analyzed further in the following chapter, informs the defensive rhetoric that continued to appear throughout her published work. Again and again, Brontë abnegates commerce and profit-driven writing in favor of "Truth," or those writings that result from genuine artistic (and spiritual) revelation. Her own self-representations as an author parallel the need for maintaining this authenticity.

4. Vignettes and Tailpieces

I began this chapter by briefly observing the ways in which books, as depicted in *Jane Eyre*, both inform and shape the characters of their readers. It is also the case, as we have seen, that the personal beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices of authors both affect and effect the physical qualities of books. Such exchanges are always bracketed by the contingencies of historical contexts—the changing technologies,

⁵⁵ See chapter four of this study, "The Book of Nature," for an account of this.

methods of distribution, and marketplace trends that help determine the ways in which books are made and received by their authors, publishers, and readers.

Books shape books.

It is fitting, then, that *Jane Eyre* begins with another book: a volume of Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Jane does not read the book in any expected sequential fashion (as we, ourselves as readers, are presumably at that moment moving from page one to two and three of *Jane Eyre*). Rather, from its very start, *Jane Eyre* presents us with a remarkable scene, in which reading is depicted as not just the straightforward ingestion of printed content, but also the manipulation and transformation of it. Books are not simply vehicles for abstract bodies of information, but navigable objects whose "letter-press"-printed "leaves" might be turned and skimmed (4); as readers of Brontë's novel, we are indirectly invited to compare our own style of reading with Jane's.

Jane's reading of natural history is not a quest for objective fact. Instead, it is an activity heavily determined by the interplay of physical and imaginative space—the immediate "history," as it were, of the reader. Consider Jane's position within the window seat at Gateshead, "clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating" her from the "drear November day" (ibid.). Reading here might be likened to a "protecting, but not separating" act through which interpretations arise that are simultaneously private/protected as well as open/receptive to the work of material and natural influences. Jane reads Bewick's natural history in a space conducive to her own interpretation of nature; for even as Jane is "turning

over the leaves” of her book, she also studies the landscape around her, almost as if it, too, were an illustration: “that winter afternoon [...] a pale blank of mist and cloud [...] a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub” (ibid.). Reading is an event in which text and context determine one another. It is both flexible and porous. If we were to chart the arc of the narrative sequence of the “text” that Jane reads, it would not be a sequential reading, page by page, but one including these exterior influences that she describes. Jane’s reading is simultaneously a turning away from the natural and material world—as evidenced by the “double retirement” of her withdrawal into the window seat, with its red moreen curtains—as well as a rediscovery of it. Ironically, Jane best “reads” nature, the garden where she might have walked, indirectly—through the medium of a book.

The reading event itself is presented as a recollection mediated through time, the scene being narrated by an older Jane depicting a younger one—a narrative effect serving, perhaps, as another turn or “double retirement.” Thus, when Jane reads, sitting “cross-legged, like a Turk,” we cannot be sure whose interpretation is responsible for the simile (ibid.). Clearly, the physical positioning of Jane’s body styles itself in a way that we may liken to her early taste for literature, which we soon learn tends toward “Arabian tales” (41). In this way, Jane is literally shaped by her reading. But which Jane is doing the shaping? Does the young Jane envision herself as a Turk as she reads, or does the older Jane draw the parallel for her? We realize that, in constructing her life story, from the very beginning Jane is describing her earlier self as a product of literary style—but the

narrated and narrating Janes are allowed to blur. Jane's style of narration is akin to her method of reading: it is an act that protects, covers, or hides relationships between selves, even as it points to them. Reading, narrating, and writing happen together.

More conventional readings of the first pages of *Jane Eyre* treat these passages and those following them as primitive stages in Jane's development as a reader. In her study, *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience*, Carol Bock argues that "reading is a purely consolatory pursuit for young Jane, not simply because it is a refuge from the unhappiness of her actual environment, but also because it allows her [...] to see analogies in books that help her to accept her own experience" (72). With respect to the descriptive passages in Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*, Bock writes: "Jane initially finds an objective correlative for her inner feelings, and reading those passages prepares her to interpret the following illustrations in a satisfying (though, to us, sad) manner" (73). Bock understands young Jane's reading of Bewick to be an instructive illustration of the dangers of subjective and solipsistic reading. In Bock's view, Jane must struggle to literary proficiency from these "unpromising beginnings" (ibid.).

Are these beginnings so "unpromising"? What would a "proficient" reader of Bewick encounter? Proficiency, literalism, and detached objectivity are just as dangerous in *Jane Eyre* as flights of fancy. (This is most clearly marked by the inflexibility and fates of both St. John and Eliza Reed.) Bewick's small, modest, uncolored and yet expertly handled wood-engraved illustrations do not "console"

Jane's feelings; on the contrary, Jane's mind enters into trance-like conversation with them: "Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own; shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive" (5). Jane's art of seeing is an incipient but powerful talent. The "death-white" landscapes maintain their integrity, but also serve as blanks or canvas for open emotional exploration and (later, artistic) response. Feelings, for Jane, are as "real" a subject as any graphic detail: "I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchyard with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two tress, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of even-tide" (ibid.). This is not an instance of thwarted pathetic fallacy, but of an emerging aesthetic. Jane reads not just for ideas, but also for figured emotion. Perhaps this is why birds are almost absent from Jane's descriptions of what is, after all, a book nominally about the natural history of birds. Jane reads the book's ornamental vignettes, apparently unrelated to its main subject, to discover a different kind of history—one that, to a casual observer, could seem merely ancillary. Jane, herself a marginal figure, an orphan self-described as "small," "disconnected," and "plain," is not unlike these vignettes.

Jane's autobiographical narrative easily appropriates the genre of natural history, just as her own response to Bewick's images recalls to Jane similar moods elicited by Bessie's nursery stories, themselves products of narrative amalgamation:

Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings [...] passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of Pamela, and Henry, Earl of Moreland. (5)

Bessie's memory blends Richardson's bestselling novel with "old fairy tales and older ballads" likely to have been transmitted by word of mouth. Just as the genre of natural history slides into autobiography, a published work merges with folk tale. The "books" Jane and Bessie carry are a kind of residue from their selective reading of them.

When John Reed abruptly discovers Jane and asks her what she has been doing "behind the curtain," he proceeds to ask her to "shew the book" as proof of her purported activity of "reading." John's abrupt demand also prompts us to question the legitimacy of Jane's activity. Was she, in fact, "reading," or merely indulging in a solipsistic daydream, as literary critic Carol Bock suggests? John and Jane's exchange underscores the fact that, while one can readily show a physical book, one cannot as easily show or demonstrate one's reading of it, nor the value of one's interpretations. Readings are performative events that cannot be located in objects alone; like the vignettes that Jane has been studying, they are present with the text, but have no definite border. John Reed, by contrast, treats

books simply as material goods: “I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years” (7–8).

The work of Thomas Bewick is highly significant for *Jane Eyre* in still another way. As the critic Jenny Uglow has noted, Bewick was famous in his time for representing the common subjects of everyday life—“the very Burns of woodcutting,” as described in 1838 by William Howitt (quoted in Uglow, 310). Bewick’s plain, unadorned depictions of reality were often praised for their truth. Wordsworth’s poem, “The Two Thieves,” celebrates Bewick along these lines, as Uglow points out, through a “plainer and more emphatic language” that itself was linked to the “forms and rhythms of nature” (311). In that poem’s manuscript version, Wordsworth contrasts the product of Bewick’s “rude tools” with the “canvas and oil” of Sir Joshua Reynolds (*Poetical Works*, vol. 4, 245). Uglow points to the significance of Wordsworth’s turn from the “high art” or “generalised, ideal beauty advocated by Reynolds and his followers” to the “cheap woodcuts” and “common language” of Bewick (*ibid.*).

This “common language” was informed by Bewick’s own belief that he was interpreting, as he writes in his memoir, “the great Book of Creation,” which was made up of “the living, the visible, words of God” (279). The analogy was very important for Brontë, and is one that I return to in the final chapter of this work, “The Book of Nature.” Bewick’s approach to both “reading” and interpreting nature serves as a key example of the way that ideology literally gives shape to books. As John Brewer succinctly writes in his own study of Bewick, “Technique was

moral” (417). So, too, was this the case with Brontë. For both the language of the Bible and the imagery of Bewick combine to serve as important counterpoints to the strategically placed plot twists of *Jane Eyre*.

First, we should note that Brontë, like many other writers, likely shaped her novel with popular (and wayward) readers in mind. Guinevere L. Griest describes how the divisions of three-decker novels “interrupt” their narratives, an inconvenience that often prompted subscribers to stop reading a novel at the end of its first volume, when it did not hold their interest. Consequently, authors often structured and timed their plots with the three-decker form in mind, so as to maintain their readers’ attention. “If some kind of crisis was often desirable at the end of volume one,” Griest writes, “it was practically imperative at the end of the second” (105). Thus, the endings of volumes one and two of *Jane Eyre* coincide with two dramatic turning points in the action and mood of the novel. Volume one concludes with the fire started by Bertha Mason in Mr. Rochester’s bedroom, and Jane’s rescue of him. Likewise, volume two concludes with a major turn in the plot: Jane discovers Rochester’s previous marriage to Bertha. These calculated cliffhangers serve to propel readers into the novel’s second and third volumes. At the same time, their melodrama (which Brontë claimed was a necessary ingredient for the successful publication of *Jane Eyre*) is undercut by a series of contemplative vignettes drawn not from the shelf of the circulating library, but from the Bible and the imagery of Bewick:

Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne: but I could not reach it, even in fancy,—a counteracting breeze blew off land, and continually drove me back. Sense would resist delirium, judgment would warn passion. Too feverish to rest, I rose as soon as day dawned. (Ending of volume 1; 187–88)

The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, “the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me.” (Ending of volume 2; 375)

Strategically positioned at the very end of volumes one and two, these two final passages constitute verbal “tailpieces” that undercut the melodrama of the novel’s plot. The passages draw on the language of Isaiah 62:4 and Psalms 69:1–2, and they echo Jane’s opening impressions of Bewick’s vignettes: “a broken boat stranded on a desolate coast” and “two ships becalmed on a torpid sea” (5).

The first passage illustrates all of the mixed hope and anxiety of a voyager on the sea who catches a glimpse of land, which, in this case, represents a spiritual,

as well as earthly, marriage (Beulah signifying Israel but also literally meaning, in Hebrew, “married”). The analogy of approaching shore recalls Jane’s early meditations with respect to the “coasts” and “bleak shores” she reads about in Bewick, as well as the “marine phantoms” and other fancies that are activated in Jane’s imagination by her encounter with Bewick’s wood-engraved vignettes. If Jane’s early desires manifest as a kind of reading informed by “imperfect feelings,” by the end of volume one, Jane draws on the language of shorelines (themselves a kind of border or margin) to allude to her desire for arrival, marriage, and spiritual bliss.

By the conclusion of volume two, we realize that this desire, too, is the product of an undeveloped understanding. Here, there is no ship or support of any kind. The watery scene recalls the mood of the poetry from Bewick’s introduction: “the Atlantic surge / Pours in among the stormy Hebrides” (4). Jane has lost her sense of destination, and even as she comes into “deep waters,” the language of Psalm 69:1–2 floods her writing—the language of the Bible overflowing Jane’s narrative and concluding the volume. Indeed, the passage’s strong parallelism creates an echo between Jane’s language and that of the Bible, as if she has lost her own language entirely to it: “my life lorn” / “the waters came into my soul”; “my love lost” / “I sank into deep mire”; “my hope quenched” / “I came into deep waters”; “my faith death-struck” / “the floods overflowed me.” Structurally, the Biblical language justifies and gives shape to what is on the verge of shapelessness

—the condition that we and Jane find ourselves in after indulging in the romance that she and we have been fed by Rochester.

When Jane meets St. John in volume three, she finds someone whose language has also been flooded by that of the Bible. Throughout that volume of *Jane Eyre*, St. John echoes Biblical scripture, sometimes drawing on it directly for his own speech. His reading is not rereading, but a fixed idea, as static as he appears to Jane: “To me, he was in reality become no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold, bright, blue gem; his tongue, a speaking instrument—nothing more” (524). Just as with the endings of volumes one and two, the end of volume three also resolves in sacred language, this time as written by St. John, now a missionary in India. (And this “vignette” too still faintly echoes Jane’s reading of Bewick, for India is yet another remote region of “rocks and dangers” that must be arrived at via ship.) St. John writes in his letter to Jane:

“My Master [...] has forewarned me. Daily he announces more distinctly,— ‘Surely I come quickly;’ and hourly I more eagerly respond,—‘Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!’” (579)

The text from Revelation 22:20, nested within the context of St. John’s letter and positioned at the final threshold of the novel, seems to affirm the promise of spiritual realization. Yet these words—“I come quickly” and “even so come”—also strongly echo the secular text of *Jane Eyre* itself: Rochester’s call “Jane! Jane! Jane!” and Jane’s reply, “I am coming! [...] Wait for me! Oh, I will come!” (536). This miraculous exchange between Rochester and Jane—one that apparently

transcends material and physical laws, and certainly the writing of letters—overshadows St. John’s own account of call and response, which merely repeats the words of Revelation.

Jane does not dismiss St. John’s reading; in fact, the words in his letter fill her heart with “Divine joy.” But the novel suggests an alternative way of interacting with texts: living with them, among them, and speaking with a voice that, through them, creates something new—a living voice like a living book. That these words come, written in St. John’s handwriting and sent from a great distance, reminds us that reading is a material as well as imaginative act.⁵⁶ Secular and sacred language blend, St. John the Divine’s account merging with that of St. John Rivers, and then with that of Jane. St. John’s anticipated death and resurrection parallel the condition of texts themselves, which only live as they are reread, re-conceived, and remade by their readers.

⁵⁶ The materiality of the letter is underscored with Jane’s statement: “I know that a stranger’s hand will write to me next” (578).

Chapter 2: Authors and Bookmakers

[...] every trifle of a great genius is worth preserving.

Preface to volume two of “Young Sout’s Poems, with Notes.” Paris: MDL Pack, 1829 [Haworth: MS by PBB dated September 30, 1829]

Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life & it ought not to be.

Robert Southey to Charlotte Brontë (1837)

I hated the business, I begged leave to defer it: no—it should be gone through with now.

Jane Eyre (Clarendon Edition)

The thoughts and habits of readers, as presented in *Jane Eyre* and discussed in the previous chapter, often seem confined to kinds of books, whether romance novels or religious tracts. Yet print also makes possible that which gestures beyond it. “I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even mortal flesh,” as Jane tells Rochester, “it is my spirit that addresses your spirit” (318). How are we to interpret such revelations when voiced in the form of a commercially successful novel—a genre that, in 1847, was heavily associated with “custom,” “convention,” and, not least of all, the many tales of romance, crime, and high life that constituted the same “amusement-industry” critiqued by Thomas Carlyle, George Henry Lewes, and other contemporaries?⁵⁷ A regular reader of *Blackwood’s Magazine* and *Fraser’s Magazine*, Brontë herself was no stranger to such criticisms of the novel.⁵⁸ The critic Heather Glen has shown how Brontë’s juvenilia imitate and satirize popular works, including the so-called “Newgate novels” of William Harrison Ainsworth (e.g., *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*), the silver fork novels of Lord Edward Lytton Bulwer-Lytton (e.g., *Pelham*), and the Gothic romances of Ann Radcliffe.⁵⁹ We note, too, that, in describing her own reading activities as an adult, *Jane Eyre* herself conveys (or betrays) little interest

⁵⁷ Kathleen Tillotson discusses the importance of such critiques with respect to the development of the novel in her introduction to *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*.

⁵⁸ As Heather Glen writes, “Jane Eyre’s sense that ‘the golden age of modern literature’ has vanished, that ‘poetry’ and ‘genius’ must take their stand against ‘Mammon’, is prefigured in *Fraser’s* concern with what it saw as the commodification and debasement of romanticism—its attacks on the annuals, and on the ‘fashionable novelists’ such as Bulwer-Lytton and his ‘feminine followers’, its caustic view of sentiment, its parodies of figures such as Southey, Coleridge, Mrs Hemans, and Thomas Moore, its scorn for the cult of Byron and the over productivity of Scott” (*Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* 8).

⁵⁹ See Glen’s introduction to *Tales of Angria*.

in novels at all, while the effects of frivolous reading are suggested by the vapid escapism of Georgiana Reed and the self-interested, conspicuous consumption of Blanche Ingram.

Although *Jane Eyre* does not provide a window onto the publishing trade that gives rise to those mass-market fictions that constitute its shadow, Brontë's early tales do—incorporating the languages and paratexts of editors, publishers, and booksellers, while, at the same time, satirically exposing mercenary trade practices. For Brontë, authorship begins as an enterprise complicit not only with popular literature, but also the commercial marketing of books, only to become increasingly distanced from it. In *Jane Eyre*, we find writing that draws on mass-market genres in order to arrive at a new literature: one that gestures toward revelatory, unmediated self-expression—a response, as it were, to the perceived threat of the novel's status as mere commodity.

...

As a maker of her own manuscript books, which were written, bound, circulated, reviewed, edited, revised, and even “advertised” in collaboration with Branwell, Emily, and Anne, Charlotte Brontë was early on accustomed to imagining and imitating the cycle of book production in its entirety, but through almost entirely flexible means, much akin to Jane's vision of “a tale that never ended.” It seems that for Brontë, evidence of commercial publication and distribution were part of the “story” of any book. A title page introduces its own “characters”—author, editor, publisher, and bookseller—who are not restricted to the book's preliminary

pages, but who operate in Glass Town and Angria as part of a powerful and highly competitive trade in books. Authors vie not only with each other, but also with publishers and booksellers, who have their own business-driven agendas. Thus, when we encounter Brontë's early books, we must read through a double lens, tracing not only their historical manufacture at Haworth (i.e., the history of Brontë's own manuscript making), but also their purported production—the fictional representation of their publication and distribution in Angria.

During her early years at Haworth, Brontë was free to experiment with concepts and activities of book production without the requirements that would later be demanded of her by professional publishers. If we find it ironic that the kinds of wide public readerships, patronage, and commerce depicted as driving book production in Angria did not, in fact, motivate the manufacture and coterie circulation of the Brontës' manuscript books at Haworth, perhaps the scarcity of capital at the parsonage, combined with a deep love for books, induced an exploration of its antithesis. New books were seen as luxuries by the Brontë children; as a result, books and money would be especially linked by the Brontës' relative lack of access to both.

If tangible resources were limited, industry and imagination were not. The Brontës' Glass Town and Angria sagas sprawl over scores of fragments and manuscript books, a large number of them bound in covers and, as was often the

case, assigned imaginary publishers and booksellers.⁶⁰ The forms of these early books constitute an authorial voice grounded in not only the trade and commerce of books, but also in the capacity of language to simulate materiality—to fashion, via words, additional books, imaginary ones created by a fictive communications circuit of authors, publishers, editors, reviewers, booksellers, literary patrons, antiquarians, connoisseurs, &c.⁶¹ Thus, books, as broadly conceived and instantiated by Brontë, simultaneously provide Angria with a sense of history and a virtual economy: a history that can be incessantly revised and disputed (providing fodder for more stories), and a thriving market that can support the demand for more and more publications.

Indeed, the emphasis of Brontë's early writing was perhaps more on conceptualizing, simulating, and performing the *business* of writing and publishing than on mastering any particular genre. Brontë served under a swathe of male pseudonyms not only as author, but also as bookseller, editor, and publisher—positions from which she, through her works, could satirize the various self-serving faults endemic to each, and, by extension, anticipate her own place in

⁶⁰ The bookish, fragmented narratives of the individual works of the juvenilia are reflected, on a larger scale, by the way we read the sagas as a whole. Reading Brontë's early writing is necessarily an act of reassembling. Although much of the juvenilia assumes the shape of discrete, hand-sewn volumes, apparently separate from one another—often with title pages seemingly addressing general audiences—it is extremely difficult to read just one title and grasp its meaning without reading the other works.

⁶¹ In a recent essay on the Brontës' early writings, Christine Alexander (who has edited most of the early writings of Charlotte Brontë) observes that "the Glass Town writings constitute a literary marketplace." She continues by describing these as "a cacophony of voices as narrators of disparate texts challenge each other for the 'Truth' of their story, appealing to their Glass Town audiences through the authority of their genre" (*Tales* xx). Yet it is clear that there is more than a "cacophony" at work here. I borrow Robert Darnton's term, "communications circuit," from his famous essay, "What Is the History of Books?" (1982), as it more accurately represents the kind of model that Brontë and her works emulate.

the trade and the kinds of faults that she would later avoid and silently “correct” in the novels for which she became famous. These early works thus provide a map, as it were, of how Brontë witnessed and imagined the book trade. They establish the foundations for an ongoing critique of commercial publishing that routinely surfaces in her correspondence and, more obliquely, within the published novels themselves.

Any reading of *Glass Town* and Angria’s publishing history also necessitates a bibliographical survey of Brontë’s manuscripts. The study that I have conducted traces for the first time the production of Brontë’s manuscript books as such apart from her other manuscript fragments. This approach has required a fresh analysis of the manufacture of dozens of original manuscripts—their bindings, formats and foliation, paper, and letterforms. I suggested in the first chapter of this study that Brontë’s writing gestures toward tangible, physical books, in order to convey their limitations. As Brontë became more deliberate in her attempts both to market her work and share it with professional writers and editors, so too her process began to alter: we no longer find imaginary “editorial” apparatuses and “advertisements” in her manuscripts, and she discontinues the practice of making little “books.” Meanwhile, Brontë’s fiction also shifts from its early modes of satire and chatty, self-referential romance (her literary inheritances from Pope, Swift, Byron, and, most especially, Scott) toward a more naturalistic approach to writing that does not represent the act of writing itself, nor the business of publishing.

This shift can be attributed, in part, to the stigma of “bookmaking” (of which Scott was accused), as well as to historical conditions associated with gender and economic status that discouraged female novelists (especially those of the upper and middle class) from depicting writing as a suitable occupation for women. Owing to such circumstances, the respectable profession of teaching, I argue, emerges in Brontë’s fiction as a suitable narrative of work for her female narrators, instead of those scenes of (male) authorship previously represented in her earlier unpublished works.

To show the implications of this transition, I begin with an analysis of the manuscript “books” themselves and their self-identification with publishing conventions via paratextual apparatuses (e.g., title-pages, prefaces, advertisements, &c.). I provide examples of how Brontë’s early manuscripts appropriate publishing- and editorial-related conventions tied to professional print, much in the style of Walter Scott’s *Waverley Novels*, which were also inflected with entangled histories and fictions of antiquarianism, manuscript making, and the recycling and copying of historical documents. Here we find hints of the “bookmaker” at work. We see in these early writings Brontë’s narrators increasingly becoming slaves to profit—manufacturing books for the sheer sake of selling them. Writing is increasingly (and dangerously) affiliated with trade, at the expense of art. Such concerns became more pressing and real as Brontë herself was compelled, a decade later and at the advice of prospective publishers, to calibrate her narratives and adapt her subjects to suit the literary marketplace for fiction—a

market whose perceived tastes Brontë critiqued as giving rise to “certain literary evils,” and one she sought to change.⁶²

1. “Publishing” at Haworth

Long before the name “Currer Bell” appeared on the title page of any work written by Charlotte Brontë, she, employing a variety of pseudonyms, was fashioning scores of books, along with their attendant apparatuses: bindings, title pages, imprints, editorial statements, prefaces, tables of contents, footnotes, appendices, and indexes, along with publishers’ lists, advertisements, blurbs, reviews, and catalogues. If the now-famous Glass Town and Angria sagas are filled with extraordinary heroes, preternatural beauties, and fantastic events, their heady plots are grounded in the language of publishing and its realism. Garrulous authors, editors, booksellers, printers, and publishers constantly bookend and interrupt these early writings, reminding readers that narrative art is a product of material craft, and *vice versa*. Indeed, Walter Scott’s Dr. Dryasdust and Captain Clutterbuck would have readily mixed with the Glass Town set. Our interpretation of every Angrian text is informed by exactly *who* “wrote,” “edited,” “sold,” or “published” it (see Figure 5)—and we find that every imaginary author, scribe, editor, bookseller, and publisher has his own agenda.

⁶² See Brontë’s 6 November 1847 correspondence with George Henry Lewes, discussed in the first chapter of this study (*Letters*, vol. 1, 559).



Figure 5: The title page of "The Violet" (14 November 1830).

RTC01. Robert H. Taylor Collection, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

Publishing, reading, and writing, as envisioned and explored in Brontë's early works, are all aggressive acts rooted in competition for power—particularly the power to produce more books. Many of the various articles, reviews, histories, poems, and tales that Charlotte Brontë wrote were themselves the result of a small ongoing book war in which she and Branwell vied for narrative control: their respective heroes try to oust one another, even as Branwell and Charlotte sought to out-write one another—each sibling expressing his or her authority by fashioning more and more volumes in order to establish greater turf in the imaginary worlds of Glass Town and Angria.⁶³ In addition, Brontë's writings themselves readily incorporate the voices of competing authors at odds with one another: Charles Wellesley, who narrates many of the stories, is constantly at work attempting to undermine the authority of his brother, the Marquis of Douro (later referred to as Zamorna), whom Brontë also championed; Brontë's author Captain Tree punishes in print Charles Wellesley; Brontë's Marquis of Ardrah, editor of the *Northern Review*, seeks to expose and unseat Zamorna (and also Charles Wellesley) by “fiercely administering the rod of correction” in the form of an especially scathing article (*Early Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 315); &c.⁶⁴

A number of critics have remarked on the combative quality of Brontë's early writings. The tendency has been to define this activity as a kind of staged

⁶³ As Juliet Barker observes, “the very act of writing thus became a sort of game in which each attempted to outdo or outmanoeuvre the other” (193). For a more extended historical account of Branwell and Charlotte's interactions, see *The Brontës*.

⁶⁴ Much has been said of Zamorna's “Byronic” likeness. In fact, Wellesley supplies the other half of the Byronic portrait. As Jerome J. McGann notes in *The Romantic Ideology*, Byron himself “covets the stance of the ‘outsider’,” one who “presented himself as ‘the enemy within,’ the gadfly and critic of his own age and culture” (137).

conversation, in which the Brontës assume “personae” and act out various roles. Christine Alexander characterizes the paratextual features of Brontë’s early writings as a “continual verbal battle in editorial notes, prefaces, afterwords, and the actual texts of their stories.” She writes, “Historians, poets, and novelists jostle each other for their readers’ attention. Editors and critics reinterpret and cast doubt on their rival’s productions [...]. Through their narrative personae, Charlotte and Branwell constantly satirize and rewrite each other’s versions of events. They analyze, admire, or scorn each other’s characters” (*Tales* xx). Alexander suggests that this activity is a continuation of the Brontës’ early household “plays”: “Their personae act as ‘masks’, allowing them to identify and ‘play’ with opposing points of view” (*ibid.*). Carol Bock similarly describes Brontë as an “amiable pugilist” whose early writings are an extension of her early playacting at Haworth. Insofar as Brontë encounters print, she uses it to adopt “roles” that she then performs through “imaginative playacting.” Bock writes:

As a model for some of Charlotte’s first literary productions, *Blackwood’s* thus not only gave her an image of her hypothetical reader but also suggested the character she might play in becoming an author and the kind of activity in which she might engage her audience. To use terms appropriate to the writing of fiction, it helped her to conceptualize the entire storytelling situation. The diagrams that sometimes accompanied *Noctes Ambrosianae* might serve as a metaphor for that situation: they spatially emphasize its

interlocutory nature and particularity with which it was conceived. As a visual analogue for the fiction-making process, these diagrams *eliminate the text as an object and describe literature as an experience*—a conversation between characters that is dramatically conceived within a fictitious setting. (14) [my emphasis in italics]

The tendency of both interpretations, which emphasize the importance of role-playing, is to move away from the composition and manufacture of Brontë's actual manuscripts, and also the trade practices that they emulate, in order to define authorship as being essentially performative in nature. Yet, if the Brontës circumvented or "eliminated" the "text as an object" in their storytelling, as Bock suggests, why did they painstakingly imitate paratextual features, such as title-pages, tables of contents, and advertisements, that are hallmarks of a print-based, as opposed to a speech-oriented, environment? Paratexts such as these serve to emphasize the origins of physical texts. As Gerard Genette writes in his introduction to *Seuils* (i.e., *Paratexts*), such features exist in a text to "*present it [...] to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world*" (1). Building on this insight, I want to make the case that the Brontës and their writings envision language not only as being essentially material in nature, but also commercial. If Bock suggests that the fiction-making process can operate without texts as objects—that literature can be an "experience" that leaves physical texts behind—I hope to show the opposite: that the materiality of books, and ideas about their production, distribution, and reception, were central to Brontë's early fiction-making process.

In Angria, writing is not just the product of authors and readers, but also of editors, booksellers, critics, antiquarians, collectors, and other agents who treat books as historical objects and commodities. In short, writing is also a *thing* to be acquired, a good to be bought and sold.

The tension, of course, was that literary art was seen as being tainted by strong associations with manufacture and commerce. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, readers questioned whether books had become like any other commodity, as one reviewer for *Blackwood's* quipped, "in this age of Mammon, when so many both of books and razors are manufactured, simply 'to sell'" ("Gems from the Antique," 1822). Indeed, we find in the "advertisements" included in Brontë's juvenilia hyperbolic listings for goods ranging from a single reel of thread to a thousand horses, as well as outrageous money-making scams (e.g., "TO BE PURCHASED / Nothing, by Captain / CRACK-BRAINED"; or "TO BE SOLD: the worth of THREE halfpence and a penny").⁶⁵ As we will see, bookmaking schemes similarly crop up throughout the juvenilia, and Brontë's early writing readily satirizes the avaricious propensities of authors, editors, publishers, and booksellers alike.

Even as Charlotte Brontë's early works parody the short-term, fast-and-loose dealings of those working in the book trade, she herself had a keen sense that books were valuable resources for education and self-improvement. Brontë spent a great deal of her adolescence reading the foundational writings of Western

⁶⁵ See the December 1829 issues of "Blackwoods Young Mens Magazine."

literature, including the Bible and the works of Virgil, Shakespeare, and Milton. The children were encouraged by their Cambridge-educated father to pursue a serious course of reading, to the extent that they all had some ability to read and write Latin—an unusual accomplishment for Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, when considering the general educational practices of the time.⁶⁶

The family probably subscribed to the circulating libraries in Keighley, and almost certainly used the libraries at the Keighley Mechanics' Institute and at Ponden Hall.⁶⁷ And, despite their limited income, the Brontës owned a number of books at the parsonage. The small library was by no means luxurious: it contained inexpensive reprints and piracies,⁶⁸ as well as many books that had been previously owned. As Juliet Barker notes, “The fact that so many of the Brontës’ books were second-hand reflects not only the high price of books at the time but also their own lack of funds to spend on such extravagances” (146). Their library included dictionaries and grammars, religious texts and tracts, classical literature in Latin and Greek, English and Latin bibles, works of science, history, arithmetic, geography, and philosophy, as well as works of English, French, and German

⁶⁶ As Juliet Barker notes, “While it was commonplace for ladies to speak and write the modern languages, it was rare to find one who was familiar with Latin, Greek and Ancient History. Unlike Branwell, Charlotte never quotes from the Greek and only rarely uses Latin tags, but her work is littered with classical references, which suggest more than a passing acquaintance with the writing of the ancient world. [...] Emily was adept enough at Latin to be able to translate and make notes in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Anne bought a copy of a Latin text book in November 1843, presumably as an aid to teaching her pupil, Edmund Robinson” (147).

⁶⁷ See Barker, *The Brontës*, 148–9.

⁶⁸ E.g. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (Paris, 1827), bb15 in the Brontë Parsonage Museum. William St Clair writes that the book is most likely a London imprint, as “the type looks English and the printers’ key signatures are in letters and numbers, not numbers as in most French books.” He continues, “In a copy I have seen in original boards, the boards are made from English publishers’ waste” (*The Reading Nation* 678).

literature.⁶⁹ These, the family annotated, copied, corrected, dog-eared, doodled in, inscribed, underlined, scored, soiled, stabbed—and sometimes repaired and rebound.

The used and antiquarian items in the collection at Haworth impressed Brontë with a sense that books served as witnesses of a tangible past. For instance, one of her earliest surviving writings records the use of a book at Haworth: “Once papa lent my Sister Mar[ia] A Book it was an old Geography and she wrote on its Blank leaf papa lint me this Book. The Book is an hundred and twen[ty] years old it is at this moment lying Before me while I write this.”⁷⁰ Charlotte Brontë would have been only twelve years old when she wrote this on 12 March 1829. How arresting it must have been for her to realize that the book in her hands had outlived so many others before her, including her older sister, Maria (who had died at the age of 11 in 1825).⁷¹ Maria had not survived, but her mark in the book had; the irony is that her mark is primarily known to readers today, not through her own, but through Charlotte Brontë’s writing, which captured it. Less than a year later, Brontë, adopting the pseudonym of Lord Charles Wellesley, writes in a preface to “The Adventures of Mon Edouard de Crack” that “my motive for publishing this book is that people may not forget that I am still alive.”⁷²

⁶⁹ My study of these books was drawn from the collection at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, England, as well as through records of sale found in resources such *American Book Prices Current*. Some of the following research and interpretations are adapted from my article, “Authors and Bookmakers.”

⁷⁰ MS Bonnell80(11), Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England.

⁷¹ There is some debate as to when Maria was born and how old she was when she died. Her short life is most accurately documented by Juliet Barker in *The Brontës*, 137.

⁷² For a published transcription of this manuscript, see Alexander, *Early Writings*, vol. 1, 34.

Wellesley's preface is immediately followed by a note signed by Brontë, who documents with painstaking detail her own composition process, meticulously accounting for each hour she wrote her story. The parallel between these two statements is arresting: for Charlotte seems to have been impressed at an early age not only by the power of textual artifacts to survive their owners, but also by the significance of writing as an historical event in itself. If we think of Dickens's young David Copperfield "reading as if for life," Charlotte Brontë was writing (and documenting her writing) as if for life.

For books as physical objects hold a promise akin to the epitaph on Helen Burns's gravestone: *resurgam*. Recall that in *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine's ghost is summoned in a dream after Lockwood finds her marginalia in a collection of "antique volumes" bound in calf. Their published contents, intended for a wide reading public, have been repurposed, as it were, into something more akin to a diary: "Catherine's library was select, and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not altogether for a legitimate purpose; scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen-and-ink commentary—at least, the appearance of one—covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left" (24). What seems, at first glance, to be mere "commentary" turns out to be an intensely private memoir concealed within another text. The printed text is a pretext for a personal, handwritten document that speaks, as it were, beyond the grave.

In contrast, the products of Brontë's early bookmaking were private manuscripts (created for and read by herself, Branwell, Emily, and Anne) that

masquerade as publicly circulated books printed and manufactured through trade. In these narratives, we encounter little overt evidence of the emotional or material deprivation later depicted in *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*, or, for that matter, in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Yet, the small size of their manuscripts suggests a need for concealment, and could very well indicate a shortage of paper supplies for bookmaking.⁷³ The manuscript volumes' pretense to new publication in print belies their humble recycled forms (oftentimes made from scraps of waste paper),⁷⁴ just as their depictions of expensive books and posh libraries stand in stark contrast to the Brontës' modest holdings and limited resources at Haworth—and to the later austerity of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, whose Protestant narrators cast a suspicious eye on luxury and frippery alike. Brontë's early manuscript books, however, contain popular romances, as well as scandalmonger tales, that, on the whole, remain unconcerned with serious questions of duty, religion, or mysticism. They are written and published, purportedly, as commercially profitable fiction, instead of as morally profitable reading. As such, they emulate and satirize the

⁷³ Opinion is divided on whether the cost of paper was a large factor in the size of the books. Thomas J. Wise writes, "The 'poverty' that existed in the Haworth vicarage was comparative, not real. Quite a number of MSS. were penned—by Branwell in particular—in characters of ordinary dimensions, and many were accompanied by no inconsiderable waste of paper. From time to time I have been afforded the opportunity of examining physically the whole of these juvenile MSS., and my opinion is that the little booklets owe their existence to the early ambition of the children to pose as 'authors,' and their desire to preserve their poems and stories in a form as nearly as possible approaching that of a printed book" (*Bibliography* xi).

⁷⁴ While Brontë's late manuscripts (such as *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, &c.) were copied onto high-grade stationery, the early manuscripts were written on inexpensive, low-grade wove paper, and, as I write below, were most probably themselves fair-copies assembled from smaller scraps of writing. The books were most often bound in clean, but discarded industrial-grade papers used for wrapping commodities. For instance, "The Violet," which is held at Princeton University, is bound in dark blue/grey wrappers originally used to package epsom salts sold locally in Keighley. The inside of the book's back cover bears a stamp that reads: "Purified Epsom Salts, / SOLD BY J. WEST, / CHEMIST & DRUGIST, / Keighley." [Text inside ornamental border.]

trade in popular fiction, even as they bear the particular (and peculiar) traces of their author.

When I speak of Brontë's early "manuscript books," what exactly do I mean? To begin, let us take the complete manuscripts. I calculate that there are 53 extant manuscripts that present themselves as complete works written and assembled by Charlotte Brontë from 1827 to 1853.⁷⁵ Of these, I believe that 39 present themselves as "published" books or periodicals produced in either Glass Town or Angria during a period running from 1829 to 1835.⁷⁶ Most of these are manuscripts written in prose and composed of at least two bifolia (eight pages).⁷⁷ (An exception

⁷⁵ This figure includes fair copy holograph manuscripts of Brontë's novels: *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*. It does not include copybooks, fragments, incomplete drafts of works, single poems, or loose Angrian documents, such as the "Last Will and Testament of Florence Marian Wellesley." This estimate is based on: 1) my inspection of Brontë's manuscripts at: the British Library; the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth; the Houghton Library at Harvard University; the Morgan Library & Museum; the Berg and Pforzheimer Collections at the New York Public Library; the Manuscripts Division of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University; and the Poetry Collection at the University at Buffalo; and 2) my study of Christine Alexander's *Bibliography of the Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë*.

⁷⁶ This number is informed by my own ongoing research and documentation of Brontë's manuscripts, and builds on the pre-existing work of Alexander and Symington. Providing an exact and reliable number is difficult for a number of reasons. First, about a dozen of Charlotte Brontë's manuscript books are still in private hands. These are usually referred to as being "untraceable" (q.v. Christine Alexander's *Bibliography of the Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë*). This is not the actual case; the manuscripts are simply very difficult to locate, owing to the fact that the collectors who hold them wish to remain anonymous. However, as was shown by Sotheby's December 2011 sale of the September 1830 "issue" of the "Young Mens Magazine," these manuscripts will eventually surface again, if for no other reason than the fact that they can command exceptionally high returns at auction. (The September 1830 "issue" of "YMM" sold for just under a million dollars at £690,850.) Even so, many of the manuscripts held in institutions have not been described at great length, nor do the existing bibliographies provide detailed descriptions of their physical formats. (See footnote above.) There are many collections that I still have to visit in order to confirm the accuracy of these figures.

⁷⁷ In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elizabeth Gaskell grossly exaggerates the length of Brontë's early manuscript books. Having transcribed Brontë's 1830 catalogue, she claims that "each volume contains from sixty to a hundred pages" (67). The actual range is from two to 68 pages (and the latter figure includes all the pages in the four-volume "Tales of the Islanders"). The typical Brontë book from this period is either 16 or 20 pages in length, or folio manuscripts gathered in groups of either four or five bifolia. Typeset transcriptions, of course, are longer. Even so, the early manuscripts typically range from about 1,500 to 30,000 words, with "The Spell" at about 42,000 words and "The Scrap Book" at 53,000 (based on the word count estimates provided by Christine Alexander in her bibliography).

is “Leisure Hours,” a single sheet, two-page “periodical” created by Brontë in 1830.) This tally does not include loose fragments nor working drafts of stories and poems, but (with the exception of the single-sheet “Leisure Hours”) bound books, sewn and fashioned in covers, and usually bearing manuscript pages imitating traditional print-based apparatuses, such as title pages.

It is a strange fact that, although Brontë herself distinguished between her “books” and fragments, creating in August of 1830 a catalogue of the finished works that she “published,”⁷⁸ scholars have not more decidedly distinguished between the two.⁷⁹ Brontë’s “Catalogue of my Books, with the periods of their completion up to August 3, 1830” includes a list of 22 volumes⁸⁰ that represent a range of genres, including: biography (“Characters of the Great Men of the Present Age”); drama (“The Poetaster,” “in 2 volumes”); multi-volume history (“Tales of the Islanders,” “in four volumes”); periodical literature (“The Young Men’s Magazines,” “in six numbers”); poetry (“A Book of Rhymes;” “Miscellaneous Poems;” and “The Evening Walk”); and tales (“Two Romantic Tales;” “The Search

⁷⁸ This manuscript is held by the Morgan Museum & Library: see Brontë 15, which is part of the Henry Houston Bonnell Brontë Collection. A transcript of the catalogue appears in *An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë: Volume I: The Glass Town Saga, 1826–1832*, edited by Christine Alexander.

⁷⁹ Although Christine Alexander will often indicate whether a manuscript is a “hand-sewn booklet,” her bibliography does not separately list nor account for Brontë’s “books” apart from her other writings. The bibliography also does not contain detailed descriptions of foliation, paper, &c. The result is that, in Alexander’s list, fragments and drafts of works are interspersed with Brontë’s books (as is the case in her edited collection of Brontë’s early writings), making it difficult to establish which works were actually fashioned as books. Alexander Symington similarly does not distinguish between the two.

⁸⁰ At the conclusion of the catalogue, Brontë writes, “Making in the whole 22 volumes / C Brontë August 3, 1830 / August the 3, Charlotte.” (See p. 214 of *Early Writings*, vol. 1.) Note that Brontë separately counted bound volumes of multi-volume works (such as “The Poetaster,” in two volumes), not single titles.

After Happiness, a Tale"; &c.) (211–14). All of these manuscripts were produced as bound books, with the exception of "Leisure Hours," which was most likely intended to imitate a broadside or pamphlet. And it is almost certain that all of them are still extant, as all but two are held in institutions.⁸¹ The catalogue represents the various kinds of books one would encounter in a publisher's list, and emphasizes Brontë's interest in "manufacturing" books of different genres and formats. The catalogue suggests that Brontë was intent on simulating the book trade on a broad scale—and that she created a kind of model that she could control as author, publisher, and editor.

This document and the bound books that bear witness to it provide additional evidence of Brontë's writing process apart from the "trance writing" that critics have traditionally emphasized. As explained in the introduction to this study, such interpretations are based on Brontë's own self-description of such automatic processes in her Roe Head journal.⁸² Winifred Gérin characterizes Brontë as writing "like a medium through whom a spirit worked without control, and who could at the same time clearly register the sights and sounds, though not

⁸¹ The ownership and whereabouts of only two of these volumes is unknown. "Characters of the Great Men of the Present Age" was formerly in the Law Collection, and "A Book of Rhymes" remains untraced after its sale in 1916 by Walpole Galleries. These are almost certainly held in private collections.

⁸² In her Roe Head journal, Brontë apparently records "the still small voice alone that comes to me at eventide, that which like a breeze with a voice in it [comes] over the deeply blue hills & out of the now leafless forests & from the cities on distant river banks of a far & bright continent" (*Tales* 158). Thus, Brontë describes "energies which are not merely mechanical" (158), writing with her "eyes shut" (165) and depicting in Romantic terms her "divine, silent, unseen land of thought, dim now & indefinite as the dream of a dream, the shadow of a shade" (*ibid.*). The elusive "still small voice," however intangible, has its own definite relationship to print, echoing Kings 1:19 of the King James Bible, and anticipating Jane's extraordinary exchange with Rochester at the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*.

the significance, of what she saw” (*Five Novelettes* 17). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar go so far as to argue that Brontë was “essentially a trance writer” (312). However, if Brontë initiated writings with her eyes “shut” (and described her own creative process in Romantic terms), she also instantiated them as publications, and fashioned her stories in a workmanlike manner, editing, copying, and binding her poetry and prose with requisite deliberation and precision.

It is clear, for instance, that Brontë’s manuscript volumes were not blank books that she created and filled on impulse, but rather were planned and organized as folio sheets bound together only after texts were copied onto them. This process required that Brontë complete a work in draft form and organize its contents, not leaf by leaf, but bifolium by bifolium, before making it into a book. A typical sixteen-page volume from the Glass Town saga, for example, required a single gathering of four bifolia. When Brontë prepared a bifolium, she generated a text not just for two, but four pages at a time, and often pages at opposite ends of her book (e.g., pages 1 and 2 would be conjugate with pages 15 and 16; pages 3 and 4 conjugate with 13 and 14, &c.). That Brontë worked in this way is apparent, given that her handwriting carries over across conjugate leaves, through the sewing, as it were, in a manner that would be impossible had she not copied her texts out in full in advance of their binding (see Figure 6). In order for her to do this, it is extremely likely that she copied, edited, and bound these texts drawing from the same kinds of draft “pencil scraps” that Gaskell mentions in *The Life* in connection

with Brontë's later novel writing.⁸³ In short, bibliographical evidence suggests that Brontë's little books were themselves fair copy manuscripts that resulted from a complicated drafting and planning process.

Furthermore, if we compare the books listed in Brontë's catalogue with the entire body of extant manuscripts from the same period, it seems clear that what

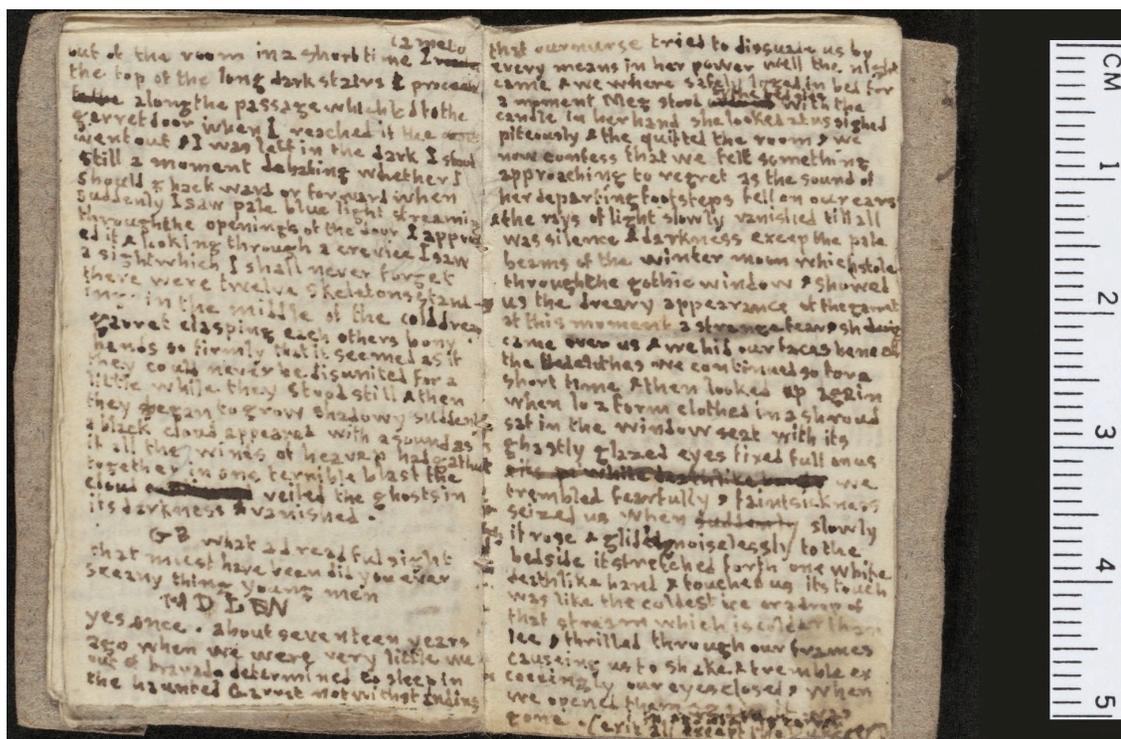


Figure 6: Writing from page 4 (verso, leaf 2) visible on page 13 (recto, leaf 7) in Brontë's October 1829 "issue" of her "Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine" (referred to as "The Silver Cup" in Harvard University's catalogue).

MS Lowell 1 (5), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁸³ In her biography, Gaskell writes the following of Brontë: "She never wrote a sentence until she clearly understood what she wanted to say, had deliberately chosen the words, and arranged them in their right order. Hence it comes that, in the scraps of paper covered with pencil writing which I have seen, there will occasionally be a sentence scored out, but seldom, if ever, a word or expression. She wrote on bits of paper in a minute hand, holding each against a piece of board, such as is used in binding books, for a desk. The plan was necessary for one so short-sighted as she was; and, besides, it enabled her to use pencil and paper, as she sat near the fire in the twilight hours, or if (as was too often the case) she was wakeful for hours in the night. Her finished manuscripts were copied from these pencil scraps, in clear, legible, delicate hand-writing, almost as easy to read as print" (246–7). Few of these "pencil scraps" are extant.

counted as a “book” for Brontë had something to do with its physical production. For instance, Brontë’s earliest extant book, a sixteen-page illustrated manuscript commonly referred to by its first line, “There was once a little girl named Ane” (c. 1827), was bound in a scrap of wallpaper, and is both unsigned and undated. Neither this nor Brontë’s other earliest extant manuscript fragment, “The History of the Year” (1829),⁸⁴ appear in Brontë’s own catalogue. Progressing chronologically, Brontë’s third extant manuscript was produced as a “book,” “Two Romantic Tales” (28 April 1829) being hand-sewn into covers that bear both a title and Brontë’s name. In addition, the book contains designated chapters. Brontë continued to incorporate these features into her next project, “Tales of the Islanders” (a four-volume work whose first volume was completed in June 1829).

Brontë further developed the presentation of her books, almost certainly in concert with Branwell, who had introduced Sergeant Tree as a Glass Town printer and bookseller in June 1829 (if not before)⁸⁵ on the title page of “Branwells Blackwoods Magazine [sic].”⁸⁶ Even as Brontë continued to write other works (e.g., poems) on separate loose sheets of paper, her next books (as listed in her own catalogue) began to have title pages and additional apparatuses. The title page for “The Search after Hapiness [sic]” (17 August 1829) is at once charmingly earnest

⁸⁴ This untitled fragment, made on 12 March 1829, is commonly referred to as “The History of the Year.” Having studied the fragment and Brontë’s handwriting in person, I believe that the title could actually be “The History of the Upon” (i.e., as in “once upon a time”). See Bonnell80(1)n, the Brontë Parsonage Museum & Brontë Society, Haworth, England.

⁸⁵ This is the earliest extant manuscript of Branwell’s “printed” and “published” by Tree.

⁸⁶ See MS Lowell 1 (7), Houghton Library, Harvard University: “Branwells Blackwoods Magazine.” AMsS (initials); [Haworth], 1829 June. 9f.(18p.) 5.2 x 3.6 cm.

and humorous in its presentation: “THE SEARCH AFTER | HAPINESS | A TALE BY | CHARLOTTE | BRONTË | PRINTED BY HERSELF | AND | SOLD BY | NOBODY ETC., ETC. | AUGUST | THE | SEVENTEENTH | EIGHTEEN HUNDRED | AND | TWENTY-NINE.” In addition, the book contains a preface and a table of contents at its end. The same month, Brontë took over “Branwells Blackwoods Magazine,” which became: “BLACKWOODS | YOUNG MENS | MAGAZINNE[?] | MAGAZINE . . | EDITED . . BY THE | GENIUS | CB [heart-shaped laurel sketched around Brontë’s initials] | PRINTED .BY | CAPTAIN | TREE | AND SOLD BY | [ornamental rule resembling a scroll] | CAPTAIN CARY SERGEANT Blood, | CORPORAL LIDELL, &c., &c., &c” (see Figure 7).⁸⁷ (Brontë’s new editorship had been announced by Branwell in the “Concluding Address” of the July 1829 issue.) In the first number that she “edited” of her periodical, Brontë includes a story written under her own name, as well as an unsigned review of a book purportedly written by the Duke of Wellington; a poem by “UT;”⁸⁸ “Military Conversations;” advertisements for books, a painting, and the sale of a copyright; plus a table of contents. It seems to be the case that, starting here and throughout the autumn of 1829, Brontë developed the authorial identities of Glass Town authors Lord Charles Wellesley, the Marquis of Douro, and Captain Tree, who began to “contribute” and “publish” works alongside those contributed by Brontë

⁸⁷ See MS Lowell 1 (6), Houghton Library, Harvard University: “Blackwoods Young Mens Magazine [...] Edited by the Genius C.B.” AMsS; [Haworth], 1829 Aug. 10f.(19p.) 5.3 x 3.4 cm. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁸⁸ “UT” most likely signifies the Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley. See “Military Conversations” in the October 1829 “issue” of “Blackwood’s Young Men’s Magazine”: MS Lowell 1 (5); see also “The Silver Cup: A Tale,” 1829 Oct. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Christine Alexander includes a transcription of these manuscripts (*Early Writings*, vol. 1, 74).

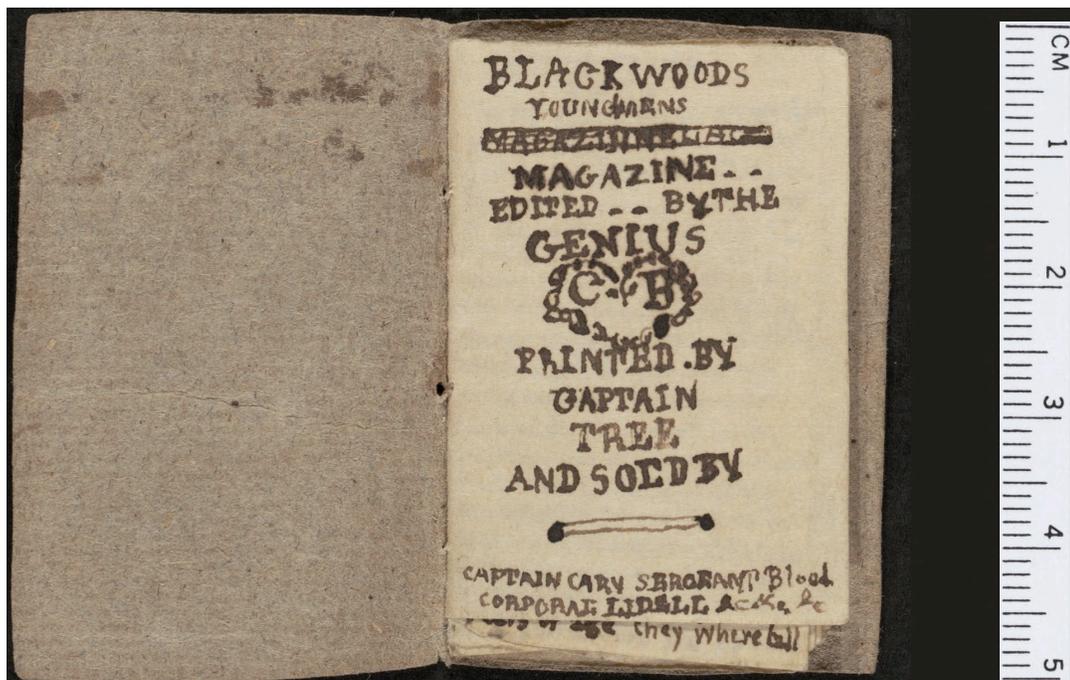


Figure 7: Title page of Brontë's bound autograph manuscript made in 1829, "Blackwoods Young Mens Magazine, Edited by the Genius C.B." [sic].

MS Lowell 1 (6), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

(who often appears as "CB").⁸⁹ In December 1829, with "Characters of the Celebrated Men of the Present Time," Brontë began to write entire books under the names of Glass Town authors—in this first instance, as Captain Tree—also usually continuing to sign and date them in her own name. Thus, Brontë introduced a kind of dual authorship that she would maintain over the course of the following five years through her writing of "The Scrap Book: A Mingling of Many Things" ("compiled" by Lord CAF Wellesley on 19 March 1835). Brontë claimed authorship of the manuscripts, even while allowing her Glass Town authors their own record of professional "publication." The system enabled Brontë to document

⁸⁹ Captain Tree, for instance, appears as the author of "The Silver Cup," in the October 1829 issue of "Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine." And Douro and Wellesley appear co-published as "UT."

her own writing (of which she was evidently proud), while also unfolding the “narrative” of authorship and publication represented through the books’ paratextual apparatuses.

Through their abundant paratexts, Brontë’s early books not only gesture at, but also give form to, a network of writers, editors, printers, publishers, booksellers, readers, collectors, and critics that, in themselves, provide a figured audience and commercial context for the writings that further fuel their narratives. Frequently, one finds that Brontë’s early writings begin not only with title pages providing information about their “publication,” but also with reference to other Angrian works (sometimes actual Brontë-made books; sometimes imaginary or speculative books).⁹⁰ “High Life in Verdopolis, or the Difficulties of Annexing a Suitable Title to a Work Practically Illustrated in Six Chapters” (1834) starts with a quotation “extracted from an article in a late number of Tree’s ‘Verdopolitan Magazine,’ which from internal evidence is known to be the production of Zamorna’s pen” (*Early Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 5).⁹¹ “The Spell, an Extravaganza” opens with a quotation from the preface to the “uniform edition of Captain Tree’s

⁹⁰ Brontë is responsible for at least three kind of texts: 1) a body of signed and dated manuscripts of which she is the credited author and manufacturer; 2) a body of works (often overlapping with those also credited to Brontë) that are written by different imaginary writers, and that are produced and distributed by imaginary publishers, printers, and booksellers; and 3) imaginary works that are written by imaginary writers and that are instantiated only in part, through descriptions, quotations, references, advertisements, &c., within the writings, but not actually manufactured as books.

⁹¹ No copy of this magazine survives; it most likely existed in the form in which we encounter it here: an imaginary book that is made tangible only through Brontë’s “quotation” from it.

Novels and Romances” (149).⁹² In both cases, it is likely that these works existed solely via these references to them, and that they were never fashioned as discrete books.⁹³ Yet both the “extracted” texts and their described forms serve as the apparent impetus for the fashioning of actual manuscripts-cum-books.

In some cases, the author of one Brontë-made book attacks a rival’s prior production, perpetuating the manufacture of additional books. In Captain Tree’s preface to “The Foundling” (1833), Tree alludes to Wellesley’s “Something about Arthur” (1833) when he refers to the “vile and loathsome falsehoods, those malignant and disgusting insinuations with which some late writers have thought proper to adorn their contaminating pages” (44). In response to Tree’s attack, Wellesley begins his preface to “The Green Dwarf” (1833) with a defense for his “long, profound, and [...] very ominous silence”: “What, ’ says the reading publick, as she stands in the market place, with grey cap and ragged petticoat, the exact image of a modern blue, ‘what is the matter with Lord Charles? Is he expiflicated [sic] by the literary Captain’s lash? Have his good genius and his scribbling mania forsaken him?’” (128). Clearly, the literary “lash” only provides further justification

⁹² The “uniform edition of Captain Tree’s Novels and Romances,” is, again, almost certainly an imaginary edition—perhaps modeled on the various uniform editions of Scott’s “Historical Romances,” which were issued in octavo, duodecimo, and 18mo formats in the 1820s.

⁹³ Brontë begins referencing imaginary books early on in her writing. Take, for example, the titles listed in the following advertisements at the back of the October 1829 issue of “Blackwood’s Young Men’s Magazine”: “A Treatise on the Nature of Clouds, by Captain Snuff”; “*A Book of Utility*, by Monsieur Heregos, price 3 half-pence”; “*A Tavern Tale*, by Private Inwithhim, price 5 shillings”; “*A Book of Politics*, by Sergeant UP AND DOWN, price £2 2s”; “*How to Curl One’s Hair*, by Monsieur Whats-the-reason”; and “*A Treatise on Perfumery*, by Captain Coxcomb, price 1s” (77–8). None of these titles appears in Brontë’s “Catalogue” (created August 3, 1830). There are no other references to the works within Brontë’s oeuvre, and the titles are clearly jokes.

for reply—and a tangible thread for both Brontë’s narrative and ongoing production of books.

Christine Alexander and others have noted how brother and sister influenced one another through their collaborative and rivalrous writing. This activity also clearly manifests in terms of mock-aggressive trade practices, reinforcing both the ongoing battle of books in Glass Town and the siblings’ own competitive bookmaking at Haworth. For example, the end of the second volume of Branwell’s “Real Life in Verdopolis” (21 September 1833) contains the following advertisements for many of Charlotte’s books:

Books. published. this.

Season.

By. Seargent Tree. GGT.

No 587. G.S.

Lord Ronan. a poem by the Marquis of Douro⁹⁴

I Vol. Oct. 12s.

Something about. Arthur By. L^d C^s Wellesly.⁹⁵

II. Vols. Oct. 20s.

⁹⁴ It is likely that this book was never made; it does not appear in Charlotte’s catalogue (1830), Alexander’s bibliography, nor Winnifrith’s *Poems of Charlotte Brontë*. I have not yet found any record of it as having been sold in the book trade.

⁹⁵ “Something about Arthur” (1 May 1833), written by Charles Albert Florian Wellesley (Charlotte Brontë), appeared not in two bound volumes, but one. The manuscript is located in the Stark Collection of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. According to Christine Alexander, the title information is located at the end of the manuscript (*Early Writings*, vol. 2, part 1, 7).

The fate of Coomassie. a poem by Young Soult.⁹⁶

.I Vol Quarto 2[£]-0^s-0^d.

The Foundling a Tale by Captain Tree.⁹⁷

I Vol Oct. 1[£]-0^s-0^d

The Green Dwarf a tale. by L^d C^s Wellesly [sic].⁹⁸

:I Vol. Quart. 12 s.

Real Life in Verdopolis a tale by Capt Flower

II. Vols Oct. 30s.

[decorative “rule”]

NB. The. tales intituled. Something about Arthur and the Green Dwarf may also be had. of Seargt Badenough. neatly stitched in. from 12. to 24 NOS price. one penny each.

Seargt Badenough

Pothouse Alley=

G G town

(*Works*, vol. 1, 332)

The information presented here lends a verisimilitude to Branwell’s advertisement and the publishing trade in Glass Town. We find a Stationer’s number, mention of

⁹⁶ Victor A. Neufeldt writes that “there is no evidence” that Branwell composed this poem (*The Works of Patrick Branwell Brontë*, vol. 1, 332).

⁹⁷ “The Foundling: A Tale of Our Own Times” (27 June 1833) was written by Captain Tree (Charlotte Brontë). The manuscript is held by the British Library (Ashley 159).

⁹⁸ “The Green Dwarf: A Tale of the Perfect Tense” (2 September 1833) was written by Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley (Charlotte Brontë). The manuscript is located in the Stark Collection of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

the format of each book, prices in pounds, and, last but not least, an attached advertisement for Sergeant Badenough's rival cheap reprints of two of Charlotte's/Wellesley's works, "Something about Arthur" and "The Green Dwarf," in serial form, to be sold at the price of one penny per number (the cost of what were at that time referred to as "bloods" and later as "penny dreadfuls"). The advertisement for this rival cheap edition would have been a playful taunt aimed at Charlotte, of course. And the high price that Young Soult's apparently deluxe quarto commanded can be interpreted as being rather self congratulatory, given that Branwell wrote under Soult's name.

Perhaps Branwell was only returning the favor. For Charlotte's/Wellesley's "Something about Arthur" (1833) begins with a motto from Glass Town writer Captain John Bud (another of Branwell's pseudonyms). Wellesley recounts how he came across the quotation in a discarded odd volume of Bud's:

Some months ago, as I was lounging over a bookstall in one of those wretched alleys which intersect Verdopolis, I accidentally drew from a tattered pile of trash an odd volume of Bud's works, and on opening it the moral maxim which forms the motto of this chapter met my eye. After reading it carefully I began to ponder on the connection which I could not

deny existed between it and my present circumstances. (*Early Writings*, vol. 2, part 1, 10)⁹⁹

That Wellesley discovers Bud's work in "a tattered pile of trash" adjacent a bookstall rather slyly suggests that works by Branwell's author, who specializes in history (e.g., "The History of the Young Men"), are neither very popular nor marketable. Wellesley salvages the odd volume to appropriate its content (and the story of its sad fate) for his scandalmonger's tale. (Has Bud's odd volume merely been recycled into another form of "trash," one wonders?) Here again, one Angrian publication gives rise to another—a seemingly self-perpetuating corpus of books and texts that interdepend on one another.

The proliferation of imaginary books in Glass Town and Angria, in addition to the actual "books" Brontë fashioned, allows for the inclusion of many precious and historical objects. A number of collectors and connoisseurs populate Glass Town. We learn, for instance, that "a manuscript copy of that rare work, *Autobiography of Captain Leaf* [...] was written on a roll of vellum, but much discoloured and rendered nearly illegible by time" and is housed in a "beautiful casket of wrought gold." When asked how he obtained "so inestimable a treasure," the Marquis Douro replies "with a smile: "That question I must decline to answer. It is a secret with which I am alone acquainted"" (*Early Writings*, vol. 1, 341). Such

⁹⁹ The motto reads as follows: "To keep company with those who are far beneath our rank or accomplishments, whether bodily or mental, is the surest method of eradicating those seeds of virtue which parental affection and assiduity may have carefully planted and patiently nourished within us . . . Bud" (10). Although Bud writes many multi-volume works, this motto does not appear in any of Branwell's surviving texts written by Bud. For extant early writings by Branwell during this period, see volume one of Victor A. Neufeldt's *The Works of Patrick Branwell Brontë*.

valuable artifacts form the basis of local histories. If we read Branwell's early writings, we learn that Leaf's manuscripts inform John Bud's work, "The History of the Young Men"—and that their lacunae are also reflected in that history: "The rest of the speech and meeting is lost from Leaf's manuscripts nor is any MSS yet discovered [sic] supplied [...] the chasm" (149).

Yet the "value" of rare and luxurious books is also determined by the ways in which such objects are read and owned. "A Peep into a Picture Book"¹⁰⁰ provides a remarkable example. The story is an account of Wellesley's prolonged reading of *Tree's Portrait Gallery of the Aristocracy of Africa*, described as "three large volumes" bound in "green watered-silk quarto covers and gilt backs" (85). For Wellesley, reading the book has to do with "the pleasure of hanging over the forms that speak without sound, of gazing into motionless eyes that search into your very heart" (86). We move page by page through the volume with Wellesley. There are hints of connoisseurship: "The second volume is nearest to my hand, and I will raise first from the shadow of gossamer paper, waving as I turn it like a web of woven air, the spirit whosoever it be, male or female, crowned or coronetted, that animates its frontispiece" (86).

Wellesley's account allows Brontë to fashion, via words, two books: an imaginary one whose lavish illustrations (reminiscent of the mezzotints by Edward Finden and John Martin that Brontë so greatly admired) in turn inspire Wellesley to mark down his own impressions. And there are additional books within books.

¹⁰⁰ "A Peep into a Picture Book" appears in Wellesley's "Corner Dishes, being a Small Collection of Mixed and Unsubstantial Trifles in Prose and Verse" (1834).

Zenobia, we are told, “leans on a large clasped volume, another of equal size lies open before her, and one taper forefinger directs the spectator’s attention to the page while her eye looks into his with an earnest and solemn air as if she were warning him of the mighty treasures contained in the maxims of ancient lore to which she points” (89). The implication is that we not only read books; books also read us. (Indeed, at one point, Wellesley writes of an illustration of Northangerland in Tree’s volume: “I felt as if he could read my soul” [87].) These illusions/illustrations are interrupted, however, by the very material circumstances of Wellesley’s over-eager, aggressive reading/rewriting of them: “While examining the portraits I had been jotting down the few remarks here contained. The ink had been communicated by the pen to my fingers, and by them to each leaf as I turned it over” (95–6). General Wilson Thornton, the book’s owner, is dismayed to find his treasure “spoiled”: “Daubed your hands with ink, and then rubbed them over every portrait in the book [...] there’s a hundred pounds thrown away” (95). We are reminded that what evoked so many meaningful (if ephemeral) impressions for one reader amounts to pounds and shillings to another. Much in the way that John Reed will later claim Bewick as his rightful property, General Thornton regrets not the loss of his book, but the loss of his investment.

We never forget, when reading the juvenilia, that books are the products of trade, and are therefore published for profit. In Brontë’s early writings, we find a complex and frequently thriving center of commerce around books—mention of antiquarian book collecting, auctions, the publication of cheap editions, purchases

of copyright, literary patronage, piracies, &c. If the writings of Glass Town authors are somewhat vitriolic,¹⁰¹ we should note that their publishers similarly compete against one another. Take, for instance, Brontë's "A Leaf from an Unopened Volume, or the Manuscript of an Unfortunate Author" (1834), "edited" by Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley. The book's "publisher," Sergeant Tree (as stated on the manuscript's title page), proclaims in his preface the following:

The extraordinary nature of the following pages made me hesitate at first whether I should publish them. But having understood that a cheap edition, in numbers, of the same work was being struck off in a neighboring printing press, I determined to run all hazards in order to gratify the public curiosity. Besides, I considered that such parts as were most likely to offend the persons here alluded to are put so far beyond all belief or possibility by glaring inaccuracies of date that no one could be much annoyed by them. Trusting that my surmises may not prove false

I remain
the obedient servant
of the Public
Sergeant Tree

From Tree's perspective, the chief motivation for publishing the work is financial: Tree is concerned that a competitor will complete production of a (presumably

¹⁰¹ The word for "glass" in Latin is "vitrum," from which we get the word "vitriol."

pirated) cheap edition in numbers before he is able to come out with his own (presumably authorized) version.¹⁰² Brontë is playing on what was then a well-known publishing practice: publishers would initially issue and sell a work at the highest price the market would bear, and would reissue it (usually, in a less costly, lower-priced format) only after the more expensive version had made its rounds.¹⁰³ Furthermore, it seems that Tree also has taken into account yet another factor that might affect his finances—that is, whether or not he is likely to be sued for libel upon publishing the work. The fact that the story takes place in 1858, a full 24 years later than its publication date, suggests to Tree that readers (and potential litigators) will (and should) regard the work safely as fiction instead of fact.

However, Tree's assertion that the narrative is "so far beyond all belief or possibility" is both compounded and complicated by Charles Wellesley's editorial introduction. Wellesley claims that he merely served as the amanuensis for a mysterious "midnight visitor"—a nameless self-titled "unfortunate author," who reads to Wellesley from a "bundle of dirty-looking blurred manuscripts from his pocket" (*Early Writings*, vol. 2, part 1, 325). In his introduction, Wellesley assures the "intelligent reader" that he "alone could not have been the author of what is here detailed" (323). Yet, even if we take Wellesley at his word, we cannot be sure

¹⁰² Of course, Tree's preface raises the question of whether he actually owns the copyright for the work. We find in Brontë's early writings some interest in the notion of copyright. Take for instance, an advertisement that appears in the August 1829 issue of "Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine": "A copyright of a book containing 5 splendid engravings, crown octavo, to be sold. Apply to Sergeant Gloveinhand, Brandy Lane, Glass Town. N.B.: The engravings are in mezzotinto style; nothing but the most absolute necessity has induced the advertiser to part with them." (Necessity, in this case, is probably driven by alcoholism, given the address of the owner!)

¹⁰³ Brontë, like any other typical reader of the time, would have encountered the term "cheap edition" in advertisements, publisher's catalogues, reviews, &c.

that the “unfortunate author” is himself the author of the manuscripts that he recites to Wellesley. We are left uncertain of precisely who is responsible for the content of the story—except, of course, Brontë herself. However, the story’s emphasis on its supposed origins and physical production underscores the fact that the “intelligent reader” in Glass Town has little way of authenticating exactly what she is reading. Fiction-making and publishing share more than books in common: both are confidence games, and readers are the dupes of both authors and publishers.

For further evidence of this pattern, we need only look back to a review in the August 1829 issue of “Blackwood’s Young Men’s Magazine” (edited by “the genius CB” and “printed by Captain Tree”) of a Glass Town publication, *The History of the Causes of the Late War*,¹⁰⁴ a work that was purportedly written by the Duke of Wellington.¹⁰⁵ The anonymous author of the review disputes the authorship ascribed to the book, and attributes it instead to “our own scrivener Sergeant Bud” (*Early Writings*, vol. 1, 56). In making his case, the anonymous reviewer employs several different methods to uncover Bud’s authorship.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ This particular work was never written by Brontë; it does not appear in her catalogue, nor in Alexander, nor Symington.

¹⁰⁵ Christine Alexander misunderstands the Duke’s role in the review, and mistakenly asserts that the Duke is the author of the review, when he is clearly the purported author of the book. See *Early Writings*, vol. 1, 56, footnote 5.

¹⁰⁶ The first approach to identifying the author is bibliographical in nature; upon examining the manuscript of the work, the reviewer finds that “the margins are uncommonly narrow.” The second method is akin to formal literary analysis: “the style is like that of a rule to show cause why a prosecution for libel should not be tried against some unhappy individual”; in other words, the style is so poor, the Duke of Wellington could never have been thought to write it. We can liken the third approach to a criminal investigation: “Bud, at the time when it was writing [sic], was out of the way when we wanted him”; he has no alibi. The fourth approach is more biographical in nature: “we are sure His Grace never would have the patience to write such a long, dry thing” (56).

Finally, the reviewer claims to have wrested a confession out of Bud through the administration of a “dose of tell-the-truth-stuff.” Bud admits that “he wrote the whole, except those parts which we have particularized as being excellent and which he got His Grace to do for him.” It turns out that Bud’s motivation for falsifying the authorship of the work was “to have it published in his [i.e., the Duke’s] name that it might sell the better” (ibid.).¹⁰⁷ Although the Duke of Wellington himself is not implicated as having financially benefitted from this arrangement, the reputations of his sons, Charles Wellesley and Zamorna, are not free from such imputations.

In his anonymous article for the *Northern Review* (an Angrian periodical), the Marquis of Ardrah, editor of “one of the most widely circulated magazines in Africa [i.e., where Angria is located]” (*Early Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 315), suggests that, although Charles Wellesley appears to expose his brother to scandal via his numerous tales, Zamorna is, in fact, complicit in this activity. Ardrah sees little threat to Zamorna in Charles Wellesley’s writings: “The scandalous anecdotes, the fustian descriptions promulgated respecting him by his brother we fling away with scorn; we strip off every decoration of romance and look calmly upon the naked reality” (313). Instead, Ardrah locates their source in “grasping avarice,” and accuses Zamorna of encouraging his brother to promulgate such stories for his own financial gain:

¹⁰⁷ Such bookselling impostures would have been familiar to Brontë. For instance, Byron’s name was falsely attributed to Polidori’s story, “The Vampyre,” which appeared in the April 1819 issue of *The New Monthly Magazine* (*The Flesh is Frail: Byron’s Letters and Journals* 131).

Zamorna's mind is characterized in an equal degree by the qualities of silly vanity and grasping avarice. The former leads him to encourage his brother in writing all that sickening stuff about his private ongoings with which the public is periodically surfeited and to allow the publishing of his own casual poetic effusions, all of which turn on the same nauseating subjects, and the latter makes him so utterly disregarding of the most obvious precepts of delicacy that he does not scruple to pocket the gains derived from so polluted a source. Yes, he will calculate the profits which such publications as 'The Marriage and the Funeral', 'The Alchemist', 'Five Years Ago' etc. are likely to bring him in. Human degradation can go no farther!

(314–5)

In his reply to Ardrah's article, Zamorna admits: "You say that from this polluted source I have derived much profit. Candidly, I have, and that profit has always been employed in buying the copyright and the copies of those noxious publications to commit them to the flames. Not a word more either of explanatory or exculpatory will I vouchsafe on this subject to any man breathing!" (321).

If Brontë later complained in 1848 to W.S. Williams of authors reducing themselves to "mere bookmakers"—of the same order as "Merchants, professed gain-seekers"—her own early writings not only dramatize this activity, but thrive on it. Bookmaking, as depicted in *Glass Town* and *Angria*, fosters Brontë's own early production of books, and vice versa. Yet, as we will see, these and her later

unpublished works anticipate how such a self-perpetuating production cycle eventually implodes, when authors and tradesmen become increasingly indistinguishable from one another, books written and published merely to pay off accumulated debts.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, just as publishing comes under increasing fire in Angria, Brontë begins to approach writing and manuscript-making alike in different ways.

What is the historical basis for the disenchanting figure of the author-cum-bookmaker, and his role in nineteenth-century publishing? Let us turn to the writings and personal history of Brontë's own literary hero, one of the greatest of all nineteenth-century "bookmakers": Sir Walter Scott.

2. Writing as Manufacturing and Reassembling: The Example of Scott

No: creation, one would think, cannot be easy; your Jove has severe pains, and fire-flames, in the head out of which an armed Pallas is struggling! As for manufacture, that is a different matter, and may become easy or not easy, according as it is taken up. Yet of manufacture too, the general truth is that, given the manufacturer, it will be worthy in direct proportion to the pains bestowed upon it; and worthless always, or nearly so, with no pains. Cease, therefore, O

¹⁰⁸ Q.v. Brontë's untitled manuscript of 1839, commonly referred to as "Captain Henry Hastings," and her unpublished writing, "The Return of Zamorna" (c. 1837).

ready-writer, to brag openly of thy rapidity and facility; to thee (if thou be in the manufacturing line) it is a benefit, an increase of wages; but to me it is sheer loss, worsening of my pennyworth: why wilt thou brag of it to me?

Unsigned review by Thomas Carlyle of Lockhart's

Life of Sir Walter Scott, Baronet

(London and Westminster Review 1838)

Long before Thomas Carlyle recounted in mock-epic tones the history of Walter Scott's rapid "manufacture" of literary wares, Scott, during his lifetime, had been accused of bookmaking. In 1808, we find him listed in *The Satirist* in its "College of Book-Makers," where he presides as the "Apollo of modern poetasters" (279). Soon afterward, he appears in the May 1810 issue of *The Monthly Mirror* in an article, "On Book-making," which begins thus: "The great evil, that attends the present diffusion and fashion of literature, is book-making. Every man who puts his name to a book, is now-a-days not necessarily an author, and there are many booksellers who are mere tradesmen as haberdashers—manufacturing the articles they sell, and selling the articles they manufacture" (343). The critic continues, pointing out:

the modern bookseller does not undertake a new edition of an old author, because the last was bad, and he can publish a better, but because there is a demand for that author in the market: and, since

his works, in so many volumes, bound in russia, will fill the shelves of a “nobleman or gentleman’s” library, whether they are badly edited or well, the bookseller prefers to have them done in what he calls *the shop manner*, because that is cheaper.* Everyone who knows any thing of “*the trade*,” is convinced that this is the origin of half the books that are published in *New Bridge-Street*, and *Paternoster Row*.

* It was was thus that Mr. Walter Scott lately undertook to edit the works of Beaumont and Fletcher for one hundred guineas a volume *well*, and fifty guineas *shop*, and that his booksellers decided in favour of *the shop*. (ibid.)

Walter Scott’s association with trade was eventually the cause of his near financial ruin. For Scott, the relationships among author, publisher, printer, and editor were especially porous: if he served as both author and editor, he also was heavily entangled in the financial dealings of publisher and printer. Where did the work of bookmaker end and that of author begin?

Let us start with Scott as author, and as Brontë first received him. It is well known that Brontë was greatly influenced by her reading of Walter Scott’s works. In 1834, Brontë advised her close friend, Ellen Nussey, “For Fiction—read Scott alone all novels after his are worthless” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 130). There we find, as with his predecessors Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift (whom Brontë also read), a running paratextual commentary on authorship and the publication of books that

is both satirical and mock-historical in nature. Brontë's intermixture of imaginary authors, editors, and printers, and the manner in which she exposes their underhanded dealings, certainly would have been informed by the writings and editions of Scott. If Brontë is playfully complicit with her own "bookmakers," fabricating Angrian history out of a hodgepodge of partially realized and purely conceptual texts, so, too, we turn to Scott, whose professed antiquarianism was the motive force for his many historical "notes" and the various imaginary texts masquerading as authentic documents in his novels.

Brontë's early, unpublished writings often begin with self-conscious meditations on the origins of her own texts and their readerships—a tendency that, in the works of Scott, manifested in the many "epistles" and numerous "editors" and "authors" that bookend his *Waverley Novels*. Usually, the overt subject of Scott's prefaces is history, yet the focus, very often, is on the self-interested ownership and interpretation of documents. Today perhaps the most well-known example of this trend in Scott's writing is the placement at the opening of *Ivanhoe* of its "author's" (Laurence Templeton's) "dedicatory epistle" to the fictitious Reverend Dr. Dryasdust. The epistle, written by one aspiring antiquary to a formidably well-established and venerated one, provides a comic frame narrative that allows Scott to critique and justify simultaneously a work composed "partly out of the pearls of pure antiquity, and partly from the Bristol stones and

paste” (12).¹⁰⁹ The precious “Wardour Manuscript” is the asserted chief source of *Ivanhoe*: it is a “singular Anglo-Norman MS.,” which Sir Arthur Wardour (a character from Scott’s novel, *The Antiquary*) “preserves with such jealous care in the third drawer of his oaken cabinet, scarcely allowing anyone to touch it, and being himself not able to read one syllable of its contents (ibid.). It is also imaginary document. Yet this is not disclosed by Templeton. Instead, we are told that the Wardour Manuscript is “as important as” the Bannatyne Manuscript, a notable surviving early modern manuscript, and the Auchinleck Manuscript, a famous medieval manuscript (at that time held in the Advocates’ Library in Edinburgh; now held in the National Library of Scotland) (ibid.). What is imaginary is placed alongside what is real; the “pearls of pure antiquity” are intermixed and strung alongside Bristol stones and paste. One begins to wonder what is pearl from paste. One finds that what is “authentic” is used chiefly as a mere setting for what is “paste”—and that what is “paste” is treated as “pearl.”

What would it mean if we were to take Templeton at his word—if his imaginary Wardour Manuscript, were, in fact, “as important” as other actual surviving historical documents? If we turn to *Pevevil of the Peak* (1822), we find in Dr. Dryasdust’s prefatory letter to Captain Clutterbuck an account of the doctor’s

¹⁰⁹ It is also indirectly suggested that the historical context of *Ivanhoe* and its “scholarly” pretensions distinguish it as being more than an “idle novel,” even if not a strict historical account. As Templeton writes at the outset of his epistle to Dryasdust: “I am conscious, however, that the slight, unsatisfactory, and trivial manner in which the result of my antiquarian researches has been recorded in the following pages, takes the work from under that class which bears the proud motto *Detur digniori*. On the contrary, I fear I shall incur the censure of presumption in placing the venerable name of Dr Jonas Dryasdust at the head of the publication, which the more grave antiquary will perhaps class with the idle novels and romances of the day. I am anxious to vindicate myself of such a charge” (5).

conversation with the “Author of Waverley,” who has just been elected to the Roxburghe Club of London (a society, as Waverley’s author puts it, of “select bibliomaniacs” [7]).¹¹⁰ When the Author of Waverley asks Dryasdust whether these “learned persons will have but little toleration for a romance or fictitious narrative founded upon history,” Dryasdust warns him that such “skilful antiquaries” “may be apt to quarrel with the inconsistent nature of the superstructure—just as every classical traveller pours forth expressions of sorrow and indignation, when, in travelling through Greece, he chances to see a Turkish kiosk rising on the ruins of an ancient temple” (8). The Author of Waverley replies as follows: “But since we cannot rebuild the temple, a kiosk may be a pretty thing, may it not? not quite correct in architecture, strictly and classically criticized, but presenting something uncommon to the eye, and something fantastic to the imagination, on which the spectator gazes with pleasure of the same description which arises from the perusal of an Eastern tale” (8–9). The implication is that we cannot rebuild the past as it once was (an impossible task), nor can we prevent the intermixing of languages and cultures, which are all, more or less, living ruins. Like the Eastern tale, which has been translated and stands apart from its origin, the kiosk that stands upon the ruined temple of another culture also constitutes history. That we selectively re-imagine and reconstitute versions of the past is inevitable, whether we are Dr. Dryasdust or the Author of Waverley. If writing cannot rebuild history as it once was, it can appropriate it—though, despite whatever the Author of

¹¹⁰ Indeed, the Roxburghe Club of London had and still maintains an active membership.

Waverley professes, it is an act that is not without its own kind of violence, as is suggested by the Turkish origin of the kiosk.

If Scott “edited” and adapted history for the sake of writing entertaining novels of historical romance, drawing on both real and imaginary documents to do so, Brontë selected Africa as the template for Glass Town, her pleasure ground—her Mirror Town—and, with Branwell, created her own founding manuscripts and documents for it. Brontë built her own “Turkish kiosk,” as it were, on ancient ruins; and those ruins, as one would suspect, have less to do with Africa itself, and much more to do with Western literature, from the Bible through the writings of Byron and Scott, as well as the silver fork, gothic, and Newgate novels that also influenced her work. Brontë’s early “books,” like Scott’s, live very much in the shadow of their predecessors, but refuse to see themselves that way. Both authors go about creating fallen, mock-heroic literary worlds that are substantiated by their own self-consciously “false,” but nevertheless seductive, myth-making, fueled by self-reflexive fictions of publishing, collecting, and manuscript-making.

The early, unpublished writings of Brontë and the published works of Scott both give tangible form to a fictive communications circuit of trade, editorship, and readership. Of course, Scott’s works not only depict this circuit, but also constitute it through their forms as physical objects manufactured, sold, and distributed by actual, working printers and publishers. And, yet, Scott’s prefaces show us that, just as we inevitably read history through the lens of romance, so too real things are agreed-upon fictions. *Ivanhoe* begins from the outset as the story of

an object in time: the physical book itself—its cover, title-page, and preface—are part of the fantasy that we entertain about what it means to participate in history.

What these very material effusions mock and critique are the real, self-interested practices that each maker, whether author, editor, publisher, or bookseller, brings to a text. In this way, history and fiction alike are generated by solipsistic minds busy creating foundations established either through parasitically feeding off of other texts, or through commentary on their own self-fashioning. *The Monastery* (1820), as we learn in that novel's absurd and lengthy opening two epistles, is "edited" from "genuine Memoirs of the sixteenth century." What constitutes a "genuine" document in this instance? We learn that the memoirs were initially compiled by a monk, then by his nephew, who, after improving them with his own turn of phrase, gives the papers as a reward for services rendered to Captain Clutterbuck, who, after introducing his own contributions and seeking an editor for the manuscript, applies to the Author of *Waverley*—who promptly makes his own alterations to the story and claims all rights to it as his own "property." These two epistles constitute 76 pages, or approximately a quarter of the first volume of *The Monastery*, in its first edition, a three-decker. (Padding, indeed!)

We find that the Author of *Waverley* is also portrayed as a shameless profiteer. He writes to Clutterbuck:

Observe, therefore, Captain Clutterbuck, that [...] I receive you as a partner, but a sleeping partner only. As I give you no title to employ or use the firm of the copartnery we are about to form, I will

announce my property in my title-page, and put my own mark on my chattels, which the attorney tells me will be a crime to counterfeit, as much as it would to imitate the autograph of any other empiric—a crime amounting, as advertisements upon little vials assure us, to nothing short of felony. I scorn to use either argument or threats; but you cannot but be sensible, that, as you owe your literary existence to me on the one hand, so, on the other, your very all is at my disposal. I can at pleasure cut off your annuity, strike your name from the half-pay establishment, nay actually put you to death, without being answerable to any one. (*The Monastery* 74–75)

Having thus assumed “authorship” of the memoirs, the Author of Waverley cheerfully adds: “let us address ourselves to our task, and arrange as we best can the manuscript of your benedictine, so as to suit the taste of this critical age” (75). He concludes with a comment on his publisher, John Ballantyne (Scott’s publisher, of course), and the publishing trade as a whole: “It is a wrathful trade, and the *irritable genus*¹¹¹ comprehends the bookselling and the book-writing species” (76).

One is reminded of Thomas Carlyle’s pointed, unassuaged assessment of Scott himself—that “no literary man of any generation has less value than Scott for the immaterial part of his mission [...] our highest literary man, who immeasurably beyond all others commanded the world’s ear, had, as it were, no message whatever to deliver to the world; wished not the world to elevate itself, to amend

¹¹¹ The actual Latin should read here: “inritabile genus,” or “irritabile genus,” after “Genus irritabile” (Horace: Epistles, ii. 2, 102).

itself, to do this or that, except simply pay him for the books he kept writing” (357). If Scott’s works bear “messages,” they are enmeshed in a game of narrative hide-and-seek: am I writing something historical or just spinning a fiction? Are my footnotes real, or are they part of the romance I invent?¹¹² And, by extension: are you, Reader, profiting from this story, or am I just turning a profit? Features such as editorial commentary and interpolated documents that purport to “reveal” the origins of a fictional work remind one that reading, like writing, is a game of pretenses. Nevertheless, such paratexts also have the advantage of jumpstarting a narrative, and padding it, as it were, to the right (and salable) proportions.

In 1819, Byron wrote to John Murray, “I could have spun the thought of the four cantos of that poem into twenty—had I wanted to book-make” (105). He was referring, of course, to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. There is a distinction to be made between the craft of making a book (e.g., letterpress printing, hand bookbinding, &c.) and the mere compiling, padding, or recycling of a book’s contents. All bets aside, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a book-maker both as “one who makes a book (as a material product)” (e.g., “1710 ‘J. Distaff’ Char. Don Sacheverellio [bookseller’s note] Printed and Sold by Francis Higgins, Bookmaker), and as “one who composes or compiles a book; often disparagingly, one who makes a trade of this” (e.g., “1533 T. More Apol. i, in Wks. 928/2 For of

¹¹² For an extended investigation into this topic, see Robert Mayer’s essay, “The Illogical Status of Novelistic Discourse: Scott’s Footnotes for the Waverley Novels,” in which Mayer argues that Scott’s novels “make contradictory claims, both to historicity and to fictionality, and provide no easy way for the reader to resolve the apparent contradiction [...]. Scott’s apparatus embodies an assertion of the fundamentally illogical status of novelistic discourse by making the paradoxical claim that the novel is a literary form that lays claim to being read as both fiction and history” (913).

newe booke makers there are now moe then ynough”). Texts are devalued whenever strongly associated with mass-production. It is one thing to manufacture physical books; it is quite another to manufacture their contents. Even as the term “bookmaker” seems to bundle publishers and writers into one class, it also emphasizes class divisions separating bookmen from authors: while nineteenth-century booksellers and publishers readily identified themselves as part of “the trade” (a term that antiquarian booksellers continue to use to this day in reference to their business), authors did not. As Linda H. Peterson writes in *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, “Many nineteenth-century writers, men and women alike, feared the taint of trade because they sold manuscripts to publishers and thus, perhaps, dealt in commodities: books, pamphlets, articles. Most handled this nicety of usage by referring to authorship as a ‘profession’” (2).

Although Scott is well remembered for professing in 1830 that literature should be a “staff” and not a “crutch”—that his “profits” should not “become necessary” to meet his “ordinary expenses”¹¹³—the income generated from writing, in fact, became a necessity for him. Scott, who was co-partner with the printer James Ballantyne, advanced large sums of money to the publishing firm of Archibald Constable—a business decision that backfired. After Archibald Constable collapsed in January 1826, Scott spent the rest of his life revising and reissuing his former works to repay a debt of more than £120,000 to his

¹¹³ Scott wrote this in his introduction for a new edition of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* that was part of his larger series, *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*

creditors.¹¹⁴ After Scott's death, Carlyle argued that Scott had been content to "manufacture" and not "create" books for one reason: "to make more money" (362). As Carlyle saw it, Scott's partnership with his printers, the Ballantynes, was a "cover" for an endeavor that largely consisted of "trade." And as Carlyle points out, "A printing and bookselling speculation was not so alien for a maker of books" (356).

Even before the collapse of Archibald Constable, one can see that the marketing of Scott's works was irrevocably entangled in the content and presentations of his writings. John O. Hayden writes that Scott's anonymous authorship and routine use of pseudonyms were seen by contemporary reviewers as "part of a wide scheme of what was called 'bookmaking'—profiteering by either raising the price or padding the contents of books. Scott had demonstrated that novel-writing was big business [...]. The mystification concerning authorship was sometimes attacked as just a further gimmick to attract attention and sustain sales" (4).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Scott was, in fact, successful in paying off the debt. Indeed, as is noted in the general acknowledgment to the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, the Bank of Scotland now considers Scott "a champion of Scottish banking" and "an illustrious and honourable customer not just of the Bank of Scotland itself, but also of three other banks now incorporated within it" (*Ivanhoe* viii). The Bank of Scotland sponsored the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels in token of "its long and fruitful involvement with the affairs of Walter Scott."

¹¹⁵ One might interpret Brontë's use of pseudonyms and her employment of various publication strategies through a similar lens. Take, for instance, the complex "provenance" of her aforementioned work, "A Leaf from an Unopened Volume." The book's introductory paratexts, which complicate (and mystify) the relationship between author, scribe, and publisher, attempt to justify what would otherwise appear to be a mere salacious scandalmonger's tale. As a result, the manner in which the book is "published" not only provides a "realistic" context for an outrageous tale; it also suggests, through the threat of a rival Glass Town publisher, that the work is a hot commodity (an ironic stance, given the blatant fact that Brontë's works, at that time, were nothing of the sort).

And to what end? In retrospect, Carlyle perceives it thus: “Walter Scott, one of the gifted of the world, whom his admirers call the most gifted, must kill himself that he may be a country gentleman” (363). We see “Scott writing daily with the ardour of a steam-engine, that he might make 15,000*l.* a-year, and buy upholstery with it” (ibid.). Carlyle writes of Scott’s obsession with the decoration of Abbotsford: “marble-slabs for tables, wainscoting of rooms, curtains and the trimmings of curtains, orange-coloured or fawn-coloured” (ibid.)—a preoccupation that is also reflected in his writings.

We find a similar obsession with interior decorating in the juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë, whose narrators lovingly catalogue the extravagantly appointed interiors of her Angrian mansions and palaces. Such luxury finds its way even into *Jane Eyre*. We read of Thornfield’s costly furnishings and appointments: its “purple chairs and curtains,” its “Turkey carpet” and “walnut-panelled walls” with “one vast window rich in stained glass, and a lofty ceiling, nobly moulded” (125–6). We encounter “vases of fine purple spar,” “Tyrian-dyed curtain,” and “white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans” (ibid.). We are told of the “pale Parisian mantel-piece” whose ornaments “were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red” (126).

Yet Thornfield is a golden cage—as Rochester sees it, a “plague-house” (175). The root of its evil, we learn, lies in the avariciousness of Rochester’s father. According to Rochester, “little could he endure that a son of his should be a

poor man. I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage” (388). These motivations are kept from Rochester, who is told “nothing” of Bertha’s money, but, instead, of her extraordinary beauty—one strongly associated with luxury and conspicuous display. As Rochester recounts: “I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram; tall, dark, and majestic [...]. They showed her to me in parties, splendidly dressed [...]. She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments” (389). Although Rochester’s father and brother know that Bertha comes from a “mad” family, they withhold the information from him in order to secure Bertha’s thirty thousand pounds (389–90). Bertha’s splendor is a cover for vice, her beauty impermanent. So too, in the end, Thornfield Hall must burn, its “mortar, and marble, and woodwork” lost, its walls “shattered,” its interior “devastated” (543).

The destruction of Thornfield follows a general pattern in *Jane Eyre* of luxuries being abandoned, sacrificed, or destroyed: Gateshead also must be emptied of its fine goods, and Moor-House refurnished by Jane according to only a “model of bright modest snugness,” despite her new wealth (500). Ferndean is an appropriately austere destination, its rooms “gloomy” and furnishings “old-fashioned” (553)—in short, a fitting setting for the novel’s resolution in that it contains very few material temptations or distractions. Ill-gotten gains are destroyed or redistributed through a kind of providential reckoning (the implications of which I address in the following chapter).

If *Jane Eyre* picks up where Scott's works left off, lovingly demolishing Abbotsford and all of its illusions for him, Brontë's early writings are in keeping with his. Her little "books" depict writers and publishers, foremost, as profiteers. Texts are shamelessly appropriated without consequence, and naive, aspiring authors are either brought to heel, or (as is the case of Lord Lofty in the story "The Tragedy and the Essay" [1833]) duly crushed. In 1832, we find Verdopolis described as "the vast streets and mighty commercial marts of our great Babel [...] the dissonant cries of all nations, kindred and tongues, congregated together in the gigantic emporium of commerce, of arts, of god-like wisdom, of boundless learning and superhuman knowledge" (*Early Writings*, vol. 1, 338).

Later Brontë would return to a similar image in her correspondence with her own publisher.¹¹⁶ Perhaps playing on Jonathan Swift's "Battle of the Books,"¹¹⁷ whose satire traces the "Quarrel" between the "Antients" and "Moderns," whereby "there was a strange Confusion of Place among all the Books in the Library," Brontë concludes a long letter to her publisher, George Smith of the publishing firm Smith, Elder & Co., as follows:

You should be very thankful that books cannot "talk to each other as well as to their readers." Conceive the state of your warehouse if such were the case. The confusion of Tongues at Babel, or a congregation of Irvingites in full exercise of their miraculous gift—would offer but a feeble type of it. Terrible

¹¹⁶ I interpret this letter along very similar lines in my article, "Authors and Bookmakers."

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* (London: Charles Bathurst, 1747). See bb241 held in the Brontë Parsonage Museum & Brontë Society, Haworth, England.

too would be the quarrelling. Yourself and Mr. Taylor and Mr. Williams would all have to go in several times in the day to part or silence the disputants. Dr. Knox alone, with his “Race, a Fragment” (a book which I read with combined interest, amusement and edification) would deliver the voice of a Stentor if any other book ventured to call in question his favourite dogmas.

Still I like the notion of a mystic whispering amongst the lettered leaves—and perhaps at night when London is asleep and Cornhill desert, when all your clerks and men are away and the warehouse is shut up—such a whispering may be heard—by those who have ears to hear. (*Letters*, vol. 2, 470–1)

Brontë’s “quarrel” erupts in a publisher’s warehouse, whereas Swift imagines a library at war with itself.¹¹⁸ Swift mockingly writes, “it is with Libraries, as with other Coemeteries [...] that a certain Spirit, which they call Brutum hominis, hovers over the Monument, ’till the Body is corrupted, and turns to Dust, or to Worms [...]. So, we may say, a restless Spirit haunts over every Book, till Dust or Worms have seized upon it” (163). For Brontë, books are also restless things, but are instead a tumult of commercial goods contesting one another, each struggling to assert its opinion in the contemporary marketplace. It is only when the day’s business ends that contemplation is possible: “a mystic whispering amongst the

¹¹⁸ For instance, Swift writes that a copy of Regent’s Humanity had “most barbarously treated” Æsop, “had torn off his Title-Page, sorely defaced one Half of his Leaves, and chained him fast among a Shelf of Moderns. Where soon discovering how high the Quarrel was like to proceed, he tried all his Arts, and turned himself to a thousand Forms: At length in the borrow’d Shape of an Ass, the Regent mistook him for a Modern” (171).

lettered leaves [...] when all your clerks and men are away and the warehouse is shut up.” Ever attracted to the busy scene of publishing, Brontë would eventually position herself as both a mystic and an interloper there.

3. The Turn from Bookmaking toward Narratives of Work

Starting in 1836 and around the age of 20, it appears that Brontë stopped producing “books” at Haworth, and no longer included in her works title pages parading the attendant names of Angrian editors, publishers, and booksellers; nor did she create the kinds of intricate paratextual apparatuses that characterized her earlier “publishing” activities. The method by which she manufactured her writings also seems to have changed, shifting away from the practice of preparing bifolia bound in a single gathering within wrappers, toward the preparation of her writing on single sheets.¹¹⁹ The last Brontë-made cover we have is on “Passing Events”—

¹¹⁹ The manuscript commonly referred to as “The Return of Zamorna” (c. 1837), although currently untraced, was transcribed for the Shakespeare Head edition of *Miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings*, and is described as being written on “ordinary note paper” (281). Many of the untitled manuscripts that follow are also untraced, and were likely also written on such paper, so far as their descriptions suggest. The fair-copy holograph manuscript of *Jane Eyre* was written page by page on full, single sheets of high-grade stationery. Needless, too, to say that the handwriting increased in size. (See “Authors and Bookmakers”: 472–84.) Many of these later manuscripts (i.e., those dating from 1837 through *Jane Eyre*) have been rebound by collectors, either concealing or destroying in the process any evidence of the original state of their physical structures (e.g., original sheet size, sewing structure [if present]). I have attempted, whenever possible, to study these manuscripts and examine them for evidence of their original sewing and binding structures. In earlier instances (i.e., manuscripts made before 1837), original covers have often been preserved even when manuscripts were bound into portfolios along with the “contents” of their works. (Collectors tended to save anything bearing Brontë’s original handwriting.) The fact that I have not yet found or located a record of such a cover after 1837 strongly suggests that Brontë ceased making them.

perhaps, not coincidentally, the last of the early, unpublished writings to bear a title.¹²⁰

How do we know that Brontë did not continue to make books in her former fashion, and that later examples simply are no longer extant?¹²¹ Of course, this is a possibility, but it seems very unlikely given the following evidence. First, it is certain that Brontë retained all of the “books” that she produced through 1830, as all of the volumes entered in her 1830 “Catalogue” have been, at one time or another, professionally described and sold by members of the antiquarian book trade.¹²² Also, Brontë deliberately documented the history of her own bookmaking by signing and dating a great many of her works in her own name (i.e., in addition to the names of her other “authors” and “publishers”), sometimes recording the

¹²⁰ That these works are untitled is supported: a) by evidence offered by extant, traceable manuscripts; and b) by the descriptions in the Shakespeare Head edition of the currently untraced manuscripts in private hands. It would be extremely useful to have the opportunity to examine manuscripts in private collections for evidence of any prior binding structure—particularly, the untitled manuscript commonly referred to as “The Return of Zamorna,” which was last recorded as being in the Law Collection, as well as the manuscript commonly referred to as “Four Years Ago,” formerly held by the collector John L. Clawson.

¹²¹ In *A Bibliography of the Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë*, Christine Alexander notes: “Occasionally Charlotte refers in her manuscripts to titles of other stories, possibly written by her: the title-page of ‘The Foundling,’ for example, lists seven additional stories by its author, one of which has been traced, but since no further evidence can be found of the remaining stories they are not mentioned in the bibliography. It is quite possible, however, that ‘The Incorporeal Watcher,’ a prose manuscript in ‘The Foundling’ and in ‘Visits in Verreopolis’ Volume I as “Tree’s horrible romance”, may yet come to light” (xviii). In fact, Brontë refers to a number of other stories (e.g., in advertisements, &c.) throughout the juvenilia that are clearly imaginary, as they are not in her catalogue and playfully reference absurdities. (See section above on Brontë’s imaginary texts.) The title, “The Incorporeal Watcher,” is most likely a joke and precisely what it claims to be: incorporeal.

¹²² The majority of these manuscripts were purchased by Clement Shorter, acting as an agent of Thomas J. Wise, in March 1895 (see note below). However, six manuscript books, including “The Poetaster” and “An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent Men,” were sold in a single lot at auction by Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge in July 1907, where they were purchased by the firm of Bernard Quaritch. (N.B.: Alexander writes that Wise purchased some of Charlotte Brontë’s manuscripts at this sale, but it appears that he only purchased manuscripts by Branwell.) See *Book-prices Current: A Record of the Prices at which Books Have Been Sold at Auction, from October, 1906, to July, 1907, Being the Season 1906–07*, volume XXI (London: Elliot Stock, 1907).

time it took to complete writing them. That Brontë both carefully tracked and preserved these books, as well as the great number of extant “books” that followed afterward, suggests that she maintained an archive, as it were, of her early writings.¹²³

In addition, historical evidence of sales in the antiquarian book and manuscript trade strongly indicates that Brontë’s archive was largely undisturbed until it was purchased in March 1895 by Clement Shorter, who was acting as an agent for Thomas J. Wise.¹²⁴ Only one item from this archive of her early works ever emerged from a source other than the collection held by Nicholls.¹²⁵ And although a portion of Brontë’s manuscript books cannot now be easily traced, owing to their sale to private collectors, many of the bookseller and auction house records generated at the time are sufficient for establishing the basic size, shape,

¹²³ In addition, there is no evidence that Brontë ever burned or otherwise destroyed any of her own manuscript “books.”

¹²⁴ As Wise and Symington write, “The pioneer of Brontë research was the late Clement K. Shorter, who personally interviewed Charlotte Brontë’s husband, the Rev. A. B. Nicholls, in March 1895, at Banagher, Ireland, and obtained from him many papers in his possession relating to the Brontë family. These included some interesting letters which had not been printed in Mrs Gaskell’s biography, and a mass of manuscript material in the minute hand which is characteristic of the Brontës” (*The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships & Correspondence* vii).

¹²⁵ In 1892, Professor Ernest Nys of Brussels discovered a bound set of her manuscripts in a Brussels bookstall; presumably, Charlotte left these at the Pensionnat of M. Héger upon her return to England (Symington’s *Misc. and Unpublished Writings* 471). Other manuscripts sold at auction in July 1907 by Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge came from the property of Mrs Nicholls, widow of Arthur Bell Nicholls—thus were part of her original collection. Note: of course, the fair copy holograph manuscripts for *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette* were not part of this collection, but were written at a later date, and they became the property of George Smith, who saved them and later bequeathed them to his heirs.

format, and general content of those additional manuscripts that Brontë left behind.¹²⁶

Finally, one can clearly witness Brontë's manuscript-making process change over time as she moved from the activity of coterie publishing to that of preparing fair-copy manuscripts for professional publication. The later manuscripts, on the whole, are progressively larger in terms of their size.¹²⁷ Likewise, fewer paratextual apparatuses appear in Brontë's texts beginning in 1836. For instance, although bound and titled, "Passing Events" lacks a title page, a preface, and elaborate chapter headings, anticipating similar features (or the lack thereof) in the later manuscripts to come.

After "Passing Events" in 1836,¹²⁸ the vast majority of Brontë's manuscripts would remain untitled.¹²⁹ We also discover Brontë's most prolific "author," Charles Wellesley, abruptly recast as Charles Townshend. This apparent shift in Brontë's

¹²⁶ In many instances, portions of these manuscripts were transcribed in part or photographed before they were again purchased by private collectors. For instance, "Visits in Verreopolis" is currently untraced, but its title page, preface, table of contents, and first chapter were photographed and the manuscript transcribed for volume one of *Miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings of Charlotte and Patrick Branwell Brontë of The Shakespeare Head Brontë* (SHB) before it was sold from the Law Collection. Likewise, a transcription of the contents of "Two Romantic Tales" appear in the SHB.

¹²⁷ For example, many of the "Blackwood's Young Men's Magazines" (1829–30) measure approximately 5 cm tall by three 3 cm wide. A number of works generated in 1833 and thereabouts (e.g., "The Green Dwarf," "Arthurianna," "The Secret and Lily Hart") measure 11.5 by 9.3 cm. And the work referred to as "Mina Laury II" (Robert H. Taylor Collection at Princeton University Library), created in 1838, measures 18.5 cm tall by 11.5 cm wide.

¹²⁸ Sales records and evidence of extant, traceable manuscripts suggest that "Passing Events" is the last of Brontë's manuscripts to be bound in a titled homemade cover according to her earlier pattern. "Passing Events" does not contain a title page, however, nor any other significant textual apparatus. Although the manuscript (which is held by the Morgan Library & Museum) has been disbound and inserted into a portfolio, its original upper cover remains intact.

¹²⁹ Notable exceptions naturally include the holograph manuscripts of *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*.

approach to preparing her writings, which coincides with the appearance of Townshend as narrator, seems to have been overlooked by Brontë's editors and critics alike. What motivated this change, and what implications does this transition have with respect to Brontë's later writings?

Compare Brontë's production of five "books" per year in 1833 and 1834 to her output in 1835, which consisted of her one last Angrian "publication," "The Scrap Book. A Mingling of Many Things," "compiled" by Lord C. A. F. Wellesley.¹³⁰ This approach to fiction—that of compiling or anthologizing—would itself seem to signal some form of transition in Brontë's approach to narrative, even while adding to the Angrian corpus one last genre.¹³¹ For "The Scrap Book" is precisely what it sounds like. Among other writings, it contains: speeches by the Duke of Zamorna; articles "extracted" from the *Northern Review* and *Verdopolitan Intelligencer*; a letter written by Zamorna to the Marquis of Ardrah; a fragment of poetry; a

¹³⁰ N.B.: "The Wounded Stag and Other Poems" appears in Alexander's bibliography as a 20-page manuscript titled by Brontë and dating from January 1836; however, it's an assemblage of several separate manuscript drafts gathered at different times, and in different stages of completion, and not a Brontë-made book.

¹³¹ Heather Glen has argued that this and two other collections of short prose by Brontë, "Corner Dishes" and "Arthuriana," are representative of Brontë's early fictions, and that they exemplify Brontë's interest in the sketch or tale—a form, Glen writes, that Brontë sought to develop further in her final Angrian tales. Of the works commonly referred to as "Mina Laury," "Stancliffe's Hotel," "The Duke of Zamorna," "Henry Hastings," and "Caroline Vernon"—all written in 1838 or afterward—Glen writes: "Their generic signals are those of 'sketches' and 'papers' of the period: an emphasis on 'scene' rather than narrative connection; shifts of tone and mood; pronounced inconclusiveness" (*Tales* xxxiv). Glen's reading of these final manuscripts rests on two points: that the length of Brontë's late unpublished work was "short enough to be read in a sitting," and that "each tale ends in impasse or in unresolved dilemma." However, Brontë's earlier unpublished writings also have these same qualities, which are not particularly characteristic of the three miscellaneous collections that Brontë assembled from 1833 to 1835 that Glen mentions. (N.B.: Glen dates all three of the collections as being assembled during the same year in 1835; however, "Arthuriana" was written in 1833, and "Corner Dishes" in 1834.)

scandal story; and miscellaneous accounts of the Angrian aristocracy.¹³² As such, “The Scrap Book” recalls other popular publications of the 1820s and ’30s, such as Oliver & Boyd’s *Scrap Book: A Collection of Amusing and Striking Pieces in Prose and Verse*, or *Fischer’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book*. Wellesley’s adoption of the role of editor/compiler¹³³ thus introduces a final form to Angria’s marketplace for books before he dispenses with his role as “Wellesley”—just as Brontë began to abandon her own bookmaking model.

I date this marked change in the narration of Brontë’s stories and her approach to manuscript-making as coinciding at roughly the same time that she and Branwell sent samples of their poetry to Southey and Wordsworth. (Charlotte had written to Southey on 29 December 1836,¹³⁴ Branwell to Wordsworth on 10 January 1837.¹³⁵) In his reply to Charlotte’s letter, Southey stated the situation bluntly: “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment & a recreation” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 167). In her response to Southey, Brontë gently insists that she has attended to her duties, though with some difficulty: as a governess, she has “enough to occupy [her] thoughts all day long,” though she confesses to “thinking” in the evening. She writes that she has

¹³² It is also worth noting that these materials date from over an extended period, ranging from September 1834 to June 1835.

¹³³ Wellesley also serves as the “editor” to “A Leaf from an Unopened Volume, or the Manuscript of an Unfortunate Author.” Here, however, his role is that of editor of one author’s manuscripts—though his role as editor is questionable, perhaps more of a posture, given the marvelous, “extraordinary nature” of the tale’s author, who so mysteriously appears and vanishes.

¹³⁴ See Southey’s reply, dated 12 March 1837, to Brontë’s letter (*Letters*, vol. 1, 165).

¹³⁵ See *Letters*, vol. 1, 160–1.

“endeavored not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfill, but to feel deeply interested in them.” Yet she admits that she does not always “succeed”: “sometimes when I’m teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my Father’s approbation amply rewarded me for the privation” (169). Brontë’s second letter to Southey, described above, suggests that her father, like Southey himself, also discouraged her from pursuing a career as a professionally published writer.¹³⁶

We should note, too, that even as Southey depicts writing as a kind of “business” that will interfere with womanly “duties,” Brontë, in response, refers to her own writings as intangible stuff: “imaginative pleasures” and “one dream of the imagination” (169).¹³⁷ Although Brontë took an active interest in publishing (as we have seen in her early writings), she refrains from discussing the possibility further with Southey, and elides the lingering question of a career in writing. When Brontë eventually began her negotiations with publishers, she instead assumed a male pseudonym, and carried out many of her early business transactions under the pretext of being a male author.¹³⁸ In May 1848, under the incognito of Currer Bell,

¹³⁶ Juliet Barker notes that when Brontë contacted Southey, she also probably disclosed to her father her dislike of teaching (she was languishing at the time as an instructor at Roe Head), and sought his advice with respect to her future prospects as a writer. Barker speculates (with good reason), “Perhaps Branwell’s recent letters to *Blackwood’s Magazine* prompted her to imagine that she, too, might earn her living by her pen” (243).

¹³⁷ We note, too, that Brontë sent Southey poetry, and told him that she aspired to “‘be for ever known’ as a poetess”—not as a novelist (169).

¹³⁸ Charlotte Brontë revealed her true identity to George Smith in the summer of 1848 when the publisher Newby began to sell her sister Anne’s work to American publishers under the pretext of its having been authored by “Currer Bell.” Even so, she and Anne requested that “to all of the rest of the world,” they remain as “‘gentleman’ as heretofore” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 113).

she wrote to W. S. Williams that the “present market for female labour is quite overstocked” and wondered “where or how could another be opened”:

Is there any room for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers, for more female artists, more authoresses? One can see where the evil lies—but who can point out the remedy? When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident—when her destiny isolates her—I suppose she must do what she can—live as she can—complain as little—bear as much—work as well as possible.

(*Letters*, vol. 2, 66)

Such questions had preoccupied Brontë more than a decade earlier when she herself sought a vocation.

If we turn to the contents of Brontë’s unpublished tales of the 1830s, they explore writing as a tenable means of employment, though the focus still is on the question of male authorship. “Passing Events” (1836) begins, “Every man to his trade, the blacksmith to his anvil, the tailor to his needle.” As one might predict, the artist and writer are not far behind: “let him paint to the life [...] let him write so well that each separate voice shall speak out of the page in changeful tone” (*Five Novelettes* 35). It is during this phase in Brontë’s writing that her fiction begins to cast, in ways that only had been hinted at in her previous writings,¹³⁹ authorship as a means to earning a living, but also as a degrading form of trade. The untitled

¹³⁹ In his preface to “The Evening Walk: A Poem,” the Marquis of Douro writes, “The following pages are the production of my pen, not, according to a much-used scrap of cut and dried phraseology, the emanations of leisure hours, but the fruit of some days’ labour” (*Poems*, SHB, 95).

manuscript commonly referred to as “The Return of Zamorna” (c. 1837) opens as follows: “Reader I’ll tell you what—my heart is like to break. ‘What for?’ you’ll ask. Because I’m run dry. I never till last night adopted the general opinion that we were on the verge of a national bankruptcy.” When Charles Townshend finds himself unable to pay his landlord, he is told, “‘Sir if you have not the money by you, you must either go to jail on the spot or promise to set to and write a book. I will take the manuscript myself to the booksellers and receive the payment, and meantime be pleased to give me your coat, waist-coat and watch in pledge.’” Thus, Townshend sat down to his “alotted task, and shirtless, vestless, coatless, with a blanket over [his] shoulders in lieu of the legitimate gear, proceeded to write at the beck of Suerna Ellrington, the linen-drapeer, to procure money to pay [his] lodgings” (*Misc. and Unpublished Writings*, vol. 2, 281–4). We find the pattern repeated in Brontë’s untitled manuscript of 1839, commonly referred to as “Captain Henry Hastings.” During a police interrogation, Townshend is asked about his line of work: “‘What business do you carry on—?’ ‘a very thriving one.’ ‘what is it?’ ‘I’m a Jerrey—’ ‘What species of conveyance do you drive—an omnibus or Cab?’ ‘neither.’ ‘What then?’ ‘A quill’” (*Five Novelettes* 195).

Charles Townshend’s mercenary approach to writing coincides with the situation of the Brontës themselves, who were at that time sorely in need of additional income, and who began to think of writing as a way for earning it. In his role as narrator, Townshend underscores some of the more degrading aspects of

writing prose for profit. The untitled manuscript commonly referred to as “Caroline Vernon” opens with the following reflection:

When I concluded my last book I made a solemn resolve that I would write no more till I had somewhat to write about, & at the time I had a sort of notion that perhaps many years might elapse before aught should transpire novel & smart enough to induce me to resume my relinquished pen—but lo you—! Scarce three moons have waxed & waned ere “the creature’s at his dirty work again.” (*Five Novelettes* 277)

Cynically identifying himself with the shameless “Scribbler” whom Alexander Pope excoriates in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, Townshend freely admits that his principal concern is not in finding remarkable things to write about, but rather what “may sell well when committed to paper—Lord, a book-wright need never be at a loss” (278). And so it’s the case that, even in 1839, after the pretense of book production had ended, Charlotte Brontë herself was still a bit of a “Scribbler,” fulfilling an imaginary demand for fiction in an Angrian marketplace that prompted her, like Townshend, to write rapidly¹⁴⁰ (at least, to her way of thinking), recycling stale subject matter for the sake of meeting imaginary debts. This mode is at odds with Brontë’s later self-described method of writing from lived experience. The slow frequency at which she wrote later in her life, as well as her insistence of drawing her subjects “from life,” would have registered to Brontë

¹⁴⁰ Brontë most likely began the manuscript of “Caroline Vernon” only a few months after completing “Captain Henry Hastings” (*Five Novelettes* 273).

as a practice distinctly separate from the work of mere scribblers and bookmakers, as she conceived them.¹⁴¹

What then becomes of this stubborn “scribbler,” the last remnant of Brontë’s bookmaking? First, we note that all of Brontë’s “scribbling” narrators are males.¹⁴² Second, that by the time Brontë’s work is professionally published, her scribbling narrators are converted into female teachers: we find Jane Eyre serving as an instructor at Lowood before taking a position as governess at Thornfield Hall, after which she holds a post as teacher in Morton’s village school for girls. Lucy Snowe secures a respectable job as a paid companion, and then inadvertently finds work as a teacher at Madame Beck’s *pensionnat*, before establishing her own school with the help of M. Paul Emanuel.

Brontë’s published novels never overtly address the greater difficulty that she herself faced of what it meant to write for money as a woman. Such problems were instead subsumed within a broader theme preoccupying three of Brontë’s four novels: the necessity of finding a profession. The larger question of trade does not disappear, but instead becomes indirectly addressed through the quest for respectable employment.

In Brontë’s first novel, *The Professor*, this anxiety immediately surfaces in the form of trade when, in chapter two, her Eton-educated narrator, William

¹⁴¹ Chapter one, “Shaping Volumes,” addresses the rate at which Brontë produced her writings.

¹⁴² N.B: There is one possible exception to this of which I’m aware—an ambiguous case. “The Violet” is attributed on its title page to the “Marquess of Douro,” and on both its cover and in its preface to the “Marquis of Douro.” Brontë, on the verso of the title page, pointedly refers to herself as the “Marquess of Douro.” The ambiguity seems deliberate here, and perhaps revealing—the implication being that the Marquis published in print perhaps might all along be a Marquess.

Crimsworth, refuses both of the respectable livings offered him by each of his maternal uncles, Lord Tynedale and the Hon. John Seacombe, in favor of a career in business: “Lord Tynedale demanded sternly ‘Whether I had thoughts of following my father’s steps and engaging in trade?’ Now I had no thoughts of the sort [...] but such was the scorn expressed in Lord Tynedale’s countenance as he pronounced the word *Trade*, such the contemptuous sarcasm of his tone, that I was instantly decided” (7).¹⁴³ However, it is precisely this same career in “trade” that reduces Crimsworth to little more than an “automaton” when he takes work as a translator in his brother’s business. As Hunsden tells him, “You sit at that desk in Crimsworth’s Counting-house day by day and week by week; scraping with a pen on paper, just like an automaton; you never get up, you never say you are tired, you never ask for a holiday, you never talk about change or relaxation” (36). If trade makes machines of men, the implication is that some are better suited to manufacture than others. Hunsden comments that Crimsworth is “cut out” to be a “nobleman,” and concludes his harangue as follows: “you’ve no power; you can do nothing; you’re wrecked and stranded on the shores of Commerce; forced into collision with practical Men, with whom you cannot cope, for you’ll never be a tradesman” (38).

It is ironic that, by chapter three, we find our narrator reduced to a mere copyist, mechanically translating banal business letters for pay, given that *The*

¹⁴³ In her fair copy manuscript of *The Professor*, Brontë not only underlined the word “Trade,” but wrote it in a different script, using the serified letters she traditionally used for titling works (&c.), as opposed to her cursive script. (The fair copy manuscript of *The Professor* is held by the Morgan Library & Museum.)

Professor itself is presented as a narrative resulting from Crimsworth's own failed personal correspondence, written not under duress nor for capital, but independently and for pleasure. The discussion of this correspondence at the end of chapter one provides an indispensable, if indirect, commentary on the (purported) production of *The Professor*. Recall that chapter one of *The Professor* begins with a long letter from Crimsworth to his friend (named none other than "Charles"), who attended Eton with him. Upon concluding his epistle, Crimsworth coolly remarks, "To this letter I never got an answer." Crimsworth goes on to justify the narrative that follows, explaining:

The leisure time I have at my command, and which I intended to employ for his private benefit—I shall now dedicate to that of the public at large. My narrative is not exciting and, above all, not marvellous—but it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled in the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience, frequent reflections of their own. (14)

Thus, we are immediately made aware that Crimsworth's tale is produced not for pay, but written out of leisure¹⁴⁴ by a man of learning.¹⁴⁵ Even so, we are warned that its story should not be regarded as mere entertainment. Instead of soliciting

¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Brontë writes the following about Crimsworth in an early, unpublished draft preface to *The Professor* (which had been originally titled *The Master*): "I suppose the succeeding narrative was the work of his leisure [h]ours after he retired from business" (295).

¹⁴⁵ In the introduction to her study, *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, Linda Peterson writes that, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, "authors debated whether writing should be pursued in their leisure hours after fulfilling the obligations of a traditional, learned profession (or, in the case of women, domestic duties) or whether it should be a full-time occupation [...]. In the eighteenth century and at the start of the nineteenth, a man of letters was simply a scholar, a man of learning" (3).

the attention of general audiences, Crimsworth appeals to readers of the “same vocation” as his, presumably other “professors”—or, possibly, other writers. We infer that leisure is not an escape from work, but a reflection on it—or even, perhaps, that the right vocation provides an opportunity for leisurely self-reflection. If it’s Crimsworth’s task to discover an occupation that will suit a man “cut out” to be a “nobleman,” the underlying question is how to write literature and live as a gentleman when one is not provided with the resources of a nobleman.

Crimsworth’s situation reflects the earlier quandary in which Brontë’s Angrian narrator, Charles Townshend, finds himself. If we return to the scene of Brontë’s previous writing, we find that her early Glass Town and Angria narratives not only revealed in scenes of high life, but that its chief authors were either privileged nobles or writers subsidized through patrons of the upper class. This depiction of the privileges (and abuses) of the Angrian patronage system is succeeded by a satirical critique of writing as a form of employment. In optimistic moments, Brontë’s writers find themselves situated in the thriving marketplace of a busy metropolis; in (increasingly) disenchanted ones, they are reduced to the slave-like manufacture of words devoid of feeling or interest. This binary view of authorship hinges on class distinctions informed by the substitution/transformation of Charles Townshend for Lord Charles Wellesley—Brontë’s favorite narrator becoming a kind of displaced or fallen aristocrat, who must write to earn his living. We should note that William Crimsworth, like his counterpart, Charles Townshend, is a person of noble blood who finds himself in reduced

circumstances—a situation that serves as an exaggerated, dramatic parallel to that of Charlotte, who, as the daughter of a respectable Cambridge-trained Anglican clergyman, was called upon to serve as a governess in order to secure additional income for her family.

This preoccupation with unearned wealth dovetails Brontë's own professed interest in writing stories about "Labour." Just as Crimsworth repudiates the privileges of his high connections, Charlotte, as an author, eventually found fault with narratives of high life, which proved unsatisfactory as subjects for her fiction. Brontë makes this stance explicit in her preface to *The Professor*:

I had got over any taste as I might once have had for the ornamented and redundant in composition—and had come to prefer what was plain and homely [...]. I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs—that he should never get a shilling he had not earned—that no sudden turn should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station—that whatever small competency he might gain should be won by the sweat of his brow [...] that he should not even marry a beautiful nor a rich wife, nor a lady of rank—As Adam's Son he should share Adam's doom—Labour throughout life and a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment. (3–4)

Earlier signs of this turn in Brontë's writing are reflected in her story, commonly referred to as "Captain Henry Hastings," whose heroine Elizabeth Hastings, a "pale

undersized young woman dressed as plainly as a Quakeress in grey,” emerges in contrast to the noble women who ornamented Brontë’s previous stories and who echoed the silver-fork novels of the time.¹⁴⁶ The daughter of a gentleman farmer, Elizabeth Hastings still must “consider how to make out life.” Finding herself “majestically alone in the midst of trading Zamorna,” she forms a school and teaches the children of the “wealthy manufacturers in the city & the aristocracy of the seats round”—“dependent on nobody—responsible to nobody” (243).

Here we find a new fantasy: the fantasy of the independent teacher. Historical sources, including Brontë’s own correspondence, suggest that teaching was anything but a refuge of majestic solitude. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Mary Wollstonecraft bitterly reflects on her own experience: “A teacher at a school is only a kind of upper servant, who has more work than the menial ones” (71). Brontë certainly found her own work as both a school teacher burdensome, referring to her time instructing pupils at Roe Head as “wretched bondage,” and preferring to redirect her feeling and energies, which she described as being “not merely mechanical,” toward her own imaginative writing (*Tales* 447–8). The fate of the governess was no better. In an 1848 letter to W. S. Williams, she writes that “many a time, when her charge turns unruly on her hands, when the responsibility which she would wish to discharge faithfully and perfectly, becomes unmanageable to her, she will wish herself a housemaid or kitchen-girl, rather than a baited, trampled, desolate, distracted governess” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 64).

¹⁴⁶ Of course, Elizabeth Hastings anticipates Jane Eyre.

Yet the narrative of school-keeping persists, and not only in Brontë's writing, of course. (She and her sisters had formed a plan to open a school at Haworth Parsonage, but the venture failed when they received no responses to the advertisements they circulated.) The critic Edward Copeland argues that, although such employment lacked the prestige of holding a post as either a governess or paid companion in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, "school-keeping as an *idea* had powerful ideological advantages" in that its isolation prevented the "humiliation of social exposure" endemic to these other two more genteel forms of employment (177). We repeatedly witness such exposure in *Jane Eyre* when Jane is employed as a governess, and also in many other instances throughout the novel. As Karen Chase observes, "even more dreaded than the exposure to careless nature is an exposure to human scrutiny. Although Jane obsessively seeks to 'elude observation,' she is continually made to endure the stares of others" (*Eros & Psyche* 62). In Brontë's fiction, school-keeping becomes an ideal means for securing respectable concealment (at least, this is the temporary case in *Jane Eyre*; Lucy Snowe, of course, runs her own school at the end of *Villette*).

However, whether at Thornfield or in the village school, teaching provides a kind of double concealment; for if William Crimsworth, Jane Eyre, and Lucy Snowe all teach, the implicit fact is that they also all write. Contrary to her earlier fictions, the narrators of Brontë's novels never resort to writing for a living, but always to teaching. Meanwhile, we read their writings—narratives produced during undisclosed moments—while the actual work of that writing, the activity of it

(unlike Jane's sketching, for example), is never itself depicted. Karen Chase has called this feature of *Jane Eyre* the "greatest and most confounding gap of all":

She writes. She writes the story of her life as she wants to tell it. But she writes into that story not the story of her writing, but only the shadow of her authorship. Critics have wondered when and where she writes—they suppose the activity is secret, separate from her marriage. But this is not another mystery so much as the hint of another story, the glimpse of a companion Jane who is not *in Jane Eyre*, and who is not *of Jane Eyre*. ("Who's/Whose Jane Eyre?")

This development in Brontë's narration is clearly a departure from her early focus on authorship, and is a characteristic that separates her late novels from, say, Dickens's *David Copperfield* (published in 1849 and 1850).

Thus, the favored themes of authorship and publishing, which so regularly punctuated the plots and shaped the structures of Brontë's early, unpublished writings, fall away in her professionally published novels. Brontë's female narrators/writers, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, are mute on the topic of the genesis of their prose, much less its "publication." And, indeed, gender has much to do with it. Their silence on the subject of writing is consonant with a broader historical trend, certainly among Brontë's female precursors during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, of excluding the depiction of women authors from novels and short stories. In his study, *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790–1820*, Copeland notes that, aside from a "very

occasional example,” female novelists of the period were “reluctant indeed to introduce women as authors into their fictions.” The reasons for this suppression extended beyond the fear that women authors undoubtedly had of compromising their own social respectability. As Copeland writes, the realities that these women encountered as authors made the subject an especially painful one: “Patriarchal restrictions, urgent financial need, grave economic risk, and real personal danger—debtors’ prison and the rest—make it the sorest and rarest of topics” (12). One can observe a parallel trend with respect to biographies of female authors. Linda H. Peterson points out that, even as late as the 1850s, “the models for writing a woman author’s life history were few, and none distinguished” (132).

These questions are informed, on a larger scale, by a concern shared by male and female authors alike: neither wanted to be portrayed as a hack, even if he or she were pressed to write for pay. But the point was a particularly painful one for women. Copeland reports that Charlotte Smith wrote the following in a private letter to her friend: “I love novels no more than a Grocer does figs” (202).¹⁴⁷ Acknowledging in a private letter that one’s novels are, essentially, commodities is quite a different thing from declaring it publicly; female authors especially avoided any depiction that smacked of the taint of trade. Copeland suggests that women writers of the first quarter of the nineteenth century and their publishers alike participated in a “genteel charade”: John Blackwood, for example, “avoiding all mention of money and [...] supplying a regular allotment of well-pointed flattery”

¹⁴⁷ Copeland’s reference: “Letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, 9 October 1793. The Henry E. Huntington Library, HM 10809, San Marino, California.”

in his letters to Susan Ferrier, and Jane Austen taking “care to distance herself from the gentleman-like posings” of her publisher, John Murray (200–1). Meanwhile, Peterson makes the case that female authors of the 1830s were valorized in *Fraser’s Magazine* for their “beauty, femininity, and domesticity,” and were complimented “as much on their good looks as on their ‘mournful’ verses or ‘pleasant tales’”—a kind of “mythmaking” that created “acceptable versions of the female author,” one “pouring or drinking tea, fondling dogs, writing at dainty tables, or [...] looking in the mirror to adjust a hat” (26). Additionally, she notes, “it is no coincidence that Maclise, the illustrator, and Maginn, the editor, populate the women’s portrait with titled ladies” (34). Peterson writes, “for women in the 1830s, as for men, the key aspects of professional authorship were respectable social status, genius or genial wit, and silence about earnings” (33).

Such was the pattern that Brontë would have observed in her readings during the 1830s, when she herself began to consider writing for pay. And so she writes the following to Lewes in November 1849 about the use of her pseudonym:

I wish you did not think me a woman: I wish all reviewers believed “Currer Bell” to be a man—they would be more just to him. You will—I know—keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex—where I am not what you consider graceful—you will condemn me [...].

Come what will—I cannot when I write think always of myself—and of what is elegant and charming in femininity—it is not on

those terms or with such ideas I ever took pen in hand. (*Letters*, vol. 2, 275)

Because scenes of authorship are not represented in *Jane Eyre* nor *Villette*, the exact nature of Jane's and Lucy's own writings remain safely obscure,¹⁴⁸ just as the taste and respectability of both women, for the most part, remain intact and unquestioned.¹⁴⁹

As is well known, Brontë concealed her own activities as both editor of the Brontës' *Poems* and as author of her novels until her death in 1855.¹⁵⁰ This choice of her pen name, Currer Bell, has its own suggestive history—the masculine name “Currer” very possibly being inspired by the last name of Frances Richardson Currer (1785–1861) of Eshton Hall in Yorkshire.¹⁵¹ Currer was a wealthy philanthropist and bibliophile, and was regarded in 1836 by Thomas Frognall Dibdin as being the “THE HEAD of all female Collectors in Europe” (*Reminiscences* 949). As such, she appears in his famous *Bibliographical, Antiquarian and*

¹⁴⁸ The wording on the title page indicating that *Jane Eyre* was an “autobiography” “edited” by Currer Bell was added at the suggestion of her publishers (see Brontë's correspondence with Smith, Elder on 12 September 1846, *Letters*, vol. 1, 539). Neither phrases appear in Brontë's fair-copy manuscript of *Jane Eyre* (“Jane Eyre,” George Smith Memorial Bequest, Add. 43474–6, The British Library).

¹⁴⁹ In the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the respectability of Lucy and Jane comes into question only when they wander unprotected: Lucy in Brussels, before securing work at the Pensionnat, and Jane in the village of Morton, before being taken under the protection of the Rivers family. Of course, some reviewers questioned their taste. One only has to turn to Elizabeth Rigby's infamous review of *Jane Eyre* for an example (*Quarterly Review* 153–185).

¹⁵⁰ By the time of her death, most knew of Brontë's identity. As early as November 1849, she complained to W. S. Williams that she could “no longer walk invisible” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 272).

¹⁵¹ The name “Eshton” also appears in *Jane Eyre*, as that of Mr. Rochester's wealthy house guests (q.v. *Jane Eyre* 214).

Picturesque Tour.¹⁵² For a woman to appear in such a history was remarkable, indeed. As George Watson Cole notes in his essay, “Book-collectors as Benefactors of Public Libraries,” Currer is “almost a solitary example in the annals of book-collecting, in which a woman appears as an enthusiastic bibliophile” (52).

That choice of the name “Currer,” then, is one that brings us full circle, providing a masculine cover, but one that indirectly signals a kind of feminine appropriation of the book *qua* book. Like Currer, Brontë also aspired to succeed in a male-dominated sphere, yet she lacked the advantages that leisure and wealth afforded. As Currer Bell, Brontë would assume the stance of a (privileged) male author in order to, in the words of her own preface to *Jane Eyre*, “raise the gilding, and show base metal beneath” (xxix). If she valued Thackeray as the “first social regenerator of the day—as the very master of the working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things” (xxx), it was because she too aspired to make possible such change by mastering the same marketplace that she had for so long satirically emulated.

¹⁵² I am grateful to Elizabeth Denlinger, Curator of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection at the New York Public Library, for first bringing to my attention that Frances Richardson Currer was a book collector. Juliet Barker does not mention this fact, but notes she was a philanthropist: “The name ‘Currer’ was familiar to the Brontës as that of the philanthropist Frances Richardson Currer, who was a benefactor of many local institutions, including the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge and the Keighley Mechanics’ Institute” (480). Currer, however, was (and remained) famous for her extraordinary bibliophilic activities, which are described at length in Dibdin’s *Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in the Northern Counties of England and in Scotland* (1838). Cole provides a summary of Currer’s library: “In 1852 it was estimated to contain about 20,000 volumes and was rich in the natural sciences, topography, antiquities, and history, besides containing a fair collection of the Greek and Latin classics. All of the books were in choice condition and many of them were in fine bindings. Miss Currer, who possessed a scholar’s as well as a collector’s love of books, privately printed two catalogues of her library” (52).

Chapter 3: Profitable Reading

This talent of reading which you possess, will prove a blessing or a curse, just according to the use you make of it.

Patrick Brontë, from *The Phenomenon, or An Account in Verse, of the Extraordinary Disruption of a Bog*

[...] the only genuine Romance (for grown persons) Reality.

Thomas Carlyle, "Diderot" (1833)

If Thackeray did not cherish in his large heart deep feeling for his kind, he would delight to exterminate; as it is, I believe he wishes only to reform.

Currer Bell to George Henry Lewes (1848)

If Charlotte Brontë's early writings parody the profit-driven publications of bookmakers, the correspondence and prefaces that she wrote once she was a published author liken the proper task of the novelist to the more serious duties of prophet and priest. It is well known, for example, that Brontë referred to Thackeray in 1848 as the "legitimate High-Priest of Truth" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 98), and she was in earnest when she wrote to W. S. Williams, "I study him accordingly with reverence" (*ibid.*). In the same letter, Brontë indirectly draws on the Aristotelian idea of art as imitating nature in order to outline her own greater purpose as a writer: "The first duty of an Author is—I conceive—a faithful allegiance to Truth and Nature; his second, such a conscientious study of Art as shall enable him to interpret eloquently and effectively the oracles delivered by those two great deities" (*ibid.*). For Brontë, art is not written for art's sake, but in service of this higher "Truth." The author serves as interpreter, never as creator.

The unscrupulous productivity of the bookmaker was thus anathema to Brontë, as she made clear to her publisher, George Smith. Any income that she earned as an author was a "very subordinate motive for writing." As Brontë wrote to him, "I will not permit it to hurry my pen" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 262).¹⁵³ At the same time, Brontë was not above accusing other (female) writers of materialistic motives. In the unpublished preface to *Shirley*, Currer Bell vehemently charges

¹⁵³ Upon receiving £500 in payment for *Shirley*, Brontë reported to George Smith that she was "pleased to be able to earn so much" (253). Yet, at the same time, she emphasized that income was only an ancillary concern of hers: "The thought of laying a foundation for a future independency gives me a certain pleasure [...] but you will understand me when I say that I hope never to allow it to become more than a very subordinate motive for writing; I will not permit it to hurry my pen: if I did both you and the Public would soon tire of me, and certainly I should cease to respect myself" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 262).

Elizabeth Rigby (a.k.a. Lady Elizabeth Eastlake) of promulgating “romantic rumors” about the author of *Jane Eyre* among the “inhabitants of Mayfair,” and likens Rigby to no better than a mere tradeswoman: “Who invents new things for their consumption? Who manufactures fictions to supply their cravings? I need not ask who vends them: you, Madam, are an active saleswoman; the pages of your ‘Quarterly’ form a notable advertising medium” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 243). If Brontë conceived of great authors as secular priests and mystics, who served as mediums for conveying truth, she often likened other writers to manufacturers and inventors, the false prophets of Mammon.

Brontë’s conception of the author, in combination with her professed allegiance to “Truth” and “Nature,” as mediated by “Art,” presents its own problems, however. As the critic George Levine writes in his study, *The Realistic Imagination*, “All ‘life’ in art is artful, not merely selected, but created and shaped through the medium. Thackeray knew this well, and it filled him with misgivings about fiction writing [...]. His novels willfully remind us of the difference between art and life” (142). One could readily argue that Brontë, too, realized this, as well as the same “untruth of fiction” observed by Thackeray (134). After all, both

Thackeray and Brontë started off writing in the mode of satire.¹⁵⁴ But, as Levine notes, there is a significant difference between the two novelists' approaches:

In her late Preface to *The Professor*, Brontë describes how she required of her hero that he “work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs— . . . that no sudden turns should lift him in the moment to wealth and high station.” In what seems a deliberate statement of a central part of the realist's creed, she argues that “as Adam's son,” the hero “should share Adam's doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment.” Yet if Jane Eyre, for example, drinks only a “moderate cup” because she returns to a maimed Rochester, she certainly inherits from the conventions of fiction several “turns” that make her both wealthy and happy [...]. Charlotte Brontë's imagination, despite her longing after the study of “real life,” felt experience with too much unironic intensity to allow her to settle for the moderate cup. There is a Providential structure to her reality that requires the devices of formal and narrative ordering of the very modes realism begins by parodying. (182)

¹⁵⁴ George Levine and Harry Levin both note that realism often begins in parody. As Levin writes in his chapter, “Anti-Romance,” in *The Gates of Horn*, “It cannot be an accident that realism, from Rabelais' burlesque of the Arthurian legend to Jane Austen's glances at Fanny Burney and Anne Radcliffe, has so often originated in parody [...] that so many novelists, like Thackeray, have started as parodists, playing the sedulous ape to their seniors” (47). See the previous chapter for a discussion of satire in Brontë's Angrian saga. *The Professor* also has been interpreted as satirical, most notably, by Heather Glen: “The ironic treatment of the narrator, pivotal in her early writings, has become an incisive, pointed questioning of the central presuppositions of one of the most prominent discourses of her time” (*Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* 48).

Here Levine identifies the providential element present in *Jane Eyre*, and suggests that this aspect of the novel's structure, with its standard plot devices, thwarts the realism that Brontë strove for as an author. The impression that we take from this criticism is that Brontë is sabotaged by her own overly earnest, impassioned sensibilities, and that she is naively drawing on hackneyed plot devices derived from other books. Such formulas are incompatible with realism, which has been understood by critics, in large part, as signaling the "real" by parodying trends in popular literature.¹⁵⁵

The way in which Levine's critique treats providence highlights the ongoing tension that critics have in reconciling religious writing and secular literature, which often have been viewed as parallel traditions, often in competition with one another.¹⁵⁶ In this regard, it is not surprising that religious elements in Brontë's work have posed a problem for at least some critics and readers, who see such aspects as being essentially non-literary. In addition, as Thomas Vargish has observed, a cursory understanding of providential design "lends itself to ridicule and does little to endear *Jane Eyre* to current sensibilities" (60). Vargish himself favors a more "varied and developed" interpretation of providence, which he

¹⁵⁵ Northrop Frye argues along these lines in *The Secular Scripture*, as does Harry Levin in *The Gates of Horn* and Levine in the work referenced here. Frye argues that this is the case, because the novel "was a realistic displacement of romance, and had few structural features peculiar to itself. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, [sic] use much of the same general structure as romance, but adapt that structure to a demand for greater conformity to ordinary experience. This displacement gave the novel's relation to romance [...] a strong element of parody" (28).

¹⁵⁶ As Frye writes, "Is it possible, then, to look at secular stories as a whole, and as forming a single integrated vision of the world, parallel to the Christian and Biblical vision? [...] I should like to look at fiction as a total verbal order, with the outlines of an imaginative universe also in it. The Bible is the epic of the creator, with God as its hero. Romance is the structural core of all fiction" (*The Secular Scripture* 13).

pursues in his close reading of *Jane Eyre*.¹⁵⁷ But what seems more necessary is to treat providence itself as a historical discourse—and to identify the ideas and books that helped shape Brontë’s understanding of that discourse as it related to the contemporary culture of literary writing and publishing. Doing so can not only provide insight into Brontë’s evangelically inflected understanding of authorship, but also provide a sense of how Brontë’s work engages particular thoughts and writings with which she and her contemporary readers would have been familiar. Working along these lines, I find that *Jane Eyre* incorporates providential interpretations and devices in order to subject them to critique, even as it draws on evangelical thought to help distinguish “real” romance from the “kidnapped romance”¹⁵⁸ of materialist enterprise. *Jane Eyre* critically engages these discourses not to dismiss them, but, ultimately, to reabsorb the more authentic forces that animate them. Finally, *Jane Eyre* does not offer up its insight as a kind of gift; instead, readers are left to distinguish false prophets from oracles—to determine for themselves what constitutes truly profitable reading.

...

¹⁵⁷ See *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985).

¹⁵⁸ This is not a nineteenth-century term, but that of the critic Northrop Frye developed in *The Secular Scripture*. As Frye writes, “In every period of history certain ascendant values are accepted by society and are embodied in serious literature. Usually this process includes some form of kidnapped romance, that is, romance formulas used to reflect certain ascendant religious or social ideals” (24). Also: “What we have called kidnapped romance is usually romance that expresses a social mythology of [a] more uncritical kind, which may be intense but is not deep, and is founded on prejudice and unexamined assumptions” (109–10).

If the Brontë sisters successfully “tamed” the figure of the “wicked squire”—the literary descendant of Richardson’s villain in *Pamela*—as Harry Levin provocatively suggests (37), *Jane Eyre* similarly absorbs the workings of the religious tract, adopting and recasting the tract’s narrative structure in order to reapproach those “two great deities,” “Truth and Nature.” At the risk of oversimplifying things, we find in *Jane Eyre* both the seductiveness of the generic, popular romance (the Rochester narrative of volume two) and the corrective “anti-romance” of the tract (the St. John narrative of volume three) dialectically opposing one another, exposing alike the untruths of mass-market fiction and the “counterfeit sentiment” of religion.¹⁵⁹

Mass-market romance and Calvinism—not bookmakers—come under attack in Brontë’s novels. Yet both were heavily associated with certain “types” of books, giving rise to certain kinds of misreadings. For example, when Jane Eyre meets Mr. Brocklehurst, she is given, upon parting from him, a tract: “the ‘Child’s Guide’ [...] containing ‘an account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G—, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit’ [...] a thin pamphlet sewn in a cover” (37). In contrast to Jane’s struggle with John Reed over Bewick’s *British Birds*, this book is freely presented to her. However, the “Child’s Guide” is not received by Jane as a gift, but instead as an indictment that is very literally imposed upon her. Reading becomes a form of punishment whereby the child herself is “read.” The book becomes an instrument of discipline, its very physical

¹⁵⁹ Of course, these relationships are more porous than they seem. Romance can be morally instructive—one only need look at the example of Richardson, whose works Brontë knew well. Similarly, religious tracts incorporate motifs from romance in service of their messages.

presence serving to degrade and disgrace its new “owner.” In the name of religious salvation, words become a thing obscuring the person and disrupting the individual’s integrity, not unlike how Miss Scatcherd “wrote in conspicuous characters on a piece of pasteboard the word ‘Slattern,’ and bound it like a phylactery round Helen’s large, mild, intelligent, and benign-looking forehead” (86). It is perhaps also not a coincidence that the name “Scatcherd” was heavily associated with both educational and religious publishing during the first half of the nineteenth-century.¹⁶⁰ (Indeed, the Brontës owned at the very least two books from that publisher, and Charlotte appropriated one of them for her own fanciful sketching and poetry writing.¹⁶¹)

At the same time, Brontë’s narrators blatantly caution readers against the pitfalls of “romantic” misreading. In the first chapter of *Shirley*, we find the following warning:

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you were never more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion,

¹⁶⁰ The well-known bookseller James Scatcherd was a native of Yorkshire, and partnered successfully with a Mr. Letterman, “a man of upright conduct and indefatigable industry.” His financial success was attributed in particular, however, to his “engagement with Mr John Reeve, to print his bibles and common prayer books” (*A Dictionary of Printers and Printing* 904).

¹⁶¹ At the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, I examined a book, bb47, extensively marked by Charlotte, most likely in 1837: Mr. Porny’s *Grammatical Exercises in English and French* (London: Printed for F. Wingrave; J. Walker; Wilkie & Robinson; Scatcherd & Letterman; J. Richardson; and Gale & Curtis, 1810). Charlotte’s annotations include two poems, beginning “On the bright scene around them spread” and “I can speak no more of infancy,” as well as doodles of heads and figures of gentlemen and ladies. There are an additional few lines of verse, beginning “dreams, dreams.” The other book associated with Scatcherd is bb196: *The Union Dictionary; Containing All That Is Truly Useful in the Dictionaries of Johnson, Sheridan, and Walker* (London: Printed for Wilkie and Robinson; Scatcherd and Letterman; G. Kearsley [&c.], 1806. This book, too, bears Charlotte’s name at the top left of the title page.

and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have to work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. (7)

Shirley, we are clearly told, is no romance. Here, we can understand Brontë to mean what Northrop Frye refers to in *The Secular Scripture* as “sentimental romance” (19), a form of popular literature that constitutes, as Frye puts it, the “bottom of the hierarchy [...] what people read without guidance from their betters [...] the object of a constant bombardment of social anxieties for over two thousand years” and what “nearly the whole of the established critical tradition has stood out against” (ibid.). According to Frye, popular romance frequently has been dismissed as escapist material along the same lines as the erotic and pornographic.¹⁶² Frye associates this tendency with Western culture’s “Platonic and traditionally Christian framework,” arguing that “the real social function of literature in this view, is to persuade the emotions to align themselves with the reason [...]. The disputes are mainly, not about the status of literature, but about how efficient the

¹⁶² As Frye writes: “Popular literature, the guardians of taste feel, is designed only to entertain: consequently reading it is a waste of time. More closely regarded by anxiety, it turns out to be something far worse than a waste of time. Romance in particular is, we say, “sensational”: it likes violent stimulus, and the sources of that stimulus soon become clear to the shuddering censor. The central element of romance is a love story, and the exciting adventures are normally a foreplay leading up to sexual union. Hence romance appears to be designed mainly to encourage irregular or excessive sexual activity. This may be masturbation, which is the usual model in the minds of those who speak with contempt of ‘escape’ reading, or it may be a form of voyeurism. Most denunciations of popular romance on such grounds, we notice, assume that the pornographic and erotic are the same thing: this overlooks the important principle that it is the function of pornography to stun and numb the reader, and the function of erotic writing to wake him up” (20).

serious aspect of serious literature is in separating itself from the moral turpitude of mere entertainment” (20).

We find traces of this attitude in the opening of *Shirley*—the reality, coolness, and apparent solidity of reason, like the “consciousness” of preparing for the duties of a day’s work, contrasted with the mere play of “passion, stimulus, and melodrama.” What is only suggested in *The Professor* is openly declared here at the outset: that “real” narratives of work are antidotes to romantic delusions. As Frye writes, “work is purposeful, directed to an external end” as opposed to the “self-contained and expressive” “ritualized action” of romance (40). Such positive emphasis on work and anti-romantic sentiment is, of course, characteristic of many secular, literary Victorian novels. But work plays a role of particular importance in all of Brontë’s novels. As Barry Qualls has argued, “all [Brontë’s] novels assert a this-world ethic. Self-knowledge is nowhere possible unless the individual can find some work, some activity that will define the self in relation to other human beings [...] work in her novels is a spiritual issue, a way of sane living” (45).

One could also say here that writing itself had finally become a legitimate form of work for Brontë, somewhat contrary to the former advice of Southey, who had once warned her against “habitually indulg[ing]” in “daydreams” “likely to induce a distempered state of mind” that would render her “unfitted” for ordinary work in the daily world. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, Brontë could not depict this work as a viable employment for women in her fiction, and thus found

herself in the odd position of not only giving to her heroines the same work as governesses and school teachers that she, herself, ultimately rejected in favor of writing, but of then also dispensing advice (via her narrators) that discouraged the kind of “romantic” inclinations that had once helped inspire her own career as a novelist.

In fact, Brontë’s own writing had not entirely escaped the taint of the potboiler. *Jane Eyre* was received by some critics as being “melodramatic.” As one reviewer for the *Athenæum* put it, its heroine was “too romantically assisted in her difficulties.”¹⁶³ One imagines that Brontë would have received such reviews bitterly. As she wrote to Lewes in January of 1848, “If I ever do write another book, I think I will have nothing of what you call ‘melodrama’” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 10). If the voice of *Shirley*’s narrator is defensive and cool, it is certainly owing, in part, to the residual sting that *Jane Eyre* was censured by some reviewers for the same “passion, and stimulus, and melodrama” that were required to sell it. This is not to say that Brontë’s anti-romantic discourse first emerged in her years as a published novelist; this satirical mode runs through almost all of her writing, including the juvenilia,¹⁶⁴ and characterizes *The Professor* in particular ways. As previously discussed in the first chapter of this study, Brontë’s anti-romance, or “defensive” rhetoric, also routinely surfaces in *Jane Eyre*. Indeed, if we don’t take this message

¹⁶³ H. F. Chorley’s unsigned review of 23 October 1847 appears in Allott’s *Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (72).

¹⁶⁴ As Heather Glen points out, “The ironic anti-romanticism, as well as the straightforward ‘romance,’ of *Blackwood’s* and *Fraser’s* is a prominent feature not merely of the little journals of Glass Town, but of most of the writings that survive from Charlotte Brontë’s early years” (*Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* 9).

into consideration, we risk misreading the latter as mere escapism—the kind of novel and reading experience that Georgiana, and presumably Rosamond, seek.

Brontë's anti-romance was influenced by two general trends taking place during the second quarter of the nineteenth century: reactions against the commercialization of Romanticism, and the proliferation of evangelical publishing.¹⁶⁵ Mass-production fed the former, inevitably leading readers to suspect and devalue affected works that simply appealed to the consumer's appetite for luxury; at the same time, it was the chief strategy of the latter, whose tracts and chapbooks were printed cheaply and were thus widely and readily available to the general public. In fact, both Romanticism and evangelicalism had started as countercultural movements. As Elisabeth Jay notes, "Evangelicalism, like Romanticism, had offered an alternative to the philosophy on which the new industrial society was founded [...]. Evangelicalism asserted the unique importance of the individual" (7).¹⁶⁶ But the individual could easily become lost within this

¹⁶⁵ Tillotson writes that "the 'religious novels' of the forties assisted in important changes of emphasis in the novel as a whole" (136). In his study, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction*, Barry Qualls finds in Victorian writing, particularly the novels of Brontë, Dickens, and Eliot, a "sense of writing as a *scola cordis*": "The defining characteristic of this fiction is its quest to be at once secular scripture and sacred scripture" (1; 14). That such novels fulfilled a "need" for "sacred romance" only made the distinction between their romance and popular romance all the more important: "the Victorian novel—paradoxically, confusedly, determinedly—became in its amalgamation of disparate anti-romance 'romance'" (13).

¹⁶⁶ As Jay argues, more fully: "Evangelicalism, like Romanticism, had offered an alternative to the philosophy on which the new industrial society was founded. Although the precise relation between Evangelicalism and the dominant philosophy of the age, Utilitarianism, is notoriously difficult to estimate, in theory they were antithetical. Whilst Utilitarianism thought the interests of the individual and of the community should be identical, Evangelicalism asserted the unique importance of the individual. Evangelicalism's emphasis on a personal relationship with God, its rejection of the corporate authority of the Church, and the premium it placed upon the individual's judgement assured a man of a significance frequently denied him in secular society" (7).

grind of industry—Romantic and evangelical language alike perceived as becoming more and more “manufactured.”

Richard D. Altick describes the furor of evangelical “bibliolatry” and bible reading as “less of a conscious exercise of the intellect than as a ritual that was an end in itself” (99–100). Cheap bibles and inexpensive, didactic books were the “chosen weapon of aggressive, proselytizing religion,” resulting in a “large industry,” the size of whose output was “staggering” (99–101).¹⁶⁷ Altick writes: “Religious literature [...] was everywhere in nineteenth-century England. Tracts were flung from carriage windows; they were passed out at railway stations; they turned up in army camps and in naval vessels [...], and in jails and lodging-houses and hospitals and workhouses [...] at Sunday and day schools [...]. They were a ubiquitous part of the social landscape” (103). Brontë, the daughter of an evangelical Anglican clergyman, would herself have almost certainly distributed such material in the Sunday school that she taught at Haworth.

Meanwhile, as Heather Glen points out, journals that Brontë read, such as *Fraser’s*, relentlessly exposed the “commodification and debasement of romanticism” (*Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* 8). Glen finds a reflection of those critical currents in Jane’s approbation of *Marmion*, and also in

¹⁶⁷ Altick writes: “It would be futile even to try to estimate how many copies of religious and moral works of all sorts were distributed in Britain in the nineteenth century” (101). Nevertheless, he and others offer figures. In his preface to *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Literature*, John Sutherland estimates adult and juvenile fiction published between 1837 and 1901 as constituting about twenty percent of total book production of the period (including religious novels). He adds: “Non-book tract fiction produced by evangelical organizations like the Religious Tract Society and short stories in magazines might well double this figure” (1). And Elisabeth Jay, drawing on the research of Patrick Scott, notes an “increase” in the publication of religious books during the first half of the nineteenth century: “Between 1801 and 1835 they formed 22.2 per cent [sic] of all books published and between 1836 and 1863 33.5 per cent were religious in content” (7).

her assessment that “the golden age of modern literature’ has vanished, that ‘poetry’ and ‘genius’ must take their stand against ‘Mammon’” (ibid.).¹⁶⁸ It was Scott, the poet-cum-novelist, who undoubtedly helped the novel rise to respectability and who, through an emphasis on history and antiquarianism, helped rescue “romance” from the taint of the popular gothic novel.¹⁶⁹ Yet Scott’s reputation, like that of the confused distinction of Romanticism/“romance” itself, precariously straddled the realm of art and commerce. As Harry Levin writes, Scott’s was a “dual role: the last minstrel and the first best-seller [...]. He conducted tours of the highlands, starting from the library and returning to the counting-house, compromised discreetly between Jacobite adventure and Hanoverian comfort. Romance became his business” (45).

One way of looking at popular literature, according to Northrop Frye, is as “a packaged commodity which an overproductive economy, whether capitalist or socialist, distributes as it distributes food and medicines, in varying degrees of adulteration” (21). We have already seen how Brontë responded to the marketing of books in her Glass Town and Angrian narratives, which imitate and satirize such

¹⁶⁸ Note that Glen, however, interprets the narrative voice of *Jane Eyre* as being entirely distinct from Brontë’s previous work—a sharp break from the anti-romantic discourse that characterized Brontë’s early writings up through *The Professor*. Glen unequivocally characterizes Jane Eyre as delivering her narrative with “passionate directness” (50, 144) as opposed to Crimsworth’s “cool, unromantic irony” (50) and the “ironically appraising tones of a markedly unillusioned voice” in *Shirley* (144). Glen argues, “Indeed, *Jane Eyre* seems hardly to question its narrator’s point of view. There is nothing here like that deliberate refusal of intimacy with the reader with which *The Professor* opens” (50).

¹⁶⁹ Indeed, many studies of nineteenth-century literature use the figure of Scott as a landmark for the rise in the fortunes of the novel. James Eli Adams has a section entitled, “The Novel After Scott,” in his recent *History of Victorian Literature*, in which he writes the following: “The novel was in 1830 the youngest and least established of the major genres, still widely suspect as at best shallow amusement or distraction, frequently indistinguishable from ‘romance,’ and thus for many conservative religious readers a dangerous indulgence in daydreams and lying. Yet the stature of the form had been transfigured by the career of a single writer, Sir Walter Scott” (23).

cycles until, finally, Brontë's narratives collapse upon themselves, exhausted through their own self-perpetuated (and disillusioned) bookmaking. Likewise, Brontë's aforementioned letter, written to George Smith in 1850, in which she imagined the contents of a Cornhill warehouse disputing with one another, suggests that she also found little that was sacred among the flood of religious texts being sold. Her "mystic whispering amongst the lettered leaves," after all, speaks only "at night when London is asleep and Cornhill desert, when all your clerks and men are away and the warehouse is shut up" and is heard only "by those who have ears to hear."¹⁷⁰ As Brontë began writing for a reading public (and one that included her father), she assumed it as a duty—one with a moral obligation to instruct her readers.¹⁷¹ This became her this-world ethic, her work. Her difficult task, whether she realized it or not, would be to fashion an authentic voice distinct from all of the others in the warehouse, without entirely discarding those other voices.

Finally, as much as Brontë's writing strives for "reality," it is also deeply imaginative and indebted to romance—that is, her "authentic" Romantic inheritance from Byron and Scott. Indeed, on its deepest level, romance is inescapable, for, as Frye writes, "romance is the structural core of all fiction: being

¹⁷⁰ This language, of course, references Matthew 11:15 ("He that hath ears to hear, let him hear") and Mark 4:9 ("And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear").

¹⁷¹ We find evidence of this purpose in Brontë's belated preface to *The Professor* and elsewhere in her correspondence. See, for example, Brontë's letter to W. S. Williams in May 1848: "Would the intellect could preserve from low vice, but—alas! it cannot [...]. Lewes is nobly right when he says that the Intellect is not the highest faculty of man, though it may be the most brilliant; when he declares that the moral nature of his kind is more sacred than the intellectual nature; when he prefers "goodness, lovingness and quiet self-sacrifice to all the talents in the world" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 59).

directly descended from the folk tale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as quest" (14). As Frye points out, it is also the case that realism cannot operate without engaging romance—that "realistic fiction, from Defoe to Henry James, is [...] essentially parody-romance" (28). More profoundly, and most relevant to Brontë's comparison of the author to priest, Frye associates romance with "secular scripture" and realism with revelation:

It is quite true that if there is no sense that the mythological universe is a human creation, man can never get free of his servile anxieties and superstitions, never surpass himself, in Nietzsche's phrase. But if there is no sense that it is also something uncreated, something coming from elsewhere, man remains a Narcissus staring at his own reflection, equally unable to surpass himself. Somehow or other, the created scripture and the revealed scripture, or whatever we call the latter, have to keep fighting each other like Jacob and the angel, and it is through the maintaining of this struggle, the suspension of belief between the spiritually real and the humanly imaginative, that our own mental evolution grows. (43)

For Brontë, the warehouse would help provide the setting necessary for readers to distinguish an authentic Jane from a consumer-copy Blanche, the genuine prophet-author from the false prophet bookmaker, the "revealed scripture" from

the “created scripture”—yet like realism and romance, these figures would all go hand in hand.

1. The Shape of Truth: (Anti-)Romance in *The Professor & Jane Eyre*

If we take Brontë at her word in her preface to *The Professor*, her resolutely anti-romantic novel failed to be published, in part, because it too relentlessly insisted on its no-nonsense, plain narrative.¹⁷² In retrospect, Brontë bitterly casts the novel’s rejection as a casualty of the ways in which publishers conducted their “business”:

I found that Publishers, in general—scarcely approved this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical—something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a native taste for pathos—with sentiments more tender—elevated—unworldly—indeed until an author has tried to dispose of a M.S. of this kind he can never know what stores of romance and sensibility lie hidden in breasts he would not have suspected of casketing such treasures. Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real—on trial this idea will be often found fallacious: a passionate preference for the wild wonderful and thrilling—the strange, startling and

¹⁷² Q.v. “Authors and Bookmakers,” 478–9.

harrowing agitates divers souls that shew a calm and sober surface.

(4)¹⁷³

Brontë acidly accuses publishers of favoring delusive romance above what is “real,” implying that, at the time she sought publication, her own prospective publishers were more interested in turning a profit than in championing literature. (What Brontë does not disclose, of course, is that she herself once had, and most likely retained, a penchant for the “wild wonderful and thrilling.”) The dig would have registered to readers, many of whom still regarded publishers as mere tradesmen. As Byron once wrote of John Murray: “if the tradesman don’t understand civility—change him—he is but a sort of intellectual tailor” (*Letters*, vol. 6, 103).¹⁷⁴

Indeed, it seems that both Brontë and her narrator, William Crimsworth, alike suffer at the hands of trade. Crimsworth’s abandonment of trade as a profession is as much as an exercise in properly *reading* his life as in living it—and his life is no mere potboiler. At the outset of his story, Crimsworth unapologetically conveys his disdain for escapist reading, cautioning thrill-seekers that his book is aimed toward sober readers “in the same vocation” as himself, not to those seeking

¹⁷³ *The Professor* was first published in 1857. Brontë most likely wrote the preface to *The Professor* between 1849 and 1850. As Arthur Bell Nicholls writes, “The foregoing Preface was written by my wife with a view to the publication of “The Professor” [shortly] after the appearance of “Shirley” (4). Nicholls copied the preface from a draft, made in pencil, Brontë left upon her death in 1855. Nicholls’ fair copy of the preface is tipped into the fair copy manuscript for *The Professor* (originally titled *The Master*, and corrected as such in the fair copy draft), which were both purchased by the collector T. J. Wise. The manuscripts are held by the Morgan Library & Museum.

¹⁷⁴ In fact, authors (Byron included) were just as keen to turn a profit as their publishers. But, as we have seen, writers were also often inclined to stand apart from their publishers, and point the finger.

“exciting” or “marvellous” diversions (14).¹⁷⁵ Like his successor, Jane Eyre, Crimsworth routinely “reads” the characters of those around him, yet he directly compares personalities with derivative literature, instead of merely suggesting the effects of such reading. Of a sensible woman, he observes: “Look at this little real woman! is she like the women of novelists and romancers? To read female character as depicted in Poetry and Fiction, one would think it was made up of sentiment, either for good or bad—here is a specimen, and a most sensible and respectable specimen too, whose staple ingredient is abstract reason” (90). In fact, Crimsworth refuses to live as though he were a character in a popular romance. When a woman who has an interest in seducing him moves into the residence where he lives, he promptly leaves, explaining his actions by differentiating them from those typically found in the plots of French novels:

I was no pope—I could not boast infallibility—in short—if I stayed, the probability was that in three months’ time, a practical Modern French novel would be in full process of concoction under the roof of the unsuspecting Pelet. Now modern French novels are not to my taste either practically or theoretically. Limited as had yet been my experience of life, I had once had the opportunity of contemplating near at hand an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of

¹⁷⁵ The irony, of course, is that he writes his story during his retirement. See “‘The Professor’: Earlier Sketch of a Preface” (295).

fiction was about this example, I saw it bare and real and it was very loathsome. (187)

Instead, Crimsworth casts himself as a detached observer of human nature, emphasizing his own objective powers of perception: “Let the idealists—the dreamers about earthly angels and human flowers, just look here, while I open my portfolio and shew them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature” (97). The “portfolio” referred to is, of course, a metaphorical one, whose “sketches” “after nature” consist of words that attempt to convey an accurate or “real” picture—an analogy that Brontë herself would continue to employ and exploit in *Jane Eyre* in order to counterbalance the dangers of delusive thinking. That Brontë herself, at least until 1840, was a voracious reader of French novels, which she characterized as “clever wicked sophistical and immoral,” probably comes as no surprise (*Letters*, vol. 1, 226). Crimsworth’s emphatic turn from such fiction (as with Jane’s later turn from Rochester) arguably allows Brontë to indulge her taste for salacious plots while maintaining the moral high ground. Although lurid love affairs shadow and threaten to overtake the narratives of her novels (as they, indeed, had once dominated her later Angrian writings), in *The Professor*, they are inevitably (and judiciously) relegated to the safe realm of untenable sub-plot.

Perhaps it is fitting that *The Professor* also proved difficult to sell in its presentation as a physical book. A one-volume work with literary pretensions, *The Professor* was particularly ill-suited for the circulating libraries of the time and, consequently, for the audiences who most likely would have appreciated it. Recall

that Smith, Elder not only rejected *The Professor*, but also asked “Bell”/Brontë to send them a work in three volumes.¹⁷⁶ Despite Crimsworth’s appeal to educated readers like himself, one-volume novels of the kind Brontë prepared were not generically associated with the presentation of respectable fiction. Novels with any pretensions to literature were typically written as three-decker novels for circulating libraries.¹⁷⁷ Although three-deckers frequently appeared in the form of “cheap” editions after a few years’ run in the circulating libraries (as with *Jane Eyre*, which was published in one volume in 1850), the form in which a work initially appeared conveyed a great deal of information about its class. As Guinevere L. Griest writes, single-volume works of fiction often carried the stigma of the “cheap” or “railway” edition: “It was customary, certainly, for successful three-deckers to be re-issued in single volumes, but there hovered over a first edition in three stately tomes an aura of dignity and worth which tended to obscure those works unfortunate enough to be issued originally in a meagre one volume” (46). Brontë’s attempt to market her work either as a tale in a single volume or as one volume of a three-volume work (i.e., with *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*) was most likely hastily considered, and certainly ill conceived.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ See chapter one, “Shaping Volumes,” of this dissertation.

¹⁷⁷ As Simon Eliot points out, “for most of the nineteenth century the three-volume set, or three-decker as it was frequently called, was the fashionable, respectable, high-status way of publishing the first edition of a novel” (37).

¹⁷⁸ Tillotson arrives at the same conclusion: “The publication of a new novel in one volume was rare; the unpopularity of this form with publishers (again, thanks to the tyranny of the libraries) may have been one cause of the rejection of Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor*. The one-volume form normally signified a cheap reprint, usually appearing two to three years after first publication; it seems also to have been used for certain special types of novel, perhaps less likely to find favour with library subscribers—religious novels and tales intended to appeal to younger as well as older readers” (24).

One can interpret her idea of creating a three-volume work out of *The Professor*, *Agnes Grey*, and *Wuthering Heights* as a naive attempt to exert control over the form her work took (perhaps treating fiction as an editorial compilation—a “mingling of many things,” as it were) without adequate knowledge of its practical sale and distribution.

It remains unclear whether Brontë had specific reservations about the format of the three-decker novel that prevented her from attempting one prior to *Jane Eyre*. It's the case that religious novels often appeared in one volume,¹⁷⁹ and that Brontë would have encountered resistance to three-volume novels in the periodical literature of the time. Although the three-decker format was pervasive, it did not meet with universal approval.¹⁸⁰ Circulating libraries were invariably identified with frivolous readers. A reviewer for *Fraser's Magazine* points out that romances in three volumes by authors such as Harrison Ainsworth were “in great demand at the circulating-libraries” and were “sure through circulating-libraries of a certain sale.” We also find that “young ladies bewilder their brains with novels of love; they read and never think, but catch up, as they hurry on, the perter parts of the dialogue or the more remarkable situations in the story. The moral of the author, if he has one, is overlooked.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ See Tillotson's comment in the preceding footnote above.

¹⁸⁰ This dissertation's first chapter, “Shaping Volumes,” discusses the reputation of the three-decker novel at length.

¹⁸¹ “Ainsworth's ‘St. James's; or, the Court of Queen Anne.’” *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 30, no. 180 (December 1844): 740.

Whatever Brontë's opinions on the three-decker might have been, it is readily apparent that, in the instance of *The Professor*, she tried to adapt the form to her own ends, instead of modifying her writing to meet what was a widely recognized standard approach to the kind of literary novel she was attempting.¹⁸² To this extent, one could argue that Brontë resisted a tried-and-true business model for fiction. Her experiment failed, both in form and content, to please prospective publishers, and she would learn from this failure in writing *Jane Eyre*.¹⁸³ Heather Glen has characterized *The Professor* as a “chilly narrative of self-help” whose “sharp analytic intelligence” “demands intellectual grasp rather than imaginative sympathy” (49–50). She notes, “Those ‘sudden turns’ denied to Crimsworth—unearned wealth, a transformative marriage, excessive happiness—are central to Jane Eyre’s story” (50).¹⁸⁴ Indeed, such “turns” are embodied in *Jane Eyre*’s three-part structure.¹⁸⁵ Just as the sudden turns in Jane’s fortunes are made manifest in *Jane Eyre*’s shape as a salable, three-volume novel, one could argue

¹⁸² The novels of the writers Brontë once sought to emulate, such as Scott, were published initially as three-deckers, and were very much associated with the format. According to Tillotson, the three-decker was the most “common” form in which new novels appeared in the 1840s (22). However, it’s also important to note with Simon Eliot that, during the Victorian period as a whole, “the majority of novels, and certainly a substantial majority of fiction, were not published first as three-deckers. Even Mudie’s shelves contained more novels in one or two volumes than in three” (40).

¹⁸³ Brontë began writing *Jane Eyre* in August 1846 upon receiving a rejection letter from a publisher who read *The Professor*. (For an account of this, see Jane Jack and Margaret Smith’s introduction to the Clarendon Edition of *JE*.) The last page of the fair copy manuscript of *The Professor* is dated 27 June 1846, though Brontë wrote to publishers Aylott and Jones about the manuscript in April 1846 (*Letters*, vol. 1, 461).

¹⁸⁴ Glen also takes the view that the “awkward abrasiveness” of *The Professor* is “replaced” in *Jane Eyre* by “a passionate directness” in contrast to the “cool, unromantic irony with which Edward Crimsworth was seen” (50). My own view, explored in the the present study, is that Brontë does not “replace” her cool rhetoric with passionate language, but rather strategically employs the former in order to make acceptable the latter.

¹⁸⁵ Tillotson notes that “the three-volume form matched a formal literary design: in many novels the structural divisions are as clear as the three acts of a play” (23).

that the flat form of *The Professor* resisted the commodification of literature, much like its eccentric, satirical narrator, who stubbornly rejects both escapist romance and the soul-crushing workaday practicalities of trade.

The great difference between *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* is that, unlike William Crimsworth, who is too canny to be deceived by a designing woman, Jane Eyre falls in love with Rochester under false pretenses: she is, in fact, susceptible to the kind of romance that she disdains. Indeed, *Jane Eyre* is haunted by misreading, particularly by misguided novel reading—for instance, the self-absorbed indolence of Georgiana, who falls “asleep on the sofa over the perusal of a novel,” and who relays the “soft conversations” and “sentimental scenes” that constitute stories of “herself, her loves, and woes,” which sound to Jane like “a volume of fashionable life” (297; 293). Do we not also listen to Jane describe herself, her own loves, her own woes? Brontë would have been keenly aware of this irony, and also of the differences distinguishing Jane’s “romance” from Georgiana’s. A number of contemporary reviewers make precisely this distinction, categorizing *Jane Eyre* as a “domestic novel” with romantic elements rather than as a novel of high life, or silver fork novel.¹⁸⁶ For example, an unsigned review in the *Examiner* reads: “Whatever faults may be urged against the book, no one can

¹⁸⁶ See for instance the unsigned review appearing in the November 1847 issue of the *People’s Journal*: “This is one of the most notable domestic novels which have issued from the press in this country for many years past. We have had so much waste paper sent into the world recently, under the false pretence of being the literature of fiction, that it is quite a relief to find a really good and striking production. English ‘fiction’ is *not* entirely a ‘fraud,’ as we were beginning to suspect” (collected in Allott, 80).

assert that it is weak or vapid. It is anything but a fashionable novel.”¹⁸⁷ Another reviewer commented on *Jane Eyre*’s ability to incorporate “romance” without sacrificing “truth”: “Although a work of fiction, it is no mere novel, for there is nothing but nature and truth about it [...] at the same time it lacks neither the odour of romance nor the hue of sentiment.”¹⁸⁸

Jane Eyre is also not without its own tendencies toward sensationalism. As George Eliot wrote to Charles Bray of *Jane Eyre*: “The book is interesting—only I wish the characters would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports” (collected in Allott, 92). By the end of its second volume, we have strayed into territory similar to very same “bare and real” and “very loathsome” “romantic domestic treachery” that Crimsworth reviles in French novels.¹⁸⁹ Jane discovers that Rochester is married—to a lunatic nymphomaniac with vampiric tendencies.¹⁹⁰ (At one point in the novel, Bertha attacks her own brother, biting him, and threatening to “drain” his heart of blood. Startling incident. Check. Thrilling excitement. Check.) Just as Jane must flee Rochester’s attempted bigamy

¹⁸⁷ This is A. W. Fonblanque’s unsigned review in the 27 November 1847 issue of the *Examiner*. And in his 31 October 1848 review in the *Revue des deux mondes*, Eugène Forçade writes: “There is another resource in common use among English novelists which is likewise eschewed in *Jane Eyre*: I mean the depiction of life in high society which of itself has guaranteed the success of a number of fashionable novels” (collected in Allott, 102). A handful of contemporary reviewers disagreed, for instance, the author of the unsigned review in the April 1848 issue of the *Christian Remembrancer*: “The rather ambitious descriptions of manners and social life which the book contains are, we are bound to say, a most decided failure. The satire falls back with the accumulated force upon the head of the satirist. It is ‘high life below stairs’ with a vengeance” (collected in Allott, 91).

¹⁸⁸ This quotation comes from an unsigned review in the 14 November 1847 issue of the *Era* (9).

¹⁸⁹ The following passage is adapted from my article, “Authors and Bookmakers.”

¹⁹⁰ As G. H. Lewes wrote in his unsigned review in the December 1847 issue of *Fraser’s*, “There is, indeed, too much melodrama and improbability, which smack of the circulating-library,—we allude particularly to the mad wife and all that relates to her, and to the wanderings of Jane when she quits Thornfield” (692).

and seduction, Brontë must rescue her novel (and her readers) from an increasingly salacious plot. For, at its center, *Jane Eyre* is about a passionate but sensible woman who becomes the victim of a story too good to be true: the rich man who wants to wed her is already married. She is not Rochester's "equal," for he already has a "bride" in the form of Bertha Mason, and he withholds this information in order to acquire another.¹⁹¹ When Jane discovers that she has been deceived by Rochester at the end of volume two, Brontë's readers are sharply reminded that they and Jane have been too susceptible to the powers of fiction—that both Jane and her readers have, after all, abandoned the reliable "sense" and "judgment" that we find at the end of volume one for unrestrained "delirium" and "passion." Yet it is our desire for an ideal romantic plot as readers that makes us just as vulnerable as Jane, and both Jane and we are alike duped into swallowing Rochester's version of the truth, without sufficiently questioning its basis in fact. Thus, Brontë exposes sensationalistic elements as the darker side of an already flimsy fabric: a yearning for love based on the patterns of fiction, not reality. At the same time, she introduces them into her novel, most likely as an effort to market it to circulating libraries in reaction to the criticism that she received from publishers who rejected *The Professor* for its lack of "wild wonderful and thrilling" content.

¹⁹¹ See Rochester's proposal speech to Jane, in which he denies having a "bride." While this is true with respect to Blanche Ingram, the statement also constitutes a significant falsehood when interpreted with respect to Rochester's actual preexisting marriage to Bertha Mason: "My bride! What bride? I have no bride!" (318) and his following exchange with Jane:

'Come, Jane—come hither.'

'Your bride stands between us.'

He rose, and with a stride reached me.

'My bride is here,' he said, again drawing me to him, 'because my equal is here [...].'¹⁹¹ (319)

This is Brontë's great compromise: she incorporates such elements into *Jane Eyre* to suit the tastes of publishers and readers, some of whom, in response, would attribute the book's popularity to the public's craving for "illegitimate romance,"¹⁹² and others who would unduly worship its heroine irrespective of her flaws. The bifurcation of such responses would have a hand both in Brontë's future writing and in the long-term reception of *Jane Eyre*.¹⁹³ What Kathleen Tillotson wrote in 1954 still holds true today: "*Jane Eyre* is now read by thousands who have no idea of its period, many of them even too young or too unsophisticated for clear discrimination of past from present, imaginary from actual; who devour it, unaware of difficulties" (257). That *Jane Eyre* remains, by far, Brontë's most popular book is owing, in very large part, to the enduring mainstream appeal of the romance of volume two.

If Brontë's great gamble was to present in *Jane Eyre* a love story so powerful and memorable that it led some to brand her novel as a popular romance or, in the 1860s, as the progenitor of the sensation novel,¹⁹⁴ her great

¹⁹² This is Elizabeth Rigby's term, taken from her December 1848 review in the *Quarterly Review*: "the popularity of *Jane Eyre* is a proof how deeply the love of the illegitimate romance is planted in our nature" (166).

¹⁹³ For instance, Brontë writes to Ellen Nussey in 1853, "As to the character of 'Lucy Snowe' my intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which 'Jane Eyre' was raised by some injudicious admirers. She is where I mean her to be, and where no charge or self-laudation can touch her" (*Letters*, vol. 3, 137). In his chapter, "Decentering the Author," in *Misreading Jane Eyre: A Postformalist Paradigm*, Jerome Beaty comments on this letter and writes, "The Jane the 'injudicious readers' too much admired is clearly the younger Jane, the Jane experienced in the temporal reading, buttressed by the primacy effect—and blinded by it. Brontë's image of Jane is that of Jane off the pedestal, not the rebellious child or defiantly independent and wholly self-reliant young lady, but the mature Jane Rochester who writes the story of how she found God's plan and her place" (216).

¹⁹⁴ After the publication of *Lady Audley's Secret* in 1862, Margaret Oliphant noted in the September 1867 issue of *Blackwood's Magazine* that *Jane Eyre* had unfortunately initiated a new "flood of contemporary story-telling" of a sensational nature (258–259).

accomplishment was to convince so many of her readers that a woman as intelligent as Jane could also be gullible enough to be tricked into a false marriage. Brontë does this without compromising Jane's authority as a credible narrator. The first chapter of this study has already touched on Jane's rhetoric of "plain truth," as well as the stately, sober presentation of Brontë's work as a three-decker novel—a format that invested her story with respectability (at least relative to other publishing formats). But Jane Eyre's credibility as narrator is also owing to the novel's third "act" (as some reviewers referred to its third volume)—that is, the remove of Jane to Moor-House, and to an evangelical reading of *Jane Eyre*/*Jane Eyre* that, like the romance of book two, is explored, but, ultimately, set aside, in favor of the more secular kind of mysticism with which the novel ends.

2. Homecoming: *The Cottage in the Wood*

Increasingly pressured to adopt the popular three-volume format for her fiction, Brontë composed *Jane Eyre* specifically for distribution to the library market. However, in writing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë did not entirely pander to her critics; instead, in creating her first three-volume novel, she indirectly drew on forms of mainstream fiction (most relevant to our discussion, the novel of fashionable life and the moral tale of the religious tract) to appeal to popular audiences, while also refracting and exposing their weaknesses. Perhaps suspicious of both what her father referred to in his own writing as the "sensual novelist" and the "romantic author" (*The Cottage in the Wood* 3–4), Brontë finally developed an authorial

voice that allowed her to distance herself from the popular market while also appealing to it. As a work of literature, then, *Jane Eyre* not only anticipates its own reading and reception as a mass-market, popular romance; it also provides a sharp correction for it in the form of the third volume of the work, which is modeled, in part, on Mr. Brontë's evangelical tale of religious conversion, *The Cottage in the Wood*. While this approach to didactic moral writing is also, finally, rejected (along with the Calvinism of St. John Rivers), the following interpretation of *Jane Eyre* demonstrates how Brontë continued to experiment with and synthesize popular narrative forms using the structure of the three-decker novel. In this way, Brontë continued to leverage the format of her fictions in service of their meanings—in the case of *Jane Eyre*, appropriating and adapting the rhetoric of specific genres in favor of what Brontë seems to have strived for: an authentic voice that simultaneously appealed to the mass market.

Tellingly, the St. John narrative of *Jane Eyre*'s third volume is the part of the novel most often redacted or entirely omitted in nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first century adaptations of the novel.¹⁹⁵ Yet, this volume importantly provides a sharp corrective to Jane's/our "misreading" in volume two. In doing so, volume three also develops a critique of Calvinist-inflected evangelical literature that reveals such religiously charged rhetoric to be just as problematic as the kind of commercial "drive" found in the novel of fashionable life.

¹⁹⁵ This judgment is based on my extensive work in studying and building Rare Book School's "Jane Eyre Collection," which, in 2014, contains more than 700 items.

As was suggested earlier, *Jane Eyre* has been read by a number of critics as a religious novel, and, particularly, as being providential in its intention.¹⁹⁶ Fewer readers have explored the connection between evangelicalism and Brontë's notions of authorship, publishing, and reading. Brontë's introduction to evangelical thought and literature would have come through her father. Patrick Brontë, after all, was an Anglican clergyman, who published six chapbooks of moral tales and poetry: *Winter-Evening Thoughts* (1810), *Cottage Poems* (1811), *The Rural Minstrel* (1813), *The Cottage in the Wood* (1815; 1818),¹⁹⁷ *The Maid of Killarney* (1818), and *The Phenomenon, or an Account in Verse, of the Extraordinary Disruption of a Bog* (1824), along with miscellaneous sermons and religious treatises.¹⁹⁸ Kathleen Tillotson memorably characterizes Patrick Brontë's publications, in the Brontë household, as the "inspiring, overarching example of achieved authorship, the sober intoxication of actual print. While [Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne] were children, the mere existence of his five [sic] printed volumes would outweigh, perhaps even conceal, [Patrick's] lack of fame" (266). Indeed, Tillotson speculates that his children's later "awareness of his

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Vargish surveys this history of criticism in his chapter on Charlotte Brontë in his monograph, *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction*. He writes, "The straightforward agreement between poetic justice, the meting out of merited punishments and rewards, and providential intention, the completion of God's design in the novel, allows Jane at the end to combine love for Rochester with Christian rectitude" (64).

¹⁹⁷ A prose section of *The Cottage in the Wood* was reprinted in the 6 June 1817 issue of *Cottage Magazine*, and separately beginning in 1859 in Bradford by Abraham Holroyd. I have examined an 1860 copy of this "reprint" ("from the edition of 1818"); however, it doesn't include the frontispiece of the 1818 edition, nor the collection of poems following the tale. It was also reprinted in 1865 in Bingley.

¹⁹⁸ For the full titles and a complete list of Patrick Brontë's publications, see *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, Volume 4: 1800–1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1118–1119).

personal disappointment, and his propitiate ambition for them, must have sharpened the conviction that nothing but the firm assurance of literary fame for his offspring would do to offer in return” (267).

Despite the obscurity of Patrick Brontë’s religious publications (relative to the success of his daughters’ novels), his evangelical writings would inform the Brontës’ understanding of literature and, particularly, the greater, beneficial purposes that fiction might serve with respect to readers. Patrick’s moral tale, *The Cottage in the Wood; or the Art of Becoming Rich and Happy* (1815), not only lends important plot points to *Jane Eyre*, but, more central to this study, establishes a definition of what constitutes “profitable” reading (and writing). The meaning of the chapbook’s subtitle is emphasized by what follows on the title page of the first and second edition (Bradford, 1815; 1818): “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.’ — *Prov. iii.13, 14.*” Here the analogy of “merchandise” characteristically serves to underscore the insignificant value of material commodities in comparison with that of well-earned wisdom. The opening sentence of the tale pursues this line of thought, beginning with a diatribe against authors who merely seek to “please” rather than “profit” their readers:¹⁹⁹

Many writers, whose selfish aim is rather to please than profit,
strangely misrepresent human affairs: they so bewilder and prejudice

¹⁹⁹ I have included the relevant passages in their entirety, owing to the fact that this text is especially difficult to access at present.

the minds of their readers, that they see nothing in its genuine shape and colours, and are made incapable of bearing the evils, or of enjoying the comforts, that blend the common cup of nature.

The sensual novelist and his admirer, are beings of depraved appetites and sickly imaginations, who having learnt the art of *self-tormenting*, are diligently and zealously employed in creating an imaginary world, which they can never inhabit, only to make the real world, with which they must necessarily be conversant, gloomy and insupportable. Hence, without the most distant reference to principle, palaces are represented as the certain abodes of misery, and cottages exhibited as the never-failing source of happiness. Frequently also, in order to make his hero and heroine dazzling and extraordinary characters, the romantic author, overstepping the bounds of probability, will freely indulge in the *miraculous*; with the greatest composure and facility, transforming beggars into kings and queens, and kings and queens into beggars; and, extracting the most unqualified approbation, and the tenderest sympathy from the pusillanimous reader, who has never yet been wise enough to admire the language of truth, or kind enough to sigh over a real object of distress. Whatever be the drift of the narrative, the visionary writer mistakes his way, being utterly incapable of tracing evil to their proper sources.

[...]

I have taken the liberty of making these remarks, in order to prevent my readers from thinking that the inhabitants of the *Cottage in the Wood*, were any way indebted for the blessings they enjoyed, either to the obscurity of their lot, or the rural beauties of their situation. (3–5)

The Cottage in the Wood thus opens with a preemptive defense: the empty depictions of wealth, happiness, and miracles perpetuated by “selfish” and “visionary” writers, “sensual” novelists, and “romantic” authors—and consumed by those “pusillanimous” readers who are their admirers—have nothing to do with the subjects and aims of *its* tale and *its* author (even though wealth, happiness, and miracles are also *its* own subject). This self-conscious partitioning of pleasurable from profitable reading affords a parallel not only to Georgiana’s “romance” as distinguished from Jane’s, but also to Crimsworth’s invective against immoral literature, and to Brontë’s own (and somewhat confessional) representation of her imaginative Angrian writing in her letter to Southey.

Had Charlotte Brontë written the opening to *The Cottage in the Wood* herself, she might have revised her father’s sentence as follows: “Many writers, whose selfish aim is to please *merely for the sake of financial* profit, strangely misrepresent human affairs.” For Brontë did not see pleasure itself as being incompatible with spiritual profit. Indeed, one’s preoccupation with spiritual “rewards” could be as problematic as any obsession with material ones (as we see

in the case of St. John Rivers, whose asceticism is as questionable as Rochester's materialism).²⁰⁰

A critique along these lines surfaces in Brontë's undated, untitled story, commonly referred to as "The Return of Zamorna," which ironically appropriates religious rhetoric to expose the link between canting Christianity and materialism. Brontë's tale opens with its narrator, Charles Townshend, returning from Ebenezer Chapel to his lodgings, where his landlord, Surena Ellrington, awaits him. Townshend makes small talk about the sermon he heard at the chapel. When Townsend inquires after how his landlord has spent his evening, Ellrington replies:

"I trust my time has not been unprofitably spent." And he [Ellrington] looked towards a Bible which lay open before him.

I assented, glancing however, not at the sacred volume but at a thin meagre book ensconced underneath and peeping modestly from beneath the ample covers with the sober countenance of a Ledger.

"You have been questioning your heart Surena," said I, "and balancing accounts between yourself and Satan against the last day."

"I trust I have," he answered, "Self-examination is the most laudable of Christian exercises."

[...]

"This is your rent-day Mr Townshend," said he.

(Misc. and Unpublished Writings, vol. 2, 282)

²⁰⁰ St. John's asceticism reveals the dangers of such convictions; Jane and St. John's sisters, Mary and Diana, ultimately cannot live with one who repeatedly proves to be as "inexorable as death" (466).

Just as a bible serves as a cover for a ledger, all talk of spiritual profits and accounts is reduced, finally, to a discussion of rent. Thus, it is suggested that “The Return of Zamorna” is the product of both unread bible *and* up-to-date ledger; it is a fiction born by two “parent” books, as it were, married by the pun of profit, with the material implication of the word, in this instance, clearly outweighing the spiritual. In Angria, ledgers take priority over bibles.

How then was Brontë to write a novel for both kinds of “profit”? *The Cottage in the Wood* reflects a brand of deep and very blatant mistrust of novels typically held by nineteenth-century evangelicals—a suspicion of certain books that would have been familiar to Brontë. As Richard Altick writes in his chapter surveying the nineteenth-century religious publishing industry: “The tract people made it plain that they were out to substitute good reading matter for bad. They conducted an endless war against ‘dangerous’ publications which the common reader not only considered harmless, but, more important, truly enjoyed” (104). In this respect, Altick addresses a contradiction central to evangelical thinking: “Along with the evangelicals’ deep faith in the efficacy of print, went an equally profound distrust. Rightly used, books could make men wiser, purer, and more devout; but misapplied, they could prove a snare of the devil” (109). In this way, the novel was often attacked as the “most dangerous of all literary forms” (110). We only need turn to *Jane Eyre* to see how such danger is treated.

St. John Rivers, an ordained Anglican minister, not only saves Jane Eyre from death, but *Jane Eyre* from becoming another one of the “clever wicked

sophistical and immoral” novels that Brontë once read and enjoyed (and, presumably, of the kind that her father would have deplored). Unlike Rochester, who seduces Jane, in part, through relaying stories of his former paramours and vices (those same “hackneyed” “poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life” [166]), St. John is an ascetic who abnegates romance of any kind. When Jane, famished and also drenched from her journey through the rain and marsh, is discovered half-dead upon the doorstep at Moor-House, we are told that her life is saved by his act of “evangelical charity” (444). (Indeed, the frontispiece of *The Cottage in the Wood* contains a picture of a similar scene: an intoxicated Mr. Bower lies “covered all over with mire, and almost senseless” at the door of the cottagers who rescue him [see Figure 8].) We are encouraged to interpret Jane’s rescue as a divine response to her two earlier pleas: “Oh, Providence! sustain me a little longer! Aid—direct me!” (421); “I can but die [...] and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence” (429). After Jane accepts St. John’s offer to teach at a village-school, he increasingly attempts to persuade her to join him, as his wife, in his work as a missionary. The severe, inflexible asceticism of Rivers, however, provides an over-sharp corrective to Rochester’s wealth-driven, disillusioned sensualism.²⁰¹ Both “misreadings” must

²⁰¹ The abrupt juxtaposition of Rochester’s attempted bigamy in volume two with St. John’s mission in volume three recalls Jane’s judgment at the end of volume one (“Sense would resist delirium: judgment would warn passion”). St. John manifests “sense” and “judgement,” or, as Karen Chase notes, appears as the “severe personalization” of Jane’s appeals to God and to “laws and principles” (*Eros & Psyche* 72). The end of volume two heralds this transition, when Jane surrenders her own romantic reading for one from Psalms 69:1-2: “That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, ‘the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me’” (375). Yet Jane’s correction to her romantic misreading is too sharp; Chase, who interprets *Jane Eyre* as a “series of negations,” writes, “Jane had yearned for God and confronts spiritual intolerance” (72).

be resolved by the end of Brontë's novel, which declares itself as something both akin to and apart from Rochester's (Byronic) Romanticism and Rivers' Calvinist-inflected Anglican evangelicalism.²⁰²

In a sense, volume three of *Jane Eyre*, which resolves these "misreadings," is about the conversion of both men, St. John and Rochester. Its predecessor, in this respect, is the *The Cottage in the Wood*—a tale that is also about the religious conversion of its hero and heroine. Along the way, the tale's wealthy rake loses his fortune, and its self-denying heroine becomes rich (through an inheritance). The plot runs as follows: a "young and interesting girl" by the name of Mary, who is described as "far above the ordinary level of those in her circumstances," is the only daughter of two humble cottagers. She is taught to read the Bible at Sunday school. Her virtue has as much to do with restraint as with studiousness. We are told that, "As her good principles kept her from reading vain and frivolous books, all the time she had to spare was devoted to the perusal of the Scriptures, and such works as were calculated to give her just ideas of herself and the world" (8). Mary herself becomes a teacher at the Sunday school where she was a student. And she very soon begins making a "constant practice" of reading a "portion of the Scriptures" to her parents every morning and evening, until "by the Divine blessing" they are "converted unto godliness" (10–11).

²⁰² In her study, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Elisabeth Jay charts the history of Calvinist thought as it influenced nineteenth-century Evangelicalism. She writes, "The moderate Calvinism which lay behind the thinking of many Evangelical clergy reinforced their allegiance to the body of all true believers or the Elect rather than to the Established Church which included so many purely 'nominal' Christians" (19).

The family spend their evenings “rapturously employed in their holy exercises” (13). One night, they discover a genteel young man lying “covered all over with mire” and in a “helpless condition” at their cottage door; it turns out that he is intoxicated (13–14). After he is restored to his senses, the young man departs abruptly. The man, a Mr. Bower, returns several months later to apologize for his behavior, and “candidly” confesses that “drunkenness” is his “besetting sin” (15). Mary’s father, in remonstrating with him, frequently cites verses from the Bible. In response, Bower replies as follows: “I have had my doubts about the Bible. I have sometimes thought the whole was but a fable, invented by priests, to put money in their pockets, and to fill such simple people as you and me with idle terrors” (17), adding that he has always suspected the Bible of being a “mere human composition” (18). He receives a heartfelt lecture from Mary’s father, and Bower reports that he is “*almost persuaded to be a Christian*”; then, with reluctance, he leaves the cottage (22).

Bower continues to visit the cottage and is “apparently much reformed.” However, soon afterward, he attempts to secure a promise from Mary to live with him as his mistress; for this, he offers to pay her 100 pounds a year (and also to provide her parents with 100 pounds a year). He says: “I intend to advance you far above the rank of a servant: you shall be my wife in every thing, the ceremony of marriage only excepted. Come, Mary, let us be parson and clerk ourselves. Mutual consent is all that’s required” (25). “Warmed with indignation, and covered by blushes,” Mary rejects the proposal. In reply, Bower makes the excuse that he was

merely testing her “integrity” and offers her “honourable marriage,” which she unwaveringly refuses, quoting scripture at him (26). Later, in private, Mary offers a prayer that Bower be turned “from the error of his ways” (30). Upon hearing about Bower’s offer, Mary’s parents congratulate her on her escape from him, and soon afterward die (happily and “seated on thrones of glory”) (33). Mary lives with a poor relation, resisting a second offer from Bower, as well as the advances of other “wicked and designing men” (34).

Finally, “sufficiently tried” by God, the “clouds of providence” begin to “break upon her head in copious showers of blessings” (35). Mary becomes companion to an old woman who, after three years, dies and leaves her 4,000 pounds. Mary, now independent, employs herself in charitable work. Meanwhile, Bower has returned to his rakish lifestyle “with increased greediness to his former wickedness and folly” (36). After an evening of drunken debauchery, he and two companions, through an “interposition of providence,” are “assailed by a furious tempest,” and witness an oak struck by lightning (37). Uninjured, Bower’s wicked companions make the grave mistake of resuming their “idle songs, and blasphemous conversation,” as Bower lingers behind “looking up to God for deliverance” (37). His friends are shot by robbers, Bower escapes, and finally reforms. However, having already drunk away his fortune, Bower now seeks work, and becomes an assistant in a large school. Mary meets him at the school while she is distributing books to children as rewards of merit. Mary sees the “pleasing change” that has taken place in Bower, is proposed to, and accepts marriage after

thinking it over for three months. We are told, “What once could be termed only a disallowed and transient passion, is now become pure and settled affection, founded upon the immoveable basis of friendship and esteem” (42). The couple have children and raise them “with much prayer and diligence” (45). The tale concludes first with an account of the death of Mary, followed by that of Bower. The chapbook contains, after the conclusion of the tale, two poems in iambic pentameter (“The Pious Cottager’s Sabbath” and “The Nightly Revel; or the Circumstances of William Bower’s Conversion”), plus poetic “Epitaphs” for Mary and Bower in iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter, respectively.

One can readily detect many parallels between Patrick Brontë’s moral tale of religious conversion and *Jane Eyre*. As Valerie Grosvenor Myer observes in *Notes and Queries*, Brontë adopted many of the motifs of *The Cottage in the Wood* for the “moral skeleton” of *Jane Eyre*. She writes, “Jane, like Mary, is tempted by a ‘rake,’ who attempts to seduce her. Jane, like Mary, resists and goes away to earn her own living. Jane, like Mary, inherits a fortune, which she gives away. Rochester, like Mr. Bower, comes by Providence back to religion, and is fit for marriage to the proudly independent heroine” (490). We can add to the list that Mary and Jane are both teachers who rise to their positions within the same schools where they began as students; they are both orphans (though Mary is made an orphan later than Jane); an oak tree is destroyed by lightning in each story as a portent; &c. The roles appear very much the same, with one important exception: Jane and Bower alike appear at the door to the cottage. Their “overlap”

recalls Jane's strong identification with Rochester: she will not abandon him, nor cast him out of her life, despite however much St. John prompts her to do so.

The Cottage in the Wood is not without its own hypocrisies. One wonders why, if it is enough to be spiritually "rich" as her parents were, Mary inherits a small fortune. In the end, it seems that spiritual "profits" must be matched by financial ones. Mary's wealth is clearly portrayed in the tale as a mark of providence, as is Bower's loss of fortune. Calculating at five percent the income generated by Mary's inheritance of 4,000 pounds, she ultimately receives the 200 pounds per annum that were initially offered to her and her family by Bower. The accounts of ledger and bible adequately balance, along with Bower's misdeeds.

Nevertheless, *The Cottage in the Wood* provides a very important counterpoint to St. John's Calvinist-inspired evangelicalism. Although Jane initially is refused entrance to Moor-House by the Rivers' servant, Hannah, she is admitted by St. John, who hears and responds to her entreaty to God. Later, St. John will tell Jane that he believed that he "recognised" in her "one of the chosen" (529), a fact suggesting that St. John likely saved Jane owing to his Calvinist belief in unconditional election. However, it is also precisely St. John's Calvinism that comes between them. Jane describes St. John's sermons as defined by "a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness: stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation—were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom" (449). Whereas St. John allows Jane entrance to the Moor-House (or the

figurative “Cottage”), he encourages Jane to forget Rochester. Such exclusion is, in fact, antithetical to the Anglican Evangelicalism of Patrick Brontë, as a comparison with *The Cottage in the Wood* readily shows. Whereas Mary and her family admit Bower, a blatant sinner, and befriend him in order to help him, Rivers deems Rochester a “bad man” (486)—and presumably irredeemable—thus omitting mention of Rochester even after Jane weds him.²⁰³

3. Cant and “Counterfeit Sentiment”

It is suggested that St. John, an ordained Anglican clergyman, has experienced a conversion that leads him to adopt this Calvinist outlook. As St. John recounts to Jane, he was himself once “intensely miserable,” and doubted his choice to enter the ministry:

I burnt for the more active life of the world—or the more exciting toils of a literary career—for the destiny of an artist, author, orator; anything, rather than that of a priest [...]. I considered; my life was so wretched, it must be changed, or I must die. After a season of darkness and struggling, light broke and relief fell: my cramped existence all at once spread out to a plain without bounds—my powers heard a call from heaven to rise, gather their full strength, spread their wings and mount beyond ken. God had an errand for

²⁰³ Through the end of his life, St. John refuses to acknowledge Jane’s marriage to Rochester. Jane’s letter to him announcing the marriage goes unanswered. She writes, “six months after, he wrote to me; without, however, mentioning Mr. Rochester’s name, or alluding to my marriage” (575).

me; to bear which afar, to deliver it well, skill and strength, courage and eloquence, the best qualifications of soldier, statesman and orator, were all needed: for these all centre in the good missionary. (462)²⁰⁴

We read this passage after Jane has already observed the following of St. John: “Zealous in his ministerial labours, blameless in his life and habits, he yet did not appear to enjoy that mental serenity, that inward content, which should be the reward of every sincere Christian and practical philanthropist” (448). If St. John’s tale of conversion “sincere”? Certainly, it is sincerely felt; but his account of spiritual “relief” is inconsistent with the perturbation with which he conducts his affairs. We question whether St. John’s “conversion” is actual—whether it is motivated by divine revelation, or, instead, by a need to master and suppress inordinately strong feelings, including his powerful attraction to Rosamond Oliver, the sole heir of a wealthy tradesman.²⁰⁵

It is also the case that an example of misdirected Calvinist zeal has already been offered up in volume one of *Jane Eyre* through the example of Brocklehurst. Elisabeth Jay notes the difference between Brocklehurst and St. John as follows: “Where it is possible to laugh with Miss Temple at the absurdity of Brocklehurst’s position it is inappropriate to sneer at the misguided sincerity of St. John

²⁰⁴ St. John’s intense craving for a “more active life” recalls Jane’s own meditation atop the leads of Thornfield Hall—the difference being that Rochester, who arrives shortly thereafter, ultimately addresses, in a fashion, Jane’s need.

²⁰⁵ Elisabeth Jay, commenting on the same passage, writes: “St. John’s rational outlook to seek another sphere in which to fulfil [sic] himself, and his effort of will [...], are transformed to a sense of particular redemption. The note of self-abnegation before his Saviour is, however, altogether missing” (256).

Rivers” (256). Whether it is “inappropriate” or not to do so, Jane, in fact, holds St. John’s view of love, however sincerely intended, in contempt—and does so openly, moving progressively from “sarcasm” to “disdain” to “scorn” in response to the despotic marriage proposal he offers her: “I scorn your idea of love [...] I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it” (522).

St. John’s “counterfeit sentiment” is, in fact, a willful attempt to “rewrite” the end of the novel that we are reading. Were *Jane Eyre* to conclude with Jane marrying St. John and setting off on a mission to India, according to St. John’s “long-cherished scheme,” the book would indeed merit the classification “religious novel.” When St. John unknots the riddle of Jane’s identity and recounts to her the story of her life, it is not “to hear the sequel of a tale,” but, in fact, to subjugate her and to write and authorize that sequel himself. As he tells Jane: “I find the matter will be better managed by my assuming the narrator’s part, and converting you into a listener. Before commencing, it is but fair to warn you that the story will sound somewhat hackneyed in your ears: but stale details often regain a degree of freshness when they pass through new lips” (484). When St. John narrates what amounts to the plot of the story we have been reading, it might as well be a piece of tract literature, for its characters are reduced to interchangeable figures in service of a greater purpose—*his* greater purpose, which, we are to understand, is God’s greater purpose. (Indeed, after his first marriage proposal to Jane is refused, St. John warns Jane: “do not forget that if you reject it, it is not me that you deny, but

God” [522].) Suffice it to say that a reformed rake does not appear in St. John’s abbreviated version of *Jane Eyre*. All of Jane’s attempts to pick up the thread of Rochester’s story are rebutted. As St. John says, “my head is otherwise occupied than with him: I have my tale to finish” (486).

If St. John attempts to hijack Jane’s narrative, it is owing to his own suspicion of human love—of making an idol of Rosamond, as Jane did of Rochester. St. John imagines his love for Rosamond as a “nectarous flood” overflowing the “field” of his “self-denying plans,” “cankering” them like a “delicious poison”: “now I see myself stretched on an ottoman in the drawing-room at Vale Hall, at my bride Rosamond Oliver’s feet [...]. She is mine—I am hers—this present life and passing world suffice to me” (476). Indeed, we realize that St. John, like Jane, is fleeing from the lure of “delirium and delusion” and their attendant material comforts (*ibid.*). Like Jane, he also fears becoming a willing slave to sensualism, “voluntarily” submitting to Rosamond “under her yoke of flowers,” resting his temples on the “breast of temptation” (*ibid.*). We are reminded of not only novels of fashionable life and the kinds of “delightful romance” to which Rosamond herself alludes (460), but to Patrick Brontë’s “sensual novelist and his admirer.” If St. John is overly invested in rewriting Jane’s ending, it is because he reads her dilemma as his own, and as requiring the same solution.

In the end, neither Rochester nor Brontë’s Romantic inheritance can be shut out from the “cottage,” as it were—both must enter. If St. John’s Calvinist

views are unchangeable, Romanticism proves more pliable, once cleansed of commodification and restored to the mystery and sublimity of “nature.” When Jane entreats “Heaven” to “Shew me—shew me the path!” (535), she receives a feeling that she describes as being “not like an electric shock,” but “quite as sharp, as strange, as startling.” Jane writes, “it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were not summoned, and forced to wake” (535). When Jane hears Rochester’s voice call, “Jane! Jane! Jane!,” she knows not from where it comes: “it did not seem in the room—nor in the house—nor in the garden: it did not come out of the air—nor from under the earth—nor from overhead.” Yet, she reports, “I had heard it—where, or whence, for ever impossible to know!” (536). Unlike Rochester, who will later interpret Jane’s response and return to his call as a divine answer to his prayers, Jane does not directly attribute the event to providence, nor to her imagination: “‘Down superstition!’ I commented [...]. ‘This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused, and did—no miracle—but her best’” (ibid.). Jane later writes, “I recalled the voice I had heard; again I questioned whence it came, as vainly as before: it seemed in *me*—not in the external world. I asked, was it a mere nervous impression—a delusion? I could not conceive or believe it: it was more like an inspiration” (539).

We recall Jane’s assertion, upon hearing Rochester’s voice and leaving St. John, “*My* powers were in play, and in force” (536). Indeed, Jane herself is the instrument that receives and drives not just dead (i.e., printed), but living

thoughts, “over the universe”—Shelley’s “West Wind” with a difference. As Rochester predicts earlier in the novel:

“But the instrument—the instrument! God, who does the work, ordains the instrument. I have myself—I tell it you without parable—been a worldly, dissipated, restless man; and I believe I have found the instrument for my cure, in—”

He paused: the birds went on carolling, the leaves lightly rustling. I almost wondered they did not check their songs and whispers to catch the suspended revelation [...]. (274)

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane and Rochester alike perceive the divine through an ability to harmonize with the natural world: to listen to it, and to give it space as it resonates within themselves, unlike St. John, who is in endless contest with nature in his attempts to overcome it. (As Jane says of St. John, “Nature was not to him that treasury of delight” [448].)

While Brontë’s adaptation of Romanticism and Anglican Evangelicalism remains very much about the conversion of the individual, her approach is also a marked departure from both ideologies. If Brontë once believed in what Jerome J. McGann has since called the “grand illusion of Romantic ideology”—that “one might escape such a world through imagination and poetry”—she also began to understand the “great truth of Romantic work”: “that there is no escape, that there is only revelation (in a wholly secular sense)” (*The Romantic Ideology* 131).

Brontë’s own vision is not entirely secular, however, nor is it entirely Anglican

Evangelical in its leaning. Thomas Vargish characterizes her approach as “heterodox,” observing, “Brontë’s perception of providence at work in the temporal world is bound up with her mildly heterodox assumption that nature and human virtue are complementary in their action. The concept of an apprehensible providential intention gains tremendous force from the romantic sense of the immanence of God in nature” (65). Jane, as she describes her own actions, prays in “my way—a different way to St. John’s, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet” (537).

So where does this leave our notion of “profitable reading”? If the narrator of *The Cottage in the Wood* scrupulously settles all accounts, and St. John attempts to rewrite them, Jane allows Rochester to interpret for himself the significance of his own conversion. Reflecting on his errors and their consequences, Rochester discloses the following to Jane at Ferndean:

“Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty [...]. I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconciliation to my Maker. I began to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere [...].”

“I thank my Maker, that in the midst of judgment he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me

strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done
hitherto.” (571–3)

It is striking that here, Jane seems reluctant to draw a religious moral herself. Instead of fervently affirming Rochester’s belief in providence, as St. John, playing “hierophant,” might have done, or turning toward the practice of additional holy exercises (like the Mary and her parents in *The Cottage in the Wood*), she suspends both disclosure and interpretation. With respect to the mysterious nature of Rochester’s call, Jane writes, “The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed. [...] I kept these things, then, and pondered them in my heart” (573).

Thus, Brontë neatly evades concluding her tale with either sanctimonious or superstitious talk. Jane’s most profound revelation will remain unspoken—aside from what we, of course, have read. Its value is maintained through a sense of privacy, not through the language of instruction or self display. Concomitantly, Rochester, upon Jane’s return, has little interest in displaying Jane to the world. We remember the man who once jested with Adèle that his marriage ring was in his pocket “under the disguise of a sovereign,” and who led a reluctant Jane through the “gay stores” of Millcote’s silk warehouse and jeweler’s shop (337–8). Likewise, we remember the woman who once “hated the business” of shopping, who could not bear to be “dressed like a doll,” who crushed the hand of Rochester when he smiled “such as a sultan might,” bestowing on her his “gold and gems” as if she were a slave (338–9). Had Rochester succeeded in his attempt to dress Jane

up, it would be akin to inserting into our printed copy of *Jane Eyre* the kinds of pretentious “mezzotinto’ pencil drawings” and “poonah-paintings” that Thackeray scoffs at in *The Paris Sketch Book* (a subject that follows in the next chapter of this study). By the end of the novel, such display is immaterial. As Rochester says, “Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip” (570).

Chapter 4: The Book of Nature

To her we emphatically say, Persevere; keep reality distinctly before you, and paint it as accurately as you can, invention will never equal the effect of truth.

George Henry Lewes
Unsigned review from *Fraser's Magazine*
December 1847

Charlotte Brontë once likened herself to an artist whose duty it was to represent reality afresh, painting from “Nature herself” instead of copying the works of other masters (*Letters*, vol. 2, 118). As we have seen in the previous chapters of this study, copies and notions about reproduction were central to Brontë’s writings and understanding of authorship. In both Brontë’s representations of Angria and London’s Cornhill, there are too many copies of books. The Angrian marketplace and Cornhill warehouse alike are overbrimming, and yet bookmakers still seek quick profits by issuing cheap editions or by recycling and “editing” previously published works to sell as newly improved versions. This recycling and duplication is imitated in Brontë’s little books (themselves fair-copy manuscripts), which emulate and parody the paratexts of print publications, as well as the habits of unscrupulous publishers. Meanwhile, popular romance and tract literature provide ready-made templates for the plot of *Jane Eyre*. Although the patterns of romances and tracts are observed and even incorporated in *Jane Eyre*, they, like the two initial marriage proposals of Rochester and St. John, are not fully embraced. For such readings prove to be like St. John’s own misguided “reading” of Jane, or “counterfeit sentiment”—a misguided attempt to shape reality to an ideal, as opposed to observing the nature of that reality.

The following chapter takes up the concept and history of the copy as it relates to nineteenth-century discourses about visual art; such discourses not only informed Brontë’s own understanding of “high art,” but pertain to the broader evaluation and assessment of novels by literary critics such as George Henry

Lewes. Beginning with an analysis of Brontë's own practice of producing paintings and drawings, I turn to the ways in which these activities inflected her particular understanding of language as a means of artistic representation. The concept of painting or drawing "from life" provides Brontë with the necessary framework that allows her to situate the craft of novel writing as a form of original interpretation or translation apart from the recycling of copies endemic to bookmaking.

At the same time, it must be noted that Brontë's drawings "from life" or "from nature" are still inextricably connected to the idea of the book. Patrick Brontë recounts in a letter an occasion taking place during Charlotte's childhood when he asked her what was "the best book in the world." "The Bible," she is said to have replied. When he asked what book was "next best," she answered, "The Book of Nature" (quoted in Gaskell, 48). There is evidence that this sensibility informed Brontë's understanding of books throughout her life. Artists, Brontë believed, could, at best, only make copies from "Nature"—could never themselves "create"—for their role, as conceived by Brontë, was always that of "medium" or "interpreter" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 98). Thus, "Nature" operates as something beyond human invention, even while it serves as a means to access "Truth" (*ibid.*).

In the context of this study, we understand that nature, which no human hand originates, stands apart from the warehouse, overstocked with its manufactured commodities (whether three-decker novels or religious tracts). At the same time, nature is also represented in artworks, where it often signifies that which is not artificial, nor created by humankind. The very concept of the Book of

Nature seems like a paradox, as it invests what is natural, or beyond fabrication, with attributes typically associated with a man-made object. The difference, of course, is that, unlike other books, the Book of Nature is “written” and “made” by God. According to this kind of understanding, nature, like the Bible itself, is divinely authored. As such, the Book of Nature “binds,” as it were, all other books. As we read in the opening chapter of *Waverley*, “It is from the great book of Nature, the same through a thousand editions, whether of black-letter, or wire-wove and hot-pressed, that I have venturously essayed to read a chapter to the public” (6). Nature—in this instance, human nature, or, as Scott writes, “the deep ruling impulse” (5)—is the common thread that provides continuity across history, from the Gothic “black-letter” typefaces of incunabula through the hot-pressed wove paper first introduced by Baskerville and the Whatman firm in the middle of the eighteenth century. Here the changing face of the physical book and its technologies only underscores the concept of an underlying, unchanging, and enduring one. It is Scott’s ability to read this Book of Nature that allows him produce his own books. So, too, was the analogy an important one for Brontë.

1. Copies of Copies & Drawings “from Nature”

Brontë had been an avid amateur artist in her youth, copying engravings from a number of sources, among them Bewick’s *History of British Birds*, Finden’s *Illustrations of the Life and Works of Lord Byron* (London, 1833–4), and annuals,

such as the *Literary Souvenir* of 1830 and the 1831 *Forget Me Not*.²⁰⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell writes that “at one time, Charlotte had the notion of making her living as an artist, and wearied her eyes in drawing with pre-Raphaelite minuteness, but not with pre-Raphaelite accuracy, for she drew from fancy rather than from nature” (106). Christine Alexander goes further and argues that, until the age of nineteen, Brontë had intended to be a professional artist: “Charlotte might have been a second-rate miniaturist, a watercolor copyist, or botanical painter” (“Educating ‘The Artist’s Eye’” 23).

In *The Art of the Brontës*, Alexander discusses the instructional systems for drawing under which Brontë likely studied and practiced, and argues that such study was gendered, to the extent that young women would have been compelled to draw from copies: “Charlotte’s drawings show us that she had little encouragement to work ‘from life’, which was usually the prerogative of the professional or the male amateur. When she did attempt to paint ‘from life’, as in her earliest flower paintings or portraiture, the effect is an obvious lack of understanding of the formal aspects of art” (41). Alexander bases this claim, in part, on Brontë’s earliest known letter, one written to her father on 23 September 1829, which documents Branwell as drawing directly from nature, even while Charlotte and her sisters copied their own drawings from prints: “Branwell has taken two sketches from nature, & Emily Anne & myself have likewise each of us drawn a piece from some views of the lakes which Mr Fenell brought with him

²⁰⁶ Christine Alexander extensively explores this period of Brontë’s work in *The Art of the Brontës* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1995), co-authored by Jane Sellars.

from Westmoreland, the whole of which he intends keeping” (quoted in by Alexander and Sellars in *Art*, 10, 68; see *Letters*, vol. 1, 105).²⁰⁷

It is tempting to isolate the practice of copying from that of drawing from nature—and to identify the former only with feminine accomplishments, instead of locating its presence in fine art.²⁰⁸ Fine art, as we generally think of it, is “original,” not derivative. Copying, however, served as the foundation for any artistic study during the early half of the nineteenth century. Thus, Juliette Wells notes that the aforementioned letter might only convey that Branwell was more advanced as an artist than his sisters, not that they were instructed according to different methods.²⁰⁹ As Ann Bermingham observes in her study, *Learning to Draw*, “Many drawing masters pointed out the importance of studying nature directly. However, they also recognized the difficulty of doing so [...]. The amateur [...] must first learn the ‘grammar of art’”:

²⁰⁷ Alexander acknowledges that it was “not unknown” for women to also “draw from nature.” She cites as an example advice in *The Lady’s Country Companion*, as well as some work by all of the Brontë sisters (*Art* 41).

²⁰⁸ Christine Alexander argues that the emphasis on copying in Brontë’s training (which, Alexander speculates, was geared toward mastering feminine accomplishments [see *Art* 51]) limited Brontë’s abilities as an artist: “Charlotte Brontë’s rigid artistic training had left her with no skill in representing life ‘from nature’, let alone imagination” (*Art* 59). This distinction about the role of copying with respect to fine art is more nuanced than presented by Alexander, as I hope to show; meanwhile, in her dissertation, “Accomplished Women: Gender, Artistry, and Authorship in Nineteenth-Century England,” Juliette Wells notes that “onlookers and readers, beginning with the publication of Gaskell’s *Life*, have reacted to and represented Brontë’s artworks in ways that establish and enforce a distinction between accomplishment and art, a distinction that [...] was emphasized by conduct and education literature” (130).

²⁰⁹ Wells writes: “While the influential late-eighteenth-century theorist William Gilpin advocated direct drawing from nature, his successors in the 1800s and 1810s reintroduced copying as an essential means of acquainting beginners with the rudiments of art, a practice that was in turn rejected by theoreticians from the 1840s onward. That the first written record of the Brontë children’s art reports that Branwell was drawing from nature while each of the sisters drew ‘a piece from some views of the lakes which Mr Fenell brought with him from Westmoreland’ could well indicate only that Branwell was the more advanced student, not—as Alexander has argued—that the siblings’ art study was gendered” (“Accomplished Women” 135).

[...] far from driving amateur draftsmen out into the fields and forests in pursuit of nature at first hand, the concern with touch placed a new emphasis on copying. Whereas Gilpin and Cozens had devised modes of landscape drawing that virtually freed the amateur from this task, as well as from the necessity in some cases of even looking at nature directly, Bryant, like his fellow drawing masters, emphasized the importance of copying in order to develop a repertoire of touches that could be resorted to when one finally did turn to sketching out of doors. (116)

Drawing from nature and copying from prints thus goes hand in hand: one has the ability to interpret nature through first developing a practiced “repertoire of touches.”

This practice of copying (i.e., as a means of acquiring the basic skills for drawing) was not in any way new. Bermingham suggests that it originated in sixteenth-century Italy, and associates the appearance of drawing books with the rise of academies in Italy and Europe, the spread of printing, and the development of humanist handwriting manuals (40–8). Handwriting manuals, like drawing manuals, focused on proportion and geometric harmony, and taught their subjects step by step, line by line, stroke by stroke. Bermingham writes, “The connection to writing, textuality, and ultimately to learning was reinforced by the narrative-like progression from parts to more complex wholes that the book format imposed on drawing” (43). In this way, drawing books encouraged artists to attempt the

“perfectibility” of idealized forms through copying, and were intended, as Bermingham argues, “to reconcile naturalism with ideality” (40). Meanwhile, drawing manuals themselves became the objects of borrowing and piracy, and were thus subject to radical reinterpretation (47). While some books represented and featured works of particular celebrated artists, whose individual, masterful styles were the subjects of focused study and imitation, other books (particularly those published in England) were compendia of printed images plagiarized in the spirit of conveying “basic information” about how to draw. Bermingham writes, “The first opens a door onto modern authorship and connoisseurship, and the second onto the invention of printing and other forms of mechanical reproduction. That they should both emerge at the same time seems only logical” (47). In such a cycle, we thus find the distinct and distinguished work of the “original” artist/author (which had already been interpreted into intaglio and/or relief processes for the purposes of print) further broken up, reduced, and copied by bookmakers into smaller pieces. These pieces, in turn, could be (perhaps seamlessly) copied and appropriated into that aforementioned “repertoire of touches” that would inform another artist’s drawing “from life.”

And so if there can be said to be a “grammar of art,” it was one also tied (necessarily so) to a grammar of print. Brontë was remarkably attuned to the visual patterns and conventions of printing. Just as she adopted different hands and strokes to imitate the look of distinct typographical and lettering features in her early manuscripts, she meanwhile imitated features specific to different

techniques for manufacturing images. Gaskell writes: “When she [Brontë] was 16 or 17, she wanted much to draw; and she copied nimini-pimini copper-plate engravings out of annuals, (‘stippling,’ don’t the artists call it?) every little point put in, till at the end of six months she had produced an exquisitely faithful copy of the engraving” (Gaskell 439). Indeed, Brontë’s surviving artwork reveals that, in making copies of prints, she was preoccupied with replicating not just the subject matter of images, but also the marks specific to the technological processes whereby they were made. For example, one can readily see that Brontë’s view “Geneva” (BPM Bonnell 14) was copied from a steel engraving. Her choice of pencil as a medium is itself reminiscent of the prototypically cool, silver-gray look of prints produced from steel plates. And one can discern, especially in the treatment of the foreground, that Brontë took pains to imitate the razor-thin, fine lines, evenly spaced one after another, that are a hallmark of the process (which, in fact, was performed with the aid of a machine), instead of simply shading the area with her pencil, which would have been a much more practical method for the medium in which she was working.

We find traces of this print-based environment even in Brontë’s representation of three-dimensional objects taken from life. To take one example, Brontë’s 1830 watercolor, “Wild Roses” (BPM C9.5), bears the following line of text beneath its title, suggesting that its image is drawn from life: “Charlotte Brontë” “From Nature” “July 13, 1830.” (See Figure 9.) However, the extremely stylized quality of the image and its formal presentation—including the exceedingly fine



Figure 9: "Wild Roses," signed and dated in pencil by Brontë. 1830.

BPM C9.5, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England. Image provided courtesy of the Brontë Society.

cursive script of the titling, imitative of that so often found in steel engravings of the period—complicates any claim that the image is purely a product of natural observation. Christine Alexander, who also notes this ambiguity, observes that the work resembles plates from Patrick Syme’s *Practical Directions for Learning Flower Drawing* (Edinburgh: Published “For the Author,” 1810) and Edward Pretty’s *Practical Essay on Flower Painting in Water Colours* (London: S. & J. Fuller, 1810). Alexander concludes that Brontë must have copied from manuals, as well as drawn from nature, when she began painting flowers (*Art* 170). Whether or not Brontë in fact painted her “Wild Roses” from real ones, there is clearly a tension arising in the verbal and visual “vocabulary” used to signify what is “natural” from what is man-made that itself presents a series of pressing questions related to the creation and circulation of images. As an artist, how was one to distinguish one’s “original” representation of nature from a copy of a print, without also referencing conventions (such as titling, stylization, &c.) learned via print—the medium through which such copies of copies proliferated and by which a great deal of “art” was taught? In a world suffused with print, including manuals on how to draw “from nature,” how was it possible to render afresh a “real” subject? Such questions parallel Brontë’s own later preoccupation with constructing “real” characters.²¹⁰ (We are reminded of the praise of Lewes, who writes in his review of *Jane Eyre* that its heroine is a “woman, not a pattern.”)

²¹⁰ See, for example, Brontë’s introduction to *The Professor*.

These developments go hand in hand with the commodification of fine art, which became more pronounced in the early nineteenth century, along with the resulting attempts of critics to define (and defend) fine art from the products of commercial speculation (Bermingham 127–8). Brontë made her copies from commercially printed images, many of which were themselves derivatives of works originally composed in very different media, such as oil. At the time, painted and drawn images could be widely circulated only after they had been interpreted into a relief, intaglio, or lithographic print.²¹¹ A painting or sketch had to be translated, as it were, by an engraver onto a printing surface in order to create a reproducible image. This presented its own difficulties. Many artists, including the novelist William Thackeray (who drew illustrations for his own writings) resented having their work mediated and (ineptly) transformed by what were perceived as mere craftsmen, instead of artist-engravers.²¹² As Thackeray writes in the second volume of *The Paris Sketch Book*, “to copy fine expression and fine drawing, the engraver himself must be a fine artist”—the implication being that few interpretive engravers could count themselves as such. Critics also favored hand-work (which

²¹¹ Although photography was invented by Nicéphore Niépce in 1827, Fox Talbot’s work, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), is widely regarded as the first commercially published book illustrated with photographs. Books illustrated with tipped-in photographs (usually albumen prints) only became popular in the 1850s, and reached the height of their popularity in the 1860s (Wakeman 83–84). Photomechanical relief blocks, such as line blocks and half-tones, superseded wood-engraved blocks only in the 1880s (q.v. Wakeman 161–3).

²¹² Bermingham writes that “the first outcry against copying” came from a group of artist-engravers, including William Hogarth, in 1735, when they petitioned the House of Commons for “a bill to be brought in ‘for the encouragement of the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.’” “The object of the bill,” Bermingham notes, “was to outlaw the common practice of printsellers of copying artists’ prints and selling them, often at a lower price, as the originals” (153). In the nineteenth century, Josiah Wedgwood defended mechanical reproduction against this prejudice: “The art of making *durable copies*, at a small expense, will [...] promote the art of *making originals*, and future ages may view the productions of the age of George III with the same veneration that we now behold those of Alexander and Augustus” (quoted in Bermingham, *ibid.*).

tended to be read as being artistically authentic) as opposed to those illustration techniques that relied on and emphasized mechanical reproduction. For instance, Thackeray points out the relative limitations that artists faced when working in steel or wood. This is “art done by machinery,” he writes, as opposed to “the honest work of hand.” Thackeray continues: “we [...] prefer the rough workmanship of the painter to the smooth copies of his performances which are produced, for the most part, on the wood-block or the steel-plate” (3).

It was not the “honest work of hand,” but the “machinery” of the print process itself that Brontë seems to have imitated in much of her drawing and painting. At the same time, Brontë sometimes interpreted those processes, using them in unconventional ways, in a manner that individuated her subjects. A telling example of this is Brontë’s watercolor, “Lycidas” (BPM C13), dated 4 March 1835, which was based on an image derived from Henry Fuseli’s painting “Solitude at Dawn.” “Solitude at Dawn” was very clearly inspired by Milton’s famous pastoral elegy, which adopts its name “Lycidas” from antiquity. Indeed, Fuseli completed the painting for exhibition in his Milton Gallery, which had first opened in the years 1799 and 1800 (Calè 46). Fuseli, a Swiss painter first elected to the Royal Academy of Arts in 1788, then appointed as Professor of Painting in 1799 before being made Keeper of the Royal Academy in 1804, was associated with the most eminent and elite English artists of the period, including Sir Joshua Reynolds (Gould 174; 177–8). His gallery, like others of the time, reconstituted the masterworks of British literature through what Luisa Calè has identified as a “dual

cultural function” that allowed elite artists to maintain their high standing, even while repackaging their fine art for mass audiences:

The galleries made a claim to be a new, narrative form of high art, yet they also circulated celebrated examples of the national literature in the commercial form of visual attractions. Indeed, the galleries were commercial outlets for the the sale of illustrated books and prints, offering readers a visual entertainment for advertising and marketing purposes. (6)

In this vein, Fuseli sought to promote, circulate, and sell his work among general audiences, and started working in 1803 with an engraver, Moses Haughton, Jr, who began interpreting Fuseli’s paintings as engravings (Calè 52). Haughton’s aquatint engraving, entitled “Lycidas,” measuring approximately 15.5 inches tall by 11.75 inches wide, was an upscale production intended as a print for framing. (See Figure 10.) Presumably, it would have been sold to patrons of the Milton Gallery who wished to purchase a reproduction of his painting suitable for display in their private offices and homes.²¹³

Decades later, Haughton’s intaglio print of Fuseli’s painting was itself interpreted, this time by the wood-engraver John Jackson, who was commissioned by the publisher Charles Knight to create a relief wood-engraving that appeared in the 14 July 1832 issue of *The Penny Magazine* and in the first volume of Knight’s

²¹³ Some sources mistakenly refer to Haughton’s intaglio print as a stipple engraving (e.g., D. H. Weinglass, “*The Art of the Brontës and Fuseli’s Solitude at Dawn*,” *Brontë Society Transactions* 1997, volume 22, 145–7.) This is clearly not the case, given that Frederick Christian Lewis, a noted printer of aquatints, signed the work “Lewis, Aquatinta.”

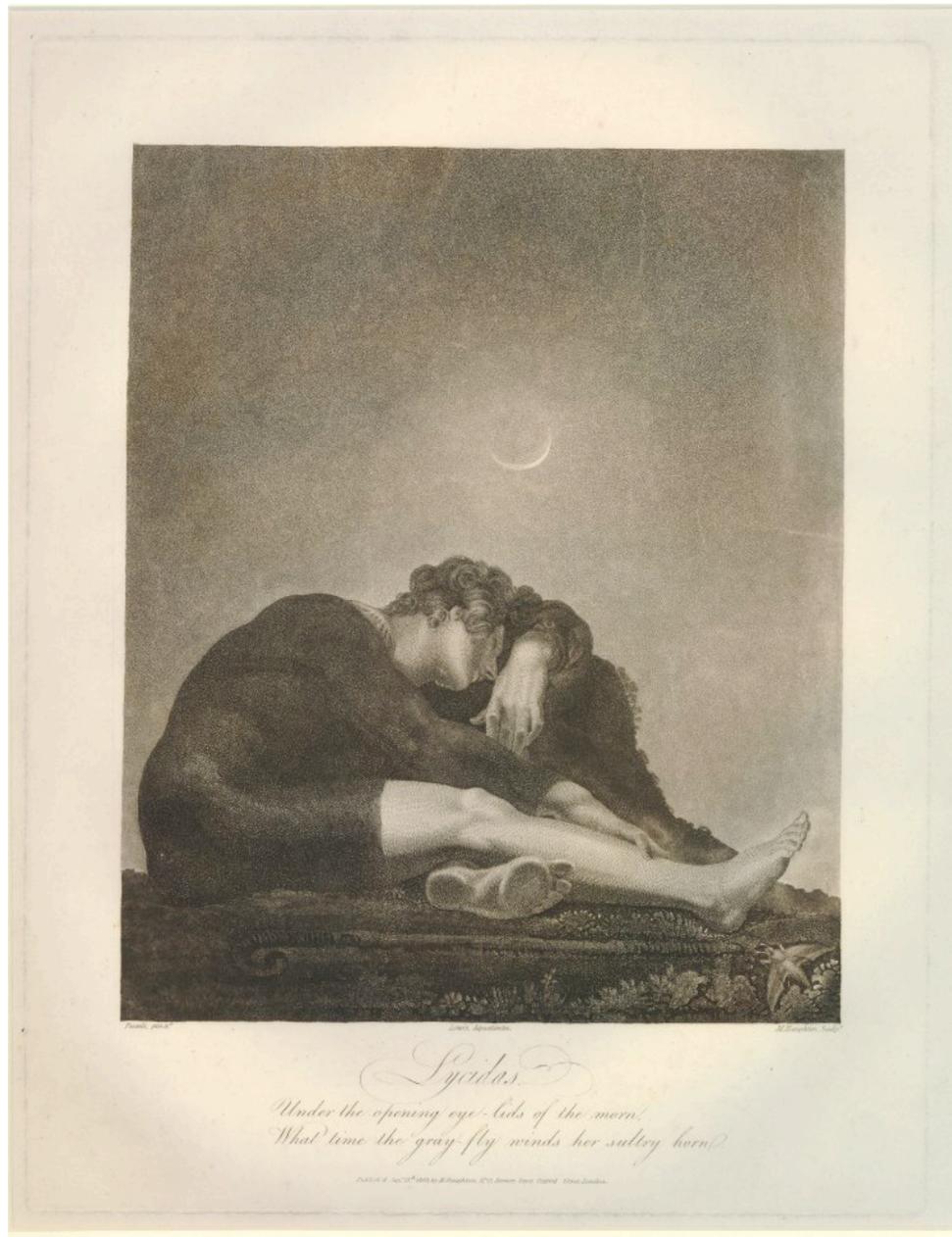


Figure 10: Aquatint entitled “Lycidas” by Moses Haughton, Jr. interpreting Fuseli’s painting, “Solitude at Dawn.”

British Museum registration number 1979,U.1247. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Gallery of Portraits, to illustrate the “Life of John Milton” (Weinglass 146–7). In both instances, this modest image (see Figure 11), measuring only three inches tall



Figure 11: John Jackson’s wood-engraved interpretation of “Lycidas.” *The Penny Magazine*, 14 July 1832 issue, 152.

Reproduced from the private collection of Barbara Heritage, Charlottesville, Virginia.

by three inches wide, was set on a page predominated by letterpress text, where it served merely as an ancillary decoration. Unlike Haughton’s deluxe aquatint print, which was intended for framing, Jackson’s “Lycidas” was a small, inexpensive reproduction inappropriate for such purposes. It seems likely that Brontë copied her image from Jackson’s “Lycidas,” given that, in her painting, she clearly treats the image as a vignette, with the same contours and outline as we see in Jackson’s derivative version. (One also notes a greater likeness in perspective between Brontë’s and Jackson’s images than in Haughton’s, particularly with regard to the facial profile of both figures.) In addition, Jackson’s image would also have been readily available to Brontë, owing to the wide circulation of *The Penny Magazine*.

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Despite the remove at which she studied Fuseli’s “Lycidas”—and that picture’s remove from Milton’s poem—Brontë attempted to make the image her own by introducing to it new features (see Figure 12). For example, she applied black ink to the corners of her painting. Although Christine Alexander suggests that this treatment might have been required for the application of large “photo hinges,” it seems clear that Brontë gave her image a mourning border.²¹⁴ Milton’s



Figure 12: Brontë’s watercolor “Lycidas” (signed, titled, and dated 4 March 1835 in pencil).

BPM C13, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England. Image provided courtesy of the Brontë Society.

²¹⁴ Having examined this drawing in person, I found no evidence that the corners had been blackened for the purposes of mounting. Also, no other artwork in the collection is treated in this fashion.

“Lycidas” is an elegy, after all, and the border, which was common at the time (for instance, on mourning stationery) registers Milton’s loss at the level of painting as object. Unlike Jackson’s black-and-white wood-engraved vignette, composed of lines made by scoops and cuts into wood, Brontë’s figure is largely composed of the repeated application of small overlapping points of watercolor paint—almost as if she were imitating the look of a lithograph, or perhaps a stipple engraving or aquatint, as with Haughton’s intaglio print. (The technique of Pointillism would not be developed until the 1880s.) The resulting image is an arresting hybrid whose appearance suggests that Brontë adapted the look of multiple print processes and techniques to create something that had a new feel, despite its derivative origin.

As I argued in the previous chapter, *Jane Eyre* registers, adopts, corrects, and adapts various styles of writing, thus engaging yet also transcending mass-market popular literature. “Lycidas” serves as a fitting parallel in this respect. At the same time, Brontë herself (e.g., in her correspondence) draws on traditional distinctions made between the production of “high” and “low” visual art to justify the originality of her writing. In her following letter written in 1848 to W. S. Williams and excerpted earlier, Brontë defends *Jane Eyre* on the basis that it is taken directly as a “study” of “Nature” as opposed to a “copy” of existing models:

Defects there are both in “Jane Eyre” and “Wildfell Hall” which it will be the authors’ wisdom and duty to endeavor to avoid in the future; other points there are to which they deem it incumbent on them

firmly to adhere, whether such adherence bring popularity or unpopularity, praise or blame. The standard heroes and heroines of novels, are personages in whom I could never, from childhood upwards, take an interest, believe to be natural, or wish to imitate: were I obliged to copy these characters, I would simply—not write at all. Were I obliged to copy any former novelist, even the greatest, even Scott, in anything, I would not write—Unless I have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it in, I have no business to publish; unless I can look beyond the greatest Masters, and study Nature herself, I have no right to paint; unless I can have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent. (*Letters*, vol. 2, 118)

As we have seen in her other letters, Brontë sharply distinguishes her work from “standard” novels and “Conventionality.”²¹⁵ She justifies her own authorial enterprise principally through her writing process, which she likens to painting. The emphatic (and illustrative) repetition of the phrase “obliged to copy” suggests that popular works are inferior, precisely owing to the way in which they merely borrow and imitate the language of other books. Such authors study the papery language of print instead of the real world. In this way, Brontë presents herself as a master writer, who, like a master painter, does not draw from two-dimensional models, but from living ones. She must “look beyond” the works of contemporaries

²¹⁵ Q.v. Brontë’s letter of February 1848 to Williams; also, her November 1847 letter to Lewes; &c.

and predecessors (including her formidable precursor, Sir Walter Scott) to encounter “Nature” afresh.

But, as we also know, art can never simply mirror “Nature.” As Brontë herself writes, she must have “something of [her] own to say” and a “way of [her] own to say it in.” How do we reconcile the creative subjectivity of the “original” artist with that which needs only be interpreted: the natural (divinely created) “Truth”?

2. Literary Criticism and the Analogy of Painting

When Brontë presents herself as an author who, like an original painter, must “look beyond the greatest Masters, and study Nature herself,” she is not introducing a standard of comparison from art criticism, but implementing critical language already in use by authors and contemporary reviewers for distinguishing original literary works from the dross of publishing houses. Visual images were valued as much for their apparent authenticity as for the skill with which they were executed: a painting taken “from nature” was arguably more “original” than an interpretation of another artwork, however accomplished. The further removed the artist from a demonstrably immediate, firsthand encounter with her subject-matter, the less likely that the subject-matter was an imitation—a mere attempt at reproducing a master’s work. Was it a coincidence that painting—a process extraordinarily difficult to replicate accurately via print processes—became an analogy adopted by critics for identifying highly realized fiction?

In his 1815 review of Jane Austen's *Emma*, Walter Scott characterizes inferior novelists as "imitators who rushed in crowds upon each path in which the great masters of the art had led the way." He contrasts their "materials"—the "strong dark colours which excite surprize and horror," the "robbers, smugglers, bailiffs, caverns, dungeons, and mad-houses" of genre-driven plots now grown "stale and familiar"—with an emerging novelistic style, the study of "ordinary life": "the substitute for these excitements [...] was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him" (*Quarterly Review* 192–3). While this passage has been read in connection to realism in fiction and also to the study of natural history,²¹⁶ Scott's immediate analogy is of the literary novelist to the fine artist, who is able to view natural subjects firsthand and to render them afresh, as opposed to the hack writer or copyist.

Indeed, the vocabulary of sketching and painting continued to play an important role in the critical assessment of literature throughout the nineteenth century, especially in distinguishing "original" works from imitations.²¹⁷ A critic reviewing *Jane Eyre* for *Britannia* claims, "The author is a Salvator Rose with his

²¹⁶ See chapter two of George Levine's study *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*. For a reading with respect to natural history, see the first chapter of Peter Knox-Shaw's *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²¹⁷ The term "realism" is itself closely connected to the visual arts. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt traces the origin of the term to painting: "'Réalisme' was apparently first used as an aesthetic description in 1835 to denote the 'vérité humaine' of Rembrandt as opposed to the 'idéalité poétique' of neo-classical painting" (10).

pen” (quoted in Allott, 11). An unsigned review in the 27 November 1847 of *The Examiner* praises *Jane Eyre* for its “graphic power” and “varied and vivid portraiture of men and things” (756–7). On 14 November 1847, a reviewer for *The Era* writes that *Jane Eyre* is “no mere novel, for there is nothing but nature and truth about it,” though “neither is it like your familiar writings, that are too close to reality.” The same critic likens the novel’s “pictures” to the “Cartoons of Raphael”: “The figures are not elaborately executed, but true, bold, well-defined, and full of life—struck off by an artist who embodies his imaginings in a touch” (9). Yet another critic writes that “much of the characters and incidents are taken from life,” and “the execution of the painting is as perfect as the conception” (review by “Aquilus”; October 1848 *Blackwood’s*, 459–74).

More than any other contemporary analysis of *Jane Eyre*, that of George Henry Lewes relies on the concept of drawing “from nature.” At the conclusion of his unsigned review, written in 1848 for *Fraser’s Magazine*, Lewes advises Currer Bell to “Persevere; keep reality distinctly before you, and paint it as accurately as you can, invention will never equal the effect of truth.” Throughout the same review, he uses the analogy of sketching to distinguish “truth of delineation” from “art and artifice,” skillful “transcripts from the book of life” from “mere plot” and “pattern.” The characters of *Jane Eyre* are “sketched with a vividness which betrays the cunning hand: a few strokes, and the figure rises before you. Jane herself is a creation.” Lewes insists that, in *Jane Eyre*, “the pictures stand out before you: they *are* pictures, and not mere bits of ‘fine writing’.” And, if Brontë’s

sketches are, in an instance or two, imperfect in their rendering, drawing too much from the generic stock of the circulating library (as Lewes argues in the case of St. John Rivers), the defect is a product of “the woman’s pencil”—that is, a woman’s propensity for copying from generic models, rather than from direct, lived experience. Nevertheless, on the whole, such comparisons support Lewes’s judgment that “reality—deep significant reality” is the “great characteristic” of *Jane Eyre* (686–95).

In a publishing marketplace suffused with “frauds” and “counterfeits,” the analogy of sketching from nature became a way of distinguishing works of genuine literary merit from genre-driven potboilers.²¹⁸ And yet, the skillful novelist also could not just record whatever experience she encountered. To return to Scott’s 1815 review of *Emma*, he notes that “something more than a mere sign-post likeness is also demanded. The portrait must have spirit and character, as well as resemblance” (*Quarterly Review* 93). Indeed, Edwin Percy Whipple, writing for the October 1848 issue of *The North American Review*, chastises Currer Bell as follows: “the authors [sic] of *Jane Eyre* have [...] made the capital mistake of supposing that an artistic representation of character and manners is a literal imitation of individual life” (357). Contemporary commentary such as this indicates that even as masterful writing takes its models from life, language should not indiscriminately “copy” actual experience. Rather, as these critics write, the best literature must convey reality via a style that also betokens tasteful selection

²¹⁸ *Jane Eyre* is praised as being “not a mere sham—a counterfeit” in the 1847 review from *The Atlas* (collected in Allott, 69). And we read that “English ‘fiction’ is not entirely a ‘fraud,’ as we were really beginning to suspect” in the 1847 review from *The People’s Journal* (collected in Allott, 80).

of subject matter for appropriate ends. Indeed, original, life-like representations could be rejected by audiences if they were thought, as the three curates in the first chapter of *Shirley* were by Lewes, to be “offensive, uninstrucive, and unamusing.” As Lewes writes in his 1850 review of *Shirley*, “We are confident that she [Brontë] has seen them, known them, despised them; and *therefore* she paints them! [...] and although not inventions, we must be permitted to say that they are *not true*” (159). Not “true”? What then did truth mean to Brontë, Lewes, and their contemporaries? And how are we to interpret the “plain truth” that Jane Eyre claims for her narrative?

It appears that there are two kinds of truth at odds with one another: the established order of tasteful resemblance to which Scott and Lewes refer, and the “plain truth” upon which Brontë insists and that aggressively asserts itself as such. It is worth examining more closely Lewes’s 1850 review of *Shirley*, because it is in this work that he first detects Brontë’s defensive rhetoric of “truth,” which, as I argue in the first chapter of this study, also recurs throughout *Jane Eyre*.

Lewes begins by writing that *Shirley* lacks the “agreeableness of a work of art,” and by this, he means both pleasantness in appearance and, perhaps more importantly, narrative cohesion. For Lewes, “true” and “real” writing must read as a seamless, unified whole. Whereas *Jane Eyre* is a single, masterful “picture,” *Shirley* is a mere “portfolio of random sketches for one or more pictures” (*Edinburgh Review* 160). Whereas in *Jane Eyre* “life is viewed from the standing point of individual experience,” “in ‘Shirley,’ that standing point is frequently

abandoned, and the artist paints only a panorama of which she, as well as you, are but spectators” (159). For Lewes, the fragmented nature of *Shirley*'s narrative is expressed and perhaps even exacerbated on its material level as a physical book. Chapters are like loose “sketches,” and, for this reason, Lewes argues, “the book may be laid down at any chapter, and almost any chapter might be omitted. The various scenes are gathered up into three volumes,—they have not grown into a work” (ibid.).

These problems in choice of subject (e.g., the curates) and “incoherence” of perspective are only magnified, according to Lewes, by the obtrusive interference of the narrator, who seems to “anticipate” “some such objections.” Lewes quotes the following prickly passage from *Shirley* as an example:

Note well! wherever you present *the actual simple truth, it is somehow always denounced as a lie: they disown it, cast it off, throw it on the parish; whereas the product of your imagination, the mere figment, the sheer fiction, is adopted, petted, proper, sweetly natural.* (159–60)

Lewes proceeds by addressing these questions of truth, imagination, and resemblance in art:

Now Currer Bell, we fear, has here fallen into a vulgar error. It is one, indeed, into which even Miss Edgeworth has also fallen: who conceived that she justified the introduction of an improbable anecdote in her text, by averring in a note that it was a ‘fact.’ But, the

intrusion is not less an error for all that. Truth is never rejected, unless it be truth so exceptional as to stagger our belief; and in that case the artist is wrong to employ it, without so *preparing* our minds so that we might receive it unquestioned. The coinage of the imagination, on the other hand, is not accepted *because* it departs from the actual truth, but only because it presents the recognised attributes of our nature in new and striking combinations [...]. Art, in short, deals with the broad principles of human nature, not with idiosyncracies: and, although it requires an experience of life both comprehensive and profound, to enable us to say with confidence, that '*this* motive is unnatural,' or '*that* passion is untrue,' it requires no great experience to say 'this character has not the air of reality; it may be copied from nature, but it does not *look* so.' Were Currer Bell's defence allowable, all criticism must be silenced at once. An author only has to say that his characters *are copied from nature*, and the discussion is closed. But though the portraits may be like the oddities from whom they are copied, they are faulty as works of art, if they strike all who never met with these oddities, as unnatural. (ibid.)

One might also note that this excerpt from *Shirley* quoted by Lewes is part of a much longer passage in Brontë's novel that attacks the "crotchets" of the "discriminating public": "Are you not aware [...] that the unvarnished truth does not answer; that plain facts will not digest?" (722). Indeed, at first glance, the

blatantly unapologetic realism of *Shirley* would seem to suggest that Brontë was following Lewes's earlier advice, to "keep reality distinctly before you, and paint it as accurately as you can." In a letter to W. S. Williams, Brontë even likens her writing to photography in justifying the truth of the scene with the curates: "*it is true*—The curates and their ongoings are merely photographed from the life" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 181). However, as Lewes argues, copying subjects "from nature," in itself, does not make a subject "natural." His understanding of art is akin to an idealized nature. His idea of writing is like a drawing from nature that is informed by practiced copies of "ideal" examples—the drawing from life that seamlessly incorporates practiced, artful touches. "Truth" is an effect: successful art must "prepare" its readers so that it might be received "unquestioned," without revealing its own artifice. In short, Lewes argues that art must *appear* natural.

Brontë was certainly not ignorant of such principles. In *Jane Eyre*, she calls attention to them. For instance, Jane defends herself against accusations of falsehood when she tells Miss Temple a "restrained and simplified" version of her story, which "sounded more credible" than the version Jane conveyed earlier to Helen, when she told the story "without reserve or softening" (66, 83).²¹⁹ In this way, *Jane Eyre* can present both versions of her story. On the one hand, the earlier, passionate perspective is all the more convincing, precisely because Jane later acquires a "most correct," chastened narrative style that demonstrates her

²¹⁹ One might compare Jane's strategy to Brontë's in writing *Jane Eyre*. In an early letter to Smith, Elder, Brontë writes: "Had I told all the truth, I might indeed have made it far more exquisitely painful—but I deemed it advisable to soften and retrench many particulars lest the narrative should rather displease than attract" (*Letters*, vol. 1, 539–40).

developed sense of judgment. On the other, Jane gains the trust of Miss Temple, even as she discloses to her reader her ability to elide truths to which we have already been privy as her readers. Jane thus indirectly draws attention to the fact that telling “truth” in itself requires art. As a result, canny readers will naturally wonder if they, like Miss Temple, are being manipulated.²²⁰

It seems likely, however, that Brontë did not subscribe to the idea put forward by Lewes that the truth of novels should be received “unquestioned.” Certainly, the early chapters of her first three novels, *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Shirley*, introduce physically unattractive characters, who each comment, in some way, on the act of reading—a strategy that invariably calls attention to the activity and motives of novel reading itself. In an 1849 review of *Shirley* for the *Daily News*, one critic quips: “There are few things more forbidding than the commencement of a novel by the author of ‘Jane Eyre.’ Like people who put dwarfs and monsters to keep their gates, or ugly dogs to deter idle folk from entering, so doth this writer manage to have an opening chapter of the most deterring kind” (2). Indeed, Brontë’s publishers, Smith, Elder, suggested that she revise the beginnings of both *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. In both instances, Brontë defended these introductions and insisted on their “truth,” despite the risk of their being unfashionable.²²¹ In her defense of *Shirley*, Brontë writes to W. S. Williams that

²²⁰ This tendency in Brontë’s work is especially pronounced in *Villette*. Think of Lucy Snowe’s deliberate narrative withholdings (for example, that concerning the identity of Dr. John/Graham Bretton) and the novel’s pronouncedly ambiguous ending.

²²¹ Q.v. Brontë’s letter to Messrs Smith, Elder and Co., 12 September 1847 (*Letters*, vol. 1, 539); also Brontë’s letter to W. S. Williams most likely written on 10 February 1849 (*Letters*, vol. 2, 181).

“Truth is better than Art. Burns’ Songs are better than Bulwer’s Epics. Thackeray’s rude, careless sketches are preferable to thousands of carefully finished paintings” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 185). Characters of “plain” appearance and unconventional habits were certainly one hallmark of such “truth.” Yet it becomes increasingly apparent that, for Brontë, realistic writing was also self-referential: disclosing one’s narrative art, whether indirectly or directly via an address to one’s reader, did not destroy a novel’s verisimilitude, but conveyed insight into the real condition and convention of storytelling itself. And so *Jane Eyre* begins with an act of reading, and concludes with one; and so Jane is a reader, artist, teacher, translator, and, implicitly, a writer.

The authors whom Brontë most admired, among them Byron, Scott, and Thackeray, tended toward extremely self-conscious writing that often highlighted the circumstances of its own construction. Of Thackeray, Brontë writes: “No author seems to distinguish so exquisitely as he does dross from ore, the real from the counterfeit” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 553). One might argue that it is precisely Thackeray’s self-awareness as an artist and novelist that lends his work its greatest power. Peter L. Shillingsburg makes such a case in his study, *Pegasus in Harness*, when he writes, “Thackeray saw more clearly than most of his contemporaries the problems of trying to create or capture ‘reality’ in ‘fiction,’ and he knew more clearly than many a historian of his day that the coherence created by the orderly arrangement of historical data, commonly taken for ‘truth’ in ‘history,’ is an illusion.” Shillingsburg goes on to say that “the neat wrapping up of loose ends

where villains are punished and heroes vindicated and rewarded, Thackeray knew, is an illusion. Reality is ambiguous and indeterminate [...]. So Thackeray reminds his readers constantly and truthfully that the puppet show is not real” (21–24). If she did not close with puppets, as Thackeray did in *Vanity Fair*, the endings of Brontë’s novels are perhaps as ambiguous and disconcerting as her introductions: *Jane Eyre* concludes, not with Jane’s union to Rochester, but with a letter from St. John; in *Villette*, Monsieur Paul’s ultimate fate remains, as Brontë wrote to W. S. Williams, a “little puzzle” (*Letters*, vol. 3, 139). Instead of painting a definite picture or of gratifying one’s desire for resolution, these endings draw attention to the desire for closure itself—thereby destabilizing, at the last moment, the perfect ending, or the perfect “escape.”

3. Studying Nature’s Reverse: Fanciful Sketches

In his *Essay Concerning Human Nature* (1689–90), John Locke describes the workings of the mind in pictorial language reminiscent of the processes and tools of painting and drawing. The mind itself is “white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*” on which the “Fancy of Man” paints (104). Ann Bermingham sees Locke’s analogy as referring to the operation of a camera obscura. She observes, “The crucial feature of [Locke’s] metaphor is that the mind reflects on representations of objects, not the objects themselves. The assumption is that these representations are such true and clear images of things that they are equivalent to the things themselves” (72). This metaphor is only possible,

Birmingham argues, owing to the notion that drawing could be “a neutral and transparent mirror of the natural world,” and that the “mind’s true pictures,” like those of the camera obscura, were “clear unmediated projections of external nature that the mind separates into rational categories and taxonomical orders” (ibid.). Fancy, on the other hand, is inventive and boundless, offering agreeable but false pictures.

By the nineteenth century, analogies of pure (i.e., unmediated) painting and drawing were fraught. In 1817, Coleridge writes that Milton’s imagery “is creation rather than painting, or if painting, yet such, and with such co-presence of the whole picture flashed at once upon the eye, as the sun paints in a camera obscura” (393). Yet Coleridge also returns to the metaphor of the camera obscura to express his disgust with the “devotees of the circulation libraries”: “I dare not compliment their pass-time, or rather kill-time, with the name of reading. Call it rather a sort of beggarly day-dreaming [...] while the whole *matériel* and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental camera obscura manufactured at the printing office” (182). Here the very faculty of interpretation is corrupt—nothing more than “mental,” mechanical—a camera obscura without the benefit of natural light.

By 1851, Brontë also shared this jaded view, conceiving of the mind of the inferior reader as a blank book susceptible only to the impressions of other books. As she advises George Smith:

When other people overwhelm you with acquired knowledge [...] derive not pride—but support from this thought. “If no books had ever been written—some of these minds would themselves have remained blank pages—they only take an impression—they were not born with a record of thought on the brain, or an instinct of sensation in the heart. If I had never seen a printed volume, Nature would have offered my perceptions a varying picture and a continuous narrative, which, without any other teacher than herself, would have [...] schooled me to knowledge unsophisticated but genuine.” (*Letters*, vol. 3, 663).

The knowledge acquired by the brain of the (popular) inferior reader is likened to a physical book and is purely derivative. The second (and, as we understand it, more desirable) kind of mind is not described explicitly as a book, but rather absorbs Nature itself. While the “blank” brain is akin to a book filled by other books (again, another bookmaking image), the latter mind, it is suggested, is born with a “record of thought” that allows it to interpret Nature, or the Book of Nature. The Book of Nature is varying and continuous, as opposed to the inferior reader’s mind, which is finite, like a bound object. Here again there is the suggestion that Nature cannot simply manifest as “Truth,” but must be interpreted by a skilled reader whose mind is not a *tabula rasa*, but rather infused with its own “thought” and “instinct.” We recall that Jane Eyre paints not just “from life,” but also with the “spiritual eye,” as we learn in her conversation with Rochester (153).

Wordsworth's definition of the imagination situates it apart from "images" that are merely a "faithful copy [...] of absent external objects." Indeed, the imagination itself is not an object, but an series of "operations":

Imagination has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon these objects, and process of creation or composition, governed by certain fixed laws [...]. Certain processes of the imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath performed the process like a new existence.²²²

The imagination, then, does not copy objects, but rather builds upon them or abstracts them so that they appear "like a new existence" to the very same mind that was responsible for their transformation. The imagination is a process for making unique, via internal effects, objects that otherwise might have been merely identical to external likenesses.

It is certainly the case that Brontë was familiar with Wordsworth's definition of imagination, if not in the context of the preface to the 1815 edition of his *Poems*, then through its reprinting in other works, including Allan's *Life of Sir*

²²² This definition of the imagination appears in the preface of Wordsworth's 1815 edition of *Poems*. I've presented it as it appears quoted on page 172 of George Allan's *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Thomas Ireland, Junior, 1834), the same edition owned and extensively annotated in what appears to be Charlotte Brontë's hand, bb90, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England.

Walter Scott (which Charlotte seems to have read carefully and to have annotated rather aggressively).²²³ Brontë often characterized her own imagination as needing to be held in check; she feared losing sight of recognizable “external objects” in favor of her own idiosyncratic inventions. Such anxieties are evident in her draft letter to Hartley Coleridge, in which Brontë ruefully writes of her Angrian creations: “The ideal and the actual are no longer distinct notions in your mind but amalgamate in an interesting medley from whence result looks, thoughts and manners bordering on the idiotic” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 236).

If Wordsworth’s imagination is a series of operations and processes, then Brontë’s is not unlike a rebellious colony that has run amok. While Wordsworth’s “inward eye” (to which Brontë refers in her 10 December 1840 letter to Coleridge) focuses on the effects of daffodils, the subjects of Brontë’s “eye,” at this stage, have no recognizable counterpart in nature. In Brontë’s letter to Coleridge, she concludes that she must “produce something which shall at least aim at an object of some kind” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 240). This statement is ironic when taking into consideration that Brontë’s Angrian writing gravitates toward objects: the materials of publishing culture and the commercial products generated by the imaginations of other artists instead of “other” kinds of lived experiences that would signify as “real.” Just as Brontë saw landscapes through the patterns of print technology, her early writing openly adopts the paratexts and particularities of

²²³ See footnote above regarding Allan. In 1846, Brontë requested that her and her sisters’ poems be “printed in 1 octavo volume of the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon’s last edition of Wordsworth” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 449). Moxon’s 1845 edition does not, however, contain this preface. Brontë had read earlier volumes of Wordsworth, as she recommended Wordsworth’s poems in an 1834 letter written to Ellen Nussey (*Letters*, vol. 1, 130).

publishing. But she came to liken these works as “the grotesque things carved by a besotted pagan for his temple” and to the “chiselled features” and “blind, marble eyes” of Pygmalion’s statue beginning to be kindled up with “life” (ibid.). (Indeed, one is reminded of St. John’s own static, marble-like features.) As with her meticulously copied drawings and paintings, Brontë’s early imagination tended to move, like Pygmalion, from art to nature, instead of from nature to art.

If Brontë made an art of imitating art, she also made spontaneous free sketches that seem to represent, if anything, whimsical, imaginary beings. Even as she rigorously and meticulously reproduced, line by line and dot by dot, images created by professional artists and engravers, the reverse sides of some of her pictures depict chaotic and riotous renderings of exotic and demonic scenes conveying scenes of anger, terror, despair, revenge, whimsy, mystery, and obsession. Here, like a “besotted pagan,” Brontë worshipped her own gods, both lovely and “grotesque.”

For example, the back of Brontë’s drawing exercise, “Boy and Dog” (BPM C5; Alexander nos 16 and 17), contains a riotous group of sketches mocking the copied exercise that appears on the more presentable front side of the sheet (see Figure 13). The boy’s head has been faithfully studied and copied by Brontë, but then given, either by herself or Branwell, a beard and the outline of a buxom woman. The figure is being attacked by a turbaned soldier with a sword. This scene is itself accompanied by another one of figures kneeling on their knees before a huge, horned, demonic face, worshipped by a priest at a smoking altar. Other

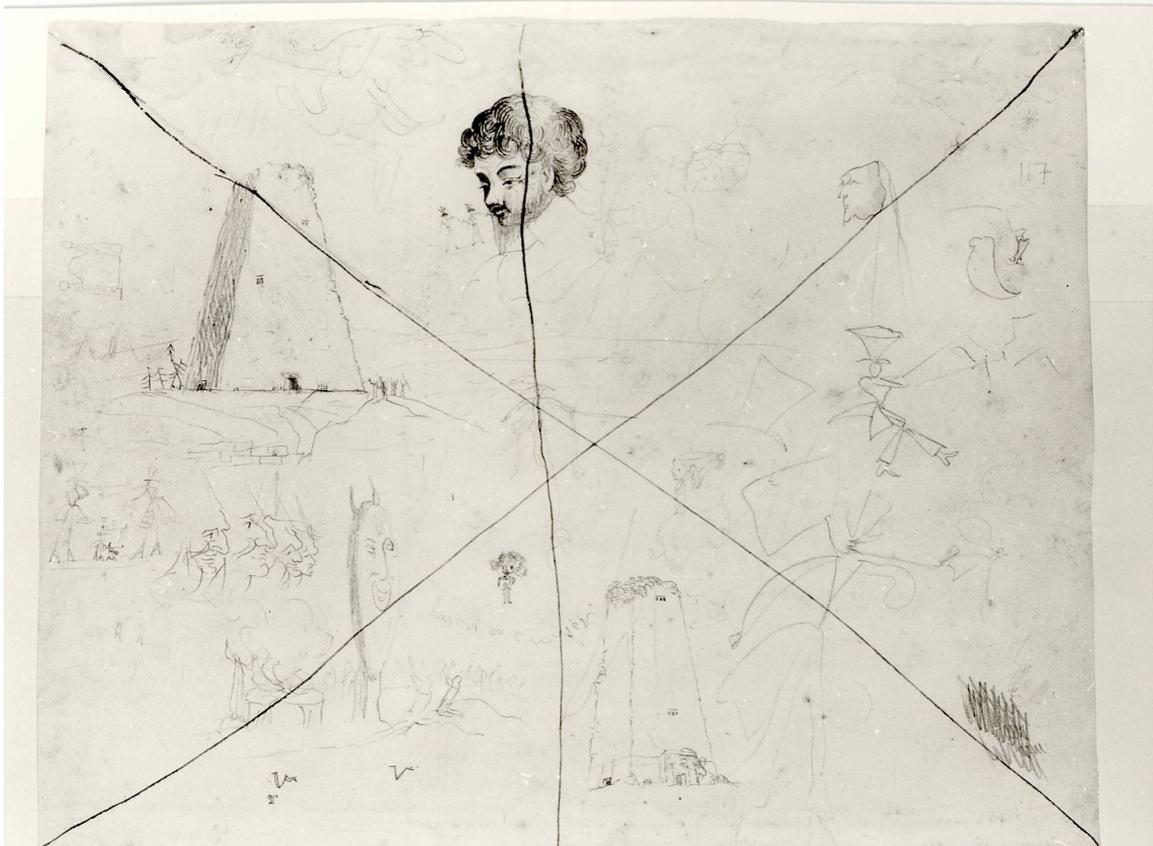


Figure 13: Reverse side of Brontë's "Boy and Dog"; pencil on paper, c. 18 May 1829; unsigned.

BPM C5v, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England. Image provided courtesy of the Brontë Society.

drawings include two scenes of a tall, narrow temple, one with figures brandishing spears at its base. We also find a row of four grotesque faces, and a phrase in pencil: "Baron De Cuvier"; a sketch of a damsel in a pointed hat and wimple; and numerous light sketches of soldiers in pencil. A large asterisk (or X with a line

through its cross) made in brown ink “cancels” the whole scene, but, in fact, does very little to censor its images.²²⁴

A number of other studies by Brontë have similar sketches on their reverse sides, providing additional evidence of the kinds of the free sketching that she and Branwell engaged in.²²⁵ For instance, the reverse side of “A Fancy Piece” (BPM



Figure 14: Reverse side of Brontë’s sketch, “A Fancy Piece”; pencil on paper, c. 1829; unsigned.

BPM C6v, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England. Image provided courtesy of the Brontë Society.

²²⁴ Although Christine Alexander attributes the image to Brontë, it is unclear whether Charlotte was responsible for all of the sketches on the reverse of “Boy and Dog.” Alexander suggests that Branwell might have added the beard and been responsible for the tiny figure of Baron De Cuvier, owing to the fact that the name “Cuvier” appears at the end of Branwell’s “Collection of Poems by Young Soult the Rhymer” (163).

²²⁵ See, for instance, “Seascape” (BPM C3.5)/“Cormorant on rocky coast” (Alexander 14), and “A Fancy Piece” (BPM C6; Alexander 19). Although Christine Alexander attributes the majority of the drawings on the backs of these drawings to Branwell, other subject matter (e.g., a devil’s head and the beginnings of a fence or balustrade) recurs in images she identifies as being made by Brontë, such as those on the verso of “Aristocratic Gentleman” (BPM B34; c. 1833–4; unfinished watercolor), otherwise known as “Alexander Percy” (no. 105 in Alexander).

C6v; Alexander 197) features a creature (perhaps a soldier?) in boots, trousers, and a tailed coat, with its arms and head on backwards (see Figure 14). The head, with its lurid, animal-like face and long nose, smokes a pipe and wears an exotic, eastern-inspired headdress not unlike the exotic cap on the reverse of Brontë's painting, "Tower on a Hill" (BPM C68). This large figure is surrounded by numerous faint sketches of various scenes. In one, a French soldier approaches a house with children and a woman in its yard; in another, there is a house and fence, and a woman and a man in the yard (the man is wearing what appears to be a turban with a plume). In yet another scene, a soldier stands at the summit of a crag with a flag in his arms, followed by another climbing soldier. A bird-like soldier, with chicken feet, wings, and a bizarre head, appears under a long row of smoking buildings; below him is a large mansion surrounded by a fence; and, adjacent to that, a crude sketch of a hand adorned with four rings clutching air.

Another notable example is "Seascape"/"Cormorant on rocky coast" (BPM C3.5/Alexander 14), Brontë's untitled copy of the tailpiece vignette facing Bewick's "Great Black Cormorant" in his *British Birds*.²²⁶ Brontë's interpretation of the vignette is executed with careful attention to the line work of the wood-engraving upon which it is modeled. The reverse side, however, reveals a tangle of figures engaged in battle (see Figure 15). Who drew the tall, haughty soldier (a figure

²²⁶ For Bewick's image, see pages 378 and 379, respectively, in the sixth edition of the second volume of *A History of British Birds, Vol. II, Containing the History and Description of Water Birds* (Newcastle: Printed by Edw. Walker, Pilgrim-Street, for T. Bewick; sold by him, Longman and Co. London, and all Booksellers, 1826). Text by Ralph Beilby, amended by Bewick. (Reference copy here: NYPL copy QL 690 .G7 B57 1826.) While Brontë's copy from Bewick is signed and dated 24 January 1829, she did not title it, hence the two titles "Seascape" (BPM catalogue) or "Cormorant on Rocky Coast" (in Alexander).



Figure 15: Reverse side of “Seascape” (BPM catalogue)/“Cormorant on Rocky Coast” (Alexander); pencil on paper, c. 1829; unsigned.

BPM C3.5v, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England. Image provided courtesy of the Brontë Society.

resembling Napoleon), positioned far left, hand on hip, observing with coolness the onslaught of crude, ogre-like creatures? Again, it is unclear whether Charlotte or Branwell made the sketches.²²⁷ But the image itself is evocative of the kinds of narrative combat that Charlotte and Branwell engaged in whilst collaboratively developing their Angria saga. The bizarre, violent images on the reverse of Brontë’s careful study remind one of origin of the Brontë children’s storytelling—that is, the

²²⁷ Christine Alexander attributes the whole to Branwell, given that the script in the upper lefthand corner is in his hand (*Art* 198).

toy soldiers that initiated the plays that eventually gave rise to the Glass Town and Gondal sagas.²²⁸

If these surviving sketches reveal anything, however, it is the contrast between the practice of copying and that of invention. While the “public” sides of these images attempt to master technique in order to resemble, as best as possible, the images they reproduce, the reverse sides are nothing of the sort: their makers would seem to have rejoiced in cacophony, defying the grammar of representation that they routinely practiced—preferring the rapidity and energy of stick figures to more considered renderings. The crude lines convey a simple freedom and robustness that has its own advantages, such as the irony employed in Brontë’s more well-known depiction of herself bidding farewell to Ellen Nussey—a pen sketch made by Brontë in 1843 featuring a coarse and elementary image of her own figure, in contrast to a more agreeable and tasteful treatment of Ellen.²²⁹ Brontë’s stylistic presentation here is akin to Jane’s own strategy, when she chooses charcoal and paper for the creation of her own self portrait, as opposed to the watercolors and ivory that are selected for that of Blanche.

So, too, Brontë’s artworks experiment with popular images, and their ability to be individuated through sketching. Brontë’s watercolor and pencil drawing, “King of Angria, Duke of Zamorna,” is a half-length portrait styled much on mass-

²²⁸ See the manuscript commonly referred to as “The History of the Year,” BPM Bonnell80(11), which was first transcribed by Elizabeth Gaskell (*Life* 69).

²²⁹ See “Good-bye” (ink on paper, 6 March 1843) in *The Art of the Brontës*, Alexander no. 159 (261).

produced portraits Byron (see Figure 16).²³⁰ The figure has been adapted for apparently Angrian purposes: Zamorna appears in full military dress, wearing a high-collared black velvet uniform and a black hat with a large black plume. The background of the portrait is overbrimming with symbols and words that are sketched very faintly in pencil. The icons in the picture include a crown and scepter, a sword hilt, an ink pot and quill, an artists' easel, a lyre, a serpent, and a stone tower. Meanwhile, the lines of text read “King of Angria, Duke of Zamorna & Marquis of Douro’ (along the top right corner and down the right edge); ‘Field Marshall the most noble’ (along bottom left edge); and some French phrases: ‘conquérant [sic] des cœurs et des couronnes’ (written in around the right shoulder), ‘Vainque[u]r des fils et des femmes’ (along the right side between portrait and first inscription)” (Alexander and Sellars 225–26). These additions in pencil are all emblematic of military and artistic power, over which Zamorna, as head of state, is master. As such, they call attention to the symbolic function of language and image alike, particularly its ability both to create and destroy.

The portrait adapts a commercial image, making it individual and infusing it with something like totemic power. The skeletal, unfinished quality of the pencil-work is specific to the medium of drawing itself, not print, and suggests plans for a world of ideas on the verge of taking shape, fueled by the mental activity of the head they surround. Unlike the printed images of landscapes that Brontë regularly

²³⁰ Although the stylized figure of Zamorna strongly resembles Byron and is clearly inspired by images of him (and of the kind that Brontë later distanced herself from), the figure is not directly copied from any known portrait of him (as was Brontë's portrait entitled “Alexander Sout”). See Alexander and Sellars (*Art* 218).



Figure 16: Brontë's watercolor sketch, "King of Angria, Duke of Zamorna" (c. 1834), which is held in the private collection of Mrs. Eleanore Lang, Dundas, Ontario, Canada.

Image borrowed from the Brontë Parsonage Blog, Haworth, England.

copied as a student, there is an attempt here to particularize an image through language, to fuse the medium of painting with writing, to bridge portraiture with the written representation of concepts, wishes, and desires. This artwork, perhaps, is the most compelling evidence of Brontë's literal attempt to "*draw* stories," as recounted by Elizabeth Gaskell.²³¹ We may look to *Jane Eyre* for examples of the inverse to this method—that is, Brontë's ability to write pictures.

4. "Flesh and blood": *Jane Eyre's* Narrative Art

When Smith, Elder prepared to publish a third edition of *Jane Eyre* in 1848, W. S. Williams wrote to Brontë to inquire whether she would be willing to create illustrations for the novel. In response, Brontë sent a lengthy reply to Williams discussing the relative merits and demerits of illustrated novels (in particular, praising Thackeray's gift as a draughtsman), as well as an analysis of her own limitations as an artist:

I have not the skill you attribute to me. It is not enough to have the artist's eye; one must also have the artist's hand to turn the first gift to practical account. I have, in my day, wasted a certain quantity of Bristol boards and drawing-paper, crayons and cakes of colour, but when I examine the contents of my portfolio now, it seems as if during the years it has been lying closed, some fairy had changed what I had once thought sterling coin into dry leaves, and I feel much

²³¹ Elizabeth Gaskell writes that Brontë "wanted to learn how to express her ideas by drawing. After she had tried to *draw* stories, and not succeeded, she took the better mode of writing" (439).

inclined to consign the whole collection of drawings to the fire; I see they have no value. (*Letters*, vol. 2, 41)

Brontë's response here is not unlike one found in another of her letters, written to Henry Nussey in 1841, in which she dismisses her earlier practice of writing poetry:

Once indeed I was very poetical, when I was sixteen, seventeen eighteen and nineteen years old—but I am now twenty-four approaching twenty-five—and the intermediate years are those which begin to rob life of some of its superfluous colouring. At this age it is time that the imagination should be pruned and trimmed—that the judgment should be cultivated—and a few at least, of the countless illusions of early youth should be cleared away. I have not written poetry for a long while. (*Letters*, vol. 1, 245)

We see in these two quotations the contest between fancy, in all of its “superfluous colouring,” and common sense. Common sense seems to triumph. Nevertheless, although Brontë professes that she cannot earn a living from her artwork or poems, she went on to publish a book of her and her sisters' poetry; her heroines, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, paint and draw; and, even as she will later, in a letter to Henry Lewes, claim to reject “romance” and “over-bright colouring” in favor of “soft, grave and true” work, she will also defend “Imagination” and all its “bright pictures” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 559).

In her letter to Nussey, imagination is dismissed as an “illusion,” but it is also a thing of nature: a native botanical, one that, like a wild and unruly shrub or tree, might be “pruned and trimmed” and “cleared away” to give space for the “cultivation” of judgment. The sense here is that imagination is neither a mere “copy” nor an “empty form,” but something just as natural—perhaps even more natural—than the cultivar of reason/realism. And in her letter to Lewes, imagination “shews [...] bright pictures” that are not reproductions, but are, like those things of nature, substantial enough to represent in themselves.

The imagination, then, is no fleeting illusion, nor the product of artifice, but a substantial, natural thing that can be represented. But how? Brontë insisted on words alone in *Jane Eyre*. Smith, Elder might easily have hired an artist to illustrate the novel. Indeed, Brontë anticipated this possibility and, in her 11 March reply to Williams, she preemptively rejects the idea, claiming that such illustrations are well suited for the likes of popular and handsome heroes and heroines:

If then ‘Jane Eyre’ is ever to be illustrated, it must be by some other hand than that of its author. But I hope no one will be at the trouble to make portraits of my characters: Bulwer- and Byron-heroes and heroines are very well—they are all of them handsome—; but my personages are mostly unattractive in look and therefore ill-adapted to figure in ideal portraits—At best, I have always thought such representations futile. (*Letters*, vol. 2, 41)

Although Brontë had once copied portraits of “ideal” beauties from annuals, gift books, and suchlike, we know, from Harriet Martineau’s obituary for Brontë, that Charlotte eventually came to believe that her sisters and other writers “were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course” (*Daily News* 5).

Jane Eyre is no *Vanity Fair*. The latter blatantly flaunts and satirizes stereotypes associated with mainstream novels, while *Jane Eyre* incorporates them. In an 1848 review published in *The Christian Remembrancer*, one contemporary critic cautions, “Let her take care that while she detects and exposes humbug in other minds, she does not suffer it to gain dominion in her own” (collected in Allott, 88). We find evidence of the “humbug” of such standard works reflected in *Jane Eyre*’s cast of characters, who include inferior, would-be heroines who serve to distinguish Jane Eyre as unique. Indeed, Brontë’s mature work aggressively situates itself not outside of, but within a hierarchy of representation that includes, along with an “original” character, such as Jane, a series of inferior, standard “types,” ranging from Brocklehurst to St. John (as noted by Lewes), including aspects of Rochester’s character. Jane is valued by her readers precisely because she is *not* Blanche, *not* Georgiana, *not* Rosamond—nor like any other prototypical heroine. (That she would later become such a model herself is another matter, and one treated in the epilogue of this study.)

A beautiful subject such as Blanche would display well in the same kind of “ideal portraits” that Brontë dismisses in her letter to Williams, whereas Jane

Eyre's self-portrait, very clearly taken from life, is likened to a punishment:

“Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully; without softening one defect: omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, “Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain”” (201). That Jane's portrait of Blanche is drawn from a description provided by Mrs. Fairfax underscores not only Jane's powers of listening and artistic execution, but also a generic quality underlying perfection itself: we have seen Blanche's kind of beauty before; Jane can draw it, precisely because it is ideal, whereas her own likeness, in its irregularity, must be taken from life.

When comparing the two portraits, Jane appraises herself dismissively, as though she were a picture that no one would wish to publish or purchase. At the same time, this means of comparison indirectly emphasizes Jane's originality—a character sketched from nature and one whom we have never seen before, instead of a standard type. Jane's ability to draw from nature also suggests an ability to represent the truth of her own circumstances. Such life-like portraiture is treated by Jane as a kind of mirror, reflecting the reality of her person and circumstances; but the portrait is decidedly deficient, in that it fails to represent Jane's very real power to attract Rochester. Prosaically, one might argue, as Jane later does, that “beauty is in the eye of the gazer” (218). Yet Rochester's fascination with Jane seems to be kindled as much by her resistance to affected self-display as Blanche's prodigious propensity for it increases his disgust. Indeed, if beauty is something

suitable for display, finished or perfect, akin to Jane's painting of Blanche on ivory, then Jane's portrait in chalk suggests its opposite: an image that is still being formed—one that has the capability of yet being modified.

Karen Chase has characterized Jane Eyre as “evanescent, immaterial, a fragrance, an essence, a soul that remains always apart from its incarnations.” As Chase observes, “Rochester can no more grasp her than the succession of attributes can define her” (*Eros & Psyche* 75). Indeed, Rochester describes Jane as “full of strange contrasts” (400), a determination supported by the long train of comparisons that he assigns her:

“nonnette” (160), “little girl” (166), “Neophyte” (167), “sententious sage” (169), “curious sort of bird” (171), “vivid, restless, resolute captive” (171), “young lady” (176), “quaint, inexperienced girl” (176), “witch” (184), “sorceress” (184), “no talking fool” (186), “cherished preserver” (187), “little friend” (255, 272, 273, 275), “pet lamb” (271), “simpleton” (272), “little niggard” (282), “dream or shade” (306), “elf” (307, 399), “truant” (307), “fairy” (307, 559), “child” (314), “dependant” (315), “wild, frantic bird” (318), “second self” (319), “best earthly companion” (319), “my equal” (319), “my likeness” (319), “little sceptic” (320), “strange [...] unearthly thing” (320), “little wife” (321), “darling” (322), “pale, little elf” (325), “Mustard-Seed” (325), “little sunny-faced girl” (325), “angel” (327), “comforter” (327, 405), “mere sprite”/“sprite” (330, 345),

“salamander” (330), “fire-spirit” (330), “good little girl” (331), “little English girl” (339), “little tyrant” (341), “bonny wee thing” (341), “capricious witch” (341), “little bungler” (342), “hard little thing” (344), “provoking puppet” (345), “malicious elf” (345), “changeling” (345, 561), “mermaid” (351), “eel” (351), “briar rose” (351), “stray lamb” (351), “witch” (355), “little nervous subject” (356), “treasure” (359, 570), “lingerer” (362), “lily” (362), “little darling” (384), “dove” (395), “eager bird” (396), “arbitress of my life” (398), “my genius” (398), “childish and slender creature” (398), “linnet” (398), “no transitory blossom” (400), “indestructible gem” (400), “my sympathy” (402), “my better self” (402), “my good angel” (402), “a mere reed” (405), “resolute, wild, free thing” (405), “savage, beautiful creature” (405), “spirit” (405), “rescuer” (405), “my hope” (405), “my love” (405), “my life” (405), “living darling” (555), “gentle, soft dream” (555), “beneficent spirit” (560), “sky-lark” (562), “cruel deserter” (563).

If truth can, in fact, be represented, it must be as mobile, indeterminate, and flexible as Jane herself—as pliant as a “mere reed” and as “indestructible” as a gem; both a “simpleton” and a “genius”; a “rescuer” and a “deserter”; an “angel” and a “witch”; a “good little girl” and a “savage, beautiful creature.” Rochester’s attempts to name Jane—including the titles he gives her: Janet, Jane Rochester, and Mrs Rochester—are as vexed as his attempt to hold on to her when she decides

to leave him. As Rochester finally addresses her, it is “you, spirit [...] that I want: not alone your brittle frame” (405). Whether through her attention to the individual dots that constitute an image, or to the shifting names by which Jane is called, Brontë’s writing emphasizes the acts of mark-making and of naming themselves, without disrupting the integrity or realism of its subjects. Reality does not exist as a summary of parts, but as the process itself of assembling those parts. This helps to explain Brontë’s own attraction to William Thackeray’s skill as an illustrator, which she characterizes as an ability to convey real, nuanced character through the sparsest of details, mere “lines and dots”: “You will not easily find a second Thackeray. How he can render with a few black lines and dots, shades of expression so fine, so real; traits of character so minute, so subtle, so difficult to seize and fix—I cannot tell; I can only wonder and admire [...]. All is true in Thackeray: if Truth were again a Goddess, Thackeray should be her high-priest” (*Letters*, vol. 2, 41). It is precisely Brontë’s inability to “seize and fix” upon the character traits in Thackeray’s drawings that makes them most attractive to her.

In a later letter to Williams, Brontë contrasts Thackeray’s “refreshing” drawings with the “wooden limbs” of “common-place illustrators”: “Thackeray may not be a painter, but he is a wizard of a draughtsman; touched with his pencil, paper lives. And then his drawing is so refreshing; after the wooden limbs, one is accustomed to see portrayed by common-place illustrators, his shapes of bone and muscle, clothed with flesh, correct in proportion and anatomy, are a real

relief" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 41). Moreover, such "wooden" illustrations are relished only by wooden people. Thackeray himself presents us with such a view in *The Paris Sketch-Book* (1840), in which he derides the contents of the "standard 'Album'":

that unfortunate collection of deformed Zuleikas and Medoras (from the Byron Beauties, the Flowers, Gems, Souvenirs, Casquets of Loveliness, Beauty, as they may be called); glaring caricatures of flowers, singly, in groups, in flower-pots, or with hideous deformed little Cupids sporting among them; of what are called 'mezzotinto' pencil drawings, 'poonah-paintings,' and what not [...]. "The Album" is to be found invariably upon the round rosewood brass-inlaid drawing-room table of the middle classes, and with a couple of "Annuals" besides, which flank it on the same table, represents the art of the house; perhaps there is a portrait of the master of the house in the dining-room, grim-glancing from above the mantel-piece; and of the mistress over the piano upstairs; add to these some odious miniatures of the sons and daughters, on each side of the chimney-glass; and here, commonly [...] the collection ends. (5–6)

Thackeray's disgust with the pretension of such images is equalled by the hollow, self-display of their over-anxious, class-conscious owners.

Like Thackeray, Brontë was troubled by the poor workmanship and vapidness of popular illustrations. Her choice to have her work unillustrated seems to have reflected her own developing aesthetic: Brontë turned her writerly gaze from the

popular, derivative images that she had once copied (and seems to have admired) to local landscapes and to subjects characterized by their plainness, while simultaneously retaining likenesses of superficial beauties for the contrast they afforded.

Words were also thought to be better suited to conveying emotions than images. For instance, Brontë would have read the following in Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*: "Of all the means which human ingenuity has contrived for recalling the images of real objects, and awakening by representation, similar emotions to those which are raised by the original, none is so full and extensive as that which is executed by words and writing" (vol. 3, 118).²³² Writing, Blair argues, is superior to drawing and painting, precisely because it can describe that which cannot be seen: "the Painter being entirely confined [...] can only exhibit objects as they appear to the eye, and can very imperfectly delineate characters and sentiments, which are the noblest subjects of Imitation or Description. The power of representing these with full advantage, gives a high superiority to Discourse and Writing above all other imitative arts" (vol. 3, 120).

If Brontë could be said to have "painted" with words, her subjects were both exterior and internal landscapes. Such is the analogy that Lewes uses when he writes approvingly of *Jane Eyre*: "the aspects of external nature [...] the bright spring mornings,—the clear solemn nights,—were all painted to your soul as well as to your eye, by a pencil dipped into a soul's experience for its colours" ("Shirley")

²³² Brontë read Blair at Roe Head. Gaskell writes that Brontë was given "a great quantity of Blair's 'Lectures on Belles Lettres' to read" (85).

158). But Brontë's writing also exploits the porousness of language, concealing truths while seeming to reveal them, just as the first person narration of *Jane Eyre* itself suggests confinement and limitation. If we think of illustration as a means of clarifying ambiguities or of exemplifying standard types of meanings, per its Latin origin, *inlustrō* ("to light up" or "to disclose" or "explain"), the great power of Brontë's writing is its flexibility and open incompleteness.

Within the confines of its first-person narrative, *Jane Eyre* thrives on a protean capacity for disguise and reinvention. It is not just that Rochester cross-dresses as a gypsy, and that Jane later travels under an assumed name. At one point, Jane describes herself with "green eyes," but only after she reports Rochester calling them "hazel" (325). (How would this be rendered as an image?) It is precisely because Brontë denies us a graphical representation of her narrative that we must rely on Jane's version of the truth, just as Rochester eventually does when he is blind. This effect is later fully exploited in *Villette*, when Lucy Snowe withholds both the full identity of John Graham Bretton from her readers and her own identity from him long after she has recognized him. Thus, Brontë's writing emphasizes the ability of language not just to define but also to limit one's access to knowledge. If Jane suffers at the hands of her various masters, then we realize, as we read *Jane Eyre*, that we are entirely in Jane's hands (and those of Currer Bell). Just as Jane neglects to inform Rochester that she has a living uncle (who will, indeed, "interfere" in their marriage), we cannot see what she does not choose to reveal.

Many scholars have commented on and interpreted the significance of Jane Eyre's artwork, and some have studied Jane's pictures within the context of Brontë's own work as an amateur painter. In her essay, "Educating 'The Artist's Eye,'" Christine Alexander documents Brontë's education as an artist, and concludes that, in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë sought to convey "imaginative truth that may not always reproduce the physical world, as is the case of Jane's surreal pictures, which capture a psychological reality" (29). Juliette Wells argues that Jane, unlike Brontë, "never aspires to greatness in art, and in many ways her practice of drawing seems to sit comfortably within the category of feminine accomplishment." She finds that Jane's "artworks [...] may demonstrate her unusual level of artistic skill and imagination, but their function in the novel as a whole is primarily to advance Brontë's romance plot" (*Brontës* 79–80).

These readings, as useful as they are, especially for understanding how accomplishments, such as painting, help establish Jane's "genteel status" (69), do not reckon with the central concern of this chapter, whose focus has been on painting as an analogy for writing. So far, I have attempted to show how the concept of painting "from life" or "from nature" served as a means of comparison for Brontë and literary critics alike to differentiate between original and imitative writing. Rochester's discussion with Jane about these artworks indirectly engages this discourse, thus more broadly informing Jane's credibility as a narrator and also the status of *Jane Eyre* itself as a work of serious literature. If Brontë (operating under the pseudonym of Currer Bell) is likened to an "artist who

embodies his [sic] imaginings in a touch” by contemporary reviewers,²³³ Jane herself represents that very kind of artist—one proficient in painting both from life and from the imagination. Jane’s imaginative paintings not only arrest Rochester’s attention, but serve to distinguish Jane from other school girls. Her lifelike landscapes and portraits secure the approval even of her former enemies, Georgiana and Eliza. Jane’s extraordinary skill at reproducing images would seem only to reinforce the reliability of her narrative, whose convincing, painterly descriptions emphasize Jane’s powers of observation. Indeed, it is tempting to think of Jane’s art as a magic mirror—one whose smooth surface reflects a truth that can be read at face value, or, at least, if studied long enough, that can reveal someone’s character, much in the way that Jane uses phrenology to decipher the personalities of those around her. In addition, Jane’s portrayal as a skillful artist has implications for *Jane Eyre*—a novel written by an unknown author who had to establish credibility with readers and critics. By employing the language of painting in *Jane Eyre*, Currer Bell indirectly displays his own developed knowledge of art.²³⁴

Yet, painting also has its limitations as a medium in *Jane Eyre*. It is precisely the lifelike, seemingly objective quality of portraiture that can be most

²³³ Quotation taken from the 14 November 1846 issue of the *Era* (9). See discussion above.

²³⁴ Not all critics were persuaded that Currer Bell had special knowledge of art. In her famous review of *Jane Eyre* for the *Quarterly Review*, Elizabeth Rigby writes: “And if by no woman, it is certainly also by no artist. The Thackeray eye has had no part there. There is not more disparity between the art of drawing Jane assumes and her evident total ignorance of its first principles, than between the report she gives of her own character and the conclusions we form ourselves. Not but what, in another sense, the author may be classed as an artist of a very high grade. Let him describe the simplest things in nature—a rainy landscape, a cloudy day, or a bare moorside, and he shows the hand of a master; but the moment he talks of the art itself, it is obvious that he is a complete ignoramus” (176).

misleading, for no artist and no viewer is an impartial interpreter of experience, however “accurate” the images they create or study. If Locke’s conception of the mind turns on the concept of art as a magic mirror, whereby, as Bermingham summarizes, “representations are such true and clear images of things that they are equivalent to the things themselves” (72), Jane’s ability to reproduce life-like images of her companions (Blanche Ingram, for example) would also indicate a mastery of understanding. The ability to receive and represent a likeness accurately should be an indicator of detached, impartial judgment.

Jane has an almost preternatural ability to anticipate visually (on paper or in her mind) what others will look like. More than any gipsy, at times she seems to see the future. Upon receiving and reading a reply to her advertisement, Jane muses to herself: “Mrs. Fairfax! I saw her in a black gown and widow’s cap; frigid, perhaps, but not uncivil: a model of elderly English respectability. Thornfield! that, doubtless, was the name of her house: a neat, orderly spot, I was sure” (105). Jane’s prediction is confirmed when she arrives and finds Mrs. Fairfax “exactly like what I had fancied Mrs. Fairfax, only less stately and milder-looking” (115). However, this clear vision is undercut by an embarrassing blindness: upon her arrival, Jane mistakenly believes Mrs. Fairfax to be the owner of Thornfield Hall.

The pattern is repeated when Mrs. Fairfax describes, in great detail, Blanche Ingram’s beauty. Jane uses the information to paint a portrait of Blanche, and when we finally meet her, we are not surprised to learn from Jane that, “As far as person went, she answered point for point, both to my picture and Mrs. Fairfax’s

description” (215). But here again comes the intrusion of misinterpretation: the portrait is created out of a strong, self-censuring reaction to a mistaken inference. Jane, upon hearing of Blanche’s beauty and accomplishments, immediately assumes that Rochester wants to marry her. Despite the fact that Mrs. Fairfax (who is not as slow as Jane makes her out to be) tells Jane that she can “scarcely fancy Mr. Rochester would entertain an idea of the sort,” Jane fixes on the idea in her head: “When once more alone, I reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavoured to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense” (200). Indeed, Jane’s “imagination” has led her astray, but not in the way she believes. The irony is that what Jane calls “imagination” in this context—the “thoughts and feelings” of the heart (i.e., her growing attachment with Rochester)—makes sense, and what she refers to as the “strict hand” of “common sense” is, in fact, a flight of imaginative fancy. She correctly looks into and reads her heart, even as she willfully misreads Rochester’s. It is striking, too, that Jane’s faulty “common sense” is characterized in the same language as that of her autobiography, which so often remarks on its endeavor to tell “plain truth”: “Reason having come forward and told in her own quiet way, a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real and rabidly devoured the ideal;—I pronounced judgment to this effect:—That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies” (200–01). Jane’s romance is

incredible even to herself; and, although some of its foundations are shaky (i.e., Rochester's market-driven dissipation), the feelings are real, and it is the "plain, unvarnished tale" that she tells herself which is the delusion. Jane berates herself in harsh, unforgiving terms: "Poor stupid dupe!—Could not even self-interest make you wiser? You repeated to yourself this morning the brief scene of last night?—Cover your face and be ashamed! He said something in praise of your eyes, did he? Blind puppy! Open their bleared lids and look on your own accursed senselessness!" (201).

Jane is the dupe—but the dupe of the overly "moderate," "correct" style of storytelling that she has acquired. Interpreting Mrs Fairfax's story thus, Jane furnishes for it the proper illustrations, and, in doing so, follows the tastes of the most general and popular of audiences: one that favors luxury and ideal beauty over the realistic representation of an irregular figure, however original. Jane's "strict hand" of "common sense" proceeds to execute faithfully her own portrait in chalk without "softening one defect" or omitting a "harsh line"; for her own likeness, Jane smoothes away "no displeasing irregularities." She chooses for Blanche's ideal portrait "a piece of smooth ivory" and paint of the "freshest, finest, clearest tints" (201). Jane notes: "Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them" (202). We understand that we are to interpret these images through the eyes of a conventional reader, choosing Blanche over Jane for her beauty and birth.

Of course, we are indirectly encouraged to read against that comparison by realizing how impoverished and emotionally shallow are such popular readings.

If Brontë's heroines were "ill-adapted to figure in ideal portraits," the portrait of Blanche would seem to suggest the deceptively alluring qualities of fashionable ladies depicted in popular publications that Brontë had once copied. In *The Art of the Brontës*, Alexander likens Blanche's portrait, her "raven ringlets, "Grecian neck and bust," "round and dazzling arm," to the ideal portraits that Brontë would have encountered in Finden's *Byron Beauties* and the annuals she copied from (25). This, however, is clearly a negative association for Brontë. The commodification of Byron is only underscored when Blanche launches affectedly into song: "Here then is a Corsair-song. Know that I doat on Corsairs; and for that reason, sing it "con spirito"" (225). Blanche's beauty reflects the very kinds of mass-market, "ideal" images that Brontë rejects as illustrations for *Jane Eyre*.

We receive an unblotted image of perfected beauty later in the novel in the person of Rosamond Oliver. Of Rosamond, Jane writes: "Perfect beauty is a strong expression; but I do not retract or qualify it: as sweet features as ever the temperate clime of Albion moulded; as pure hues of rose and lily as ever her humid gales and vapoury skies generated and screened, justified, in this instance, the term" (463). Jane experiences "a thrill of the artist-delight at the idea of copying from so perfect and radiant a model" (471). And yet Rosamond's life also does not make for compelling subject matter; Jane's portrait of Rosamond serves as a kind of test of St. John's will and of our own narrative interest. She appears in the novel

only to fall quickly away. Why? Rosamond represents the kind of well-meaning heroine native to the sort of “delightful romance” that she imagines to be Jane’s “previous history” (470). We infer that Rosamond, like Georgiana, Eliza, and Blanche, is a product of her reading and constructs the world around her through its pages. Brontë, through St. John, rejects this type of romance, as she also rejects derivatives of the Byronic female through Rochester and Blanche. Jane Eyre claims for herself neither earnest perfection nor cynical self-satisfaction.

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, we are encouraged to read portraiture alongside character, and character alongside styles of reading. At the same time, Jane’s misreading (i.e., her persistent misunderstanding of Rochester’s feelings for Blanche) is central to our own reading of *Jane Eyre*: it preemptively anticipates any skepticism that we, as readers, might have with respect to Rochester’s preference for Jane. Jane’s underestimation of her own power, like her plainness, only heightens her credibility. By dismissing ideas of romance, Jane only makes her romance more believable—and, by extension, suggests that *Jane Eyre*, as a novel, is not simply gratifying the fanciful wishes and desires of its readers. Jane’s own resistance to self-display implies that we read *Jane Eyre* not for Jane Eyre herself (that is, as a prospective love interest), but for the sake of its own writing.

In his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, a work owned by the Brontë family and with which Charlotte was familiar, Edmund Burke argues that “power in poetry or painting is owing to the power of imitation and to no cause operating in the thing itself” (45). Thus,

through art, ordinary, unattractive subjects, such as a “cottage, a dunghill, the meanest and most ordinary utensils of the kitchen,” inspire pleasure. “But when the object of the painting or poem is such as we should run to see it if real, [...] we may rely upon it, that the power in the poem or picture is more owing to the nature of the thing itself than [...] the skill of the imitator, however excellent” (45).

Clearly, we are meant to read *Jane Eyre* not to admire the physical person of Jane Eyre, but for the work itself and the skill with which it is written. In an age of mechanical reproduction, one in which there is a proliferation of stereotyped images and copies, qualities of plainness and imperfection evoke a sense of literary and artistic authenticity. Like Thackeray, who preferred the “honest work of hand” and the “rough workmanship” of paintings and sketches to the “smooth copies” resulting from printing processes,²³⁵ *Jane Eyre* showcases the singular appeal of what is plain and irregular through its purportedly “plain tale with few pretensions.” Yet we also cannot escape print: in daily life, the self not only reads, but misreads—“editing” and “writing” life experiences in ways not unlike those in which we interpret other texts. To persuade others in such an environment, one must present a rhetorical construction that admits both the imperfect nature of perception and the artifice of art, without discrediting some remaining ability to convey truth through accurate representation. (Are we surprised that a “mad” woman resides upstairs?)

²³⁵ See chapter one, “Shaping Volumes.”

With this reading in mind, let us finally turn to the question of Jane's ability to represent her imagination through visual artworks. Both Alexander and Wells note that the three paintings that Rochester examines from Jane's portfolio demonstrate her abilities as an original, imaginative artist (Alexander 26–29; Wells *Brontës* 70). Rochester tells Jane that he will look at her portfolio, "if [she] can vouch for its contents being original," and warns her that he can recognize "patch-work" (152). Rochester's ability to recognize both the copies and the hands of other artists parallels his ability to read the characters of women, such as Blanche, whose carefully polished beauty and studied accomplishments are meant to conceal her inauthenticity and more mercenary motives. (Jane, on the other hand, does not flaunt her accomplishments; it is Adèle who initially shows Jane's portfolio to Rochester.) Rochester's preference for what is "original" over "patch-work" raises, through the analogy of painting, a question central not only to *Jane Eyre*, but the the endeavor of the nineteenth-century literary novelist: what distinguishes an authentic work from a mere copy? How do ideal forms relate to real subjects? What hand does a master artist play in the work of his successors?

At first, Rochester suspects that Jane's images are not original works:

"Where did you get your copies?"

"Out of my head."

"That head I see now on your shoulders?"

"Yes, sir."

“Has it other furniture of the same kind within?”

“I should think it may have: I should hope—better.” (ibid.)

Jane claims that the original sources of her paintings remains mysterious even to herself. At the same time, she does not deny that she has copied these images; the originals reside, as Jane says, in her head. Jane’s reply, which might be interpreted merely as a sarcastic quip, underscores an important concept: these imagined scenes are as “real” as any exterior landscape, but are far more difficult to represent. By extension, we are indirectly invited to scrutinize the authenticity of the work *Jane Eyre* itself. Is the novel we are reading the product of clever “patch-work” or recycling?

We cannot see Jane’s pictures, only read her verbal descriptions of them. Similarly, Jane’s paintings are but imperfect copies of complete things that she perceives using the faculty of her imagination. As Jane tells Rochester, “I was tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realize” (154). The artifacts themselves, we are told, “are nothing wonderful. The subjects had indeed risen vividly on my mind. As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived” (153). Here Jane characteristically undercuts her imagination (and claim to artistic mastery) with the voice of moderate common sense, even as Rochester deems them “strange,” “peculiar,” and “elfish” (154). Meanwhile, those reading *Jane Eyre*

may sense the remove of its words from the scenes and images it attempts to describe.

Jane's insufficiency to render her vision recalls ideas central to English Romanticism, and, later, the editing of texts. As Shelley writes in his "Defence of Poetry": "the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet" (quoted by Jerome J. McGann in *The Textual Condition*, 8). In the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf would write in a letter to Vita Sackville West: "But a novel, as I say, to be good should seem, before one writes it, something unwriteable but only visible [...]. I assure you, all my novels were first rate before they were written" (quoted by G. Thomas Tanselle in "Textual Instability and Editorial Idealism," 58–9). According to such views, texts and artworks can never in themselves be completely realized; "original" literary works are always themselves transcriptions or translations, never simply writing as writing.

Like the "Book of Nature," the imagined work is something beyond the self—something to be read, yet a more evasive kind of text. If we return to Rochester's exchange with Jane, his reply, "That head I see now on your shoulders?," emphasizes the paradox: Rochester can see Jane's physical head, but he cannot access its real, imagined contents, which Jane herself is incapable of adequately representing. Further, Jane does not know what other "furniture" her own mind holds. If we were to compare Jane's mind to a house, as Rochester does, it would be a mansion like Thornfield, containing secret rooms.

And yet, as evasive as it may be in terms of its representation, Jane's art is also indebted to the works of other masters. Even as Jane presents herself as an original artist (she tells us that the copies come "out of my head" and of "the thing I had conceived"), we can liken the setting of the last of her watercolors, described as an "iceberg piercing a polar winter sky" (154), to Bewick's "firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters" (5).²³⁶ And describing the painting, Jane refers to lines from *Paradise Lost*: "This pale crescent was 'The likeness of a Kingly Crown'; what it diademed was 'the shape which shape had none'" (ibid.). We hear a transforming echo, not a repetition, of Milton's paradoxical language from book two, where Satan encounters Death. Just as those paintings from nature require practiced "touches" made from ideal copies, here Jane draws on the work of Milton, whose language provides the finishing touch, not of the master painter, but of the master author. The effect is akin to a palimpsest, Miltonic text overlaying Jane's text—yet it also suggests anxiety, the repetition of the word "shape" itself giving shape even as it presents a Satanic double, a copy that evacuates the meaning of the first "shape." Who is the "original" author of this painting, this description?

We question the ontological status of *Jane Eyre* itself: Rochester might not be able to read Jane's mind, but he can (at least for most of the novel) "see" Jane, while we, as readers, cannot see her, nor her paintings, though they are minutely described. We are left with words alone, signs which must substitute for originals,

²³⁶ Christine Alexander has also noted this parallel with Bewick. See Alexander's "Educating 'The Artist's Eye': Charlotte Brontë and the Pictorial Image."

just as Jane's paintings secure only "the shadow" of her thought, or as, in the end of the novel, we read about a speaking voice—Jane's voice "impressing by sound" on Rochester's ear "what light could no longer stamp on his eye"—a voice which we, as readers, cannot hear (577). As Jane writes:

He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. (ibid.)

Thus, Jane's voice interprets the Book of Nature, restoring her tale to its "original" context.

Finally, Jane's very reality is called into question. When she returns to Rochester, he is blind. Rochester asks, "In truth?—in the flesh? My living Jane?" Jane replies: "You touch me, sir—you hold me, and fast enough: I am not cold like a corpse, nor vacant like air, am I?" Rochester cries, "My living darling! These are certainly her limbs, and these her features: but I cannot be so blest after all my misery. It is a dream [...]" (555). Although Jane claims that she is not "vacant like air," her very name suggests otherwise. And when Rochester later insists again: "You are altogether a human being, Jane? You are certain of that?" (559), we are reminded that reading is not unlike a kind of intangible dreaming.

Contemporary readers were not hampered with such questions. For George Henry Lewes, Jane Eyre was a creature of "flesh and blood"—a choice of words

that unironically echo Rochester's own doubts and reaffirm Jane's own claim to reality. In the end, that "reality," however, can only be affirmed through the mystery of what is present, but remains unseen and unnamed:

"Oh, God! what is it?" I gasped.

I might have said, "Where is it?" for it did not seem in the room—nor in the house—nor in the garden: it did not come out of the air—nor from under the earth—nor from overhead. I had heard it—where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! (536)

Where are Jane's "originals" stored? They cannot be recreated, or fully reproduced, in any medium. *Jane Eyre* is like Wordsworth's "mountain Echo": "Like—but oh, how different!"²³⁷ The telepathy at the end of the novel—when Jane hears Rochester's cry, and when (as we learn later) Rochester hears Jane's—suggests that the authentic self, like all natural things, remains divine, mysterious even to itself. It is only divine authorization that makes possible the pure communion of one spirit directly addressing another.

In the end, Jane and Rochester share what she describes as "a more animated and an audible thinking" (576)—an otherwise unwritten, unrepresentable conversation to which we, as readers, no longer have access. At the same time, Jane withholds from Rochester the secret of their telepathy as being "too awful and inexplicable" (573) for her to disclose to him, thus tempering

²³⁷ This final passage from *Jane Eyre* offers up an echo of Wordsworth's untitled poem beginning, "Yes, it was the mountain Echo": "—yes, we have / Answers, and we know not whence; / Echoes from beyond the grave, / Recognised intelligence!" The opening of the 1807 version of this poem begins as, "Whence the Voice? from air or earth?" (*Poems*, vol. 2, 265–6).

the most incredible event in the novel and indirectly acknowledging the very large claim she has made on her readers' suspension of disbelief. That this secret is revealed exclusively to us, Jane's readers, however, creates its own form of renewed intimacy through the act of reading. It is her final gift to us. Art cannot create, but it can be revelatory.

Epilogue

This dissertation has conducted an analysis of *Jane Eyre* as informed by Charlotte Brontë's development as an author and maker of books. To that end, it has attempted to synthesize bibliography with formalist literary criticism—fields that, as D. F. McKenzie argued in his 1985 Panizzi lecture, were once as distanced from one another as they were congruent “in their shared view of the self-sufficient nature of the work of art or text” (*Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* 15). As part of that process, this study has developed a bibliographical and book historical framework for interpreting Brontë's broader ideas about books *qua* books—as objects that effect meanings through their physical instantiations—as well as for understanding the ways in which books serve as metaphors for interpreting reality, or, as Brontë herself so often put it, “Truth.”

We have learned from reading Brontë that material qualities of books are not necessarily incompatible with transcendental spiritual beliefs. By the same token, we have understood the subtle ways in which religious sentiments can themselves become entangled and lost within the world of publishing and material profit. There is no “safe” book that one can simply turn to and adopt as one's own. Even the most profound books, such as the Bible, must be interpreted and, in this sense, “remade” by their readers. Indeed, such acts are necessary, for pure acts of artistic creation are never possible. It is my hope that this renewed understanding of Brontë's material, psychological, and ideological relationship with books may

not only be of use for future studies of Brontë's work, but might also contribute to what Leah Price has described as an ongoing "dialogue" between literary critics and historians of the book—a conversation that, as Price writes, "has been reshaped by cognate investigations into the history, phenomenology, and sociology of reading" ("The History of a Book to a 'History of the Book'" 120).

There are, however, many important areas left unattended in this study that could be informed by its arguments. What follows are three very brief cases in point.

Owing to limitations in scope, this project has not addressed Brontë's manuscript production after 1847, a subject of considerable interest. Brontë's manuscripts for her last two published novels, *Shirley* and *Villette*, exhibit evidence that suggests a significant change in her production process—namely, the numerous excisions noted by Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith in their critical editions of *Shirley* and *Villette* (q.v. *Shirley* xxvi–xxix; *Villette* xxx–xxxi). Rosengarten and Smith imply that this change could be attributable to the deaths of Brontë's brother and sisters (*Shirley* xxvi). In a recent article, Ileana Marin speculates that the excisions in *Shirley* are owing to self-censorship: "It appears that [Charlotte Brontë] used the physical removal of text whenever she felt that a particular passage revealed something too intimate about the author" (21). Such readings might benefit from a closer analysis of the production of the manuscripts themselves—one that took into consideration, for instance, format, paper stock (including sheet size), lines per page, registration, &c.

In addition, although this dissertation has explored the ways in which publishers market books to various audiences, especially through binding design, it has not addressed the greater implications of that history. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century copies of *Jane Eyre* can provide important evidence about the various ways in which the novel was produced and received. A brief comparison of two copies of *Jane Eyre* published in 1953 may serve to illustrate this point. *Jane Eyre* was marketed as a paperback romance novel by Pocket Books as no. 88 in its “Cardinal Edition” series (see Figure 17); the book sold for 35 cents. Its cover features an illustration by Tom Dunn of Jane and Rochester locked in a passionate embrace, with the following slogan above them: “The story of a tortured love.” The book’s back cover presents the novel’s plot in terms presumably written to attract readers in search of mysteries and gothic romance: Rochester seems “the embodiment of virility,” despite his “perverse moodiness and temper”; and “Thornfield [...] threw its web of mystery around Jane.”

The same year, *Jane Eyre* was brought out by Penguin Books for the first time as no. 960 in its series (see Figure 18). Priced at two shillings and sixpence, that book was also an affordable volume, but bound in stark orange and cream wraps designed by Jan Tschichold, who was already famous for developing and implementing the so-called “new-typography.” The perfection, austerity, and restraint of Tschichold’s design for Penguin exemplified the values expressed in Beatrice Warde’s earlier (perhaps less-justified) conviction that Penguin’s covers were “an exercise in discipline, good manners and economic realism” (quoted in

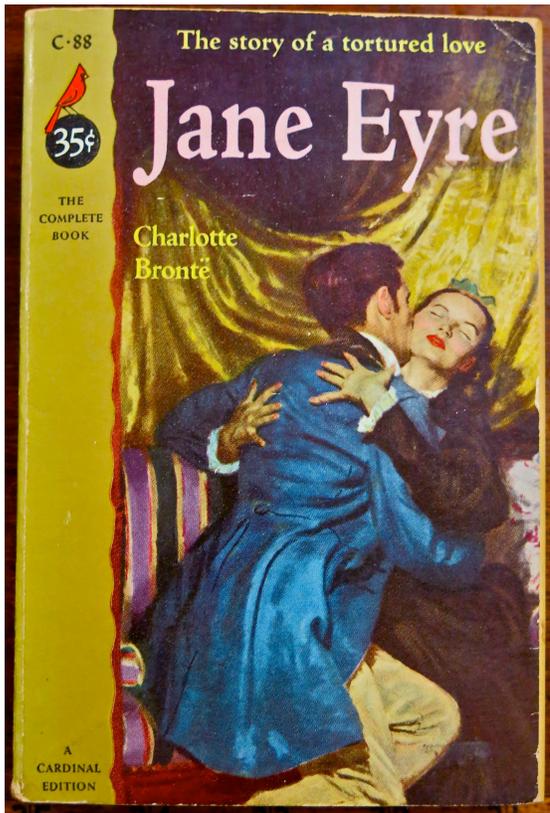


Figure 17: The “Cardinal Edition” of *Jane Eyre*. [New York]: Pocket Books, 1953.

Jane Eyre Collection, Rare Book School,
Charlottesville, Virginia.

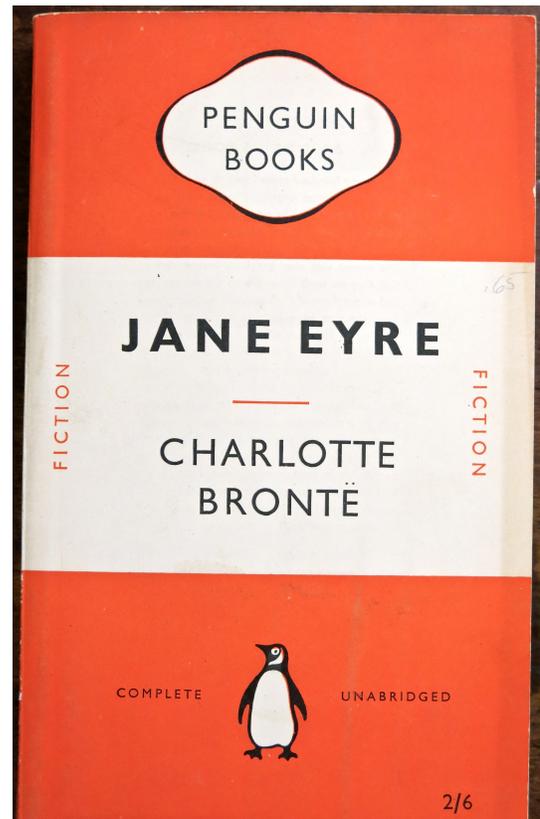


Figure 18: *Jane Eyre*. London: Penguin Books, 1953. 1st printing.

Jane Eyre Collection, Rare Book School,
Charlottesville, Virginia.

Baines, 50). The plain, “classic” look that Tschichold achieved was used for the covers of numerous titles for Penguin, and conveyed both the status and gravitas of the series’ literary contents. Unlike the design for the “Cardinal Edition” of *Jane Eyre*, Penguin’s edition features a back cover with biographical information about Charlotte Brontë, as well as a black-and-white image of Branwell’s famous portrait of Anne, Emily, and Charlotte. The facts presented in the blurb invite one to

consider *Jane Eyre* not as a love story, but rather as an historical literary achievement.

We can begin to see parallels between these books and those discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Like the sensational covers produced for *Jane Eyre* in the 1890s, the Pocket Books “Cardinal Edition” plays up the melodramatic aspects of Brontë’s narrative. Meanwhile, the subtle elegance of the Penguin edition of 1953 corresponds to the “good taste” and refinement embodied in the covers of *Jane Eyre* produced by Smith, Elder. A well-researched study of twentieth-century editions of *Jane Eyre* conducted along broader lines could take into account how various copies were sold and marketed to audiences—including the venues where they were distributed (whether at the supermarket or university bookstore), the kinds of changes made to paratextual presentations over time, annotations and other responses made by contemporary readers, &c. Such research could be part of a larger project investigating the degree to which twentieth-century publishing and book design informed the production of “literature,” canon formation, and more general trends in the marketing of popular fiction.

Finally, some of the concepts presented in this study—particularly those pertaining to literary criticism and the analogy of painting—may help to identify and interpret ongoing patterns in the history of criticism of novels. To take one example, in 1877, Leslie Stephen, then editor of *Cornhill Magazine* (and later editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*), raised the question of pictorial

representation in Charlotte Brontë's writing, suggesting that the same technique that was so emblematic of her "genius" was also simultaneously the cause of her limitations. Stephen writes that the "amazing vividness of her portrait-painting is the quality which more than any other makes her work unique amongst modern fiction" (727). Yet he also finds fault with the fact that Brontë has not sufficiently transformed her materials: "The scenery and even the incidents are, for the most part, direct transcripts from reality," he observes (726). This, as we have seen, was the very same criticism leveled by Lewes against *Shirley* in 1850. Brontë had defended her work to Lewes as "merely photographed from the life" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 181). Yet, by 1877, photography has a negative connotation in the assessment made by Stephen: "*Shirley* contains a continuous series of photographs of Haworth and its neighborhood; as *Villette* does of Brussels: and if *Jane Eyre* is not so literal, except in the opening account of the school-life, much of it is almost as strictly autobiographical" (726).

It is clear that Stephen's interpretations are heavily influenced by Gaskell's *Life*. Such impressions would have only been reinforced by Smith, Elder's first illustrated edition of *Jane Eyre*, produced in 1872, containing wood-engravings by Edmund Morison Wimperis of "views" identified by "a friend of the Misses Brontë" which were meant to represent the "actual places" that were thought to have inspired the setting for the book. The illustrations not only invite readers to consider the ways in which Brontë modeled her fictional settings on the places she

had visited, but indirectly encourage them to “decode” *Jane Eyre* as if it were a historical record of its author’s life.

As Stephen sees it, Brontë is merely copying from her life, not for any reason other than her limited experience in the world and “small stock of materials” (728). Contrasting Laurence Sterne’s *Uncle Toby* with Brontë’s *M. Paul Emanuel*, Stephen observes that Paul Emanuel is “so real that we feel at once that he must have been drawn from a living model”; whereas *Uncle Toby* is “the creation of Sterne, and the projection into concrete form of certain ideas which had affected Sterne’s imagination” (733). Stephen concludes that, unlike *Uncle Toby*, Paul Emanuel “never carries us into the higher regions of thought,” owing to Brontë’s “narrowness,” “want of familiarity with a wider sphere of thought,” and “limitations of [...] intellect” (732–5).

Stephen correctly identifies and quite accurately describes Brontë’s process, but gravely errs in underestimating the intellectual protocols motivating it. As we have seen, Brontë’s method of writing “from life” was not owing to any particular poverty of thought—rather, it was quite deliberately grounded in the vocabularies and methods of painting and drawing that privileged the skilled depiction of “natural” texts above so-called “creations,” and in opposition to bookmaking. Stephen would have it that Brontë worked in isolation with few intellectual resources. Instead, she set out to represent what was plain and commonplace, in the tradition of artists such as Bewick and poets such as Wordsworth. For Brontë, this aesthetic was formed in response to the

preponderance of popular literature celebrating what by the 1840s seemed merely artificial, material, and illusory.

Stephen predicted that, ultimately, Brontë would be “a writer who appeals only to a few” owing to her “want of comprehensiveness,” and that her “faithful lovers” would, in time, “be reduced to a narrow band” (724). As any a survey of reprints, translations, abridgments, prequels, sequels, and spin-offs reveals,²³⁸ *Jane Eyre* endures precisely because it engages and inspires so many kinds of popular writing. Meanwhile, those who recognize either the name “Uncle Toby,” or even the title *Tristram Shandy*, decrease in number.

We have read the biographies. We think we know Charlotte Brontë, just as we believe that we know Jane. Yet it is precisely Brontë’s fame that has helped to conceal alternative histories pertaining to her life in work—histories that this dissertation has attempted to bring to light. The materials that we use to trace such histories are at times themselves elusive. As Rochester comes to understand of Jane herself, “Conqueror I might be of that house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling-place [...]. Of yourself, you could come with soft flight and nestle against my heart [...] seized against your will, you will elude the grasp like an essence—you will vanish ere I inhale your fragrance” (405–6). Although we can never possess the past, we may serve as its temporary custodians. For books have their own lives and fates, which are inseparable from their material incarnations. It is through an attentiveness to

²³⁸ Q.v. Patsy Stoneman’s *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights*.

the historical particularities of books, and the very challenges that we face in interpreting them, that our best readings emerge.

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