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Margaret Pavleszek April 7, 2018

From Her Head: Finding the Romantic Genius in *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

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When Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, the full title was *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, edited by Currer Bell. Due to the date of its publication and the literary atmosphere in which Charlotte Brontë cultivated her creative sensibilities, the novel is positioned between the lyric poetry of the Romantic era and the rise of the realist novel of the Victorian era. Though the novel is most often studied in the context of the Victorian Gothic novel and the Victorian realist novel, treating the novel as a Romantic autobiography, like William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, by the character of Jane Rochester, rather than Jane Eyre, is all but nonexistent in the rich critical landscape surrounding the novel. Charlotte Brontë was very familiar with the conventions and interests of Romanticism of the elevation and exploration of the self, specifically that of the poet. Ultimately, by exploring both the history of the Romantic era and the exploration of the concept of genius by the poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Lord Byron, and by exploring young Jane's portrayal of her own subjectivity through her visual artwork, the embodiment of Jane's genius is Jane Rochester's composition of her autobiography. In creating a character who explores her own genius in the form of a Romantic autobiography, Charlotte Brontë creates a character who creates herself as the subject of a Romantic work, rather than allowing herself to be the object of a male narrative voice. By examining this novel as a Romantic autobiography, this project aims to prove Brontë's creation of the Romantic female genius in the character of Jane Rochester.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of literary studies and criticism surrounding Charlotte Brontë's first published novel, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. Charlotte Brontë came of age in the waning years of the Romantic era and published her first novel in the first decade of Queen Victoria's reign. With the rise of the Victorian realist novel, the continued presence of the Gothic novel, and the lingering effects of Romanticism contributing to Brontë's literary upbringing, *Jane Eyre*'s lineage contains many branches that all contribute to better understanding the novel as a whole. *Jane Eyre* is studied first and foremost as a text fundamental to the field of feminist literary criticism in the novel's treatment of female agency and its depiction of marriage. With this in mind, the full extent of Jane's mental interiority as an artist and an autobiographer is rarely studied within the context of feminist subjectivity theory or Romantic theory.

In the following study, I will argue that Jane Eyre represents Charlotte Brontë's creation of the female genius. The question of Charlotte Brontë's own genius has been explored by historians of the Brontë family and Charlotte Brontë's biographers. Instead of examining Brontë's cultivation of her own genius through the creation of Jane, I will explore Brontë's use of the Romantic tradition to create an image of the female genius that is separate from Brontë herself. The female genius in *Jane Eyre* shares characteristics with the Romantic poet's conception of the male poetic genius; however, the female genius, through Brontë's novel, establishes a tradition of female aesthetics distinct from the male tradition. The term "genius" is one that is coded against women throughout literary history. However, the image of the Romantic genius as a reflection or a guiding force of the age is the image to which Brontë had ready access and critiqued in the character of Jane. Also, I will examine the relationship between

the genius and the ideal form of art and the capability of the genius's imagination to render new what is familiar to the audience within the context of Brontë's novel.

Charlotte Brontë and her siblings developed their creative sensibilities in a Romantic literary atmosphere. As we will see, the figures of the Romantic period that were most present in the lives of the Brontë siblings were William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Lord Byron. It is from the works and the lives of the aforementioned male poets that Charlotte Brontë took inspiration in constructing Jane as a character. By exploring their separate formulations of the Romantic genius, we might be able to approach *Jane Eyre* and its influence upon the image of the female genius, the history of feminist criticism, and English literature as a whole.

Though Brontë took a significant amount of inspiration from the Romantic tradition in the construction of this novel, and such inspiration will be the central focus of this study, we must keep in mind the other genres that were at her disposal. Throughout the discussion of the Romantic tradition surrounding the image of the genius and utilization of the genre of autobiography in fully exploring the genius, I will draw on the influences from genres such as the Gothic novel and the governess novel that are also used to elevate the female protagonist to the level of the "transcendent 'I'" in which the Romantic poets placed themselves.

For the purposes of my project, I will examine the Romantic tradition of the genius as it was explored in the writings of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the dichotomy between genius and madness exemplified in the life of Lord Byron. I will use Jane Eyre's visual artwork and her narrative agency as the implied autobiographer as emblematic of her genius and I will determine how Brontë uses this novel to construct her revision of the Romantic ideal of the isolated male genius through Jane Eyre as a poor and plain governess and then culminating in Jane Rochester as the wife, mother, and autobiographer.

The first goal of this project will be to establish the term "genius" to be used in the context of Brontë's novel and the Romantic tradition of genius, as William Wordsworth explores in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and in his autobiographical work *The Prelude* and in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's metaphysical theories of *Biographia Literaria*. In addition to the theoretical work done by the Romantics and the autobiographical work that they produced in order to explore their own genius, Brontë was fascinated by Lord Byron and the image of the Byronic hero as this passionate, sexual, reclusive, dangerous character. This characterization of the Byronic hero is often applied to the character of Edward Rochester in the novel; however, Brontë explored the Byronic hero in her creation of fictional artists in her juvenilia and then in her creation of Jane. With this in mind, Brontë uses the spectrum of the Romantic movement, with Wordsworth and Coleridge near its beginning and Lord Byron as a figurehead of the change in Romanticism to include the danger associated with genius, to explore the mind and the genius of a young woman.

The first chapter will also serve to establish the roles that women were allowed to occupy within the Romantic tradition. Such roles were almost exclusively the role of the muse, the observer, or the vessel for male creativity. Later in my project, I will examine how Charlotte Brontë not only allows Jane to occupy the role of the artist and the autobiographer but also how she actively fights against being cast in any other traditionally female-coded roles, like that of the muse or the object of narration, by Rochester and other men in the novel. In establishing the groundwork of the project through an examination of the tenets of genius and imagination that Wordsworth and Coleridge formulated, I will also introduce the creation of the female subject within the context of Romanticism and in the context of the autobiography. The creation of the female subject in the autobiography is complicated by image of the angel of the house that

became the ideal image of womanhood during the Victorian period. By embodying the image of the female genius and creating work in which she is the subject, Jane directly contradicts this image of womanhood. The creation of the subject in *Jane Eyre* and in Romanticism is rooted in Coleridge's "infinite I AM" when one has access to what Coleridge refers to as his or her "primary imagination." Jane's imagination will be elaborated upon in later chapters of the project, but it will be in the first chapter that I introduce the importance of thinking about *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography rather than simply a first-person narrative. Jane's presence as the subject of the autobiography allows her to take the power of presentation of her life and of her mind. By making this distinction between the function of the autobiography versus the function of simply a first-person narrative, my project explores how the autobiography allows for narrative control and construction of the self that is essential to the definition of the female genius.

The second chapter will examine Jane Eyre's visual artwork and its early role in the exploration of the female subject. I posit that the visual artwork is Jane Eyre's early treatment of her mind as the subject of a work of art, which develops into Jane Rochester's treatment of her mind as the subject of her autobiography. Jane Eyre engages in the traditionally male activity of painting, rather than confining herself to drawing and, more specifically, drawing copies of other artists' work. Brontë's personal history with the tradition of female accomplishment and Jane's experience with copying rather than artistic creation fuels the depiction of Jane's mental interiority through visual art. Through her visual artwork, Jane Eyre displays her originality and also suggests her connection to the sublimity of the female genius. Brontë creates Jane as an artist who is aware of the limitations of her ability in portraying the full detail of what she set out to paint. In this small detail, Brontë positions Jane Eyre as an anomalous character in the literary

tradition. The progression of her artwork will act as a gauge for the developing treatment of herself as the subject that will then transfer when Jane Rochester writes her autobiography. It is through the visual artwork that she created in her youth that Jane Rochester presents the contents of her mind for her readers. This is an early form of self-expression that is linked to the Romantic autobiographical tradition. The subject of these paintings is the contents of her mind.

The final chapter will examine *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography and the character of Jane who writes the autobiography as the Romantic genius. During the Gateshead and Lowood episodes of the novel, Jane the narrator uses language of development where it concerns young Jane's art. This chapter will examine further the narrative agency that Jane takes over her art, the history of this part of her life, and the authority she holds over Rochester's narrative of reality after she goes to live at Ferndean with him. She creates his reality for him due to his blindness and she is able to have that artistic agency while still holding the domestic position of the caregiver and wife. Through the development of her narrative abilities through her art and the manipulation of narrative as she writes the autobiography will all contribute to the classification of Jane Rochester as a genius.

Throughout the project, but most strongly in the third chapter, I will prioritize the distinction between Jane Eyre and Jane Rochester. Jane Eyre, as both a young girl at Gateshead and Lowood and an eighteen-year old governess at Thornfield, is the subject of the autobiography written by Jane Rochester, a married woman who takes up the pen and composes a study of her mind and genius through the form of the Romantic autobiography. For the purposes of this project, these are separate versions of Jane and separate stages of development for the image of the genius. For this reason, Jane Rochester as the autobiographer and as the

version of Jane that conducts the Romantic act of self-creation and self-examination becomes the image of the genius while Jane Eyre is the young woman who possesses qualities of genius.

Brontë's use of the genre of autobiography as a fictional frame for a realist novel increases the possible connection between the subject of the autobiography, its fictional author, and the reader. In writing in the autobiographical frame, Jane creates herself and gives herself subjectivity that was not often allotted to women represented in Romantic literature. Jane takes on not only the identity of the Romantic subject, like the speaker in Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper," but also the subject a Romantic autobiography. Through the form of the Romantic autobiography, the Romantic genius takes on the greatest possible subject: its own mind. Jane displays her own mental interiority as well as the events of her life. In the Victorian tradition however, there was a confinement of the woman to the domestic sphere and a restriction of her interaction with and self-expression to the public world.

Beginning with Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's landmark work of feminist literary theory, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and subsequent reactions to their argument, feminist criticism will help to understand how the term "genius" is coded against women. Drawing on the argument that Gilbert and Gubar make regarding the role of Bertha Rochester as a Jane's dark double and a physical manifestation of Jane's anger, the third chapter takes this argument a step further to include the "double" of the genius utilized in Romantic autobiography as a tranquil presence and as the presence who orders the events of the past. Drawing on the theoretical writings concerning the depiction of women and the role of women in the minds of the Romantic poets, my casting of Jane Rochester as the Romantic female genius manipulates the expectations of the time and the literary criticism surrounding the novel specifically. While the first chapter draws attention to the roles that women were "allowed" to occupy in the Romantic tradition, the

third chapter expands upon the argument from the first chapter to determine how Brontë manipulates the tradition of the Romantic autobiography within the tradition itself and by utilizing genre conventions from popular fiction like the Gothic novel and the governess novel to justify the placement of her heroine as the subject of the autobiography.

Gilbert and Gubar approach their study of nineteenth-century literature written by women as a study of women fighting against the male-dominated literary canon. Their study examines where women's anger becomes strikingly apparent in their work and what comes of this anger. Virginia Woolf approached Charlotte Brontë as a writer whose anger limited her capabilities of fully expressing herself. I will be approaching Woolf's argument from a different angle. Where Woolf considers the voice in these moments to be Brontë's own, we must remember that expression of this anger comes directly from the mind and pen of Jane Rochester. Though she supposedly writes as a tranquil presence making sense of the narrative, she suffers from the same oppressive domestic atmosphere that her younger self cries out against and that confined Charlotte Brontë. Though Jane Rochester writes from a space of remove, as we will see, the passions that she expressed in her youth are not absent in the time in which she writes.

The underlying current of this project is the argument that, due to the form of the autobiography and the depiction of the genius, Brontë's feminist agenda is most strongly seen in her depiction of Jane Rochester as an author. She presents this agenda through the autobiography and the modes of artistic expression that Jane uses, as we will see. Very few critics examine the work as an autobiography by the character and even fewer feminist critics of the novel approach the abilities of this autobiography to transcend the types of life-narratives that were seen as proper for a female author to tell. Due to this proposed agenda, Jane Eyre as the visual artist and

Jane Rochester as an autobiographer are characters that have inspired rewritings and strong literary reactions and depictions of the women as the artist.

An interest that I have approached in this project is the issue of androgyny in the Romantic tradition and in feminist criticism. In the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, he considers an androgynous mind to be advantageous to the creative process. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf argued for a similar point. However, because creativity is coded to be masculine, creativity in the mind of a woman was dangerous in the Romantic tradition. Instead the attention to emotion that was generally associated with women was considered to be advantageous to the male creative process. Works of criticism like Diane Long Hoeveler's *Romantic Androgyny: The Woman Within* are primarily concerned with the roles that women were allowed to occupy within the Romantic tradition. The woman was the muse for the poet, the observer to the poet's genius, or the vessel for the male poet's creativity. The woman as the artist was either an image, rather than an individual, or nonexistent. The woman as the artist was never an individual. I will not argue that Brontë's depiction of Jane is an early attempt at what Virginia Woolf would call the "androgynous mind" in *A Room of One's Own*. Instead, I will examine the novel in the context of Woolf's hesitancy towards the "I" as being inherently male. Because Brontë places Jane Eyre in the male-dominated creative space and empowers her with the use of the "I", Brontë does not reposition the "I" as now belonging exclusively to the female author or the female narrative voice. Instead, Jane's use of the "I" occupies an ambivalent position in the question of its gender that raises the question of Jane's "I" as being androgynous or something different altogether. By examining female creativity, the Romantic tradition, and androgyny through the lens of feminist criticism, I hope to prove that Charlotte Brontë explores

female creative agency in such a way that she depicted the female genius as an individual rather than a tragic idea like the titular character of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott."

Briefly, I will address a question regarding the topic of my project. *Jane Eyre* is a text that has been widely interpreted and widely discussed. Why, then, will I look at this text for the purposes of my project? Jane Eyre is not by any means the only female artist depicted in literature before or since the novel was published in 1847. Germaine de Staël published *Corinne, or Italy* in 1807. The title character is a female poet who is hailed a genius by her lover and by the Italian public. Charlotte Brontë's own sister Anne published *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in 1848 in which a female artist makes her living by her work. The novel also explores the taboo topic of divorce in the Victorian context. Despite the accomplishments of the aforementioned novels in the realm of feminist criticism, *Corinne, or Italy* is novel written from the point of view of Corinne's lover and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is overwhelmingly narrated through the letters of the protagonist's second husband about the events that took place before they married. The male narrative presence in both novels makes the women of these works, though they are artists who are able to insert themselves into the male-dominated creative space, objects to some degree of the male gaze who are subject to male interpretation. *Jane Eyre* is a study in self-interpretation on the part of the protagonist's older self through the autobiography and the expressions of her mind through her visual artwork. Self-examination and self-interpretation on the part of the female artist through the medium of autobiography is a power that Jane Rochester is the first to yield.

In my project, I position *Jane Eyre* substantively different from the aforementioned texts and others like them due to the narrative agency that Brontë allots Jane. This narrative agency and the agency of self-creation, along with the imaginative qualities of her paintings and the

interactions with the sublime in nature that Brontë includes, will be interpreted together in order to prove that Jane is Charlotte Brontë's depiction of the female Romantic genius. Unlike many novels that involved a romance plot at the time in which Charlotte Brontë composed the work, marriage does not act as an impediment to Jane's genius in the novel; nor does it mark the end of Jane's literary life. Instead, the genius morphs over time and expresses itself in different ways, whether through the visual art, the narration of reality to Rochester when he is blind, or the eventual writing of her autobiography. Charlotte Brontë thus positions female genius within the domain of a realist novel and utilizes the conventions of the Romantic autobiography to allow the female genius to be the subject of its own work and to break forth from the restrictions of the domestic space.

CHAPTER ONE

"The Genius of the Haunt": The Development of Charlotte Brontë's Romantic Imagination

When *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* was published in 1847, the novel entered a literary marketplace that was in a moment of transition. Though it is contested when the Romantic period supposedly ended, whether in the 1830s with the beginning of Alfred Lord Tennyson's career or in 1850 with William Wordsworth's death, Charlotte Brontë's first published novel is placed in conversation with both the familiar Romantic tradition and the emerging Victorian literary tradition. Where it concerns the Romantic tradition, Brontë incorporates discussions of the individual, the sublime, and imagination, along with familiar images from the Gothic novel and the Byronic hero. Brontë then uses the familiar generic expectations of the Romantic tradition and the expectations surrounding the Romantic genius to critique the generally male-coded image and to reassign the role of the genius to a female artist and writer. Though there were female authors and poets who published during the heights of the Romantic period, like Mary Wollstonecraft, her daughter Mary Shelley, and the poet Mary Robinson, women writers had a complicated relationship with the philosophical and artistic shifts that took place during the rise of Romanticism.

In Charlotte Brontë's depiction of genius, she focuses on Jane Eyre's creative autonomy, her imagination, the space and the mindset in which she creates her work, whether it is her visual art or her narrative art. Additionally, Jane's relationship with her own story over which she has complete creative agency will be the major concern for this project. She combines and works within the generic structures of the Gothic novel, the governess novel, and Romantic autobiography, in order to critique and reimagine the Romantic genius. Aside from the overarching themes of Romanticism, Brontë utilizes genres that are generally concerned with the

female experience to justify her own critique of the genius. In creating her image of female Romantic genius, Brontë drew from the predominantly male-dominated near-contemporary Romantic movement and all that the system of thought entails, the rising interest in the governess novel, and the traditions and expectations surrounding female education. Because Brontë placed herself and her female protagonist in conversation with this diverse set of genres as well as gender expectations, we must take a step back to break down the conversations into which Brontë inserted herself and her novel with the publication of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*.

The Brontës are themselves considered to be isolated geniuses. Following the deaths of the two eldest siblings in childhood, the four youngest children, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne, were educated at home and left to express their genius in the isolation of the Haworth Parsonage. In their isolation, the four Brontë siblings created the fictional worlds of Gondol and Angria and wrote an accompanying mythology for these fictional lands. The lands that the siblings created, Charlotte and Branwell's work specifically, featured characters that were developed on the template of both the statesman genius and the Byronic hero. In addition to Brontë children's development of complex mythologies for the lands of Gondol and Angria, the children were also visual artists. This is where the definition of genius as it extends across the realm of art differs and it calls gender into question. The Brontë sisters' visual art was almost exclusively confined to the distinction of copies or landscape renderings, or what is considered to be accomplishment versus art. Christine Alexander notes that in Charlotte Brontë's early visual artwork "apart from several later portraits, such as the fictional *Woman in a Leopard Fur*, her work shows little of the imaginative flair that Rochester perceived in several of the drawings in Jane Eyre's portfolio" ("Art and Music" 244). My second chapter will examine the full extent of

this issue and how Charlotte Brontë takes the social understanding of female accomplishment, and perhaps what Coleridge would link with fancy, and elevates creation within the female mind.

The Oxford English Dictionary provides the etymology of "genius" from Latin as a "male spirit of a family, existing in the head of the family and in the divine or spiritual part of each individual". The classical link to the paternal lineage of genius and creativity and a presence of the genius within the domestic space excludes a female-coded spirit of genius while still existing within the space that is generally identified with the woman. With such a definition, if a woman was identified as having qualities of genius, she is identified as having masculine qualities and masculine intellectual capabilities. Carrying this concern forward, in their landmark feminist study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar spend the first chapter exploring the coded image of the pen, its phallic connotation, and the paternal lineage of creativity. The artist, as Gilbert and Gubar mention and the Romantics perpetuate throughout their writings, is often equated with a divine Creator (5). As such a Creator is coded as male throughout biblical literature, and in the Western canon in general, such an association can only be placed upon a male artist. The female-coded images, however, are nature, the muse, and the observer of genius. Designating nature as female makes the woman the vessel of divine creation but not the divine Creator herself. Nature becomes the passive inspiration for the poet's internal musings and is then interpreted through the male gaze.

As Gilbert and Gubar state, reconsidering the female writer with the paternal lineage of creativity in mind presents the same difficulty that female authors faced during the nineteenth century. With the paternal inheritance of vision and creativity, Gilbert and Gubar write, female authors did not have "literary mothers" after whom to model themselves. Though there were obviously women writers before the nineteenth century, few were so impactful on the culture of

the nineteenth century that women writers at the time could actively engage with the public memory of previous female writers. However, there were images and representations of female artists that were accessible to female writers.

Brontë and the Gothic Novel

Though Brontë is usually considered to be post-Romantic novelist and studied as an early Victorian novelist, the discussions that began during the Romantic era were still present in the intellectual atmosphere of Britain at the time when Brontë was growing up and when she began developing her own images of the genius and the Byronic hero. After all, Robert Southey was made poet laureate in England from 1813, three years before Charlotte Brontë was born, and William Wordsworth was made poet laureate following Southey's death in 1843, four years before Brontë's novel was published. Additionally, the Gothic novel of the end of the eighteenth century and its links to Romanticism had morphed and developed through the first half of the nineteenth century to novels that are considered to be psychological gothic texts. The manipulation of the Gothic genre since its inception in 1764 with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, would be a marker of the artistic attitudes surrounding the negative capabilities of imagination and the unknown within the mental landscape of the individual. The concept of a "psychological gothic," subgenre specifications given to both *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, is rooted in the mind's imaginative capabilities and in terrifying images and emotions inspired by dreams. Both intense emotions and dreams were of particular interest to the Romantic poets.

When Brontë published her novel, the genre of the Gothic was still very much present in the literary marketplace. The Gothic trend remained alive through the annuals that the Brontë

family avidly read, penny-dreadful publications, and through the work of the Romantics. Though the Gothic was the genre that was looked down upon by the Romantic poets as being sentimental fiction that was typically read by women, many of the Romantic poets, like Byron and Coleridge, utilized the Gothic in their work to explore the human mind and the individual.

Due to the adaptability of the Gothic genre, the different strains of the Gothic that existed at the time of Charlotte Brontë's writing were widespread. There was the general distinction between terror and horror Gothic. This distinction came about near the end of the eighteenth century with the work of Ann Radcliffe and M. G. Lewis. Ann Radcliffe herself formulated the definitions *in New Monthly Magazine* in 1826. The terror Gothic is the type of Gothic tale where the frightening and seemingly supernatural antagonist is revealed to be part of the human world and not supernatural at all. In the horror Gothic, the supernatural is revealed to be just as present as aspects of the real world. Under this distinction, *Jane Eyre* would be classified as a terror Gothic text. The light that young Jane witnesses in the red-room is explained away. Rochester's dog is not a mythical beast from Bessie's stories. Even Bertha Mason is revealed to be a human woman rather than a ghost haunting Thornfield. Every aspect of the Jane Rochester's autobiography is a feature of the real world.

One subgenre of the Gothic that is discussed in conjunction with Ann Radcliffe's novels at the end of the eighteenth century and then nearly a half-century later with Charlotte and Emily Brontë is the subgenre of the female Gothic. The female Gothic is characterized by the theme of female anxiety surrounding domesticity and the social expectations imposed upon women during this time. A patriarchal villain pursues the female protagonist of this strain of the Gothic and there is the prominent presence of sexual terror throughout the narrative. Charlotte Brontë adopted several recognizable traits from the female Gothic when constructing her novel. She

undertook the motif of the ancestral home that contains a secret past. This ancestral home, Thornfield, contains the secret of Bertha Mason who serves as justification for any anxiety Jane Eyre might feel towards domesticity. Through the isolation of the house itself and the isolation of Jane herself within the house Brontë takes on a common theme of the female Gothic. However, Brontë reworks the theme of the isolated woman in the form of Jane Eyre to accompany her reimagining of the Romantic genius.

Thus, isolation is essential to the self-examination and self-creation of the poet as the subject. The male poet is able to choose a state of isolation while in the Romantic tradition and in the scope of British literature at the time the isolated woman is a threat to men. The Gothic novel makes use of forced isolation and imprisonment to contribute to the atmosphere of terror in the genre. However, Charlotte Brontë reassigns, as will be explored later in the project, the choice of solitude and solitude as a creative space for the female genius. This brief introduction to the Gothic conventions that Brontë utilizes in her novel will be helpful moving forward to consider what tools were at Brontë's disposal to use in her critique of the Romantic tradition of genius.

The Governess and Her Rise to Prominence

Another genre that Brontë uses to validate her reassignment of the genius is the genre of the governess novel. This genre became popular in the early Victorian period as readers became increasingly interested in social issues and in the struggles of the middle class as a whole. The aspect of the governess novel that Brontë allocates to her novel is that of the governess as the socially isolated observer of the Victorian household.

Nora Gilbert details the specifics of the governess novel and how the expectations surrounding this female-dominated genre created a space for *Jane Eyre*, as well as Anne

Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. An issue that Gilbert takes particular interest in is the solitude of the governess within the household. This issue links the governess novel to the previous discussion of the Gothic. The isolation of the governess is largely due to the position that the governess occupies within the domestic space. She is not a part of the family and she is above the rank of the servant (Gilbert 456). The intriguing role of the governess in this type of novel is their ability "to provide us with a particularly nuanced delineation of the dress, department, and daily habits of the characters surrounding them. They provide us, that is, with the very material that would come to characterize the Victorian realist novel" (Gilbert 467). Though this ability of the governess roots this genre in the Victorian tradition, this observational quality of the governess can be translated to what will be detailed in Wordsworth's definition of the Poet. Though the governess observes more surface-level details about those around her, she observes the specifics that make up the society that she inhabits. Her indeterminate place within the house will also connect to the role of the Poet in the work of the first-generation Romantics.

The Roots of Charlotte Brontë's Romanticism

Following the philosophical and intellectual advancements of the Enlightenment and the study of the individual as the thinking subject, influenced by René Descartes' assertion, "I think; therefore I am," the Romantic poets and Romantic philosophers of the end of the eighteenth century took a different approach to what constitutes an individual and what constitutes an artist. Even within the movement of Romanticism, the representation of the artist and the genius changed as Romanticism grew to incorporate the representations of heroes in the Gothic novel and both the positive and negative capabilities of genius. Charlotte Brontë had a direct or indirect

relationship with the first-generation Romantics, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, as well as the second-generation Romantic Lord Byron. Because Charlotte Brontë began writing in her youth after the death of Byron, the accumulated culture of the first- and second-generation Romantics was readily available to her through publications of the previous years and the remaining accessibility of William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. Though she and her siblings were most interested in the work and image of Lord Byron, the work of the first-generation Romantics were available to her and are essential to understanding the lineage of the Romantic genius with which Brontë was concerned in her novel.

The first-generation Romantics like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth were concerned predominantly with pushing back against the perpetuated importance of Reason in the formation of the individual during the Enlightenment. They, as well as the second-generation Romantics, venerated the passions of the individual and advocated for the expression of such passions through writing and through art. Expression and exploration of emotion was regulated to the male-dominated literary sphere and thus the genius, who was theorized to be able to translate the passions of the human mind into an accessible literary or artistic form, was discussed in terms of the masculine. Genius was not a discussion unique to the Romantic movement. The topic of genius has a long history throughout Western intellectual history.

However, the approach to genius during the Romantic period was concerned with the relationship between the genius and the sublime and the belief that the Poet, or artist in general, was a prophet of sorts to those who cannot perceive the sublime. The image of the genius, as discussed by William Wordsworth in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, was a man who is in touch with the sublimity of his own mind and is able to translate intense emotion into art in order to communicate with the general public. Additionally, Wordsworth also stipulated that even though

the Poet translated the intense passions of the human mind, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth 611). Wordsworth's necessity for space and emotional control following the events or passions that will then be translated through the words of the poet suggests that a woman could not be cast in the role of the Poet. However, as Alan Richardson details in his study of the "Romantic poet's feminized self-conception," the perceived-as feminine attributes of sensibility of emotional connectivity were traits sought out by male poets (Richardson 18). In seeking to "appropriate the female for male subjectivity," the image of the genius was thus reified as an androgynous mind; a mind, however, that could only exist in the male body.

The tenets of the Romantic genius are linked to classical traditions, Enlightenment thought, and the elevation of the individual and the individual's mental interiority. The Romantics and the aesthetic philosophers who came before them were interested in the function of art and its reflection of the artist and the world in which it was created. In terms of the classical traditions and particularly those of Plato, the work by philosophers to elevate art and poetry above the level of mere craft that Plato thought it to be began before the Romantics. The Romantics, however, profited from the advancements of the philosophical discussions of art that occurred following the classical period and translated into discussions of the origins and uses of art and poetry. In his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams sums up the approach to poetry that developed during the Romantic period as such:

> A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the

> external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind. (Abrams 22)

To, as Abrams says, make the internal external elevates the writer to a divine Creator, as Coleridge explains in his *Biographia Literaria*, and explains the Romantic belief in the poet-genius as a prophet to his fellow man. Abrams's articulation of this particular Romantic theory of the Poet is more closely linked to the first-generation Romantics William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The source material of the poem is first and foremost the imagination of the poet. The second source is closer what might be considered as copying from life but the intervention of the artist's imagination makes what would just be a copy of an image or a detail in a life into a work of art. Carrying this particular definition and distinction forward through the work of the Romantics and then to the discussion of the frame of the autobiography in Brontë's novel will be essential in developing a working definition of the Romantic genius and then the Romantic genius that Charlotte Brontë creates in her novel. If the poet or artist who produces the work of art that Abrams describes does so with the mind as the origin, the poet is no longer just a translator or vessel of the sublime for those who cannot make sense of it. Instead, the work of art or piece of literature has no external source. When applying this definition to *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist's visual artwork comes from her own mind and the events of her autobiography, though these events happened to the character, the narrator reworks the events of her life through her own mind and imagination.

Wordsworth, the Function of the Autobiography, and the Poet

Because the Romantic poets, both between the first- and second-generations and between poets of the same generation, had differing opinions regarding the imagination and the position

of the poet or artist in society, it is important to break down the beliefs of the poets with whom Charlotte Brontë was in direct conversation. This discussion will examine William Wordsworth's image of the Poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theories regarding the imagination and its role in the artistic process, Robert Southey's advice to Charlotte Brontë in a letter ten years prior to the publication of *Jane Eyre*, and Lord Byron's formulation through is own life of what would be called the Byronic hero and the influence that character's framework had upon the work of Charlotte Brontë and her siblings' juvenilia as well as the characterizations of Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester. In order to track the development of the genius, as Charlotte Brontë most likely understood it, my study of the lineage of the Romantic genius will begin with William Wordsworth.

William Wordsworth is often studied as the emblematic Romantic poet and the first to formulate the theories of the Romantic moment in his preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth was not the first contributor to the aesthetic theory of Romanticism but his theories were accompanied by his practice of those theories in the collection that he published with Coleridge. It is in this preface that he sets down his theory of style surrounding the lyric poem, his beliefs regarding the language of poetry, and the role of the Poet and how this figure relates to his fellow men. Wordsworth encouraged the elevation of groups that were generally ignored in poetry, like children and beggars, to be the subject of his work and the work to follow. This elevation must be done through language describing emotion and that language must be of the common people. In encouraging this style and focus of writing, however, the groups to which he hoped to draw attention become vehicles for expressing genius through poetry. It was through such figures that Wordsworth claimed that the Poet could express the truth about human nature. As Wordsworth writes in the preface:

> The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to [chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting] by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature…(Wordsworth 596-597)

Though he references the aim of the particular collection, *Lyrical Ballads*, he lays a theoretical framework for the poetry that he hopes will follow. However, this particular passage does not hold the imagination to the level of creation that he would later extrapolate upon in his autobiographical work *The Prelude* or that his contemporary Samuel Taylor Coleridge would explore in his *Biographia Literaria*. In calling for a new rendering of the familiar, Wordsworth's suggestion can be connected to his own autobiographical work in *The Prelude* published in 1850 and to Charlotte Brontë's approach to the genre conventions surrounding autobiography, particularly Romantic autobiography.

Concerning the genre of autobiography in connection to Wordsworth, it is impossible for Charlotte Brontë to have had access to *The Prelude* before she published *Jane Eyre* in 1847 because the work would not be published until 1850, three months after William Wordsworth died. However, she may have had access to early responses to the poem in manuscript form. Samuel Coleridge wrote a response to the work that is reproduced in Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill's edition of *The Prelude* which includes the 1799 and 1805 manuscripts and the revised version that was published in 1850. Coleridge's response to the work is dated January 1807, and was included in the volume of his poetry, *Poetical Works*, that

was published in 1834 (J. Wordsworth 542). It is this volume of work to which Charlotte Brontë may have had access, if only because it was available to the public at the time. Coleridge ecstatically praises Wordsworth's autobiography in verse and proclaims that he has been presented with "the Foundations and the Building-up/Of thy own Spirit" (Coleridge 5-6). The creative achievement that Wordsworth details in his autobiography, in which he charts his artistic development and casts himself as the Poet of his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, achieved the very mission of reinforcing the image of the genius with Wordsworth in the role of the genius.

In the epigraph of the poem, Coleridge distinguishes *The Prelude* as Wordsworth's "history of his own mind." Wordsworth's recollection of his artistic development becomes a question of power over self-presentation and narrative. Wordsworth worked on *The Prelude* from 1798 onward. He conducts the exploration of his own creative development through the language of a poet who writes at the end of his own creative timeline. Though it is William Wordsworth the man presenting and detailing his artistic development, *The Prelude* can also be read as the character or image of the Poet telling the story of how he became so. It is the Poet detailing the practice of the tenets of poetry and expression that Wordsworth formulated in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

Though Wordsworth presents himself as the Poet in *The Prelude*, by Wordsworth's standard, the Poet occupies a station above his fellow man while still feeling the intensity of human emotions. In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he writes, "[T]he Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner" (Wordsworth 607). The power of the Poet develops through a poet's life but it is not an acquired talent. The Poet is the born-prophet for the human race. The preface details an

individual who is able to interpret what he himself feels, not only interpreting the emotions of others.

Notably, Branwell Brontë wrote a letter to William Wordsworth on January 10, 1837. Included in Margaret Smith's collection of the Brontë correspondence, Branwell asks Wordsworth for the Romantic poet's opinion of his own work. He writes that Wordsworth "developed the theory of poetry as well as its practice, and both in such a way as to claim a place in the memory of a thousand years to come" (ed. Smith 161). This proves that the Brontë children were familiar with Wordsworth's preface in which he details his figure for the Romantic genius. Branwell's own description of the work that he is submitting to Wordsworth is reminiscent of representations of genius that is akin to the Byronic hero. The Brontës experienced the Romantic movement from relative hindsight so the image of the genius or the artist as represented by the Brontë children is not marked in the same way that the image developed through Romantic discourse. Wordsworth did not respond to Branwell's letter.

However, Charlotte Brontë wrote a letter to Wordsworth's contemporary and Britain's poet laureate Robert Southey for his opinion on her own poetry. She received a reply that has been read many times over as Southey discouraging Brontë from pursuing writing because she is a woman, notably in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. However, while this is a logical reading of the infamous statement, "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life [and] it ought not to be," Southey discusses Brontë's worth within the context of Romanticism and the practice of writing poetry (ed. Smith 166-167). There was a sense of impropriety that surrounded female authors and the assumption that by writing she was making public that which was inherently private, like the domestic sphere. However, the rest of Southey's letter is often overlooked. Southey writes to Brontë, "You evidently possess [and] in

no inconsiderable degree what Wordsworth calls 'the faculty of Verse'" (ed. Smith 166). Southey goes on to warn Brontë against allowing what daydreams she has from overtaking her whole mind and the part that domestic tasks will play in drawing her away from the imagination (166). He points out Brontë's strong interest in celebrity through her work. Branwell had an identical aim in writing to Wordsworth. To approach poetry with this aim, Southey writes, is not the method by which to cultivate talent. The letters that they exchanged, however, placed Brontë's talent within the domestic setting and regulating the power of her imagination due to her gender. Southey did not apparently believe that there were elements of genius in Brontë's poetry. The approach to recognition for creativity will enter the discussion more prominently when considering the use of Jane's art through the novel and its relationship to the distinction between art and accomplishment.

For now, however, it is useful to note, as John Pfordresher does in his study of the history of Brontë's novel, that Charlotte Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* nearly in secret (Pfordresher 29). Female self-regulation is a societal expectation that would generally limit the woman from taking on the role of the genius as described by William Wordsworth in his preface. However, Brontë makes use of the expectation of self-regulation in conjunction with the governess novel genre in order to formulate her reinvention of the genius.

Coleridge and the Imagination

Another major contributor to the Romantic theories regarding imagination was Wordsworth's contemporary Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge's metaphysical interpretation of the imagination and the theories connecting the creative process of the poet or the artist to a type of divine Creation took Wordsworth's formulation of the genius and expanded upon the

aspects of the image that elevated the creative genius beyond the role of prophet for the human race. In Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* his chapter on the imagination details what he considers to be the different subcategories of imagination, how they differ within the creative process, and the difference between imagination as a whole and what he calls "fancy." The two types of imagination, primary and secondary, are reminiscent of the creative process detailed in Wordsworth's preface. In Coleridge's theories regarding the imagination, he differentiates between the two in terms of divine Creation:

> The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. (Coleridge 313)

What he distinguishes as the "primary imagination" is connected to "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that Wordsworth details in his preface. Coleridge takes this description of imagination a step further and connects it to a divine inspiration. Wordsworth elevated the emotions of the Poet as the inspiration for the poetry that the Poet would then produce. Since Coleridge is considering "all of human perception," the images that the poet conjures as reactions to what the poet sees, hears, and feels are also essential in the creation of poetry.

The secondary imagination is the type of imagination that figures into the act of writing poetry. Though Coleridge describes the secondary imagination as an "echo," whereby it can be

read to be of lesser importance in the mind of the poet, the secondary imagination can also be read in connection with the state of tranquility that Wordsworth describes as the essential step in recalling and making sense of the intense emotions that will then be present in poetry. The state of tranquility that both Wordsworth and Coleridge describe will be essential to understanding the scenes of artistic creation that Charlotte Brontë describes and both Jane Eyre and Jane Rochester experience in the course of the novel. The act of recreating and recollecting is the primary concern when approaching the novel as Jane Rochester's autobiography and what it means in the context of her art and her genius.

An additional interest for Coleridge in his chapter of *Biographia Literaria* is the distinction between imagination and fancy. This distinction will be important when considering the role that the autobiography plays in Jane's genius and in the issue of her art in comparison with the female practice of accomplishment. If the autobiography is only a documentation of details surrounding experiences, it is possible to approach autobiography as simply copying from life. For this reason, Coleridge's definition of fancy and its relation to memory as separate from the divine inspiration that takes place in the case of primary imagination and the articulation of such inspiration through the secondary imagination places fancy on a lower intellectual tier in Coleridge's Romantic conception of the functions of the mind:

> Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. (313)

Where it concerns art, fancy might be linked to Jane's artwork that falls under the category of accomplishment. The accomplishment is a definite representation of the work of another, usually the work of a male artist as was the case with the Brontë children and their visual artwork, or representations of landscapes. However, where the autobiography is concerned, the author has a level of creative agency that makes it impossible to have an entirely factual account through the autobiography. The writer has lived through the experiences that he or she narrates and the power achieved through hindsight will influence the construction of the narrative.

In the formation of her narrative, Jane narrates her story and points out the moments that are manipulated for the sake of constructing an interesting story for a reader. The "materials" that Coleridge references are not necessarily all present during the time that the events that an autobiographer narrates are happening. When Wordsworth constructed *The Prelude*, he continued to work on it from when he began in 1798 and it was still a work in progress when he died in 1850. If this form of Romantic autobiography is, as Coleridge puts it, constructed only through "the law of association," then Wordsworth's construction of *The Prelude* would have theoretically been final after Coleridge first heard the work read in 1805.

Continuing briefly with the topic of correspondence between Charlotte Brontë and Romantic poets, she was never in contact with Samuel Coleridge in a direct capacity but she did write to his son Hartley Coleridge and asked for his opinion on her work in 1840. It is in her response to his letter that she laments the time in which she was born. In their youth, Brontë and her siblings were fascinated by annuals like *Lady's Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine, and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. These publications featured tales, publications by the Romantic poets and Mary Shelley, and work by artists such as J. M. W. Turner and John Martin, as Christine Alexander details in her study of the subject ("'Kingdom of Gloom'" 413). Though

her letter to Hartley Coleridge was sent only seven years before *Jane Eyre* was published, she continues to reminisce on the literature of the past that was published in those annuals. Though, from Brontë's response to the poet, Hartley Coleridge did not have a very high opinion of the work that she submitted, the letter places her in an androgynous space of creativity because Hartley Coleridge, she writes, cannot seem to decide if she is a man or a woman (ed. Smith 240). This implication of the types of work that women tend to produce versus the type of work that men tend to produce is very much present in the type of work that Charlotte Brontë produced in her youth and also the work that for which she would be known through *Jane Eyre*.

The Byronic Hero and The Mad Genius

Another source of influence in Charlotte Brontë's formulation of her most famous character comes from the work of Lord Byron. Byron's influence can be seen in Brontë's use of the Romantic or Byronic hero. This intense character type is present throughout the Brontë siblings' juvenilia. The isolated and rebellious hero contributed to Charlotte Brontë's image of the hero in Rochester and the genius through Jane. The construction of the genius in Brontë's work is not entirely confined to the states of tranquility that Wordsworth and Coleridge describe in their work. As Darrin M. McMahon asks in his history of genius that focuses on the Romantics, "Was the genius a martyr, or the master of humanity?" (McMahon 139). The second-generation Romantic poets darkened the view of the genius to encompass the imaginative capability of the creative mind and this proved the power of the genius to become overwhelming. It was also Byron who contributed to the conception of the genius who is at risk of suffering from madness. Christine Alexander writes of the influence of this image of the Byronic hero and Charlotte Brontë's interest in "the fatal magnetism of the Byronic hero" ("Art and Artists" 195).

Not only do the alluring qualities of the Byronic hero apply to Brontë's characterization of Edward Rochester, but also in the "pride and passion of Jane herself" (Gilbert and Gubar 338). It is then the Byronic qualities of herself that Jane examines in the course of her visual art and in her autobiography.

Thus, the dichotomy between madness and genius is present in the relationship between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason in the novel. Gilbert and Gubar approach Bertha Mason as Jane's "dark double" in the sense that Bertha expresses Jane's anger regarding the restrictions that Jane faces on the basis of gender. However, extending that metaphor to consider their relationship in terms of Jane's genius incorporates the Romantic notion of genius with which Brontë would have been most familiar. This dichotomy between Jane and Bertha will be explored more fully in the third chapter within the context of androgyny and the double that is created in the act of writing an autobiography.

The importance of the individual, intense emotions, and imagination transcended the Romantic discussions of poets and artists in the Romantic practice of what Christine Alexander refers to as "hero-worship." One man who was an object of particular fascination to the Romantics, and the main focus of Darrin M. McMahon's chapter on Romantic genius in his book examining the history of the concept of "genius," was Napoleon Bonaparte. The Romantic poets, especially Lord Byron, admired Napoleon as a "genius of deeds" in the early days of his fame (115). Another aspect of Napoleon that is of particular interest to McMahon and to the image of genius during the Romantic period is that the genius is conscious of the myth surrounding his own genius and participates in the perpetuation of said myth (116). This particular detail regarding genius is essential to the further discussion of Romantic genius in the works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and then in the exploration of Charlotte

Brontë's use of genius in her creation of Jane. However, excluding Lord Byron, the Romantic poets who were interested in and admired Napoleon at the beginning of his political career quickly began to resent him and to admonish him in their writing (Beatty 33). Napoleon's dangerous ambition, his apparent belief that he was above the people of France, and the change in his image, Paul Stock writes, marked the end of the Romantic belief in Napoleon as representational of a Romantic ideal (Stock 369). This fluctuation in hero-worship was essential to the formation of the Romantic identity, just as the example of the Duke of Wellington is instrumental to Charlotte Brontë's development of her narrative identity.

Where the Romantic poets were interested in Napoleon Bonaparte, Charlotte Brontë was most interested in the Duke of Wellington. As Christine Alexander describes, the Duke of Wellington served as a model hero for the four Brontë children and their fantastical stories with which they entertained themselves at the Haworth Parsonage. The Duke of Wellington, as Alexander elaborates, "fulfilled [Thomas] Carlyle's principle that the great man was a genius capable of being either a soldier or a statesman" (5). Though this image of the genius does not pertain to artistic genius within the Romantic tradition, it does present one side of the genius as a symbol of accomplishment from which a wide audience can learn. This image of the genius as the statesman in Brontë's juvenilia and in her imagination morphed when she was introduced to the works of Lord Byron and Walter Scott (Alexander 12). This change incorporated the Byronic elements of Romantic genius that would eventually be found in both Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester. Such elements developed upon the image of genius as an isolated man with an element of danger and rebelliousness. The image of the male genius in the Duke of Wellington, and the main focus of Christine Alexander's article, significantly contributed to Charlotte Brontë's construction of her "self-image." The problem, however, with both the image of the

statesman-genius and the creative genius in the Romantic tradition is that both images are understood to be male. Thus, for Charlotte Brontë to have a male role model for both herself as a writer and for the characterization of her most famous heroine forces any study of genius with regard to *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Brontë to keep that consideration in mind.

Moving forward with the study of Charlotte Brontë's creation of the female genius, it will be important to recognize, as many critics have before, that Brontë's feminist agenda represents a stepping stone in the history of feminist criticism. She and her protagonist were influenced by a male-dominated literary tradition and yet both are free from the idea that women can only copy the work of men. Taking up the angle of historical consideration for her work, Charlotte Brontë created a new image of genius in the form of a woman. There were female artists who were described in literature before *Jane Eyre* was published. However, it was through Brontë's combination of motifs from the Gothic novel and the governess novel that she was able to carve out a spot for her poor and plain governess as a genius within the well-established Romantic tradition of genius.

CHAPTER TWO

"Where do you get your copies?": Visual Art and the Genius

In casting Jane Eyre as Charlotte Brontë's model of the genius, it is necessary to first look at Jane as the visual artist and how Brontë uses visual art to express the mental interiority of her protagonist. Jane the narrator tells the story of her life beginning when she is ten years old. Jane the narrator takes up her pen twenty years later but she does not practice verbal or written narrative through episodes of her life that she focuses on as the narrator. Instead, it is through her visual art that her younger self develops her narrative voice, narrative capabilities, and her own methods of self-examination.

Jane's art and her imagination are regularly linked to the creation of a narrative or the narrative that she hears from others. Jane's interpretation of the art of others through the narrative that she constructs and then the interpretation of her own life through an abstract narrative both cultivate her skills as the Romantic genius. Brontë utilizes the expectations surrounding female accomplishment to ground the Romantic female genius in artwork and then Brontë expands Jane's capabilities to exceed the bounds of what would be considered female accomplishment. Jane renders new what is familiar, as William Wordsworth writes of the poetic genius in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, through the narrative that she constructs for the art with which she interacts in her youth and then in her self-construction in her own visual art.

The Function of Visual Art in Romanticism

Even though the first- and second-generation Romantic poets that were discussed in the previous chapter were for the most part strictly writers rather than visual artists, the visual artists that were part of the Romantic movement throughout Europe struggled with the same intellectual

developments that the English poets encountered. In his study of the term "Romantic" within the history of art, William Vaughn wrote, "In the pictorial sphere the word ["romantic"] had evolved from this ["wild and fantastic"] to describe sights that excited the imagination and led to reverie" (Vaughn 14). The discussion of the term began with German philosophers, spread through continental Europe, and then on to England. Within the context of visual art, the role of the artist as the prophet arose just as it did within the realm of poetry. This definition of Romantic art combined with Wordsworth's theory that poetry "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" works to create a definition of the type of Romantic art that Jane Eyre creates in the course of the novel. The Romantic art that Vaughn considers in the course of his study are predominantly painted works. Though some of the works considered are sketches done in pencil, the medium within which most established art was made contributed to the elevation of the artist within the Romantic tradition.

It was during the Romantic movement that artists worked more with watercolor as it was a "rapid technique [that] was admirably suited for capturing the most transient and fleeting moments of a landscape, the changes of light and atmosphere" (Vaughn 33). The capability of the Romantic artist to capture such moments or features of the world elevates painting, and particularly painting in this medium, to a higher artistic medium than an artist who works in a different medium or a copyist who might work with the depiction of a work by another artist that would be a static original from which to work. The fleeting nature of both the artist's intense imaginings and the minute intricacies of nature, however, are not visions that can be depicted only through the medium of watercolor, as Brontë implicitly argues in Jane's chosen media for visual art. Brontë works within the conventions of accomplishment to both elevate the medium of pencil into the discussion of portrayal of the imagination by the genius as well as elevate the

woman who works both in and outside the bounds of accomplishment to express the inner workings of her mind.

Charlotte Brontë and Female Accomplishment

Where it concerns visual art, female artistic creation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century would generally fall into the category of "accomplishment." Though some female visual artists were able to escape the confines of this socially accepted form of creation, many women were regulated to an artistic education that amounted to a strain of performance. The historical context of accomplishment will be complicated when applied to *Jane Eyre* and how Brontë utilizes this practice of art where is concerns Jane's social status as a governess at Thornfield and whether she can be considered an accomplished woman at all. However, this point of reference will provide a framework for an artistic culture with which Charlotte Brontë was familiar and into which she placed her heroine.

Throughout the novel Jane engages with the visual arts of drawing and painting. However, the realm of female accomplishment extended beyond that to include music, which Jane Eyre demonstrates briefly at Rochester's request, decorating fire screens, and dancing, among other performative and decorative arts. As Ann Bermingham writes, "The accomplishment is directly tied to this new construction of the domestic space as a space of authentic (and virtuous) subjectivity" (184). This subjectivity, however, is not linked to originality. Accomplishment served to win the attention of eligible suitors while maintaining female propriety and restricting female access to increasingly questionable social spaces. Already, the issue of class in the definition of an accomplished woman is apparent. The accomplished woman would generally be from a middle-class family or above. Her family would

have the financial ability to provide for her education in such accomplishments as would win her the attention of society and of suitors. The issue of accomplishment and the domestic sphere took hold before Charlotte Brontë was born, as cities became increasingly to be considered immoral centers. The accomplished woman would not earn money through her creations and this differentiated her from the "artist" (Bermingham 186). The link between accomplishment, performance, and the marriage plot is a key point of interest in criticism of *Jane Eyre* and in Jane's relationship with other women in the novel. Bermingham makes the distinction between the artist and the accomplished woman as such, "She [the accomplished woman] was not an artist because she was neither original nor a paid professional" (186). In the practice of drawing and painting, women engaged in copying classical works, copying the work of established male artists, or drawing portraits from life. To bring the definition of the artist as one producing original work and earning money through such work into conversation with the discussion of originality as it relates to the Romantic genius in the novel *Jane Eyre*, Jane does not earn money for her original visual artwork. It would not be appropriate for her to do so. However, both the style of her visual artwork and its originality are essential to placing Jane's art in conversation with Romantic art and to examining Jane's growth as a narrative artist from the moment she is introduced to the moment in which she is writing the narrative of her life.

Jane Eyre **and the Life of the Artist**

When Jane Eyre is introduced as a ten-year old child, she channels narrative through the art that she encounters in Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Brontë's young heroine works her way through the copy of Bewick in such way that she focuses on the additional vignettes and she then provides the narrative for the pictures herself. For young Jane, the power of the artwork

comes not from the technique but from the stories that she is prompted to create for them. She focuses on the artwork that lends itself to narrative rather than the artwork that depicts the birds before the corresponding descriptions or the smaller vignettes that do not depict full scenes. The language that Brontë uses to describe the thoughts of her younger self are not the words of a preadolescent girl. Rather than a translation of the thoughts that her younger self had in the moment, Jane's narration instead provides general insight into the mind of her younger self based on her memory of the types of thoughts that she had at the time.

Jane Rochester as the narrator partially shrugs off the narrative that her younger self created, referring to these imaginings as "the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains," but also mentions that her constructed narratives were nonetheless "strangely impressive" (Brontë 11). Young Jane's narratives are rooted in the emotions that the pieces inspire, thus the narrator refers to the imaginings as "half-comprehended." Jane's daydreams about the stories that she ascribes to the artworks are not simply the musings of a child that the narrator might disregard. Even though this episode in Jane's story is not narrated through the mind of a young girl, Brontë and her narrator nonetheless elevate the mind of a female child to the focus of the first third of the novel and fictional autobiography. Young Jane does not approach the works in Bewick's book as purely aesthetic pieces that are meant to be enjoyed, though such a response would be understandable in a child's reaction to works of art. Nor does she use the book as an educational tool. Instead, young Jane wishes to understand the work and, in order to understand the work, she creates a small narrative for her own purposes and escape from her life in the Reed household.

As young Jane looks through the pictures in Bewick's book, she bridges the gap between the description of an object and the ascription of narrative. When she comes to the vignette that

shows, “The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms,” she provides a hypothesis for the subject of the picture (Brontë 11). The young Jane’s construction of fantastical narratives will prepare her for the development of her narrative abilities expressed in visual art that will exceed the realm of considering a woman’s art as only accomplishment. An accomplished woman would generally depict that which was familiar and tangible. Whether this is a landscape that she could see, a portrait of a subject who sat before her, or the artwork of a master, it is work that has a tangible origin. This is not the case for either the Bewick vignettes to which Jane’s attention is drawn or the work that Jane will produce later.

As Jane describes her younger self’s reactions to the paintings and the narratives of each, she writes, “Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my underdeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting” (11). The young Jane takes intellectual pleasure and emotional comfort in the narrative of art. Intense emotion will characterize Jane’s future relationships with narrative and art. In this particular moment, she associates the narratives with happiness, even though the vignettes described convey dark scenes. Like the songs that Bessie sings and the stories that she tells to Jane, though these dark images that do not immediately connote safety or happiness, the vignettes in Bewick’s book offer young Jane a moment of freedom from the toxic atmosphere of the Reed household. Brontë uses “half-comprehended notions” and “imperfect feelings” to describe young Jane’s mind and how she approaches the art that she sees. Such descriptions serve a dual purpose in Brontë’s formation of the female genius.

The first is the surface-level preservation of female modesty. Though Jane is far from an unselfish character throughout the novel, she is still bound by the propriety surrounding femininity and female accomplishment. Such presentations of modesty would be the tradition

within which Brontë enacts the second purpose of such vocabulary. Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth cite the genius as one whose creations, whether literary or artistic, are limited only by his capabilities to translate what is in his mind to a form that those around him would understand. What the narrator could be describing under the guise of claim to modesty is the belief that young Jane's intellectual or narrative development has not reached that point that she could create stories for the vignettes or understand the emotions that she feels when looking at the works at this point in her life. Jane, while she is at Gateshead and later at Lowood School, is still developing as an artist. Brontë positions such vocabulary of development as being from the pen of Jane Rochester nearly twenty years after the young protagonist is introduced at the age of ten. This language from an older Jane suggests that the Jane that writes the narrative has reached some form of goal in her emotional and artistic development. Because she has theoretically reached such a goal, the narrator is able to look back on the imaginings of her younger self with a sense of awareness of her progress of her growing imagination and talent for narrative.

In one of the most famous scenes of the novel, the young protagonist is sent to the red-room as punishment for striking her cousin John Reed. When she is brought to the room in which her uncle died, the Gothic narrative of the vengeful spirit takes hold of her. This scene is often compared to Bertha Mason's imprisonment in the third-floor space of Thornfield Hall. One detail about this scene and its connection to the later description of the infamous room in Thornfield is the intense emotions that are inspired within these two spaces. In the red-room, Jane constructs the narrative of her uncle's restless spirit and the seemingly spectral appearances in the red-room to the point that she has an intense physical reaction to the workings of her own imagination. She eventually experiences "a species of a fit" and faints after she calls for help and is left in the state

of terror once again by her aunt (Brontë 22). In her young mind, this narrative about her uncle returning to enact revenge upon her is so strong that the emotions take her over. However, it is the adult Jane that narrates these emotions from what could be argued is the state of tranquility that Wordsworth believed was necessary for the creation of poetry. The narrator's place above the action of this scene allows her to say, "I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern" with her collected authorial voice that creates a simultaneous narration of the scene from the heightened emotions and terror of the Radcliffean Gothic to the resolution of the terror being caused by a human force rather than a supernatural force (21). The narrator relates the emotions of her younger self that will inspire a strong response in the reader, whether the reader is familiar with the tropes of the Gothic genre or not. Though there is no visual art in this scene, the narrative that Jane creates in this moment about her uncle inspires such an intense response that the narrator, from her place of tranquility twenty years later, is able to translate the physical reactions of terror to inspire similar reactions in the reader of the autobiography.

After Jane is sent away from Gateshead and away from the Reed family, she is sent to Lowood School where the capabilities of her imagination are tested. She maintains her sense of self and her imagination through the isolation that she chooses within Lowood. Besides the companionship of Helen Burns and the protection of Miss Temple, Jane exists in solitude at Lowood. During these moments of solitude at Lowood, before the arrival of Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane looks at the area surrounding Lowood and the inhospitable weather and realizes that she does not feel saddened for her enrollment at Lowood. She does not feel that she has left anything behind or that she has anything to think back on fondly. Instead, she watches the weather and "wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness, and the confusion to

rise to clamour" (65). It is not calm weather from a traditional landscape that excites Jane while she is at Lowood but the turbulent weather depicted in the second volume of Bewick's *History of British Birds.* While she is at Lowood, the living conditions at the school force her to travel inwards to create her own mental sustenance through the act of imagining food before she goes to sleep and spending time with Helen Burns. It is also at Lowood where she begins to learn drawing as an accomplishment; however, this occurs only after the death of Helen Burns and Jane's return to solitude in Lowood.

Following public humiliation when Mr. Brocklehurst exposes her history with the Reeds and then Miss Temple's subsequent inquiry to Mr. Lloyd about the situation that Jane endured at Gateshead, the narrator writes, "I from that hour set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty" (88). Her creative inclinations in her youth depend upon the situation in which she finds herself. As the narrator continues to describe her younger self's progress, she describes the workings of her mind before she experienced this transition at Lowood. She writes of her tendency to "prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper, of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk" (88). Though she conjures no physical sustenance using her imagination, the mere act of using her imagination and her tendency toward narrative in order to survive the hardship of Lowood creates an important link to what Kathleen A. Miller describes as Jane's "word-painting." Though the full extent of this term is used in the context of the end of the novel, which will be discussed in due time, this is an early variation of Jane's "word-painting" that she uses for her own benefit.

Jane's imaginings of the dinner are mental expressions of her physical deprivations at Lowood and are methods for survival. However, the narrator describes the shift that young Jane experiences with her new success at Lowood and her steps towards what at first seems to be

accomplishment. In this moment of transition, Jane "feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings…all work of [her] own hands; freely penciled" artwork (88). The shift marks a second stage in the development of Jane's artistic agency through visual art, the first being Jane's interaction with Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Throughout the novel, Jane's artwork and her agency are bound in such a way that she holds no responsibility to anyone for the creation of her art other than herself.

Though Jane is taught the accomplishment of drawing at Lowood, her agency and her independence in her work bring her creations to the level of art rather than accomplishment. Though Jane's economic situation complicates part of the definition that Ann Bermingham provides for the artist, Jane's work, its originality, and its style, extends into Bermingham's definition of the artist and into the realm of the Romantic genius. In Jane's young musings about the future of her own art, she imagines "ideal" work. This is her imagination's conjuring of images that she will portray through her visual art. Wordsworth's theory of Romantic genius is a mind that is able to see the "ideal" and then does his best to convey that ideal to those who cannot see such connection with the world around them. However, the young Jane does not connect her ideal to a divine vision that exists outside of her own imagination. Instead, the ideal resides in her own imagination and would thus verge into the theories described by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria.* Though the images that Jane describes are landscapes and natural settings, these are natural settings that her mind creates.

In conjuring natural scenes to draw, young Jane develops her own imaginative capabilities that will come to relative maturity through her later paintings. Brontë endows a ten-year old girl with such capabilities of imagination that she believes such images to be the "ideal." From this moment forward, Jane does not credit her ideas as coming from anywhere other than

her own imagination. The distinction between the accomplished woman and the woman as the artist within the context of the novel is drawn by Juliette Wells. According to Wells, "Jane Eyre is ultimately neither artist nor accomplished woman, but suspended between these identities" (69). Wells's argument that Jane cannot fully occupy the role of the female artist is due in large part to the issue that Jane's art is also used as an accomplishment. Additionally, Wells argues, it is Rochester who ascribes value to the work and "asserts most explicitly, though not without qualification that her drawings deserve to be considered art, and that she deserves to be thought of as an artist" (79). Wells sees the use of Jane's art as an accomplishment as inhibiting to her possibility of being seen as the female artist. However, Brontë allows her heroine to occupy both identities without one taking away from the other, beginning with the moment of transition at Lowood.

Brontë repeatedly works within the restrictions of tradition and gender expectations in the novel and she does so in young Jane's imagination of her art, its subject, and the medium of the pencil. Jane employs intense powers of imagination and imposing her creative capabilities on a landscape in order to come up with a new representation of what would be familiar in the theory of the Romantics. Maggie Berg in her study of the influence of art on the novel and on Jane's character points out that the Jane's use of pencils in her artwork is more akin to the medium of the copyist rather than the recognized artist, who would use paints (Berg 94). Since women's artistic accomplishment would be judged on their abilities as copyists, Brontë, in placing the young Jane in the more traditional accomplished woman as the first step in her development as an artist, allows Jane to transcend the title of an "accomplished woman." Young Jane's creation of natural scenes at this moment at Lowood in the novel transfixes her imagination and this type

of creation of landscape is present through her artwork and her idealistic imaginings of her future work.

Beyond Accomplishment

Following this moment at Lowood, the narrator describes her transition from Lowood to Thornfield. When Jane is looking for a job, her recommendations as a governess are her accomplishments, of which include drawing (Brontë 103). Drawing, in this instance, is seen as separate from painting. Drawing is a woman's art while painting belongs in the male, intellectual sphere. Because it connotes the act of copying, drawing is a skill that Jane may impart unto others, while her ability to paint stands apart from such a skill. Drawing was generally a skill that was performed with pencil. Charlotte Brontë elevates into the study of genius the medium of pencil that was generally thought to be less than the art of painting. Jane's artistic capabilities are not restricted to her paintings while her skills as a copyist are expressed only through her drawings. Jane's strong sense of narrative throughout her art develops despite the need to rely on the lesser art of drawing as a recommendation for her suitability for employment at Thornfield Hall. The paintings that she produces during a holiday while she was employed at Lowood and then displays to Mr. Rochester at Thornfield are then a manifestation of Jane's artistic genius. These paintings combine the narrative power that she conveys through art, the depiction of the contents of her own mind, and her ability to portray the familiar as entirely new to her audience's eyes.

Before Jane leaves Lowood to go to Thornfield, she meets with Bessie and another example of her artwork is put on display for the readers. Though the details of the "landscape in water colours" are not expressed in the narrative, it is considered as a testament to Jane's

accomplishment rather than her artistry because Bessie asked if Jane was able to draw (Brontë 109). Recalling the detail given by William Vaughn of the Romantic artist's inclination towards the use of watercolors this is not necessarily an answer to Bessie's question within the context of Jane's accomplishments. In this moment, Bessie compares Jane's work to that which "Miss Reed's drawing-master could paint" (109). Such a master would generally teach a young lady, such as Miss Reed, how to copy work rather than create original artwork. This landscape is not given much attention besides Jane's short explanation for its creation as a gift of thanks to Lowood's superintendent. The origin of the landscape is not given and Bessie quickly moves on to her next question regarding another of Jane's accomplishments. Kathleen A. Miller discusses this moment in the novel and focuses on Bessie's use of the word "beautiful" in her reaction to the painting. Miller writes, "Bessie's choice of the word 'beautiful' to define Jane's art is significant because it demonstrates that she recognizes and responds to its aesthetic value" (Miller 254). However, the mere appreciation of the aesthetic value of the piece does not signify that Bessie sees this work of Jane's as somehow separate from the distinction of accomplishment and belonging to the realm of art.

Because the originality of the piece cannot be fully judged within the context of the narration, Bessie's reaction alone and the medium in which Jane worked link the work to the definition of Romantic art rather than the work of a copyist. The crucial scene in which Jane's visual artwork is on display for both the male gaze and for the reader takes place when Jane resides at Thornfield as a governess. During this scene, Jane explicitly vouches for the originality of her work and thus defends herself from any belief that her work is the work of another artist or that she is only a copyist.

"That head that I see now on your shoulders?"

When Jane is first confronted by Rochester's questioning of her art, the first accusation that he makes is the assumption that she did not create such artwork entirely on her own. As in several conversations that Jane and Rochester have throughout the novel, he eggs her on in order to inspire an outburst of offended pride. Though Rochester's sincerity is questionable in this particular scene of the novel, he nonetheless is interested in the work. As he continues to give Jane directions to hand over her portfolio, he dares her that the work be original and that he "can recognize patchwork" (Brontë 146). Jane gives him the task of judging the work for himself, giving the false impression that she will limit her own voice.

Before Rochester's attention and Jane's narration settle on three of her paintings, Rochester casts other pieces from the portfolio aside. Based on the expectations of the accomplishment of painting rather than the art of painting, it can be assumed that the paintings that Rochester casts aside are landscapes or other "copies." The difference between what are examples of Jane's accomplishments and the pictures that draw his attention is a distinct line between the understanding of art as accomplishment versus art as a display of genius.

In a scene that could have been a key example for Virginia Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Own*, Rochester inquires of Jane when she was able to "find time to do them?" (146). Not only would a woman be excluded from the domain of artistic creation from an ideological viewpoint perpetuated by a patriarchal society, but she would be excluded simply on the grounds that she should be occupied with other domestic tasks. However, time is not a concern for Jane, as her mind is continuously working and as she uses her creative abilities elsewhere. She describes the experience of creating these paintings as an experience of absorption. Jane also tells Rochester, "I was happy. To paint them, in short, was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I

have ever known" (Brontë 148). The connection between art and emotional comfort recalls Jane's relationship with the pictures in Bewick's *History of British Birds* and with the songs that Bessie would sing. Though feelings of absorption and happiness are more passionate than a feeling of tranquility would generally inspire, Jane created these pieces in a mental space of removed from the passion and torment that inspired the works.

Returning to the female artist as a copyist rather than a creator, Rochester's question, "Where do you get your copies?" and Jane's response provide a framework for the conditions under which Rochester would, as a man, be comfortable praising Jane for her artistic talent (146). To assume that the artwork is a copy removes the agency that Jane exercises through the creation of her art. Jane is more of a cerebral painter than Rochester ever is able to understand. Rochester is denied such an understanding because he does not describe the paintings back to Jane who, as the narrator, will then transcribe his perceptions for the reader to then judge the artwork. The paintings are not verbally interpreted through the male gaze. Jane fights against the view of the woman as the vessel for male creativity through her own narrative authority.

After taking narrative control of her paintings that are entirely of her own imagination, she gives one justification to her readers:

> While he is so occupied, I will tell you, reader, what they are: first, I must premise that they 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. (147)

This passage would suggest an artist's modesty rather than a woman's modesty. Jane stands before a jury of readers who wait to hear the descriptions of the pieces. Her modesty does not

undercut the beauty of her work. Instead, one can only imagine what they would look like if her entire potential could be transferred to the canvas. Her "spiritual eye" is of interest when arguing that Jane is not a modest artist. She equates the images that she attempted to paint with divine visions. By considering Jane's imagination as her "spiritual eye," Jane's connection to her own genius, and her attempts to translate such images into painting places her in further conversation with the Romantic poets and their conceptions of genius in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century. The fact that she points out the limits of her own ability to fully convey these visions echoes Wordsworth's discussion of the limits of the Poet in conveying the ideal and the sublime to those who are unable to fully comprehend it in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Jane goes on to describe paintings that echo what William Vaughn referred to in the context of John Martin's Romantic artwork as "imaginative landscapes" and express the full capabilities of her imagination while interpreting the events of her life through art. This allows the paintings to be discussed within the context of the sublime in Romanticism. Jane's artwork is a manifestation of the emotions accumulated through trauma in her childhood. Such emotionally charged works, when combined with her own impressive imaginative capabilities, become a central example of her Romantic genius.

The three pictures that Rochester sets aside as being anomalous among the others in her portfolio have inspired several different critical approaches and interpretations. I will examine such interpretations as those made by Thomas Langford, Maggie Berg, and Robin St. John Conover that consider these paintings as prophetic of the events to come. Though the study of Jane's genius is less concerned with what exactly Jane *means* when she creates these paintings, if she means anything specific, their prophetic qualities lend an interesting dynamic to casting Jane as the Romantic female genius. The general consensus among critics is that the first painting is a

representation of the childhood that she spent at Gateshead and Lowood. The second is understood, in one form or another, to be a prediction of her time at Thornfield with Mr. Rochester. The third is meant to be another prophetic representation of her time to be spent at Marsh End, her interactions with St. John Rivers, and the discovery of Rochester's injury after Bertha Rochester burns Thornfield.

Beginning with the first painting, Jane Rochester describes a work that is rooted in the tradition of landscape painting that her younger self would have seen in the edition of Bewick and which Brontë herself copied. Jane's painting adds a dark image to the landscape that she leaves out of her description until the end. She describes the painting thus:

> The first represented clouds low and livid, rolling over a swollen sea: all the distance was in eclipse; so, too, was the foreground; or, rather, the nearest billows, for there was no land. One gleam of light lifted into relief a half-submerged mast, on which sat a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked with foam; its beak held a gold bracelet, set with gems, that I had touched with as brilliant tints as my palette could yield, and as glittering distinctness as my pencil could impart. Sinking below the bird and mast, a drowned corpse glanced through the green water; a fair arm was the only limb clearly visible, whence the bracelet had been washed or torn. (147)

The cormorant is an image that critics have approached differently. In her examination of *Jane Eyre* as a revisionist creation myth, Robin St. John Conover theorizes the cormorant to be representative of Satan from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Though this interpretation is beneficial in the grander scheme of Conover's argument that *Jane Eyre* is a retelling of the creation myth from Eve's perspective, for this discussion, the cormorant is better served in the

connection between Bewick's *History of British Birds* and its effect on Jane, as well as Jane's portrayal of her own mind and her past.

The first painting places Nature in the position of ultimate power through the cormorant. The figure of the bird itself is not unlike "the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock" that Jane saw in the Bewick book in her youth (Brontë 11). The creature depicted in the book and the creature which frightened young Jane, is reborn in this painting. By taking inspiration from her childhood, whether consciously or not, Jane the artist is participating in artistic reinvention and originality inspired by the work that came before her. The cormorant is translated into a similarly treacherous scene that "the black, horned thing" overlooks in the Bewick illustration. While the creature in Jane's youth overlooked a crowd gathered around a public hanging, the cormorant overlooks and has participated in the scene of the shipwreck. This lends into Thomas Langford's early pronouncement of the cormorant as representative of "the evil force" responsible for the death of Helen Burns while Jane was a student at Lowood School (Langford 231). Nature itself is participating in a theft of life and theft of possession. Oddly, it is the bracelet that Jane Rochester mentions as having demanded her attention and skill. The manmade object held in the beak of the cormorant, one would imagine, is the focal point of the painting. By drawing both implied visual attention and narrative attention to this manmade object, and in doing so the animal that has taken possession of it, a cruelty of natural cycles is invoked while making the described image hauntingly beautiful.

If Jane is in fact translating the difficulty that she endured during her time at Gateshead and Lowood, she masks this behind her art. Jane did not draw a portrait of Helen Burns in memory of her lost friend. Jane does not paint the red-room in an effort to convey the emotions that she felt during that Gothic moment in her childhood. Instead, her emotions manifest and

morph in what she describes as period of absorption and she paints a landscape that exists only in her imagination. There is no physical original of the landscape. Jane Eyre as the artist creates both the original and the representation, just as Jane Rochester creates herself through the writing of an autobiography. In the Platonic tradition of the divine original to which an artist aspires, Jane's imagination takes divine agency of said original. By giving Jane this level of creative agency, Brontë positions her heroine as a new figure in the discussion of Woman as artist.

In the second painting, Brontë engages with another aspect of the Romantic tradition while simultaneously revising this tradition. Jane's narrative control continues as she describes the contents of the second painting:

> The second picture contained for foreground only the dim peak of a hill, with grass and leaves slanting as if by a breeze. Beyond and above spread an expanse of sky, dark blue as at twilight: rising into the sky was a woman's shape to the bust, portrayed in tints as dusk and soft as I could combine. The dim forehead was crowned with a star; the lineaments below were seen as through the suffusion of vapour; the eyes shone dark and wild; the hair streamed shadowy, like a beamless cloud torn by storm or by electric travail. On the neck lay a pale reflection like moonlight; the same faint lustre touched the train of thin clouds from which rose and bowed this vision of the Evening Star. (147)

This painting engages with the image of the woman as divine inspiration to the poet/genius in the Romantic tradition. Though the description itself is attentive to the care with which Jane handles her subject, both Brontë and Jane engage with the tradition of the woman as the object of the male artist's gaze. If my argument is that Charlotte Brontë revises the idea that genius and artist are inherently male-coded terms, this image is crucial to understanding where the influence of the male-dominated Romantic traditions upon Brontë's composition of the novel. By placing

Jane within the tradition of the isolated male genius as a woman, certain expectations of such a tradition are difficult to escape, but not entirely impossible to critique through direct engagement.

As I have mentioned previously, in the Romantic tradition, and in male-dominated literary tradition as a whole, the woman is rarely ever the artist. In this instance, Jane's painting casts the Evening Star as a muse. The function of the female-coded idea and then the image is to display Jane's talent as an artist. The subject of the painting is not oblivious to the male gaze. The subject is seemingly aware that she is being observed and she does not remain passive in the interaction between the painting and the observer. While the female-coded image or the female in Romantic poetry is generally treated a passive inspiration or observer to the genius of the poet, like the female worker in Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper," Jane Eyre's painting gives the subject of her work an active role in the expression of Jane's genius in this painting. It is this painting that inspires a vocal reaction from Rochester regarding Jane's technique. This painting, which depicts a female-coded image, is the work of art that inspires verbal engagement from the male audience. The Evening Star's eyes and the movement of the image are technical aspects that could inspire a sense of intellectual equality between Rochester and Jane. Rochester's status as an upper-class man allows him to assume that talent is taught and asks of Jane, "And who taught you to paint wind?" (148) Jane is not given the opportunity to answer this question. Because the novel is told through Jane's recollections, Rochester's thoughts are conjecture. However, the culture of the time and the passage itself support the probability that he does not consider the possibility of Jane's natural talent. As talent differs from, but is nevertheless essential to, the Romantic genius, by writing off the possibility of Jane's talent, Rochester

deprives Jane of the ability to be considered a genius in the eyes of the patriarchal society in which she lives.

In rendering the familiar new to her audience, Jane conveys the image of a mountain in the second painting that Rochester identifies as the fictional mountain of Latmos. He asks her, "Where did you see Latmos? For that is Latmos" (148). Jane's depiction of a setting with which Rochester is familiar is the detail that most unsettles him and prompts him to order her to remove the pictures. Though Rochester is comfortable in providing Jane with some praise for her artwork, he draws the line as her imaginative vision allows her to reach beyond the bounds of her restricted external vision and even beyond the natural world to which she normally would not have access. Through her imagination, she achieves the image of what Rochester believes the fictional location to look like and thus to convey the contents of his own mind to back to him. She depicts Rochester's world to him and he chooses not to confront the full capabilities of the "artist's dreamland" of Jane's mind (148). This is an early instance in which Jane portrays a version of Rochester's reality back to him and has narrative control of what he believes to be familiar to him and unknowable to her.

The third and final painting that Rochester examines presents a new level of surrealism in Jane's work. It also takes on another issue within Romanticism and manipulates tradition:

> The third showed the pinnacle of an iceberg piercing a polar winter sky: a muster of northern lights reared their dim lances, close serried, along the horizon. Throwing these into distance, rose, in the foreground, a head—a colossal head, inclined towards the iceberg, and resting against it. Two thin hands, joined under the forehead, and supporting it, drew up before the lower features a sable veil; a brow quite bloodless, white as bone,

> and an eye hollow and fixed, blank of meaning, but for the glassiness of despair, alone were visible (148).

Though Jane goes on to describe further the details of the painting, this is a point in her narration of the painting that examines what Brontë might be doing differently in this painting than in the previous pieces. There are multiple interpretations for this painting when approaching Brontë treatment of an aspect of the Romantic tradition of the veiled muse. Diane Long Hoeveler, in her examination of androgyny in the roles that women were allowed to occupy in Romantic poetry, one of them being the muse, argues, "It is no coincidence that the muse and her avatars are often veiled; they are mysterious, brooding, unknown, and unknowable" (Hoeveler 207). Hoeveler's point is but a fragment of her discussion of the function of the veiled muse in Romantic poetry but this detail of the veiled muse falls in line with feeling of mystery that Jane has when she is with Rochester. Robin St. John Conover, in her Creation revisionist reading of the novel, interprets the head as a prediction of Rochester's condition after Bertha Rochester destroys Thornfield (St. John Conover 183). Reading the head as Jane's prediction of Rochester's condition casts him as a veiled muse and her creative inspiration.

Critics have read the veil on this figure to be representative only of Rochester's future blindness. However, the discussion of the veiled muse, and the role of the veil in the narrative following Jane and Rochester's engagement can open a conversation on Brontë's manipulation of the Romantic muse. The head in the painting seeks support from the iceberg itself and the "two thin hands" have an equal role in keeping the head upright. Langford writes in his study of the paintings that the third painting can be read as being representative of Jane's time at Marsh End and the arctic scene is representative of St. John Rivers and "the bloodless, barren, living death of the life into which he would draw Jane" (Langford 232). I would argue that this scene is

more representative of Jane's move to Ferndean following her time at Marsh End. In the scene at Thornfield in which Mr. Rochester disguises himself as a gypsy and speaks to each of his guests individually, and during Jane's turn, he says to the young governess, "You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you" (228). This scene takes place after Rochester looks at Jane's paintings. However, Jane's coldness and her apparent lack of feeling is a detail that Brontë addresses several times through Jane's narration. Her supposed coldness can be applied to the prophetic painting of the head leaning against the iceberg and reading the iceberg, as well as the hands supporting the head, to be Jane.

The veil that the hands lift from the face in the painting is not entirely unlike the moment at the end of the novel in which Rochester regains sight in one of his eyes. The figure in the painting has only one eye as well. The hands' act of lifting the veil from the figure's eye gives the muse a power and a relief from being only the inspiration for the creative work. Brontë's awareness of gender expectation within the Romantic tradition and the role that Rochester occupies that verges on the role of the muse hints at the equality that should exist between the artist and his or her muse. The support that the head draws from the iceberg is mirrored in Rochester's reliance on Jane when they live at Ferndean. He is reliant upon her narrative in the time that he has lost his sight. Her creation of the world is what he must take as true. He is familiar with this landscape, and yet, it is rendered new through Jane's construction.

The Question of Genius in the Company of Other Women

Jane does not ascribe a full narrative to the previously discussed paintings that Rochester scrutinizes early in their relationship. Later, when Blanche Ingram and Rochester's other guests come to stay at Thornfield uses the narrative provided to her by Mrs. Fairfax in order to create an

artistic representation of her future romantic rival. Jane as the artist approaches Blanche as a woman who is disingenuous once she sees Miss Ingram interact with Mr. Rochester. Jane holds disdain for the marriage plot and finds Blanche to be putting such a narrative into effect upon her arrival at Thornfield.

The first time that Jane encounters an image of Blanche Ingram is after Mrs. Fairfax divulges Miss Ingram's beauty and accomplishments to Jane. Jane as the artist takes to her art in order to convince herself of the narrative that must, in her mind, be the most appropriate. Again, the medium that Jane uses to depict herself and Blanche carries the weight of esteem. She draws herself in chalk while the portrait of Blanche is "an ivory miniature" (187). Again, Jane is using the tradition of a female accomplishment in order to exercise her genius. She imagines what Blanche Ingram will look like with only the words of Mrs. Fairfax. Using only the small narrative that Mrs. Fairfax recounts to her, Jane is able to depict Blanche in the miniature in a portrait that is not entirely unrecognizable from the original; though, more importantly, it is from this portrait that Jane constructs a pseudo-marriage plot narrative in terms of the type of woman that Mr. Rochester would appropriately marry. She inflicts this narrative on herself through her art. This narrative comes through the "voice" of Reason and the narrator Jane divulges, "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 that ideal" (186). Jane Eyre as the artist repeatedly interacts with female-coded images that advise her towards certain decisions. In this moment, Reason draws Jane's attention to the unlikelihood of the relationship between herself and Rochester from a class standpoint. This new narrative that Reason imparts onto Jane is limited by the external "reality" while Jane's narrative is idealized and hopeful.

The portrait is revealed to be very near the original when Jane meets Miss Ingram. As the narrator writes, “The noble bust, the sloping shoulders, the graceful neck, the dark eyes and black ringlets were all there” (200). Where the original falls short is in Blanche Ingram’s face. Jane is not entirely able to render it; though she had the ability to depict what Rochester was convinced was Latmos. Where Jane’s creative genius fails is in portraying Blanche’s physiognomy. Jane’s genius is rooted in the Romantic tradition of the early nineteenth century while the interesting in physiognomy takes hold during the Victorian period. Where Jane’s artwork, and specifically the artwork that would credit her as an artistic genius in the Romantic genius, is rooted in the natural and her genius was spawned by imaginings of natural scenes, portraiture by women is often considered to be an accomplishment. Though Jane draws portraits throughout the Thornfield section of the novel, they are helpful predominantly to understand her ability to conjure the faces of others based on the narrative that she constructs and that she hears. Where Jane’s genius is rooted in the narrative that she constructs to accompany the art that she creates and is only conscious of her work falling short of the ideal, Brontë presents a definition of genius to confront the character of Blanche Ingram.

The definition of genius that Jane Rochester explicitly provides as the narrator is one that is not fully elaborated, but is assigned one striking feature. Jane the narrator writes, “Genius is said to be self-conscious: I cannot tell whether Miss Ingram was a genius, but she was self-conscious—remarkably self-conscious indeed” (200). Charlotte Brontë interacts with a specific Romantic tenet of genius that seems to be misconstrued to portray Miss Ingram in a negative light. Brontë’s definition of genius as “self-conscious” is applicable to the Romantic definition of genius only in an artistic sense. In the Romantic tradition, genius is self-conscious of the limits between the ideal and what the genius is then able to convey to those who are not in touch with

the idea. Jane takes a different approach to genius when discussing Miss Ingram. There is also the possibility that Miss Ingram's self-consciousness, or Jane's perception of Miss Ingram's self-consciousness, stems from the social narrative that Blanche constructs in order to further what she believes will be the marriage plot.

Blanche is aware of the narrative in which she participates in order to further this story and Jane sees this awareness disqualifies Blanche from the label of genius. Mrs. Fairfax first describes Blanche as being admired "for her accomplishments" as well as her beauty (185). Blanche's abilities stop after her accomplishments in Jane's eyes. Jane repeatedly believes that she is intellectually superior to those around her. She engages with historical stereotypes surrounding women that label them as incapable of interacting with men on an equal intellectual plane. She provides a condemnation of Blanche and, by extension, accomplished women who engage in heightened acts of performance to further a marriage plot. Jane's feelings towards Blanche for the reason that Blanche is a copyist of the traditional marriage plot also functions as reasoning for why Blanche is unsuitable for Rochester:

> She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted but its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. (215-16).

Jane believes herself to be on an equal intellectual and emotional level with Mr. Rochester and she believes that Blanche is not her equal. The language of this passage compares Blanche with a cultivated garden that is manicured for the sake of appearance. It is this type of garden that was met with disdain from the Romantic poets and artists at the beginning of the eighteenth century

(Vaughn 30). Being a native of the moors of northern England, Brontë was familiar with the untamed natural area and shared the disdain of her Romantic predecessors. She then passes on that disdain to her protagonist. This level of cultivation for the sake of the marriage plot, in Jane's opinion, limits the woman's intellectual and creative capabilities. Though Jane does not go so far as the label herself a genius, this quote can be turned around on Jane Rochester in composing her autobiography as an exploration of her own originality and her own mind. Though this reversal of the self-conscious nature of genius when applied to Jane would not be an entirely negative consideration, then the sentiment toward Miss Ingram should not be so negative either.

Jane's approach to Blanche is one of disdain because of Blanche's performance, as Kathleen A. Miller notes in her argument for the need to read Jane's artwork as essential to the formation of her identity (Miller 258). This performance that Jane feels is in an effort to further the marriage plot is externalized further through the impromptu theatrical performance in which Rochester and Blanche play man and wife. This performance itself has Gothic roots and in itself displays Charlotte Brontë's reworking of the marriage plot within the Gothic genre just as she allows Jane's artistic imagination to take its first steps through the medium of pencil. To Jane, Blanche Ingram would be the social equivalent of a copyist, while Jane herself would be closer to the realm of artist. Though Jane is not entirely confined within the definition of fine art, as she works with pencils and chalk and she draws portraits, she constantly feels that she does not perform a narrative as Blanche does. Jane's disdain for performativity and convention in art and her awareness of both in life and in literature places her, at least by her own estimates, on an intellectual level higher than that which Blanche occupies.

The Portrait of the Genius

The last two major instances in which Brontë presents Jane's artwork are examples of Jane's portraiture. The first is a portrait of Rochester when she goes to Gateshead to see Mrs. Reed before her death. Here, Jane does not set out to draw a portrait of Mr. Rochester. She begins to draw a man's face as it appears in her mind. However, before she draws this portrait during her visit, she draws whatever happens to come to her mind in what the narrator refers to as an "ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination" (268). Though critics usually focus on the details regarding the portrait of Mr. Rochester and Jane's act of drawing him without a physical "copy," the small descriptions of the vignettes that Jane draws echo the paintings that she shows to Rochester earlier in the novel. The drawings that Jane describes seem to be a hybrid version of the paintings. The three drawings are brought forth from her own imagination and she draws them in pencil rather than with paint. The last two drawings feature supernatural figures remind us again to "the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock" that she saw in Bewick's book when she was ten years old at Gateshead (11). These small drawings do not have the prophetic capabilities that her paintings have but they are nonetheless exercises in imagination.

Brontë allows Jane such exercises within the domestic space and in which she is surrounded by an audience. Not unlike Virginia Woolf's theory in *A Room of One's Own* that Jane Austen could write novels in the drawing room with her family around her, Brontë similarly posits that painting specifically requires solitude, while drawing can be done in a more public place. Nonetheless, Jane's genius pervades even though she is limited by her surroundings. Though Maggie Berg points out, "At Marsh End Jane usually draws rather than paints: a mode peculiarly suited to 'copying,' and one that avoids the indulgence of imagination," Jane's

imagination is not limited by her surroundings (Berg 94). It is only the connotation of the medium that she uses that limits the reaction of others to her artwork.

In her formulation of a female genius, Charlotte Brontë must first trace the development of Jane's control and awareness of her own subjectivity through the artwork that she creates. Though Jane may bridge the gap between being an accomplished woman and an artist on the surface, her imagination and her treatment of her own mind as the subject are present throughout her art, whether she is drawing or painting. Her paintings show the strongest connection to the Romantic tradition and the Romantic definition of genius but her abilities to conjure narratives for other works of visual art as well as her ability to communicate the contents of her mind through the typically feminized, and thus deemed lower, practice of drawing. The influence of Bewick's *History of British Birds* and the prospect of her own future artwork act as a starting point in Charlotte Brontë's novel and build to the paintings that Jane shows to Mr. Rochester at Thornfield. However, the character of Jane who creates the visual artwork is still a past version of the narrator of Jane who is writing the fictional autobiography. The development of the genius begins with the reflection of her mind through her artwork. This self-creation through her visual art will then be fully developed in Jane Rochester's composition of her Romantic autobiography.

CHAPTER THREE

Jane Eyre and the Romantic Autobiography

The narrative of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* is itself told through a work of art. The novel is constructed as an autobiography written by Jane ten years after her marriage to Rochester. Though her romance with Rochester is the central episode of the autobiography, this story arc is not the only period of her life on which Jane the autobiographer chooses to focus. Charlotte Brontë ascribes the power of self-narration and self-creation to a female artist who employs the aesthetics of Romantic autobiography to describe her artistic growth. Just as Jane tells the reader the contents of her paintings while they are examined by Rochester, the frame of the autobiography allows the entire narrative of the past to be told through a woman's point of view. While the paintings were depictions of the inner workings of her mind in a single moment, the autobiographical form allows Jane to gives an account of the development of her mind.

When the novel was released in 1847, the complete title was *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography.* Under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, who served as the "editor" of the text, Charlotte Brontë engaged with a tradition of autobiography and as well as presented the appearance of a male voice for the novel where is lacked such a voice. By ascribing her pseudonymous self with the role of the editor rather than the author, Brontë passed the role of the author on to the young female protagonist. There was a presence of supposed male authority while the words were still presented as being written by a woman. Charlotte Brontë added the subtitle following the suggestion of her publishers at Smith, Elder and Co. and this subtitle was only present in the first edition of the novel (ed. Smith 540). While this subtitle was eventually removed, the details within the novel that draw attention to the autobiographical frame were kept and allowed Jane to maintain the power of the autobiographer in the subsequent editions of the

novel. In labeling *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography, Charlotte Brontë placed her novel in conversation with a genre that was familiar to her nineteenth-century audience who would have been familiar with the genre in several different contexts, whether it was the male autobiography, the woman's autobiography, the spiritual autobiography, or the Romantic autobiography.

Elevation of the Individual

Every type of autobiography that was present in the literary market at the time that *Jane Eyre* was published elevates specific individuals to be the subject of a literary work. In the Romantic autobiography, specifically, the poet or author himself was the subject of the work and the author's subjectivity is rooted in emotion, experience, and mental interiority. Casting a woman as the subject of a work and also allotting her the ability to create herself as the subject of that very work is complicated because, as mentioned in previous chapters, the woman is rarely the subject of a Romantic work. While she could be the object of the male poet's gaze or the vessel for his genius, her own subjectivity was nonexistent. The added complication of the woman as the subject is the elevation of the subject that took place in Romantic works. Catherine Belsey notes that the "transcendence of the subject in poetry is not presented as unproblematic, but it is entirely overt in the poetry of [the Romantic] period. The 'I' of the poem directly addresses an individual reader who is invited to respond equally directly to this interpellation" (Belsey 170). Because women were not afforded the same subjectivity and the ability of self-creation in the Romantic tradition, Brontë's portrayal of female authorship through the frame of the autobiography allows for both the creation of the self in Jane's narration of her own life and the creation of a reader with whom Jane the author can interact.

Like Brontë's relationship to the Gothic novel and the governess novel, Brontë uses the aesthetics of autobiography to elevate the position of the female artist and to mold a new image of the female genius in the form of a character who at first glance is a person of little consequence. "Fictional autobiography," Jerome Beaty discusses specifically within the context of *Jane* Eyre, "valorizes the individual's rights and freedoms—his *and hers*—and the mind's interiority, not as a source of the subjective distortion but as the source of truth; it is ideologically radical" (Beaty 79-80). However, though a sense of trust in the truthfulness of the narrative is necessary between the reader and the author of the autobiography, the Romantic autobiography also showcases the "subjective distortion" produced by the mind of author and this creative agency is inherent to the Romantic subject. Disregarding for a moment the work as a novel and a work of fiction, Charlotte Brontë created a character in Jane Rochester who, because of her embodiment as the Romantic autobiographer, acted as a source of truth as well as a representation of her own genius.

The ten-year old Jane Eyre is an orphan in uncle's house where she occupies an indeterminate place within the Reed household. Since the death of her uncle, young Jane has been a feature of the house rather than a member of the family. After she strikes John Reed and is carried to the red-room as punishment, the servant Miss Abbott chastises her for striking her "young master" (Brontë 15). In the conversation that ensues, Jane questions whether she is one of the servants rather than part of the family. Miss Abbott replies, "No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep" (15). Even though Miss Abbott places her in a position lower than that of a servant, Jane is the daughter of a parish priest, like Charlotte Brontë herself, and the niece of a gentleman. Jane is forced into a position of anonymity by the cruelty

of her aunt and her cousins. However, the very act of Jane Rochester writing her autobiography rescues herself from the anonymity that she experienced as a child.

From Gateshead, Jane moves to Lowood School where she joins the troves of young girls who are forced into obscurity by the cruelty of Mr. Brocklehurst under the guise of Christian teachings. At Lowood, the girls "were all called by their surnames as boys are elsewhere" (Brontë 64). This detail that Jane provides does not work to equate the girls at Lowood with boys who are educated elsewhere. The girls at Lowood are not afforded the same type of education that boys were give. Instead, the education at Lowood is tailored specifically to young girls in order for them, as Mrs. Reed hopes, "to be made useful, to be kept humble" (41). Instead, Lowood and Mr. Brocklehurst reify Jane's anonymity by depriving her of her first name and to force her into a state of passivity expected of women at the time. Jane is further alienated within the confines of the school when Mr. Brocklehurst reveals the story that Mrs. Reed wishes him to tell about her perceived wildness at Gateshead. When her past is revealed to the other students of Lowood, ten-year old Jane lost the ownership of her own past. When Brocklehurst provides a false account of her past, she becomes the object of the story rather than the subject. Brocklehurst's proclamation to the students of Lowood becomes a work for false biography over which Jane has no control.

When Jane moves to Thornfield after spending eight more years at Lowood, six as a student and two as a teacher, she takes the position of the governess. The governess figure is, as Nora Gilbert writes, "in a social standing abyss, 'inferior' to the family she worked for but 'superior' to her employer's housemaids, cooks, footmen, et al." (Gilbert 456). Again, Jane finds herself in an indeterminate social position within the domestic sphere that mirrors the position that she held at Gateshead. As a governess at Thornfield, however, she is an object of fascination

for the Victorian reading audience. Paradoxically, the title of the novel does not link her to her profession of governess or her later profession as a teacher at Marsh End. Even though the literary marketplace at the time in which Brontë wrote the novel was densely populated with the figure of the governess, the original title of the work does not point out the character's profession. The mention of her role as the governess might have acted as an affirmation of experience in the same way that the name of a Romantic poet would attest to his autobiographical work's artistic importance and to the quality of experience detailed in the work. Instead of presenting a profession worthy of interest, the title works in the same way that the titles of eighteenth century realist novels worked. The title presents an individual that is worthy of interest and presents the possibility that the reading public might see itself in the protagonist where it might not see itself in the Romantic autobiographies of poets.

Subjectivity in the Women's Autobiography

Autobiography as a form is generally approached as a truthful account of the author's life. However, the aesthetics of autobiography, which will be discussed promptly, allow the form to be studied as literature rather than simply a historical account of the author's past. This is not a strict definition of the genre but rather a fluid understanding of the presentation of a self between the author and his or her audience. Within this understanding, there are certain aesthetics of autobiography that developed according to the gender and the social class of the writer. In an early collection of essays examining the aesthetics and politics of women's autobiography, Estelle C. Jelinek's introduction distinguishes between the concerns of a man's autobiography and those of a woman's autobiography, posing the issue of the need for a different tradition of autobiography and different method of studying women's autobiographies. Jelinek notes that the

difference in critical approach to autobiographies written by men and autobiographies written by women is "[t]he consensus among critics is that a good autobiography not only focuses on its author but also reveals his connectedness to the rest of society: it is representative of his times, a mirror of his era" (Jelinek 7). It is the male autobiographer who can be considered to be a "mirror" of the age while a woman cannot. The reason that a woman cannot be able to reflect the spirit of her age is that, historically, women's autobiographies are concerned with their lives in the home and with the personal relationships that they form throughout their lives (8). The autobiography's generic tendency to focus on the male writer's professional development and the focus on the female writer's domestic life further enforced the widespread gender roles of the day in works meant to glorify individuals.

The language that Jelinek uses regarding the male autobiography and the role of the male autobiographer as the "mirror" can be directly placed into the discussion of the Romantic tradition and the role of the poet as the prophet and a voice for his age. The image of the mirror plays a central role in M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Both the image of the mirror and the lamp are representations of the mind of the Romantic poet. The mind as the mirror eventually developed into the image of lamp; however, Abrams's examination of the symbol is useful in applying Jelinek's study of the male autobiography with the subgenre of the Romantic autobiography:

> The artist himself is often envisioned as the agent holding the mirror up to nature, and even the originality of a genius is explained in large part by his possessing the zeal and acuity to invent (in the root sense of "discover") aspects of the universe and of human nature hitherto overlooked, and the imaginative ingenuity to combine and express familiar elements in new and surprising ways. (Abrams 42)

It is the male artist or writer who is able to perceive the universal and reflect upon human nature in order to communicate a truth to his audience. Meanwhile, the female artist's perception is confined to her own realm of personal experience, which is applicable only to her own life. However, within the tradition of the realist novel the reading audience is meant to recognize the protagonist and the other characters. Therefore, instead of positioning her image of female genius above her audience, Charlotte Brontë places her image of genius, though a product of the Romantic tradition, among the ranks of her readers.

The Romantic Autobiography

The autobiography also lends itself to a sense of perverse voyeurism in the reading public. In the eighteenth century, this dichotomy of impropriety of the confession and the elevation of the individual providing the narrative began with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* in 1782 (Wu 179). This publication is often considered the spark for the development of Romantic autobiography. The Romantic autobiography was predominantly interested with the creation of the self through the act of writing. The autobiography became attractive to the Romantics because of the distance that exists between the self that is writing and the self that is created in the recollection of experience. Frances Wilson notes that the autobiographical writing captured the attention of the Romantics because the act of such writing involved the creation of "an internal other, and it is intriguing to note that the 'rage,' as [Robert] Southey called it, for autobiographical writing comes hand-in-hand with the fascination in European fiction for doppelgangers and split-selves" (Wilson 72). These "doppelgangers and split-selves" that Wilson references are most clearly seen in Gothic fiction. However, where the second-selves of Gothic fiction are associated with the supernatural or act as agents of terror, the

second-selves of the Romantic autobiography allow for an examination of the greatest possible subject: the writer himself.

In giving Jane Rochester the power of the autobiographer within the context of the continued discussion of the influence of Romanticism on the novel, Charlotte Brontë engages with the aesthetics of both Romantic autobiography and the aesthetics of women's autobiography. The focus of the women's autobiography has been previously discussed as centered predominantly within the domestic sphere and focused on the author's relationships with other people rather than her own personal or professional development. Another concern with the lives of women as portrayed through both the autobiography and the novel to keep in mind is, as Cynthia S. Pomerleau notes, "Men may mature, but women age. It is significant that the eighteenth-century novel often ended with the marriage of the heroine; the author's vision of life is not forced to accommodate the fate of the heroine as she ages" (Pomerleau 37). Charlotte Brontë does not make light of this issue in her novel. Though the novel's concluding chapter begins with the (in)famous line, "Reader, I married him," the frame of the autobiography does not end with a wedding. As we will see, the complications that arise in Brontë's compensation between the Romantic autobiography and women's autobiography are not resolved through a seemingly fairytale-like ending.

The Subgenres of Autobiography in *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë utilizes the conventions of several different genres, both of autobiography and of the novel, in constructing the narrative of *Jane* Eyre. However, Jane Rochester as the author employs predominantly the conventions of autobiography in constructing her work. Jane Rochester's autobiography deceptively reads like a spiritual autobiography, a

subgenre in which female autobiographers often participated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Linda H. Peterson explores the issue of spiritual autobiography by comparing Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* with *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography.* Because autobiography is a literary method of self-interpretation, "[i]f women wished to write autobiography, they had to use the language of the spiritual autobiographer" (Peterson 130). English spiritual autobiographies, a subgenre populated by both male and female writers, had several aesthetic and narrative similarities regardless of the gender or religious sect of the author. Despite the similarities that exist between most spiritual autobiographies, according to Tessa Whitehouse, "written accounts of spiritual experience required the shaping hand of a human editor as much as they might owe their origins and direction to divine intervention" (104). For the most part, however, the spiritual autobiography included a moment of conversion, whatever form this moment might take, along with moments of doubt, with the eventual end at the author's deathbed. As we can immediately see, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* does not feature a moment of conversion, nor does the narrative end with the narrator's death.

Though Charlotte Brontë was the daughter of a clergyman and laced the novel with biblical references as well as references to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Romantic autobiography is the subgenre more conducive to the aims of Jane Rochester's writing and of Charlotte Brontë's novel. Stevie Davis notes in her edition of *Jane Eyre* that the autobiography was "a form rooted in the confessional tradition of Puritan testament" (542n1). However, this functions only as a directed connotation for the readers and builds the expectation surrounding the narrative to come.

Where there are moments that resemble to spiritual autobiography in terms of a conversion moment or a scene at the author's deathbed, Charlotte Brontë places Romantic

images instead. For instance, following the revelation that Rochester is already married and his wife lives in the third-story of Thornfield, Jane Eyre suffers from a crisis in which she must choose whether to leave in order to save her own soul or to live with Rochester in sin. The Evening Star image from Jane's paintings, as a muse, returns in this moment. In that instance, the muse is given a voice. The guiding muse, in the form of the moon, speaks to Jane. The figure of the moon "spoke to [her] spirit; immeasurably was the tone, yet so near," and instructs Jane, as a figure of matriarchal guidance, to leave Thornfield in order to "flee temptation" (Brontë 367). Jane interacts with the female-coded image of the moon, not entirely unlike the Romantic poets interacted with the female-coded images of nature. Jane is not told by God to leave Thornfield. Though such an occurrence would be in line with the spiritual autobiography that was the form through which women were expected to express and to interpret their lives, Brontë decided to have the nearly religious experience be given by a secular image that is deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition.

Reading *Jane Eyre* as an Autobiography

Though Charlotte Brontë is the author of the novel *Jane Eyre*, the character herself is the author of the autobiography. Jane the author is present throughout the narrative as the voice of her present self as she narrates the actions and feelings of her past selves. In addition to describing her own thoughts and feelings during the action of the autobiography, Jane is also charged with recreating the atmosphere of the narrative. The settings of the narrative are retold through Jane Rochester's memory.

Memory, in the case of every autobiography, is not an infallible source of wisdom; additionally, because both the Romantic tradition and the Gothic tradition are linked to

heightened emotional states for the characters participating in the narrative, any "copy" of the events of the past will be influenced by the present emotions of the writing-self. As Ruth D. Johnston notes, "The proliferation of tellers [in the traditional Gothic narrative structure] who are simultaneously characters produces a jumble of perspectives which resists the kind of consensus that a single point of view achieves through retrospection in Romantic narrative" (Johnston 74). By placing the writing-self and the written-self within the context of both a Romantic autobiography and a Gothic atmosphere, the narrative structure of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* allows for a splitting of the female author through the act of writing that is both an artistic reconstruction of the past by Jane Rochester and a danger to what Johnston refers to as "the threat to autonomy" through the presence of Bertha Rochester (73). By combining both the Romantic autobiography and the Gothic novel, Brontë assigns a sense of order that Johnston proposes to be generally absent from the latter. This sense of order accomplishes a goal not unlike that which Jane Austen achieved in her parody of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* and what Ann Radcliffe achieved in her terror Gothic novels. The presence of the Gothic atmosphere in the overwhelmingly realist narrative allows for the heightened emotional states that give way to Romantic expression and to social commentary on the part of the female author.

Stepping back for a moment to examine the economic incentive for writing in the Victorian era, as Elaine Showalter examines in *A Literature of Their Own*, women began to seek out writing opportunities as a second income for their families, whether they aim to support their parents and siblings or their husband and children, there was the possibility for women to become professional writers while still adhering to the obliging image of the Victorian image of the angel of the house. Jane attained financial equality with Rochester when it is revealed that she inherited a substantial sum following the death of her uncle. Before the passage of the

Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, a woman could not maintain any of her own property or financial assets after she was married.

Considering this fact in tandem with Showalter's point, Jane writing an autobiography does not present a financial incentive. Any financial incentive would be in terms of domestic finance rather than personal financial gain. As Showalter writes, "For women, however, work meant labor for *others*. Work, in the sense of self-development, was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal" (22). The form of the autobiography as self-expression and "self-development" directly contradicts the responsibilities of the angel of the house. Jane Rochester's creation of an autobiography is a self-indulgent literary form rather than a selfless effort to provide for her family. Jane does not create original artwork or written work with the goal of financial gain. For instance, Jane's visual art functions as recommendation for the role of the governess. The cerebral pieces are then for Jane's own enjoyment and as an externalization of the images that her mind conjures. The autobiography does not have to function as an economic enterprise but possibly as a history of her artistic career and mental development.

The first embodiment of Jane as the subject is the ten-year old Jane who takes part in the Gateshead and Lowood episodes of the novel. The second is eighteen-year old Jane Eyre who is often considered to be the narrator of the novel. The third is the author of the autobiography, Jane Rochester. Jane Rochester is the only version of Jane who is present throughout the events of the autobiography in the same way that the persona of William Wordsworth the adult poet oversees the events of his childhood and adolescence in *The Prelude*. The title of the novel is deceptive in determining which version of Jane is the true subject of the autobiography. Jane Eyre is the visual artist while Jane Rochester is the autobiographer.

How, then, do we chart the development of Jane's artistry and genius across the two media? Jane Eyre begins to use and manipulate narrative during her time at Gateshead, developing her skills as an eventual author early during her time as a governess at Thornfield, and then writing her autobiography as mistress of Ferndean. Jane's development from an isolated young girl to a married woman chronicles her own story is achieved through her artistic achievement and development rather than the shifts in her narrative voice. Jane's narrative voice, or the voice of Jane Rochester as the Romantic genius, is not entirely distinguishable from the voices of her younger selves. She writes the speech of her younger self with the power of hindsight and her own developed artistic voice.

Jane Rochester's narrative voice is also present during the moments in which Jane Eyre engages with and creates visual artwork. Though there are moments in the autobiography where Jane Rochester describes her drawing with pencils, Jane Eyre is never described in the act of painting. In the previous chapter of this study, I noted that the painted works are reflections of Jane's mind. However, the descriptions are provided by the voice of Jane Rochester. In this way, the "painter" is Jane Rochester because she creates the images for reader. The descriptions from the thirteenth chapter of the autobiography are given in past tense. Even though the use of past tense in this particular moment might seem to separate Jane Rochester from the visual artwork that Jane Eyre created, the role of the autobiographer is not separate from the role of the visual artist. This moment is not unlike Wordsworth's creation of a poetic work in order to chart his development from childhood to his eventual perception of himself as what Duncan Wu describes as the "prototype of the enlightened man" (Wu 181). Jane Rochester uses the narrative of the autobiography in order to convey the contents of a series of paintings that represent the events of the autobiography to come. In this moment, Jane Rochester describes the genius that she

possessed as a young woman while simultaneously exercising the creative genius that she possesses as an autobiographer.

Jane the narrator makes the point of saying following her eight-year jump from Helen Burns' death at Lowood to her move from Lowood to Thornfield Hall, "[T]his is not to be a regular autobiography: I am bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest" (99). As we have seen thus far, however, the autobiography is a genre dependent of the editorial agency of the author. Even though the genre is understood to be a representation of the author's life, the work is nonetheless constructed with a reading audience in mind. Jane as the narrator possesses hindsight over the events that she describes in the autobiography in order to construct a work that her reader is meant to enjoy and to interact with. Jane herself selects the events in her life that would contribute to a work of greater literary interest. This selection involves taking from the moments in her life up to the point of writing her autobiography that have been most turbulent and filled with the most passion. The construction based on the emotions involved in these episodes of the autobiography recalls Wordsworth's claim that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origins from emotions recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth 611). In Cynthia A. Linder's study of Romantic images in *Jane Eyre*, she points out the editorial capabilities that Jane possesses over the narrative relates to "the Romantic tradition of writing, as it is the essence of Romantic philosophies that man only regards, and singles out for special comment, those aspects of life which are of importance to himself" (31). The moments that Jane Rochester decides to share with her readers in constructing her autobiography are the episodes in her life that were the most turbulent and filled with the most "powerful feelings."

Anna Gibson discusses this separation between the narrator and the character as a step in Charlotte Brontë's narrative style towards the narrative decisions that she makes in her composition of her novel *Villette*. Gibson asserts that where Jane the narrator and Jane the character remain separate through the use of present tense for the voice of the narrator and past tense for the voice and actions of the character nearly eliminates the possibility of Jane the narrator having an "immersive experience of her earlier thoughts and actions" (Gibson 213). The separation that Gibson seems to look down upon as unrealistic in *Jane Eyre*, however, is characteristic of the Romantic autobiography. Though Gibson charts Brontë's narrative style as developing in *Jane Eyre* and fully developed in *Villette,* the separation between Jane Rochester as the author of the text and Jane Eyre as the character of the text creates a relationship between the adult Jane and her reader based on Jane's confident narration is not a mark of Charlotte Brontë's underdeveloped narrative style but a conscious decision which bestows upon Jane Rochester the role of the transcendent "I."

In the interim between Jane's arrival at Thornfield and Rochester's arrival, Jane is almost overcome by the oppressive domestic atmosphere. What Jane considers most oppressive about the domestic dynamics of Thornfield is the sense that she is among those who are intellectually inferior to herself and her awareness of her own limited worldly experience. It is during her first months at Thornfield that she engages in pacing through the third story of the manor and going up through the attic to stand upon the battlements of the hall to take in the world that lies outside of Thornfield's walls. As mentioned previously, Wordsworth wrote in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that the mark of the Poet or the genius is the Poet's ability to perceive the ideal and to communicate that ideal to those unable to perceive the world as he sees it. The Poet is also aware that it is impossible for him to achieve such an ideal.

As Jane stands on the battlements and contemplates the landscape, she is aware of the possibility for knowledge that exists outside of the confines of the domestic space. Jane struggles throughout this scene with the limits inherent to her gender that are concerned not only with intellectual growth but also emotional expression. She believes that both can be achieved through acquaintance with a wider variety of people. As she stands on the battlements, Jane longs for "more intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was her within my reach" (129). Jane eventually finds the intellectual equal that she craves in Mr. Rochester. Jane looks down on Adèle Varens and Mrs. Fairfax because they offer her little intellectual stimulation. She sees them as the types of women who would "confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings" (130). Jane is aware of the patriarchal confinement of women only the arts of accomplishment but does not shy away from verging on condemning the women who are stuck in the expectation of the performance of femininity through the domestic arts. Jane Rochester then laments the limitations women face by writing in the present tense rather than the past tense. In this lament, Jane Rochester argues in favor of a woman's emotional depth being equal to that of a man (129). Jane Rochester also argues that women "need exercise for their faculties" (130). Such "faculties" are beyond the realm of mere accomplishment. Though Jane the narrator expresses an all-inclusive image of women as inherently capable of creativity and emotional expression equal to that of men, Jane seems to have a particular idea of what sort of expression should be considered as a breaking with the accepted image of female creativity.

It is this particular scene that Virginia Woolf addresses in *A Room of One's Own* as being emblematic of Charlotte Brontë's anger, the very anger that Woolf believed to be limiting to the expression of Brontë's own genius. Brontë, Woolf writes, "will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself

where she should write of her characters" (Woolf 69-70). Woolf makes the assumption here that it is the voice of Brontë rather than Jane Rochester who expresses this frustration for the confinement that she feels as a woman. It is in this moment that Jane Rochester, a wife and mother who has supposedly achieved the equality that she desired with Edward Rochester, laments the lack of opportunity for female participation in intellectual expression. In her introduction to the history of the British governess and how the figure came to be used in Victorian literature, Kathryn Hughes writes, "[T]he 'busy world' Jane longs for is not so much a position in an urban household but rather the public world of literature and the professions, the world occupied by men" (Hughes 5-6). Though she is physically limited from entering such a world, both while at Thornfield and at Ferndean, Jane Rochester enters the male-dominated literary space by writing her autobiography and making public the contents of her mind and her emotions.

The scene in the third story then functions as an example of the narrative that Jane creates for herself in order to combat her restlessness. Jane as the narrator describes her time in the third story before Rochester's arrival as a time to "allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it…to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously" as she paced "along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards" (129). In this moment, Jane is both the creator and the recipient of these visions and narratives. In this scene, Jane's creative moments of solitude resemble what Coleridge described as the primary and secondary imaginations. We recall Samuel Coleridge's definitions of the tiers of imagination:

> The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition

> in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. (313)

The initial "bright visions" that Jane experiences in her moments of solitude are then what Coleridge would ascribe to the category of primary imagination. As Jonathan Wordsworth writes in his essay about the two types of imagination in *Biographia Literaria*, the primary imagination is associated with spontaneity and divine creation while the secondary imagination can be controlled with the aim of creating poetry (25). The fact that Jane Eyre is able to see such "visions" is a mark of genius and a higher form of imagination that Coleridge describes as being linked to divine creation. As Jane narrates these stories to herself in the third story she exercises her imaginative capabilities and creating narratives much like the Brontë siblings created for the fictional lands of Angria and Gondol. It is significant to note that Jane never reveals the contents from her imagination in this scene. In Wordsworth's depiction of the Poet, the artist acts as a translator for intense emotions and passions that are made apparent to him through his knowledge of and ability to see sublimity.

Though this moment in the third story is not directly implicated in the construction of Jane's autobiography, Jane's exploration of her own imagination in this moment as a refuge from intellectual restrictions she faces at Thornfield reinforces the subjectivity of Jane Eyre in the work of Jane Rochester. Jane Rochester as the author in these moments of imagination and artistic creation engages with her own subjectivity. The role of the primary imagination in the creation of the self poses a problem for Sheila M. Kearns in her study of the autobiographical writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

> In one sense, Coleridge's assertion that the primary Imagination is a repetition of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM highlights the status of the finite mind that is "never an object except for itself" and can gain knowledge of its own being only in a process of "perpetual self-duplication." However, the definition of the primary Imagination does provide a ground for this knowledge in asserting that human perception has as its stable origin the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM. (Kearns 161)

The interaction of the primary imagination, as Kearns points out, between the finite mind, or that of the Poet, and the creation of the self as the transcendent "I" is not limited to the self-exploration that is done by the poet. Regardless of whether Jane reveals the contents of her mind at this present moment to the reader, the very act of creating herself as the subject connected to the primary imagination and able to makes sense of the "visions" that she has allows her to be cast as the transcendent "I". The "visions," regardless of their contents, are vital in Jane's creation of herself as the subject in her autobiography.

The Issue of the Androgynous Mind:

Near the end of the Thornfield episode of the novel, Jane Eyre comes into contact with Bertha Mason in the third-story room. Until now, Jane believed Bertha to be Grace Poole or a figment of her dreams and her imagination. Upon seeing Bertha, Jane Rochester describes the woman as a something between human and beast that "ran backwards and forwards" (338). This is the same action, only carried out more passionately and powerfully, that Jane performed in the third story as she created narratives for herself to expand her mind. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar use this detail as one example on which they build their case for their reading of Bertha as Jane's dark double. In their study, Bertha is a

personification of the frustration and passion that Jane cannot express. In order to express the anger that Jane feels and to act upon this anger, Bertha must be characterized as more masculine and in so doing becomes a threat. Within the question of androgyny, Bertha is the woman who embodies to a dangerous extent the male-coded form of creativity and expression is driven mad or perceived as mad. Meanwhile, Jane is the woman who learns to express herself in such a way that would be considered to be more feminine and is left more or less in peace to practice her art.

As we have seen, Jane passes judgment upon the other women that she feels to be akin to performers and arrangers rather than artists despite her advantage of hindsight. Jane seeks out solitude in order to observe and to reflect upon Adèle, Mrs. Fairfax and Blanche Ingram. These are the women who ascribe to what would be considered in Jane's mind to be exclusively feminine in their modes of expression. On the other hand, Bertha is the androgynous female who takes on violent masculine traits. Maggie Berg approaches the depiction of Bertha as a portrait that Jane creates of herself. "Bertha's animalistic virility," Berg writes, "parodies the Victorian notion that to be truly creative is to be masculine" (82). However, this is a notion that specifically applies to androgyny where is concerns the female artist and her infringement upon the realm of male creativity.

Samuel Coleridge championed androgyny in the mind of the male poet. Anne K. Mellor elaborates on this point thus, "But this androgynous imagination is appropriated by a male poet and rejected by the reproving female….For Coleridge, the androgynous mal is the source of divine creativity….In contrast, the potentially androgynous female is an image of horror" (Mellor 7). Though the androgynous female is a danger to those women who confine themselves to traditional codes of femininity, Jane Rochester refrains from passing explicit judgment upon Bertha despite having ten years to consider the woman who lived in the third story. The

judgment is passed by the Victorian audience and the androgynous female is punished at the end of the novel. However, Bertha as Jane's dark double is complicated by Jane Rochester's refusal to comment on the woman aside from her physical appearance upon first seeing her. Bertha thus becomes an object of Jane's autobiography rather than an explicit further exploration by Jane Rochester into her own subjectivity.

If we consider the now landmark theory of Bertha Mason as Jane Eyre's double, first appearing in *The Madwoman in the Attic* and further interpreted in later works of criticism, we must consider what, if any, of Jane's passionate personality must be lost in order for her relationship with Rochester to work. The pacing that Jane does while in the third story and while she is in front of Thornfield Hall is linked to her own narrative creativity and her Romantic musings. Meanwhile, when Jane sees Bertha Mason in the third-story room, the first Mrs. Rochester's pacing is seen as maniacal and animalistic. As Jane's dark double, Bertha embodies and acts on the anger that Jane feels toward the restrictions of domesticity (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Because Jane cannot act on her anger, Bertha's agency within the domestic space is the force that levels the playing field between Rochester and Jane. It is Bertha who tears Jane's bridal veil. It is Bertha who destroys Thornfield Hall and handicaps Rochester. When that is done, it is Bertha who takes her own life as if her dark work is finished.

Bertha's presence does not contaminate the utopian Ferndean because it is the space in which Rochester and Jane are equals and where Jane seems to feel no uneasiness about the gender dynamics of her new domestic life. There is no narrative need for Bertha as an embodiment of Jane's rage anymore and following the story that Jane hears regarding the destruction of Thornfield and Bertha's death, no mention is made of the madwoman again. In her study of the first-person female perspective in the novel, Thorell Porter Tsomondo theorizes,

"Bertha acts as a disciplinary 'I' in Jane's narrative space" (Tsomondo 83). This assumes that a level of subjectivity is given to Bertha within the novel. However, we must then ask if the subjectivity has its source in Jane's autobiography. Tsomondo's argument poses that Bertha's presence in moments when Jane believes herself to be alone signifies blindness, whether deliberate or accidental, on the part of Jane the narrator (84). However, we must remember that not only has Charlotte Brontë given the power of the autobiographer to Jane Rochester, but also the power of the novelist. When Jane Rochester announces to the reader that this work "is not to be a regular autobiography," she takes the confident position that every detail that she decides to share has been tailored to befit a work of literature rather than calling upon hindsight to fully expand upon a moment in her life with the knowledge that she has as the narrator of her own life. Jane Rochester confidently narrates around Bertha's existence and embodies her past self's lack of knowledge. Ultimately, Jane's construction of Bertha's life as it exists in the autobiography is both of the object of the male gaze and as the threatening female who must then be punished in order for Jane's story with Rochester to continue.

However, the androgynous female is punished in Jane Eyre's absence. Jane was not present when Bertha Rochester destroyed Thornfield Hall and jumped from the same battlements on which Jane stood and pondered her own limitations. She is *told* the story of Bertha's death just as she is told the story of Bertha's origin and her marriage to Rochester. Bertha Mason Rochester's past is narrated through the memory of Rochester, then transcribed in Jane's autobiography, and her death is then narrated through the memory of another man. The distance that then exists between Jane and Bertha complicates Gilbert and Gubar's theory of Bertha as being the dark double. Though this doubling is appropriate within the discussion of the female Gothic, the distance between the two women during the moments of male narration prevents

Jane Rochester from allowing Bertha to embody the same subjectivity that Jane affords to her younger self.

Unlike the narration of Bertha's life by men in the autobiography, Jane Rochester and Jane Eyre fight against such description by anyone who is not herself. She is the subject only of her own self-exploration. When Mr. Rochester disguises himself as a gypsy, Jane resists being read by a person who she believes to be a woman; nevertheless, she engages with the disguised Rochester as he attempts to discover the contents of her mind. When the innkeeper recounts the story of Thornfield's destruction, the same story in which the fate of Bertha Rochester is revealed, Jane Eyre repeatedly directs the man's narrative away from herself. Just as the man comes to the moment in which her past self would make an appearance, Jane Rochester writes, "I feared now to hear my own story. I endeavored to recall him to the main fact" (491). By directing the man's narrative, Jane Eyre in the moment may have been reacting in this way in order to save herself from being the subject rather than simply fearing the possibility of revisiting emotions which this narrative would inspire.

The decision made by her past self is, however, pointed out to the reader by Jane Rochester. Within the context of the autobiography, she is the only one with agency over her own history. This is not unlike the opposition that the Romantic poets felt in the face of biography. Wordsworth and Coleridge specifically were opposed to the trend that took hold, as Julian North writes, with the work of Samuel Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets*. The interest of the biography, North argues, is the poet in the domestic space because "the domestic space in biography was where the reader would genuinely some to know the great man because it signified the shared humanity of the subject and the reader" (North 11). Wordsworth and Coleridge were opposed to biography for the reason that through the biography, "A poet's works

and this his self were endangered by the claims of his public" (North 32). This resistance by the Romantic poets against biography can be used to understand Jane's aversion to being described in the innkeeper's narration of what happened to Thornfield in her absence. While Bertha is the object of the narrative and subject to interpretation that she herself cannot provide, Jane is the only one with the power to interpret her past and her mind.

The Genius at Ferndean

When Jane arrives at Ferndean, her narration of landscape and the awareness of the sublimity of the natural scenes around her are charged with the task of conveying the world to a blinded Rochester. In doing so, she creates their world for him. Though there is debate regarding whether Jane and Rochester are equals at the end of the novel or if Jane is the superior in the relationship, Jane's narrative power places her above Rochester in their marriage. She writes in the conclusion of her story, "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—the landscape before us" (519). Now, instead of translating the sublime in nature for the sake of a reading public, she does so within a domestic space for the sake of her husband.

At the time that she is writing her autobiography, Jane Rochester is about thirty years old and has lived as Rochester's wife at Ferndean for ten years. She is a wife and mother and Rochester has regained some of his sight. Jane has created the world around herself and Rochester. During their time at Ferndean, she describes the landscape to her husband and she "was then his vision" (519). By acting as his eyes within this domestic setting, it is possible to read Jane's role in this moment as one of performance in which she uses her genius and artistic sensibilities for benefit of a man. However, I posit that, instead of an act of performance only for

the benefit of her husband, Jane practices the abilities of the Romantic genius within the domestic space. Because it is in the domestic space, Ferndean is read as the location where Jane's genius is somehow tamed in order for to embody the image of the Victorian wife and mother.

This supposed performance, however, is her communication and translation of the world that she sees. It is her translation that takes on the role of Rochester's vision for the first two years of their marriage. In this moment, Jane is not merely copying the world that she encounters. She interprets the landscape just as she interprets herself through the form of the autobiography. M. H. Abrams writes, regarding a similar translation of landscape and emotion, "[T]hough poetry maybe ideal, what marks it off from fact is, primarily, that it incorporates objects of sense which have already been acted on and transformed by the feelings of the poet" (Abrams 53). Even though there is the possible argument for a taming of Jane's genius when she lives at Ferndean, she interprets the landscape and the atmosphere of Ferndean directly to Rochester's awaiting ear, her own subjectivity creates a narrative of the world for him to receive. She creates an ideal verbal depiction of their world with complete authority.

Jane's own imagination is present in every description that she provides to Rochester. Though her audience in her creative production is only one man, she embodies in the concluding chapter of the autobiography the Romantic definition of genius as a deity in its creation of a landscape (Christensen 220). On a slightly tangential point, the visions that Jane provides to Rochester consist "of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us" (Brontë 519). In this moment, Jane describes her creation of several of the creations that God enacts in Genesis in which the world is brought into being. On a much smaller scale, Jane creates the world as a deity would. Even though there are restrictions believed

to accompany a woman following her marriage, in which she is obligated to serve her husband and her children completely, Alexandra Lewis argues, "[A]lthough she [Jane] speaks of being 'my husband's life as fully as he is mine,' she yet retains that unceasing narrative of her own imagination, so glowing to her mind's eye and inward ear" (Lewis 72). Her embodiment of the deity within the domestic space and supposedly for the benefit of her husband is not a taming of her genius. Instead, she maintains the full extent of her Romantic genius despite the restrictions of marriage that even Jane herself believed to exist.

Several critics, most notably Gilbert and Gubar, have presented Ferndean as a landscape of utopian equality between man and woman is achieved. However, this utopia can only exist separate from society. "True minds," Gilbert and Gubar write, "Charlotte Brontë seems to be saying, must withdraw into a remote forest, a wilderness even, in order to circumvent the strictures of a hierarchal society" (Gilbert and Gubar 369). Though Rochester and Jane seem to live in a state of equality, I hope that I have proven with the above point that Jane was not tamed when she moved to Ferndean and married Rochester. However, the authority that Jane has is indebted to Rochester's disability. The authority through her narrative creation of the landscape around Ferndean is very present to both herself and Rochester in the moment that she provides her descriptions to her husband. This particular authority is separate from her authorship of an autobiography. Though Jane and Rochester are separate from society through their residence at Ferndean, by writing an autobiography Jane inherently makes public her own life. By creating a relationship between herself and the reader of her work, Jane Rochester brings her readers through the history of her life and, similar to Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, a "history of [her] own mind." Even though she is physically separate from society within the work, Jane's very creation of her autobiography, a work of literature meant to be read, negates, if only partially, the

separation that exists between her and the strictures imposed upon her by the society that exists outside of Ferndean.

In the last few pages of her autobiography she writes, “My tale draws to its close” (519). This detail complicates the autobiographical frame and the advancements in female autobiography that Brontë makes in the construction of the work. It raises the question of whether Jane’s life as the subject ends when she lays down her pen and completes her autobiography. However, I propose that we instead take into account the fact that Jane lays down her pen as the author rather than strictly as the autobiographer. She completes her narration of the most passionate episodes of her life and thus her irregular autobiography ends.

Her autobiography does not end with her marriage, nor does it end with her death. Instead, it ends with her presentation of her work to her reader. She will continue to exist beyond the realm of the autobiography. It is uncertain whether Jane Rochester will write again or creation visual artwork again. However, her creation of herself as the Romantic genius within an autobiography and her examination of her own mind with the audience of a reader whom she has created for the purposes of her work insures the future life of Jane Rochester in the study of female subjectivity, female artistry, and female genius in the literature that would follow.

CONCLUSION

Charlotte Brontë's first published novel is often read in terms of Brontë's own life. In fact, the subtitle of the novel, "An Autobiography," is read to be a direct reference to the work being Brontë's autobiography and her own efforts to give herself a happy ending. It is this type of reading, this reckless search for Charlotte Brontë within her most famous character that forces the novel's frame as Jane's own autobiography to be largely ignored. By drawing attention to the novel's autobiographical frame and the power that Brontë gives to her protagonist, I hope to have expanded the scope of the novel's feminist agenda of elevating a female consciousness and subjectivity to that of the Romantic genius.

The novel's title, as I have written, recalls the tradition of the eighteenth century realist novel in which an unknown person becomes worthy of study and worthy of an audience. The difference between *Jane Eyre* and novels like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* is the level of privacy that is implied in the form of the latter two novels. *Robinson Crusoe* is constructed in the form of a travel journal and *Pamela* is an epistolary novel. Even though both are published works, the travel journal and the letters create a level of voyeurism by the reading audience into the lives of the protagonists that is necessarily absent from the autobiographical form. The autobiographer makes public the contents of his or her mind and the life events most significant to the formation of his or her self-identity.

Though Brontë deliberately concealed her identity behind the pseudonym of Currer Bell and named herself as the editor of the text, the first edition of the novel attributes its authorship as an autobiography to a "poor, obscure, plain, and little" governess. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar began their landmark feminist study of nineteenth-century female authors by

introducing the pen as a phallomorphic tool that men alone were allowed to wield without hesitation or criticism. Meanwhile, women were seen as lack and did not have the same ready access to the tool that was inherently coded as masculine. Though Gilbert and Gubar limit their study to female novelists with the exception of Emily Dickinson, the same restriction, and possibly even more strongly, was placed on the female autobiographer. Due to this restriction, the fictional female autobiography allowed Brontë to further a feminist agenda that may have been otherwise impossible at the time that the novel was published. The full title of the first edition, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, edited by Currer Bell, places the pen, as a tool of self-creation and self-examination, into the hand of a young woman.

As Charlotte Brontë herself was a product of a rich literary and artistic atmosphere, it is no wonder that in constructing the work she created a novel that can be placed across a spectrum of genres to which I have alluded in the course of my study. Of the genres that Brontë employs, the genre of the Romantic autobiography gets the least attention, if any. The traditions of the Romantic autobiography were dominated by male authors and it is the male tradition from which Brontë took inspiration. Along with the traditional image of the woman as the angel of the house, Brontë had to work within male-dominated traditions in order to develop a new approach to Romanticism through the lens of female aesthetics.

As we have seen, the Romantic autobiography, even more so than the general autobiography of a life, allows the author to explore as well as create his or her own subjectivity. The Romantic autobiography, though generally written by established poets, allowed the author to examine his own mind as the subject of the work. By casting her protagonist as the Romantic genius with the capabilities within Romantic autobiography for transcendent self-creation,

Charlotte Brontë gives a female character a level of subjectivity that was not given within the Romantic tradition.

Additionally, though Jane Rochester maintains distance between her written-self and her writing-self she is nonetheless present throughout her self-narration; just as the adult William Wordsworth is present as he details his intellectual life in *The Prelude*. Jane Rochester's exploration of her own mental development and of her own subjectivity makes her own mind, rather than just her life, the subject of a Romantic work and elevates herself to the position of the transcendent "I." As the Romantics were predominantly concerned with the sublime and the Romantic autobiography examines the poet's mind and genius as a sublime subject, Charlotte Brontë's novel elevates the female mind in possession of genius to a sublime subject that can only be interpreted to an audience by the genius herself.

Carrying the sublimity of the female genius forward in conjunction with the study of the surreal representation of Jane's mind through her visual artwork and within the context of the autobiography as a whole, the female mind is held to a higher esteem in *Jane Eyre* than many critics give it credit. Jane Rochester does not submit to the image of the domestic woman as only the angel of house. Though her creativity and genius is allowed to flourish to its fullest capacity after she is married predominantly because of Rochester's disability, she carries out her exploration of her own subjectivity and her own mind after Rochester begins to recover. As the image of the Romantic genius was not fully accessible to women at the time of the novel's composition, Brontë and Jane Rochester work within the genres of popular fiction in order to place the image of the female genius and the transcendent "I" within a landscape that the reading audience would recognize.

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