Judicious Improbable as Critique: The Brontës' Possible Fictions and Their Reception

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Dedication

For Paul Douglass and Nancy Stork in gratitude.

Abstract

This dissertation examines how the Brontës augment natural fiction with Gothic and sometimes folklore in their novels and how these augmentations serve their critiques and affect the novels' reception, through the formation of a judicious probable.

Charlotte Brontë attempted to eschew other genres in favor of natural fiction in *The Professor*, using an ethos of fiction learned from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* but the book failed to secure a publisher. The first chapter explores the complexities of Brontë's first-written novel and its reception as an unsatisfying precursor to her later works.

Charlotte had learned her lesson with *Jane Eyre*, incorporating Gothic and folklore to craft the autobiography of a young governess consistently misread by authority figures as a changeling in a novel that asserts Jane's right to depict her own experiences without external corroboration. The second chapter juxtaposes Charlotte's evolving ethos with reviewers' objections to its improbability and controversial subject matter.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* differently combines natural fiction with Gothic and folklore, centering the text on the unreliable accounts of two primary narrators whose loyalty to middle-class rationality cannot hold up in the regional world of the text. They demonstrate the necessity of an expanded view of the possible in their ideologically motivated readings of Cathy, Heathcliff, and Linton Heathcliff as changelings. The fragmentation of the text's Gothic prevents the text from overstepping the possible and allows the novel's primary characters to dramatize a proto-polyamorous love ethic and the author's own mysticism. The third chapter posits links between the novel's ethos and its vexed critical reception.

Anne Brontë eschews folklore but employs a domestic Gothic alongside her natural fiction by enclosing her heroine's diary account within the first-person narrative of the novel's hero. Gilbert Markham initially demonstrates his incompleteness and then experiences Helen's domestic Gothic alongside the reader and is emotionally educated thereby. Anne's novel asserts not only Helen's right to depict her own experiences but to use those experiences didactically to instruct others—both men and women. The final

chapter marks how Anne's decision to stay firmly within the mundane possible made her immediate reception if anything more caustic than those of her sisters' preceding novels.

In each of these novels, the Brontës judiciously employ the improbable in order to expand natural fiction, refusing to be relegated or dismissed. Their efforts were popular but often disputed by reviewers who found the improbability and coarseness of their novels undermined their claims to seriousness. This dissertation shows how the Brontës depiction of uncommon experiences by combining genres suggests how exclusionary probable fiction is and explores the implications of that exclusion by refusing to replicate it.

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Introduction

The tension between romance and realism certainly does not begin the mid-nineteenth century with the application of the term "realism"[1] to the English novel for the first time. Michael McKeon notes "'romance' not only as a distinct generic, but also a broad epistemological category whose meaning is overwhelmingly trivializing or pejorative" (McKeon 27). With this in mind, criticizing a text for its improbability aligns it with romance in this pejorative sense. By contrast, an author's efforts to remain possible suggest efforts to be taken more seriously than classification as romance would allow.

McKeon identifies "tacit but recurring questions" for the novels of the eighteenth century (McKeon 27-28)[2]. Adapting elements of McKeon's first and last questions, I argue that a close examination of the contemporary reception of the Brontës uncovers such questions for early Victorian fiction. 1) What makes a novel 'natural'; 2) what a natural novel is supposed to depict and how; 3) how improbability in a novel undermines its ability to be taken seriously by reviewers and thus its ability to mount a useful critique. An equally close examination of the Brontës' novels reveal the right of authors and characters to narrate their own experiences, their right to their own interpretations of those experiences, and thus the role of a judicious improbable in forming (often unwelcome) critique. This is a primary seeming paradox of the Brontës' fiction: they draw from less prestigious genres and forms to expand the possible of the natural novel and enable their critiques because natural fiction does not yet recognize the experiences they wish to depict as sufficiently valid for depiction.

My focus in on the question of perceived probability and improbability within fiction because I am interested in the power dynamics at play in determining what is possible and probable in fiction—what is at stake when a reviewer publicly dismisses a text as improbable, especially in terms of how this plays into questions about the types of experiences deemed acceptably within the realm of natural fiction and what is marginalized by being identified as being outside that realm. Ultimately, effective critique, according to early-Victorian reviewers, must come from a text moderate enough in its depictions of character and plot to be believably representative. Yet this formulation does not account for depicted experiences that are possible but doubted because their existence is distasteful or uncomfortable to the reader.

Michael McKeon responds directly to Watt, acknowledging his contribution to realism studies but noting a "vulnerability" in Watt's "delimiting the formal characteristics of the novel" by attaching too much importance to formal realism as a criterion" (3). In this, McKeon is likely correct though I find Watt's definition still useful because it helps systematize what the reviewers of the nineteenth century were reaching for.

McKeon also takes a usefully Bakhtinian approach to the development of the novel. He confirms, like Watt that the novel arose as the genre of the middle class. He notes that the aristocracy and its genre of romance do not simply vanish—and that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not invent the novel out of nothing (McKeon 3-4). McKeon acknowledges that the generic and class tension between novel and romance "registers as an epistemological crisis." This crisis he locates in questions of truth and virtue (McKeon 20-21). This matters to my project because the reviewers' idea of what is probable versus the authors' and thus narratives can easily be omitted in the resulting

gap. To cope with this, the Brontës hybridize their work while remaining possible, a sign they mean their critique to be taken seriously.

While my project is primarily Victorian in focus, it is interested in this social and generic instability as the Brontës chafe against the overly delimiting expectations of *natural fiction*—the contemporary reviewers' term for what Watt and McKeon would later call realism. Their responses suggest one way of coping with those expectations when judicious improbability becomes useful and even necessary to the authors' critique.

Improbability[3] puts distance between a fictional text and its realism, but realism, while it purports to be invested in representation, is predicated in part on what readers would deem unlikely. Yet for stories that remain *possible*, this designation of improbability reveals readerly and reviewer assumptions about possibility and, indeed, *whose* experience can respectably be depicted and why. That something exists, according to most Victorian critics, is not sufficient justification that it be depicted. Realism can and does exclude perspectives perceived as too coarse or unlikely by critics and reviewers, demonstrating how much assumptions inherent in their reception of work shapes its generic designation and respectability.[4]

For those experiences that are not suited to depiction through formal realism and its precursors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, authors fill in realism's gaps by adopting elements from other, less respected genres: Gothic, folklore, and eventually sensation fiction—all of which partake in the improbable and provide useful frameworks for resisting the exclusiveness of "natural fiction."[1]. Doing so while remaining bounded by the possible suggests such works can be read as more than escapism that denies

[1] See also Jaffe's *The Victorian Novel Dreams of the Real*, p. 6.

reality. These works signify a concerted effort to expand what is allowed within the more respected category of novel and seek representation of perspectives deemed by the custodians of the social and literary status quo to be suspect.

Authors who borrow in this way demonstrate keen awareness of genre and its emergent and porous hierarchy by pushing the boundaries between genres. The tensions between the probable and the improbable did not begin in the nineteenth century but rather have dogged the modern novel since the eighteenth. The eighteenth century gave rise to multiple explanation of probability that would become useful to the interpretation of novels.[5] Roger Lüdeke[2] connects vital dots regarding eighteenth-century fiction in both the realist and Gothic modes.

In the first place, he notes that the "reality claim of the eighteenth-century novel" separates it "from fantastic modes of narration" which include "the ancient epic, the medieval romance and the religious allegory" (37). Lüdeke observes that [c]onservative writers like Tobias Smollett downright condemned the romantic mode of writing as an anti-modern realm of "ignorance, vanity, and superstition," which Smollett attributed to religious excesses in 'credulity,' prompting authors to "los[e] sight of probability" and "fill their performances with the most monstrous hyperbole'" in order to "'apply to the wonder rather than the judgment of their readers'" (37). There is a lot to unpack here, beginning with how probability is a large part of what romantic writers—writers of romance before the Romantic Period—have lost, giving way instead to titillating exaggerations, which Smollett perceives to be monstrous. The link, then, that Lüdeke

[2]"Gothic Truth and Mimetic Practice: On the Realism of Schiller's *Geisterseher*" from *European Romantic Review* (2017). While Lüdeke works primarily on Gothic in German, his observations of the developing genre tension and its implications apply here.

draws is between the reality claim and the probable realm in conservative eighteenth-century fiction. Though later theorists will deconstruct these assumptions, they are also significant on their own terms.

Intriguingly, Smollett—along with Fielding and sometimes LeSage—were the novelists even conservative Regency and Victorian reviewers would exempt from their condemnation of the genre. James Howison in *Blackwood's* in January 1819, mentions all three authors as imperfect but valid depicters of manners—with Fielding being the best of the three.[3] In this way, you can see a thread of the same genre-centered but morally-grounded conservatism continue from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth. By the Victorian period, it had taken on new life. Moreover, moral conservatism was not the sole province of the political Tories. Even periodicals that favored Reform were capable of aggressive conservatism regarding what they perceived as social mores and morality—at times being even more aggressive than the Tories.[4]

Lüdeke draws a distinction between Smollett and "[m]ore liberal authors such as Clara Reeve, Joseph Addison, James Beattie, or Richard Hurd" who "could tolerate the improbabilities and impossibilities of earlier forms narration at least as evidence of a historically different, or pre-modern approach towards reality and social practice" (38).[6] Reeve, who wrote the Gothic novel *Old English Baron* (1778) in direct response to

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[3] Tobias Smollett (1721-1771), Alain René Lesage (1668-1747), and Henry Fielding (1707-1754). See *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Jan. 1819, p. 394. See Jun. 1830 Fraser's, "Mr. Edward Lytton Bulwer's Novels and Remarks on Novel-Writing," pp. 509-33. p. 510. February 1831 Fraser's "Novels of the Season," pp. 95-114 mentions Fielding and Smollett, elevating both above the "Bulwers and Edgeworths" that have replaced them. Oct. 1838 review of Dickens's early novels states that, at first glance, Dickens appears "the truest and most spirited delineator of English life, among the middle and lower classes, since the days of Smollett and Fielding" (76). See also 1832 *Athenaeum* no. 316, in the essay "British Novels and Romances."

[4] Walter Bagehot was aware of the gendered social implications of genre expectations, but that awareness, as Keen points out, does not result in a coherent strategy to cope with the problem (see Chapter 3 of *Victorian Renovations of the Novel*).

Walpole's *Otranto*, went on several years later to write *Progress of Romance*, her history of prose fiction in which she avers that "As a country became civilized, their narrations were methodized, and moderated to probability—From the prose recitals sprung History,—from the war-songs Romance and Epic poetry" (14).[5] Modernity, then, is both methodical and aligned with the probable—this from an author who herself dipped into Gothic fiction earlier, lending particular credence to Lüdeke's observations that realism indicates a divergence or separation from the older and less disciplined form of romance, but also that the concurrent rise of the Gothic as the eighteenth-century iteration of the romance is subversive because it threatens the modernity claim of realism. The novel's shaking off of the past and its improbable is not so clear-cut as these authors would prefer to believe. Indeed, Reeve's own participation in Gothic as a genre highlights how fuzzy the actual distinctions between genres could be. Yet the hierarchy, porous as it is, matters because it is defended by individuals and publications in positions of authority. The hierarchy is imposed rather than organically formed—like other taxonomic systems.

For Reeve and for other liberal realism advocates, imperfections in romance were allowable because they could be interpreted as evidence of earlier authors striving toward depictions of the real. And yet, Lüdeke continues, Clara Reeve epitomizing liberal authors, would still use "her poetological remarks on realism for a self-confident affirmation of the epistemic and ethical conditions of her own modernity" (38). Eighteenth-century novels came closer to depicting reality and were therefore superior. Novelists had a responsibility to moderate—one might even say *digest*—materials so as to be able to stay probable regarding both character and plot elements, while still

[5] Part of this passage is also cited by Lüdeke, p. 38.

managing to tell an interesting story.[7] This moderation was a sign, then, of the higher level of discipline and craft attained by a novelist than a mere romancer. An author wishing to be taken seriously would do well to strive to write novels, therefore, and not romances.

Further, as Lüdeke states, "Reeve's coupling of 'probability' with 'civilization' points to a close connection between the cognitive and moral aspects of realism" (38). It also, though for Lüdeke this almost goes without saying, establishes a robust connection between probability—the probable—and realism, a connection that was developing in the eighteenth-century novel. Equally as important, Lüdeke observes: "Since the early eighteenth century, the advocates of realism had demanded the novel's representation of a story world to follow what Rivière Manley called the 'Probability of Truth, which consists in saying nothing but what may morally be believed'" (p. 34 qtd. Lüdeke 38). This moral-probable truth remains important in Victorian contemporary novel reception, though it takes complex turns when it does—because what may 'morally' be believed is potentially up to a reader's discretion, such discretion being subjective and thus incomplete or fallible. This moral-probable arises contemporaneously with "epistemological probability" which Lüdeke also calls "hypothetical truth," derived from the scientific method and linked to mathematical probability. [6]

In addition to moral probability, the eighteenth century became interested in legal probability. "'Legal" probability, according to Matthew Wickman, demonstrates the shift

[6] Karin Kukkonen observes how a mathematical probability model allows readers to learn the 'rules' of a fictional world while Mark Loveridge speaks of "probable inference" which allows in-text characters (and readers) of a probable novel to predict what other characters are likely to do and respond accordingly ("Northanger Abbey; Or, Nature and Probability"). Thus, Bayesian probability furnishes a way to cope with necessarily partial evidence.

in the courts from testimonial to circumstantial evidence. The same shift manifests in the novel through a preference by critics for circumstantial narration—narration that by way of foreshadowing and respecting the probable that gels with what the critic perceives as reasonable assumptions—over testimonial evidence (as from a first-person narrator who is reporting from an improbable personal experience that is *not* corroborated circumstantially (64-67).

Wickman further identifies herein a "dialectic" relationship to the past, straining between disavowal and nostalgia. The developing realist novel—with its ties to the probable—can be seen as the epitome of disavowal, while the romance, defined by its improbability and concern for plot over character aligns with nostalgia and desire for the past. Yet the relationship remains a dialectic discussed at times in binary terms, rather than a true binary. As we will see later, too, the tensions between genres or modes are not the only dialectic applicable to the novel (67-68). In other words, realism must give the impression that all events have led into each other, but not that the exact events thus predicted are the *only* possibility. Necessity in this case has less to do with need and more to do with inevitability. Inevitability, either tragic or fortuitous, pushes a work closer to romance in the dialectic, as does having a single, uncorroborated viewpoint.

Concurrent with this was a growing interest in mathematical probability[8] that caused an unconscious drift from viewing probability as an approximation to a fact of reality. This shift becomes deeply enmeshed in how later readers and reviewers make decisions about novels as they collapse what could or should happen according to a combination of moral and mathematical probability, with what *will* or *must* happen. In addition, the language of reviewers when criticizing narrative excesses frequently takes

on a mercantile cast when as novels are termed “extravagant,” suggesting a kind of economy in-text of what can be afforded by the author, subject to public scrutiny of its suitableness—or of what the reader is willing, literally and metaphorically, to buy. This matters because the unconscious drift from viewing probability as an approximation to a fact of reality—and a method of coping with its inherent contingency—becomes deeply enmeshed in how later readers and reviewers make decisions about novels, and a moral-economic approach intertwines with the moral-probable.

The opposite of inevitability is contingency, leaving potential openings for “different outcomes” rather than the “necessary rules of providence” which govern earlier romances, and the “implicit plurality of non-necessary realities.” This opposition allows contingency to align “with the moral claims of autonomy and reflexivity” by relying on its readers’ capacity to compare and judge the legitimacy of the experiences and practices of fictional characters” (38-39). Thus, the eighteenth-century novel was viewed by its advocates as superior to romances because it embraced the potential existence of multiple possibilities, rather than treating the development of its story world as an inevitability that could only go one way. The flexibility was more respectful to readers and incorporated them more fully, as they no longer had to take everything in the text on faith.

This not-taking-on-faith also helps explain reviewers’ preference for the more objective approach of realism, which, ideally, builds a “consensus,” to borrow Elizabeth Ermarth’s term.[9] Through the experience of reading a text that invites the reader to learn for themselves and build a consensus based on where and when the various in-text perspectives agree with one another, that agreed-upon perspective is safer because it is

corroborated by multiple sources within the novel.[7] It is thus, then, to adapt Ermarth, that more rebellious authors can undermine the project of realism. Moreover, disagreement or lack of consensus among the disparate *genre* elements such an author employs produces a dialogic tension among the component genres. The Gothic, as a subjective and immersive mode of fiction may ask readers to take certain things on faith, like older romance forms have done while later sub-genres like the sensation novel push on readerly credulity in a different way. *However*, there is a darker side to that preference for consensus, to the reviewer's hankering after the apparently universal: it relies on a reader's external experiences to assess what is probable and also sets a high bar in terms of an *author's* personal experience. Depiction of what is *not universal*, to reviewers' minds, suggests an imperfect knowledge of the world. Attraction to the singular, aberrant, coarse, vulgar or titillating is shortcut to popularity or a wide readership but fails in critique by not being sufficiently representative. By implication, in such a situation, the reviewer has the right to determine what is and is not universal and may be tempted by anxieties of his or her own to decide against texts that do not conform to a specific world view.

The paradox is that readerly discretion born of worldly experience may be used to decide whether the events of a novel are probable and thus pass muster, yet an author writing based on personal experience (either their own or another's) risks having the work thus produced labeled singular, aberrant, and as a result, inadmissible as realism, as a novel worth taking fully seriously. The novelist must give the impression of objectivity

[7] This skill, probable inference, can also appear on an in-text level. See again "Northanger Abbey; Or, Nature and Probability" which discusses Henry Tilney's practice in-text of predicting what people are *likely to do* and responding accordingly, pp. 6-7.

through distance even as the reviewer claims a certain level of objectivity while employing subjective assessment.

This matters because Gothic is a mode uniquely suited for close, immersive depictions of the singular, aberrant, and uncomfortable—emphatically including what is uncomfortable without being supernatural or impossible. The very reasons reviewers shy away from Gothic as a serious endeavor mark it as useful for depicting real, improbable experiences left out of the consensus. Gothic can depict what the ostensible universality of realism overlooks or refuses to touch and can thus become a back door to fuller novelistic representation and effective social critique.

What eighteenth-century practitioners and advocates of realism are working their way toward is collated and adapted by Ian Watt into the theory of formal realism, expounded in his still-influential *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Herein, Watt advances the theory that it is realism that divided the emergent novel form from others, suggesting at least partial agreement with realism practitioners and advocates from that period and also with many of the values of Victorian critics and reviewers— except Watt locates formal realism in the realm of the possible, not the probable, while acknowledging probability's status in eighteenth-century conversations about the novel. Watt, then, leaves space for post-Victorian critics to adopt texts that contemporary reviewers deemed beyond the pale.

Watt deliberately distinguishes between novel and "inverted romance." The latter, he argues, would be content to focus on a rejection of elevated subject matter, in favor of the "seamy side of life" (11)**.** Formal realism as a practical convention rather "attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective" so that, by Watt's definition, "the novel's realism does not reside in

the kind of life it represents but in the way it presents" (11). In this way, Watt sets up a way to understand formal realism as a depiction of the realm of the possible—as well as a way to understand the incursions of the improbable, seemingly from other genres, and equally as importantly, from *personal experience* into the novel—not as a sign of sloppiness but of judicious expansion of the novel's rightful territory. This principle combined with an examination of a text's component genres reveals the struggle for greater novelistic representation.

Thus, Watt unfolds an argument which aligns Watt closely with the "French Realists themselves" as he himself acknowledges (11)—as well as later English authors. If *this* is the realist project—to depict variety without copping to a rigid or enforced notion of propriety, then depending on who gets to decide, the Brontës can be said to belong to it, and by expanding the definition of the novel to the realm of the possible, not merely the probable, Watt's formulation helps account for novels that resist aspects of the Victorian status quo while still formally aligning with realism.

Watt enumerates features of the realist novel—"nontraditional plots" (14-15), "realistic particularity" (17), and particularized characters—and then notes "a curious antinomy" in that "uncompromised application of the realist point of view in language and prose structure" causes an author to "thereby forfeit other literary values"; whereas, "stylistic virtues tend to interfere with his technique as a novelist" (30).[8] He acknowledges that such characteristics do not originate in the eighteenth century, but he likewise draws the distinction that that "in Homer and in earlier prose fiction these passages are relatively rare, and tend to stand out from the surrounding narrative; the total

[8] Here, Watt contrasts Defoe and Fielding with Richardson, but the principle has potentially further-ranging applications.

literary structure was not consistently oriented in the direction of formal realism" which Watt locates particularly in *plot*, which, in such earlier texts, "was usually traditional and often highly improbable" and therefore "in direct conflict with its premises" (33). Watt, then, is aware of probability on a gradient and at least partially corroborates the eighteenth-century realists' own perspective, observing that the intermittent realism in earlier texts creates contradictions that highlight the ways in which other non-realist forms depend on earlier traditions not truly compatible with realism as a convention.

Watt also notes that formal realism, which he likens to "the rules of evidence" is "only a convention; and there is no reason why the report on human life which is represented by it should be in fact any truer than those presented through the very different conventions of other literary genres" (32). Yet if this is the realist project—to depict variety without copping to either a rigid or enforced notion of propriety or a ludicrous exaggeration, the Brontës are a part of it. The distinction here that identifies is one also observed by others—a growing interest in so-called reportage—of evidence-based depictions. Such evidence-based depictions are perceived by the nineteenth-century critics as rational, as moderate, and therefore as trustworthy, while uncorroborated depictions of the "singular" risk being labelled irrational.[10] Additionally, readers made uncomfortable by challenges to their own world view may fall back on declaring the text and its unwanted perspective or sentiments impossible or absurd**.**

Gothic and Changelings

Eve K. Sedgwick notes how vexed Gothic is as a term and locates the most satisfying definition in Robert Heilman's essay on Charlotte Brontë: "'an original, intense

exploration of feeling that increases the range and depth of fiction" (131 qtd. 21). Where she disagrees with Heilman is in refusing his distinction between Charlotte Brontë and a regular Gothic (Sedgwick 3-4). This debate indicates how much on a fault-line the Brontës' work is, with some scholars of Gothic wanting to claim them as distinctive or separate from the primary Gothic tradition while others dispute the distinction—as still other scholars seek to read the Brontës as novelists whose loyalty is after all to realism, or whose seeming radicalism is undercut by their acquiescence to conventionalities.

Yet Sedgwick declares outright her desire to make Gothic more coherently understood—and the noticing of it "respectable," putting the words into quotation marks to partially ironize the hierarchy even as she acknowledges it. Her approaches are phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and "loosely" structuralist, "having to do with the way language treats itself and the relationship between signs and meanings" (Sedgwick 7).

As Lüdeke already hinted, the "co-emergence" of the Gothic novel threatens the neat dichotomy eighteenth-century realist advocates and practitioners drew, placing outdated improbable fictions relying on exaggerations or 'necessary providence' on the one side and themselves on the other, with their contingency and modern truth claims on the other. Gothic represented an "alternative tradition" that "posed a manifest threat to the modernity claim of the novel" (39). This conception pairs well with Katie Trumpener's from *Bardic Nationalism,* which suggests that Gothic derives much of its power and best material from a raiding, conscious or unconscious, of England's Celtic periphery—with

the national literatures of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland providing a space for colonizer authors to play with ideas novel to themselves.[9]

Additionally, Joanne Shattock notes the recent trend "to parallel the impulse that led to Gothicism in fiction with the development of a visionary poetics in the second half of the eighteenth century, citing Robert Kiely's *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972), arguing herself that the relationship thus drawn "makes a neat historical pattern, and it has the value of dramatizing a major preoccupation of the period" specifically, a desire to "disrupt categories and transgress boundaries" through experimentation in "fragmented narratives, multiply embedded stories, surprising digressions, improbable points of view, and grotesque inversions of decorum" (48). To this, Gothic writers, like visionary poets, add a similarity of content in their mutual desire to "explore extreme states of consciousness" though Shattock cautions scholars to remain vigilant in observing the *formal* differences between novels and poetry. She draws attention to the theory of 'pure poetry' first advanced in 1756 by Joseph Wharton when critiquing the lack of the pathetic or sublime in Pope (Shattock 49). It is, according to him, "'a creative and glowing IMAGINATION' that qualifies as an author as a poet" (caps his). Gothic—and its proponents—are, by contrast, viewed as "revel[ing] in [the mode's] 'impurity'" (Shattock 51). The combination of elements does not have either neoclassical or Romantic unity, and is made a mixed, impure mode, perceived as inherently subordinate or lower.

[9] Combining the two helps fill both critics' respective gaps. Lüdeke's essay in about German Gothic, and "German" in contemporary reviews was often code for Gothic or horror fiction. On the other hand, Trumpener's forcefully argued thesis about the apparent innovations of the Gothic novel in England adds dimension to Lüdeke's assertion here about the modernity claims of the realist novel. See Trumpener's Preface, pp. xi-xiii.

Shattock goes on to explain that these contrasting perceptions are (naturally) grounded in "a variety of cultural and social presuppositions" and "conventional expectations" (52). To speak broadly, poetry is a rarefied form that is "pollute[d]" if it tries to pull from the lower orders or from ordinariness. The novel, on the other hand, "[a]s it developed in the eighteenth century, was tied by convention to the issues and concerns of ordinary people" which "were typically social rather than metaphysical" or if the novel's concern "*was* metaphysical, the drama turned on the crisis of a private individual more often than of a public figure" (52-53). By transgressing these generic expectations, then, the Gothic "trespasses on laws that are fundamentally social in character" and its transgressiveness is not purifying but potentially destructive to "the bonds that constitute society," making the genre threatening to those who benefit from or wish to uphold the status quo.[11] Notably, a reader or reviewer must accept the premises of that status quo to perceive Gothic practices negatively. Yet Gothic in the hands of those seeking to depict underrepresented personal experiences are a challenge to, among other things, the assumption that choices are not limited by circumstances outside an author's (or reviewer's) control.

While Shattock next points out that the Gothic "has a more conservative thrust" than all this transgressiveness might suggest, by showing and "titillating its readers with all manner of 'unnatural acts' only to explain away the supernatural or punish the perpetrators" (53), that conservatism does not always hold up. Female or "explained" Gothic is indeed marked by its practice of demystifying the apparently supernatural by identifying its natural cause, as exemplified by Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Yet, in spite of the many well-reasoned explanations for Radcliffe's explanations, the fact

remains that her "hints of the supernatural could not be entirely subordinated to her apparent didactic framework," leaving a residue.[10]These residues potentially retain subversive value, a potential that only increases as the already-hybrid genre is crossed with nineteenth-century realism.

Lüdeke reads Gothic novels as "first of all, about characters who do not want to believe what they see" and who after "los[ing] their sense of reality…also forfeit their ability to act," from which derives a "radically 'other' structure of individual experience" as in *The Castle of Otranto*. This otherness becomes more complex as Gothic evolves, rendering the genre useful for the depictions of subjective experience. While it is often a colonizing genre in England, laying Celtic sources over a German framework, it provides a back door for subjective experiences the dominant power structures would prefer to ignore or silence. In this way, the accusations of "singularity" used to dismiss texts perceived as too outside the common or too subjective in their depictions of individual characters may be viewed as having a particularly exclusionary resonance.

While Lüdeke advances a conception of Gothic contingency, more useful to this project is his notion of "Gothic realism," which "gains all its attraction by depicting events and actions supposed to be impossible as 'real' and, conversely, assumed unrealities as possible" (40). It is that word "assumed" that is so telling because it accounts for the role of readers' and reviewers' assumptions, which are by no means infallible. Gothic realism pushes at the bounds of what readers *consider* possible, moving to include what other realisms might well *exclude*, but without necessarily having to transgress what actually *is* possible.

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[10] Anne Radcliffe. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. New York: Penguin, 2001. Introduction, p. xvii.

Then, too, Manuel Aguirre[11] contributes to a hybrid-genre understanding of Gothic by arguing for its connection with and debt to folklore. He notes: "Current critical work on the Gothic is intensely concerned with the problem of demarcation: is Gothic a genre? A mode of writing? An aesthetic? […] This critical awareness of boundaries has in turn alerted us to the Gothic's involvement in border issues" (Aguirre159). Among these Aguirre identifies "the 'thresholds' of rationality" beyond which lie "the unexplored reaches of mind and society, the neighbouring cultures of continental Europe, and a Catholic and feudal (i.e., 'Gothic') past which seems to haunt the borders of Enlightenment Britain." Aguirre goes on: "Some reflexes of these concerns are the haunting ghost and the medieval building; 'barbaric' conducts from beyond the pale; notions of (often unwilled) transgression; or the instabilities that result from an existence on the edge" (159-60). Aguirre's enumeration of Gothic reflexes is prefatory to considering a tale that—though not often studied as such yet by critics—exposes a kinship between folklore and Gothic and "draws attention to a key development in the literary history of the Gothic, revealing how folk narrative traditions were "both exploited and discredited in the move towards a modern poetics of prose realism" (Aguirre 160). His observation allies Aguirre with Trumpener.

This tale, "The Adventures of Count Beaumont" (1765) predates all English Gothic novels except *Otranto* and all Gothic stories (including its closest follower, Anne Laeticia Barbauld's "Sir Bertrand") and, Aguirre argues, is itself a Gothic tale that "abounds" in Gothic motifs, covering plot, characters, point of view, atmosphere, and setting"—some of which recur in later, recognized-as-Gothic texts (160-61). It is not

[11] Manuel Aguirre. "A Gothic-Folklore Interface." *Gothic Studies* 21.2 (2019): 159-75

merely the motifs but the stacking of them "to shape almost archetypal gothic episodes and motifs" that is so important, as well as the text's adherence to the Burkean sublime, leading Aguirre to conclude that we have "sufficient grounds" for treating "Beaumont" as a Gothic text, specifically "explained" Gothic—termed by other scholars "female Gothic" (163), meaning the Gothic that accounts for all apparent supernatural occurrences.

Having proved the tale is Gothic, Aguirre goes on to demonstrate, by way of the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index, how closely "Beaumont" *also* adheres to a specific tale type (i.e., AT 326 or "The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is") (164-66). Showing the debt of this demonstrably Gothic tale to a folktale type underscores how closely bound together folklore and the Gothic can be—an important realization as Gothic suggests the possible necessity of critics "to recognize that the Gothic operates halfway between literature and folklore" and therefore "applying to it criteria from the realm of literary criticism alone might actually misrepresent fictions which occupy such a liminal space vis-à-vis the literary system" (171).

Aguirre's essay suggests that there has been a potential for connection between Gothic and folklore or legend motifs since its beginning as a genre in English—which is corroborated by Katie Trumpener, who examines how the national literatures including folk traditions of the Celtic peripheries of Britain were ransacked and absorbed by the so-called innovative genres of late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century England.[12] Folklore and the Gothic that so readily absorbs and repurposes its motifs become vital methods by which hybrid-genre novelists may incorporate residual concepts and motifs to fill the gap between what is accepted in their respective literary moments' realisms and the experiences of individuals those authors wish to depict. Yet folklore is more than a

component of Gothic and more than a way to incorporate the supernatural. It gives a second symbolic register or set of pregnant metaphors to allow an author to explore what realism may attempt to deny. Lüdeke speaks of “Gothic realism” and Aguirre makes a strong case for the interrelatedness of the Gothic and folklore, raising the potential for folklore to exist within a realist framework. Specifically, I have chosen primarily texts with changeling figures, not out of some arbitrary liking for changelings but because such figures represent a powerful challenge to the status quo in said realist framework. Moreover, while Trumpener’s points are well-taken, it is suggestive that those not represented in realism should so often reach for Gothic, even as this intuitive affinity is marked by an appropriative impulse that should not be overlooked.

This leads us to questions of ideology and subversiveness in fiction and novelistic representation. Cates Baldridge seeks to answer the question of whether it is possible for the novel to be meaningfully challenging to the established order. In his Preface to *The Dialogics of Dissent in the English Novel,* Baldridge immediately addresses the substitution of an earlier critical consensus about the novel—as a "site for subversion"—for a newer one, with the novel's apparent subversion serving instead as "merely the prearranged charade of Power, a feigning of distress designed to lure us into believing that we are somehow dismantling the Bastille, when in actuality we are walling ourselves up in textual Panapticons" (Baldridge x). Thus, Baldridge encapsulates the Foucauldian critical lens that exposes how complicit in upholding the status quo the novel is as a form. Baldridge, however, wishes to take neither dogmatic view, instead putting the two views into dialogic tension using a critical lens that is equal parts Bakhtin and neo-Marxism (x-

xii). These two views he argues are compatible "provided one is willing to be flexible rather than dogmatic" (xiii).

Regarding Jon Stratton's contention that a novel is the product of its contemporary social pressures, Baldridge agrees but also points out that the novel is an uneasy synthesis of precursor genres "some of which were labeled 'literary' 'and some of which were not" (4-5), and thus productive of the kind of dialogic tensions that particularly interest me in this project. He likewise, by way of Bakhtin, notes the importance of character development—characters that change and have interior lives—as among the novel's most important formal innovations. Lennard Davis reads character development as frequently moving “from cultural out-group to cultural in-group, shedding attitudes obstructive to hegemonic designs with every turn of the page,” a linear transformation that, Baldridge argues “underestimates the extent to which hegemonic discourses within a novel can be disrupted and decentered by the dialogic process” and also fails to account for “problem novels” that give indication of challenging the author's assumed cultural project (10). Baldridge’s argument, then, can be extended to include the tensions produced by a novel’s component genres while also remaining aware of the novels in which the author’s stated project is at odds with aspects of the text produced thereby. He argues for the qualified restoration to the novel of acknowledged subversive potential.

Nina Baym’s *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* (1984) offers useful insight into the networks of authority and response in fiction, though her focus being primarily nineteenth-century American literature and reviews means one must be careful when mapping her ideas onto British authors. Still, she addresses probability directly as it pertained to the formation of plot which, she states, “distinguished novels from other

literary modes and, within the mode, identified artistic success" (70). She also notes the tendency of contemporary reviewers to declare this or that work of a particular author to be "not a novel" and names Cooper, Dickens, and Thackeray—and even Sir Walter Scott—as important novelists who "were said on occasion to have written books that were not "proper novels" (70).

Reviewers, Baym observes, preferred plots that occurred in the "natural" order, or in other words, proceeded chronologically, "departures" from which "were perceived as signs of a lack of skill" (78). She continues that probability, while its lack would not disqualify a work from novel status, "was of considerable importance in determining the eventual value of a given work. Most reviewers of the day agreed the novelist who had made an artistic and interesting plot out of the probable had achieved something qualitatively superior to one who relied on improbability to wind up a story or deliver a character from complications of incident." It was easier to borrow from the toyboxes of improbable genres (especially romance) than to confide oneself to what was most likely, creating a perception that an author employing the improbable was committing a kind of concession—almost cheating.

Yet she admits there was less consensus that a more probable story was also inherently more interesting (78-79), demonstrating the tension between novelty and interest and probability. Ultimately, Baym observes how probability separates novel from romance in the end and, as such, serves as one of the measures of a novel's success. Transgressing probability too far is a good way to get a work called "not a novel."

But who reviewed the novels? Which publications did this work, using both named and unnamed reviewers? The quarterlies—the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*, but also

the *Westminster* were more prestigious than the monthlies or weeklies. As Joanne Shattock points out, the monthlies, particularly *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's* were notable for "at best rollicking high spirits, literary pranks, and generally 'light' articles, and at worst, acerbic satire, and splenetic personal attacks." The perception of the quarterlies was of "*gravitas* and solidity," but "the magazines were measured by their entertainment value, even to the point of irresponsibility" (6-7). [13] Yet what the quarterlies and monthlies have in common is a reluctance through the thirties and into the forties to review novels, preferring to critique poetry, travelogues, nonfiction monographs, and theological or philosophical treatises in their published reviews.[14]

The work-a-day labor of reviewing fictional prose was done more reliably by the weeklies, particularly the *Athenaeum*.[15] In part, this was because the weeklies were less pretentious, yet they still saw their reviewing as doing serious and significant cultural work. For the rest, it was a practical consideration: periodicals publishing four to twelve times as frequently had more opportunities to review a variety of texts. On the other hand, quarterlies were longer and their reviews, often containing copious extracts, were correspondingly lengthier too. Nor did publication schedules entirely account for periods of six months and more in which the longer periodicals hardly touch at novels at all.[16]

To help account for the seemingly fanciful, in her book *Victorian Renovations of the Novel*, Suzanne Keen puts forth her "annex theory." Broadly, annex theory is a framework to explain the incursions of nonrealist genres and modes into seemingly (or debatably) realist texts.[17] Jay Clayton makes a similar argument for the incursion of the poetic device of the visionary individual, which he observes "can be particularly unsettling in novels"—the genre he recognizes as the "special province of the ordinary

and the everyday" (3). However, these are less perfectly applicable to what I am trying to do.

Ermarth argues that a lack of agreement between or among in-text perspectives undermines realism. Audrey Jaffe argues that realism keeps the other genres in line while "fetishizing" history and material objects (16). Yet Jaffe attributes to novels and novelists a "desire for the real," which is necessarily exclusionary and fetishistic, a lens that is even more useful if extended to incorporate the reviewers and critics seeking to define and enforce what being a novel means. Furthermore, I argue that staying within the realms of the possible enables these Victorian authors to say what they need to say without being dismissed out of hand. What many contemporary reviewers objected to was, ironically, not the fairies. It was the apparent willingness of the Brontës, Dickens, and Hardy to explore the lives of characters whom these reviewers found difficult to believe in for more ideological reasons. The Brontë sisters offended both against taste and against the probable, a metric used to separate the serious or nascently realist texts from the genre-bound texts of the circulating librariesor Minerva Press. Dickens offended too but found popular success. Hardy worked to establish himself as a relatively inoffensive serialist before aggressively asserting himself against the moral status quo in his final novels—though hints of his grappling with the same issues can be found in earlier works if looked-for.

To Conclude: My Project

It would be an overstatement of the sort the contemporary reviewers themselves hated to claim that their primary concern when reviewing novels was how probable they were. It would be an equal exaggeration to assert that *any* time a reviewer disliked or

took exception to a work, they cried ‘improbable’ as either a kneejerk reaction or the automatically disqualifying call of a referee. Indeed, improbability of character and/or of plot were largely allowed under certain conditions. For instance, historical romances, much in vogue from the 1820s into the 1840s, were, if they were entertainingly and not sloppily done, largely given a pass.[18] The apotheosis of historical romance author in the nineteenth century was, of course, Sir Walter Scott, whose *Waverley* romances (now called novels) set off a cascade of imitators, some tolerated more amiably than others by the critics of the day.

When stories that need telling cannot be told in the forms endorsed by the status quo, their authors will be pushed to innovate, often by using elements of the genres or modes less well-regarded and more subversive to that same status quo. For the Brontës, this means dipping into Gothic and folklore, harnessing them as sources or frameworks for the improbable but not simply to act out but to *push* out, expanding the bounds of the novel without implicitly agreeing to be relegated to romance. Gothic frameworks and, where needed, the changeling motif, provide useful structures for depicting what is underrepresented, helping the Brontës to bridge the gaps left in realism with its emphasis on the middle-class, middle-of-the-road, and probable that excludes what did not, in reviews’ estimation *belong* in serious fiction.

As Sedgwick and Heilman note, Gothic expands literary possibilities (Sedgwick 3, Heilman 131). I argue that the Brontës work to expand natural fiction through forming and experiential Gothic: Gothic that depicts their experiences including and especially ones not yet believable by reviewers who outline the status quo of natural fiction. The immersiveness of their Gothic declares the right of their heroines to narrate their

experiences without depending on external corroboration while inviting the reader to share their experiences vicariously.

The first chapter looks at Charlotte Brontë's first-written but last-published novel, *The Professor*, in which we see how Charlotte's initial theory of composition—largely derived from her extensive reading of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*—leads her to attempt a novel without the supernatural but still carefully improbable, with mixed results that suggest she realized components of other genres were necessary to effectively reach her readers. Catherine Malone writes cogently about the reception of *The Professor*, noting the difficulty readers have in liking its protagonist. I argue that the unsatisfying effect of Crimsworth illuminates an important aspect of Brontë's critique within the text as he is juxtaposed with its secondary protagonist Frances Henri.

The second chapter marks how Charlotte's second novel *Jane Eyre* indicates her new, more hybrid approach to composition, willingly incorporating Gothic to immerse the reader in the first-person experiences of its heroine, whose perceived uncanniness undermines familial and marital relationships throughout the novel, with characters in authority consistently misreading her to justify their attempts to dominate her. Jane's unlikely happiness at the close of the novel can be read as an implicit critique of the status quo that dictates that women of education but without looks or wealth will most likely end miserable, so that the apparent wish fulfillment of the ending becomes culturally important. Chris R. Vanden Bossche argues that the novel's subversion of the status quo, "conceived as an act of resistance" is ultimately "neutralized by a movement toward repression that reinforces ideology and reabsorbs critique back into itself" (47). He notes the critical debate around whether *Jane Eyre* was "consolatory" to the middle

class or "revolutionary" (Vanden Bossche 54), marking likewise that reviewers' responses were not purely personal but "producing political discourse" (Vanden Bossche 54). It is for precisely this reason that I attach importance to the reviews. My reading coincides with Drew Lamonica's, but I pair the Gothic with the folkloric to show how Jane's Gothic exposes how the changeling motif is unwelcomely projected onto her. I also adapt Smajić's "natural supernaturalism" and am in conversation with Marianne Thormählen**.**

The changeling motif as employed by Charlotte and Emily Brontë dramatizes interrelated genre and class tensions and adds to this a recognition of the abject. In "Approaching Abjection," Kristeva identifies a state that is neither subject nor object, a way of understanding the outsider or other that has had profound influence over understanding the Gothic. Abjection provides a way to understand characters of ambiguous or fluctuating status, caught in a power struggle, and is also compatible with my examination of how Charlotte and Emily Brontë employ the folklore motif of the changeling to denote a character with ambiguous social status who has a destabilizing effect, often unintentionally, over ones whose statuses are more clearly and conventionally defined. These privileged characters read the abject ones as changelings to emphasize their otherness and justify acts against them. The use of the changeling as an effect of other characters' misreadings makes folkloric understanding double-edged, both a way of probing the possible of their respective texts and as a method of critique.

The third chapter shifts to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights,* arguing that the novel follows not one but *three* changeling figures, who in turn reveal the insufficiency of a conventional Victorian morality, particularly as it pertains to love and the formation

of intimate relationships. I expand Emily Rena-Dozier's notion of Heathcliff as marginalized and misread to include Catherine and the misreadings of them as changelings by narrator characters. These narrators' attempts to establish interpretative control are ultimately exposed. While the plot may be read literally as an illustration of a kind of proto-polyamorous ethics of love similar to Percy Shelley's, as Patsy Stoneman states. I argue that ethic may also be viewed as a coded form of Emily Brontë's own mysticism, to which the notion of communion with an ideal presence outside of but akin to oneself was paramount, and that their parting highlights the danger inherent in drawing equivalences between the natural and the conventional.

The fourth and final chapter examines Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, a novel widely read as realist by modern critics though condemned nonetheless for its improbability and its audacity immediately following publication. This last chapter will argue first that *Tenant* is, while firmly separated from the supernatural, still a more Gothic novel than most critics acknowledge, using the Gothic to more deeply immerse the reader in the true-to-life anguish of its protagonist. This experiential Gothic is and largely "domestic" to borrow Tamara S. Wagner's adjective. Like Charlotte's, it is immersive and uncorroborated to declare Helen's right her experiences and interpretations and her right to use both to learn herself and to teach others, beginning with Gilbert Markham, posing my answer to what Doreen Thierauf calls the "Gilbert Problem." Unlike Charlotte, however, Anne eschews folklore-as-critique, opting to have Helen overtly use her own narrative in-text to teach Markham and thus the reader, as Edith Kostka notes. However, I argue it is not only her diary but her letters that serve this purpose. The chapter will argue the most threatening aspect of the novel, as demonstrated

by its reception, is its commitment to depicting unpleasant, often gendered truths about actual life and insisting directly the right to narrate and interpret one's own experience—and even use one's gains therefrom to educate others, challenging a status quo that expects silence. As such, its reception reveals that, while allusions to the supernatural within natural fiction can enlarge the possible in one way, the author who abstains is in equal danger of not being believed if her narrative and critique fall outside of what reviewers wish to believe.

The Brontës' drawing upon genres of the improbable—and their own experiences—ultimately enable them to tell stories not yet sufficiently mainstream to tell in more fully realist terms. The reviewers are primarily either men or pretending to be men arguing about the believability of female experiences so in this there is a running thread not only of "what is probable and reasonable in the realm of human experience" but "are women's accounts trustworthy"? I think this is particularly pertinent in Tenant where Helen gives over proof of what she's been through to clear her name in Gilbert's eyes and the reviewer comments that a decent woman wouldn't have written such a thing – when faced with the closest thing a fiction can offer to proof, the reviewer attempts to find something untrustworthy about the character's choice to talk of her experience.

Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*: Unsatisfying but Apt Precursor

Introduction

Charlotte Brontë's first-written novel *The Professor*, rejected by eight publishers but causing Smith and Elder to bespeak her next manuscript, was published posthumously with the consent of her widower Arthur Bell Nichols. Readers were by then thoroughly familiar with the rest of her work and also eager for a last novel, even if it had been composed first. *The Professor* appeared in 1857, shortly after Elizabeth Gaskell published her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, so that the reception of the novel is inextricably linked to the biography, with this new, sudden knowledge coloring the reviews. Indeed, much of the reception material on *The Professor* is in reviews of Gaskell's *Life*. Catherine Malone has studied this relationship in detail, and I am indebted to her article.[12] I argue that the perception of Crimsworth as unsatisfying illuminates an important aspect of Brontë's critique within the text, as his sense of himself is exposed as more limited and less objective than he claims, inviting contrast with Frances Henri.

The novel itself is Brontë's first attempt at a serious novel for public consumption though not her first long work. In it, she uses the framework for fiction she learned from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* the periodical with which her family was most familiar. The *Blackwood's* hierarchy privileges natural over supernatural—but with no reference to probability as such—suggesting a hierarchy that views fiction without supernatural interventions as more serious and important than fictions that rely on the supernatural, suggesting in turn an early iteration of what Watt and McKeon have

[12] 'We Have Learnt to Love Her More Than Her Books: The Critical Reception of Bronte's Professor"

identified[13]: the view of the novel as a genre of moderation, largely for the consumption of the middle classes.

Why did Charlotte's attempt to stay within the possible and align herself with natural fiction fail to win her publication? Why, after it *was* published posthumously, did reviewers respond so tepidly, and why should we care? Ultimately, Charlotte Brontë learned her ethos of fiction from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* but discovered the gap between what reviewers advocate for and what publishers will take, a discovery that would prompt her to innovate, combining elements of other genres with her natural fiction to create a much more popularly successful hybrid text. Her first attempt deserves attention, however, as it demonstrates a core awareness of the difference in experience of a poor but well-connected man with a poor and obscure woman and thus suggests that cursory or dismissive responses to *The Professor* miss the chance to read the novel as possessing useful commentary independent of Brontë's other novels.

Charlotte Brontë was extremely familiar with *Blackwood's*, particularly the early numbers from which this hierarchy emerges, and she produced a novel that gave indication of following the *Blackwood's* precepts for a natural fiction. Fittingly, E.S. Dallas wrote "Currer Bell" for *Blackwood's* in 1857. In it, he gives a holistic account of Charlotte's work but pays particular attention to *The Professor*, as the most recent release. He takes it as a given that *The Professor* was substantially revised into *Villette*, which he deems far superior. Yet he acknowledges the power of Charlotte's plain-looking heroines: "How was this humdrum little creature—this Frances Henri, this Lucy Snowe, this Jane Eyre, this Charlotte Bronte—raised into a heroine of romance? She was

[13] See the opening of my introduction.

not only attractive, she was fascinating, because she had an eye none could escape" (*Heritage* 362). Thus, the heroines'—and author's—powers of observation form the basis of her appeal, with Dallas admitting that the minuteness of Charlotte's enumerations of passion accounted for much of the popularity of *Jane Eyre* in particular.

Yet this slippage between author and heroine poses a difficulty. Before making this admission about Charlotte's second novel, Dallas suggests "it is perhaps…a defect of all Currer Bell's novels" that "She must find a motive for every little act, for the twirling of a thumb…she has no idea of purposeless behaviour, uncontrollable impulses" (*Heritage* 363). From this we can glean that Dallas views Charlotte as following her project too *closely*, as if risking the loss of spontaneity or the animating spark of fiction. Though he likely did not intend to say, so E.S. Dallas suggests, then, that Charlotte learned the earlier *Blackwood's* lessons too thoroughly and agrees with the publishers ultimately that her more hybrid later productions are superior. Of course, Dallas wrote nearly forty years later than those Charlotte adhered to from the early numbers of *Blackwood's*. For all Dallas, with the benefit of hindsight, sees *The Professor* in the context of Brontë's other works, when she was submitting the manuscript unsuccessfully for publication a decade earlier, editors necessarily did not. The failure of the *Professor* to be the published predecessor of *Jane Eyre* is suggestive of the gaps between the authority of the editor and the reviewer as Charlotte, basing her first novel on her own lights as colored by the artistic theory in *Blackwood's* failed to achieve publication.

Catherine Malone addresses one of the chief perceived failings in *The Professor*—that the hero is comparatively unengaging and, for many readers, (not least Charlotte's contemporaries), insufficiently defined. Reviewers have, as she herself

remarks and an examination of the reviews will attest, largely dismissed this as Charlotte not knowing how to write male characters. Charlotte herself partially thought so, stating that “[i]n delineating male characters I labour under disadvantages: intuition and theory will not always adequately supply the place of observation and experience"; whereas, "[w]hen I write about women I am sure of my ground" (179-80). Here the issue of personal experience comes to the fore again. As Malone further observes: "Many modern critics, therefore, look no further in accounting for the comparative failure of *The Professor*" yet she demurs: "the failing is not that Brontë cannot convincingly create male protagonists but that a male protagonist cannot convincingly tell the type of story Bronte wanted to narrate: a history of suffering" (180). Crimsworth has not had an easy time of it, but he possesses privileges as a man and blind spots too, that prevent the full realization of a narrative of suffering.

Structurally, Malone further notes that in using the autobiographical form to tell Crimsworth's story, we get on the one hand an unsatisfying narrative and on the other hand a demonstration of how autobiography can reveal more than the autobiographer intends—by showing us how the autobiographer wishes to be perceived and yet also showing how these self-perceptions do not necessarily match up with the external evidence that ought to corroborate (183-5). I agree wholeheartedly with Malone’s position that Crimsworth’s autobiography is more revealing than he as protagonist intends, and I argue in fact that those aspects of Crimsworth that make him most frustrating are most essential to Brontë’s critique as she juxtaposes Crimsworth’s experiences with those of Frances Henri, demanding comparisons between the two

characters that expose Crimsworth's blind spots as well as broader social blind spots regarding educated but poor women at the time.

Brontë's decision in *The Professor* to eschew supernatural genre elements and to employ the improbable only through "singular" characters and providential coincidence make *The Professor* a useful starting place for understanding Charlotte Brontë's project as a novelist and her reception, despite or even partly due to the complexity of the novel's textual history. While the novel's struggle toward publication exposes tensions among different kinds of authority in the production and consumption of fiction, the criticisms and objections expressed in its wake, often read as evidence of the novel's failure, comparatively or otherwise, are equally revealing. On the one hand, they expose a potential oversight in Brontë's approach, assuming that by eschewing the larger-than-life she could elude criticisms that tied her to the nineteenth-century romance. Romances were, for many nineteenth-century reviewers, at best amusing trifles and at worst, idiotic nonsense. Encroaching on the natural (or proto-realistic) with characters or plot mechanisms that, stripped of the supernatural or not, still fall out of the common way, is intuited as threatening to the status quo of the so-called natural. On the other hand, these objections arguably expose readerly discomfort with Brontë's juxtaposition of William Crimsworth and Frances Henri's struggles, with the latter exposing the unexamined privilege of the former.

Part I: Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine's theory of the Natural novel/the improbable

Most relevantly for the consideration of Charlotte's work, we can watch the unfolding of a porous and evolving hierarchy of fiction within these earlier numbers of

Blackwood's. As we will see, the hierarchy is sometimes implied by contributors but other times, explained outright. While this genre hierarchy developing in Blackwood's privileges the "natural"—by which is often meant, the realistic (though realism as a literary discourse by that name is twenty-five to thirty years ahead)—several contributors also conceive of a place for what is variously called the preternatural, supernatural, and marvelous, and put forward a hierarchy to organize these more imaginative kinds of fiction, inspired as they are by romance. Thus, when Charlotte finds her first, carefully un-supernatural novel meeting with an indifferent reception, *Blackwood's* also suggests the alternative in what we would now call character-driven genre fiction and what one contributor called "a more philosophical and refined use of the supernatural (613)."

The hierarchy privileging the natural over the supernatural is openly discussed in several prominent reviews of novels and discussed or implied in other article contributions in early numbers of *Blackwood's*. J.G. Lockhart's review of Godwin's *Mandeville* implies the hierarchy when the reviewer says of *Caleb Williams* that "[t]he sufferings, through which he tells us he has passed, are depicted indeed with all the distinctness and clearness of realities," though he immediately qualifies the statement with a hint at that novel's genre hybridity, adding**, "**but this we silently attribute, while we listen, to an imagination invigorated with the supernatural acuteness of disease. The impressions which his story makes upon us is that of a dismal dream, which we feel to be a fiction, and from which we are anxious to escape (268-70)." Additionally, Lockhart draws a connection between the supernatural and disease—a failure of mental health. For the mentally healthy, such dreams cannot be real, bringing us to Lockhart's ultimate delineation between novels that depict facts and realities and ones that trade in *fictions*.

Fiction evokes, in this usage, senses of both lack of clarity and of unreality—non-existence—and a link to insanity.

The March 1818 review of *Frankenstein* by Sir Walter Scott likewise prefaces its hierarchy of genre fiction by asserting the primacy of "[t]he first general division of works of fiction, into such as bound the events they narrate by the actual laws of nature." It is clear from the tenor of the rest of the review that first here means not simply the soonest chronologically but the *highest* division of fiction. This privileging of that which is governed by laws of nature is acknowledged in the opening of the essay "On the Use of the Supernatural in Fiction," wherein the author concedes, "Some have thought that, in modern works of fiction, there should be no gratuitous introduction of the preternatural." The reviewer, then, is aware that the presence of supernatural rather than simply natural elements in a novel is a contentious issue—perhaps even one that affects such a novel's perceived critical importance or validity.[19]

In "Thoughts on Novel Writing," the Blackwood's contributor further unfolds an ethos of novel-writing, declaring:

> Since in modern times, the different modes of national existence are no longer capable of being represented in epic poems, it has become the task of the novelist to copy, in an humbler style, the humbler features exhibited by human life (394).

Here, then, we see the novel set up as a kind of anti-epic. It must reflect the national character, but it must do so in a lower, "humbler" register, which would guide the author toward depictions of middle-class experiences or, as he would go on to say, "the novels which have dealt in actual existences, and not in pastimes of imagination" (394). Though

it would be a gross oversimplification to declare the novel thus monolithically a middle-class medium, the reviewers were frequently middle-class men who looked for themselves and their own experiences and values so that their reviews are, in part, an enforcement of that desire and therefore reward those novelists who satisfy it. However, as Charlotte's first novel's reception suggests, the reviewers are not the only ones with desires at play.

Lest we forget that such "humbler" style is in fact the higher calling of a novelist, William Howison declares that Fielding, Le Sage and Smollett "form the highest class of the novels which have dealt in actual existences, and not in pastimes of imagination. In proportion as society has undergone the influence of detrition, succeeding novels of the pourtraying class have grown more limited in their objects, more slight in their execution, and more ephemeral in their interest (304)." Howison rounds off his essay be dismissing fashionable novels for being unsystematic and the genre that will become the Bildungsroman as "spurious" because it lacks didactic value (305) . While some of this author's view is idiosyncratic, other aspects of it confirm a sort of hierarchy by consensus forming at the time.[20]

Likewise, In "Hints for a Young Author, From a Very Old One" (April 1822), a review of the novel *Adam Blair,* reviewer Henry Mackenzie asserts:

> This is a work of real genius. There is much of nature and pathos in it. There is also novelty in the plan of the story, not dealing in high sentiment or romantic adventures, but in the walk of ordinary life, and among persons of middling rank; an example more applicable from these

> circumstances, than those high-toned narratives, which do not speak to the business and bosoms of ordinary persons (466).

We see, then, the reviewer Mackenzie confirming what we already know to be Blackwood's investment in the notion of artistic genius, but also confirming the hierarchy that sets natural writing above romance—which former he states is exemplified in the willingness of the author to depict the ordinary and middle-rank. Indeed, we see a hint of the conversation ongoing today regarding the importance of *representation* in literature. This hierarchizing, then, demonstrates an ideological position that will be borne out as *realism* becomes a term in discourse on the novel as a medium.

Similarly, two months later, the reviewer of Lady Caroline Lamb's inoffensive *Graham Hamilton* "sincerely congratulate[s] her upon her improvement" in leaving behind the more passionate and transgressive tendencies of her notorious first novel, *Glenarvon* the kiss-and-tell novel about her four-month affair with Lord Byron. The reviewer adds: "She has now learned to restrain her exuberant imagination within the bounds of good taste, equally with respect to story as to style, and to dignify and idealize her talent for sketching striking likenesses" so that Lady Caroline moved away from the *roman à clef* of *Glenarvon* toward a more composite and thus acceptable style that also appeared to rein in her passion, which had this reviewer conclude: "Graham Hamilton appears to us to belong to the class of proper and of good novels. It presents a spirited picture of the manners and follies of the times, in that portion of society with which the reputed author may be supposed most familiar."[21]In other words, unlike *Glenarvon*, *Graham Hamilton* stays in its place—it is neither fanciful nor attempting to reach outside

the author's own experience.[14] Nor was it pointed or singular but instead could be seen as representative of a class, rather than of recognized individuals. Thus, it is not merely form but content too, the marriage of which is a Romantic ideal.

We can mark, then, the consensus that emerges, prizing the "natural," the ordinary, and middle-class over the fantastic, romantic, or supernatural, as well as hints that composite characters that can be viewed as representative of their class are more respectable than singularities. What the Blackwood's contributors call "natural" would, I argue, in thirty or so years become the then-inchoate *realism*.[15] Additionally, reviewers prize characters not only middle-class but *moderate* backgrounds—not the larger-than-life types we find in epic or in tragedy, as indeed the review of *Mandeville* notes, nor the flamboyant aristocrats of romance, and ones that can be generalized with apparent ease to an entire class or sub-class of individuals. Thus, the role of imagination is further proscribed in natural than supernatural fiction—and having fewer possible directions to take, must busy itself with a kind of accuracy and thoroughness depicting what is most reasonable to expect against so moderate a backdrop. And yet *Blackwood's* makes no direct stipulations here about probability.

Part II: How Charlotte lived up to it: The Professor

Charlotte Brontë's first novel *The Professor* endeavors to follow the stipulations of natural fiction laid out in *Blackwood's*, following these notions of the "natural" and the "middle." Her protagonist is a genteel but poor young man who, even as Charlotte states

[14] Indeed, Lady Caroline's biography referred to *Graham Hamilton* as the novel to "offend no one" (227-40). See *Lady Caroline Lamb: A Biography* (2004): pp. 227-40.
[15] See Introduction, p. 2, note 1.

in her Preface, would not only have his previously mentioned "mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment" but would work for his own bread and enjoy nothing not of his own earning. Furthermore, he would not marry an exquisitely beautiful woman. In this, Charlotte gives every indication of bearing out the promises in her preface: William Crimsworth is paid a moderate sum in exchange for work at a school in Brussels, and he marries a respectable but hardly ravishing young woman of genteel background but no wealth. There is little of either epic or romance about either of these young people, and even their conjugal passion is as practical as it is deeply felt, with his work—and the connections he forms as their result—able to elevate them to moderate prosperity**.**

In the Preface to *The Professor*, published posthumously but written prior to *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte outlines her artistic credo thus:

> I had […] come to prefer what was plain and homely. At the same time I had adopted a set of principles on the subject of incident, &c., such as would be generally approved in theory, but the result of which, when carried out into practice, often procures for an author more surprise than pleasure (*Professor* 36).

Having decided against larger-than-life characters or outlandish plot developments,[22] as *Blackwood's* so strongly advised, Charlotte found herself struggling to appeal to publishers who "in general scarcely approved of this system but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical—something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos, with sentiments more tender, elevated, unworldly (*Professor* 37)." Thus, Charlotte's early experience of publishers demonstrates the tension omnipresent for a fiction-writer: the need of a publisher to sell versus the push by

critics to define and enforce theoretical ideas about quality and taste in that fiction. The reviewers, then, serve as authorities over theory and publishers—and readers—as authorities over practice. The critic may propose a ‘should’, but the publisher enforces a ‘must.’

Nonetheless, *The Professor*'s place in Brontë scholarship is a complicated one due to its circumstances of publication. After Charlotte's marked success with her other three novels, its posthumous appearance was eagerly anticipated as both last and first of Charlotte's fictional works. However, this also meant that readers and reviewers read *The Professor* less for itself in many cases than as a rough draft of Villette and/or a fictionalized autobiography. It was also published soon after Elizabeth Gaskell's wildly popular *Life of Charlotte Brontë,* which led some reviewers to speak of *The Professor* in reviews of the *Life* and also to use reviews of both texts as space to defend their past opinions on the Brontës, as in the cases of *The Christian Remembrancer* and the *Examiner* or to refine or capitulate, as did G.H. Lewes (*Heritage* 180-81).

As Charlotte’s Preface states, and we can confirm via the publication history of this novel, not only did all the publishers pass on it in 1847 but that her publisher Smith & Elder tactfully but firmly resisted any attempts by Charlotte to re-offer *The Professor* while she was still living, always urging her to produce the new material that became *Shirley* and *Villette* (Gérin 311-12). Despite attempting to follow these always-evolving principles to a serious kind of prose literature, Charlotte’s reception was unenviable, leading her to wryly note herself her surprise at such romance subsisting in the breasts of seemingly prosaic publishing editors.

Fascinatingly, the emergence of the Brontës' life story late in Charlotte's life, and more so after her death, with Gaskell's biography, led to some realizing their mistake in claiming variations of "this never happened in real life" or "no well-bred young lady could have the understanding of vice that the Brontës evince." This also helps account for why charges of improbability specifically are not leveled at the novel though some reviewers still registered their displeasure with the choice of material and mode of presentation. Yet this also means that aspects of the novel that displeased reviewers even in the wake of Charlotte's death and the revelations of her pitiable life story can be read as genuine preoccupations overcoming the predisposition of critics to be kind in that particular moment.

The *National Review* review of Gaskell's *Life* encapsulates one such preoccupation—singularity—stating: "Miss Bronte never deals in abstractions; all her people have body, reality, definiteness. But they are too singular. The greatest poets have always been those who have done the greatest things with the old every-day materials" (*Heritage* 354). Thus, Charlotte is identified as a second-rate purveyor of the singular. To support his argument, the reviewer quotes Lewes's admonition to Charlotte to trust observation over imagination, drawn from Lewes's review of *Jane Eyre*—apparently disregarding the subsequent evolution of Lewes's views on the Brontës and their writing while demonstrating the influence of Lewes's first Brontë review.

Similarly, the *Examiner* employs mainly biographical criticism—a move that became increasingly common after the publication of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life,* as Catherine Malone notes (187-88). The review fixates first on the novel's *bitterness,* stating *The Professor* is "even more bitter than *Villette*," which at least shows the benefit

of Charlotte's increased happiness and connection to people as she got older. It goes as far as to say "[h]er last book was the healthiest, and had she lived we do not doubt that out of her perfect happiness to which she had just attained before she died, there would have come a book like this…in distinction of expression, but entirely differing from it in tone" (4). Presumably, the reviewer is alluding to her marriage and takes a presumptuous tack in assessing Charlotte's mental health through her work, and one tempting to generations of Brontë critics. Though the reviewer never uses the word "improbable" directly, he (or perhaps she) refuses to believe in Charlotte's characterization of the pensionnat students in Brussels though admitting "Miss Bronte meant no personality and no untruth; she wove the threads of fiction and she coloured them with tints which she thought well chosen as a match to the prevailing hues of life. The world she saw was, indeed, but a shadow of the truth" but vivid enough for readers to believe in them anyway. This notion of the "shadow of the truth" suggests an objection to Charlotte's subjectivity, her drawing from experiences again too singular to be generalizable, thus identifying a place in which reviewers feel justified to make a ruling to that effect. If the problem is that character experiences—as drawn from author experiences—need to be corroborated by a third party's experience enough that it may be generalizable. This exposes, however, a long-standing tension between needing characters to represent groups and needing them to be sufficiently individual to be worth reading about.

The Saturday Review, despite identifying despite identifying a "fresher, lighter, and more airy grace than any of the somewhat grim series of daguerreotypes" that come from "the sombre and metallic surface of Miss Bronte's imagination" but also posited: "She brings her ordinary heroes and heroines with a rush that startles and almost

overwhelms the imagination of the reader. It is impossible to believe entirely in characters that are always as violently at work, internally as a smith at his anvil." The reviewer also suggested that the lack of "common social atmosphere…that tempers their relations into a certain undefined unity" **(**680**)** further pushed credulity (680). Her characters thus were too ordinary and yet too isolated, too divided from society in its broadest sense. And yet Crimsworth and Marian Henri socialize about as much as people living on slender means in a foreign country might be expected to do. Regarding internality, then, it is not the outward conscientiousness, that the reviewer objects to but the inner turmoil. Apparently, a tutor of slender means ought to be more tranquil—or less aware of his emotions. Such sentiments indicate assumptions about the correct and likely conduct of such a character, implying Crimsworth's behavior is too much a diversion from that expectation for some readers to countenance. This objecting to Brontë's characters not being sufficiently of the world recurs in the reception of *Jane Eyre*—see Elizabeth Rigby's review in the *Quarterly* and the *Christian Remembrancer*'s declaration that as a "novel of manners," the novel is a failure—indicating something more subtle at work. The moments in both novels most objectionable or provoking of disbelief are linked to the emotional experiences of the characters, rather than the exact mechanism for conveying those experiences.[23]

The Athenaeum decided that *The Professor* was "a mere study for Jane Eyre or Shirley (345)," a sentiment in keeping with the *Blackwood's* assessment that the text was "remarkable as a literary curiosity" but "the poorest" of her works (*Heritage* 361). The *Athenaeum* reviewer also chides: "Miss Bronte does not exhibit her characters in critical action, or under strong temptation. Low chicane, astuteness, sensuality, and tyranny are

keenly and observantly drawn; but throughout the novel, the quietness is unnatural, the level of fact too uniform, the restraint and theory of life too plain" (*Heritage* 345). Moreover, "the principal parts are sustained by an unnatural brother, a rough manufacturer, of the type of Mr. Helstone, who interposes *ex machina* and rescues the hero" (*Heritage* 345). The repetition of the word unnatural with two possibly different meanings deserves unpacking: in the first, it seems to echo the *Blackwood's* meaning—that of writing that verges on becoming or is unrealistic. At the least, it is strange enough to strain a reader's incredulity. The "unnatural brother" however, may refer only to Edward's lack of fraternal sympathy, rather than a lack of reality.

That Charlotte's ordinary characters are fraught seems clear. In choosing to write according to her own at times pathologized perceptions, producing characters that act contrary to expectation, the text reveals reviewers in disagreement about whether the movement of the text were too abrupt or containing overmuch "unnatural quiet." The quiet is pathologized and used against the text's credibility.

Thus, Charlotte as a young author discovered—and her earliest mature work dramatizes—the tension between separate kinds of authority posing questions of imagination: how much and of whose. That this question registers in discussion of Charlotte's first novel, the least cross-genre of the four she wrote, is telling. Her Preface specifically declares her intention to eschew romantic excess and her personal experiences are still rejected by reviewers whose imaginations do not, apparently, reach far enough accept the existence of what the late Currer Bell sought to show them.

The Professor's achievement and relationship to her earlier works is not a site of consensus among by present-day critics, either. Juliet Barker, one of the most influential

Brontë scholars, argues in *The Brontës* that Charlotte's "determination to put Angria behind her and write about the real and ordinary was somewhat marred in execution," elaborating:

> the earlier chapters—which are the most flawed—with their heavy-handed caricatures of the feuding Crimsworth brothers, set in a Yorkshire mill counting-house, were simply an adaptation of Branwell's Angrian tale "The Wool is Rising," written when he was a mere seventeen. Unable to shake off the shackles of Angria, Charlotte fell into her old bad habits of Gothic exaggeration. Edward Crimsworth, for instance, is a crudely drawn character who even resorts to the horsewhip in his perversely vicious behaviour to his brother (Brontës 500).[24]

Yet Barker's claims deserve scrutiny. In the first place, she calls its characters "heavy-handed" and "exaggerated", yet her critique surpasses even the most irritable of the contemporary critics. Crudity is up for interpretation here. William's view of his brother is corroborated in-text by Hunsden and while not common, seems to speak to Edward's character rather than his author's skill at characterization. The *Athenaeum* hints at the extremity of his behavior but raises no specific objection to it. Intriguingly, I have searched everywhere I could think to and found no objection by contemporary reviewers to Edward Crimsworth as such. He is referenced in passing as an "unnatural brother" but that can be read as referring to his lack of fraternal affection—no reviewers refused to believe his behavior though the *Examiner* denied the possible existence of pupils as unpleasant as Crimsworth's impressions suggest.

Barker's dismissal of *The Professor* takes a turn, furthermore, into gendered assertions about Charlotte's capacity as an author. She argues that it was "a major error to adopt a masculine narrator for *The Professor*" because "Charlotte was a quintessentially feminine writer: her talents for describing repressed emotion and for accurate observation of the minutiae of daily life were those of a passive observer, a role pre-eminently that of the nineteenth-century woman." She states that Charlotte had fought this throughout childhood by adopting masculine personas, and "William Crimsworth was simply the Angrian Charles Townsend under another name." She concludes, then, that "[u]nable to write convincingly as a man, Charlotte retreated behind the comforting familiarity of the sarcastic and frequently flippant shell. In doing so, she destroyed the heart of the novel, for her central character is unreal." Barker is obviously not satisfied with the novel, seeing its protagonist as caustic and, apparently, lacking in the heart that makes Charlotte's other works more satisfying, attributing their greater satisfaction to Charlotte remaining in her place and writing female characters. These conclusions corroborate Malone's view that, on finding the novel and its protagonist unsatisfying, both contemporary reviewers and some modern critics "look no further" for the source of their dissatisfaction.

However, Crimsworth's seeming coldness and obvious idiosyncrasy serve a vital function within the novel, too. His sense of himself is of one who is dispassionate unless roused past bearing—he "always speaks quietly" (*Professor* 55)—and to his mind, fairly, even when clerking for his brother, who is frequently insulting. Though it rankles him to be exploited, he does his work "faithfully, punctually, diligently" (55) and treats his later employment at the pensionnat with the same conscientiousness. For William, working

honestly, even for a bad master, is a matter of self-respect. To cheat his brother would demonstrate his own inferior character, and so he remains until the end of his first quarter of employment and resigns respectably.

At the moment of crisis with Edward Crimsworth, he answers his brother's accusations "calmly," refusing to meet his brother's anger with fear or anger of his own. Nor will William Crimsworth brawl when menaced with a horsewhip, instead disarming his brother and promising to have him before the magistrate should he resort to fists (*Professor* 72). This lack of escalation serves then to corroborate Crimsworth's choice of adverb. Crimsworth also admits, at least rhetorically, that he is "not infallible" though his confidence in his readings of situations is authoritative. Nevertheless, the incompleteness of his perspective is revealed over time and through his exposure to Hunsden and to Frances Henri, so that the unfolding of the novel in due course demonstrates his limitations.

In M. Pelet's school, he hears his first English reading lesson and is appalled, exclaiming upon the recollection: "My God! How he did snuffle, snort and wheeze! All he said was in his throat and nose, for it is thus that the Flamands speak" (*Professor* 94). The first reader he describes as "vastly self-complacent" at not being corrected immediately. Having heard them, he is thoroughly critical and, based seemingly on this first experience where his English sense of propriety—or snobbishness—has been mortified by their nasal pronunciation, he generalizes offhandedly: "It did not require very keen observation to detect the character" of his students but needed a certain degree of tact to adapt one's measures to their capacity," the students who were, according to him, "like lead" (*Professor* 97). Crimsworth's insistence on the need for tact and the

dismissal of his students' intellects would seem contradictory and yet taken together show Crimsworth to be what he is: a man of limited experience seeking to cover his insecurities and willing to write off those whom he perceives as failing his standard. No consideration is made of whether a surly, condescending Englishman eager to criticize and reluctant to praise might be seeing what he wishes to see or what he makes it easiest for his students to show him. Crimsworth's pedagogical theory aside, however, his first teaching period underlines a central preoccupation for Charlotte: the manner in which the genteel but poor end up teachers whether it is their true vocation or not.

Crimsworth's habit is to tell his impressions as facts, even if he occasionally makes rhetorical nods toward qualifying statements—"it does not take much" or "clearly." Crimsworth emerges, early in his career as professor, as a man as satisfied by the accuracy of his own perceptions of reality as any nineteenth-century magazine reviewer, believing too, in his ability to succeed upon his own merits, closing the first chapter of his employment by stating he has "conquered" the inevitable difficulties "in a few weeks, having acquired as much facility in speaking French as set me at ease with my pupils" and "continued tenaciously to retain the advantage," thus preventing "mutiny," an occurrence "all who are in any degree acquainted with the ongoings of Belgian schools, and who know the relations" between students and teachers there "will consider an important and uncommon one. Before concluding this chapter, I will say a word on the system I pursued with regard to my classes: my experience may possibly be of use to others" (*Professor* 97). Not to belabor the point, but here again we have William Crimsworth's potentially inordinate sense of accomplishment bleeding into his diction. Here too, a kernel of hypocrisy shows through in that Crimsworth's French is far from

perfect on arrival but has now improved so that he no longer need worry about exposing himself, after all his complaints about the inadequacy of the Belgians' English.

Also, his work is done "tenaciously," yet he has been in his post only a few weeks, and his self-praise is followed by a frankly astonishing passage about mutiny, which he cavalierly suggests anyone familiar with Belgian pedagogical relations would expect, and his avoidance of such revolt being "singular" and further reflective of his remarkable ability and conscientiousness. Again, he gives the reader to understand that his experience is fit from which to generalize, even suggesting his system and its effectiveness might actually be useful to others. Crimsworth's recounting suggests an almost breathtaking arrogance and presumption on certain subjects, but that is illustrative of his character, not necessarily beyond incredulity. We can disbelieve Crimsworth's word without doubting his author's. As the narrator of a first-person account, Crimsworth gives his version of events and, in the process, inadvertently indicates how limited that perspective is.

Contemporary and later critics have both marked Charlotte's anti-Belgian and anti-Catholic prejudices and have suggested she is channeling an autobiographical impatience with her students—and impatience that would recur to a certain extent in *Villette*—yet she astutely puts her frustrations into the mouth of a male protagonist, where they underscore more than her own personal grievance. Before the introduction of Frances Henri, Crimsworth gives the reader opportunities through his own testimony as narrator to doubt his authority on what he speaks about, exposing his snobbishness and his sense of himself as equal to hardships but given to a dry sort of boasting upon overcoming them. He is, in fact, arguably less likeable in the earlier part of his Belgian

narration, in which the wrongs against him or matters he takes most to heart, seem to be more revealing of his own hypocrisy and willingness to judge than of any important violation of himself—unlike those of his brother's brutality and stinginess.

To most fully view Crimsworth's character and its implications, however, the reader has the second half of the text, in which Frances Henri both mirrors Crimsworth and exposes him. Frances Henri is the code hero of the text but cannot triumph on merit—except by finding a man to appreciate her. Crimsworth is not a badly written man simply because he has the flaws of his class and gender, both alleviated and thrown into relief by his capacity for insight at least as far as his wife is concerned.

Before Crimsworth meets Frances, Mlle. Reuter, his second employer, begs his favor for one who is "not a pupil of the house" but "in one sense, a teacher, for she gives instruction in lace-mending, and in little varieties of ornamental needlework." Her desire is to "qualify herself for a higher department of education" through English lessons, "in which language she has, I believe already made some progress; of course, it is my wish to aid her in an effort so praiseworthy." Crimsworth's affirmative is given, as he relates himself, "laconically, almost abruptly," intended as a counterpoint to Mlle. Reuter's feminine and Continental effusiveness, but she continues:

> 'Mdlle. Henri has not received a regular education; perhaps her natural talents are not of the highest order: but I can assure you of the excellence of her intention, and even of the amiability of her disposition. Monsieur will then, I am sure, have the goodness to be considerate of her at first and not expose her backwardness, her inevitable deficiencies, before the young ladies who, in a sense, are her pupils' (*Professor* 144-45).

Mdlle. Reuter seems eager, by her repetition, to stress that Frances is not, in fact, a pupil of hers but rather an instructor "in a sense"—it is important to her to impress upon Crimsworth not only her own generosity but the low or uncertain status of Frances who, as an instructor of sewing arts is not on the same level as teachers of properly academic subjects. She appeals to Crimsworth's snobbishness, so much so that he does not even register that it is happening. Mlle. Reuter also works hard to prime Crimsworth to expect Frances to be dull, intimating her lack of formal education and then, condescendingly, how "praiseworthy" it is that Frances should wish to better herself, pressing him to take her self-interested interpretation of Frances Henri as literally true.

Interestingly, Crimsworth seems to have no notion of how thoroughly he is being managed by Mdlle Reuter, instead congratulating himself on seeing through her design "so clearly," declaring, "the longer she preached about the necessity of being indulgent to the governess-pupil, the more impatient I felt as I listened. I discerned so clearly that while her professed motive was a wish to aid the dull, though well-meaning Mlle. Henri, her real one" was to "impress" him with "an idea of her own exalted goodness and tender considerateness" (*Professor* 145), leading him to agree as quickly as possible to abbreviate the interview. Yet he believes his employer on the essential points—that Frances is untalented and of low enough rank that he may treat her according to his own discretion. All the verbiage about the need for gentleness in the face her "inevitable deficiencies" actually stresses how in Crimsworth's power Frances is, and he appears to relish this.

That he does believe Mlle. Reuter's initial estimation of Frances Henri's talents is corroborated by his continued abruptness in dismissing his would-be pupil when she is

tardy to her first lesson, admitting that he "could not read in her face the effect" of the speech he admits is "not very civil" and then wonders whether the dismissal affected her as it would someone who possesses sensitivity, which he declares his experiences in Belgium have taught him to treat as "almost a fabulous quality," revealing again the level of self-absorption, of assuming, we have come to expect, as he attempts to render human sensitivity an improbable quality. Thus, Crimsworth continues to be correct in small matters, acknowledging his irritation with his employer, the abruptness of his speech—while missing the broader point: that it is important to Zoraïde Reuter that he be predisposed to doubt or undercut Frances Henri. This becomes significant once Crimsworth at least realizes his employer's romantic interest in himself.

By conversing with her over her *devoirs*, Crimsworth learns Frances Evans Henri is Anglo-Swiss, her English mother having died ten years previously. Her aunt "houses and nourishes" her but her 1200-franc annuity was insufficient to send Frances to school, except for lace-mending, a "*métier*" that, though "tedious" could be quickly learned and made to turn a modest profit. From her wages, Frances has bought books from which she has studied, hoping to attain enough education that, along with her English lessons with Crimsworth himself will enable her to go to England to be a full teacher, earning enough money and having an exalted enough position to be respected and able to support herself (*Professor* 167-70).

Much of Crimsworth's poignancy—if not all—is borrowed. Frances Henri, who never boasts, nor argues outright with Crimsworth, nonetheless exposes him and his assumptions. Frances is almost entirely an autodidact by necessity. As a woman and, indeed, a woman without rich relations, she receives formal instruction in nothing but

lace-mending until her English lessons from Crimsworth. Even those lessons are on sufferance, and Zoraïde Reuter ends them by dismissing Frances once she recognizes the younger woman as a rival for Crimsworth's attentions. No rich uncle who hates her has sent her to the top preparatory school and university in her country, for fear of looking miserly in advance of an election. Her intent scrabbling after a thorough education and moderate, respectable employment highlight by contrast Crimsworth's unexamined advantages—in short, his privilege—while showing her desire for middle-class stability.

Crimsworth makes frequent claims to moderation of ambition, of temperament, and lets the reader know he considers himself a good worker, insisting on being recognized and appreciated on his own merit. Yet what Crimsworth claims to be, Frances *is*. That she achieves on her own merit cannot be doubted as she possesses nothing else to help her along. Crimsworth's redeeming feature if he has one is that he recognizes Frances's merit sufficiently to marry her.

Crimsworth's struggles and perception of them invite juxtaposition with his wife Frances Henri and it is not he who shines by that comparison. Frances has as much of gentility in poverty as he, if not more. Crimsworth notes how bare but carefully kept her parlor is before he gallantly refuses having a fire lit for his sake when it is clear there is too little coal for the hospitality not to put hardship on her. (Here he also asserts his Englishness at how Europeanly parsimonious she is with her tea leaves.) Further, she has intellect and significant desire and capacity to learn, so that he enjoys teaching her (*Professor* 199-201). And she has passion underneath her meek exterior that can be kindled through cross-examination, as in the debate with Hunsden in the penultimate chapter. The novel makes it clear that, penniless or not, Frances is at least Crimsworth's

equal, and it is to his credit that he realizes her worth as much as his casual, period-appropriate sexism permits. What is equally clear, to the reader, if not to Crimsworth himself, is that Frances might have died a lace-mender for the simple fact of being a woman. Her upward mobility is not merit-based but marriage-based, with Crimsworth's recognition of her worth being ultimately more incidental than he would find it comfortable to admit. Just as little would he like to acknowledge that his success in the fullness of time—likened by Alison Hoddinott to that of Nicholas Nickleby (167)—is as due to his gender as to his talents.

The juxtaposition of his life struggles with those of Frances Henri highlight that he is simply not as oppressed as he thinks he is. He has overcome adversity, yes. But his education, gender, and good breeding were enough to offer him two ways out of poverty—either by marrying the proprietress of his school, which he elects not to do, or by his masculine diligence enabling him to establish his own fortune in the fullness of time. He can do what the Brontës wish they could do. And the woman he marries demonstrates the difference—she is at least as intelligent as he is, at least as eager for education, application of her talents, and she nearly spent her whole life as a lace-mender.

Yet their marriage union and subsequent success only further underscores the gendered double standard at play in the novel. Crimsworth has two possible escapes from underpaid drudgery as an English teacher. One, he can marry Zoraïde Reuter and become proprietor of her school. Even if doing so would render him in practical terms a kept man, he would have access to wealth and at least to the outer public, would be the school’s master. Two, he can work his way up from salaried teacher to proprietor of his own school. He achieves the latter, and while his abilities play their role, so too do his

connections. Having cultivated a mutually respectful relationship with at least one of his students of means, he is able to appeal to that student's father for material help after he leaves his previous posts. Likewise, when it is time to relocate to England, it is through Hunsden's exertions on his behalf that Crimsworth and Frances establish their girl's school and thus provide for themselves.

None of this is to say Crimsworth's success is unbelievable, only that it is as dependent on who he knows as what he does—on his connections to other men whose wealth and knowledge allow him to rise in the world. Frances has no such connections, save through him, and as such, she can only aim as high as a salaried teacher somewhere in England—this, she told Crimsworth was her highest ambition. Her actual elevation to mistress of a school comes unlooked-for and through her marriage to Crimsworth.[16]

Nevertheless, Crimsworth's impressions and protestations mainly reveal how important perception is to Crimsworth and how much he, as a character, desires to exemplify the ideals held out by *Blackwood's* and taken up by Brontë. Yet Crimsworth also cares about probability—arguably more than *Blackwood's* did, using it to decide to leave a situation that according to "probability" would become "in three months' time, a practical modern French novel" (*Professor* 214). Crimsworth himself desires to exemplify values of self-control, rationality, and conscientiousness that allows a man to overcome adversity on his own merits, in part mirroring his author's stated intention. His successes vary. These values also remain important to Brontë as she continues to write and shifts to focusing on female protagonists. Ironically, however, as Alison Hoddinott

[16] For another perspective on the ending of the novel's arguable ambivalence, see Sally Shuttleworth's "Hanging, Crushing, and Shooting: Animals, Violence, and Child-Rearing in Bronte Fiction," pp. 27-47 in *The Brontës and the Idea of the Human* (2019).

notes, Crimsworth's most frequently mentioned physical and perceptive characteristic is his "short-sightedness," which helps to "destabilize[e]" his own reading of himself—and of his surroundings (Hoddinott 167). The reader, seeing his exposure is drawn even more to Frances, whose experiences furnish the novel's effective critique.

William Cohen is correct to argue that the formal oddity of the novel enables material interiority. Yet the lack of outside corroboration of Crimsworth's perspective, convinced though he is of his own objectivity, serves another purpose. The external world he relates through his first-person narrative and descriptions seems, in the full course of things, not to actually support his image of himself. He may believe these self-claims, but even so, he is not completely honest with his reader—putatively a friend of his but actually us. This impression grows as his image of himself as delimited and achieving on his own merit is *partially* true but also partially belied by the companion narrative of Frances Henri. Interestingly, Charlotte puts her reader in a position similar to that the reviewers find themselves regarding herself: we realize Crimsworth is not lying to us but is telling us a subjective truth, the implications of which are not really borne out by what we glean of external reality. The shortsightedness that Alison Hoddinott notes in her article as a recurrent and overt descriptor makes this disparity appear intentional.

Several contemporary reviewers and Juliet Barker have argued that the perceived unevenness means Charlotte Brontë cannot effectively write male characters. Cohen provides a counter explanation for the stylistics of the novel, and I would furthermore counter that writing about a man whose struggles are mediated by his gender in ways he barely recognizes is not inherently an inability to write men but rather suggests insight into how men can view themselves. Crimsworth is as much Branwell as he is Charlotte.

And while Charlotte did not view gender as the only determinant of power dynamics between people—also noting relative wealth and social facility—she acknowledges gender's role in shaping opportunity and demonstrates this as thoroughly. Frances Henri is Crimsworth's equal in desire and striving after education and after goodness, which are linked in Charlotte Brontë's conceptions of them.[17]

Conclusion

Little has been written on *The Professor* as a Gothic text—unlike Charlotte's other Belgian novel *Villette*, which partakes of Gothic frameworks extensively. In fact, what sets *The Professor* apart from Charlotte's other novels other than its male first-person protagonist is its deliberate eschewing of Gothic or folkloric frameworks in an attempt to write a fully natural novel, in the early *Blackwood's* sense.

Nor do other scholars treat *The Professor* as a specifically Gothic novel. William A Cohen notes that *The Professor* is "almost the only early Victorian novel" with a woman author but a male first-person protagonist. With this in mind, he offers a different perspective on the exaggerations Butler finds so crude and indicative of bad habits. Cohen posits that "the work's peculiar narrative situation supplied Brontë the opportunity to imagine being a man, and in particular to wonder what it felt like to inhabit a male body" with that "fantasy of male embodiment" enabling her to "dramatiz[e] the strangeness of the idea of being inside any body at all" (445). Thus, Charlotte uses William Crimsworth's perspective and recurrent narrative images to demonstrate "human interiority" and more specifically what he calls *material interiority*, the "literary depiction

[17] See "Learning to Imagine: The Brontës and Nineteenth-Century Education Ideals." Dinah Birch. pp. 48-66 from *The Brontës and the Idea of the Human* (2019).

of ethereal inner qualities in a language of tangible objects, a practice that collapses dualistic conceptions of mind and body (or body and soul) by making subjective inwardness and bodily innards stand for each other" (445). The figurative depictions of "entombment and boundary violation" use exaggeration to underscore this demonstration. In this reading, which makes sense of some of the more perplexing aspects of the text, Cohen does not write off this first novel as an unsuccessful aberration by provides a useful framework for understanding the role of exaggeration within it, without assuming a Gothicism not borne out by other critics.[18]

While the theory appears to privilege the natural over the supernatural, the reception of *The Professor* in contrast to that of *Jane Eyre* suggests the preference is undermined by the desire for even the prosaic improbable to remain in the romance and not aspire to being a novel. Brontë, however, aspires to writing a novel and desires it to be taken seriously. Having a male protagonist, it is not necessary to lean on the immersiveness of Gothic—or so she thinks. Readers struggle with fully believing in Crimsworth anyway. In her later novels, Brontë relies on Gothic to immerse the reader in her heroines' experiences, as I will show with *Jane Eyre* in the next chapter.

In addition, it is not that Brontë cannot write men—it's that she is most interested in struggles against structural limitation. She writes of a man overcoming adversity. That limitation ends up doubly structural as it underpins the structure of the novel itself. Charlotte tries to depict this through male eyes and is less successful than in *Jane Eyre* because Crimsworth, in spite of his poverty, is not subject to the same limitations as

[18] William A. Cohen has published on material interiority in the works of Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens, *The Professor* figuring prominently in both.

Frances Henri, or of her successor Jane Eyre. It risks stating the obvious to say that Brontë was preoccupied with the question of what educated young people of more or less genteel birth but no wealth were to do—particularly women, whose economic opportunities were more limited than their male counterparts. Yet her works reflected this focus well enough that, after her biography and *The Professor* were released in 1857, the *Dublin University Review* acknowledged the "lesson, painful as it is instructive, to have the details of a career such as this, set before us in all its life-like and photographic truth. None of us wish to think that there lurk, estuating among us, passions, prejudices, agonisms, of a wholly novel and unanticipated degree of intensity—that there may exist close to us, only separated from us by the partition wall of our own indifference or want of curiosity, minds, homes, destinies, undivined and disastrous, differing from those here depicted in one circumstance alone, that the dark lantern of genius has not struck upon them, and made them conspicuous" (88). Being confronted with Brontë's life-story lent authority to what she narrated in her fictional works and triggered a noticeable response from the reviewer who admitted such lesson were "disagreeable: they make us uncomfortable—but they are wholesome. It does not do for us to repose upon our own ignorance—sooner or later, we shall find that we are on a crust, which may open or explode, and do us harm" (89). This admission of imperfect knowledge on the part of a reviewer alludes to one of the tensions most deeply embedded in the reception of Charlotte Brontë's work—writing about characters whose experiences were, in some respects, close to her own yet remained removed from the experience of reviewers led some reviewers to deny belief.

In a similar vein, Charles Kingsley wrote to his wife upon reading Gaskell's *Life*:

> Be sure the book will do good. It will shame literary people into some stronger belief that a simple, virtuous, practical home life is consistent with imaginative genius; and it will shame, too, the prudery of a not over cleanly, though carefully white-washed age, into believing that purity is now (as in all ages till now) quite compatible with the knowledge of evil (*Heritage* 343).

Kingsley declares, alongside the *Dublin University Review* of the salutary effect of the biography in its ability to "shame" literary people into a more tolerant frame of mind and force them to admit that one can be virtuous oneself without being ignorant of the darker aspects of human nature. This admission is particularly striking from Kingsley, given his *Fraser's* review of Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* eight years previously, in which he thoroughly savaged Anne for the impropriety of her novel (*Heritage* 269-73).

The combined life and work would ultimately convince at least some reviewers—and many readers—of the benefit of the project Charlotte Brontë and, in different ways, her younger sisters, undertook, but much of their vindication would be posthumous.

Conscientious and Diagnostic Improbability: The Changeling and Gothic as Critique in *Jane Eyre*

Introduction

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë learns from her experience with *The Professor*, drawing on the thread of *Blackwood's* novel criticism that pointed the way to a judicious improbable, as I will show. Learning from her study of *Blackwood's* that there was a way to draw upon the supernatural without ceding all claim to seriousness as an author, Brontë negotiated the space between natural and supernatural fiction, keeping her fiction possible and its most folkloric element a result of characters' misreadings. The resulting work elicited complex responses. While few reviewers categorically hated the novel, they objected to its improbability on the grounds that it was simply too unlikely to be believable. Intriguingly, however, their objections revealed a preoccupation not with the supernatural but with ordinary experiences, as reviewers set their own personal experience against the representations in the novel.

Brontë therefore augments her natural fiction, drawing on Gothic and the folk motif of the changeling, making Jane's changeling status in part a mark of characters' habit of misreading her, as the Reeds, Rochester, and St. John Rivers all do. Jane must resist and ultimately counter the self-serving othering of her fellow characters' interpretations with a first-person immersive Gothic that presents her own experiences, including internal ones, and the interpretations thereof. The lack of external corroboration thus enacts Jane's insistence on the right to report and interpret her own experiences—what is probable or not is subordinate to the question of who decides.

The novel and its reception indicate a struggle over rights to experience and representation, including the representation of belief. To this end, Jane stays within the realm of the possible with a first-person narrator that immerses the reader, partly for the purposes of emotionally educating them, even as *Blackwood's* indicates is imaginative fiction's greatest usefulness.

Part I. Blackwood's and the Supernatural Novel

The backbone of the theory of genre fiction unfolded in Blackwood's are comprised in Scott's extensive review of *Frankenstein* and Wilson's concise article published September 1818 "On the Use of the Preternatural in Works of Fiction," though it is foreshadowed somewhat by his *Mandeville* reviews earlier and later by the "Hints" review. The *Frankenstein* review begins, "This is a novel, or more properly, a romantic fiction, of a nature so peculiar, that we ought to describe the species before attempting any account of the individual production." As previously discussed in this paper, the reviewer separates off the "natural" and then devotes himself to elucidating the classes of fiction that "are managed by marvellous and supernatural machinery." Upfront, he draws an important distinction between old tales in which "the poet or tale-teller does not, in his own opinion, transgress the laws of credibility, when he introduces into his narrative the witches, goblins, and magicians, in the existence of which he himself, as well as his hearers, is a firm believer" and "marvellous" tales told in the absence of that good faith, in which the marvel itself is the point. This latter kind, Wilson maintains, concerned with characters "dragged along by its machinery, is comparatively an inferior object" (648-49).

This usage of the supernatural as a self-indulgent shortcut, then, creates "inferior" fiction barely worth noticing, but the reviewer does not, at least, assume, that all novelists employing the supernatural partake of this same fault, suggesting the existence of a "more philosophical and refined use of the supernatural" in which the alterations to the "laws of nature" are done "in order to show the probable effect" of marvels or miracles because "the pleasure ordinarily derived from the marvellous incidents is secondary to that which we extract from observing how mortals like ourselves would be affected" being departures "From sober truth…still to nature true" (649**)**

In other words, novelists following the delineations of the natural and the probable while shifting the parameters of reality for serious reasons can still register as serious work because there is, in these contributors' minds, a kind of *natural supernatural*. Intriguingly, this approach's emphasis on the probable suggests an unexpected kinship or affinity with the numerous reviewers of the Brontës who objected not, specifically, to the hints at the supernatural, but at the perceived improbabilities in plot development.[19] This approach to interpreting supernatural fiction also suggests a kind of back door by which authors employing such devices can be read using a similar rubric to that used when reading natural fiction—because some supernatural fiction can remain "true to nature"—though the Blackwood's contributor does not specify precisely how this is to be gone about.

While Wilson argues for a supernatural probable, he otherwise suggests in "The Preternatural in Fiction" rather that authors stay within the bounds of the *possible,* citing the need for "an outlet" granting "escape" so that "poets should be permitted to feign all

[19] See especially *The Athenaeum*, which addressed improbability in *all* the published Brontë novels.

wonders which cannot be proved to be impossible, and which are not contradictory to the spirit of our religion."[25] The improbable but possible is thus of service to a poet who serves "as the constructor of a fable," provided his use of wonders not undermine the integrity of the overall work—here he mentions "probability or interest," suggesting that it is what is what is *impossible* that would offend, not what is simply unlikely.

The review of *The Devil's* Elixir (1824), a two-volume romance translated from German by E.T. A. Hoffman, also argues explicitly for the legitimacy and artistic utility of the "*horrible*," (italics his), further stating that, it being impossible to banish the supernatural from art or conversation—and it being "absurdity" to suppose Ann Radcliffe had "exhausted" its potential, readers and reviewers should content themselves with enjoying the well-executed manifestations of the supernatural—particularly those that mix these genre elements "with ordinary human feelings" (55-57). This synthesis of genuine, recognizable emotion with improbable narrative development is thus a worthy artistic expression. While the reviewer acknowledges *The Devil's Elixir* as "'light'" reading (67), in 1824, almost no fictional prose was not so qualified, however well-considered otherwise by reviewer, as indeed the reviewer of *Jane Eyre* would note in October 1848.

Jane Eyre was reviewed in *Blackwood's* in the idiosyncratic piece "A Few Words about Novels—A Dialogue," in which, ostensibly, a man called Aquilius and an unnamed curate discuss the merits of fiction as a general pursuit before reviewing nine novels, of which *Jane Eyre* is the penultimate. For the discussion of the last two novels in particular, the curate's wife Lydia joins the conversation.[26] Their broader conversation shapes as a defence of novels and a pointed critique of reviewers who overreach

themselves in their privileging of experience over reading and telling their assumptions as fact. Fiction, they agree, arms readers for “possible contingencies” and serves as a fitting addition to “experience” for “[l]ife is too short to learn by a process so slow, that the pupil begins to decay before he has learnt one truth" (460).[27]

Indeed, the novel is, according to their formula, invaluable to its readers given that as a catalyst to the imagination and thus to the development of emotional range and awareness. Aquilius posits, “[e]ven feelings are to be made—are much the result of education.” *Blackwood’s* sets itself apart by how far it is willing to go, stating, “The wildest romances will, in this respect, teach nothing wrong. If they create a world somewhat unlike the daily visible, they create another, which is reality to the possessor, to the romantic, from which he can extract much that is practical” (463). *Blackwood’s* is arguing for the practicality of romances—not at all a standard opinion among fiction reviewers in 1848. However, *Blackwood’s* implicitly defines romances as novels about love rather than episodic narrative with larger-than-life characters often in exotic settings or time periods. The magazine goes yet further by addressing those who decry romantic fiction claiming “mainly to protect women” with their misplaced “caution” when, Aquilius counters, “among all the young women whom I have been acquainted with, I should say that the novel-readers are not only the best informed, but of the best nature, and some capable of setting examples of extreme fortitude” (463). Fiction—*romantic fiction*—condemned by hardliners for filling women’s heads with nonsense—does good to readers of both genders, not harm. The naysayers suggest “such reading encourages extravagant thoughts and gives rise to dangerous feelings” but Aquilius counters: “And why dangerous? And why should not such thoughts and feelings be encouraged” (463).

Love being "requisite" for women's roles in the home, forbidding them fiction is, according to Aquilius, counterproductive as well as absurd.

Of *Jane Eyre*, the Aquilius said it was "pathetic" and "singular" and "so like truth that is difficult to avoid believing that much of the characters and incidents are taken from life, though woman is called the weaker sex. Here, in one example, is represented the strongest passion and the strongest principle, admirably supported" (473). There is no automatic separation in his mind between what is singular and what is truthful—he has no trouble believing that something out of the ordinary would be taken from life—and praises the strength of passion of the novel's protagonist. The novel does what the dialogue argues good fiction should do, in furthering the emotional experience and education of the reader, and he does not see Currer Bell's probable womanhood as a barrier to that, praising instead her ability to combine passion with principle. He notes that Brontë has made the unconventional choice to have her heroine plain, so as "to show that high and noble sentiments, and great affection, can be both made subservient and even heightened, by the energy of practical wisdom," an endeavor which he deems unsuccessful (474).

Rochester, by contrast, "has great faults—why should we mince the word? —vice. And yet so singular is the fatality of love, that it would be impossible to find two characters so necessary to exhibit true virtues, and make the happiness of each. The execution of the painting is as perfect as the conception" (474-75). Here, *Blackwood's* makes an argument that different reviewers echo and dispute, as we will see—that Jane's and Rochester's relationship is so effectively inevitable as to remove the danger of Rochester's vice, so that neither reader nor author need be perturbed. *Blackwood's* is not

naïve enough to think there will not be controversy, however, quipping that *Jane Eyre* is "not a book for Prudes—it is not a book for effeminate and tasteless men; it is for the enjoyment of a feeling heart and vigorous understanding" (475).

Blackwood's is on the vanguard of the nascent discourse of realism as the chapter on *The Professor* demonstrates. Yet *Blackwood's* contributors also provide a path to a less purely mechanical and thus more critically validated—not to say valid—kind of *genre fiction*. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (and *Villette*) in particular demonstrate an alignment with this approach. As this section will show, it also suggests an augmentation to the natural through the more than natural, either super- or preter-. This approach Charlotte takes up advisedly and conscientiously, beginning with *Jane Eyre*. By adhering to the possible while borrowing from genres known for their improbable elements and conventions, Charlotte endeavors to negotiate both discourses. Her varied reception suggests the complexity of this negotiation.

In *Jane Eyre,* Charlotte Brontë does not simply capitulate and write a romance. Instead, she judiciously incorporates the improbable from multiple sources—including fairy legend, Gothic, and personal experience—to produce a text that arguably remains natural even while taking advantage of the possibilities opened up by supernatural literature, for narrating what is possible but not yet accepted by arbiters of natural fiction, who expect a level of probability and moderation, as well as propriety, and who replied to *Jane Eyre* in several cases with incredulity and even anger, privileging their own experience, as we will see..

Charlotte may not have convinced all her reviewers with her conception of a possible that allows for the depiction of a woman's experience, even when those

experiences are uncommon or controversial, yet she undertakes the emotional education of her reader, even as Aquilius argues for, while demonstrating the struggles of a heroine chronically misread within her own text.

Part II: *Jane Eyre's* Double-edged Reception

Nine of the fourteen *Jane Eyre* reviews in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* reference the novel's improbability, including nearly all of the major periodicals: *North American Review*, *Fraser's*, *The Examiner*, *The Spectator*, *The Athenaeum*, *Atlas*, and the *North British Review.* While objections ranged from a dislike for Jane's character and moral outrage at the behavior of Rochester, it was the improbabilities of the plot coupled with the willingness to show the unpleasant side of a governess's life that garnered the most objections. Notably, *Blackwood's* does not accuse Charlotte of either coarseness or improbability, and nor does *The Critic* or *Era*.[28] But even the French critic Eugene Forçade, while both sympathetic overall and remarkably unsexist, located improbability in its plot (*Heritage* 103).[29] Other reviews include those in the *People's Journal, Dublin Review, Dublin University Magazine, Graham's Magazine,* and *Tait's Edinburgh Review***.**

Catherine Malone summarizes, "[o]n its publication, *Jane Eyre* was condemned as immoral and unchristian, as emphatically a bad book, as a book not to be given to the young" (175). She cites, respectively, the *Mirror*, the *English Review*, the *Dublin Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review* (1857). She asserts that it is the publication of Gaskell's *Life* that teaches the public the error of its ways.[30] The perceived moral questionability of the novel indicates the extent to which reviewers perceived *Jane Eyre* as transgressing norms they felt ought to be maintained, regarding the conduct of individuals, especially women. The charge of improbability, significantly, falls into two categories, however: that which

reviewers perceive as foreign to themselves, and that which is indisputably unlikely to occur.

Sometimes, reviewers follow up the charge of improbability (or coarseness) with an account of how, in their critical view, Art ought to be. These theories of composition have something in common with that of *Blackwood's*, outlined above and so influential on the Brontës' work. However, the divergences are telling. G.H. Lewes while reviewing *Jane Eyre* for *Fraser's* is of two minds, suggesting that "Reality—deep significant reality—is the great characteristic of this book…not, perhaps, in the naked facts and circumstances, but in the actual suffering and experience." However, he applies a precept which stung Charlotte deeply: "unless a novel be out of real experience, it can have no success…All the craft in the circulating-library will not change that." For an author like Charlotte—or indeed either of her sisters—who lived fairly secluded and relatively uneventfully, this narrows the possibilities of what is successful—or acceptable—in their fiction to an oppressive degree. Indeed, Charlotte responded to this charge: "is not the real experience of each individual limited? […] and if an author dwells upon that solely or principally is he not in danger of repeating himself and also of becoming an egoist?" (Barker: 152-53). Here, Charlotte is in keeping with the *Blackwood's* attitude—an author's experience being necessarily limited, she must go beyond it. Moreover, she adds a characteristic dimension, combining the stylistic with the ethical: an author who draws only on her real-life experience, that being limited, must risk becoming repetitive—a fault reviews do not easily forgive as the receptions of such authors as G. P. R. James, James Fenimore Cooper, and even Sir Walter Scott over time demonstrate—but Charlotte adds, archly but with intent, the ethical or moral danger of so self-focused an author

practicing egoism in the corresponding growth of sense of self-importance seeming to become the foundation of morally correct writing. Brontë then not only disputes her confinement to a prescribed limitation but suggests the dangers inherent in doing so.

We see in Lewes's review for *Fraser's*[20] an explicit privileging of realistic, autobiographical fiction, pitted against the hacky, forgettable page-turners of the circulating library, of which he is openly contemptuous. St. John Rivers he singles out as the character who verges closest to this artificial implausibility (*Heritage* 84-86). Charlotte, for her part, chafed at stipulations that could be seen as favoring G.H. Lewes and his more immediate peers while excluding her for what she could not help.

We can glean added context from Lewes's review of *Shirley* for the *Edinburgh Review*, justifying the review's inclusion in a chapter on *Jane Eyre*. After a long disquisition in which he explains that women have struggled to be artists because of childbearing and their attempts to be too masculine, he advances his philosophy of what is rejected versus allowed in fiction:

> Truth is never rejected, unless it be truth so exceptional as to stagger our belief, and in that case, the artist is wrong to employ it, without so preparing our minds that we might receive it unquestioned…Art, in short, deals with the broad principles of human nature, not with idiosyncrasies: and although it requires an experience of life both comprehensive and profound, to enable us to say 'this motive is unnatural' or 'that passion is untrue', it requires no great experience to say 'this character has not the air

[20] Lewes also noticed Jane Eyre for the *Westminster Review* in Jan 1848, registering his certainty that Jane Eyre was the work of "a lady, a clever one too" and that the "characters are too life-like to be mere creations of fancy (*Westminster Review* Vol xlviii, 581-4).

> of reality; it may be copied from nature, but it does not look so (*Heritage* 164).

Lewes thus argues that a truth that provokes disbelief in the reader is a sign of an author's failure to properly prime her reader for an exception. Yet while his principles may indeed be sound, and yet they do not answer the question of how to make readers with little relevant experience and less willingness to imagine or defer to the possibility of greater expertise elsewhere**.** He even gestures toward the pitfalls of his own system—that a deep and broad experience is needed to be able to pass judgment on the truths of another's work—but falls back upon the "air of reality" and its appearance. Such am argument anticipates Audrey Jaffe's project "to articulate a theory about Victorian realist fiction that does not depend on but rather fleshes out the idea of what 'feels real'—since…the idea of the real is inseparable from that of ideology, and an indication of ideology's success is precisely the feeling of reality it conveys" (Jaffe 15). Reviewers under Lewes's formula have the ability to dismiss work they cannot believe in, yet no specific provision is made in his theory for when a reviewer's affective response takes precedence over other considerations. This refusal to believe, armed with calls of improbability and even at times worse imputations will take us on a tour of sorts through the contemporary reception of *Jane Eyre* that suggests both irony and contradiction: reviewers won't believe in Charlotte's characters, complain that she does not have knowledge of the world but have no firsthand knowledge of experiences comparable to those she represents in *Jane Eyre*.

Yet Lewes, as one of the period's pre-eminent writers and reviewers and also the least personally hostile to Brontë's work is a fitting starting point for looking more in-

depth at the specifics of *Jane Eyre'*s reception. He was frank about his affection for the novel's protagonist: "We never lose sight of [Jane's] plainness; no effort is made to throw romance about her — no extraordinary goodness or cleverness appeals to your admiration, but you love her", the "creature of flesh and blood, with very fleshly infirmities, and very mortal excellencies; a woman, not a pattern" (*Heritage* 83). Here, Lewes declares his preference for a character who is not written to be admired as one would admire a romance heroine but appears fully embodied and flawed, appearing to be an individual rather than a pattern to be stereotyped or drawn by rule. Lewes loved Jane as a character, as did the three dialoguers in *Blackwood's*, as well as the *People's Journal* reviewer and many ordinary readers. Elizabeth Rigby is the major dissenting voice, as we will see later.

Lewes was less perfectly enamored of the two primary male characters. Rochester, he declared "well drawn and from life; but it is the portrait of a man drawn by a woman, and is not comparable to the portrait of Jane" (85). The "but" indicates a qualifying statement, suggesting that male characters recognizably from female pens are inferior, despite the previous claim that Rochester was drawn "from life". Thus, Rochester's not having been invented out of whole cloth is put into tension with his author's gender, the effectiveness of his characterization ultimately contrasted with Jane's. Women from female pens are flesh and blood enough to be loved and forgiven their origin, more easily than men from such pens. This gendered double standard continues with his estimation of St. John of whom Lewes also cautions, possesses a "touch of the circulating library" though "not enough to spoil the truth of the delineation," whose "art and artifice" appear to be positive in Lewes's mind. Yet, he

further qualifies himself; “one feels a certain misgiving about him; it is another example of the woman’s pencil” (86). Lewes does not specify — other than authorship — what, specifically makes him, or rather, ‘one’ so uncomfortable about St. John. One might suggest it is his religious fervor paired with such intense denial of his own “fleshy” aspects, except that in the very next sentence, Lewes praises Helen Burns, the most devout woman in the text as “lovely and loveable; true, we believe, even in her exalted spirituality and religious fervor; a character at once eminently ideal and accurately real” (86).

The objection thus remains nebulous. The allusion to the circulating-library is suggestive, however, of contrivance for its own sake, of a lesser commitment to artistic truth and mentioned the circulating library also in reference to the novel’s plot: “too much melodrama and improbability, which smack of the circulating library” attach to the revelation of a mad wife and Jane’s post-Thornfield wanderings (*Heritage* 85). The disdain for the circulating library of the time is all over the periodical press of the time. Intriguingly, the events Lewes for one takes exception to are unlikely but prosaic, and not supernatural. This holds true for many reviewer objections regarding the plot of *Jane Eyre*—that the bending of prosaic or ordinary reality is more off-putting than flights of the supernatural, perhaps because supernatural elements would, after a certain point, remove a novel entirely into the realm of fantastical writing, neither intended to be taken literally, nor so taken.

Other reviewers registered their difficulty in believing in—and at times outright denial of the possibility or morality of Rochester’s existence. He was the most controversial character, provoking the most adverse response. *The Athenaeum* would only

grant the existence of such a character conditionally. The qualification leaves room to wonder whether he is one of the "certain eccentricities" of the text that "verged on "what is improbable if not unpleasant" (*Heritage* 71-72). *The Spectator* was more pointed in its attestation that "the reader cannot see anything lovable in Rochester" (74). Not only is this denial definitive, it speaks of an abstract reader rather than of the reviewer himself, which is misleading. Rochester, while controversial, was by no means universally hated. *Graham's Magazine*, on the other hand, accuses Currer Bell of not understanding depravity and the morally corrosive potential of a character like Rochester on the imaginations of others.

The Christian Remembrancer recognizes that women and men look for different things in their main characters, suggesting Rochester "past middle age" and "blind and fire-scarred" is "such an Acia as no male writer would have given his Galatea" while demonstrating him "a true embodiment…of the female imagination" (483).

Elizabeth Rigby, in her contentious review for the *Quarterly* rejected *Jane Eyre*'s attempt to portray the aristocracy, dovetailing with the *Remembrancer*, which viewed the "novel of manners" aspect of the text as its greatest failure. These periodicals' rejection of *Jane Eyre* as worldly realism because it fails to reflect worldly experiences as the reviewers themselves expected implies that such reflections are a novel's job. Indeed, Rigby's preference for *Vanity Fair* (and its heroine Becky Sharp)[31], reviewed in the same essay, further suggests this, and the refusal of belief appears as a personal preference granted critical weight—always a risk in reviewing.

The *Spectator*, on the other hand, rejects not just the effectiveness of Rochester and Jane individually but of their entire love plot,[21] declaring the "whole" of *Jane Eyre* "unnatural and only critically interesting" as a result. His stated inability—or refusal—to believe in their falling in love would indeed harm his ability to enjoy the text, yet he gives no concrete reason for the objection other than implying that it is "unnatural." In another novel, the disbelief of this element might not be serious, but love metaphysics, are essential to all of Charlotte Brontë's works, and it stands out that even this first published and most successful of her novels provoked at least one influential reviewer to disbelieve the principal couple's kind of love.

The dissenters and the *Spectator* suggest Charlotte treads a fine line regarding romance—so that there is open debate whether to treat *Jane* Eyre pejoratively as such. Answers have partly to do with reviewer *preference*—do they want worldly mimesis or a departure therefrom?[22] This debate is further demonstrated by response to the revelation of Bertha Mason Rochester and the dénouement and final resolution, each of which provoked debate when read in aggregate. G.H. Lewes objected to the mad wife subplot, but the *Athenaeum* defended it, intriguingly on the grounds of personal experience, a notably rare example of a reviewer's personal experience being used to defend the content of the novel, rather than dismiss it. Having murmured a bit about Jane's governessing, the *Athenaeum* objected more strongly to the ending. Lewes complained that Jane was "too sorely tried" after her flight from Thornfield.

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[21] *Tait's* (346-48), *Era* (*Heritage* 78-79), and *Blackwood's* (459-74) flatly disagreed.
[22] Other reviews, including Eugene Forçade's, *The Living Age*, and *Blackwood's* saw *Jane Eyre* as a refreshing change (*Heritage* 100-04; *Age* vol. 16, pp. 481-87; *Blackwood's* 459-74).

Intriguingly, Chorley defends the situation at Thornfield: “We, ourselves, know of a large mansion-house in a distant country where, for many years, a miscreant was kept” and kept mostly secret. Chorley is also a good sport about Brontë’s making “the secret explode at a critical juncture of the story”. However, post-dénouement, Chorley finds Jane “too outrageously tried and too romantically assisted in her difficulties; — until...obstacles fall down like the battlements of *Castle Melodrame* in the closing scene, when "avenging thunder strikes the tower of Crime, and far above in Heaven's ethereal light young Hymen's flower-decked temple shines revealed” (*Heritage* 72). He can, then, allow the characters and initial situation. But its resolution he cannot accept in the same spirit. What makes his refusal of the ending so striking, however, is his decision to quote from another work to prove his point, rather than pull a damning line or two from *Jane Eyre*. Nor does his review specify what is so romantic or outrageous except that Jane is allowed to overcome her obstacles to have the life she wants, against presumably, what Chorley deems probable.

While all of these plot developments have connections to the reviewer’s perception of the developments’ probability or lack thereof, it is intriguing that *The Spectator* goes so far as to scoff at the dead uncle’s bequest—a fairly conventional coincidence, and one often employed by Dickens and others as early as the 1830s—and to the intercession of the Returned Letters Office in important revelations, which is a more off-putting imposition by the author in the reviewer’s opinion. On the surface, it would be easy to say that the more romantic, melodramatic, or supernatural elements put reviewers off. Yet the seemingly prosaic improbabilities come in for their share of

objection, as I touched on before. Believability must, then, necessitate being moderate, even in ordinary incidents and coincidences.

It is the *Christian Remembrancer* that at last objects to the supernatural: **"**Having demonstrated by this litany of improprieties, Currer Bell's lack of proper femininity, the reviewer moves onto the plot, deemed "most extravagantly improbable, verging all along on the supernatural and at last running fairly into it" (*Heritage* 90). The review is so influential it was reprinted in the *Living Age* (vol. 16, 481-87).

And there again, the *Athenaeum* defends the rare but attested event of the concealed mad person on the grounds of personal experience. We see it again in the matter of St. John Rivers. G.H. Lewes finds him too close to a Minerva Press character, objecting to him more strongly than to Rochester, but the *Dublin Review* defends him on the grounds that those who have encountered such a man before will thrill the recognition. "It is not everyone who will have me with such a one [as St John Rivers]; those who have will recognise it with a thrill. We have spoken of the unity of the story, —its coherency is no less remarkable; every incident is exciting, unexpected; not one can be taxed with being forced, unnatural, or even improbable; and the catastrophe is a fitting climax, —pathetic, and yet full of softness and satisfied feeling" (*Heritage* 223).

Among the most intriguing reviews is Eugene Forçade's for *Revue des deux mondes*. A Frenchman who reviewed both French and English literature, Forçade puts *Jane Eyre* into a different perspective. He objects to an author so clearly talented resorting to "improbably linked" and "disjointed incidents" to wind up her story (103).Yet there is the sense that such a contrived resolution is not worth the characters at whom he has "no reproach to level," being "energetic and emphatic rather than delicate"

and ultimately "true" (103). Yet his objection is not morally colored. Rather, Forçade suggests the notice of probability—or its lack—especially in authors who have demonstrated themselves worth seriously noticing, goes beyond England, yet the particularly moralistic and gendered objections of the most critical of the English reviews finds no echo in his. He is fairly confident Currer Bell is a woman but does not weaponize her gender as the reason for the text's weaknesses, nor berate her for coarseness. Instead, he praises the novel's morality, finding it refreshing in contrast to what he sees as the "depraved instincts, corrupt emotions, and monstrous attachments" of contemporary French fiction (104).

These, then, are the two main issues: those of experience and of probability, and they are bound together. The experience of reviewers and of author when too unlike can be rendered incompatible and lead the reviewer to decry the novelist's lack of experience of "the world" which generally suggest the world *as the reviewer knows it*. It can also lead to accusations of improbability, with varying degrees of harshness implicit therein, from the gentle disappointment of Forçade to the much more aggressive *Spectator*.

As for the improbable, Brontë employs indisputably it at times and, as I argue, advisedly. Reviewers' claims of improbability as a criticism represent an assertion of their authority via their ethos, stating that their experience is extensive enough to render unto them the right to judge the likelihood of an author's depictions and even, at times, to make assertions about what a novel demonstrates regarding its author's respective knowledge and experience.

The first-person narration transgresses the status quo while withholding corroborating perspectives. Jane's experiences are presented by an older version of

herself. There is no recourse to others' *auctoritas*—by design. The novel thus proclaims Jane's right, structurally reinforced, to bear witness to her own experiences—a right reviewers would attempt to deny on grounds of probability or morality. Brontë however refuses to dismiss or pathologize Jane's experiences—including the psychosomatic—crafting a possible that is sufficiently expansive to allow for Rochester's summons.

Jane as a changeling in-text is an unwilling locus of discord who undermines sanctioned relationships. Further, her designation thus indicates Brontë's awareness of her deviations from the ordinary as it is perceived by others, ultimately reflected in her heroine's reception as we have already seen.

Part III: Gothic to Counter Misinterpretation

The changeling motif functions in *Jane Eyre* as an interpretative strategy by characters who wish to distance her from the ordinary for their own purposes. These attempts prompt intensifying of Gothic as Jane has intense emotional or psychosomatic reactions to being forced to transgress her own nature. The changeling thus is a useful metaphor by which to understand the disconnect between how other characters respond to Jane, in contrast with her internal and emotional life and her reception by other characters because it invokes both alienation and the potential for discord. It expresses not just otherness and alienation that is linked to both physical sickliness and excessive knowingness but also the capacity of such figures to bring disorder into family units whether or not they intend to do so and seems a fitting figure for the protagonist of a novel whom authority figures repeatedly misread.

Borrowing from Gothic but with restraint gives Brontë the ability to be psychologically immersive and suggest the blurring between perception and external

reality while depicting Jane's response to subjection and her rebellion against others' attempts to make her abject—in which external authorities seek to compel her to act against her own nature. In Charlotte Brontë's novel, the Gothic is formed experientially, constructed from the protagonist's feelings, her affective response to what happens to her in such moments. More specifically, Jane's feelings overwhelm her perception and the reader's rendering transformation possible. The preternatural thus created is perceptual. Being mad abject, isolated and read as other, pushes the constantly latent Gothic to the forefront so that Jane experiences the seemingly supernatural without transgressing the possible. It is through these experiences, psychosomatic and otherwise, that the Gothic is deeply embedded in the novel, rather than being confined to its annexes or margins, as Suzanne Keen argues.[23]

Jane Eyre does not transgress its own formulation of the possible. In fact, even Rochester's voice summoning Jane from Moor House is, according to Jane herself, an occurrence of the natural world. The revelation of her cousins and the psychosomatic haunting in the Red Room.[24] Furthermore, this careful, conscious use of the improbable while having her heroine advocate in-text for the possibility of the most supernatural-seeming incident suggests that its author has capitulated only insofar as she must. Brontë argues explicitly for the right of a governess to narrate her own experience and be believed.

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[23] For his part, Smajić reads the visitation sequence as a manifestation of Extra-Sensory Perception (pp. 14-17). Suzanne Keen reads the Red Room as a Gothic interpolation into an unstably realist text. (*Victorian Renovations of the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation* (1998)

[24] These episodes, and the erratic behavior of Bertha Mason Rochester are "standard" as the secondary lit will confirm. See Suzanne Keen's annex theory, J. Jeffrey Franklin, Judith Legatt and Christopher Parkes, Ruth Bernard Yeazell, and Srdjan Smaljić.

Many have rightly written on Christianity as a driving force in the text. Others have argued for the role of Gothic.[32] J. Jeffrey Franklin insightfully seeks to marry the two approaches using Gothic to bridge the gap between Christian spirituality and the other kind he finds in Jane Eyre — a kind of "paganised" popular Christianity (469-70). Franklin rightly notes the class differential inherent therein — popular Christianity, more overtly given to syncretic spiritual belief and practice, are more common among the working classes than the middle class or gentry in Brontë's day.[33]

In his article "Supernatural Realism," Srdan Smajić rightfully acknowledges that "supernaturalism has traditionally been theorized as oppositional, subversive, parasitic" to realism" (2). He counters that it is rather, for the nineteenth-century British novel, "not disruptive but consistently and overtly constitutive of its realism," which is "not haunted by supernaturalism…but rather openly collaborates with it, everywhere weaving it into its formal properties, thematic concerns, and critical self-reflections" (3). I think Smajić's desire to push back against many of the established assumptions about the supernatural is useful, and I agree also with his assertion later in the article that Gothic is more thoroughly enmeshed in the nineteenth-century novel—including realist ones—than is always acknowledged. His article also indicates ongoing engagement with a question that interested nineteenth-century writers, including Thomas Carlyle.[25]

Gothic for Charlotte and Emily Brontë is always present as a possibility and becomes noticeable in the moments of strong duress that prompt hauntings, both literal and metaphorical, when the outside "duplicates" the inside, as Sedgwick states (21). More broadly, for all three sisters, the particularly immersive quality of Gothic and its

[25] See *Sartor Resartus*, Book III, Chapter 8, titled "Natural Supernaturalism."

ability to depict mental and physical spaces as interdependent and convey the experiential, in which the *perceived* functions as the *real*, is essential to all three sisters' works, even Anne's, as Helen's diary shows. This helps explain the appeal to many critics of psychoanalytic approaches to interpreting this novel, but rather than invoking Freud or Lacan, I want to suggest that constructing Gothic in this way keeps the novel from crossing into improbability. Jane's, if not Charlotte's realm of the possible includes the ability of one's estranged lover to mentally reach across the distance and summon her back to him, and she does not believe such an occurrence is supernatural, or the result of superstition even if her readers might. Moreover,Jane's haunting experiences are the result of being misunderstood, even misread by figures of authority.

The psychosomatic haunting in the Red Room is precipitated by Jane's flashing out at John Reed. Forced by fear of his superior strength into a level of passivity that is contrary to her nature, Jane is pushed beyond endurance by the sight of her own blood, she is jolted from "habitual" obedience to violence against Reed and open rebellion against the servants seeking to subdue her. The servants and the Reeds stand united, in this moment, in the belief that Jane has suddenly and uncharacteristically become aggressive. Jane's self-narrative gives evidence for another interpretation, however. Her true nature had been taxed too far and revealed another side of itself, casting aside the passive persona in an act of radical self-defense.

At age eight, Jane recognizes how profoundly out-of-place she is at Gateshead, recalling whilst in the red-room, she calls herself "a discord…who had "nothing in common with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage," thus accounting for the lack of love between them. Mrs. Reed reads Jane as an "interloper" and "uncongenial

alien" (*Jane* 13), who is disconcertingly unlike her own biological children, leading Mrs. Reed to admit on her deathbed to hating it at first sight, the "sickly, whining, pining thing" that did not cry out "heartily like any other child" but by "whimpering and moaning" elicited her husband to "notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age" (*Jane* 197). The picture of Jane as changeling in thus complete—she was sickly and, in Mrs. Reed's eyes, abnormal. Equally damning was Reed's strange attentiveness to the infant Jane, which not only equaled but surpassed the attention he had shown to his own children in infancy, mortifying his wife, who saw his inordinate fondness for his sister's child as a threat to the domestic order within her own family, all the more so when Mr. Reed attempts to pass on his acceptance of Jane to his unwilling children. Most damning of all is Reed's deathbed preoccupation with Jane and his exaction of the promise from his wife that she continue guardianship against her own inclination.

Jane is of liminal gentility as the product of a mésalliance between her wealthy mother and a poor man but even worse, she threatens to supersede Mrs. Reed's own biological children by being raised alongside them. To contain her subversive potential, Mrs. Reed omits Jane from communal activities and leaves her with the servants whenever possible, knowingly violating her promise until she has sufficient excuse to send her niece to Lowood School, a charity institution meant to contain Jane's subversive influence and train her according to her station. Her banishment, however wished-for by Jane, occurs after she demonstrates containment at Gateshead is insufficient: she has attacked John Reed and revealed herself a physical threat.

Locked in the Red Room, Jane confesses the apparition she sees "had the effect of a real spirit," acknowledging thus that it is not one, and yet the *effect* is the same. The figure is, indeed, Jane's own reflection and yet that does not change the experiential reality, so different from the broader reality Jane herself recognizes the existence of at first. This conscious slippage is central to how Charlotte Brontë is able to evoke the supernatural without ever lapsing into impossiblity. Just as Jane is not *literally* a fairy creature left in place of a human child, she is not literally a fairy-imp hybrid from a nursery tale. Yet her literal existence as an abused child, or later, young adult, does not erase how other characters treat her or how she thinks at times of herself. By treating her as a changeling, the Reeds and Rochester functionally make her one and while having awareness that her early experience in the Red Room is not literal, Jane still succeeds in haunting herself.

It is an unenviable situation for Jane, however, because her prior work, made habitual, to submit to her cousin, is perceived as proof that she has suddenly revealed herself as both uncouth and dangerously dishonest. Nature and habit are put at odds here. It is not that Jane is incapable of submission, but her self-respect, such as it is, cannot endure indefinite submission to tyranny—to unearned power exerted without benefit of reason. Yet by doing so, she gives those who are not privy to—or do not believe in—her ethical code the opening to claim she is a liar. This problem—of a conventional status quo being established through practice but being attributed to inclination is a structural one, with the Reeds believing they understand Jane's *nature* as a deceiver based on their interpretation of their experience of her, while the reader, having been privy to her

internal struggle can mark how removed her natural behavior is from her defensive submission to Reed—foreshadowing Jane's behavior with St. John Rivers.

Jane flashes out at Mrs. Reed also when she is accused of deceit on these grounds and though she wins her object of self-vindication, it makes her physically ill, even as the discovery of Bertha Mason Rochester and the destruction of her planned future do so, emphasizing the cost and Brontë's intimate understanding of how emotional and mental experiences affect the physical body. Jane is physically drained by both anguish in the Red Room and the effort of reproving Mrs. Reed. Having seen herself transformed in her own eyes, if briefly, into a supernatural interloper, she is able to see the reading of her the Reeds posit, but she opposes this reading to her aunt once she is free. Her aunt's reading of her cannot be allowed to stand, even if the cost of opposing it is nervous exhaustion.

At Lowood, Jane is able to grow in spite of Mr. Brocklehurst's attempts to enforce the Reeds' interpretation of Jane's character upon her classmates. He is unsuccessful; Jane is not interpreted as a changeling in the school where Miss Temple perceives Jane's true nature and there are no family ties for her to inadvertently undermine. In Jane's relocation to Thornfield, she finds herself again misread, with Rochester directly linking her to fairies. From their first chance meeting, Rochester perceives Jane as of fairy-kind, as he half accuses her of enchanting his horse. Rochester associates Jane's lack of parents with his perception of her as fey: "And so were you waiting for your people when you sat on that stile?" (*Jane* 104) Jane's people, Rochester clarifies, are "the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them. Did I break through one of your rings, that you spread that damned ice on the causeway'" (*Jane* 104)? Herein, Rochester demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of Celtic fairy-lore: he

knows that it is more likely to find fairies by moonlight; they are likely to wear the color green; and he mentions also fairy rings, the breaking of which can lead to retribution exacted against a mortal.

Jane on the other hand argues "as seriously as he had done" that "'[t]he men in green all forsook English a hundred years ago,'" leaving no "trace" of themselves, "even in Hay Lane" or its fields (*Jane* 104). Jane therefore implicitly disclaims true kinship with the fey, asking thus that Rochester see her as she *is*, rather than misreading her, even in play. Yet Rochester's his belief in her Otherworldliness recurs in his proposal: "You—you strange—you almost unearthly thing! —I love you as my own flesh" (*Jane* 217). Thus does Rochester acknowledge his own desired kinship with fairies—through his sympathetic kinship to Jane. His earlier prophecy that they are bound together with cords against their ribs, that if they should be separated "will be snapt" and cause "bleeding inwardly" (*Jane* 215)—has come true. Rather than marking Jane as undesirably inferior, Rochester's reading of Jane as a changeling helps him convince himself he might prevail on her to marry him bigamously. She is his inferior but desirably so. He craves Jane's ability to unintentionally bring discord and threaten relationships built on the worldly status quo in the hope she will belong to him. Yet his reading of Jane as willing to transgress marriage law is proven a misreading: she honors Bertha's claim to him not out of feminine solidarity but acknowledgement of the immorality and danger of being Rochester's without legal marriage.

Jane next finds herself under the interpretative tyranny of St. John Rivers, who awes her and whom she cannot at first reproach because his adamant adherence to religion seems unimpeachable. More than that, she perceives in him a stronger, more

masculine version of her own seeking to do right. Her first instinct is thus to submit to St. John, even when he takes her from her German lessons and presses her to learn Hindustani instead. Yet he forces her into a changeling role yet again by misreading her character and his claim upon her. Jane grants his right to the labor of her hands, and the worthiness of his missionary ambition, yet the quasi-sibling bond she has found with the Rivers siblings is not and cannot be officially sanctioned in the external world.

St. John therefore rejects the unsanctioned bond. While dismissing carnal or romantic interest in Jane as a woman, he is nevertheless frank about his desire for absolute possession of his "helpmeet" (*Jane* 346). Whilst claiming his absolutism is vital to protect her reputation in a foreign land, it is no less essential to him and reveals Rivers as the text's final Gothic tyrant. He has power over her that requires all Jane's strength to break. She herself admits: "He held me in awe, because he held me in doubt. How much of him was saint, how much was mortal, I could not heretofore tell," his power over her expressed in almost mesmeric or enthrallment terms. Until he presses his suit, Jane cannot read him effectively, but at last, he betrays "his fallibilities" as a "veil fell from his hardness and despotism" and in knowing his "imperfection" Jane can read him clearly and finds the resolve to continue refusing him. Having lost her absolute belief in his disinterestedness and ethics, his unwarranted demand that she transgress her nature becomes resistible.

Once opposed, a new facet of St. John's character is revealed: his strength of purpose becomes implacability, and the religious fervor Jane admires becomes St. John's perceived sanction on high for his own will: "[I]t is not the insignificant private individual—the mere man, with the man's selfish senses—I wish to mate: it is the

missionary" (*Jane* 346). However, a marriage devoid of passion or strong affection is anathema to Jane and she demurs.

His vindictiveness is also laid bare by Jane's marking that rather than not speak to her, she feared

> the corrupt man within him had a pleasure unimparted to, and unshared by, the pure Christian, in evincing with what skill he could, while acting and speaking apparently just as usual, extract from every deed and every phrase the spirit of interest and approval which had formerly communicated a certain austere chair to his language and manner. To me, he was in reality become no longer flesh but marble; his eye was a cold, bright, blue gem; his tongue, a speaking instrument—nothing more (*Jane* 350).

Here we come to a vitally important point because this is the province in which gaslighting grows and thrives. Jane *could* be imagining this all-but-imperceptible shift in St. John Rivers and yet that fissure of doubt, leveled by those outside the situation poses the crux of the problem. Master manipulators are subtle—they do not overstep. Yet we have Jane's assurance also that all of this sharp-edged apparent normality was, in fact, "refined, lingering torture" to Jane herself, kindling "a slow fire of indignation, and a trembling trouble of grief, which harassed and crushed me altogether," convincing her that "if I were his wife, this good man, pure as the deep, sunless source, could soon kill me: without drawing from my veins a single drop of blood, or receiving on his own crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime." Her realization is reinforced by her recognition that "[n]o ruth met my ruth" for St. John "experienced no suffering from

estrangement" nor "yearning after reconciliation," remaining as unmoved by her tears as if "his heart had been really a matter of stone or metal" while being "somewhat kinder than usual" to his sisters, a decision Jane believes calculated to "ad[d] the force of contrast" and further demonstrate her error, a decision he believes motivated not by malice but on principle" (*Jane* 350). Thus does Jane demonstrates the minute and Gothic psychology at play. Sensation becomes reality as the mind seeks to explain what the body feels, and similes reach past the literal to do what the literal cannot quite manage. In addition to the "as pure" comparison we have also further likening of St. John's heart to stone and metal. The repetition of the comparison underscores Jane's own perturbation at this shift in her perspective. St. John Rivers is exposed before her as a sadist, whether she believes he is consciously malicious or not. Eyes thus opened, she is better prepared to refuse him than before, hard struggle or none.

The cluster of words—and its web of associations—is telling. In the first place, Jane wishes to distinguish between the corrupt man side of Rivers and the pure Christian side. Yet this, while intended sincerely by Jane, sets up an irony, in that it is his inability or unwillingness to respond to Jane's flesh with his flesh that is much of the basis of Jane's refusal—and is echoed in the absence of softening toward her softening and wish for reconciliation. Indeed, St. John lapses into what Jane deems principled sadism. Here, Jane's sense of St. John as a man rather than a Christian suggests his flaws. Yet his cruelty remakes him as of stone. His "pure" Christianity is held apart, as St. John Rivers transforms in Jane's estimation from flesh to marble, with his eye now also stone, as a gem, and cold, too. This chilly impasse calls Jane into antithetical activity, not only fire

as counter to his cold, but *trembling*—a soft, sustained motion set against his hard stillness.

There is a turn, also, in this passage, as the word "pure" recurs. Jane seeks in this sentence to reconstruct St. John as a *good* man, reconciling his ignoble impulses with his Christian side. Yet this is not necessarily successful either as her simile describes him as "pure as the deep, sunless source." The lack of sun suggests both dark and cold—a kind of purity with which Jane can find no kinship and indeed dreads. Her death would be bloodless and, she perceives, it would not touch his purity, his conscience figured as "crystal" without "stain." The passionless death devoid of blood further underscores the denial flesh while the pairing of purity with stone by this point echoes how St. John had previously become stone to her as a man. The echo suggests that her attempt to dichotomize St. John does not really work. St. John, both flesh and conscience, has become stone, the transformation inexorably linked to his ostensibly principled punishment of Jane. Even at the last, Jane seeks to believe the best of her tormentor, acting now in the role of Gothic tyrant in a chillier key than Rochester ever managed. His coldly reasoned conduct almost pairs him rather with Brocklehurst. Jane's report of St. John leaves him exposed. Shortly after this moment of exposure, the novel's most improbable episode begins, in St. John's presence.

In several important ways, my reading of *Jane Eyre* parallels Drew Lamonica's in "The Pilgrimage of the Poor Orphan Child" (2013).[26] Lamonica marks how Jane is othered as an orphan, how she internalizes her othering, and how each change of residence in her journey of self-discovery is marked by a yearning after "kinship" that

[26] See pp. 67-94, particularly 67-73.

had been denied her in early childhood. He touches on the Red Room, reading it as a culmination of her "imprisonment and isolation" within the Reed family, and an alienation so intense that "Jane cannot even take comfort in her mirror image" as she fancies her reflection "the heterogeneous *thing* that she believes the Reeds see" (73). Yet Lamonica does not draw the connection between Jane's alienation and internalized revulsion and the changeling motif, which I argue is vitally present in her ability to, willingly or not, sow discord in families, undermining sanctioned relationships, nor does he note sufficiently how much Jane resists full othering.

Lamonica rightly notes that Rochester's summoning Jane is a controversial plot point, with many readers" who deeming it "a silly, melodramatic device." Lamonica himself prefers to read it as "direct intervention by God" (92), similarly to Franklin. Perhaps so, but it not a Christian God that Jane uses to account for the incident but rather Nature—and a feminine Nature, at that. Thus, despite Jane's devout Christianity, Brontë brings us a love metaphysics that argues for such an auditory visitation being possible without either God or superstition as an explanation, bringing herself quite close to her sister Emily's notion.

J. Jeffrey Franklin proposes, in effect, that realism can allow for the supernatural by allowing and accounting for the existence of superstition in Christian popular religion (469-70).[34] However, Jane is both careful and specific about what is superstition and what is *not*—writing about a kind of belief that seeks to overpass the pejorative connotation of "superstition." We can believe her, or not, but she goes to significant trouble to draw a distinction between her experience in the Red Room as a child and the visitation of Rochester in the Moor House garden.

Notable also is that Jane is careful to articulate that the moment of experiential Gothic that verges closest to the supernatural is no such thing[35]. The night before St. John Rivers will leave for missionary work in India, Jane prays for guidance as he presses his marriage suit, seemingly unaware of his transformation in her eyes and in the stillness has the following experience:

> All the house was still…The one candle was dying out. The room was full of moonlight. My heart beat fast and thick: I heard it throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling…not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, while the flesh quivered on my bones (*Jane* 357).

In this heightened and hypersensitive state, in which sensations loom large and psychosomatic experience becomes likely, Jane appears simultaneously intensely present within her own body and yet able, in some way, to project herself outside of it. The narration of her experience defamilarized, with Jane careful to tell us what it is *not*—it is *inexpressible* and *unlike* an electric shock, but it *is* sharp, strange, and startling, in a way that suggests her previous states of consciousness, even when agitated, were almost torpor—she has reached something new, different, and urgent, and her body responds to this call to action with trembling, recognizing both urgency and the prospect of the unknown. Thus, Jane hears her name from "a voice somewhere," not drowned out by St. John's demands for an explanation. Jane cannot answer immediately and admits the voice "did not seem to be in the room, nor in the house—nor in the garden: it did not come out

of the air—nor from under the earth—nor from overhead. I had heard it—where, or whence, for ever impossible to know!" (*Jane* 357). Again, we see the description by the negative or process of elimination, through an entire litany of locations from which the voice is *not* coming, ruling out all the easiest to reach or expect explanations. St. John's querulousness makes an intentional counterpoint to Jane's open inquisitiveness—like a realist in a Gothic text, demanding information in the format he expects and can make sense of. St. John is the unsuccessful countervoice, seeking to exclude what he himself deems to be impossible.

What Jane does know is that the voice belongs to Rochester, who speaks "in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently" (*Jane* 357). After the moment of shock, then, Jae attempts unsuccessfully to puzzle out the literal source of the voice, at last stating the impossibility of knowing. The emotions expressed by her estranged fiancé she is confident enough to name, however. She also distinguishes it from her experience in the Red Room. In the face of the "void" of the garden and "moorland loneliness and midnight hush," Jane reflects aloud: "'Down, superstition,' I commented as that spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate. 'This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused and did—no miracle—but her best'" (*Jane* 358). This passage, enigmatic on the surface, nevertheless establishes a few points. The first is that Jane's certainty that her hearing Rochester's voice was *not* the product of superstition, as was the visitation in the Red Room as a child. It is natural even as it pushes against the bounds of what the reader may consider possible, suggesting an explained Gothic but not necessarily one all readers will accept.

Brontë also undermines any notions of external pagan magic by having Jane visited whilst at prayer, so that the experience, which she considers the work of a feminine natural power has instead a suggestion of Christian mysticism remarked upon by scholars like Franklin above. This mysticism serves also as a bond between her and her sister Emily. All in all, then, Charlotte Brontë walks right up to the edge of the possible, uses motifs that *could* have been supernatural and then disavows that the experiences thus described *are* supernatural, according to Jane's own testimony of the experience. We can believe her or not, but the character's refusal to have this moment attributed to either superstition or to a miracle is significant. Here is, perhaps, where Smajić's formulation of supernatural realism becomes the most helpful—Jane insists upon not only her right to exist but her actual existence within a world in which the bounds of the possible can encompass hearing her estranged fiancé's voice from a distance of over one hundred miles—without that occurrence being explained away as fantastical. Brontë's inclusion of this insistence is telling on another level too. As Smajić points out:

> a realist writer will not only not jeopardize his or her aspirations to verisimilitude by including what we initially read as an improbable ESP experience but, on the contrary, will approach a more encompassing and compassionate mode of realistic expression: open-ended rather than hermetically sealed" (16).

Jane is not worldly in the way that fashionable readers would prefer to see, but she indicates Brontë's awareness that to try to pass off this moment without explanation

would break credibility too forcefully with her reader, yet she is insistent about depicting it.

St. John's reproach to Jane's refusal as "unfeminine and untrue" unknowingly foreshadows two important elements of the novel's contemporary reception among reviewers. This is not to say that *Jane Eyre* was not immensely popular nor that most of the reviewers expressed their reservations unmixed with acknowledgement of the novel's other qualities or even with praise. Yet the reviews taken in aggregate provide a useful framework for understanding the complex function of the improbable within the text.

Conclusion

Therefore, what *is* improbable about *Jane Eyre* serves an important role stylistically and ideologically. That role is ultimately *diagnostic*. If Jane Eyre overcoming the obstacles set before her is so unlikely that reviewers remark upon it, that very improbability underscores a genuine difficulty for women of her class. If Jane as a character seems unlikely to particularly worldly readers, in a way that fosters their rejection of her as an inferior character, it implies a gap in the reader's knowledge as much as a possible flaw in her character construction—more so, considering how many others responded so positively to her.

These questions of experience and probability also point to a broader question about representation as reviewers of the final works of Charlotte Brontë suggest with the benefit of hindsight regarding her biography: who has the right to depict their personal experiences (suitably transformed or adapted for fiction) and who does not? The implication that natural fiction, the predecessor of realism, out to depict only what is likely would seem to demand the exclusion of depictions of that which is less likely,

marginalizing depictions that are too unprecedented, and driving marginalized voices or perspectives toward other genres. What is most likely for a character of Jane's class and type is struggle with small chance of advancement. The happy, even aspirational ending can be read, therefore, not as a denial of the demands of reality but rather as an indictment or critique of a reality that makes Jane's fulfillment so improbable in the first place, and of a fictional mode that attempts to exclude. Thus, are characters and author bound together and thus does the novel's popular success, but qualitied contemporary reception suggest inherent tensions.

One last word regarding the ideological complexities of the text: this reading of the judicious improbability in *Jane Eyre* as diagnostic of issues with reality and its representation is not intended to undercut or supplant the useful postcolonial or theological readings of the text but rather to augment the dialectics they offer by acknowledging that while a text employing the improbable from both ordinary and (almost) supernatural sources can diagnose social problems it cannot solve them on a large scale.

The singularity of Jane's success against her odds shows us this, and the need to augment reality through use of the Gothic and to represent Jane as a reluctant changeling make her a representative of a class that exists but guarantees that while much of her experience at school and as a governess may be typical, her ultimate fate cannot be read as definitive or inevitable for others in her position. This one fictional, individual governess with previously untapped capacity for passion has been saved but that comforting resolution carries further admission of its limitation. This is part of the dialogic at the heart of social novels: in bending the rules to allow one individual's

triumph, a distortion of probability must occur and yet rather than dismissing that distortion as undermining the overall project, we can see it as a structural reinforcement of the ideological critique.

The question of whose experience to represent and how is key to *Jane Eyre*'s composition—and its reception. Equally embedded in the text's structure is the related question of interpretation: Jane Eyre as heroine and narrator has the right, the text declares, not only to her experiences but to her interpretations—even in opposition to the misreadings that seek to isolate her or readings by those outside the text that would seek to contain her by making value judgements regarding the validity of her experiences, marking out some as "bad" or reflective of inappropriate fixations upon feminine desire or "morbid" intensity of feeling.. Jane's narration is meant to immerse the reader in an unexpected possible that does not exclude belief or the improbable. Its popularity suggests partial success though the detractors among her reviewers suggest how much her aim runs counter to conventions of propriety dressed up as reality.

Refuge of Unbelief: Narrators and Reviewers of *Wuthering Heights*

Introduction

For all its difference from *Jane Eyre*, in being only half a romance and not aspirational, even in a qualified sense, *Wuthering Heights* bears a striking similarity to Charlotte's more popular novel. It employs three changelings within its Gothic while refusing to fully relinquish the natural—the precursor to realism. Like Charlotte—and Anne, as we will see in the next chapter—Emily Brontë judiciously employs the improbable, her fiction pushing against reviewers' notions of how stories should be told, exposing the blind spots of reviewers when faced with what is unlikely or dependent upon belief.

As we will see, the complex hybridity of genre at play in Emily Brontë's novel provoked a rather different response from *Jane Eyre*'s. Many reviewers noted the improbability, but it seemed to vex them less than the novel's coarseness, its unrelenting ability to compel readers to read against their liking, almost against their will. What this indicates, I submit, is that reviewers, caught up in the perceived coarseness and extremity of Emily Brontë's work, overlooked not only the intricacy of its construction, as has been noted in detail by other scholars, but her commitment to the natural and the possible. She has constructed *Wuthering Heights* so that the fairy legend motif, Gothic, and the natural are all inextricably linked—no single genre can triumph over another, but neither can any be lifted out without losing something vital. Gothic in *Wuthering Heights* is not only about the primacy of experiences others are unlikely to believe in or allow the existence of—it's about making space for an unconventional love ethics, which is why it needs

fairy lore to accompany it, even as the love ethics of Catherine Earnshaw mirrors in some respects the intensely personal mysticism of its author.

The Gothic is essential to both of the registers played upon by the central love plot of the text. In the symbolic sense, the love between Cathy and Heathcliff dramatizes the spiritual communion so essential to Emily Brontë's idiosyncratic metaphysics, one not necessarily Christian. In the literally embodied sense, with Cathy and Heathcliff as human characters and not merely allegorical manifestations, the Gothic serves to unfold this metaphysics as a proto-polyamorous ethic in which Catherine at least is able to conceive of romantic love and union separate from conventional possessive marriage practices. It is among the seeming paradoxes of *Wuthering Heights* that the characters can function as an allegory for their author's conception of mystical union and also as unconventional and improbable but possible characters within a novel that never unequivocally relinquishes the natural. The two most unlikely characters, judging by the text's reception, are Catherine and Heathcliff, whose affinity for each other is presented as nearly absolute in childhood but often read as qualified or undermined afterward. I argue, however, that we are meant to take seriously Catherine's determination to belong to Heathcliff even following her marriage, that their affinity remaining unbroken even after marriage reflects a Shelleyan proto-polyamorous love ethic, uncommon and potentially distasteful to contemporary reviewers and to the text's narrators—but possible.

Wuthering Heights denies us the first-person immersiveness of *Jane Eyre* but gives us a fragmented structure through multiple narrators. Emily Rena-Dozier argues quite correctly

> “that the mode of narration used in Wuthering *Heights* - a series of narratorial frames that both reinforce and undercut one another - is both a showcase for and a critique of two major modes of narrative authority current in the nineteenth-century British novel: the gothic and the domestic. It's possible to learn a great deal about the expectations placed on narration in nineteenth-century novels from *Wuthering Heights*, a novel that makes its central concern an illustration of narratorial failure and narrative inadequacy. It does so I contend, by conscientiously identifying and discarding the methods used by earlier novels to construct narrative authority" (757).

By juxtaposing the Gothic framing of multiple narrators against the absence of the omniscient narrator who could positively clarify matters, Brontë’s “proliferation of storytellers within a central frame, storytellers who are by and large completely unsympathetic to, and often disapproving of, the stories they tell. There is no authoritative narrator in *Wuthering Heights*; the novel is not simply incoherent, but rather refuses to cohere” (Rena-Dozier 757-58). This refusal to cohere allows for Gothic to coexist with natural fiction because neither register can be authoritatively declared victorious over the other.

Yet the treatment of Gothic and changelings as *possible* remains, hinged on the beliefs and experiences of the major characters, sometimes against their better judgment. The very word “changeling” enters the text as an interpretive device of both primary narrators, who mark out Heathcliff and Cathy (and Linton Heathcliff) as interlopers from the Celtic Otherworld to distance themselves from those elements of those characters the

narrators desire to disbelieve, demonstrating the narrators' own allegiance to a conventional status quo unsupportable in the regional world of the Heights, which withholds both absolute confirmation and refusal of the improbable. Thus, not only does Brontë keep her text just within the realm of the possible, she structures the fragmented narrative so that characters' belief-oriented Gothic does not transgress the text's possible. The instinct in criticism is often to pathologize, yet the parameters Emily Brontë set suggest difference *apart from* pathology.

To this end, the Gothic's insistence on experience being paramount is bound together with the changeling motif, occurring *three* times in *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë changelings pose a challenge not only to conventional parental bonds and matters of inheritance but to other socially sanctioned relationships as well, and in *Wuthering Heights*, two changelings brought up together cause extreme havoc by marrying into the same genteel family. Cathy is a changeling who attempts to domesticate because it is comfortable and pleasant but who comes to regret it, an essential transformation proving impossible for her. Heathcliff is a changeling who challenges Hindley's primogeniture and exacts vengeance for the loss of Cathy, perpetrating another changeling in the form of his son Linton Heathcliff, who ought never to have existed. Yet all these characters and events appear refracted through narrators with allegiance to a more conventional ethic, who wish the reader to pathologize Heathcliff and Cathy (and Linton Heathcliff). Remarkably, however, this refraction works on a structural level to keep all events within the text from definitively violating possibility as we will see.

Part I: Incredulous Reviewers

Wuthering Heights was a commanding, shocking book upon its release alongside *Agnes Grey* by Thomas Newby in 1847—so much so that many reviews focused entirely on *Wuthering Heights*, while a few others mentioned *Agnes Grey* merely in passing, but it also suffered, as Tom Winnifrith points out, from being put out by a second-rate and unscrupulous publisher, whose reputation accounts for some of the critical reluctance about the younger two Brontë sisters, and who effaced the existence of Ellis Bell when he claimed falsely that *Wuthering Heights* was by the author of *Jane Eyre* (Winnifrith 15).

The reviews that are most interesting to me are the five that Emily Brontë preserved in her writing desk and remain preserved by the Haworth Parsonage archive—and the review from the *Athenaeum*. Four of desk reviews are from the *Examiner*, *Britannia*, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly*, and *Atlas*, respectively. The fifth review is an enigmatic one, in part because it is the most complimentary of its subject text but also because its source has not survived—it is labeled "unidentified" in Miriam Allott's *Critical Heritage*. I am interested in these five even more so than the other contemporary reviews quite simply because Emily Brontë, who was famously leery of other people's opinions and reserved outside her familial circle, was interested enough in them to keep them in her desk. (Emily Brontë was not shy about destroying papers she did not want kept or looked-at, as she burned the Gondal prose stories she co-wrote with Anne, as well as the novel-in-progress that might have followed *Wuthering Heights* if completed).[36] Additionally, *The Athenaeum* was the only contemporary periodical to review all of the Brontës' novels.[27]

[27] See Winifred Gérin biography.

Nearly all of the first-edition *Wuthering Heights* reviews mention improbability—nine out of twelve.[37] Of the four reviews of the 1850 reissue of both novels, *The Examiner* and *The Athenaeum* merely reiterated their views—*The Athenaeum* was also the one periodical whose initial review addressed the improbability of *Agnes Grey*. The *Eclectic Review* reviewed the sisters' dual effort for the first time and concluded that *Wuthering Heights* was improbable. Only G.H. Lewes, reviewing for *The Leader* capitulated (partially):

> Curious enough it is to read…and remember that the writers were two retiring, solitary, consumptive girls! Books, coarse even for men, coarse in language and coarse in conception, the coarseness apparently of violence and uncultivated men—turn out to be the productions of two girls…writing these books from a sense of duty, hating the pictures they drew yet drawing them from austere conscientiousness. There is matter here for the moralist of critic to speculate on. That it was no caprice of a poor imagination wandering in search of an exciting subject we are most thoroughly convinced (*Heritage* 295).

It is after G.H. Lewes learns posthumously of the Bells' biographies that he revises his previous, harsher explanation for their choice of subject, recognizing how (female) authors might come to write such works in good faith as instruments of cogent observation and critique, rather than base titillation.[38] In this, Lewes separated himself from the reviewers in the *Spectator*, among others.

Wuthering Heights was received like *Jane Eyre* insofar as that many reviewers saw it as the work of a powerful author whose genius had been misapplied.[28] The greater intensity of this sentiment is even greater than the proportion to which *Wuthering Heights* is less conciliatory to convention and readers' feelings than in *Jane Eyre.* Yet the ordering of objections was different. Reviewers noticed improbability but took genuine offense at the novel's perceived coarseness.[29] Reviewers, with one notable exception, argued that the book was untrue or, if it were true, that its contents were no fit subject for fiction, being too unpleasant or painful to be fairly dwelt upon. This argument— that a fictional subject must be true to life but too unpleasant to be worth rendering or too upsetting to be worth rendering or too upsetting to be worth reading—appeared in *Jane Eyre*'s reception and again in completest distillation in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* Such squeamishness comprises a significant dimension of *Wuthering Heights* reception. Because they believed less in the text, however, reviewers had notably fewer *specific* objections to characters or plot devices than in *Jane Eyre*, with the most attention paid to Heathcliff and Cathy, their improbable passion combined with upsetting ferocity that potentially tainted the text. Most other objections were more generally applied.

For instance, there was an unrelenting quality to *Wuthering Heights* that disturbed reviewers. H.F. Chorley of the *Athenaeum* suggested that life was depressing enough without inventing worse: "In spite of its truth to life in the remote nooks and corners of England, *Wuthering Heights* is a disagreeable story," Chorley begins, going on to add that "[t]he Bells seem to affect painful and exceptional subjects" enumerated as "the misdeeds and oppressions of tyranny—the eccentricities of 'woman's fantasy'" (*Heritage*

[28] Reviews that identify misapplied genius: *Examiner, Spectator, Jerrold's, Atlas*
[29] Reviews that note coarseness: *American Review, North American Review, Graham's, Spectator*.

218). While Chorley's distaste is clear, so too is his objection to the *exceptionalism*[39] of the text and its ability to give pain to the reader—its dwelling upon what is out of the ordinary; moreover, he genders his objection—the eccentricities of *women's* fantasy, further drawing attention by offsetting the phrase with inverted commas. The punctuation may be an attempt to incorporate irony or demonstrate that the phrase is not yet established yet the gendering is no less clear for that. Also notably, Chorley places the phrase misdeeds and oppressions of tyranny beside *woman's fantasy,* whether intentionally or not establishing a link between them, a tacit admission of the affinity between oppression by tyrants and femininity that is so integral to Gothic and femininity. Chorley also closes his review with advice to the author that "if the Bells, singly or collectively, are contemplating future or frequent utterances in Fiction, let us hope that they will spare us further interiors so gloomy as the one elaborated with such dismal minuteness" (*Heritage* 219). This advice—that Ellis Bell be more discriminating and less overwhelming in her choice of detail is echoed by other reviewers.

Britannia's review linked *Wuthering Heights* explicitly to German romantic tales, a designation that meant Gothic in the 1830s and 1840s, and called the characters "so new, so wildly grotesque, so entirely without art, that they strike us as proceeding from a mind of limited experience" (*Heritage* 224). This assertion not only furthers ties to Gothic via the grotesque, it makes an observation implicitly negative about the *newness* of the characters but hazards an explanation: the author's limited experience. One might fairly ask what sort of experience, however. It is true that *Wuthering Heights* was Brontë's first novel and that she lived far from London, yet her primary characters are not Londoners but Yorkshire residents, as she is. The reviewer thus, intentionally or not,

places his experience against Brontë's to dismiss hers, calling her characters "very unskilfilly constructed, neither graceful nor true" to nature. Perhaps this is true in the conventional sense, yet Brontë's interest does not appear to lie with the graceful, and categorically asserting the characters of *Wuthering Heights* are untrue ignores the possibility that such characters could exist.

Jerrold's, like *Britannia,* made objections to characters, and like Chorley of the *Athenaeum*, his objections are gendered. The women are "fiendish, angelic, tantalising, and terrible," while "the men are indescribable out of the book itself" (*Heritage* 228)[30]. These sentiments suggest the reader's dubiousness, his expectation that fiction intended to be taken seriously operate differently—the extremity of the characters makes it difficult for him to believe in their existence or, in the case of the men, even to venture upon a description. Similarly, *Atlas* acknowledged the text's rugged power and noted the "general effect is inexpressibly painful" (*Heritage* 231). Like *Britannia,* the reviewer feels the text "wants relief," specifying the story has "no mitigation of suffering" (*Heritage* 231). Contrast, then, is important—there is nothing pleasant, according to the *Atlas* reviewer, to offset the suffering, so that even if the suffering is possible or natural, he finds it excessive.

The author of the unsigned review in the January 1848 *Examiner* is in partial agreement with that in the *Spectator*. He declares *Wuthering Heights* "a strange book" that "is not without evidences of considerable power: but, as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable" (*Heritage* 220). Where critics in the following centuries will make much (and rightly so) of the structural intricacy and contradiction of *Wuthering*

[30] *Jerrold's* was in keeping with the approximate consensus, declaring the novel "impossible to begin but to finish" and of "great power…but a purposeless power" and rather too much (*Heritage* 227-28).

Heights, this reviewer perceives the lack of coherence as a stylistic flaw—wild and confused, not carefully crafted of heteroglot elements. Like the *Spectator,* he also finds the text improbable though he does not treat this as a disqualifying observation. Also notably, while *Atlas* and *Britannia* marvel at the "deformity" of the characters and brutality of the plot they drive, none of the reviewers Brontë kept call the work specifically coarse (*Heritage* 232, 224).

Yet The *Examiner* chid that "no one's doings "*all* his deeds and sayings, entire and without exception" could "constituted fit materials for a book of fiction" (*Heritage* 222)" and Britannia admonished that fiction's primary aim should be to "provoke delight," setting that delight as higher priority than truth. What the reviewers struggled with most were the most 'real' aspects of the text: the depictions of violence that exceed what many reviewers found acceptable for a fictional work—an objection to be strongly repeated in the reception of Anne's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Thus, the possibility of such events occurring or characters existing was no sufficient justification to depict either. Emily's depictions therefore indicate a knowing violation of the literary status quo, as she knew from her periodical reading what a reader would likely expect of her. These depictions suggested to reviewers a disagreeable or even uncouth desire to be singular—to win note through a shallow or misplaced novelty that was contrary to the understood rules of sensibility and manners in fiction at the time.

The characters the *Examiner* reviewer terms "savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer," suggesting that Homer is a civilizing influence and that the Wuthering Heights inmates are worse than those before Homer—one wonders how the reviewer might know that, Homer being the earliest of European writing (*Heritage* 220).

The character he singles out, understandably, is Heathcliff, "the hero of the book if hero there be," and "an incarnation of evil qualities," enumerated as "implacable hate, ingratitude, cruelty, falsehood, selfishness, and revenge" that likens him with Byron's Corsair and other "melodramatic heroes" (*Heritage* 220). This link to melodrama suggests resistance to the text's disregard for a middle-class reader's expectation of moderation—Brontë is too willing to go to extremes, whether she remains within the realm of the possible or not.

The reviewer also stipulates, however, his struggle "to believe in the appearance of such a phenomenon, so near our own dwellings as the summit of a Lancashire or Yorkshire moor" (*Heritage* 221). Again looms the urbanite's anxiety at believing in the possibility of such a melodramatic and threatening character—a "phenomenon" that, rather than being safely removed to the Mediterranean or the Orient like Byron's Corsair, is in reach, in the northern counties of England—and not even the northernmost ones, either, Yorkshire being south of Northumberland and Cumberland. *Wuthering Heights* being set in the North—and so emphatically—plays an important role, as Jane Mansfield usefully observes (178-81).

Scholars can—and have—qualified this dichotomy of North versus South, civilization versus rural directness (or savagery), pointing out that Haworth itself was a fairly bustling industrial place when the Brontës lived there, tripling its population during Rev. Patrick Brontë's tenure as rector, and that Charlotte intentionally played up the myth of Emily's seclusion after her death, in an effort to rehabilitate the literary reputation of Ellis Bell, playing for reader sympathy by suggesting, as some of her critics did, that

Emily was too isolated to know any better.[31] Nevertheless, the reviewers believed in and helped perpetuate this sense of dichotomy, as Mansfield points out. Mansfield explains the opposition as that of Anglo-Norman civilization versus Saxon plain speech.

However, Mansfield overlooks another aspect of the British North: the Celtic. In addition to being inherently less French, these Northerners who likely perceive themselves as more English than their southern countrymen are likewise more Scottish. The Celtic Otherworld is more influential and accessible than to many in southern England. It is worth emphasizing, as Mansfield does, that the North is made other by southern periodicals. It is noteworthy that even Northern or Scottish periodicals such as *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's* emphasize otherness in things too closely related to the Celtic past through their interpretations of events such as Culloden.[40]

The point is, North is Other of South and Celtic-infused, adding a vital layer to the dichotomies in *Wuthering Heights* and in Victorian literature more broadly: Heathcliff retains his ties to African slavery, to the traveling folk, to Irish famine survivors, while adding that of a Northerner susceptible to the Otherworld—a logical susceptibility for a changeling, or for a character the more conventionally middle-class characters might interpret as one.

This dichotomy between cardinal directions, porous or not, matters because the people of the time believed in it and *treated* it as real, as founded in reality. It helps account for the charges of improbability and unnaturalness and especially of coarseness leveled so often at *Wuthering Heights*—and its author. Southern readers—or readers who have bought into the southern value system can find little to like in such unapologetically

[31] In "What do we know about Emily Jane? Some Well-known 'Facts' Reconsidered," Sarah Fermi argues that at least some of this concealment was done at Emily's own request.

northern characters as Joseph and, ultimately, Heathcliff. But this takes us back to the question of personal experience and who has the right to have their experiences represented and validated—and whether a London man of the world ought to be the arbiter of what is capable of validation through belief. As Mansfield alludes to, reviewers who were men of the world resented the incursion into their perceived orderly world of such threatening and upsetting characters, and not far enough away by far. This dichotomy will be retained in the reception of *Tenant* in a way that reveals much more of the reviewer than the text. Additionally, characters who have aligned themselves with southern values will shortly be seen as invoking the changeling to cope with—and distance themselves from—those they dislike or cannot assimilate.

Atlas says of the characters collectively that there are none "not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible" and then singles out Hindley, the "brutal, degraded son…impotent in his degradation" and Linton Heathcliff, the "miserable, driveling coward" personifying "selfishness in its most abject form" before coming to Heathcliff himself, termed by the reviewer the text's "presiding evil genius" (*Heritage* 232).

Britannia saw *Wuthering Heights* as the unfolding of "one positive idea—that of passionate ferocity" which review says out to be "relieved by contrasts" (*Heritage* 223-24). He goes further, however, in arguing that "*Wuthering Heights* would have been a far better romance if Heathcliff alone had been of stormy passions" (*Heritage* 224). The gendered element here is undeniable: as the male lover, Heathcliff's stormy passions are excessive but allowable; whereas, Cathy as the female one has an aesthetic and moral duty to be calmer, the container of Heathcliff's passion but with little right to intensity of

her own. Here, the reviewer runs counter to the ethics of the text he reviews: Catherine's ability to match Heathcliff's intensity is essential.

Heathcliff casts a long shadow over the text, one evident in its reception. The *Examiner*, unlike the *Spectator*, was "not disposed to ascribe any part intention to the author in drawing the character of Heathcliff" and forbore to declare a moral, for all that "some of the incidents look like real events," but he returns to the problems of coarseness and believability, deeming Brontë's language "not always appropriate" and declaring "great doubts as to the truth, or rather the *vraisemblance* of the main character," specifying that the "harshness, selfishness, and cruelty of Heathcliff are in our opinion inconsistent with his romantic love for Catherine" (*Heritage* 221). The reviewer struggles to reconcile Heathcliff's brutal and ruthless qualities with his idea of romantic love, suggesting that a man capable of the latter would be incapable of the former. The reviewer thus reveals his desire to view romantic love as definitively or axiomatically ennobling—the combination of elevated with base passions in Heathcliff—worse, the idea that baseness could come *from* what is elevated—challenges this assumption, provoking the reviewer to understandable doubt that reveals the reviewer's unstated agenda.[41]

Heathcliff Chorley can accept the possible—indeed likely—existence of, with the caveat that he "might have been indicated with far fewer touches," perceiving that Heathcliff "so entirely fill[s] the canvas that there is hardly a scene untainted by his presence" (*Heritage* 218). Additionally, Chorley's perception of Heathcliff as a *taint* upon the novel is worth noting, as is his refusal to state categorically that the novel is improbable or unnatural.[42]

The reviewer who has heretofore haunted this chapter's footnotes but now bears mention in its body is G.W Peck of the *American Review*, who objected, as others did, to the primary characters but did so in a unique fashion: rather than calling either Cathy or Heathcliff monsters as such, he registers his inability—or refusal—to believe in the central passion of the text. Peck doubts "Catherine's election of Linton and her reasons for it," which Peck finds unnatural, stating: "The physical condition of our bodies, the changes which take place on arriving at an age proper for marriage, do not allow of the ignorance which our author requires us to suppose in his heroine" (CH 239). Peck therefore states as categorically impossible Cathy's ignorance of carnal desire for Heathcliff before and after her marriage to Edgar and thus calls the whole impetus of the book into question. Yet by what authority does Peck arrive at such an apparently unassailable conclusion? By applying a normative rule to a non-normative individual and thus dismissing the outlier as impossible rather than simply unlikely. This desire to stick to the typical or moderate will echo in *Tenant*'s reception.

Catherine and the other characters "are drawn with dramatic force and made to seem alive yet when we lay the book aside, they collapse, they die, they vanish; we see that we have been cheated by illusionary semblances" (*Heritage* 240). It is this indignant sense of having been deceived — almost seduced — that perhaps accounts for the stridency of Peck's objection, as well as his assertion that the adults are all "monomaniacs or persons who have breathed nitrous oxide" (*Heritage* 240). To pathologize the characters of Wuthering Heights is to contain them in a way that comforts the moderate, middle-class reader, a tactic we will see n how the novel's conventional-minded narrators interpret characters.[43] Where nearly all agree is the text's ability to

compel reading. And many take the same tack as *Graham's* though not as stridently half-resenting, half-wondering at a text that compels them to read what disturbed or displeased them — reading a text with no conventionally likable characters and a plot that *Britannia* and *Atlas* thought calculated to bring as much pain as possible.

A suggestive difference between the receptions of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* is that while Wuthering Heights was cited for improbability, reviewers were both less dismissive and more thoroughly disturbed, the latter possibility accounting for the former. There is a sense in the most aggressive critical reviewers of Jane Eyre — especially Elizabeth Rigby's — that Charlotte Brontë is writing about what she doesn't understand — that she is trying to pass off her own fancies for realities is staying close enough to reviewer's perceived reality to be left open to such accusations because she dares expect her readers to believe her perspective and because, for all the rebelliousness in *Jane Eyre*, it resolves at last in a marriage plot that simultaneously mirrors the plot expectations for a love story and is threatening in its discussion of women's education and class mobility. *Wuthering Heights* on the other hand does not elicit the same kind of refusal of belief because, it appears, many reviewers simply assume Emily Brontë did not mean her story to be believable as such. Two reviewers — *Atlas* and *Examiner*— mention the *vraisemblance* of the text, but most seem to assume Emily invented the story out of her own head for reasons best known to herself.

Yet the reviewer that is the most entirely fascinating — made all the more so by its unknown origin — is the fifth of Emily's "Desk reviews" in that it is in diametric opposition to much of the consensus otherwise forming about Wuthering Heights in 1848. This reviewer avers, by implication in fact, the text is not improbable, nor an

apparently pointless exercise in coarseness or vulgarity. Rather, the reviewer, in addition to remarking the authors "talent of no common order" (*Heritage* 243) sets forward that "it is quite impossible to read the book — and this is no slight testimony to the merits of a work of this find — without feeling that, if placed in the same position any one of the characters in any page of it, the chances would be ten to one in favor of our conduct in that position being precisely such as the author has assigned" (*Heritage* 294). This categorical declaration deserves unpacking. Unlike reviewers who suggest that such monsters as the characters in Wuthering Heights could not exist or should not, this reviewer rather argues that the actions or the characters so suit their circumstances that reviewer and reader alike would be highly likely to act the same under such conditions.

It helps that this reviewer, rather than perceiving the inmates of Wuthering Heights as deformed or monstrous found them sympathetic "brought to us at a moment of tenderness, at another with a fearfulness, which appeals to our sympathies with the truest tones of the voice of human nature" (*Heritage* 244). Where other reviewers refuse to see humanity where they do not wish to see it — or where it is obscured because they don't find it recognizable enough, this reviewer offers the opposite view. This opposite view is unique in the contemporary reception — and not that common in Brontë scholarship either, but it suggests a reader willing to take the text on its terms rather than seeking to force it into a framework — especially of stylistics and ethics — with which is almost entirely incompatible.

Here again, we see the debate about representation—by depicting the singular or strange, Brontë forsakes the most likely or probable subjects and propriety along with them. She does so to noticeable effect as well, with so many reviewers registering

disgust, bemusement, or unbelief but none saying they did not finish. Yet the ripples of disbelief in the *Wuthering Heights* reception do not approach the furor of *Jane Eyre*'s, which was beset by multiple threads of disbelief or debate around characters and plot, suggesting most reviewers did not take *Wuthering Heights* as an attempt at representing literal truth—unless it was the truth that could be found in the annals of a criminal court.[32] Yet Emily Brontë eschews the impossible and couches the supernatural, using the narrative fragmentation to her advantage to refract and thus retain plausible deniability.

Part II: When Conventional Rules Cannot Apply

The framing and fragmentation of the text, broken into disparately narrated pieces that *almost* cohere has likewise gotten extensive attention, with Sarah Wootton suggesting that Brontë exists as a "fault line" in the progression of the novel as a post-Romantic who anticipate Modernism (309). While contemporary reviewers saw this proto-Modernist strategy as a sign of undesirable incoherence, I argue that it is the gaps between narrators and the necessarily subjectiveness of their accounts that allow the text to exist on the line between genres. Elizabeth Ermarth suggests that realism is built on consensus among different perspectives. However, Ermarth addresses mundane events. A corollary exists if writing of the potentially supernatural — that the denial of the consensus grants plausible deniability and thus allows the incorporation of the supernatural without transforming a text into fantasy. Categorically stating that Lockwood, in fact, haunted by the child-like ghost of Cathy or that said ghost rejoins the spirit of Heathcliff after he dies, would be to as categorically divide a fiction from the

[32] See the comments on "criminal courts" and "Doctor's Commons" in the reception of *Tenant* in the next chapter.

natural-realist tradition, but to have the text comprise subjective accounts of hauntings allows Emily Brontë to remain within the natural tradition without relinquishing the metaphors that so enrich *Wuthering Heights*.

Yet contemporary reviewers noted the improbability of *Wuthering Heights* but did not perceive it as sufficiently close to realism to be threatening in the same way—by claiming to depict truth—though it was coarse enough to offend and its sentiments were morally questionable. I argue however, that by staying just within the bounds of the possible and couching Catherine the elder's supernatural potential, Emily Brontë is laying out her own claim to be believable and believed.

Due to its Gothic, *Wuthering Heights* is the recipient of much psychoanalytic criticism, largely from Freudians but also from Lacanians.[44] Yet the need to diagnose this text and its author and characters did not begin in the twentieth century but immediately upon its release. Most suggestive is Peck's reference to Heathcliff as a "monomaniac," a diagnosis echoed by Emily Baldys, who adds "Hindley's intemperance" and Cathy's "anorexia" (49-50). From the beginning, there has been an urge by readers, reviewers, and critics to pathologize the text, as Pourya Asl does when she suggests that the text is a record of the obsessive fixations of a neurotic author. This need to pathologize—as a way to contain—is visible in scholarship on the other Brontës, too.

It makes me wonder *why* this text provokes such hostility, such a burning urge to not only diagnose but to morally assert oneself upon or over this text. From the *Spectator* thinking the novel was morally tainted to more recent critics worrying it could corrupt young readers, there is a perception sometimes acknowledged and often obscured that *Wuthering Heights* and Emily Brontë are dangerous. The safest refuge is unbelief,

perhaps edged with moral outrage, because the text does not pass judgment as a reader might wish, its author having other priorities; and nor does it end in a conventional manner. The equivocal or paradoxical quality to *Wuthering Heights* allows for seemingly antithetical readings to coexist in criticism.[33] It allows for genres too to coexist—if not peaceably then certainly in a manner suggesting their mutual essentiality. It is ironic, that the reviewer about whom scholars know nothing had the least hostile or pathologizing perspective on the text, seeking to understand it on its own terms, not seeing the provocative or unpleasant elements as a sign of mental illness or unexpected moral depravity, but as a possibility worthy of attention.

Tom Winnifrith and Jane Mansfield both point out that Charlotte worked hard to rehabilitate Emily after her death by knowingly constructing a myth surrounding both her younger sisters and their seclusion at Haworth. The idea of Emily as reclusive is an exaggeration but her reserve is well-attested by her biography, as well as her investment in the world of Gondal that she shared with Anne, even as Charlotte—at least as an adolescent—collaborated on the fictional world of Angria with their brother Branwell. What is interesting and disappointing, however, is the desire by some to use Gondal against Emily—to pathologize her attachment to it, as if it proved her inability to cope with reality. I submit rather that it is one of the seeming contradictions of Emily Brontë that she could be so intensely practical on the one hand, baking the family's bread and housekeeping after Tabby Ackroyd could not, and yet have a rich interior life that took her to a not-quite-Yorkshire of her own invention—one that she never "outgrew" or turned upon as Charlotte did upon Angria but that, several scholars suggest, when drawn

[33] See Gérin's *Anne Brontë*, p. 212 and 217.

on for her published fiction and poetry may have necessarily become less private and thus of less consolation.[45]

Dana Medoro joins the psychoanalytic to the postcolonial in reading Heathcliff as a fetish whose life-story is "is suppressed and (mis)represented under the colonizing gaze of the two narrators" (267-8). The fetish could also be extended to the contemporary reception of him as the demonic core or "evil genius" of the novel, an entity compelling and appalling to readers despite what some reviewers perceived as his lack of believability. Nor is Heathcliff the only character to be misread by the narrators, whose implicit goal of upholding a status quo of conventional morality and polite behavior prove less than fully tenable. Faced with the improbable in the form of a prospective haunting, the advent of an adopted street urchin, and a mysterious and possibly psychosomatic illness, Lockwood and Nelly Dean's efforts to *exclude* in order to make sense of events rationally lead, paradoxically, to resorting to the changeling motif as a way of separating themselves and attempting to contain the dangerous elements of Cathy and Heathcliff (and Heathcliff's son).

By having the narrators, the characters most aligned with the conventional, invoke this motif as a tool of interpretation, Brontë exposes her narrators' shortcomings and self-interestedness in their dealings with the improbable: they prefer to disbelieve in order to feel safe. Yet belief is central to *Wuthering Heights*: by allowing characters to *believe* in improbable and supernatural

occurrences without categorically confirming their existences, Brontë stretches her possible to include the perceived supernatural.

The affinity between Cathy and Heathcliff, likewise, is further reinforced through the narrators' misreadings, particularly Nelly Dean's, whose repeated attempts to minimize Cathy and reject her love ethic render Dean complicit in Cathy's death and thus the text's possible haunting. Brontë does not, thus, allow those who perceive themselves as rational to be separate in the way they wish.

Mr. Lockwood, whose tenancy at Thrushcross Grange serves as a framing device[46] for the main tale, attempts at Wuthering Heights to observe social niceties with his landlord Heathcliff. His failure immediately demonstrates that conventional manners and mores do not apply here, to reviewers' chagrin and Lockwood's own embarrassment. Lockwood is an interloper from the outside, urban world into a smaller, more regional world, one not necessarily less real than London, but different, and he is as unwelcome as the conventions he tries to bring with him and enforce, and nor does he cope well with the transition as a liminal figure caught between realism and Gothic. His verbalized inclinations are toward realism even as the rest of him is arguably pulled against his will toward the Gothic. This tension contrasts him ultimately with Cathy and Heathcliff, for whom Gothic is not perceived as unrealistic or separate from the real.[47]

Yet his reactions while at the Heights can serve as a stand-in for those of some readers, at least before the reader becomes acclimated to the rules as they are at Wuthering Heights[48]. Lockwood is a reader himself as he peruses the fragmentary journal Cathy the elder kept as a girl, by necessity compressed, in that she has written it in the margins of another book, so that her writing looks like "annotations" of the typeset text.

This self-marginalizing by necessity is likewise suggestive of the unconventional priorities of this novel: standard assumptions do not apply. Cathy's journal is important disproportionately to its length because it is our one un-refracted glimpse at Cathy's thoughts and motivations in her own words. Lockwood allows us this glimpse *before* the main taleteller takes up the narrative. The entries tell of the joint escapades of Cathy and Heathcliff after Mr. Earnshaw's death and then laments Hindley's treatment of Heathcliff, who is not allowed "to sit with us, nor eat with us any more; and, he says, he and I must not play together and [he] threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders" (*Wuthering* 18). It is a catalogue of Hindley's and Joseph's tyrannies and mentions Cathy's and Heathcliff's mutual "plan to rebel" (*Wuthering* 18), becoming important because Cathy later threatens to leave but the journal suggests her outburst is genuine rather than put-on. Reading along with Lockwood, we have our first glimpse of Cathy's relationship to Heathcliff—in her own words.

Treating *Wuthering Heights* as a Gothic is practically a commonplace of its literary criticism, its connection to the genre noted from the first—in *Britannia*'s review mentioning the German romance. It also figures in the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic* (162-63), and Peter Thorslev's study of the Byronic Hero that takes for granted Heathcliff's inheritance of the Gothic tyrant archetype.[34]

Madran argues simply and compellingly that *Wuthering Heights* is neither romance nor Gothic novel but a "heteroglot" text using various genres and voices. George Haggerty asserts that "like no other writer before or since, Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* looks into the heart of Gothic fiction, as it were, uncovers the most

[34] See also the *Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (222-23). That *Wuthering Heights* is treated as Gothic even in such standard reference texts indicates how common the reading is.

deeply rooted formal problems which Gothic novelists themselves were never able to resolve, and forges a solution to those problems out of the smithy of her own soul" (1). While his assertion is somewhat high-flown, he seems to agree that *Wuthering Heights* is aware of genre convention, and he rightly claims Brontë uses her own metaphysics to solve the problem.

Matthew Beaumont[49] uses Marx to elaborate the class-conscious aspect of Brontë's Gothic, arguing: "In spite of her apparent seclusion, Emily Brontë was acutely conscious of this contradiction structural to capitalist modernity, whereby progress is achieved only at the cost of a certain regression for the mass of people" (138). He reads the text as one ultimately concerned with cannibalism and suggests the "isolated community on the moors is not inviolate or even self-contained" and Heathcliff's "supposedly barbaric origins serve starkly to expose, by comparison, the barbarism of his civilised new environment" (138).

I argue that Brontë's Gothic not only ensures the mimicry of physical and mental space but the primacy of unlikely but not impossible lived experiences and exploration of a code of ethics and metaphysics that is unconventional. I also note when the apparently conventional characters corroborate the Gothic elements, as when Nelly Dean acknowledges Hindley's transformation into a tyrant, his "tyrannical and evil conduct" driving away all employees but Nelly and Joseph, and his treatment of Heathcliff enough to "make a fiend out of a saint" (*Wuthering* 51). Moreover, they corroborate—and in fact introduce—the folkloric motif of the changeling, bring it to bear interpretatively.

Lockwood has a nightmare followed by a visitation from the ghost of Cathy, whom he terms "a changeling, the wicked little soul," while Cathy terms herself a "waif,"

who has wandered the moors for twenty years (*Wuthering* 21-22). By bringing the changeling term to the text, Lockwood exposes himself in this moment of profound stress as less urbane and emptied of regional knowledge than he had previously given us leave to expect, but he also immediately seeks to rationalize away his experience, calling his responses "the effects of bad tea and bad temper!" (*Wuthering* 18).[35] Lockwood's contradictory outbursts underscore the genre hybridity already present. He seeks first to explain the Gothic, using a motif of an interloper from the Celtic Otherworld to put distance between himself as an ostensibly rational man of the world and Cathy's visitation. When the immediate fright is past, however, he seeks to explain it away and thus escape the Gothic as the effects of indigestion and indisposition. His interpretations thus couch the supernatural experience, there being no omniscient narrator to absolutely confirm or deny—though Heathcliff certainly believes in Cathy's ghost, as Lockwood witnesses shortly thereafter.

Lockwood calling Catherine a changeling is suggestive, for, though born legitimately to married parents, the youngest of three children, she has a destabilizing influence, as corroborated by Nelly Dean, the other narrator, who likewise has rational considerations. Dean interprets Cathy and suggests she is "saucy," and takes an arguably fey delight in tormenting those close to her, including her ailing father. She remains slight and almost child-like of appearance, to say nothing of her pettish demeanor, which Nelly calls "marred" in Yorkshire dialect (*Wuthering* 57).[50] Nelly's following interpretation and narration of Cathy as next-door to a changeling thus resonates with Lockwood's impression of her spirit, as well as demonstrating Mrs. Dean's allegiance to a middle-

[35] Compare to the *Graham's* review that facetiously suggested that Brontë had been eating toasted cheese late at night as a way to explain the nightmarish aspect of the novel.

class status quo and morality at odds with the unconventional value system to which Cathy belongs, in some ways more than Heathcliff. In addition to acknowledging insoluble affinity, she also balks at the convention of monogamy, as we will see. The kinship between Heathcliff and Cathy appears particularly profound in this light, as Nelly Dean's interpretation of Heathcliff is likewise refracted through self-interest.[51]

Nelly Dean apparently seeing no incompatibility between her attempts to make sense of the events she relates using a conventional, ostensibly common-sense morality, creating thereby a double narrative around the advent of Heathcliff, and then a presumptuous interpretation of Catherine Earnshaw Linton that is often accepted by critics but that omits or elides important elements of Catherine's character, as we will see.

Bedridden, Lockwood's curiosity about his landlord's family furnishes a plausible opportunity for Nelly Dean to begin her tale. *She* is the primary taleteller, and her bias as narrator grows rapidly apparent in frequent asides to Lockwood. Yet she is also an agent in the events of the story she tells in first person so that a double narrative within her account emerges, seemingly unnoticed by Mrs. Dean, but evident to the reader. While both Cathy and Heathcliff use Nelly as a confessor at different times, giving the reader a glimpse of their thoughts and motives in that way, Nelly interjects her own interpretation, especially of Cathy. It is to Nelly Dean Heathcliff explains himself after he is obliged to leave Cathy at Thrushcross Grange. Likewise to Nelly Cathy goes after Edgar proposes, explaining her reasons for agreeing to the marriage, none of which her listener finds acceptable. Furthermore, it is Nelly who hears Heathcliff admit to the "strange change approaching" that causes him to abandon his project of vengeance just as it nears completion (*Wuthering* 247-48).

Heathcliff, then, has always been both knowing and proud. He also exerts a strong influence over Mr. Earnshaw, who, we are told, favors Heathcliff above his legitimate blood son Hindley, a preference that sets up the reversal of Heathcliff's status once the elder Mr. Earnshaw dies. Intriguingly, however, the coming of Heathcliff is transformed at once into a tale. Bade by her master to "e'en take it as a gift of God, though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil," Earnshaw "was really half-dead with fatigue, and all that I could make out, amongst her [Mrs. Earnshaw's] scolding, was a *tale* of his seeing it starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb" (*Wuthering* 29, emphasis mine). The explanation is thus only ever secondhand, transforming it, even in Nelly Dean's recollection, into a "tale."

Nevertheless, Nelly inadvertently sets up a double narrative here, her assertions and their evidence appearing to contradict each other, for she declares Earnshaw "took to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said (for that matter, he said precious little and generally the truth)" (NCE 30). Nelly suggests thus that the bond is *strange*, yet she does not explain why Earnshaw is unreasonable to believe the words of a child who generally speaks the truth. Similarly, Nelly addresses Heathcliff's so-called blackmail of Hindley, compelling Hindley to exchange horses with him or else "I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder" (*Wuthering* 31). Hindley responds to this with further violence, "cuffing" Heathcliff, calling him "dog" and throwing an iron weight at Heathcliff's chest, at which point, even by Nelly Dean's account, he obtains "revenge by letting his condition plead for him" (*Wuthering* 31-32). Yet the account makes it clear Hindley *has* been abusing Heathcliff, both verbally and physically, badly enough to leave unmistakable marks on

his body. Again, then, it is Heathcliff's weaponizing of *truth* that Nelly Dean is implicitly objecting to. Even his honesty is inherently suspect as a child of dubious origin.

Yet Nelly's interpretations are not always unimpeachable—they occasionally betray her bias, most noticeably in her initial account of Heathcliff, in which she plays up his otherness even when the facts do not appear to be on her side.[52] Thus, the coming of Heathcliff is transformed at once into a tale. Bade by her master to "e'en take it as a gift of God, though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil," Earnshaw "was really half-dead with fatigue, and all that I could make out, amongst her [Mrs. Earnshaw's] scolding, was a *tale* of his seeing it starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb" (*Wuthering* 29, emphasis mine). The explanation is thus only ever secondhand, transforming it, even in Nelly Dean's recollection, into a "tale."

Heathcliff's ability to charm Earnshaw, which Nelly Dean is able to vouch for, seems to go some way toward explaining this, using evidence that is actually to hand, rather than seeking too far afield. Heathcliff, as the surrogate for the former Heathcliff, exerts a kind of thrall over Mr. Earnshaw, and he is himself conscious of it, using this awareness to blackmail Hindley. And yet Nelly Dean is, in the first place, committed to Heathcliff's otherness in her account, summarizing rather than quoting her master's instructions that she ""wash it and give it clean things, and let it sleep with the children," calling the child "it" three times in one sentence (*Wuthering* 30). Her latter loyalty to the Lintons perhaps explains this, as well as a desire to demonstrate her knowingness to her audience, and she also notes Earnshaw's decision overrules the "grumblings" of his wife (*Wuthering* 30). The objections of Mrs. Earnshaw, though mentioned only in passing, are vitally important as the secondhand report of them is the only real mention of her in the

text, as is the fact that Heathcliff is "the name of a son who died in childhood" and allowed to serve "both for Christian and surname" (*Wuthering* 30). Thus, Heathcliff is both outsider and replacement for a son lost in infancy—an evocative take on the changeling in his combination of both, proving an unorthodox coping mechanism for, posing a problem within the family, as raised by his wife.

Nevertheless, Nelly inadvertently sets up a double narrative here, her assertions and their evidence appearing to contradict each other, for she declares Earnshaw "took to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said (for that matter, he said precious little and generally the truth)" (*Wuthering* 30). Nelly suggests thus that the bond is *strange*, yet she does not explain why Earnshaw is unreasonable to believe the words of a child who generally speaks the truth. Similarly, Nelly addresses Heathcliff's so-called blackmail of Hindley, compelling Hindley to exchange horses with him or else "I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder" (*Wuthering* 31). Hindley responds to this with further violence, "cuffing" Heathcliff, calling him "dog" and throwing an iron weight at Heathcliff's chest, at which point, even by Nelly Dean's account, he obtains "revenge by letting his condition plead for him" (*Wuthering* 31-32). Yet the account makes it clear Hindley *has* been abusing Heathcliff, both verbally and physically, badly enough to leave unmistakable marks on his body. Again, then, it is Heathcliff's weaponizing of *truth* that Nelly Dean is implicitly objecting to. Even his honesty is inherently suspect as a child of dubious origin.

The double narrative is evident yet again when, in failing health, Earnshaw grows yet more protective of Heathcliff, so that "[a] nothing vexed him, and suspected slights of his authority nearly threw him into fits" yet her main cited example of this is "if any one

attempt[ed] to impose upon or domineer over, his favourite" (*Wuthering* 32). Thus, Nelly's account inadvertently invites the reader to wonder why it is unreasonable to be angry at attempts—frequent enough earlier in the account—to mistreat Heathcliff, who would be left far more vulnerable after Earnshaw's death. Nelly Dean interprets Heathcliff[53] as the text's ultimate usurper and means to interject a sense that his power over Earnshaw is ill-gotten. He usurps what Hindley perceives as his rightful place as eldest surviving son, challenging the established order of primogeniture, but he does it in an uncanny manner by being given the name and status of a dead elder brother. Earnshaw's favoritism of Heathcliff over Hindley suggests either something wanting in Hindley himself or a base disloyalty in Mr. Earnshaw, as Nelly implies, but also Earnshaw's desire to have his lost son back. Tellingly, however, old Mr. Earnshaw names his adoptive son Heathcliff but does not bestow on him the Earnshaw surname. By refusing Heathcliff the name Earnshaw and not taking steps to formally, legally recognize Heathcliff as his son, Earnshaw leaves his ostensible favorite vulnerable after his death and ensures his continued status as a changeling and locus of instability.

However, Nelly Dean is not so rational as to be proof against the self-interest that biases her account. Robin Grove marks that the coming of Heathcliff displaces not only Hindley but Nelly, a servant girl only a few years older than Cathy, who resents the adoption of an urchin of doubtful origin because, he argues, she perceives his threat to her own class mobility.[36] In this mobility Nelly is ultimately successful, rising to the middle-class role of housekeeper after Mrs. Earnshaw's death, maintaining this role with Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. Her rise to the middle class helps explain her aggressive

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[36] Grove Robin. "The Poor Man's Daughter's Tale: Narrative and System in 'Wuthering Heights.'" *Critical Review* 36 (Jan 1996): 32-40.

conventionalism and her impatience with what she perceives as privileged fancifulness on Cathy's part, demonstrating how contingent even her interpretations are.[54]

Something not noted often enough in the scholarship is Nelly Dean's certainty she has plumbed the depths of Cathy's motives and behavior and consequent manipulation of Edgar Linton. She admits to "agreeable disappointment" that she observes Cathy as "almost over-fond of Mr. Linton" after their marriage (*Wuthering* 72). Then after the return of Heathcliff, , when Cathy's attraction to Heathcliff resurfaces and causes a rift with her husband, Nelly Dean believes she has the situation well in hand, even as she was earlier certain that Cathy's determination not to be separated from Heathcliff was "nonsense" proving her "ignorant of the duties" of marriage unless she were a "wicked, unprincipled girl" (*Wuthering* 64-65). She hears Cathy's plans to break both men's hearts with as much disbelief—and with a "stolidity" calculated to be "exasperating" to Cathy, whom she despises for choosing to hurt both men rather than "control herself tolerably" (*Wuthering* 92). This plus a stated desire not to alarm Linton lead Nelly Dean to downplay Cathy's illness.

Bade by Edgar to choose between himself and Heathcliff, Cathy ejects him from her presence and "lay dashing her head against the arm of the sofa, and grinding her teeth so that you might fancy she would crash them to splinters" (*Wuthering* 93). Nelly Dean presents Cathy's nervous prostration as absurd, even calling it "frenzy" (*Wuthering* 94). The behavior is extreme, certainly, but it is *possible*. Taking the commonsensical approach so far as to refuse to entertain the possibility her extreme responses are well-founded worsens her condition. In that light, much of Dean's testimony to Lockwood reads as self-justification and manipulation, as when she assures Linton "[t]here is

nothing in the world the matter" when she wishes him to hold firm despite admitting in retrospect to concern (*Wuthering* 93**)**.

Three days of isolation thereafter, Cathy asks for water and gruel "for she believed she was dying," which Nelly Dean assumes is only another calculated ploy and thus withholds the news from Linton despite later witnessing Cathy's "ghastly countenance and exaggerated manner" (*Wuthering* 94). In short, Cathy's body is disbelieved by the narrator in a similar way to the character itself in reviews. The perceived exaggeration disqualifies belief. Even now, Nelly Dean says she "could not get rid of the notion that she acted the part of her disorder"—even while Cathy admits to effectively haunting herself with psychosomatic visions of herself in heaven and as a carefree child **(***Wuthering* 98**).** Strikingly, Dean's belief that Cathy's malady is merely an absence of self-control, her belief that Cathy manipulates Linton only for malice while she herself does so for the best, indicate righteousness and her lack of concern for psychosomatic distress—but not her accuracy. If she truly believed Cathy safe, she misread her illness gravely. This misreading is, however, the fatal culmination of Nelly Dean's inability to recognize Cathy's behavior as having a valid basis. Having taken ill immediately upon being crushed by an ultimatum to choose between her two men, Cathy must abandon earlier thoughts of having both but will not relinquish Heathcliff to placate Linton and instead breaks with him. If, like Heathcliff, the reader believes in her as a haunting, she chooses to haunt him and preserve a version of their bond.

Notably, while many readers appear to take Dean's interpretation of Cathy at face value, close examination of her dealings with Cathy indicate her bias and complicity—being "reasonable" and attempting to inculcate conventional morals does not save Cathy

from herself, just as rationality does not guarantee being able to navigate the world of Wuthering Heights. Dean's distaste for Cathy's version of love and its self-destructive potential drives her to try to distance herself from both, thereby revealing how enmeshed she is in the events she narrates.

Cathy as both changeling and spirit-waif forges an early and vital connection between fairy legend and Gothic. Her haunting is peculiar in two ways: Heathcliff, its principal victim, *desires* to be haunted and, as we saw in Lockwood's episode, even in apparently spiritual form, Cathy's existence is still bound up with that of a changeling. Whereas Lockwood works hard to rationalize away the haunting, Heathcliff believes passionately in Cathy's continued spectral existence, pleading with her: "[p]lease come in, Cathy—it has been twenty years" (*Wuthering* 23), Even more significantly, he exclaims soon after her death: "You said I killed you, haunt me then. The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe" (*Wuthering* 130). Besides which, this haunting is always left just within reach of deniability, as Lockwood's experience shows. Readers can either believe or disbelieve Heathcliff as they choose, even as he declares his own belief, which the text does not invalidate. Catherine simply does not recognize the necessity of giving up Heathcliff to marry Linton. While many critics take Nelly Dean's position—that Cathy is a foolish girl at best and downright wicked at worst, Catherine of course sees no moral difficulty.

The Gothic-folklore dyad here helps figuratively articulate this affinity and its peculiar ethics. Notably, as Kitty Carlisle notes, Heathcliff *learns* to become jealous and vengeful, "conditioned toward jealousy by the dynamics within the Earnshaw household, that he is not the source of jealousy in the text himself" (46). In addition to learning

jealousy, he comes to "understan[d] vengeance to be a justifiable means of getting what he wants, thereby making it seem normal for him to resort to revenge as an acceptable means of expression.[55] Thus, Heathcliff *starts out* as arguably capable of the same kind of love as Cathy, but his capacity for it is effaced.[37] Prior to the incursion of the Lintons, such jealousy having no place in their original relationship. Yet the advent of the Lintons, as Patsy Stoneman notes, introduces jealousy to Heathcliff as an applicable concept. Stoneman thus reads Catherine's romantic travails as the text's "testing" of a Shelleyan "free love ethic"—whether Brontë intends it or not (528). I argue, however, that Heathcliff is tainted by jealousy from an outside world, even as Catherine is tainted by worldliness. While Catherine has learned a kind of incipient worldliness, Heathcliff has learned to feel proprietary toward Catherine and her attentions, tabulating the time she spends with him versus with the upstart Linton—a tabulation at which Catherine herself scoffs. For her part, Catherine has learned, if imperfectly, to view her interactions with Heathcliff in terms of pleasure to herself, unbraiding him for making no effort to amuse her, so that each is angry at the other over a different shift in their relational *status quo*—Cathy resenting his attempts to control whom she sees and Heathcliff the unprecedented charge that he must *perform* to her, their hermetic and unthinking harmony disturbed by an interloper thereupon. The ultimate interloper, therefore, is jealousy created through comparison. Yet the affinity between them cannot be effaced and the indictment is ultimately of a "real world" that would seek to deny natural imperatives for conventional reasons—then labeling those conventions as nature.

[37] See also Patrick Morris's "The Depiction of Trauma and its Effect on Character Development in the Brontë Fiction." *Bronte Studies* 38.2 (2013): 157-68.

Initially laughing at Heathcliff's difference from the Lintons, once she gets used to Heathcliff again, she climbs out a "skylight" and "along the roof" to get to him. She is not 'Miss Catherine' to Nelly Dean then but "the little monkey" (*Wuthering* 47). She is still close to Heathcliff, still athletically inclined, and still willing to take risks to be with him, even in the face of his displeasure with her. The fashionable veneer has not changed those parts of her—not yet. Furthermore, though Heathcliff blames Cathy for deserting him, he famously leaves before he can hear Cathy's singular declaration of love for him, or her insistence (give so little credence by Nelly but vitally important) that her marriage to Linton cannot change that love or cause her to give him up.

Cathy's defection from Heathcliff and her surface transformation into a proper young lady pose a major interpretative problem within the text, for her downfall is often read as tied to her failure to be with Heathcliff. Yet Heathcliff is implicated in this tragedy too—going off without a word, having learned how to be jealous as apply these feelings to Cathy. [38] Yet Linton's ascendency is short-lived and shortly narrated, arguably predicated on Heathcliff's disappearance. Heathcliff on his return a few years later in the guise of a gentleman of substance in his own right— begins through both presence and inclination, to supplant Linton. Cathy, who so passionately swore she would not hear of giving up Heathcliff as a prerequisite to her marriage to another man strives to make that refusal a reality through a reconciliation between Heathcliff and Linton that would serve her desire to keep them both but is desired by neither man, each of whom has learned to desire exclusivity with her. The strain her attempts place upon her marriage precipitate

[38] While we have seen psychoanalytic readings of Catherine already in this chapter, John Allen Stevenson argues that the equivalence between her and Heathcliff should be read skeptically, rather than taken at face value (60-61).

her final illness. Cathy's transformation into a properly conventional woman is thwarted by her tie to Heathcliff and her conviction that it is her right. This, in turn, is due to the conventional demand that she be monogamous. That she is a proponent of free love in a Shelleyan or proto-polyamorous sense ties her more firmly to changeling-hood, in that the ordinary world cannot, apparently, accept her, as Nelly Dean's reactions and Linton's ultimatum both indicate.

In this way, the question of failure and cowardice becomes a more broadly ethical one**.** Nelly Dean scoffs at Cathy's resolution to keep both men as a failure to understand marital duty. It is true in the sense that Cathy does not set much stock by conventional notions of conjugal ownership, as Patsy Stoneman notes before articulating Edgar Linton's "proprietary logic" (Stoneman: 531)—something he shares, in fact, with Heathcliff. Both men believe they deserve and ought to have sole ownership of Cathy, Edgar because he is her husband and Heathcliff because he ought to have been[56]. Ultimately, therefore, if this failure of Cathy to marry Heathcliff indicates her worldly cowardice, the reader intentionally or not aligns themselves with the conventional notion of monogamous marriage. However, by *Cathy's* more socially radical terms, both her men fail *her* Heathcliff by failing to trust and abandoning her as the result of incomplete imagination, and Edgar by attempting an ultimatum that is to her mind simply absurd. If we do not confine ourselves to the attempt to inflict convention on an unconventional novel, there is blame enough to go around, illuminating an implicit critique of fiction that exists in service of the status quo while claiming to serve truth. This critique becomes even more overt in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as we will see in the next chapter.

Winifred Gérin explains Emily Brontë's inner life—that which fed Gondal—without pathologizing it—putting her at contrast with Juliet Barker, who tends dismissive of the secondary worlds of the Brontës, including Angria and Gondal (*Brontës* 500-01). Gérin suggests a way of reconciling the natural with Gothic in *Wuthering Heights* and the duality of its author. On the one hand, Emily was the "most practically capable" of the Brontë sisters by age eleven" (18), serving in lieu of housekeeper after Tabitha Ackroyd was incapacitated, giving Emily access from an early age to the tales Rev. Patrick Brontë heard from his parishioners, enabling both insight into quotidian tasks like bread-making and an "acceptance of [parishioners' tales'] violence as a truth she heard direct from her father" (Gérin 37). Thus is the unflinching portrayal of domestic violence potentially explained, which Gérin also elucidates convincingly how Emily's own struggles outside the home, at Roe Head School, gave Emily a less judgmental perspective on Branwell (56-57).

While Charlotte—and indeed Branwell—yearned after not only the financial independence successful publication could bring but the literary recognition/validation of others, Emily had little of this. Indeed, Gérin suggests that the process of plundering Gondal first for poems and then for emotional resonances for her novel was a painful one for Emily, who saw the possibility of financial independence clearly enough but was actually angry at her sister for reading her poems without leave and mostly indifferent to the opinion of anyone outside her immediate circle. Gérin explains "the profound secrecy of [Emily's] manner, which had nothing whatever to do with duplicity" as due to "a vital need to preserve herself from interference of any kind" (4). Emily wished to be left alone

to pursue an inner life as private as it was essential to her existence. She was content at home so long as she was free to pursue that inner life.

This brings us to Emily Brontë's mysticism, perhaps explaining her insistence on depicting clashing beliefs. While some have attempted to read her as a Christian mystic in the style of St. Theresa of Avila,[57] Gérin counters that her mysticism was neither explicitly Christian nor concerned with other people. Nature played a role, as Emily sometimes called the presence she sought to commune with the "'soul of nature,'" union with which brought "ecstasy" that "once achieved became a permanent craving that no lesser happiness could assuage" (86-87). Gérin contrasts Brontë with Wordsworth, whose "revelation" came not in childhood but later, so that "such manifestations became the purpose and fulfillment of her life, as physical love was to other women," suggesting that "when they ceased altogether, she died" (87). Gérin admits a similarity to Blake in both possessing a "'double vision'" but clarifying that Brontë, unlike Blake, did not seek to build a cosmos with it; her mysticism instead "remained personal, affecting sight and hearing" in a "rapture" that was "not necessarily pleasurable" (87).

Here, then, we have the duality of Emily Brontë as a housekeeper who cared little for physical existence and, in fact, neither "recognized the necessity of submitting to the practical demands of life" outside the Parsonage, nor meaningfully distinguished between literal, material experience and the effects of her powerful imagination.[58] Thus can we understand the appeal of the Gothic—experience that encompasses mental difference or mystical visitations, that is idiosyncratic to the individual, is as integral to Brontë's perspective as to Gothic as a form.[59]

Moreover, her relationship to her mystical pursuits being necessary but not necessarily pleasurable indeed echoes Catherine's remarks about her love for Heathcliff, signifying that while Brontë's beliefs and experiences naturally informed her work, she did transform her material., even as certain contemporary reviewers such a love between 'real people' could not exist. I suggest rather that Brontë has enabled an allegorical reading by drawing inspiration from her inner life as a mystic, but that Cathy and Heathcliff remain possible characters and should not be written off as impossible or as *merely* containers for an abstract meaning. Indeed, the care with which Emily has set up the apparent ethical dilemma of Catherine Earnshaw strongly indicates that we must take Catherine seriously as a character and not merely the embodiment of an abstraction.

Just as Heathcliff and Cathy double one another in their self-destructive matrimonial decisions, their deaths are similar in how difficult to explain—and apparently metaphysically derived—they are. Cathy's death is the culmination of the interpretative problem at the midpoint of the text, with readers left to decide whether she dies of hypochondria as Nelly Dean believes, or of spiritual anguish and despair. Heathcliff's is likewise strange. Nothing appears physically wrong with him and yet he dies but, after his grief for Cathy provides the catalyst for destructive rage until he is sufficiently overpowered by remembrances of her to realize the futility of his vengeance. He views all of existence as "a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her" and is haunted not by the dead but the living— "Hareton's aspect was the ghost of my immortal love, of my wild endeavors to hold my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish—" Yet Heathcliff interrupts himself mid-litany calling it "frenzy," and he merely explains that Hareton's presence has

become a “constant torment” until Heathcliff can “give [Hareton and young Cathy] no attention anymore” (*Wuthering* 354) Heathcliff thus finds himself haunted by the echo of the dead within the living.

Finally, the burden of “frenzy” and of torment is enough that Heathcliff cannot even make himself care that the lone survivors of the Earnshaw and Linton families are falling in love and undoing his carefully contrived vengeance. Hareton and Cathy are entirely in his power, but he will not bring his plan to full completion because he must “remind [himself] to breathe” (*Wuthering* 354). He apparently stops eating and, by all appearances, perishes of a spiritual-physical inanition, demonstrating, then, that Cathy and Heathcliff are individuals for whom the spiritual and the physical cannot be as neatly separated as is usually the case, leading to Edgar Shannon rightly viewing the ending of *Wuthering Heights* as demonstrating a transcendent ethic. Love, in Brontë’s metaphysics,[39] is the primary law of human nature and the paramount principle of her universe. Adhered to, it is at once the source of joy and harmony; rejected or subverted, it becomes the fountainhead of enmity and strife" (215).

Intriguingly, the conclusion of the novel is given to Lockwood, thus allowing for a closing of the narrative frame and for the ending to be refracted through his apparently worldly perspective that has nevertheless been shown not entirely proof against the probable. A child in tears reports to Lockwood, “They’s Heathcliff and a woman yonder” whom he dares not pass. Lockwood is immediately skeptical and rationalizing that the by “probably raised the phantoms from thinking,” repeating “the nonsense he had heard” from friends and parents but interrupts himself with a dash and “yet still, I don’t like

[39] See Jill Dix Gnassia’s Metaphysical Rebellion, especially Chapter 5.

being out in the dark now; and I don't like being left by myself in this grim house—I cannot help it" (*Wuthering* 257). Lockwood's initial denial cannot fully exorcise his uneasiness, the isolation having finally exposed how hollow were his early claims to misanthropy. Nevertheless, the decision to have the spiritual reunion reported to Lockwood rather than experienced by him, coupled with his immediate attempts to rationalize and then his admission of discomfort demonstrate again the interconnection of genres within the text. Brontë places a small buffer between Lockwood and Nelly's real world and the reunion of Cathy and Heathcliff, so that the text remains both and neither. Few contemporary reviewers noted this intricacy, however.

Wuthering Heights reveals itself by the end as a meditation on the possible—one enlarged by character belief, even in the face of disapproving narrators' attempts to shrink the possible through their doubt and alignment with an exclusionary ethical status quo. Much of doubt and belief centers on the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff, in which Cathy attempts a proto-polyamorous union. Brontë sought to articulate a possible beyond what is believed in by London reviewers or the literary establishment—or the narrators who mirror them. The narrators' use of "changeling" to separate themselves from what they dislike, including the Gothic is hindered or qualified by both narrators being characters and complicit, even if reluctantly, in the conflicts of the text.

Paired Instruction, Critiques, and Genres in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Introduction

Tenant of Wildfell Hall struck a nerve on its publication in 1848, as Anne Brontë knew it would.[60] Her determination to depict a young woman's ill-advised marriage to a rake, subsequent abasement, and ultimate flight scandalized reviewers who resented her presumption in challenging dominant ideas about marriage and fictional representations thereof and her explicit critique of how women and men were socialized and educated. Reviewers therefore claimed the novel was coarse beyond bearing and implied that its characters' improbability and the distastefulness of its marriage-plots indicated artistic failure. Their expectations indicated gendered assumptions, as well as reviewers self-interest in their insistence that Brontë's creations were so unbelievable as to render her critique ineffectual.

The aggressiveness of the reviewers' response seems only sharpened by Anne Brontë's refusal to couch her critique of education and marriage within more overt genre frameworks: there are no folklore motifs, and her Gothic is not only possible but mundane, indicating she expected her novel's protagonist to be believed and her narrated experience to mount substantive critique.

Like her sisters, Anne Brontë addresses the questions of probability and the natural in fiction and the question of whose experience ought to be depicted and believed. Likewise, she encloses Helen's diary, the primary locus of its Gothic, so that it recounts how Helen herself misreads her husband-to-be and is then misread in turn by Arthur Huntington and Robert Hargrave, whose presumptions to false romance ideals only expose how mundane their attempts to tyrannize her are. There is, simply put, nowhere to

hide in this novel. Thus, Helen's diary, uncorroborated and immersive, declares Helen's right to narrate and interpret her own experiences and to use them to teach others, thus unfolding Brontë's goal of critiquing the status quo while offering a lesson for individuals. Gilbert Markham, therefore, emerges from his immersion in Helen's experience with enlarged empathy, further reinforced by his engagement with her letters afterward.

By centering Helen's diary, Brontë enables a dual correction of education, of girls who might be tempted through insufficient education to undertake reforming a rake[61], and of young men whose prior education may have discouraged empathy. Doing so, Brontë gives her characters—and her readers—of both genders the tools to cope with marriage to each other while still critiquing standard ideas of marriage and education. The very improbability of her heroine's successful escape underscores that critique, and reviewers' resistance thereto suggests their need to believe *Tenant*'s critique outlandish is interested, enmeshed in ideology. Yet the popularity of the novel in spite of them enabled Anne to answer her critics directly in her Preface to the Second Edition as we will see.

Some critics, among them Elizabeth Langland, Christine Colón and Marianne Thormählen read Brontë's commitment to realism as a repudiation of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, which, these scholars argue, both seek refuge in romantic solutions that Anne sees through and rejects. They cite her exposure to Branwell and to Methodism as possible explanations for her divergence from her sisters in this matter. James Quinnell, on the other hand, argues for continued affinity between Emily and Anne Brontë into the last years of their lives when they were writing their novels.

I put forward rather that, as a worker of the improbable but possible, Anne was, in spite of the seeming difference of approach, much closer to Charlotte and Emily's projects than Langland or Colón allow, being as concerned as they with the problems of narration of experience and their protagonists' being chronically misread and frequently alienated. The falsity she sets herself against is rather this status quo of readerly comfort at the expense of truth, whether by neglecting to represent part of the truth or by pivoting to a kind of romance that is ultimately dishonest. Her differing choice of metaphors does not categorically sunder her from the other Brontës—though it led to a contemporary reception even more caustic. By setting herself firmly in the apparently actual, she left herself even more open to disputation by reviewers who disagreed with her perceptions and decision to depict them without softening them for public consumption.

Part I: Too Coarse for Critique

H.F. Chorley, who also reviewed *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, announced his refusal to be tempted into gossip about the Bells' backgrounds before stating: "With regard to one point, however, we cannot remain silent: —The Bells must be warned against their fancy for dwelling upon what is disagreeable" (*Heritage* 251). His language is of dutiful bowing to necessity, so that his silence (in editorial 'we' form) is impossible. The Bells, whose three new novels he has reviewed, "must be warned against their fancy for dwelling upon what is disagreeable." Chorley presents their choice of subject thus as a "fancy,"—a whim, setting his editorial duty firmly against it, registering the now-familiar objection against the Brontës' emphasis against the disagreeable.[40] This

[40] Others who referenced the disagreeable or unpleasant character of the narration: *Athenaeum* and *Spectator* both objected thus—as they both did to *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

conversation around the coarseness, disagreeableness, or distastefulness of *Tenant'*s subject and its author's chosen method of depiction is one in which all seven contemporary reviewers engage in.

Though the *Athenaeum*'s review of *Tenant* is fairly short, it hits all the major points of the novel's reception. We can detect a whiff of dismissiveness, a preoccupation with not only the brutal, coarse, or disagreeable quality of the subject matter, but the *minuteness* with which it is related.[41] Chorley does still concede that it is "natural." More curiously, we see a sense of compulsion and editorial duty. Finally, and most importantly, a two-fold objection, on the one hand to the love plot and on the other to the characterization of Helen and Gilbert. These objections are complex and found in several forms in the novel's immediate reception, and that brings us to the novel's improbable, the reviewers' response to which was more subtle than to the novels in my previous chapters.

The Spectator is likewise key to this conversation on coarseness for its forceful pursuit of the positions both that *Tenant* "like its predecessor" indicates "talent ill-applied," language familiar as a near-verbatim echo from the review of *Wuthering Heights,* and that it is at home among the other Bell novels: "There is power, effect, and even nature, though of an extreme kind...but there seems in the reader a morbid love for the coarse, not to say the brutal, so that his level subjects are not very attractive, and the more forcible are displeasing or repulsive, from their gross, physical, or profligate substratum" (*Heritage* 250). This initial salvo is all the more remarkable because it indicates the reviewer is in fact having the very reaction Anne Brontë, per her Preface,

[41] Both the *Sharpe's* and *Rambler* reviewers also objected to the offensive minuteness. See *Critical Heritage* p. 264 and 268.

hoped the reader would have, but without having found the experience salutary, suggesting how fundamentally this reviewer disagreed with Brontë's project.[42]

He goes on to anticipate and ventriloquize an authorial counterargument, that "such things are in life" and "probably" visible in "Doctors Commons cases" of Georgian England "although Mr. Bell paints them as contemporary." Yet, he counters, "[m]ere existence… is not a sufficient reason for choice of subject: its general or typical character is a point to consider, and its power of pleasing must be regarded" (*Heritage* 250). The reviewer therefore objects to the lack of "attractiveness" and likewise attributes motive, qualified itself by probability, suggesting Brontë writes thus from "morbid love" for her subject matter. This attack, assigning motive and pathologizing Brontë's choice of subject, is one to which Anne responds directly, quoting this review in her Preface. The reviewer simulates Anne's response and attempts to dispense with it out of hand by saying that mere existence of a thing does not justify its depiction—by now familiar urgings to make depictions in keeping with "typical character," pleasingness, and whether extreme depictions are fully necessary to desired effect. It is "not only the subject" the reviewer finds "objectionable, but the manner of treating it. There is a coarseness of tone throughout the writing of all these Bells, that puts an offensive subject in its worst point of view, and which generally contrives to dash indifferent things" (*Heritage* 250). The reviewer does not say what this coarseness does to transcendent things—perhaps he sees nothing transcendent about any of it.[62]

The reviewer also asserts, incorrectly, that Anne depicts Huntington and company as specifically contemporary when in fact they are a generation earlier, as the reviewer

[42] Worth noting that the Preface being affixed to the Second Edition, these seven reviewers would not have seen or been aware of it.

himself hinted at on previous page of his review. The novel's frame begins in 1827 and Helen's diary in 1820—but this is too close to the present for this reviewer's comfort. The novel's setting in the Regency is not far enough temporally for some reviewers, just as Huntington's worldliness, going between his estate and his club of rakes in London, bringing them back with him, prevents the formation of comfortable geographical distance between London reader and dissolute characters. These rakes are even closer to reviewers than the thoroughly northern Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

Yet the *Spectator* is not the only *Tenant* reviewer attached to the notion of the Bells as rural authors. The *Examiner* says they are "of a hardy race" that "do not lounge in drawing-rooms or boudoirs," but rather breathe the air not "of the hot-house, or of perfumed apartments" but that which "whistles through the rugged thorns that shoot out their prickly arms on barren moors, or it ruffles the moss on the mountain tops" (*Heritage* 254). The *Examiner* here implicitly acknowledges the effect of physical setting upon experience, and he mimics their writing style regarding the natural world in his juxtaposition of privileged urban life with harsher rural living before expanding upon the contrast with "[r]ough characters (*Heritage* 254)." He continues the rural-urban dichotomy that appeared also in the reception of *Wuthering Heights*, linking it to untamed passions, though in a more positive manner than the *Spectator* did. He notes also the Englishness of the language, perceiving the relative absence of other languages as an asset, bespeaking lack of affectation.

And yet he exaggerates, at least as far as *Tenant* is concerned, for Huntington meets Helen during her first London season, in the midst of London society, at a ball. Likewise, when Huntington wishes to escape Helen's strictures and their baby, he meets

his friends and carouses in London at their club before bringing himself and his friends back to his estate to frolic at home and flaunt his affair before his wife. The debauchery, therefore, is actually not specific to rural settings but inborn and apt to break out wherever he is. Furthermore, the Huntingtons take their honeymoon on the Continent and, while the visit is not to Helen's taste, being rushed and less romantic than she'd hoped, she attributes her husband's hurry, attributed to him having been in Europe before, making him as cosmopolitan as most men of his social class at the time. The reviewer finds it comforting to confine Huntington's vices, like Heathcliff's or Rochester's[63], to the rural, even though the text does not bear it out. The *Examiner'*s reviewer thus is attached to the idea of "Nature in her loneliness" and its connection to "rude habits" though the uncomfortable conclusion of *Tenant* is actually that such habits cannot be trusted to stay confined to the rural where men of the towns need not be too worried about them (*Heritage* 254).

The rural-urban dichotomy therefore takes a hit. While the *Examiner*'s reviewer is correct to suggest isolation can intensify personalities, Huntington's vices are of a social nature. He is no Heathcliff, thrown upon quasi-solitude living among a handful of dependents as rural as he. Thus, the "coarseness" remarked on in one form or another by every reviewer in the *Critical Heritage* is of a more dangerous kind that that of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. *Jane Eyre* is possible but a fluke, *Wuthering Heights* perceived as so idiosyncratic the reviewer is at liberty not to take it literally. *Tenant* is too close to home in its pointing not only to individual but to systemic failure, unsavory and contrary to the narrative of failure as an individual matter that reassures that the system and its status quo are, after all, solid and acceptable.[64]

Fraser's took another approach. Kingsley is, perhaps ironically, the most sympathetic reviewer of *Tenant* but still voices his objections. Kingsley sketches an elaborate tableau contrasting working-class realities with leisure-class ones (*Heritage* 269-70), here to suggest, if condescendingly, an understanding of how privilege operates and actually defends the working-class's preference for "horrible fictions" as "Nature's own medicine," suggesting that fictions intended for the perusal of the working classes must be stimulating on a level that would be needless and untoward for the leisure class with its easy access to more refined pleasures. Kingsley, however, does not think Tenant a "horrible fiction" but rather "[a] people's novel of a very different school" that "taken altogether, a powerful and an interesting book" that Kingsley acknowledges as unpleasant to read as, he suspects, it was to write, "still less has it been a pleasant training which could teach an author such awful facts, or give courage to write them" (*Heritage* 270). He recognizes the bravery inherent in the decision and does not, as the *Spectator* does, suggest the author's goal is merely to titillate or to display his morbidity of mind, calling the "fault of the book" its "coarseness":

> not merely that coarseness of subject that will be a stumbling-block of most readers, and which makes it utterly unfit to be put into the hands of girls; of that we do not complain. There are foul and accursed undercurrents in plenty, in this same smug, respectable, whitewashed English society, which must be exposed now and then, and Society owes thanks, not sneers, to those who dare to shew her the image of her own ugly, hypocritical visage. But taking this book as a satire, and an exposure

> of evils, still all unnecessary coarseness is a defect—a defect which injures the real usefulness and real worth of the book (*Heritage* 270).

Kingsley catches the intent to critique but emphasizes what he perceives as uncouth exaggeration. Thus, he brings his objection to it into the realm of probability. His initial objection, which he suggests is the lesser one—that the subject matter makes the novel unfit for girls to read—thus dismisses from the text's readership the group Anne Brontë identifies as most vulnerable in its enforced ignorance. While claiming superiority to "most readers" by not complaining of its choice of subject, Kingsley nevertheless hints at disbelief by emphasizing the perceived exaggeration, refusing the possibility that Brontë is pursuing accuracy in her depiction. He allows that such things do happen but insists so indecorous a depiction undercuts the efficacy of their intended critique. Adult male readers, on the other hand, Kingsley argues, have no call to complain of a writer who exposes the "ugly hypocritical visage" of seemingly respectable society, setting his review against reviews like *Rambler* or *Sharpe's* that simply believe the material is unfit for anyone of discernment. We will return to his specific objections to Helen's diary.

Such responses indicate the early desire to segregate genders in terms of fitness for reading—plus an assumption she is writing mainly to instruct *women*. Though the word *improbable* is not on the lips of the reviewers, still they respond to improbability of both plot and character, but their objections demonstrate how bound together are plot and character in the novel, and then how related to Brontë's ethics both are in turn because her morality is socially derived.

The *Spectator* review notes "such a generic resemblance" between the three novels "that *several reviewers* remarked it" (*Heritage* 249, emphasis mine), indicating the

Spectator reviewer is already situating himself in the ongoing critical conversation, priming the reader for the assertion: “Each of the Bells selected the *singular* both in character and incident” (*Heritage* 249, emphasis mine). This marking of singularity is an ongoing concern in Brontë reception, so much so that, as we have seen, Anne Brontë takes up the matter in her Preface to the Second Edition. The *Spectator* adds to the observation this implicit objection to passion as a destructive force but also as distasteful material to contemplate for the reader (*Heritage* 249). He confirms Gérin's and others' assertion that Anne is right, like Emily, to place her novel in the Regency with its looser moral expectations and agreeable sense of distance between ‘those people’ and ‘us’ (i.e., reviewers) and also acknowledges how isolation geographically can contribute to increased concentration of personality which is, though he does not note it, a frequent component of texts influenced by rural or regional Gothic.

The *Examiner* praises *Tenant* and indeed the Bells collectively, for not being “common-place” or taking “faint or tawdry copies” from what had “already wearied reviewers,” for, even in their “tedious” moments, they are “rarely conventional,” recommending the Bells for drawing from the “original” (*Heritage* 221-22)—for taking material from personal observation and experience. This is one of the tensions: in theory, reviewers are tired of trite, recycled narratives, but in practice, the Bells are beyond the pale—and drawing from personal observation or experience does not protect from reviewers disbelieving what is sufficiently unpleasant or challenging to them. *Fraser’s* joins the *Examiner* in its appreciation its theoretical willingness to innovate—yet both object to how precisely it was done. Also worth noting, that the *Rambler* said the novel *was* in fact “commonplace,” with *Rambler* going so far as to claim there were no

characters therein that could hope to draw on a reader's sympathy (*Heritage* 267-68). In practice, then, reviewers struggle to let go of gendered notions of probability and propriety.

Whipple too suggests even realism cannot avail, if the reviewer is left displeased by the experience, speaking dismissively of "nature literally and logically set forth" and concluding with a round turn: "But the criminal courts are not the places in which to a take a comprehensive view of humanity, and the novelist who confines his observation to them is not likely to produce any lasting impression, except of horror and disgust" (*Heritage* 262). Relying on violators of the law and by extension the social contract to furnish characters and incidents therefore cannot produce good, pleasing fiction—readerly growth cannot, according to him, arise from horror or disgust. He also attributes to Acton Bell the intention of suggesting the view of humanity set forth in *Tenant* is comprehensive—helping to account for why, in her Preface, Anne Brontë acknowledges so readily the *uncommonness* of men like Arthur Huntington. Embedded in this conclusion of Whipple's, however, is likewise a fallacious assumption that all criminals get brought to court or that only criminals can in this coarse way to which he objects.

The improbability of this text is largely situated by reviewers in its characters, beginning with Huntington. Reviewers were disgusted by Arthur Huntington, as they were clearly meant to be, though several disputed the need of so *much* representation of Huntington's depravity. This question of degree or contrast is also raised by reviewers of *Wuthering Heights*, and indeed *The Examiner* directly compares Huntington's extremity of character to Heathcliff (though arguably, the more apt comparison is to Hindley). Here we see a fundamental disagreement between reviewers and author. As Anne would

counter in the Preface, she perceived rounding off the edges of the disagreeable with the aim of being less offensive and more pleasurable to the reader as dangerous in that it furnished incomplete information and led to possible misunderstanding in the reader, whom she hoped would profit by her honesty and directness (*Tenant* 3). This commitment to a thorough truth also becomes an issue for some modern critics, if in a different way, as we will see.

Chorley's impression of Huntington is much that of Heathcliff: he ought to have been drawn with a "smaller compass"—the brutality of his character indicated with fewer touches, for the sake of the reader's comfort and enjoyment. Instead, Chorley notes, Acton Bell has chosen to render him with "fond minuteness,"[43] a more ambiguous phrase than it first appears. It potentially suggests the familiar notion that the Bells *liked* writing of coarse subjects, but it also potentially suggests misguided foolishness—the Northern English usage of "fond" pertaining more to lack of judgment than to an abundance of affection.[44]

The difficulty with singularity as a descriptor of fictional content is that on the one hand, subjects may be perceived as possessing singularity due to a gap in knowledge or acceptance on the interpreter's part. Deeming a thing singular is an interpretative claim that could be made in error. And on the other, even perceived singularity does not disqualify and at times indeed points to a text's ability to serve as critique of an establishment that ignores or underrepresents a particular group. If a group's experiences have not been sufficiently represented as to be absorbed into the status quo, the few

[43] For further objections to perceived excessive minuteness, see *Rambler* and *Sharpe's*
[44] The *OED* demonstrates that in the 1840s, most of the current usages of "fond" denoted foolishness or derangement, even those definitions that denoted affection

depictions authors *do* undertake will appear to transgress the typical and even the probable, as thus filtered through that same status quo.

As the *Spectator* bids authors to look not to the "Doctor's Commons" for material, we can see also Whipple's assertion that the "criminal courts" are nowhere to seek appropriate material for fiction. Again, we see this push for moderation—for not giving what these reviewers see as undue attention to outliers, particularly the pathological outliers of criminals or the insane. Admitting Huntington and his friends are "drawn with great power and precision of outline," Whipple nevertheless objects: "Everywhere is seen the tendency of the author to degrade passion into appetite, and to give prominence to the selfish and malignant elements of human nature." Whipple would, it seems, prefer to think of passion as an always-ennobling quality, despite evidence in the 'real world' that such is not the case, and resents being subjected to such unpleasantness because it indicates a failure on the part of the novelist:

> [W]hile [Bell] succeeds in making profligacy disgusting, he fails to make virtue pleasing. His depravity is total depravity, and his hard and impudent debauchees seem to belong to that class of reprobates whom Dr. South considers 'as not so much born as damned into the world (*Heritage* 262).

Whipple sees a lack of contrast and fails to see a reason to read about such extreme examples of debauchery and damnation, charging that: *Tenant* denies its readers the enlarged view that leads to a broadening, provokes "healthy action" of readerly sympathies. By implication, the action of Tenant is unhealthy, the implication underscored by the claustrophobic image of being confined to narrow space.[45] In addition

[45] This is in keeping with Sedgwick's notion of Gothic space (21).

to claustrophobia, however, Whipple suggests the reader is subjected to a violation of consent, giving an aggressive image suggestive of rape—the reader held down and forced to look at "wolfish side of his nature." Whipple thus implies that readers have the privilege not to look, not to know, and to compel them to do so is a violation. Yet Brontë cannot in truth force anyone to read her work—and if her writing is good enough to prompt reading to the end, yet still the reader has always their own choice to stop.[46]

The implication is that Acton Bell is forcing these reviewers to read on against their wills—as if they cannot choose to close the book—and they blame her for it. This is not merely a forceful seduction, according to Whipple's description—but something very close to rape. Irony abounds that reviewers should use language so reminiscent or suggestive of violation whilst reading a novel focused acutely on the abuses of a married woman by her husband and one of his friends. Indeed, it ultimately reads as the language of the privileged that for a man of privilege to be told of the evils done to women is analogous, in his mind to enduring that evil himself. The response also echoes those readers of *Wuthering Heights* who kept on in spite of themselves. What they are compelled to read is a love-plot they would prefer not to credit.

The *Spectator*'s reviewer likewise objects to the plot resolution itself, as we will see. The most vexed character in the reception of *Tenant* is Gilbert Markham, disliked by reviewers and treated with suspicion by many critics, disputing his roles as book-ending narrator, sharer of his wife's journal, and second suitor for Helen's hand. Contemporary reviewers tended to object to what they perceived as his uncouth ferocity, seeing him as

[46] Sharpe's similarly suggested their "lady-readers" could be "seduced" to read the novel (*Heritage* 263).

unworthy of Helen because they fail to recognize or credit the transformation that sets him apart, latching onto vague impressions or individual moments so as to dismiss him.

Yet the characters whose conduct appears most to incense or unsettle contemporary reviewers are in fact Helen and Gilbert, and these objections often extend to a disbelief of their love plot[47], so that while the word 'improbable' is not invoked, the idea of disbelieving the uncomfortable as unlikely does frequently surface. The *Spectator,* as previously mentioned, noted the Brontës' fascination with singularity and incident—their focus on what was atypical. The assertion deserves unpacking because it comes with embedded assumptions. Most importantly, it suggests the reviewer's experience, both lived and read, qualifies him to determine what is not and is not "singular"—a method prone to blind spots. While Drew Lamonica notes that nineteenth-century conduct books and published reports noted the vulnerable position of governesses, for instance, suggesting it was *known,* such knowledge is not necessarily reflected in reviewers' reception of *Jane Eyre* or *Agnes Grey*, nor does the known existence of drunken, brutal husbands induce reviewers of *Tenant* to be accept Brontë's depictions of Huntington and company. Thus, it stands to reason that the didactic aspect of the novel would fail in their eyes, because it is too coarse to be fit to teach readers much of anything.

The *Spectator* to lesser degree, and the *Examiner* more fully, address Huntington's death as a prerequisite for the Helen's marriage to Gilbert Markham, and their attitude is remarkably blasé, indicating a trivializing of the novel's resolution. The

[47] The reluctance to see Helen with Markham perhaps foreshadows the readerly response to *Middlemarch,* in which certain readers—including Henry James—would have preferred to see Dorothea with Dr. Lydgate (Eliot 580).

Spectator notes the death-to-marriage plot dispassionately, and the *Examiner* reviewers goes so far as to remarks that "it is not until the author very judiciously kills off the first husband that the fortune of Gilbert the hero emerges...and his happiness is finally consummated" (*Heritage* 255). This treats Huntington's death and redemption as incidental, his removal merely a mechanical matter-of-course and moral necessity to allow the protagonists to get together. Even more critical of its moral implications was, in fact, the *Rambler*, who accounts for it thus: "By and by, of course, he dies, and the authoress gives us one of those pictures of a deathbed which are neither edifying nor true to life, nor full of warning to the careless and profligate." Even the death of Huntington, according to the *Rambler* cannot be believed in—it has failed in any didactic aim and provides no good moral warning, either so that it is a dual failure—of accurate representation and of moral instruction. Notably, however, the *Rambler* does not specify what about the death-scene is so thoroughly objectionable though we may surmise Anne's doctrine of universal salvation plays a role.

This struggle arguably belies a lack of understanding of what Helen wants, as opposed to what readers believe she *should* have. Yet much of the purpose of the novel is Helen learning to be a better judge of men so that readers may profit from her example and not have to go the long way round as she did and marry poorly the first time, while the other half is to provide men with instructive examples of how their behavior brings consequences to themselves and their dependents. The novel works to show the novel's second marriage as based upon this mutual learning experience, yet as we saw in its reception, some readers doubted the novel's resolution.

The *Spectator* notes that Gilbert "ferociously assaults" Frederick (*Heritage* 250). To Whipple of Markham is the example par excellence of the novel's overall coarseness. Markham is

> intended as a specimen of manly character; but he would serve as the ruffian of any other novelist. His nature is fierce, proud, moody, jealous, revengeful, and sometimes brutal. We can see nothing good in him except a certain rude honesty; and that quality is seen chiefly in his bursts of hatred and his insults to women. Helen, the heroine, is doubtless a strong-minded woman, and passes bravely through a great deal of suffering; but if there be any lovable or feminine virtues in her composition, the author has managed to conceal them (*Heritage* 262).

Whipple makes gendered assumptions about how "good" characters in a novel ought to act—not unlike those raised by *Literary World*. It is not enough that Markham is honest and Helen strong. They must embody other virtues than those, ones that Brontë herself has elected not to prioritize, further indicating, in these reviewers' view, her faults as a novelist, and thus the uselessness of her critique because Brontë's primary characters are rendered unlovable and their efforts to be together, therefore, do not, according to Whipple, succeed in moving the reader sufficiently. Whipple demonstrates how readers can retaliate against texts that do not gratify readerly desires and dismiss what they do not wish to hear. Likewise, the emphasis on a violent act from *before* Markham reads Helen's diary suggests the lack of credence granted by this reviewer to any attempt to demonstrate Markham's development over time—even as it indicates the need for his leis

learning. But he is too coarse, too hateful, and too misogynistic to be worth attention in the first place.[65]

Literary World also speaks with disgusted incredulity of the second love plot, arguing Helen makes a mésalliance when she

> marries a boor, whom the writer describes as lacking either spirit, generosity or language to make a full apology to her invalid brother, whom he has nearly beaten to death by mistake; and this caitiff ditcher, who should have been passed out of the window with a farm-hand fork, the writer makes his hero; because he can talk sentiment, and criticise pictures, loves poetry, and has something more than a peasant's meteorological observation of the influence of the weather on the landscape (*Heritage* 258).

Markham is, in this reviewer's reading, not good enough for Helen, demonstrating his learning of empathy comes too late for the reviewer—or that the reviewer does not credit it in the first place.[66] Indeed, according to this reviewer, he deserves to be defenestrated with a farm implement for being so uncouth and insensitive. *Literary World* likewise speaks dismissively of Markham's ability to "talk sentiment" and be susceptible to visual and literary arts. There is irony in the reviewer's inability or refusal to recognize why Helen as not only an artist but a professional artist, having been previously married to a man of no genuine sentiment and little intellect, might desire a man in possession of such faculties. It is also suggestive that *Literary World* focuses so heavily on the wrongs Markham does to another *man* as a disqualification for marriage to the novel's "belle." Its review is half snobbery and half casual elision of female needs or interests, dovetailing

nicely with its insinuation later that the reviewer has "shrewdly" deduced the author is a woman whose "principal notions of men are derived from other books" or from a singular experience of her native village, elevated with "certain touches of rascality" to make him "masculine" for the men have only the good qualities that "might be womanish, while all that is bad relishes either of the flash English novel, or of the melodramas of Kotzebue's day" (*Heritage* 259).[67] The author has proven, therefore, by her resorting to the uncommon or singular, the insufficiency of her experience. Had she known more men, she should have written a more recognizably representative story with properly masculine characters, rather than these indifferent specimens who draw on inspiration from inferior genres—the "flash" novel or outmoded German melodrama. In other words, Anne Brontë cannot write believable men because the men do not behave as he believes they ought.

Kingsley of *Fraser's* struggled to believe in Markham too: "Gilbert Markham is not one character oscillating between his old low standard and his higher new one...but two different men, with no single root-idea of character to unite and explain the two opposite poles of his conduct" (*Heritage* 272). Kingsley thus does not believe *Tenant's* author sufficiently accounts for the change or transformation in Gilbert's behavior. He also takes Markham to task for leading on his first paramour, Eliza, whom he flirts with seriously before being captivated by Helen Graham. Kingsley thus does not perceive Markham as teachable but rather as a character in two incompatible fragments. His suggestion that Gilbert oscillates without explanation indicates he does not grasp or credit the second half of Brontë's didactic project—the teaching of men as well as women. I will explore this in detail in the second half of this chapter.

Fraser's addresses the love-plot more generally but takes no moral stand,[68] arguing instead in the context of a broader ethos of composition the reviewer perceives Anne Brontë as having transgressed. Apart from the "splenetic and bitter tone" used to excoriate characters as "brute" and "demon" when the reviewer is not convinced they deserve it (*Heritage* 271), he argues against Brontë's use of an incongruous possible. The love plot is not impossible—*Fraser's* forgoes the hyperbole of claiming it is, admitting freely that his more usual objection is that fiction authors fear "wonders"—a fear that accrues shame on the author. Yet Kingsley here introduces a paradox: authors should not fear wonders but nor should they invent stories—plots, in other words. The "outward miracles" ought to have probability on their side—which Kingsley says Brontë has failed to ensure, opining that Gilbert is simply not good enough for her. In saying so, Kingsley pays Helen a significant compliment[48] and understands how her bitter experiences might lead her to search for a man of substance—of a "calibre" more equal to her own. Yet he demonstrates also his denial of Brontë's project, the culmination of this denial coming in his objection to Helen's journal. Importantly, Kingsley reads Tenant as a satire and proposes to judge it accordingly, arguing that excess coarseness of approach harms satire, robbing the novel of its "real usefulness." This excess coarseness he locates in Helen's diary, filled with written curses, implying that the transgression is all the worse because the oaths are made permanent and thus more meaningful in the text itself by being written down in cold blood by Helen, whose diary it is.

> The author introduces, for instance, a long diary...But what a great mistake, to use the mildest term, can there be than to fill such a diary with

[48] Contrast with the *Athenaeum*, who found Helen difficult to believe in as a character, and the *Spectator*, who does not doubt it but found the myopic focus on her strength undercut the ability to care about her.

> written oaths and curses, with details of drunken scenes which no wife, such as poor Helen is represented would have the heart, not to say the common decency to write down as they occurred. Dramatic probability and good feeling are equally outraged by such a method (*Heritage* 271).

which Kingsley attributes to Brontë's being "tempted naturally to indulge her full powers of artistic detail" to the point of "hav[ing] forgotten that there are silences more pathetic than all words" (*Heritage* 271). Kingsley wishes to be left to mentally supply the poignancy of the drama, not trusting Anne's writing to equal his own imagination.

We come, then, to the crux of the matter. The debate over whether the novel is too coarse to be good satire brings us to Kingsley's most telling objection to the diary, which is not its permanence but his inability to believe that such a document could exist at all in the world of its text. Dramatic probability, he asserts, dictates that, even had such hideous events occurred as set down in the diary, a wife "such as poor Helen" would be incapable of representing it. Kingsley thus proposing a telling paradox: if the reader is to believe in Helen as a wronged wife and a respectable lady of sensitivity, it is impossible that she so violates propriety as to admit to her abuse with sufficient detail or honesty as to render it so coarse in the eyes of the reader. It is, therefore, against "dramatic probability" that the diary exists, not apart from its being uncouth or in poor taste but because it is so. Kingsley does not address how her keeping silent is supposed to affect the reader more effectively, leaving us to infer simply that holding feminine silence about it would allow us to think better of her as a woman. This appears especially ironic when the novel already contains a wronged woman who suffers in silence—in the form of Millicent

Hattersley so that Helen—already her opposite in other ways—would contradict her own character and make herself redundant.

Brontë counters her critics in her Preface, asserting with more directness than either of her sisters that she has the right and likewise the duty to depict her subject,—even quoting from the *Spectator* review directly regarding her supposed "morbid love of coarse, not to mention the brutal" and addresses the oft-made assertion that her role as fiction-writer is to be "agreeable," countering that her role is rather to tell the truth, including its disagreeable elements, because not to do so is disingenuous and indeed undermines her goal. To give her reader incomplete information and "represent a bad thing in its least offensive light" is dangerous (*Tenant* 3-4).

She also references the *American Review*'s review of *Agnes Grey*, clarifying that the aspects of the story deemed too "extravagant" were in fact those "carefully copied from life, with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration (*Tenant* 3)."[69] Thus Anne Brontë asserts not only that she is drawing from life rather than some morbid[70] fancy of her own but that she has the right to do so—and a larger aim in mind that doing it simply because she can. As we saw in the reception of *Jane Eyre*, the objections to extravagance often connote a kind of mercantile exchange—an excess that cannot be properly paid for, putting it in keeping with the idea of being moderate, of living within one's means, even in terms of fictional subject matter. What is especially telling here is the objection to extravagance being levelled at what literally happened—that one's status or place within the system could make one's own experiences off-limits for representation because the reader had deemed them too extreme—or unlikely.

Reviewers' conception of the probable connotes a preference for moderation, for the typical and representative—characters and events that follow reviewers' experience of people in general. This almost definitionally requires the omission of characters—and events—deemed too far outside the typical, but as touched upon in previous chapters, such an approach and value system has blind spots, relying on readerly experiences—that can disagree with each other—and providing impetus for readerly experience to trump authorial experience or observation. On its face, valuing the moderate seems in line with the desire for fiction that was moral, that affirmed middle-class values. Yet closer examination reveals that the exclusion of that which is inconveniently extreme or singular is itself a value—even if such characters or events are possible. Such moderate realism, carefully calibrated to readers' taste—and its requisite omission of unpleasant or challenging truth is precisely what Brontë sets herself against, suggesting it is not so much an alignment with truth as with a comfortable status quo. Her resistance has clear consequences for her reception.

Equally does Brontë set herself against false romance, finding fault not only with those in authority for not teaching young people truthfully about the dangers of coming of age, marriage, and vice, but with what young people—both men and women—are taught instead, and what young people use to fill the gaps in their polite, overly curated education. Teaching girls that they can, by their very virtue redeem sinning men—and likewise teaching men to expect it—creates in *Tenant* a false relation between the sexes that in fact hearkens back to courtly romance and exposes its falsity.

Brontë's determination therefore to depict a woman who has the strength of heart and spine to endure Arthur Huntington and the commitment to romantic truth not to

substitute a more comfortable fiction or to elide the details of her suffering occurs in opposition to Kingsley's ethos—already one of the more [tolerant] in the reviews, despite its initial condescension. This diary, the key to both Markham and the reader understanding Helen's character and true predicament is, however, the aspect of the novel Kingsley can least abide. Nevertheless, Anne Brontë advanced a text that situated fault in social systems as well as in individuals, driving reviewers to take refuge in unbelief, even in the face of her commitment to a mundane possible.

Part II: Experiential Gothic as Opportunity for Learning and Teaching

Morality within *Tenant* thus is social, founded on relationships between the characters which in turn build to larger institutions, particularly marriage. Brontë maintains that the fault in the marriage of Helen to Huntington is the incompleteness of her knowledge of his character beforehand and therefore of the education that could have given her sufficient insight not to be taken in. It is not original to say so.[49] However, the less frequently remarked dimension to this failure is Huntington's. His education has not included lessons in empathy, so that his character is allowed to form as self-absorbed, uninterested in his effect upon others. It is in *learning* this empathy, taught by Helen's writing, themselves a record of Helen's education through experience, that Gilbert Markham proves the power of Helen's Gothic to effect change in a willing reader. Understanding the world relationally, Brontë discerned how vital reaching both halves of her readership, providing a narrative both cautionary and aspirational[71] and thus making use of both realism and Gothic in an effective combination for critique. Gilbert begins the

[49] See particularly Clara Poteet's "The Word of a Woman, Thanks Be to God: Women's Writing in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall." Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature, vol. 138, 2020, pp. 253–267.

text as a male character who must learn empathy to be able to marry. Helen's journal furnishes a teachable cautionary tale that enables Gilbert to experience Helen's entrapment and Helen an opportunity to process and interpret her own experiences.

Gothic in the text enables the reader—and Gilbert—to experience Helen's entrapment in marriage and ultimate extrication therefore in a way that sidesteps the conventional boundaries in terms of realist content—by making space for the characters' intense experiences deemed too extreme or disagreeable for "natural" fiction.[72] By forgoing the moderate realist approach advocated by reviewers, Brontë is able to critique false romance ideals while resisting exclusionary limits placed on realistic fiction and allow her to elucidate her conception of romantic truth. It provides the most thorough way to educate readers while simultaneously structurally endorsing through its first-person narration, like *Jane Eyre*'s, the right of her heroine to those selfsame experiences—and interpretations.

Brontë's Gothic is not supernatural, even by suggestion. Anne's reliance on first-person narrators thus centers the act of interpretation within the text. Markham as the first narrator begins self-satisfied, confident in his readings of the evidence before him. He is proven wrong through the perusal of Helen's diary, whose respective narrator contradicts his prior interpretation. Allowing Helen's words to do their work thus, Anne asserts Helen's right not only to have her experiences but to narrate and interpret them and the characters they contain. This is further reinforced by Helen's use in-text of her diary as an instructive text, as its success as such reinforces the sufficiency of Helen's evidence.

On the one hand, Gothic is an effective mode for depicting intense experiences immersively in a way that demands readers experience point-of-view character's

experiences in what I call 'experiential Gothic.' The lack at times of independent verification of those experiences invites the reader to experience uncertainty alongside the characters and mirrors the lack of acceptance or endorsement (thus far) of such experiences by cultural arbiters. On the other hand, Gothic as the form of romance in current use in nineteenth-century fiction—with or without such arbiters' full approval—furnishes Anne with the tools to mount her critique of false romance.

The enclosure of her diary within Markham's epistolary frame—whether bipartite or tripartite[50]—suggests a structural echo of the mental enclosure of Gothic itself. Yet the Gothic of entrapment spills into his narrative and fills her diary, and she is not freed from it until Markham learns from the diary's account of her earlier experience, proving to be the ideal of the novel: one who is teachable, able, after all, to profit from the experiences of another—in this case, his wife-to-be. Those who view his sharing of the diary with Halford as a typically male, entitled engulfing of her identity for his own benefit seem not to recognize that Helen was not above breaching a confidence in a good didactic cause herself, as she does when she shows Ralph Hattersley his wife's letters to prove his conduct upsets her. And furthermore, that the novel itself endorses that breach of privacy through the change it brings about in Hattersley in a way that Huntingdon's rifling through Helen's sketches isn't endorsed; there is a difference for intruding on others for gratification and doing so to teach.

Markham begins the text satisfied with himself and his readings, believing himself rationally perceptive and equal to adversity. In this, and in his penchant for description, he evokes Lockwood from *Wuthering Heights*, as *The Examiner* notes and

[50] Catherine Quirk argues for a two-part structure. I think it is three though I take a different approach than Sook Kyong Hyun.

invites comparison with Austen heroes. He, as our first narrator, forms the frame for Helen's diary, seeming to mirror middle-class moderate assumptions[73], only to be gradually but fully countered during Markham's immersion in Helen's diary, during which he learns that her apparently extreme responses to her neighbors and surroundings have basis in her previous experiences—experiences those neighbors cannot possibly share in without her intervention. The closing of the frame thus occurs with a narrator and reader who have learned the *why* of Helen's behavior and thus Helen's and Markham's mutual liberation can occur.

This is what Doreen Thierauf calls the "Gilbert Problem," giving an overview of critics who have responded to Gilbert in the context of Tenant as "a politically coherent text." She responds particularly to Maggie Berg, who cast doubts on Gilbert's being reformable in that he nevertheless uses Helen's diary to "forge homosocial bonds with his brother-in-law, Hartford" so that "Gilbert's strongly sexualized devouring and copying of Helen's text—he is "panting with eagerness" when he "deliver[s] [him]self up to its perusal"—is tantamount to "a certain symbolic violence" which Berg directly links to the many scenes in which Gilbert's actual physical violence erupts, particularly in his cruelty towards Helen and her brother (21). Berg does indeed emphasize Gilbert's resentment of Helen's "knowing gaze" in church, and his pursuit of her "accompanied by his dog and his gun, clearly out for the hunt. When he comes upon his prey unexpectedly, Helen reacts like a typical trauma survivor". Thierauf and Berg apparently agree that Markham is "[in]capable of reading the signs" and "indulges in entitled fantasizing about Helen, enjoying the emotional pain he is increasingly able to inflict upon her, even mentioning his "selfish gratification" when he learns of Arthur's abuse of her, even as he is,

according to them, "just as competitive with other men as Arthur, brutally whipping Lawrence, Helen's feminized brother (who is said to look very similar to her) and gloating about how much Lawrence bleeds after the assault," which Thierauf asserts "constitutes the novel's most brutal assault" and is all the more upsetting because he is sober at the time. Thierauf concludes that "The Tenant, after demonstrating for hundreds of pages that it is impossible for women to "cure" men of their violence, ultimately falls victim to that very fantasy" (MeToo, np). Strikingly, however, the examples both scholars draw upon *precede* the culmination of Markham's education. He is indeed selfish and *initially* struggles to correctly interpret Helen before he learns better.

Markham and his enclosure of Helen's diary in a book-length letter to his brother-in-law are controversial Those most critical in the last century read him as a barely-contained sadist and patriarchal authoritarian who undermines the novel's feminist project by marrying Helen effectively violates his wife by sharing her diary with another man, subsuming its narrative within his own self-congratulatory accounts. As we saw, contemporary reviewers saw him as a ruffian-fop unfit to be joined with a virtuous and beautiful heiress. Yet these resoundingly negative perspectives require a flattening-out of Markham's character. Moments like this if looked at in isolation from surrounding moments provide ample suggestion that Markham is, as he says himself, spoiled by a mother and sister who make much of him, and being among the most eligible young bachelors in his province. One major interpretative question—and stumbling-block—within the text is how to read Gilbert Markham, letter-writer, sometime narrator, and second husband of Helen Huntington née Graham. Is he just another violent man in a novel about patriarchal violence against women and other dependents, a usurper of

Helen's diary and thus her autonomy? Is he a useless fop unworthy of Helen's hand and wealth? Or is he materially changed, capable of being worthy?[74]

Even in recounting his most violent moment, Markham retrospectively owns he has made Lawrence his "victim" whom he is prompted to aid by "conscience" (*Tenant* 109-10). His previous sense of superiority to Lawrence and Helen by extension comes out in the reported dialogue: "[my hand]'s good enough for *you.*" His attack is violent enough that Lawrence bleeds through his own handkerchief. It is indeed a poor picture Markham makes of himself, and the older Markham narrating from memory acknowledges it. Insulted by Lawrence's repudiation of his grudging aid, narrating Markham admits:

> I left him to live or die as he could, well satisfied I had done my duty in attempting to save him—but forgetting how I had erred in bringing him to such a condition, and how insultingly my services hand been offered—and sullenly prepared to meet the consequences (*Tenant* 111).

Older Markham does not make excuses or attempt to explain the incident—indeed, his initial non-explanation, that he was "impelled by some fiend at [his] elbow" (*Tenant* 109), indicates his lack of good explanation. That said, the narrator understands as his past self chooses to forget, that he was wrong in attacking Frederick and that Frederick's reluctance to be helped by so insulting an attacker is reasonable. Notably, also, even younger Markham, though sullen about it, recognizes Lawrence could press charges for the attack. The Brontës, for all critics argue that they do not understand men, grasp how enmeshed in contemporary masculinity violence is. Their project is not to deny that capacity but to depict it thoroughly and put the reader on guard.

The reading of Helen as a trauma survivor is accurate but Gilbert is not "gloating" over Lawrence's bleeding but rather giving a thorough account of his own past transgressions, in keeping with Brontë's ethos of full disclosure rather than suppression of unpleasant details. Likewise, his self-admitted "selfish gratification" at finding Huntington has so entirely betrayed Helen is not the mark of a sadist but of a man who takes what he recognizes as ignoble comfort in knowing that Helen's affections are estranged permanently from her husband. Markham has no sanctioned claim on Helen at the moment of that gratification and is well aware of it—though he does have hope.

However**,** even so early in the text as the second chapter, we have glimpses of the potential in Gilbert Markham. In the first place, though he is not overly complimentary toward needlework, he is aware of it in some detail, finding Eliza Millward "as usual, busy with so piece of soft embroidery (the mania for Berlin wools had not yet commenced) while her sister was…mending stockings" (*Tenant* 23). Markham's setting of the scene from memory here suggests his observation not completely limited to the masculine sphere—he is aware not only that his beau and her sister are sewing but *what* they are sewing, the "soft embroidery" juxtaposed against the older more practical sister's darning of stockings, foreshadowing the change in Markham's relative opinion of the two sisters (as the partial result of Helen's insights and his friendship with her).

Of greater importance is the ethos he articulates to his mother long before he is in love with or being transformed by significant exposure to Helen

> 'I was not sent into this world merely to exercise the good capacities and good feelings of others—was I? —but to exert my own toward them, and when I marry, I shall expect to find more pleasure in making my wife

> happy, and comfortable, than in being made so by her. I would rather give than receive' (*Tenant* 54).

This ethos of wanting to be of service to his wife, rather than expecting her always to serve him, establishes a bedrock difference between him and Helen's first husband or would-be lover though Markham does not yet know that. Young Markham and the reader can make that comparison only retrospectively as Helen's diary exposes the utter self-absorption and selfishness of Huntington, whose claims to desire reform are as aggressive as they are insincere during his courtship; and of Hargrave, who goes so far as to suggest rape to expedite their relationship. However, Gilbert's ethos also separates him from his father in a manner more immediately evident. By his mother's account, Markham Sr. was a good husband:

> 'I'm sure your poor dear father was as good a husband as ever lived, and after the first six months were over, I should as soon have expected him to fly as to put himself out of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife and did my duty; and he always did his—bless him! —he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without reason, always did justice to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay—and that's as much as any woman can expect of any man' (*Tenant* 54).

Mrs. Markham it appears never got—nor expected—a remotely equal marriage in terms of accommodation of her wishes relative to her husband's, relying instead on the idea of separate spheres. Her husband's job is to appreciate her domesticity and not take too much advantage of his power over the family. Gilbert's intended approach indicates a

departure from the enforced separation and the extreme power imbalance, viewing marriage as more of a partnership.

But he still has much to learn as he demonstrates on meeting young Arthur, catching mid-fall when Helen appears, "her neck uncovered, her black locks streaming in the wind" to demand her child "in a voice scarcely louder than a whisper, but with a tone of startling vehemence" until "seizing the boy, she snatched him from me and then stood with one hand firmly clasping his, the other on his shoulder, fixing upon me her large, luminous, dark eyes—pale, breathless, quivering with agitation" (*Tenant* 21). Wavering between responses to what Markham perceives as an overreaction on Helen's part, he describes her in a manner suited to a Gothic haunting, suggesting, just after his observation of her home, that the haunting is indeed of a living woman, whose motives and decisions are mysterious to her neighbors who cannot understand the intense protectiveness she has for her child nor her unsocial behaviors and indeed pathologize both, seeking to make her adhere to their standards of society, all attempts at which she makes herself less popular by resisting.

This version of Markham, satisfied that Helen overreacts, and certain of the romantic attraction between Helen and Frederick Lawrence has misread matters entirely and failed a test of empathy by arrogantly refusing to go to Helen for her offered explanation and lashing out at her brother. Belatedly, he receives her diary, once he humbles himself and admits to his wrongheaded assumptions.

The diary begins by establishing Helen's early commonality with Markham. She is observant and confident in those powers of independent observation, chafing at a guardian's attempt to temper her observation with the elder's experience and derived

wisdom, yet Helen's experience is different. The narrative does not appear on its surface Gothic—the bright ballrooms and drawing rooms of the London season apparently antithetical to the gloomy isolation or half-wildness a reader might expect. Yet Helen's entrapments begin almost immediately. The suitor her aunt prefers, old Mr. Boarham, importunes her with a proposal her as yet unexpressed doctrine of romantic truth will not allow her to accept. His suit is followed by her intoxicating but already violent and uncertain courtship by Arthur Huntington. Warned against his rakish propensities by her aunt, Helen insists on the ethos of 'innocent until proven guilty' but with a determination "not to consent until I know whether my aunt's opinion of him or mine is nearest the truth; for if mine is altogether wrong, it is not he that I love; it is a creature of my own imagination" though she clings to an "inward instinct" that hers is the correct opinion (*Tenant* 143). While this could be read as rationalization, I read it rather as a young, inexperienced woman attempting with incomplete information to do the best she can in ascertaining truth, highlighting the dangers inherent to wishful thinking, which sways Helen more than she is yet aware.

Huntington first seeks to embody the false romance ideal of a rake reformable by the intensity of his bride's love but is exposed even before he can fully articulate that idea into a petty tyrant, by seeking to learn her feelings for him by forcing him to show her artist portfolio's "bowels," to which she responds by burning his portrait. His anger and desire to punish her for this drive him to pay further attention to Annabella (his future mistress), and ignore Helen. These events drive the susceptible Helen to rationalize:

> He meant no harm—it was only his joyous, playful spirit; and I, by my acrimonious resentment—so serious, so disproportionate to the offence—

> have so wounded his feelings—so deeply offended him, that I fear he will never forgive me—and all for a mere jest! He thinks I dislike him, —and he must continue to think so. I must lose him for ever; and Annabella may win him and triumph as she will (*Tenant* 153).

The rapid succession of dashes conveys how Helen is jerking herself from one thought to the next in a tenuous yet inwardly incontrovertible chain of logic: his intention, her resentment, its lack of proportion, his response, culminating in her despair and explanation, concluding that she has permanently destroyed her chances with him, that it is, in fact, her fault for having provoked him. The thought pattern is recognizable as that of an abused partner—she has effectively gaslighted herself, leaving her open to further romantic pressure from Huntington.

Helen's first husband is revealed thus as the first of the novel's tyrants, successfully entrapping her into marriage by pretending to desire the reformation Helen longs to help him achieve. Specifically, he seeks to enforce a double standard in terms not only of conduct but of essence. Helen is an "angel of Heaven" and her judgments of Huntington, Annabella, and the male friends who come to Grassley are unfair because they are all creatures of "earth." Huntington bids her "be not too austere in your divinity and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal'" (*Tenant* 237), embodying this false romance when he attempts to justify his adulterous affair with the wife of his friend. While seeming to compliment—and even exalt—his wife, Huntington in actuality attempts to give himself *carte blanche* to ignore his marriage vows. By setting Helen on a pedestal, he effectively seeks to put her out of his way. To be an angel is to be so perfect, Helen may (according to *his* logic) be handily disregarded in favor of her "earthly"

counterpart. Later, Huntington's desire to cast his bouts of drunkenness as superhuman unintentionally exposes how mundane his tyranny is.

Even after Helen's marriage to Huntington, the Gothic is of a domestic kind, as Tamara S. Wagner notes (117).[75] She makes no grand descriptions of Grassley Manor. Grassley is her home and, in her first months there, she is happy enough, too caught-up in her husband to essay an exhaustive physical description in her personal journal: she knows what her home looks like. Indeed, nearly all her reportage is of dialogue and descriptions of *mental* interiors, indicating she herself is the initially intended reader and she has focused on what is of true interest to herself. Having been entrapped into loving Huntington, she does the job as thoroughly as she can, in spite of the importunities of the novel's second tyrant. Like Huntington, Hargrave is exposed through his actions.

As Huntington sinks further in Helen's regard through drunkenness, emotional neglect, and infidelity, Milicent's brother Hargrave seeks to displace him in Helen's affections. His attempted affair overtly reveals the domestic violence at the heart of his courtship. Helen, directly refusing an Ovidian courtship of this type, accuses Hargrave of insulting her. In a courtly romance, making love—of a sort—to a married woman is at times allowed—a caveat, however, that Helen scorns. Tellingly, Hargrave also employs language nearly identical to Huntington's: Helen is an angel and a divinity—rather than an earthly, human woman, to be worshiped, not actually listened to. Unlike Huntington, however, he consciously pursues the role of protector—all but calling himself her knight-errant. Hargrave's reading of the situation is that, having given her heart to unworthy Huntington, she "must be miserable" and thus can and *ought* to love him. Helen counters that such adultery would bring her no lasting happiness (*Tenant* 321). Hargrave however,

persists in his misreading of their relationship. Equally tellingly, he later attempts to give Helen a way to salve her conscience: to say he "overcame her" so that she had no choice but to submit—essentially suggesting she abnegate responsibility by claiming he raped her. By saying so, Hargrave unwittingly exposes the hypocritical and predatory side of this social construction, and his true status as tyrant willing to entrap Helen when she fears it will send her to Hell to submit. Her refusal is absolute and she threatens him with her palette knife (*Tenant* 342). Helen is not proof against honest romance but refuses to be seduced by high-flown and self-serving rhetoric—she deals in practical realities. Passionate avowals of impossible devotion are false coin to her—and her judgment is borne out when Hargrave betrays her plan to escape to Huntington.

Both Huntington and Hargrave misread Helen. Her patience is perceived as passivity, her self-respectful dedication to her marriage vow ignored. Both fail to empathize with her position and her attempts to correct their misreadings fail. She learns from these failures herself and records them in her diary, where they become teachable moments as Markham reads. Thierauf wishes to blame Markham for the worst of his thoughts, revealed to us through his frank first-person reminiscences. Yet he is able to respect Helen's wishes and ultimately learns. Shortly after reading the diary, he is able to acquiesce to their parting (*Heritage* 389-91), contrasting with Hargrave, so that Brontë invites the reader to judge him on his progress, rather than solely by earlier actions the older Markham clearly regrets.

Notably, the diary is allowed to stand in its entirety, uneditorialized and without Markham's annotations, a structured declaration that Helen's experiences need no external corroboration and therefore that the diary is an independently valid depiction of

her experiences. Markham's—and the reader's—immersion in the diary is complete and uninterrupted, contributing to its Gothic. Likewise, it demonstrates Markham's respect in later years for diary—while he is enclosing the diary in a long letter to Halford, he didn't attempt to adulterate his wife's account. The diary has done vital work already—on returning it, he does not push Helen toward Ovidian love or prolong the scene past what she can bear.

However, the enclosure of the narrative is not as tidy as these other[51] scholars argue, which can help to explain why the harsher critiques of Markham have been left to stand. Markham's education is not complete until he can overcome the "selfish satisfaction" Thierauf notes. He tries to bespeak Helen's hand in advance of her husband's death. Yet Markham learns not only from the diary but from Helen's letters as sent to her brother. In them, Helen recounts her experiences ministering to Huntington in his decline.

His proprietary logic and willingness to attach his happiness to his rival's death in the moment of farewell, having read Helen's journal, suggests his reformation is not yet complete—but not that it is impossible. Thus, I must amend Kostka[76] and McMaster to say that it is not only his reading of the diary that effects Markham's maturation but also his reading of her letters to Lawrence, recounting her reckoning with Huntington and his with the consequences of his actions. Experiencing this reckoning, if at second-hand, enables Markham by the time of Huntington's death to respond differently than he himself predicted he would: "I had no reason," he tells us, "to disguise my joy and hope from Frederick Lawrence—for I had none to be ashamed of." Lest we mistake his

[51] See Elizabeth Shand, Elizabeth Langland, and Catherine Quirk.

meaning, he elaborates. “I felt no joy but that his sister was at length released from her afflictive, overwhelming toil—no hope but that she would in time recover from the effects of it” (*Tenant* 432). Markham’s ability now to think genuinely unselfishly indicates his reformation, begun by his reading of Helen’s journal, has been brought to fruition by reading her letters, further emphasizing the importance of sharing writing and correspondence more widely than initially supposed, so that we may perhaps forgive Markham for sharing his wife’s diary with a “homosocial” friend by remembering that the combination of it and the letters—also included in the book-length letter to Halford, are responsible for inspiring Markham’s latent decency, even as Milicient’s, shown him by Helen, inspired her husband’s. The key, of course, is that both Hattersley and Markham have this decency—it has not been entirely omitted or, as is more likely in this novel of social effects among individuals, eroded away.

To read this sharing of vital information that has transformative potential as solely a betrayal of confidence or an act of appropriative violence that reaffirms patriarchal domination risks missing this key aspect of the novel: learning is a social activity, whether one learns vice or virtue; furthermore, omitting upsetting details about characters gives an incomplete picture and lessens a text’s didactic potential, so that this reading, while feminist, achieves a similar end to the early reviews—in judging Markham by the worst of his freely made admissions and declaring him violent and his redemption a “fantasy,” Thierauf dismisses the didactic core of the novel, as does Berg, who compares Gilbert to a Tarantula spider who “gobbles up” his bride (Berg 22).

The educations of Helen and Markham, firmly embedded in both content and structure of the novel and contrasted with the unapologetically self-absorbed tyranny of

Huntington and Hargrave, indicate that Helen's marriage is neither shallow wish fulfillment nor a compromise to Brontë's proto-feminist project. While I think by the standards of its decade and century *Tenant* is radical, doing what male authors did not yet dare, Helen is not the only one who needs to adjust her understanding in the world of this text: Markham must do so also. Furthermore, who marries whom is not a trivial matter in this text but serious business. Brontë contextualizes Helen's remarriage by detailing Helen's first marriage and the other marriages in Huntington's set, as well as Helen's extramarital pursuit by Hargrave. On remarriage, she takes Gilbert Markham who has learned to temper his arrogance and is most likely to treat her as an actual partner.

Her first husband dies, and she marries one of her own choosing and liking, without application to anyone else—including the reader. Thus, the experience and maturity gained by both parties to this marriage—no trifling thing, either—are put to good use in their marriage to one another. And, as a woman of substance, Helen is able to marry freely—we have no sense that she does so under any sort of duress. The improbable, then, is not situated in a drunkard succeeding in dying young but in Helen's success in finding a second husband who acknowledges her personhood and overcomes feeling threatened by her wealth: itself a critique by example of marital attitudes, if not laws.

Conclusion

Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is constructed of pairings: realism with Gothic, teaching of men with teaching of women, critique of false romance with critique of exclusionary realism. Her improbable is situated in characters and situations that, while possible and bearing no trace of the supernatural, were nevertheless objectionable

to contemporary reviewers because they were too uncommon and too unpleasant to be representative or pleasurable in reviewers' estimation of the typical, driving many of them to take refuge in expressed unbelief. Anne Brontë defied the assumption that outliers are inappropriate or not useful for reaching readers even as she resisted the idea that an author's or reader's gender should be a deciding factor in what was permissible to write or read.

As Vanden Bossche states, the reviews are themselves inherently political, aligned with an ideological status quo regarding what is acceptable in fiction, particularly in natural fiction that has the right to be believed and therefore to mount effective social critique.

Anne Brontë enlarged her fiction of the possible with a Gothic approach designed to immerse her readers in the experience of her heroine Helen. Helen's narrative is enclosed but uncorroborated, a declaration of her right to her own experiences and to her interpretations of those experiences, even in the face of being misread by the novel's men. Through the writing of her journal, Helen processes what has happened to her, countering Huntington and Hargrave's misreadings of her, drawing their justification from old romances, whose ethos Helen learns to perceive rightly as self-serving and insincere, weaponizing the sexual double standard against her. Thus, Helen's diary proves useful for teaching herself and then both male and female readers about the dangers of false romance and essentiality of empathy in marriage. Markham, while imperfect, is central to Brontë's educational demonstration, learning from Helen's writings as their first reader and showing their success on himself.

Publishing *Tenant* on 1 July 1848, Brontë would have been privy to much of the reception of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* and registered the ripples made by her own *Agnes Grey.* She would therefore have understood prior to publication how unwelcome several aspects of her novel would be to those in charge of the literary status quo, in terms of depicting coarse scenes of drunkenness and marital strife, and of a wife deserting her husband. The incorporation of Gothic into her realism therefore enables the immersive narration of troubling experiences, using the Gothic as a way to augment realism with what realism would seek to exclude, producing a necessarily hybrid text. This Gothic of domestic abuse and entrapment of women by men who pretend to be romantic heroes but expose themselves as tyrants enables Anne to critique false romance even as her unflinching depictions of abuse inside and flight from a lawful marriage demonstrate her challenge to comfortable assumptions about marriage, education, and the author's obligation to be agreeable.

Reviewers largely refused to credit Brontë's attempt, resisting the far-reaching implications of believing such misery possible in mundane reality. This refusal allowed them to refuse her critique for straying too far from the agreeable. *Tenant* was too unpleasant, too exaggerated, too unvarnished. The critique it offered of education and marriage practices was too threatening –even though Brontë stayed resolutely within the bounds of the possible.

Within *Tenant*, Anne Brontë unfolds her idea of romantic truth—a truth that does not succumb to illusions and likewise demonstrates emotional awareness and intelligence—learnable by readers as well as characters and derived from relationships between individuals. Shocking upon its release, *Tenant* remains a contentious novel, with

some critics eager to assert its failings, particularly as a feminist text, or to pathologize its author's preoccupations with certain subjects.

This union within terminology between the romantic and truth is vital to understanding Anne's work—and it establishes kinship between *Tenant* and the novels of Charlotte and Emily. All three sisters strove for an understanding of romantic truth and while their respective definitions possess fine distinctions well worth consideration, they likewise demonstrate commonalities that ought not to be overlooked—not least by scholars of Anne Brontë who wish to read her as in some essential way sundered from her more high-flown and romantic sisters. The Brontës share an insistence that truth may be found in [objects] shaped like romance—though Anne stipulates the most aggressively that the [chanciness] inherent therein. Vitally**,** this idea of a sincere, generous truth aligns with a romantic view Anne Brontë seems to prize. It is. This distinction is not to sunder her from her sisters or suggest an innate superiority in Anne's fiction. Nor is it meant to imply that Anne was not othered by her reviewers, as in fact, she was. It does, however, underscore a commonality between Anne and her eldest sister. In *Tenant*, as in *Jane Eyre*, the apparently improbable is diagnostic, with the wish fulfillment of the heroine happily married suggesting that the rarity of such an occurrence—and the associated critique of marriage if an unhappy resolution is to be more expected or better believed.

Conclusion

The Brontës are a rarity—three author sisters who evolved their bestselling works alongside each other and who definitely discussed each other's work. That the Brontës were intimately familiar with each other's novels is a matter of fact, not conjecture, and thus putting the novels into conversation critically is a natural impulse especially because they had much in common and yet remained distinctive in their specifics.

The Brontës were willing to state the existence of things their contemporaries found distasteful and at times disbelieved and sought to pathologize. Readers can rightly point out, however, the popularity of the Gothic and the success of Defoe and Richardson in the autobiographical form in the eighteenth century. Yet the Brontës were writing at a peculiar moment—in which the antagonistic relationship between reviewers and authors combined with the resistance to the novel as a genre barely becoming respectable. New Romantic criticism held sway when they undertook to write and the stalwarts of Victorian criticism were still establishing themselves. While fiction had won in terms of popularity, critics were still leery of the form and seemingly anxious to establish the importance of telling the truth *pleasingly* in a way that recalls notions of the moral-probable from the eighteenth century. Fiction that purported to be serious rather than frivolous ought therefore to be natural and moderate.

What stands out about all three Brontës in different ways is their refusal to be relegated for their generic hybridity. They would not refrain from addressing matters or using constitutive genres that were popular but looked at askance by contemporary critics of the novel. Nor would they confine themselves to the insubstantiality of writing romance in the pejorative**.** They meant their works to be taken seriously, the critiques

therein emphatically included and they augmented natural fiction with the elements they judged best-fitted to their respective tasks.

Working out the Brontës' place in nineteenth-century literature is challenging, leading a reader into thickets. One of these is the thicket of genre. The natural, the Gothic, and at times folklore are constitutive of the novels, which has prompted critical debates about which genre if any triumphs in each respective text. I respectfully counter that each of the constitutive genres is essential—that the novels are not battles royale between Gothic and realism but genuinely hybrid works.

The Brontës spoke from a margin, if a short-lived one, as women authors daring to depict experiences deemed too unpleasant and uncommon to be worthy of attention at their precise literary moment. To this end, they borrowed freely from popular but critically marginalized genres. There is a kind of symmetry in their use of Gothic to expand possibility within natural, proto-realistic fiction. The same can be said for the folklore in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Genres of suspect origin served to depict suspect experiences.

Another thicket regards the novels' immediate reception. Reviewers suggest a theory of how art ought to be while editors enforce a different notion of how art *must* be to see print and sell well. Charlotte in particular encountered this gap in writing her first novel and sought to overleap it with her second, achieving substantial popular success. Yet the question of how to read her reception and that of her sisters remains. Can novels be popular yet subversive? I argue that though the Brontës' novels do not propose systemic solutions to the problems identified therein, the rejection of the narratives in some quarters as unbelievable suggests that the novels' sentiments *are* dangerous. In

exposing omissions from natural fiction in their specific literary moment, the Brontës implicitly register the inadequacy of assumptions that uphold natural fiction as moderate, middle-class, and representative of what is worthy of representation. Toi admit Jane Eyre's or Helen Huntington's possible reality is to implicitly admit marriage is dangerous, even for women who believe in its institution. To admit Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff's possible reality is to acknowledge that dangerously passionate people exist barely two hundred miles from London.

Twentieth- and twenty-first century critics also debate about how to approach the Brontës. Are they feminists? Are they radical or regressive? Did they exist in relative equanimity with each other or do the later novels repudiate the former? For anyone who argues that there is something uniquely, positively moving in a Brontë novel, there is a counterpoint scholar seeking to demonstrate how dangerously naïve and problematic the positive reading is.

As stated elsewhere, Charlotte learned from *The Professor* that while reviewers were dismissive of romance, editors viewed romance as highly marketable and thus her second novel took on hybridity. Yet she also made the Gothic essential to her social commentary.

Jane Eyre and *Wuthering Heights* are often read together given the similarities are as striking as the distinctions between them. Both use the changeling motif to convey the instability of the worldly status quo and yet expose the use of that motif by characters in-text as a calculated attempt to other vulnerable characters for individual gain.

To complicate the conversation is *Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* so often read as the ruthlessly realistic antidote to her elder sisters' romantic or mystical excesses. Yet to

suggest *Tenant* is a direct refutation of either of her sister's previous works is to miss the enduring commonality among the three. Moreover, what binds *Tenant* and *Jane Eyre* together is their focus on ethics of love and marriage from a Gothically immersive feminine perspective—and their endings which expand the possibilities of wish fulfillment. While the happy endings of both novels are simultaneously beloved and problematized, their perceived improbability contains the seed of an important critique: that a woman's happiness in the situation of either Jane or Helen should be so unlikely as to sow disbelief in worldly or skeptical readers points to the serious dangers inherent in early-Victorian marriage and the social requirements enforced thereupon.

One thing that is interesting in criticism of the last fifty years is the suggestion that the persistence influence of secondary respective worlds on Charlotte and Emily undermines their claims to realism and the implication that this makes their work less serious, demonstrating that the genre hierarchy privileging and restricting realism continues past the nineteenth century. How much imagination to use in fiction is still a matter for debate and too much imagination implies than an author cannot cope with reality as such—their ability to critique is undermined as their secondary worlds implicitly pathologized, judged interlopers on the more serious project of realism so that twentieth-century critics broadly echo nineteenth-century ones on some points.

What seems clear to me is that these worlds were spaces in which Charlotte and Emily grappled with their preoccupations, especially ones that did not 'fit' in realism but were still possible and still carried weight.

The impulse to dismiss work apparently tainted by their juvenilia also seems to link up to the broader urge to pathologize and potentially diagnose the Brontës' mental

states and those of their characters. Charges of morbidity and monomania in the nineteenth century shifted in the twentieth and twentieth centuries into psychoanalytic readings about repressed male desires and tendencies that imply in similar fashion that the Brontës are too extreme to be taken as seriously as more moderate authors, that their critiques are limited by their deviance from the norm.

Why should this be? The work of the Brontës invites readers to contemplate what to do when the genre of fiction taken most seriously cannot meet one's needs. One place Brontë scholarship and indeed novel scholarship more generally may go in future is examining potential nuerodiveristy in a way that does not implicitly or explicitly privilege the neurotypical, Gothic being a natural choice for authors to explore experiences that do not align with realism's assumptions about one's perception aligning with others' perception to build to consensus and thus and external sense of reality.

On another side appear to be those critics who find the Brontës' wish fulfillment undermines their claim to seriousness, as in the case of the ending of *Tenant*. The early feminist critiqus of *Tenant, Jane Eyre,* even *Wuthering Heights* and *The Professor* are undermined by the omnipresence of male violence. This too is at times linked suggestively with Brontë psychology—their sadomasochism and taste for violent men—and is distasteful to many feminist critics of the last half-century.

One takeaway from this is how perspectives within a school of criticism necessarily shift over time to reveal an interesting paradox. The Brontës could not be third- or fourth-wave feminists. The women in their texts must marry—or remain chaste. All their heroines marry. Yet why should depictions of violence inherently undermine their feminist critique that precedes ours by more than a century? Nineteenth-century

reviewers denied unnuanced imitators of *Jane Eyre* who titillated the reader without seeming to care about reader morality or well-being. Modern critics anxious to demonstrate the regressiveness of the Brontës seem similar in their need to demonstrate that the Brontë take on marriage is not good enough—any radical potential neutralized.

However, I propose that the Brontës' undertaking of violence in men indicates an understanding of the risks women take—must take—in order to be sexual beings in their own time. Each depicts marriage struggles and Charlotte and Anne both examine also the risks to women of affairs outside marriage. Their examination does not attempt to pretend violent men exist or that they are a great rarity. They understand rather than violence and masculinity are bound together in the nineteenth century and attempt to cope with this fact. The Brontës' focus within their novels on the dangers of characters *misreading* others to gain power over each other underscores the essentiality of empathy and engagement in good faith—while giving detailed looks at the interiors of characters who are at times terrifyingly flawed. The novels are also clear about the risks inherent in romantic intimacy, in a way that recalls Anne's commitment in her Preface to telling the disagreeable parts of the truth in order to arm the reader. In suggesting this reading, I do not wish to dismiss the vital concerns my fellow Brontë critics and readers but rather that we be careful not to lose or efface the nuance of these texts in the application of our frameworks.

In the end, discussing the radicalism or subversiveness of a text is a risky business because such questions are matters of shifting ideology. As soon as a text is identified as radical, other scholars assemble to point out how the structure of the text, in fact, undermines any previously perceived subversiveness to reinforce a dominant order.

Differing metrics can be used to measure and re-measure such things. What I ultimately want to show about the Brontës, however, is that the Brontës' critiques do not need to be in perfect accord with twenty-first century notions of what they ought to have been—which is another way to say that the Brontës do not owe us what we want to hear any more than they owed it to their initial reviewers.

The arrival of George Eliot's fiction within a few years of Charlotte's death and her rise within a decade suggests the Brontës anticipate the opening-out of the status quo. George Eliot too would wrestle with similar questions of women's experiences and choices regarding marriage but from an arguably more fully realist perspective in her greatest novel *Middlemarch*—though her favorite of her own works, *Silas Marner*, is remarkable for its blending of realism with folklore.

Notes

[1] Watt traces the early-Victorian movement of realism (réalisme) as a term from one denoting how Rembrandt differed from neoclassical idealism to one applicable to literature, beginning in 1856, when French author Louis Edmond Duranty founded the journal *Réalisme* (p. 10). The OED likewise finds a reference to realism the same year in John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* III. See p. 103. The word "realist" as pertaining to an artist or writer the OED dates from 1868 with A.C. Swinburne writing in the *Fortnightly Review*: "No modern realist has excelled in quaint homeliness. Piero's study of a Nativity." However, in the January 1847 review of *Azeth the Egyptian*. *A Novel* in the *Athenaeum*, pp. 88-89, we see the following: "The author's descriptive styles though temperate as compared with the writing of some of our *realists* in fiction, is too ambitious: but his tale, as we have said, held us enthralled" (89, emphasis mine). This suggests that, in fact, the term "realist" was not entirely unknown before Ruskin and Duranty. Certainly, the conventions of realism are forming and evolving in the 1840s.

[2] McKeon's tacit but recurring questions: "How do people conceive the relationship between fact and fiction," and "history and literature?"; "To what degree is the narrative of history itself subjected to a rationalizing periodization?"; "What is the influence on narrative epistemology of empirical stratifications of abstraction and objectification in natural and legal studies?; "What are the epistemological consequences of alternative modes of narrative 'technology'—of orality, literacy and typology?" (27-28).

[3]Reviewers may be informed by many notions of probability and its lack but the two sorts that come out most overtly and often in their own statements on novels can be placed in two broad categories: improbability of plot and improbability of character Improbabilities of plot comprise plot developments that, according to the reviewer's reading of a text, are insufficiently foreshadowed or accounted-for and/or are so far outside of what the reviewer experiences as real or likely that it is noticeable and thus worth remarking upon. Such improbabilities are frequent in romances (and picaresque novels) which are frequently episodic and driven by sudden developments of incident.

Improbabilities of character are ones that do not necessarily affect the plot *per se* but, according to the reviewer's reading, are elements or aspects of the character that the reviewer finds him- or herself unable to believe in. At times, this disbelief will, in fact, encompass an entire character who is either so flatly underdrawn or so exaggeratedly caricatured that the reviewer rejects the entire character's possible existence within the realm of the probable.

Though often distinguished in this manner, improbabilities of plot and character can intersect, and both are common in romance. These improbabilities speak to two possibilities. On the one hand, we have inadequate foreshadowing—an action that might have been understandable had its groundwork been laid more thoroughly, or an aspect of personality better accounted-for. On the other hand, we have actions or personality traits that fall beyond the pale—and no further foreshadowing could reconcile the reviewer to its presence because it quite simply 'can't exist' or 'wouldn't happen.' Declarations about a text's improbability are at times accompanied by an explanation or lecture on what the reviewer believes is proper for a text of its kind, which can be usefully revealing about the reviewer's genre expectations. While certain preferences appear idiosyncratic to individual periodicals or reviewers, commonalities emerge.

[4] I am not speaking here about financial success. As the critics themselves frequently bemoan, coarse, immoral or titillating texts frequently sold well—a part of what made such texts dangerous in their estimations.

[5]Jesse Molesworth's study *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (2010) gives a thorough account of how chance operates in these early novels.

Molesworth defines chance as "general causelessness" as opposed to "accident" as "an event without an immediate cause" and notes how "realism" and "probability" and "verisimilitude" are hard to divide into separate terms but places chance in conversation with other novelistic devices and conventions. One locus of chance in the eighteenth-century novel—and eighteenth-century reality—is the lottery, which Molesworth reads as a way of introducing readers to the improbable possibility of "events notable enough to be worthy of narrative representation" (26-7).

[6] James Beattie (1735-1803) was a poet who also wrote *Essay on the nature and immutability of truth in opposition to sophistry and scepticism* (1776). Richard Hurd (1720-1808) was an Anglican Bishop and author of *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), one of the texts grappling with romance as an archaic genre and make a case for its continued artistic value, if mainly as a relic:

> [P]rodigies [of ancient and medieval romance] we are now contemplating, had their origins in the barbarous ages. Why then, says the fastidious modern, look any further for the reason? Why not resolve them at once into the usual caprice and absurdity of barbarians? This, you see, is a short and commodious philosophy. Yet barbarians have their *own*, such as it is, if they are not enlightened by our reason. Shall we then condemn them unheard, or would it not be fair to let them have the telling of their own story (2-3).

With this sense of fairness in mind, Hurd undertook a history of Chivalry and of chivalric romance.

[7] In his Spectator essays 411-21, Joseph Addison puts forward an influential position regarding imagination. He assumes a propriety is inherent in highest expressions of imagination and understanding, though he makes his distinction between kinds of men, rather than kinds of art. He likewise observes the utility of novelty in art though he believes its power subordinate to that of "*beauty*" (italics his). Likewise, Addison accounts for differing taste in art but argues that for "true relish" and "right judgment of a description" is needed "a good imagination" and an ability to assess "the force and energy" of the diction. To be "deficient" in either quality is to fail to "see distinctly all its proper beauties."

Addison further refers to the "fairy way of writing," a phrase he attributes to Dryden. Such writing contains figures that "have no existence but what [the poet] bestows on them," including supernatural characters. Addison observes: "Men of cold fancies, and philosophical dispositions, object to this kind of poetry, that it has not probability enough to affect the imagination." Addison defends the innocent pleasure fairy-writing affords to writer and reader alike and declares Shakespeare its best practitioner.

[8] In Chapter 3, "Defoe and the Statistical (Il)logic of the Novel" Molesworth notes how Jakob Bernoulli is translated into the *future* tense when, in fact, the rise of probabilistic thinking really acted like the opening of Pandora's Box, promising forbidden knowledge but instead offering mere percentages, likelihoods, and approximations. The grammatical slippage in [the translation of Bernoulli] is a telling one: Bernoulli tantalizes with the promise to find out 'what the weather *will* be a month or even a year from now' when in fact his methods can only tell us what the weather is likely to be like, or what it *should* be like" (99, emphasis his).

[9] Elizabeth Ermarth writes about the importance of consensus to the formation of realism within texts, constructing agreement through the corroboration of multiple perspectives:

> [To] the extent that all points of view summoned by the text agree, to the extent that they converge upon the same world, the text maintains the consensus of realism; to the extent that such agreement remains unsupported or becomes impossible, to that extent the realistic effect is compromised. It is not only the presence of points of view that confers verisimilitude; it is their consensus alone that homogenizes the medium of experience and thus objectifies a common world (x).

[10] Though Watt mentions *plot*, April Alliston suggests that he in fact situates probability or lack thereof in *character*, an observation she unfolds in her article "The Female Quixote and the Novel" in which she argues first that "the primary formal crux linking conventions of gender and genre can be found in conventions about the representation of character in literature" which she links directly to probability (251). The female Quixote figure is, she demonstrates, steeped in the "improbable", the "exaggerated," the "hyperbolic" (261). Specifically, the manner in which the extreme level of feminine sexual fidelity is extolled in eighteenth-century fiction represents a moral code that is already "antiquated" in the eighteenth century. Alliston suggests this nostalgia for the quasi-chivalric is evidence the novel is feminized but it seems equally likely that implicitly holding women to the standard of fidelity so celebrated in such novels, improbable and borderline unattainable as it is, flesh and blood women's sexual behavior can be dictated. This improbable figure, then, is dangerous on the one hand because it gives women readers archaic, high-flown ideas now out-of-place in the actual world, and on the other hand because taking that ideal seriously sets women up to fail. Furthermore, the interaction of character and plot herein demonstrates how intertwined those two novelistic structures can be—when one begins talking about one, one ends up discussing the other.

[11] This also explains why, as Shattock points out, romances set the past presents a kind of buffer between the reader of the present day and the events of the text, however fantastical, marvelous, or improbable, making them more acceptable. Thus, plots centering on previous centuries could be set in England or on the Continent and be tolerated if not adored by critics who deigned to touch novels at all in that period. Eastern tales, also, when perceived as meeting a minimum level of quality, were allowed, even if set closer to the present day.

[12] Trumpener hints at her argument first in her Preface (pp. xii-xiii) but explicitly discusses the Gothic novel as among the "formally experimental and now less studied literature" that is in opposition to "canonical English literature, which is in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a "narrowing" literature "obsessed with refining then redefining, English literary style, with analyzing the nuances of English sensibility, and with increasingly pastoral redescription of the English landscape" (16). Trumpener thus outlines in a different way the literary status quo ascendant at these times and sets the Gothic—as well as historical fiction, the picaresque and antiquarian literature as running counter to it.

[13] Joanne Shattock. *Politics and Reviewers: The* Edinburgh *and the* Quarterly *in the Early Victorian Age*. Leicester UP, London: 1989. Overall, Shattock seeks to put the nineteenth-century *Reviews* into proper context, explaining such conventions as the quarterlies' belief they were "separate from 'The Press' and its attendant evils" which she lists as "subservient political affiliation, paid employment, and the ungentlemanly aroma of trade, or more precisely, profitmaking" (6). Further conventions include the editorial we and nominal incognito.

Shattock points to and approves John Gross's comparisons: a review functions like an up-to-date encyclopedia and a magazine like a "theatrical troupe" (7).

[14] At a time when other periodicals seemed content to treat novels as the genre *non grata*, *Blackwood's* was, on the contrary, giving lengthy reviews of notable novels, including *Frankenstein* (1818), *Adam Blair* (1822), *and Graham Hamilton* (1822). In the 1820s, their focus became divided between reviews and the publication of original poetry and prose, but in the 1810s and early 1820s, they not only noticed the burgeoning novel form but were at times effusive regarding their developing theoretical conception of it. See also "Hints to a Young Author from a Very Old One," "On Novel-Writing" and "On the Preternatural in Fiction," discussed in Chapter 2.

[15] Leslie Marchand, best-known as Lord Byron's biographer and the editor of his letters, wrote a book on the *Athenaeum* in 1941. In it, Marchand observes that the *Athenaeum* was "less homogeneous than some of its contemporaries" in part because its reviewers were widely diverse in their fundamental beliefs, "from the radical Dilke to the generally conservative Henry Chorley; from the jovial and sometimes irreverent Thomas Hood to the pious and orthodox Reverend Hobart Caunter; from the logical-minded Sir Charles Morgan to the sentimental Miss Strickland or Miss Barret" (230). He impresses upon us that claiming the *Athenaeum*'s contemporary reviews "were the result of mere personal whim, prejudice or stupidity is to misread, or not to read at all, the literary and social background of the time. In fact, the opinions of the *Athenaeum* reviewers reflect, it will bear repeating, with a fascinating accuracy, the current in intelligent, though not frequently the most advanced, views on almost every subject they touch" (231-32).

Marchand also notes that by 1830, New Romantic criticism, heading by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt—among others—was ascendant and his account of the periodical critics' belief regarding *poetry* highlights that for early or just-pre-Victorians, the written medium that captured most of their attention was poetry—and that it was the poet, rather than the novelist—uppermost in their minds as regarded their theorizing about literary art (232-45). In fact, Marchand notes that "the prejudice against the novel as a literary form persisted in the thirties" but "[e]xceptions were made for the historical novels of Scott's and a few contemporary novels with a purpose or a moral such as R.P. Ward's *De Vere* or eighteenth-century canonical novels" (298). He adds that the novel did grow to be less maligned under Dilke though "it was not until the social novels of the forties and fifties had demonstrated its possibilities as a practical agent in the enlightenment, that the novel as a literary form came to be accepted without condescension" (299).

[16] For instance, the *Quarterly* only intermittently cared about novels. *Oliver Twist* was the only novel reviewed by the *Quarterly* in 1839, and then the Review proceeded to ignore novels again until May 1843, wherein Elizabeth Eastlake published her review of *The Lady of the Manor*, which also functions as an essay on the value of evangelical novels generally (pp. 25-53). Her provocative joint review of *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* comes in Dec. 1848. Whitman Elwin's September 1855 review of Thackeray's *The Newcomes* is the *Quarterly*'s only novel review to follow it in the next six years.

[17] Keen explains the incursions of Gothic in Charlotte's novels by arguing that they are breaks from the main plot—relatively short pockets of time in which the laws of realism do not apply, allowing Charlotte to transgress against them when she needs to but return afterward, not much the worse for wear. Keen cites the Red Room incident (as do I), the three-day period Jane spends on the moors after leaving Thornfield, the industrial digression and Shirley's composition exercise in *Shirley* and the summer holiday and opium episode in *Villette*. Keen is astute and her theory is sound; however, while such theory can account at least partially for the Gothic, it cannot account for the fairy legends Charlotte sprinkles throughout her texts.

They are too frequent and too necessary to the plot. Besides which, Gothic permeates more, in these texts, than simply the annexes Keen addresses.

[18] My project deals with the English novel. For this reason, I am largely omitting notices of translated texts because the translation process—and its success—often occupies significant space in the review. (I have occasionally made exceptions for particularly well-known texts or authors (i.e., Hugo, Dumas, or George Sand).

I also omit reviews of texts that comprise many tales or sketches as miscellanies. However, this is a good opportunity to note that a) such tale collections sometimes appear under the heading of Novel Reviews and that the genre terms for long-form fictional prose were uncooperative. *Agnes Grey*, for instance, is called a tale. And while myriad books and articles have been written on the distinction between romance and novel, examination of contemporary reviews reveals that the terms were not so sharply delineated as twenty-first-century scholars might wish. It was fairly common for the review of a long prose fiction set in the past, which we might call a historical novel, to be subtitled rather 'historical romance' on its title page, and to then be referred to as both 'romance' and 'novel' in the course of its review.

I have, therefore, looked at reviews of tales, romances, and novels that were long enough to be published separately, to determine when and how probability and its lack were of concern to contemporary reviewers.

[19] Though it is also worth remembering that this reviewer interrupts himself when referring to *Frankenstein*, terming it a "novel, or more properly, a romantic fiction"

[20] Intriguingly, this contributor neglects to mention Samuel Richardson, perhaps indicating a rejection of the sentimental tradition of Richardson and others that existed in opposition—sometimes overtly and sometimes less directly—to the kind of satirical proto-realism of Fielding.

[21] From "Why are Professional Men Indifferent Poets?" Jan. 1821 pp. 415-19. Furnishes a useful contrast. Thomas Doubleday suggests that "the office of the poet is entirely different; his study is to adorn and embellish, to represent objects, not only in their most striking lights, and their most fascinating colours, but to add to them new properties, and represent them in all the splendour of redundant beauty or, when he condescends to strict delineation, it is only in the most beautiful objects, which defy his skill to represent them with borrowed grace (416)". Thus, novelty is the part of poets, as are exaggeration and passion. The novelist, on the other hands, ought not to invent so wildly or passionately.

[22] This resolution divides *The Professor* from her juvenilia, much of which is written in an effusive style strongly influenced by Gothic fiction and by *The Arabian Nights*. See Christine Alexander's Introduction to *The Juvenilia* as well as her article "'That Kingdom of Gloom': Charlotte Brontë, the Annuals, and the Gothic" (*Nineteenth-Century Literature* 1993).

[23] In its review of Gaskell's *Life*, the *Remembrancer* morally exculpates the authoresses but also refuses to recant its past reviews: "Here we are taught that the private side of a character may be in strong contrast to its public manifestation; that it needs rare discernment to form a true estimate of a writer from his works, and that the boldest, most fearless style, may emanate from a nature which has its sensitive, shrinking, timid side. We believe that all the critics thought they had a tolerably tough nature to deal with, that there was no need to sugar the bitter draught in this instance, and when a woman assumed a masculine tone, wrote as well or better than any many among them, and showed herself afraid of nothing, that gallantry and patronizing tenderness which is commonly bestowed upon women was changed to gall" and "our hearts bleed indeed" to know she cried over the review in the Times (*Heritage* 370-71). Though even that is flourished with the condescending "of all things in the world to weep over."

[24] Barker also dismisses the novel as "simply" a reworking of a piece Branwell wrote at seventeen. This question of influence and inspiration is, of course, a complex one, and the interrelatedness of Charlotte's and Branwell's juvenile Angrian writings is well known. That Charlotte should revisit themes that occur in an earlier story of her brother's does not seem a disqualifying observation.[24] The Brontës were all precocious enough to experiment with literary production as teenagers—and even as children—and several of the themes underpinning their juvenilia would recur in their mature works. Christine Alexander, by contrast suggests that *The Professor* is actually a departure from her juvenile productions, indicative of a transition Branwell did not live to make. Ultimately, a reading more aligned with Alexander allows us to take into consideration the bourgeois *moderation* of much of the novel. (Alexander xxxiii).

[25] The author enumerates the "reappearance of the dead" and "the struggle of evil beings for ascendancy over human nature among those supernaturalisms acceptable to Christians as neither ghosts nor demonic possession are, apparently, particularly doctrinally challenging, but rather provide a useful locus for moral instruction. He traces the pleasure of "superstitious horror," beginning with the classical playwrights but

continuing into modernity "partly from the revival of old ballads and partly from the importation of German books," (649)

[26] The novels reviewed: Miss Hamilton's *Modern Philosophies* Godwin's *St. Leon*, Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, Mrs. Trollope's *Vicar of Vrexhill, Ten Thousand a Year*, Mr. Warren's *Now and Then*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Madame de Malguet*. Aquilius and the curate also reference other authors, including Fielding, Scott, Addison, Bunyan, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and others, as appropriate.

Aqulius coins the word "simpletonianism" a term referring to having a good understanding of how to write foolish characters and an equal understanding of when and where they are appropriate.

[27] They criticize the hypocrisy of the Puritans who dismiss fiction but revere Bunyan—and accuse them of "drowning" the drama.

LYDIA "I can never forgive her passage across the heath, and her desolate night's lodging there.
CURATE: "But you will remember it without pain, for it was at once the suffering and the triumph of woman's virtue" (474).

[28] The review in *Era* was the most staunchly supportive: "There is nothing morbid, nothing vague, nothing improbable, about the story" which yet "lacks neither the odour of romance nor the hue of sentiment" but also avoids "vulgar scenes" or "vice made charming" (*Heritage* 79). While this is undoubtedly the most positive review, the reviewer risks contradicting himself and also incorrectly asserts that "no woman *could have* penned" the novel (*Heritage* 79, italics his). The reviewer leaves it open to wonder whether the review would be so positive had Brontë's gender been openly revealed—considering the reviewer's emphasis on such being impossible. The review does demonstrate, however, that even in England, the sense of *Jane Eyre* being morally questionable or edging on coarseness, was not unanimous.

[29] Eugene Forçade provides a particularly useful perspective on Charlotte's novels because, as a Frenchman, he does not excoriate her on moral or religious grounds as some of his English colleagues do, this helps expose which concerns were thoroughly English in origin.

[30] Cree Lefavour addresses Brontë's popularity on the other side of the Atlantic while Chris R. Vanden Bossche gives useful analysis of how Jane's genteel and middle-class identities collide and how those collisions affect her reception, citing Rigby's review in the *Quarterly.*

Curiously, after the release of *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, reviewers seemed to find *Jane Eyre* shone by comparison. Of the seven reviews of *Tenant* I found, five mentioned the perceived superiority of *Jane Eyre*: *Literary World, North American Review, Sharpe's*, *Rambler*, and *Fraser's*. It is perhaps a mark of how incensed the reviewers were by *Tenant* that Charlotte's novel appeared so much more appealing in hindsight.

Notably, E.P. Whipple of *North American Review* reviewed both. *Sharpe's* and *Rambler* did not initially review *Jane Eyre* at all, only registering their relative approval after *Tenant's* publication. *Fraser's* reviewed both and in both reviews made gendered assertions, but again we see *Jane Eyre*'s stock rise in relation to the less pleasant, more improper *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*—with reviewers who had not even touched *Jane* formerly registering their preference for it.

[31] Elizabeth Rigby's infamous review for *The Quarterly* (*Heritage* 106-11) does not number improbability among her many complaints about the text, but as a commoner who married into the aristocracy, it was not necessarily in her interest to do so. She did unbraid Charlotte for coarseness, accusing her of class discontent and asserting that no *true* aristocrat would conduct him- or herself abusively toward their paid subordinates as the gentry in the novel do. She also (controversially) prefers Becky Sharp as a character to Jane, claiming "there is none of that unity about [Jane's character] which made little Becky so grateful a subject of analysis" (*Heritage* 107).

[32] Heta Pyrhönen's *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and Its Progeny* (2010) reads *Jane Eyre* through the lens of the Bluebeard tale that is invoked by the novel itself and uses the tale as a framework for understanding the two texts' later receptions. The monograph demonstrates the close relationship possible between fairy tale and Gothic though she argues that it is the Bluebeard figure of Rochester who mirrors and is mirrored by the physical space of Thornfield, while I posit alternatively that perceptually, that mirroring can and does occur through Jane, whose heightened mental states affect how her first-person narrative describes and experiences the enclosed physical spaces including Thornfield in which she spends the bulk of the novel.

Through Michelle Massé, Pyrhönen also reflects on the legacy of *Jane Eyre*, whose "passionate love story" is key to the novel's continued popular success but is also, through its Bluebeard Gothic "about female masochism," which later iterations such as Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* attempt to soften, so as to

make the tale more acceptable as a romance and thus "[d]iluting the gender issues" in the foremother text (117). While I accept and respect the cautionary message, I do not necessarily agree with the interpretation of *Rebecca*. Moreover, while *Bluebeard Gothic* provides a framework related to mine, I focus more upon the fairy legend motif of the changeling and its manifestation within the Gothic and realistic aspects of the text.

Molly Clark Hillard's *Spellbound: The Fairy Tale and the Victorians* (2014) addresses the fairy legend in *Jane Eyre* by putting the "fantastical narratives" and their fey connections into "dialogic" tension with natural history. She rightly notes the 'half-fairy, half-imp' reflection Jane sees of herself in the Red Room, that "self-description" which "is tinged with fear and loathing," Hillard argues, "because to call her 'fairy' is to dismiss her from modern civilized England and place her in a natural, even pastoral, but brutalized setting" (55). I would suggest that the emotional response is correctly identified but more attributable to her painful personal sense of alienation, of not belonging in the house she must inhabit, as nothing in the text seems to suggest Jane desires or feels any temptation towards the kind of worldly modernity exemplified by the Reeds of Gateshead or the gentry invited to Thornfield, including Blanche Ingram.

Other scholars who deal with the Gothic in *Jane Eyre* include E.M. Slattery, Robert Heilman, Simon Avery, and Christine Alexander. Slattery and Heilman agree the novel represents an innovation on eighteenth-century Gothic, with Heilman particularly observing that Gothic is how all her novels after *The Professor* "evad[e] repression" of emotions, "in author or in character" (119) though he suggests *Villette* is the most Gothic of her works (127). Avery argues, similarly to Suzanne Keen, that Charlotte Brontë, unlike her sister Emily, seeks to "contain" *Jane Eyre*'s Gothic within specific physical spaces; whereas, Emily seeks an "almost total overlapping" in *Wuthering Heights* (121). He also notes Gothic is a "particularly female-dominated genre" (121). Christine Alexander reads Brontë's Gothic through the Brontë family's exposure to Victorian annuals, particularly *Friendship's Offering* (1829), *Literary Souvenir* (1830), and *Forget Me Not* (1831).

[33] Others have marked the affinity Jane has with fairies and their lore and legends. Ruth Bernard Yeazell addresses the "mysterious summons," noting how "frustrated" the mechanism of reunion made contemporary readers "who lack the necessary faith in miracles or extra-sensory perception," troubled by the apparent decision to "distor[t] the world of her novel, twisting it into the arbitrary shape demanded by Jane's imagination, or by the fantasies of the novel's most romantic, and least critical readers" (127-28). Other articles that address the folkloric or fantastical include Judith Legatt's article on hair-cutting as a form of mind-control and Alice Diver's reading of Jane as a witch who survives a witch trial.

[34] Franklin also recognizes participation in popular religion was class-dependent, which could help explain why Jane gets much of her folkloric education from her nurse Bessie. It is also true that nurses were frequently from the Celtic periphery, as Katie Trumpener notes in *Bardic Nationalism*.

[35] While denying superstition, Jane nonetheless demonstrates an understanding of folk custom in her reference to yew—a tree of importance to folkloric belief, and she invokes superstition as a black specter." Even when saying no, Jane cannot avoid suggesting yes, suggesting even in her denial that the Celtic Otherworld is as naturally a part of her experience as the Gothic interiors in which she has spent the bulk of her short life—if not indeed, more natural. Hillard suggests, in the end, "Jane the character cannot or will not resist entanglements in the hybrid space between natural and fantastic narratives" (58). I argue, indeed, that she cannot do so, that her ties to both are too deeply embedded, even as is her connection to Rochester.

Superstition, Jane's comment demonstrates, is armed with both deception and witchcraft, but this previous moment is, according to Jane, the result of neither, but rather an occurrence of nature. The occurrence, therefore, is "no miracle," but "her best." This last establishes that nature is feminine, a she, inviting a doubling with Jane herself, and lending credence to scholars who would like to read this passage as an upsurge of spiritual Christianity, which was often the province of women. Yet equally, if not more revealing, is the rejection of the term "miracle" in favor of the more pedestrian phrase "her best." Nature, then, is a working woman, who is not mistress of or mastered by the *deus ex machina* of a miracle but does her labor as well as she can. Hearing Rochester's voice is, therefore, in Jane's experience and interpretation of same, natural rather than supernatural and perfectly in bounds.

[36] Sarah Fermi suggests that the existence of this second manuscript-in-progress undermines the assertion of Gérin and Southgate that Emily required privacy in her metaphysical world—that she in fact was eager to return to publishing. However, the destruction of said manuscript appears to undercut her dismissal.

[37] *American Review, Athenaeum, North American Review, Graham's, Literary World, Atlas,* and *Examiner*. The *Athenaeum* called *Wuthering Heights* a "disagreeable story" that did not "turn away from dwelling on

those physical acts of cruelty which we know have their warrant in the real annals of crime and suffering, —but the contemplation of which taste rejects. In this, the reviewer (probably H.F. Chorley) echoes George Eliot's initial wish that the characters in *Jane Eyre* "would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports." (92).

[38] *Agnes Grey*, the single-volume novel that accompanied *Wuthering Heights* was overshadowed by it, with most reviews mentioning *Agnes Grey* as an afterthought if they engaged with it at all. Emily Rena-Dozier states that *Wuthering Heights* was in turn "overshadowed" by the wildly popular *Jane Eyre* and Winnifrith discusses how Newby's decision to claim *Wuthering Heights* was by Currer Bell to capitalize on that popularity "muddied" the reception of *Wuthering Heights* (Winnifrith 15).

[39] The *Spectator* went further, viewing *Wuthering Heights* as a ploy: "An attempt to give novelty and interest to fiction, by resorting to those singular 'characters' that used to exist everywhere but especially in retired and remote country places" (*Heritage* 217). The author of this unsigned notice does not specify, but his urban disdain is palpable: Ellis Bell is in pursuit of novelty, that is a given, and she is *resorting* to *singular subjects* to achieve this end, the reviewer ascribing Brontë's motive—and her desperation— she is reaching, implying failure, for an author ought, following this assumption, be capable of pleasing novelty without such measures. Additionally, like Chorley, this reviewer offsets a word with inverted commas: character. Here, the punctuation conveys sarcasm and incredulity: such entities as appear in *Wuthering Heights* can be called characters only by courtesy or with the intention of undercutting them.

Furthermore, the reviewer asserts, Brontë fails her own talents "chiefly because the incidents are too coarse and disagreeable to be attractive, the very best being improbable, with a moral taint about them, and the villainy not leading to results sufficient to justify the elaborate pains taken in depicting it" even if "the delineation is forcible and true" (*Heritage* 217). Like Chorley, this reviewer finds the depiction in *Wuthering Heights* coarse and unappealing and not worth the level of effort, implicitly confirming an assumption that the first end of fiction must be to please, to be pleasing. They also agree that Ellis Bell is a talented writer. However, *unlike* Chorley, the *Spectator* reviewer does not specify the "moral taint" as Heathcliff. Additionally, he asserts the text is improbable at its best but again does not specify either characters or plot points that qualify. The reviewer, in accusing Brontë of pursuing novelty in the place of substance, substitutes acid for substantive critique, while still heavily implying the tie between *pleasantly* natural fiction and being modern or up to date.

The last assertion is still worth attention however because it uncovers another suggestive assumption about the role of fiction. The *villainy* is not of great enough *result* to justify the author's trouble. Rather than saying the presence of such villainy is in itself objectionable, the reviewer declares its outcomes not large enough or noteworthy enough—that villainy then, ought to have a grandeur to it. Such grandeur is contrary to Brontë's willingness to expose the capacity for petty evil that is destructive without being grand.

Likewise, G.W. Peck's lengthy review in the June 1848 *American Review*, which attacked the text's coarseness, linking it to an idiosyncratic notion of Emily Brontë's snobbery. Peck asserts that the book and its author are "...unmannered from want of delicacy of perception, or cultivation, or ill-mannered intentionally. The author of *Wuthering Height*s is both." (*Heritage* 236), suggesting that Emily Brontë "offends against both politeness and good morals" for "there is such a general roughness and savageness in the soliloquies and dialogues here given as never should be found in a work of art" and that "would indicate that the writer was not accustomed to the society of gentlemen, and as not afraid, indeed, rather gloried, in showing it." (*Heritage* 236). That the vulgarity is partially affectation Peck undertakes to prove by Brontë knowing better than to swear outright. Yet Peck's imputation of coarseness rests on multiple assumptions: in the first place, that the only rightful writers are those accustomed to genteel society; in the second place, that language such as Brontë uses is possible but should not be used — yet again the notion that the sails of truth must be trimmed to suit a reader's palate. Qualified truth is the goal, then, of good proper fiction.

[40] An examination of *Blackwood's* reveals ways in which it upholds a southern English status quo in criticizing Catholicism and even, in one notable number, suggesting that the Scots' loss to the English during the Stuart Rising of 1745 was to Scotland's benefit.

[41] Edwin Percy Whipple in the *North American Review* (Oct. 1848) reviews several Brontë novels at once, getting several names wrong. He attributes the greater part of Bell depravity to Acton — meaning Ellis, that is to say, Emily, and refers to "Heathcote," compared with whom "Squeers is considerate and Quilp humane. He is a deformed monster, whom the Mephistopheles of Goethe would have nothing to say to,

whom the Satan of Milton would consider as an object of simple disgust, and to whom Dante would hesitate in awarding the honour of a place among those who he has consigned to the burning pitch" (*Heritage* 248). This condemnation of Heathcliff is perhaps the strongest in the contemporary reviews. He is worse than the first two Dickens villains (*Pickwick* has no obvious villain, whereas *Nickleby* and *Old Curiosity Shop* do). Even more than that, the demons of Faust and Paradise Lost would scorn Heathcliff and, according to Whipple, he is too evil to fit into Dante's Hell. Being the worst of the worst, he is hardly possible and certainly morally corrosive.

Graham's Magazine pungently suggested that the author of Wuthering Heights "has evidently eaten toasted cheese," an explanation for the "dream of Lucifer" the text contains (*Heritage* 242), and prompting the reviewer to suggest that it is a "mystery" that "a human being could have attempted such a book...without committing suicide before he had finished a dozen chapters" as the text is "a compound of vulgar depravity and unnatural horrors" that might be written "for the edification of 5th-rate blackguards," and worthy of having been authored by Dicken's Mr. Quilp (*Heritage* 242-43). *Graham's* thus found the text both vulgar and unnatural and likely to drive its author to suicide if the author were properly human. Yet no particular objection is forthcoming, colorful rhetoric substituted for substantive objection.

[42] Chorley acknowledges that the Bells are not shy about "dwelling on those physical acts of cruelty which are known to have their warrant in the real annals of crime and suffering—but the contemplation of which taste rejects" (*Heritage* 218). He goes on to compare *Wuthering Heights* to the novels of Charlotte Smith, whose late-eighteenth-century novels *Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), *Celestina* (1792), and *The Old Manor House* (1793) were popular, according to Miriam Allott.

[43] *Literary World* suggests that Wuthering Heights is bewitching, compelling readers "by strange magic" to "read what we dislike" and "become interested in characters which are most revolting to our feelings." Indeed, "not a single trait of character is elicited which can command our admiration...and yet, in spite of this, spite of the disgusting coarseness of much of the dialogue, and the improbabilities and incongruities of the plot, we are spell-bound, we cannot choose but read" (*Heritage* 234). Literary World presents the reading experience as a rough, even brutal seduction and one to be resented afterwards for enticing/compelling readers to read against their taste and better judgement, overlooking both coarseness and plot improbability. The notion of reading the novel as a seduction morphs in one *Tenant* review to imply readerly rape rather than an act of dubious consent. See *The North American Review*.

[44] This is especially true when combined by the unconventionality or eccentricity of Emily Brontë as viewed through the biography. Judith E. Pike notes the joining of Gothic and domestic violence within the text. While Heathcliff's dominance *seems* almost spectral, his actual actions are more mundanely brutal, further suggesting the blending of Gothic and realism within the text. Terence Dawson reads Cathy's situation as a "teleological process; it traces Catherine's unconscious struggle for deliverance from her own misplaced allegiances—first to her father, and then also to Linton—on two distinct levels of fictional representation" (304). Moussa Pourya Asl takes a more direct Freudian reading of Cathy's fall, attributing her struggles to patriarchy and reading civilization as inherently patriarchal and fatal to Catherine Earnshaw (29-34). Pourya Asl also published two articles concluding that Emily Brontë was a "neurotic" projecting her "obsessions onto *Wuthering Heights* as a text, thus pathologizing the author, twice.

[45] Gérin and Gnassia. Also, Beverley Southgate. Southgate and Gérin both suggest that Brontë's loss of Gondal—that is, her opening-up of her private universe to uninitiated and unwelcome readers in order to contribute to the family financially through publication, could have contributed to the deterioration of Brontë's ability to cope and ultimately even to her death.

[46] The main arena of debate is whether to read Lockwood as a representative of convention or yet another of the text's particularized characters. George Haggerty notes the "inadequacy of Lockwood" (2). Terence McCarthy suggests he is revealed in time to be "in his own way unbalanced" whatever he may believe about himself; whereas, Cates Baldridge sees him as "our representative in the text" and reads him, usefully, as a "'voyeur of rebellion'" which "type is common enough in both life and literature—the personage who is more strongly drawn than the average person to the spectacle of others' revolt against bourgeois morality, but who either possesses too much sense or too little courage himself to significantly transgress the strictures of conventional society" (275, 277). McCarthy calls Lockwood "the image of polite society pushed to the extreme" which is arguably true—much as a critic is a certain kind of extreme. Anne Williams reads Lockwood as "affected" by the natural supernaturalism of the text.

I do not see why he cannot be both. If Lockwood believes in himself as a man of the world with an elaborate pose of misanthropy that is disproven by his contact with the occupants of the Heights and

subsequent 'neurotic' responses that would only serve to indicate how thin is the veneer of superior civilization and socialization among such men—possibly further indicating the limitations of dismissive reviewers.

[47] Ronald Fine notes how Lockwood's dream appears to stay within the bounds of both the possible and probable though he does it by accepting Lockwood *had* a dream, rather than entertaining the possibility that it is an external haunting being rationalized, as Brontë leaves open. Elizabeth Gargano reads Lockwood's nightmare through the metaphor of the palimpsest which "does not ignore the 'violence and rupture' but makes room for "connection and inclusion" so that the dreams "are not isolated responses to individual texts but instead build on each other to create a layered vision whose significance appears different from that of any one fragment taken separately" (78).

[48] As the ongoing struggle with this text shows, not all readers reach this part, and even if they do, there is a heap of scholarship predicated on deciding on what those rules are.

[49] We have also readings of the characters themselves as Gothic. Beaumont focuses on Heathcliff, Krebs on Lockwood. Lodine-Chaffey and Hannon on the role of Gothic abjection on the fashioning of Heathcliff's characters and his villainy. Paula M. Krebs helpfully joins Gothic and folklore, arguing that, indeed, "[t]he ghosts in Wuthering Heights, including the one Lockwood sees, are not Gothic ghosts or magazine ghost-story ghosts; they are folklore ghosts, with roots in Ireland, England's rural past, and British working-class culture" (49). Simon Marsden likewise addresses "spectrality" in *Wuthering Heights*, linking it to Brontë's interest in the sublime.

[50] There is a fascination in *Wuthering Heights* scholarship with potentially diagnosable disorders. Joanne E. Rea traces "the emaciated Cathy who was evidently anorexic, would resemble a prepubertal child like the child at the window by Lockwood's bed" (Rea 263). Emily M. Baldys takes the "debility" of various characters in the text as a matter of course, remarking that "Critics have frequently noted the importance of illness and debility to Wuthering Heights: the significance of Hindley's intemperance, Catherine's anorexia, Heathcliff 's monomania, and many other implications of illness have all been investigated" (Baldys 49).

[51]DeRosa argues: "Contemporary queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and David Halperin have suggested that sadomasochism shatters subjectivity, dissolves selfhood and thrusts the former subject outside of ideology's reach. Freud provides the connection between S/M and an anxiety about subjecthood, and Lacan extends this reading into the realm of the linguistic" (28).

[52] Nelly Dean is frank about her impatience with Cathy, yet that same commonsensical frustration has serious implications at the end of Cathy's life and as Patsy Stoneman's essay on Cathy's approach to free love suggests, fails to quite recognize how serious Cathy is in her commitment to *both* men.

[53] It seems bizarre to many readers that Earnshaw the gentleman-farmer of Yorkshire should bring home a waif who speaks either a foreign language or a mode of English unrecognizable to Nelly Dean. What self-respecting middle- or upper-middle-class man would do such a thing, especially over his wife's objection? Nelly Dean appears to share this perplexity. She describes Heathcliff more than once as a "gipsy" child, as do Edgar Linton's parents. This might seem to be the "realistic" answer to the question of Heathcliff's origins yet even if true, it does not change his symbolic role within the text. He is also called at one point "cuckoo" (WH: 28) for his ability to displace Hindley, a reference that ties him yet more strongly to the changeling figure, for cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of other species of birds, often pushing out an egg of the nesting mother to make room. They are the changelings of the natural world, and Nelly's and the Lintons' questing for an ordinary explanation mark them as having limited understanding of their immediate world and the characters within it.

Multiple critics have attempted to explain—or perhaps explain *away*—Heathcliff's uncanniness by suggesting he is the natural son of Mr. Earnshaw, borne by an unnamed and unrecognized woman in Liverpool. Yet such a conclusion is entirely speculative, as are many of the suggested origins for Heathcliff.

[54] Heathcliff's son is also a changeling, according to Nelly Dean, implicating herself in the central metaphor of the text. This mirrors Lockwood's invocation of the motif during his visit to the Heights and is all the more striking because it occurs in broad daylight on the moor. Indicating her desire to distance herself and her charge from this unnatural child. Even from his earliest description, Linton Heathcliff resembles a changeling though not of the same kind as his reluctant father. Where Heathcliff the elder is the too knowing, insinuating changeling type, his son is the sickly type, stories of which some folklorists think arose to explain infant mortality. In the ethical apparatus of this text, his sickliness indicates the utter wrongness of the consummation between his parents. His own name—comprised of a forcing together of

sworn enemies—is an abomination. Linton is a character of no personal use of anyone, a pawn in his father's plot, and Cathy Heathcliff née Linton's determination to love him anyway is partly to spite her father-in-law and partly desperation, now that she is marooned at the Heights, with its uncouth servants and terrifying master.

Linton's changeling status is endorsed by Nelly Dean: hearing of Heathcliff's plan for the two cousins to marry, Nelly scoffs at the notion of such a "pitiful changeling" presuming to marry her young mistress, who is beautiful and an heiress (WH: 208). Here, we see Heathcliff weaponizing his son's sickliness and his changeling ability to subvert the inheritance status quo—the youngsters' marriage would ensure his possession of Thrushcross Grange as Cathy is both underage and married to his son. She is his legal property herself and anything she possesses becomes his. This is Heathcliff's ultimate vengeance upon Edgar Linton: the legal theft of his daughter and his estate.

[55] Carlisle acknowledges that "[g]limpses of what can be presumed to be Heathcliff's innate, non-vengeful behavior are sparing, but evident, as when he displays obvious scorn for the jealous tendencies exhibited by Edgar and Isabella" (47).

[56]Brownberger establishes the fascination and anxiety around cuckoldry that makes it a rich vein for Gothic, whose "writers began casting the adulteresses and their lovers as the monsters to reassign blame to the true transgressors. Emily Brontë takes a different approach in Wuthering Heights. She challenges the societal treatment of cuckolded men by placing an aggressive monster in the emasculating role. Brontë's cuckold pecks back" (2). Also provocatively, Brownberger asserts that the one being cuckolded is, taking the position therefore that Heathcliff is Catherine's true mate while Linton is a mistake and their marriage an act of cuckoldry committed against him.

[57] Gérin notes that there is "no evidence" to suggest Emily read Christian mystics and observes the lack of Christian imagery she employs.

[58] Gérin further clarifies that Brontë did not simply seek "like many romantics" to escape "conditions she hated" but rather "a positive attainment of ideal conditions"—and that she hated not her duties at the Parsonage "with which she was strangely at peace, but the human condition itself, deprived of its spiritual dimension" (89)—accounting for her misery in the painfully conventional environment of Roe Head.

[59] Rev. Patrick Brontë did not punish Emily Brontë for her metaphysical uniqueness (Gérin 122**)**

[60] A significant number of the reviews for *Jane Eyre* preceded *Tenant*'s publication: *Atlas*, *Athenaeum*, *Critic*, *Spectator*, *Examiner*, *Era*, *People's Journal*, *Fraser's*, *Westminster*, and *Christian Remembrancer*. Several reviews of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* had also appeared prior to July 1848: *Spectator*, *Athenaeum*, *Examiner*, *Britannia*, *Jerrold's*, *Atlas*, *Literary World*, and the unidentified review. From the variety of reception on her sister's work and the notice of her own, Brontë would have been aware what she was getting into though her Preface indicates the backlash was stronger even than she had anticipated (*Tenant* 3-4). All these reviews are in Allott's *Critical Heritage*.

Furthermore, the two major periodicals the Brontës had access to were of course *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's*. Anne's favorite was *Fraser's* though we can see her in agreement with the *Blackwood's* ethos that fiction—even improbable varieties—can be useful to a reader's emotional education. Carol A. Bock argues that the influence of *Fraser's* is more upon Anne's conception of being professional author, *Fraser's* having been thorough in its advice to young and aspiring writers. See "Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser's Magazine*: 'Coming Forward as an Author in Early Victorian England.' *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2001): 241-66.

[61] Elizabeth Langland speaks of Anne's commitment to realism, what she terms 'truth,'" and which she sets against dangerous Angel in the home idealizations so common at that time and notes the "striking parallels" between *Jane Eyre* and *Tenant*, except that while Jane is at a disadvantage of birth, wealth, and appearance, Helen possesses all three and yet still fails.). The contrast suggests that Anne Brontë "wanted to make it explicit that, with all the advantages in the world, no woman can easily reform a man whose habits are already established; far less can she undertake that task if she has the disadvantage of social inferiority" (114).

[62] Like the *Spectator*'s, *Literary World*'s review is lengthy and aggressive, with the added dimension of being an American weekly, as well as electing to employ figurative language when they cannot or will not name their objection. The image of the knotted kite string that literally hangs from *Jane Eyre* itself, coupled with the possibly facetious speculation that the author, who is "coarse almost to brutality" might have blood of an archaic warrior aristocracy, and the metaphor of heraldry "washing" or "effacing" vulgarity are evocative of many things never directly addressed, so that they seem to be shorthand, a workaround, priming the reader of the review to disapprove, at which point the reviewer claims not to desire to give

offense and underscores an implied difference between English and American readers, namely in their ability to perceive the vulgarity of the text relative to its English-ness. Yet he suggests *Tenant* is an undesirable addition to *Jane Eyre*, refusing to grant it independent importance (*Heritage* 257-61).

This vulgarity, the reviewer elaborates later, is wrong because it is in bad taste and, when combined with the "reality" of Bell's depictions, "the weaker part" of the novel's readership "at least are sure to go wrong," as "good taste provides the antennae or feelers as to what is right" (*Heritage* 257, emphasis theirs). The reviewer suggests that readers are lulled specifically by Acton Bell's talent at depicting setting or nature scenes into believing in the novel's human characters, which we will come back to. Such an approach also lends credence to Brontë's positing that the "asperity" of her reception was "more bitter than just" (*Tenant* 3).

Sharpe's, the *North American Review* and the *Rambler* also each remark on the novel's coarseness, with *Sharpe's* going so far as to claim their first prospective reviewer elected to return *Tenant* unread. See *Heritage* 263-66, 261-63, 266-68).

[63] Though, in fact, Rochester is also a man of the world who has traveled—and wenched—extensively before settling into seclusion half-blind with Jane.

[64] This is not to say that Brontë absolves Huntington of his responsibility for his choices or domestic violence but rather that Brontë grasps how his actions are partly due to his relationships and demonstrative of a larger problem.

[65] King, Elizabeth. "'Uncivil Usage': Shifting Forms of Control in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138 (Winter 2020) 124-140. Quirk, Catherine. "Consent and Enclosure in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: 'You needn't read it all; but take it home with you.;" *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138 (Winter 2020): 231-41**.** King and Quirk both reject the idea of *Tenant* as a proto-feminist text, arguing that the centering of Markham undercuts its feminist project. Elizabeth Langland**,** counters this reading. Their appearance in the same issue of *Victorians*, this past year, suggests the ongoing importance of this question as pertains to Brontë's novel, as does Doreen Thierauf's article in *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies* cited below**.**

While multiple reviewers objected to the diary, several scholars view Brontë's novelistic structure as worth analysis. For a succinct account of the critical debate around the diary see Lee Talley's "The Case for Anne Brontë's Marginalia" (132-37). The diary's place in the structure also, naturally, contributes to readings of Markham's character, with Elizabeth Signoretti interpreting his incorporation of the diary in his letter as Brontë's intention to illustrate Victorian men's desire to maintain power over women (21). Contemporary critics display a similar curiosity around Bronte's choice of layered narrative.

[66] Later critics are also ambivalent at best, with some accusing Markham of a kind of symbolic violence through the sharing of Helen's diary with his brother-in-law,[66] and others like the nineteenth-century reviewers, mark his violence toward Helen's brother Frederick and thus incorporate Markham into the web of violence that catches up nearly all other men in the text, as we will see later in this.

Noting the correlation of the structure and the subject matter of the novel, W. A. Craik points out that Brontë's complex narrative is her way of illustrating the complexity of real life (248-49). Naomi Jacobs sees the layered narrative as a strategic device to "deal with the unacceptability of the subject matter" (206). She argues that such topics as domestic violence, the husband's degeneration into alcoholism and gambling and the break-down of marriage life can only be discussed transparently by cushioning Helen's narrative against Markham's more socially acceptable one. Examining the influence of Helen's diary on Gilbert, Edith A. Kostka regards the embedded narration as a crucial means for Gilbert's emotional development (41). Like Kostka, I dispute the interpretation that Markham commits a violent appropriative act by enclosing the diary in his letter. I will discuss this in more detail in Part II. I argue that, equally important, the immersion in Helen's journal is essential but not the only part of his education. He is then made privy to her letters to her brother, with her permission. His responses to these indicate the changes that have occurred.

[67] The reviewer goes on to say that while Markham is possible, he would have been arrested in the USA and perhaps even challenged to a duel or socially ostracized for his behavior. Yet here, the review falls back on casting aspersions on Wuthering Heights whenever there is not enough direct material to object to in Tenant.

[68] The *Rambler*, on the other hand, did object on moral grounds to the love-plot's initial reliance on deception. While conceding that *Tenant* "is not so bad a book as *Jane Eyre*" being a novel, by contrast with protagonists "of decent intentions; and though the same offensive element of interest [desire occurring

outside marriage, presumably] (so that call it) occurs in both of the tales, and in each our sympathies are unwittingly engaged" for an extramarital attachment, "yet the subject of this second passion is more conscious of its real nature than in its predecessor" (*Heritage* 268). The reader, therefore, is tricked into sympathizing with an illicit love-plot. Intriguingly, the reviewer most morally outraged is so because he believed in the romance the *Spectator*, *Fraser's*, and *Literary World* wish to doubt.

[69] *Anne Brontë*, p. 126-27. Gérin confirms for us what Anne puts forward in her Preface to *Agnes Grey* that she actually advanced the ages of her charges, fearing that if she'd put their accurate ages, the reading public would not believe in her characters. The boy who was the original for Tom Bloomfield, Joshua Cunliffe, was aged six years and four months when she was hired on.

[70] This charge of morbidity or similar is likewise leveled at Charlotte and Emily at different times, see their *Athenaeum* and *Spectator* reviews for *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*—and, later, the *Examiner*'s review of *Villette*. It is the *Spectator* Anne quotes directly to refute, objecting to the imputation. It and the *Athenaeum* are, at least, remarkably consistent in their objections to the disagreeable in novels by the Brontës.

[50] Christine Colón gives an overview of scholarship that reads *Tenant* as a "critique of *Jane Eyre*," marking how Margaret Mary Berg and Jill Matus both examine Anne's decision to shift from the focus on Jane as individual to a broader framework.

[72] It can also fill the gaps in the two realist forms Anne uses. Amanda Claybaugh in "Everyday Life in Anne Brontë" argues that Brontë makes "ordinary events" into her particular subject, with *Tenant* "focused on the everyday life of a wife." She argues rightly: "In attempting to depict these events, Anne Brontë confronted the impediments to their depiction. More specifically, she found that the most familiar nineteenth-century plots, the *Bildungsroman* and the courtship plot, were incapable of depicting certain forms of everyday experience," including "work and married life"—necessitating a "breakdown" of structure that is revealing of "what new forms would require" (110).

[73] Elizabeth Langland argues "Helen's experience of claustration" occur as result of "the sophisticated etiquette practices that governed life for a 19th-c middle-class household but also from the related, emerging mythology of the Angel in the House that shaped behavioral expectations for its mistress" (113). Her astute observation helps elucidate the real-world underpinnings of this novel's entrapment Gothic.

[74] Edith A. Kostka notes how Gilbert's epistolary framing of the narrative may appear conventional but "certain personal characteristics reveal him to be an underdeveloped, incomplete young man," whose maturation occurs as he is forced by Helen's diary to come to terms with "female suffering and pain" that challenge his self-focus and containment (42-44).

Likewise, it is not *only* that Markham is a different man and potentially a better one, being by comparison less selfish and more resolute in temperament than the easily bored, dilettante Huntington. It is that he receives education in gender relationships through reading Helen's diary, as Lori A. Paige says. The sharing of the diary later with Halford, in addition to furnishing the novel's frame, allows another male reader to benefit in-text from the diary even as it is likewise shared with all readers, male and female, of the novel itself. See "Helen's Diary Freshly Considered." *Brontë Society Transactions* 20.4 (1991): 225-27. See also Juliet McMaster, who compares Gilbert's capacity for silent earnestness with Huntington's "imbecilic laughter," observing, "Gilbert's moral progress includes not only the curbing of his tendency to frivolity, a growing ability to recognize and properly revere what is good and beautiful, but a regulation of his passionate nature. For Gilbert, though much more moral than Arthur, is not the St. John Rivers to Arthur's Mr. Rochester, all cold reason against fire and passion. Despite some appearances to the contrary, it is Arthur who emerges as the passionless figure. Gilbert, on the other hand, is tempestuous and genuinely impulsive, swung this way and that by his feelings" (365).

[75] Wagner links the "domestic gothic" of the novel to its framing structure. Similarly, Elizabeth Shand argues that the "not particularly elegant" structure of *Tenant* indicates a rebellion against a kind of "perfect" composition that cannot meet Brontë's needs (p. 117). See "Enfolding Narrative in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Refusing 'a perfect work of art.'" *Bronte Studies* 44.3 (July 2019): 292-305. Russell Poole refers to the text's "sporadic Gothic (859)," but I would argue that the Gothic is consistently present once Helen herself enters the text. However, Poole helpfully acknowledges the "dialogic" oppositions between Helen's two relationships, with Arthur Huntington and Gilbert Markham respectively (p. 865). I would augment his dialogic by incorporating the text's second tyrant, Robert Hargrave.

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