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### Article

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## ***Jane Eyre* and social justice: How to survive a (Victorian) ‘witch’ trial**

### **Introduction**

*‘Provincialism and poverty ...passionate poetic power...’*

(Kaplan, Cora, *‘Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 15)

This article argues that *Jane Eyre* was both ‘witch’ and witch-trialled: Brontë’s ‘unorthodox heroine’ is in many ways ‘both revolutionary and licentious’<sup>i</sup> however. By painting her as perhaps ‘too masculine, too sexual,’<sup>ii</sup> she challenges the notion of the universally submissive ‘house angel,’ and brings the various conflicts of a wider societal revolution into the Victorian home.<sup>iii</sup> Likewise, if the witch is defined as one capable of performing magic, and of entering into diabolical pacts with ‘devils,’ then Jane clearly fits this description.<sup>iv</sup> Her peculiar brand of ‘witch-crafting’ is strongly influenced however by the novel’s backdrop of Victorian-era folklore, so that sophisticated tales of supernatural apparitions – ghosts, disembodied voices, and faery-folk – jostle for hearth-space with fading traditions of customary magic and popular rural superstition. Her marginalized, ‘othered’ status - part human, part elf – is highlighted throughout, even during her final ‘triumph’<sup>v</sup> as she joins the satyr-like, exiled Rochester in an inverted Eden of their own making.

In terms of magic, Jane seems to demonstrate control over the elements with fires, hard frosts, storms, and moonlight serving her well over the course of her life, even if she herself is not fully aware of this. From childhood, she summons sympathetic familiars (human, animal, and spectral) who act as her ‘messengers ...spies and companions for life.’<sup>vi</sup> She enters into dark deals with strangers, most of

whom offer promises of escape from adversity and opportunities for social advancement. It is her uneasy relationship with the domestic hearth-fire however (simultaneously representing feminine power and female subjugation) that perhaps best represents her struggles against injustice and lifelong quest for autonomy and equality.

The first section offers definitions of the concepts of witch and witch-trialling,<sup>vii</sup> in terms of their legal, historical, and socio-cultural significance, and insofar as they relate to the ordeals of *Jane Eyre*.<sup>viii</sup> Put briefly, where accusations of witchcraft were made by those holding ‘positions of real power and influence, [it was] treated as a very serious offence.’<sup>ix</sup> Likewise, any ‘society that believes in the power of magic will punish people who abuse that power.’<sup>x</sup> There is much to be gained by ruling elites where they ensure that ‘pauperised masses blamed the rampant devil instead of corrupt clergy and rapacious nobility’ for the various failings of society, not least poverty, plagues and wars.<sup>xi</sup> In the Victorian period, peasant superstitions and rural folkloric beliefs fulfilled a similar role, for an educated, affluent middle-class hoping to guard its increasingly fragile position of societal superiority. The need to create - and be set apart from – colonial ‘others’ was tied to a concept of national identity, ‘establishing an Englishness that depended on the exclusion of certain cultural groups.’<sup>xii</sup> However, ‘changing attitudes towards customary magic among the cultivated and the literate’<sup>xiii</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> century remained in many ways ambivalent, with ‘Victorian Britain [a] far from a disenchanted place.’<sup>xiv</sup> Lingering faith in ghostly apparitions, cunning-folk wisdoms, fortune-tellers, ‘mesmerism, spiritualism, occultism, and ...witchcraft’<sup>xv</sup> was apparent, despite urbanised elites sparking a political agenda aimed at dampening down the traditional folk beliefs of past

generations.<sup>xvi</sup> Jane's final 'flight' into the arms of her chosen Devil, away from the pious St John Rivers - representing religion, polite society, and Victorian frigidity – symbolises the era's struggle between the desire for educated reasoning and a need for primitive, passionate expressions of romantic feeling. When she heeds Rochester's disembodied, ghostly cry, she is evidencing clearly the deceptively subversive power of 'picturesque folklore.'<sup>xvii</sup>

The second section therefore analyses Jane's behaviour throughout the early part of the novel, setting her othered, gendered vulnerability within and against historical templates for witchcraft accusation. Her trial-survival skills are key: she repeatedly escapes or endures near-fatal ordeals, quietly influencing those around to reveal corruption and challenge inequities. Her use of words is always significant: those 'spells' that she casts over friends - and enemies – clearly serve as profound 'vehicles of truth.'<sup>xviii</sup> It is significant that her journey towards spiritual maturity begins at Gateshead,<sup>xix</sup> among those wealthy 'gatekeepers' of power who deny her utterly any sense of kinship or kindness. In keeping with folkloric customs, she comes close here to conjuring the avenging, aggrieved – yet potentially comforting, perhaps - ghost of her late uncle Reed during her trial by ordeal in the red room. The servants gossip afterwards of incessant, ghostly knocking on the chamber door, sightings of a figure in white accompanied by a great black dog, and a mysterious light above his grave. The appearance of her first familiar (Mr Lloyd, the kindly apothecary) soon after, secures her escape from the Reeds' relentless torture. Their unjust accusations set off more torments at Lowood however (examined in the third section) where traditional witch trial ordeals of hunger, elemental exposure, and public shaming, help

to further hone her spell-casting abilities, which will be more acutely tested at both Thornfield and Moor House.

As the fourth section argues, deal-making comes more fully to the fore once Jane graduates from the quasi-coven that is, arguably, Lowood: her devils now fittingly take the form of mysterious, dark strangers offering wealth or prestige. Rochester's marriage offer is the most obviously deviant - and socially defiant - in terms of conjoining crime (bigamy) and sin (adultery). If accepted it would remove them both from the comforts of polite society, to live in an essentially lawless underworld; in the end, Jane's eventual decision to return sees them lawfully wed, but living in isolated premises originally deemed too decrepit for even the insane Bertha Mason to live in.<sup>xx</sup> Her most significant episode of successfully 'dealing' with demons however - by refusing a truly evil proposal - comes at Moor House, in her resisting the temptation to treat with St John, the long lost cousin summoned in the wake of her lamenting on the moor after fleeing Rochester. The hellish terms of his loveless marriage offer would require her to renounce her true nature and various supernatural gifts, which have helped her survive thus far. Her key triumph therefore is in finally accepting her preternatural otherness through Rochester's call, and engaging in one final 'night flight' to live with him unwedded (not knowing he is by then a widower) beyond the strictures of Victorian society.

The article's concluding section represents an attempt to answer the question Jane poses at the very start of the novel: 'Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned?' (*Jane Eyre*, 1847, 18). It examines the role played by those powerful 'others' who either support her (Bessie, Mr Lloyd,

Helen Burns) or attempt to ‘out-witch’ her (Brocklehurst, Rochester, Bertha Mason, St John Rivers) through their own spell-casting or trial-enduring. Rochester is a particularly gifted practitioner of sorcery, having demonstrated the power to survive both ice and flames, and to summon Jane back to him. And yet he needs her help to overcome public censure, financial ruin, maiming, and blindness. As such, one of Charlotte Brontë’s chief concerns was perhaps to highlight just how quickly ‘dangerous social tension(s)’<sup>xxi</sup> can worsen through a systemic demonization of the vulnerable. Jane’s escape from the triadic power and influence of church, law, and familial patriarchy therefore represents a sort of ‘magical’ triumph of near-preternatural proportions:

‘...in the nineteenth century it was only in the fairy tale that Charlotte Brontë was likely to find traces of a non-patriarchal world. The divided world of her fiction has yet one more division, that between the women’s world of fairy tale, and the men’s world of Christianity.’<sup>xxii</sup>

### 1. Scrying, othering and spellcasting amongst the Reeds

*‘On an everyday level witchcraft is neither a feminist symbol, nor a pagan religion, or a fantasy. It is primarily seen as a crime, as a deviation from social norms within a community.’*  
(De Blecourt, Willem, Hutton, Ronald, La Fontaine, Jean, *‘The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century’* (6) (London: Athlone Press, 1999, 151)

Jane’s trials mirror those faced by accused witches during the European witch hunts of earlier eras.<sup>xxiii</sup> She survives unjust accusations, societal and familial abuse and exclusion, poverty, and several episodes of physical and psychological torture. Heartfelt incantations work as spells, whether spoken aloud or silently willed, especially during moments of acute powerlessness and emotional distress, whether post-accusation or mid-trauma.<sup>xxiv</sup> As a quietly powerful, seditious cunning woman, she might have much scope for political or domestic subversion, which is the premise which sparked witch-hunting centuries beforehand. If it is accepted that the concept of

the witch is a ‘cultural construct,’<sup>xxv</sup> then the process of witch trialling – and indeed the novel itself - identifies ‘vulnerability [as] the important constant.’<sup>xxvi</sup> To be possessed of defiant, visible ‘otherness’ is to also ‘walk’ as an accused witch, under constant scrutiny and public censure.<sup>xxvii</sup> Jane’s victories offer useful guidance for survival, as well as suggesting that Brontë must have been acutely conscious of peasant folklore and popular faery tales:

‘Living where she did and as she did, she was aware of the world of superstition and magic, of the Old Religion which had survived in rural England among the less educated and which kept alive a tradition totally alien to the ideals of a progressive, industrial, and patriarchal society.’<sup>xxviii</sup>

Her stereotypical images of the female sorceress owe much also to the dualism of Judaism and Christianity where, as in witch-hunting, women represent either Eve’s sins or the eternal virginity of God’s mother.<sup>xxix</sup> If the links between sainthood, magic, and witchcraft (e.g. in late medieval Europe) were frequently ‘mirror images’ of one other,<sup>xxx</sup> then socio-political events and contexts could easily move ‘an entire society to accept the persecution of women as witches.’<sup>xxxi</sup> Witches tended, to be ‘primarily women, primarily poor, and disproportionately widows.’<sup>xxxii</sup> Outbreaks of sexually transmitted diseases cannot be ignored: where, for example a syphilitic plague amongst soldiers at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century likely led to increased still births, ‘devil’s marks,’ and generalised ‘ugliness,’ this in turn framed sexually active single women as vengeful sorceresses. ‘Accursed,’ sinful men, having had contact with such women, perhaps scorning them, were likely to suffer illness, infertility, or impotence.<sup>xxxiii</sup> There are clear parallels here with *Jane Eyre*. Rochester’s hidden-away wife, Bertha, represents the ‘fallen,’ demon-possessed madwoman, brought low, perhaps through her own promiscuity. She is well placed - and poised - to harm,

murder, or emasculate the men around her at any given moment, should she be given any small measure of freedom.

Political backdrops matter: religious upheavals, socio-cultural revolutions, and institutionalised misogyny make for a fragile, gendered social order.<sup>xxxiv</sup> In Victorian Britain, fathers and husbands were clearly a ruling elite, given their place as household leaders, with freedom to practice formal medicine (itself once seen as ‘high magic’<sup>xxxv</sup>) and act as legislators, clerics, scholars and judges. The apparently frail, but secretly powerful, figure of the other/witch marked the advent of threatening social changes, particularly where increasingly visible levels of female autonomy were an issue. New industries, scientific advancements, increasing urbanisation, and altering demographics,<sup>xxxvi</sup> as occurred in the Victorian era, are not insignificant. Jane, as an unmarried, often overlooked, drab governess enchants a wealthy gentleman and escapes abject poverty several times, as if by magic. She clearly fits the model of deceptively quiet, authority-usurping woman lurking treacherously in the shadows.

Further, if ‘female security lay in conforming to the male ideal’ then any deviation from the notion of ‘sacred female’ (i.e. virgin or mother) could leave independent, unorthodox women open to accusations.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Jane is publicly tried repeatedly, whether in poor schoolrooms or opulent drawing rooms where she has failed to remain unnoticed by her tormentors. Reluctance to keep pace with societal shifts, perhaps through an association with rural customs or superstitions, can lead to being labelled as dangerous, deviant other. Dependency upon traditional homespun charity, rather than seeking out urbanised freedoms or ‘worthy’ industrial endeavour, might be seen too as having dubious links to arcane customs: defiant adherence to



mysterious folk wisdoms of earlier generations might similarly arouse suspicion.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Jane later experiences this at first hand when she encounters St John's charity-refusing servant Hannah; exhausted, ill, and starving, she is reduced to pleading for mercy at the door of Moor House, ['some calls it Marsh End'<sup>xxxix</sup>] after her 'night flight' from Rochester:

'Tell the young ladies. Let me see them-'

'Indeed, I will not. You are not what you ought to be, or you wouldn't make such a noise. Move off.'<sup>xl</sup>

This remark is prescient in terms of predicting Jane's true nature and eventual destiny, but also quite telling in respect of her refusal to quietly accept her assigned social status, whether here as reluctant 'beggar woman' or elsewhere in the novel when she was falsely accused of lying and other misdemeanours. She does not however condemn those who denied her food or shelter at her lowest points in the novel, acknowledging that her own otherness compounded her situation:

'I blamed none of those who repulsed me. I felt it was what was to be expected, and what could not be helped: an ordinary beggar is frequently an object of suspicion; a well-dressed beggar inevitably so.'<sup>xli</sup>

Actively persecuting and prosecuting miscreants, either as witches or religious heretics, was, after all, an entirely 'rational activity given the complex of ideas and circumstances'<sup>xlii</sup> that arise during times of social unrest. The elderly, impoverished, unmarried or widowed woman, might be deemed even more deviant, as Jane was here, because of her eccentric appearance or odd behaviours.<sup>xliii</sup> They were therefore prime candidates for witchcraft accusations:

‘A study of records of the sixteenth and seventeenth century witch trials reveals a "typical" accused - marginal, of poor reputation, and low social status - the kind of person viewed most likely to succumb to diabolical temptation in order to improve their situation.’<sup>xliv</sup>

Charity-refused, curse-muttering outcasts might be blamed for bad weather, plagues, failed harvests and infant mortalities. As Jane’s experiences demonstrate, poor, unmarried women were also particularly vulnerable where they were dependent upon the charities of powerful, benevolent others, whether living within family frameworks as respectable wives or daughters, or as burdensome outsiders: ‘in a patriarchal society, the existence of women who were subject neither to father nor husband was unconventional and a source of concern.’<sup>xlv</sup> The unwanted ward, impoverished schoolgirl, sullen governess, and unwed relative, all fit this scenario: Jane faces gendered distrust (from the Ingram women) even when respectably employed in a wealthy household and tasked with a young child’s education:

‘With no sexual partner, it was inferred that single women were also more likely to be seduced by the Devil in the guise of a man. Most unmarried women were also very poor and therefore thought more likely to resort to sorcery to increase their fortunes.’<sup>xlvi</sup>

Working in traditional, caring professions – as governesses, nurses, cooks, or folk healers - was high-risk, given high infant mortality rates.<sup>xlvii</sup> The ‘typically female’ crimes (namely, poisoning and infanticide) generally occurred hearthside, further challenging women’s role as maternal, nurturing life-givers and highlighting their ‘potentially extremely powerful position through their control over child-rearing and feeding.’<sup>xlviii</sup> Had oppressed, disadvantaged women sought to perform witchcraft to compensate for their low socio-cultural position, the potential for political upheaval would surely have been immense.<sup>xlix</sup> The mysterious, ‘hidden’ physiology of

women, ‘contaminating to the touch’<sup>l</sup> merits mention here too, given that it denoted an apparently diabolical nature, insatiable sexual urges, and a logical motive for fomenting socio-cultural insurgence. It was often ‘a key concern ...that women would not just seek to rebel, but to actually rule.’<sup>li</sup> This innate capacity for revolution via evil-doing (*‘maleficia’*) had implications for the entire population: inherent female malice could bring death or injury, damage property, provoke famine, and weaken the powerful. As Jane notes with hindsight, the Reeds’ servant Abbott had often regarded her as ‘a sort of infantine Guy Fawkes.’<sup>lii</sup> Such an accusation highlights not only the apparently treasonous nature of Jane’s refusal to accept injustice, but also the various overlaps between the political and religious aspects of heresy charges.

Complicity is essential too: ‘The criminal potential of witchcraft was completely dependent upon a belief in the spirit world which had to be shared by victim, witnesses, judge and jury alike.’<sup>liii</sup> Even as a small child, only the evidence of very trusted others might clear Jane’s name, if at all, once she is accused of unnatural behaviour. As her Aunt Reed states, ‘until she heard from Bessie and could discover by her own observation’<sup>liv</sup> some signs of reform in Jane (whose chief transgression here was to lack a suitably ‘sociable and childlike disposition’)<sup>lv</sup> she would have no choice but to exclude her from familial settings. Her first expulsion follows the abandoned walk: it is as if Jane is being blamed, as witches often were,<sup>lvi</sup> for summoning the stormy weather that had prevented the much-despised outdoor trek from happening that day. Banished, she fittingly conceals herself behind scarlet drapes – using the colour of the shamed female - to adopt the ‘exotic’ cross-legged pose of ‘a Turk.’

Her choice of reading material reinforces her chronic loneliness but also her growing capacity for resilience via isolation: she is drawn to a mysterious book that could serve as a sort of basic primer for a novice witch, containing as it does a series of disturbing images. These reveal the ‘haunts of sea-fowl,’ ‘deathwhite realms’ and - very aptly given the association between witches and storm-summoned shipwrecks <sup>lvii</sup> - a picture of a ‘broken boat stranded on a desolate coast.’<sup>lviii</sup> Even the moon, normally a comfort to Jane, is ‘cold and ghastly’ here. By gazing at these images, she is essentially scrying, foretelling her own future in chronological order: bleak, exile landscapes echo her Gateshead childhood, followed by the ‘multiplied rigours of extreme cold’ that will mark out her privations at Lowood. The rock-broken ship and desolate two-treed churchyard symbolise her tumultuous, near-fatal relationship with Rochester, while the ‘torpid sea’ foreshadows St John Rivers’ tepid marriage proposal. Her ‘stolen’ financial inheritance is glimpsed too, fleetingly, but with a ‘fiend pinning down the thief’s pack behind him,’<sup>lix</sup> suggesting that unseen forces, perhaps some unknown, future familiar, might well yet serve to restore to its rightful owner all that has been – or will yet be – stolen from them. The final image that she gazes upon offers the clearest picture of her true nature, if not her destiny, figuratively speaking. We see a vision of the classic witch trial, with a ‘black horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows.’ <sup>lx</sup> She is disturbed by it but notes that this odd episode of ‘reading’ did produce brief happiness in an otherwise utterly miserable, abuse-filled childhood day.

The second unjust accusation of the novel occurs soon after this, coming from her cousin John Reed: ‘she is run out into the rain – bad animal!’ Here he recalls a classic witchcraft accusation, where defendants were often likened to - if not actually

accused of having the ability to transform into - some inhuman creature.<sup>lxi</sup> He repeatedly calls her 'rat,' stressing her relative poverty ('you ought to beg...') before inflicting physical pain upon her. Abbott cruelly reinforces the animal comparisons by adding that 'if she were a pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that.'<sup>lxii</sup> Her shamefully low social status and utter powerlessness at this point in her life is made very clear: she is to them 'less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep.'<sup>lxiii</sup> When they bear her upstairs for further punishment, they adhere to the norms of the witch-trialling process, by carrying her aloft. As Riddell explains, it was thought best to

'...carry the accused so that she cannot touch the ground, as it has been found that if a witch can touch the ground even with one foot, she is able to keep silent under examination.'<sup>lxiv</sup>

Throughout, John Reed adopts the stance and tactics of the 'Witch-Finder General,'<sup>lxv</sup> ruling the house's female population by holding them in fear of having similar charges made against them. It is easy to be marked out as 'other' and accused simply on the basis of age, gender, status, or appearance. No one seems safe from potential accusation: he even calls his mother 'old girl' and points out her 'dark skin.'<sup>lxvi</sup> The significance of colouring will become much more apparent later on, when, as governess at Thornfield, Jane is recounting her run in with the murderous Bertha's 'discoloured...savage face...'<sup>lxvii</sup> As with witnesses during the witch trials, a fear of being framed as complicit was also often a factor in their apparent willingness to condemn their peers. Bessie's subsequent reluctance to leave Jane alone with the kindly, questioning apothecary, Mr Lloyd, and her altered version of the events that

had led up to Jane's imprisonment, traumatic collapse and breakdown evidence this further: 'She had a fall.' Abbott will later condemn Jane further as untrustworthy and likely to revolt: 'ill-conditioned child, who always looked as if she were watching everybody, and scheming plots underhand.'<sup>lxviii</sup> That said, the incident in the red room - presaged by the sudden outdoor storm and Jane's entranced gazing at a grimoire-like 'forbidden' text - serves as both trial and perverse triumph. It ultimately brings about Jane's release from Gateshead and reveals to some extent her ill-treatment at the hands of her vile family and their corrupt servants. The episode is particularly significant in terms of how it draws together various aspects of witchcraft and folkloric practices to indicate Jane's close ties to the supernatural. She herself perhaps also begins to acknowledge this: as she notes, the mysterious room, much like Rochester himself, was known for having some 'secret ...the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur.'<sup>lxix</sup>

This dark, scarlet chamber presages not only Rochester's drawing room, but also the adult Jane's physical attraction to him, and her desire for a father figure.<sup>lxx</sup> The 'visionary hollow' of the looking glass predicts her first fateful meeting with Rochester, as Jane sees her doppelganger, a disembodied self 'coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers.'<sup>lxxi</sup> As Gilbert and Gubar argue, her sense of 'doubleness'<sup>lxxii</sup> begins here as she sees a '...strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face...glittering eyes of fear...had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp..<sup>lxxiii</sup> Aunt Reed will later imply that the abandoned infant Jane was a sort of faery changeling: '- a sickly, whining, pining thing! It would wail in its cradle all night long - not screaming heartily like any other child, but whimpering and

moaning.<sup>lxxiv</sup> By returning quietly to ‘the dock’ (the stool upon which she was ordered to remain by her accusers) Jane seems to signal tacit acceptance of her ‘othered’ nature. It is noteworthy too that ‘...the first major scene in which the disembodied voice discloses itself dramatically takes place in the "red room," whose Sadean overtones should not be overlooked...’<sup>lxxv</sup> There is the hint also that she has been demon-possessed: during her attack on John Reed she admits that she didn’t ‘very well know what [she] did with’ her hands, and when later chastising her aunt, recalls that her ‘tongue pronounced words without [her] will consenting to their utterance. Something spoke out of me over which I had no control.’<sup>lxxvi</sup> Her aunt is shaken but – as when she is financially ruined and grieving the loss of her feckless son on her deathbed – she cannot quite manage to confess or express true regret over her cruel behaviour towards Jane.

Her time in the red room – and its immediate aftermath – together establish a sort of blueprint for the various points of crisis, revelation, and spell casting that will occur throughout the novel. Empowering moonlight and the presence of familiar-like winged things evidence her latent abilities:

‘My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down—I uttered a wild, involuntary cry—I rushed to the door and shook the lock in a desperate effort.’<sup>lxxvii</sup>

When she finally encounters her chief rival and obstacle Bertha Mason, she is essentially battling the novel’s most witch-like character, at least in terms of her frightening appearance and ‘mad’ behaviours that have led to her imprisonment in Thornfield’s attic. There will again be a looking glass and eerie reflection, but this

time the candle is easily extinguished, and the moon is absent. The lack of empowering flame and moonlight presages, perhaps causes, Jane's temporary helplessness in Bertha's presence. Ultimately however, as dark-skinned, wild-eyed wanton, Rochester's first wife is much more vulnerable within this profoundly Victorian mansion. She will not survive the vengeful pyre of her own making, nor can she marshal any of those supernatural powers that she once apparently had access to, such as the ability to bewitch a young Rochester. In clear contrast to this later scene, Jane clearly 'wins' the battle of – or rather *with* - the red room, emerging from it both changed and poised to escape Gateshead.

As in the witch trials, survival of torture is the primary aim, even if such triumphs negate the accused's claims of innocence, and lead to further trials. On awakening from her fit, Jane sees a warm fireside, which initially frightens her, until she realises that her position so close to its warmth marks elevation to social respectability and reversal of her recent banishment, rather than further torment. She is further heartened by the presence of a summoned stranger-familiar, Mr Lloyd, who, as an apothecary, belongs to a profession not altogether removed from the stigma of low magic and folkloric remedies. (The snobbish Reeds naturally employ a physician for their own ills.) Confession, again, is key, as this act - along with Mr Lloyd's perceptiveness and influence – seems to enable Jane's release. She admits to him her misery, her aversion to living in the sort of poverty that might well surround her Eyre relatives, and her desire to be educated elsewhere.

Soon after, a newly empowered Jane invokes the spirit of her late uncle ('What would Uncle Reed say to you if he were alive?') so that her aunt can only look upon



her ‘as if she really did not know whether I were child or fiend.’<sup>lxxviii</sup> From this point on, changes in the weather and other natural portents foretell – perhaps enable – important events. Just as Rochester will find himself lying injured and prone at Jane’s feet (after being flung from his horse during a convenient icy spell), so too does an unusually hard frost mark the arrival of Mr Brocklehurst. It is no coincidence that the cruel, hypocritical governor of Lowood school appears just as Jane is feeding a hungry robin on her windowsill. She clearly must look beyond the walls of Gateshead to perform and receive acts of kindness or charity, having also been forbidden even from tidying up the ‘tiny chairs and mirrors, fairy plates and cups’<sup>lxxix</sup> of Georgiana’s doll house. The symbolism is obvious – domesticity and social inclusion will be denied to her at every opportunity. Bessie’s unfair indictment of Jane’s supposed mischief-making here is followed by her aunt’s much more serious charge – in front of the ever-judging Brocklehurst – of a ‘tendency to deceit,’ which will then colour her early days at Lowood and spark further abuse and trialling throughout her adolescence.

One particular aspect of Jane’s ability to spell cast merits mention at this point. We learn in detail of how she would tenderly care for her tattered, poppet-like doll. It is clearly a comforting if ‘faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow,’ which she thought of as being ‘alive and capable of sensation.’<sup>lxxx</sup> Such items – and the Celtic mythology-based ‘fith-fathing’ that can be done with them – is apparently ‘one of the best enchantments that you can use to acquire – or affect – anything.’<sup>lxxxi</sup> It is unsurprising then that shortly after we see Jane caring for the ragged little thing, and quite heartbreakingly mothering it, Bessie almost immediately becomes much kinder towards her. She acts almost as one bewitched, bringing Jane food, tucking her

in, and affectionately kissing her goodnight. Although Jane doesn't go on to cast wax figures or deliberately craft hexing devices, she does eventually become highly skilled in portraiture, enabling her to later win over - to some extent at least - her formerly hostile cousins Georgiana and Eliza Reed. Rochester too is drawn to her pictures, if not smitten with them. This particular gift will also set in motion the means of gaining back her rightful inheritance, when St John spots her real name via her signature. As the novel often points out, such legacies can be life-changing in terms of redressing harms and effecting justice: the bequest due to Jane - denied to her by her Aunt Reed - underscores this, outlining the importance of kinship ties and revealed ancestries. Only through these, it seems, can autonomy and power can be passed on, and good works achieved, as when Jane immediately splits her fortune with her Rivers' cousins at the novel's end. This is in sharp contrast to how the Reeds' inherited wealth and weak, indulged characters bring about their collective downfall.

Drifting amongst these morally worthless Reeds, in the absence of a comforting family and constantly marked out as alien, Bessie's role as Jane's nurse and - flawed - surrogate mother takes on added significance. Witchcraft lore demands that certain types of wisdom must be passed down to novice practitioners.<sup>lxxxii</sup> English trial records depict two possible means by which a witch might acquire her companions and familiars: an animal might approach a witch of its own accord, or the creature can be inherited from another sorcerer.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> If Jane must be similarly 'tutored' by another practitioner of the craft, then Bessie, as strong believer in rural folklore, and singer of gypsy laments, is the best option, even in spite of her superficial loyalty to her vile employers. Her very name was closely associated with English traditions on witch's familiars,<sup>lxxxiv</sup> and she is not altogether unlike the adult Jane in both appearance and

personality, being slim, dark, and having at times a ‘hasty temper.’ She plays a key role, as ‘...nurse/story-teller, essential to the world of the fairy tale.... archetypal because she always represents the source of the tale in womanly knowledge. And yet, as a nurse, she is a figure of the displaced mother.’<sup>lxxxv</sup> She is the closest thing that the orphaned child Jane has to a caregiver, despite serving as spy, accuser and false witness when required to do so: she displays ‘indifferent ideas of principle or justice,’<sup>lxxxvi</sup> displaying fondness for Jane from time to time, but, as with animal familiars and supernatural imps, this often happens only when no one is looking.

It is Bessie however who ensures that Jane as a novice witch is quietly and secretly exposed to folklore, for example via overheard ghost stories and a variety of gypsy songs and folk ‘tales ...narrated on winter evenings.’<sup>lxxxvii</sup> One of these tunes, post-red room episode, foreshadows much of Jane’s future pathway (‘by false lights beguiled’... ‘both of shelter and kindred despoiled...’) predicting in particular her dangerous ‘night flight’ away from the temptations and deceptions of Rochester and Thornfield, when she must walk, witch-like, across the exposed wilderness of the moors: ‘my feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary.’<sup>lxxxviii</sup> There is a clear need for Bessie’s role to be shrouded in secrecy however, given how

‘...in a more properly matriarchal society...would be at the centre, presiding over the passing on of the tradition from mother to daughter. But, in the world of the patriarchy, the older system of knowledge and religion must go underground, as Christianity prevails and suppresses nature.’<sup>lxxxix</sup>

## 2. Lowood: ‘Orphan Asylum,’ quasi-coven?

*‘I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool.’*  
(Jane Eyre, 80)

Underground folkloric wisdoms, feminine defiance and systems of charity (contraband adequate food, scarce but shared warmth) can be found at Lowood school, so that novices might survive the strictures of its ‘religious’ governor, Brocklehurst. Jane inherits a loyal familiar, Miss Temple, from her next mentor, Helen Burns. Her training - and public trials – therefore continue but she has the benefit here of joining a sort of hearth-comforted coven of like-minded, intelligent and skilful female others. As at Gateshead, Jane must first face unjust accusation and trial before gaining any power or prestige: she is once again lifted off her feet and placed upon a high stool, so that she might be publicly judged, shamed and shunned. This tactic of constant scrutiny was employed to good effect during the witch trials:

‘Watching deprived the accused witch of sleep until a hallucinatory state set in...the witch was searched intimately ...and then forced to sit on a stool in the middle of a room for days and nights. During this time the witch was "watched" by witnesses, waiting to see a familiar sneak out to feed...’<sup>xc</sup>

Jane will be similarly scrutinised and urged to confess her ‘sins’ many times throughout the novel: she will be constantly forced to choose between self-humbled, trance-like silences or heated speeches that resemble confession but work like spell-casting. <sup>xc</sup> The ‘haunting power of memory provides a link between childhood and adulthood’<sup>xcii</sup> that also constructs and enables her personal identity. At Lowood she can however opt only for gentle, stoic acquiescence or quietly aggrieved defiance. <sup>xciii</sup>

However,

‘while the child Jane is learning to be silent and listen, she is at the same time finding the voice by which to tell her own story, as if the two skills were inseparable, two sides of the same precious coin.’<sup>xciv</sup>

On these occasions, her continued existence requires her to control her profound sense of injustice, protesting verbally only when her circumstances become too much to bear, and stopping just short of engaging in utterly ‘anti-social’ acts that might lead to complete self-destruction.<sup>xcv</sup> She perhaps with hindsight realises that had she truly injured the vile John Reed, for example, she might not have survived the likely repercussions from mother. At Lowood too, though able to endure and outwardly conform, she preserves enough mental spirit to avoid the defeated, martyred - and terribly female - fate of her beloved Helen Burns. Having only religious faith and human virtues to rely upon – with little to offer in terms of preternatural ability – it is unsurprising that Helen fails to survive the raging epidemic of illness and her long history of abuse. She is no match for Brocklehurst’s regime, when he essentially replaces John Reed as the novel’s witch-finder. A powerful mantle of (male) Christianity allows him to frame as heresy even the red, naturally curling hair of Julia Severn. Its colour is ‘particularly offensive because of its folkloric connotations, which make red hair a symbol of the devil or of fairies.’<sup>xcvi</sup> He underscores his own hypocrisy and double standards in the process as his own over-adorned family of females are revealed. Before shivering, famished orphans, they parade their regal finery of velvet and ermine,<sup>xcvii</sup> sporting a combination of curls that are both natural and (aptly) French ‘false front.’ Brocklehurst’s order that all students must have any naturally curling hair ‘cut off entirely’ - together with the removal of any top-knots – calls to mind the inspection and shearing of accused witches, carried out so that any

‘devil’s mark’ left upon them might be found.<sup>xcviii</sup> This accuses and brands the girls as being socially inferior. It is significant too, that at this first Lowood trial, the three witnesses are women: as a ‘triple-headed figure of female evil,’<sup>xcix</sup> their presence represents perfectly the power and hypocrisy of the ruling elites:

‘The three women remind Jane of her position as a poor orphan: their clothing is rich and extravagant. They act as a chorus of reproof, whispering "*How shocking.*"’<sup>c</sup>

Jane’s trial, conducted before the entire assembly, is for the conflated ‘crimes’ of having broken silences, both here at school - by accidentally dropping her slate - and earlier at Gateshead, when she revealed her ill-treatment at the hands of the Reeds. The punishment backfires: it ultimately strengthens her as she gains entry into the ‘coven’ and ushers in a new period of female camaraderie, with smiles and glances offered to her by sympathetic pupils during her public humiliation: ‘How the new feeling bore me up!’<sup>ci</sup> The moon marks this turning point, with admission to the enlightened society and novice-friendly fireside of the well-named Miss Temple. This new association gains her instruction in other crafts useful to the budding witch, such as foreign languages and portraiture. Within this new semi-secret society she finds more ‘familiar,’ all of whom reflect some aspect of Jane’s own inner turmoil and perhaps share her ‘rage of orphanhood.’<sup>cii</sup> Helen Burns – symbolising all manner of ‘saintly renunciation’<sup>ciii</sup> - and Miss Temple – representing typically Victorian, ‘ladylike repression’<sup>civ</sup> - together signify the most common options available to those facing social injustice, exclusion and harm on the basis of ‘low’ birth or gender in that era. It is significant that as a plague of typhus decimates the school’s population, Jane

is to be found in the woods completely untouched, utterly defiant and not unlike a weather witch, wading barefoot through streams, transplanting wild roots for purposes unknown, getting lost, and visiting remote swineherd cottages. She keeps company too with a witty older pupil, Wilson, whose surname tellingly, perhaps magically, is the same as one of Blanche Ingram's many reviled, 'untrustworthy' governesses.<sup>cv</sup>

Names are telling: just as Miss Temple provides a place of worship at the hearthside, so too is Helen Burns' fate of succumbing to fever foreshadowed. This is so in spite of her other abilities. She can clearly enter a self-crafted, comforting trance. As Jane observed of her demeanour, mid-punishment, she was 'looking at what she can remember, I believe; not at what is really present.' Helen herself later admits to entering often into 'a sort of dream...[hearing] the bubbling of a little brook' near her former home in Deepden from which she had to be 'awakened.' Such silent stoicism is a risky strategy for surviving witchcraft accusations, however. Helen's failure to shed tears publicly is taken as a sure sign of malevolence. A witch's power of 'preserving silence' and her inability to cry often evidenced guilt: 'If she be a witch, she will not be able to weep.'<sup>cv</sup> Still, with Helen's help, Jane refines her spell-casting methods at Lowood in response to both experiencing and witnessing hardships and injustice, even if she still seems largely unaware of her own abilities. Significantly, when watching a storm rise in the wake of one of Helen's many undeserved punishments, she admits to a 'strange excitement...reckless and feverish, I wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness, and the confusion to rise to clamour.'<sup>cvii</sup> Moments such as this remind us also of the '...relationship between past and present and the emotional intensity of [her]

childhood affections, resentments, desires, and fears...<sup>'cviii</sup> presaging those trials that still await her, at Thornfield and Moor House.

The following section looks at how certain atypical 'others' are drawn to the adult Jane, either to further accuse and try her, or to perhaps protect her from the various 'female realities within her and around her: confinement, orphanhood, starvation, rage even to madness.'<sup>cix</sup>

### **3. Jane 'out-witched'? Spell-casting at Thornfield, deal-making at Moor House**

*'Romantic passion cannot be allowed to usurp the prerogatives of divine law...God's law prohibits adultery even when extremity of circumstance would seem to permit it.'*  
(Peter Grudin, 'Jane and the Other Mrs. Rochester: Excess and Restraint in "Jane Eyre"' *A Forum on Fiction* (Winter, 1977) (10) (2) 145-157, 145)

Although her public trial scene at Lowood clearly harks back to her red room ordeal at Gateshead in terms of her utter powerlessness and her accusers' capacity for cruelty, it also predicts a key ordeal at Thornfield. Here, an adult Jane is scrutinised and found wanting yet again by rival females - the Ingrams – who are holders of wealth and privileged social status. As in childhood, Jane has retired to a shadowy window seat, hidden behind a crimson curtain, arming herself with a book - and some perhaps symbolic beadwork for 'crafting' - hoping to escape public notice and the usual censure. She is nevertheless labelled as dishonest, semi-demonic governess: the dowager Lady Ingram, appoints herself as 'judge of physiognomy,' finding in Jane 'all the faults of her class.'<sup>cx</sup> All governesses are declared diabolical: '...half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi...'<sup>cxii</sup> She is framed yet again as faery



changeling, a ‘poor sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited, not worth the trouble of vanquishing.’<sup>cxii</sup>

Jane does appear to be spell casting at Thornfield however, so their observations are perhaps not entirely without basis. The frosty weather serves her well, by throwing Rochester and his horse down at her feet: ‘I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet.’<sup>cxiii</sup> As Martin also suggests, Jane does have ‘the ambivalent appeal of the witch, the sexuality that captures and destroys.’<sup>cxiv</sup> Rochester seems to recognise that he is caught between two powerful hexes, crying ‘What have you done with me, witch, sorceress?’ as Jane throws water on his burning bed to douse the flames lit by Bertha. This is perhaps why her accusers, as they did at Lowood, must appear in triads, as unholy trinitities:

‘Mrs. Eshton and her daughters Amy and Louisa, Lady Ingram and her daughters Blanche and Mary. It is to the second of these groups that our attention is drawn, because of Rochester's apparent interest in Blanche Ingram.’<sup>cxv</sup>

Jane faces particularly invasive scrutiny at Thornfield: the particular tribunal of the Ingrams in many ways echoes the ‘..typical English trial involv[ing] four categories of witness; accuser, (often a relative, neighbour, or co-accused), interrogator, ‘watcher’..... searcher.’<sup>cxvi</sup> The watcher’s role was to confirm nocturnal visitations i.e. by the witch’s ‘imp’ or familiar, which was apparently prone to taking the form of a moth. It is apt that just such a creature appears at a key moment soon after these scenes, when Jane crosses through Rochester’s shadow in the garden.<sup>cxvii</sup> before this, the Ingrams act almost as searchers did, in seeking out some tell-tale sign

to serve as a ‘witch’s mark’ (any unusual mark, mole, scar or lump said to have been placed there by Satan, to allow imp-familiars to suckle nourishment.)<sup>cxviii</sup> Accusations spread rapidly, as Rochester accuses Blanche of witchcraft: ‘commands from Miss Ingram’s lips would put spirit into a mug of milk and water.’ He adds that she ‘has it in her power to inflict a chastisement beyond mortal endurance.’<sup>cxix</sup> She counter-accuses him, claiming that Rochester’s own appearance has something of a ‘spice of the devil’ in it.’<sup>cxx</sup>

We are reminded yet again that appearances are all-important: Jane’s childlike stature and plain, unfashionable looks cast her as odd, nearly asexual creature, or unhappy spinster, if not an imp, leaving her open to further suspicion and public censure. The social-climbing Ingrams sense that this slight girl-governess is somehow an impediment to their plans, with an otherness about her that is not dissimilar to that of Rochester’s own. It is no coincidence that throughout the novel ‘the women Jane meets are evil in proportion to the threat they pose to her final victory.’<sup>cxxi</sup> Bertha Mason, Rochester’s attic-hidden, deranged wife, presents as a much more complex character than simple love-rival: she is the most witch-like female in terms of her appearance and capacity for revenge, but she is clearly also one of the most vulnerable women in the novel, succumbing to madness, imprisonment and raging fire. She could be deemed Jane’s most obvious ‘mirror-image adversary’<sup>cxxii</sup> given that she too was labelled highly ‘deviant’ by virtue of her foreign appearance, colonial heritage (West Indian or Creole) and ‘unwomanly,’ wanton behaviour. Her implied ‘promiscuity’ is presented here as the cause of her fragile mental state, in much the same way that trialled witches were accused of copulating with devils, demons and imps. She is ‘a key figure in the rhetoric’ but also a ‘literal expression of the basis for

Jane's decision<sup>'cxxxiii</sup> to suddenly flee Thornfield and Rochester's offer to remain with him and live 'in sin': 'I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man....I am insane – quite insane, with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs.'<sup>cxxxiv</sup>

Her shredding of Jane's extravagant wedding veil could be viewed as a warning from one 'witch' to another of the dangers associated with marriage and conventional, Victorian living. Oddly, she does not harm Jane physically, perhaps recognising in her some manner of kindred 'otherness,' or sensing that she is similarly possessed of a fiery, violent disposition which can be roused by witnessing injustice. Like Jane, Bertha was not the social equal of Rochester, according to Victorian customs and logic, where 'gendered notions of inherited insanity; racially inflected ideas about self-indulgence and excess [and] constructions of colonial identity'<sup>cxxxv</sup> held sway. She may well also detect how Jane is gifted with a hidden-away, passionate nature, and has been, much like Bertha, excluded from 'polite' society through low social status and unfashionable looks:

'...one can only suggest that both Jane and Bertha are witches, that they are two sides of the same self. Jane is the attractive young witch as seductress; Bertha is the hag she becomes after marriage, when the veil is removed.'<sup>cxxxvi</sup>

In any event, Rochester's secret wife offers us a clear warning of what can happen when a witch is uncovered, 'convicted,' and sentenced to the prison of a loveless marriage.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> She demonstrates too the consequences of either restraining a passionate nature, or displaying those 'female' desires that mark women out as other: increased vulnerability, feral imprisonment, mental illness, fatal invisibility, death by

fire.<sup>cxxviii</sup> Rochester's deep hatred of Bertha seems tied - somewhat hypocritically - to her earlier 'excesses' of passion, temperament and sexual infidelity.<sup>cxxix</sup> The issue of female fertility is also relevant here: the elderly or infertile woman, incapable of child-bearing, could be perceived as subversive or sexually autonomous, as Bertha was said to have been before her marriage.<sup>cxxx</sup> On her own maternal instincts Jane stresses that, though a fond governess, she is no substitute mother to the orphaned Adele, which reflects perhaps her own isolated upbringing.<sup>cxxxi</sup> And yet, she experiences some of her most disturbing nightmares here, in terms of infanticide and loss.<sup>cxxxii</sup> Clearly the 'angry aspect of the orphaned child'<sup>cxxxiii</sup> remains a key factor, whether Jane recognises this or not.

If we accept that her rage in the red room triggered the onset of her powers, perhaps symbolising the onset of puberty, then Jane seems more than capable of summoning a helpful 'familiar' – indeed a fellow witch - to assist her. On those occasions where Jane is particularly incensed, Bertha tends to appear, for example when Rochester confides in her about his former mistresses, and just after he dresses up as an elderly, female gypsy in a bid to trick her. As such, she can be regarded in many ways as acting 'for Jane and like Jane ...by pacing...and howling like a child.'<sup>cxxxiv</sup> She serves as an angry, or frightened 'perverse surrogate,'<sup>cxxxv</sup> demonstrating not only how 'sexual license in a woman is unforgivable,' but also the potential 'consequences of unrestrained passion.'<sup>cxxxvi</sup> If Jane seems to be engaging in some 'secret dialogue of self and soul,'<sup>cxxxvii</sup> in her encounters with Bertha - where denial, rebellion, and anger feature, either prominently or subconsciously - then it makes sense that Bertha's murderous - indeed suicidal - final act is the very thing that allows Jane's union with Rochester. It is noteworthy too that Rochester has much of

‘the witch’ and the occult about him, even when not actually dressed up as a gypsy fortune teller. He may have donned this disguise to let Jane know that he is a sympathetic fellow-traveller, with an innate capacity for social deviance and defiance. Like Jane, he would - indeed, will - be a social outcast, should his thin mask of respectability slip, or his wealth fail. He demonstrates extra-sensory perception, so that when Jane walks silently through his shadow in the garden in a bid to yet again avoid his gaze, he senses her presence. He only briefly ‘outwitches’ her however, before she forever steps out of his shadow: he must pause his own scrying, to offer her a dark deal:

‘I shall get by very well, I meditated. As I crossed his shadow, thrown long over the garden by the moon, not yet risen high, he said quietly without turning – *‘Jane, come and look at this fellow.’*<sup>cxxxviii</sup>

The moth presents itself here perhaps as Rochester’s only true familiar, appearing as alien, displaced thing, not classically beautiful but still puzzling, and perhaps quite dangerous: it could symbolise his offer of bigamous, sinful marriage, or perhaps even the odd couple viewing it. It may be an ill omen, warning of impending trauma and tragedy, despite the declarations of love that follow its sighting. Its flight foreshadows Jane’s crazed departure from Thornfield after their failed wedding ceremony, but its brief presence also triggers a highly significant exchange between her and Rochester. By having them gaze upon it together, Brontë confirms that they are both equally at risk of being outcast from society and mercilessly trialled: Jane’s near-fatal exposure to the elements on the moors, her abject penury, and Rochester’s severe injuries and losses by fire. By the story’s end however, a triumphant Jane will

have defeated all rivals and enemies, to claim and name her Rochester as ‘Vulcan’ (a god of hearth fires) and ‘brownie’ – a dark and shaggy, mischievous, maimed creature,<sup>cxxxix</sup> as she cuts his unkempt hair and comforts him. The power balance begins to shift from the moment she steps out of his shadow in the garden scene.

Rochester’s powers wane considerably after this point in the novel (her hearing of his disembodied voice at Moor House, notwithstanding) and they are no match for Jane’s newly heightened ones. His diabolical pacts with the Mason siblings unravel quickly after his odd turn as the gypsy fortune teller, once Jane unmasks him. Bertha’s apparently ‘attractive’ brother – who did not appeal to Jane, only to the rather venal, unseeing Thornfield party guests – had, unknown to Rochester, appeared from nowhere to ‘charm’ his visitors and lay the foundations for the various horrors that flow directly from his malign interference that day. Rochester’s loss of power is exemplified particularly however when he pleads desperately with her to stay with him post-failed wedding: ‘You will not be my comforter, my rescuer? My deep love, my wild woe, my frantic prayer, are all nothing to you?’<sup>cxli</sup> He realises that she is much more powerful than him, and now lost to him, having tried - and failed - to cast her as a sort of witch’s familiar: ‘..it is you, spirit ...you could come with soft flight and nestle against my heart, if you would: seized against your will you would elude the grasp like an essence.’<sup>cxli</sup> The ‘non-wedding’ of Jane and Rochester is therefore an especially symbolic trial, grounded in Mason’s accusations of their sinfulness and law-breaking. The event sparks both a literal and figurative turning away from church and polite society for both of them. The impacts of cruel religious doctrine are highlighted here, i.e. the inability to escape a loveless marriage, public humiliation in

the chapel, and, not long after, St John's toxic piety that masks its own torments and hypocrisies.

Moreover, the event provokes Jane into performing a classic act of witchcraft, when she somehow vanishes by night from Thornfield without leaving any trace. Magically, she survives exposure, starvation and illness out on the moors, to conjure up long-lost family, somehow charm a sceptical Hannah, and then 'shape shift' into the role of respectable schoolteacher Jane Elliott at Moor House. Her 'dangerous double-consciousness'<sup>cxliii</sup> here reminds the socially powerful of their own limitations: her '...unseducible independence in a world of self-marketing Celine's and Blanches'<sup>cxliiii</sup> marks her out as very different from the many women who are prettier or wealthier than her. And yet, to fully embrace her powers at Moor House, she must become even more 'othered' than she was at Thornfield. She must leave behind all social respectability, financial security, and the comforting warmth of its hearth fires to engage in a prolonged, self-inflicted episode of 'witch-walking,' which brings her to the very edge of mental and physical ruin.<sup>cxliiv</sup> She is rescued from starvation and complete disgrace only when she finally abandons any lingering need for visible propriety, resorting, as Rochester's gypsy woman did, to begging and pleading with strangers.

Her battle here is 'often against death itself and her triumph is to stay alive.'<sup>cxlv</sup> Having initially spurned poverty and any chance of reunion with her father's family in childhood (Mr Lloyd had suggested this as an option to her after the red room incident) she is never more witch-like in appearance than at this point in the novel, 'trembling, sickening' with 'an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-

beaten.<sup>'cxlvi</sup> Brought low, she finds her lost-long kinfolk, as if aided by some benevolent magic that her inner turmoil and voiced lamentations have generated. She briefly finds peace at Moor House, amongst her kindly, decent Rivers cousins, Diana and Mary, the young governesses who accept her as though they were (echoing Jane's childhood recall of feeding a hungry robin) '...cherishing a half-frozen bird some wintry wind might have driven through their casement.'<sup>'cxlvii</sup> Though entirely respectable and pious in nature, their homestead setting still hints that there is more to them than we first presume. There are signs of their kindred otherness to be found in the – according to superstition, quite unlucky, if not poisonous – 'aged firs, all grown aslant under the stress of mountain winds; its garden, dark with yew and holly and where no flowers but of the hardies species would bloom.'<sup>'cxlviii</sup> As Jane stresses, there is scope for magic: 'the moonlight and the clouded night, developed for me, in these regions, the same attractions as for them – wound round my faculties the same spell that entranced theirs.'<sup>'cxlix</sup> She exchanges knowledge and skills with the Rivers girls (language, drawing) not yet knowing that these are her genetic kinfolk. She surely draws power from this before having to face her greatest trial and most dangerous temptation: St John's 'inexorable as death' frigid matrimonial offer of Calvinist semi-existence.<sup>cl</sup>

His soul-destroying, imprisoning marriage proposal represents a way back into polite society for the fallen Jane, in a far off, foreign land. There is within this dark-pact an undercurrent of the Victorian 'fear of contamination from outside' which perhaps 'became confused with fears of psychological disintegration, *'going native,'* unreason or, more familiarly today, the unconscious within.'<sup>'cli</sup> Steeped in the 'tyranny of a demanding creed,'<sup>'clii</sup> the marriage would likely complete the task of 'purg[ing]



her of her romantic individualism and wilfulness’<sup>cliii</sup> much as fire and drowning might serve to ‘save’ the soul of the convicted witch. Arguably, it would likely have tipped Jane over into an imprisoning, ‘Bertha-esque’ madness.<sup>cliv</sup> It is grounded in the stasis and toxic stillness that once forced her to remain seated, as if bewitched, on the witch-trialling high stools of Gateshead and Lowood so that hypocritical others might judge and condemn her. As Gettelman notes of Brontë generally, the ‘image of silent yet observed daydreamer resonates throughout her fiction.’<sup>clv</sup> St John is however particularly ‘frozen,’ when he sits before Jane, trance-like, at her bidding, breathing deeply for a quarter of an hour, to imagine himself married to the lively and beautiful Rosamund Oliver. It is no coincidence that this occurs on Guy Fawkes Day, with Jane fulfilling her destiny as a lighter of figurative fires. St John will sit only under the timed ‘double watch’ of his own timepiece and Jane’s silently deep scrutiny,<sup>clvi</sup> presumably so that he can avoid being drawn too far into this visionary or altered state, from which it might become impossible to return or ever again ‘reconcile imagining with language.’<sup>clvii</sup> He could, it seems, become a sort of male Bertha, were he to give in to this burning attraction; even his chaste proposal to Jane hints at the ‘masochist-sadist elements in sexual love.’<sup>clviii</sup> He reveals his own capacity for scrying when he recalls the book images Jane had gazed upon in childhood, referring to his resolve – or more accurately, his denial - as being ‘just as fixed as a rock, firm set in the depths of a restless sea. Know me to be what I am – a cold, hard man.’<sup>clix</sup> His solution would be to hide himself away at the far side of the world, taking Jane with him as a sort of surrogate Grace Poole, essentially burying them both alive in a bid to keep his desires under control. As Jane tells him: ‘I should not live long in that climate.’ His response is to not so much ‘woo’ her but to act as a pastor ‘recalling his wandering sheep...a guardian angel watching the soul for which he is responsible,’

citing brimstone Biblical passages, and appealing to her to ‘choose that better part which shall not be taken from you!’<sup>clx</sup>

The proposal is the icy opposite of the raging Thornfield fire, set by Bertha after Jane has fled, and which Rochester runs into almost without hesitation. The inferno serves to free him from his loveless, tricked-into, first marriage, and absolve him of much of the guilt associated with having agreed to it. His actions frame him as worthy Gothic hero but inflict harsh retribution: he is maimed, losing his eyesight and much of his wealth:

‘His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour ...his port was still erect, his hair was still raven black; nor were his features altered or sunk...but in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding – that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as that sightless Samson.’<sup>clxi</sup>

This harsh atonement removes any lingering imbalances of power (i.e. physical, financial) that might otherwise still exist between them. In the wake of the fire, he too will sit trance-like, half-paralysed by grief and injury, awaiting rescue by a newly empowered Jane. Her spells and dealings have served her well: by accepting her true nature she is able to hear Rochester’s final desperate incantation, calling her back to him, across the miles, just as she was about to succumb to St John’s offer. She revels in her abilities:

‘I broke from St John, who had followed me, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force...I seemed to penetrate very near a Might Spirit.’<sup>clxii</sup>

At that point in the novel Jane does not know that Rochester is free to marry her: she chose therefore, much like those opting to do witchcraft, to embrace ‘sin’ on the basis of passionate desire and to disobey the church’s laws and teachings. She has finally fully ‘confessed’ to her true nature here and gained the arcane wisdom - and, again, magically, the wealth - to be able to reject Victorian norms and hypocrisies. She can opt instead for a ‘sinful,’ passionate life with a devil of her own choosing, spurning a pious form of wedlock that would offer only misery in return for social respectability. In other words, having Jane turn her back on society, law, and church permits all round healing, both for her own sense of self, and for the badly wounded Rochester. This clearly challenges assumptions that he and Jane have together somehow ‘embraced God,’ and that it is their renewed spirituality that has somehow enabled their reunion.<sup>clxiii</sup> Jane’s final, odd incantation, references the death of St John, and seems to profess atonement and suggest devout religious faith.<sup>clxiv</sup>

Arguably, this odd addendum could be read as an attempt to convince us that she has changed her ways – lest, perhaps, we the readers are ‘watchers,’ and her confessional novel could double as legal testimony and somehow be used against her. Alternatively, as Kaplan suggests, Brontë may have been aiming for a typically Victorian ‘circulation of anger from text to reader.’<sup>clxv</sup> In any event, she has succeeded in

‘...linking the ancient oral repertoire of folktales to the later, distinctively literary canon that embraces collections of folk and fairy tales as well as moral and didactic stories, and romantic novels in which fairy tale motifs, structures, and frame narrators exert a shaping influence. ‘

The concluding section outlines why Charlotte Brontë has required her readers to firstly bear witness to the many and varied ‘cruelties of human interactions and social arrangements’<sup>clxvi</sup> before allowing us sight of Jane’s final ‘triumph of romantic over religious love.’<sup>clxvii</sup> It will argue that the main mission of Jane ‘the witch’ was to give voice to Brontë’s inner jurist, allowing the author to highlight – and perhaps suggest remedies for - a wide range of systemic, often gendered, socio-cultural injustices.

#### 4. Conclusion: Attesting to injustice

‘...rebellion and reconciliation ...bound up in one central consciousness’  
(Matus, 2002, 115)

It may be argued Brontë’s primary concern was to ‘pierce to the heart of a world divided against itself, struggling to understand changing social structures ...and most fundamentally, what it meant to be human in such a world.’<sup>clxviii</sup> The notions of justice, law, power, and belief in the supernatural are inextricably linked in *Jane Eyre*, highlighting the entrenched inequalities of Victorian society. It is worth noting also how the concept of sympathy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was itself often ‘tied directly to racial issues’ and how abolitionist rhetoric was also ‘evident throughout *Jane Eyre*, inform[ing] the novel’s racial dynamic,’ against a backdrop of ‘mid-Victorian racial scientists..[who] argued that the English comprised distinct races, suggesting the biological unsuitability of marriage between the noble Rochester and his servant.’<sup>clxix</sup>

It is also significant that

‘...because sympathy appeared universally to motivate altruistic behaviour, empiricists believed it could displace religion as a basis for

moral action...sympathy related to occult knowledge, which Jane claims in the novel's final chapters; sympathy could thus satisfy a desire for religious mystery.<sup>'clxx</sup>

Although belief in magic declined as the Victorian Poor Laws began to gradually replace private altruism and religious charitable endeavour, many avenging fairies, witches, and ghosts still 'populated the Victorian imagination,' their actions highlighting the acute need for social justice-led reforms.<sup>clxxi</sup> Lingering belief in the supernatural, whether based on the occult, superstitions, or folkloric tales, does tend to appear in those works of fiction that showcase human cruelty and societal exclusion. Victorian preoccupation with magical, shape-shifting fairy brides (and their ability to escape from their evil human husbands) also coincided with key legal

'...debates on other issues pertaining to women—their right to keep their property in marriage and their right to separate from abusive mates (or even to divorce them).'<sup>clxxii</sup>

The acceptance of 'superstition, either as a source of knowledge or as potential threat to social order' reveals much about those who believe in it.<sup>clxxiii</sup> The very notion of power often has something of the magical about it, in terms of its invisibility and pervasiveness. This is so irrespective of whether such power is merely imagined and folkloric, or grounded in tangible laws, legal structures and institutions, and socio-cultural norms of behaviour. The breaking of silences matters: to speak up over injustice is to attempt to cast the spells that might one day effect meaningful change by granting power to the overlooked and voiceless. When Jane's 'mastery seems in doubt - for instance, when Bertha Mason enters her room the night before ...or when the marriage itself is interrupted by Mr. Briggs...[she] is completely wordless.'<sup>clxxiv</sup>

Thus, by delicately threading her Gothic love story with reader-bewitching moments involving the casting of spells, deals with devils, and a series of witch-finding trials, Brontë lays bare the hypocrisies of the ruling elites, namely, the wealthy, lawmakers, patriarchs, and the church. Throughout the book these groups have tormented, judged, and punished the weak and already-disenfranchised, turning them into ever more marginalised ‘alienated misfits.’<sup>clxxv</sup> Fittingly, the novel’s resolution rests upon Jane’s ability to verbally admit and embrace her own supernatural gifts. Once she does so, she can assume her rightful place at the hearthside, newly empowered, to become a bringer of justice. In terms of those who have shunned or wronged her, it is right that the ‘roles and positions of family members begin to collapse in on each other.’<sup>clxxvi</sup> The Reeds’ various fates (bankruptcy, suicide, illness, death, obesity, and exile into foreign faith and country<sup>clxxvii</sup>) stem from their own inherent weaknesses, rather than via any deliberate spell-casting by Jane, perhaps. If she *were* to have cursed them however, she could hardly have done a more poetically sound job; all of them suffer in ways that reflect the trials Jane had to endure at their hands.<sup>clxxviii</sup> They reflect also all that is wrong with Victorian society: having taunted her for being poor, it is fitting that their own fortune is now largely gambled away. The cold aunt who spurned her and ordered her to sit immobile and alone, is now literally paralysed and shunned by her daughters. Georgina’s once-lovely looks – often compared to Jane’s plain appearance – are fading into semi-obesity, her ‘good’ name tarnished by gossip and accusation, leaving her snubbed by the fashionable set. The miserly – yet strangely content and zealous – Eliza will shortly flee the comforts of an enlightened England to live out a solitary, pious life behind the walls of a foreign nunnery. It seems likely that she will perhaps

face physical privations similar to those that Jane encountered whilst a student at Lowood.

All of the veneer-thin hallmarks of polite, moneyed society - wealth, good looks, visibility of social standing – have deserted them and left them ‘unveiled.’ The uncovering of hypocrisy was a common aim for the novel’s ‘witches’: Jane has done so from childhood, and Rochester clearly, for example, enjoyed trialling and provoking the Ingrams into displaying their avaricious ways, especially when they learn of his pretend ‘poverty.’ Bertha too, literally, shreds the costly wedding veil whose ‘magic’ was meant to hide her own non-existence, had the bigamous ceremony proceeded unchallenged. The novel’s greatest unmasking concerns the church, however. Vulnerable ‘others’ repeatedly suffer at the hands of those who, like the witch-finders, professed a monopoly over religious virtues, namely the ‘churchmen’ Brocklehurst and St John (Helen Burns is a notable exception, although even she destroys someone – herself – via an over-adherence to martyrdom). In sum, immoral legal regulation can cause much harm and sorrow: Rochester’s inability to divorce, and the inequitable property laws that impoverished Jane’s parents and, to a lesser extent, her Rivers cousins, are prime examples. Unjust socio-cultural norms can easily imprison or trial the vulnerable, turning them into impoverished wards, broken-spirited charity recipients, slandered governesses, and aberrant, ‘mad’ women to be hidden from view. As Russell noted, the powerful could legally torture, accuse and execute those who seemed unacceptably deviant or defiant simply by framing them as witches, and ‘identified as a hostile outsider...[or] scapegoat, society can project [upon]...every kind of repressed evil. And guilt compounds the hostility.’<sup>clxxix</sup>

Jane and Rochester have survived to the novel's end by existing within their own excluded 'margins...trapped on [a] social border.'<sup>clxxx</sup> Her spell-casting and deal-making have, in the end, secured for them a safe, secluded haven. Power imbalances have been largely addressed in terms of her inherited – and his much reduced - fortune, not to mention his blind, maimed helplessness. He is initially quite child-like and his new-found exclusion echoes the isolation that Jane has suffered for much of her life. Together, they now offer up a poignant illustration of the 'fragility of human happiness,'<sup>clxxxii</sup> where such contentment almost always depends upon the absence of injustice or the kind, but sometimes quite fickle, charity of others. With Jane having embraced her role as outcast witch however, she is free to adopt the position of indispensable carer; 'being so much lower of stature than he, I served both for his prop and guide.'<sup>clxxxii</sup> By not adhering 'to principle and law'<sup>clxxxiii</sup> she gains a happy marriage, rather than a socially expedient one. Similarly, although Rochester's wealth, temper and social status have all diminished, Jane's growing powers will, to some extent, restore these. Their original roles are not completely reversed, in terms of physical and social inequalities: she has given away much of her inheritance to her Rivers cousins,<sup>clxxxiv</sup> and Rochester later regains status as a far from powerless Victorian husband-father. As such, she perhaps 'begins as a slave in revolt...becomes part of the very order she was resisting ...[and] ends up underwriting what she originally sought to oppose.'<sup>clxxxv</sup> Rochester still ultimately 'is avowed as patriarchal authority; his sight and power are renewed just in time to see the baby boy who will carry on his social and economic gender role.'<sup>clxxxvi</sup> This could be seen as a sentimental, traditional ending, whereby

'...even these reversals of power, like gender and age, are not stable constructions... throughout the novel, gender identities are repeatedly built up only to be torn down...Jane resigns herself to the domestic sphere in her subservient role as wife, maid,



and child for Rochester and exchanges her former child-rearing position as a paid governess with the new unpaid feminine status of mother.<sup>'clxxxvii</sup>

That said, in terms of continuing to cast spells and strike bargains, the emergence of Jane's true 'witch-self' has given her significant freedom. She can now spar with Rochester as his equal: 'Am I hideous, Jane?' 'Very Sir; you always were, you know.'<sup>clxxxviii</sup> Where once she was reluctant to be sensed, seen, or much scrutinised by Rochester, and at times afraid even to converse with him, she now exists to do little else. She can now make him jealous - as he once did with her, when he flirted with Blanche Ingram - by calling St John her 'fair Apollo.'<sup>clxxxix</sup> Given the significance of her many silences throughout the text, this change in Jane reflects how the balance of power in their relationship has changed:

'...the power of speech is supreme. It enables [her] to take more and more control of her life as the years pass and in the end to tell it to us...Words have power, in *Jane Eyre*. They also bestow power. They are the instrument by which Jane Eyre learns to understand and master the world.'<sup>cx</sup>

It may be argued that Brontë therefore uses her novel to grant the voiceless some form of fair hearing: her Victorian audience may be more able and willing to listen to, indeed be haunted by, the mythical cries of the banshee, than to the pleas of the hidden-away and down-trodden poor. And yet, even at the very end of her trials Jane must still act as keeper of profound secrets, unable to tell Rochester of how it was his own supernatural voice that had called her back to him from Moor House: 'I listened to Mr Rochester's narrative but made no disclosure in return. The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed.'<sup>cxci</sup> She is still struggling here to fully manage all of her internal conflicts,<sup>cxcii</sup> bound perhaps to limit the sharing of certain truths, so as not to concede her new-found authority to a potentially stronger practitioner of witch craft. She is no longer the 'uneasy and elfin

dependent,<sup>'cxciii</sup> but she clearly must still hold something back, perhaps to save them both from the dangers of confessing too obviously to occult beliefs. The hearing of voices seems especially dangerous, given how it is often the unearthed testimony of the dispossessed and overlooked, which can, if or when it is finally perceived, spark meaningful socio-legal and structural reforms.<sup>cxciv</sup> Jane's struggle between the need to conform and a desire to be freed provide much more than '...a topical but relatively unimportant framing device for a traditional love story.'<sup>cxcv</sup>

Even if the story was perhaps written "in a rage," because she was a woman,<sup>'cxcvi</sup> it is not simply a tale of 'needlessly melodramatic'<sup>cxcvii</sup> 'governess revenge' nor is it simply some gentle 'victory over the universe.'<sup>cxcviii</sup> *Jane Eyre* does not fit neatly into the normative frameworks for the 'romance and quest narrative,' where an 'angry, aggrieved, clamorous, exhilarated' heroine eventually finds 'injustice redeemed'<sup>cxcix</sup> through some slightly daft 'sentimental ending.'<sup>cc</sup> It is a novel that names things for what they are: nothing less than Jane's own spell-cast name (shouted by an anguished, far away Rochester) will serve to overcome the various evils that have kept them apart. Equally,

'...the frightened and hostile sexuality of the fairy-tale world corresponds well to the imagination of *Jane Eyre*. The appeal of the world of faery for Charlotte Brontë was the appeal of a poetic system which still believed in magic and which was still centred around the role of women.'<sup>cci</sup>

Powerful magic clearly lies within voiced feelings and truths. As Armstrong summarises, for Victorian elites, often the 'right to master others was based on the not-altogether-secure ability to master the Other in themselves.'<sup>ccii</sup> For those seeking to challenge injustice, 'haunt'<sup>cciii</sup> the unjust, and empower the vulnerable, it seems that

perhaps there is a need, like Brontë, to do so from the very ‘edge of the supernatural.’<sup>cciv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Shires L M ‘Of Maenads, Mothers, and Feminized Males: Victorian Readings of the French Revolution’ (pp 147 -165) in Shires L M, (ed.) ‘*Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*’ (Routledge: New York, 1992) p 155

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid* p 156

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, arguing that gender, class, and race are used interchangeably, with the figure of the Maenad and the ‘ideal mother’ always ‘pitted against one another’ so that ‘in the cultural imagination one can easily slide into another.’

<sup>iv</sup> Garland, Anna, ‘The Great Witch Hunt: The Persecution of Witches in England, 1550-1660’ 9 *Auckland U. L. Rev.* (2003) 1152 -1182

<sup>v</sup> Charles Burkhart ‘Another Key Word for Jane Eyre’ *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Sep 1961) (16) (2) 177-179, 177

<sup>vi</sup> Bessie, for example, serves as both tutor and accuser, through her songs and disingenuous testimony to the Reeds. On the concept of the witch’s familiar, see further De Angeles, Ly ‘*Witchcraft Theory and Practice: Rituals, Spellcasting and Sorcery*’ (Llewellyn Publications: Minnesota 2001, 146) who adds that although such familiars are ‘not a pet...[they] will always choose you...[and] bring you gifts.’

<sup>vii</sup> See also Pihlajamaki, Heikki ‘Swimming the Witch, Pricking for the Devil's Mark: Ordeals in the Early Modern Witchcraft Trials’ *J. Legal Hist.* (2000) (21) 35 -58 39, who places the first European-wide witch-craze ‘roughly between 1480 and 1520, and the second between 1560 and 1650.’

<sup>viii</sup> See further Quaife, Geoffrey Robert ‘*Godly Zeal and Furious Rage: The Witch in Early Modern Europe*’ London: Croom Helm, 1987) on how formal ‘magic’ use was originally protected by respectable veneers of religion, ‘science’ and (generally male) affluence.

<sup>ix</sup> Sanders, Andrew, ‘*A Deed Without a Name-The Witch in Society and History*’ (New York, Berg, 1995) p 7

<sup>x</sup> Gibbons, Jenny ‘Recent Developments in the Study of The Great European Witch Hunt’ *The Pomegranate - Lammas* (1998) (5) noting that the practice of magic in this context did not however - in the absence of evidenced harm - constitute a crime per se (i.e. of ‘being a witch’).

<sup>xi</sup> Harris, Marvin, ‘*Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*’ (New York, Random House, 1974, 238); See also Russell, Jeffrey B ‘*A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*’ (London, Thames and Hudson, 1980).

<sup>xii</sup> Krebs, Paula M ‘Folklore, fear and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives’ Tales in *Wuthering Heights*’ *Victorian Literature and Culture* (26) (1) (1998) 41-52, 43. See also Scarre, Geoffrey ‘*Witchcraft and Magic in 16th and 17th Century Europe*’ (London, Macmillan, 1987, 34), on how ‘a community that prosecutes witches...clarifies and reinforces its moral boundaries, by exhibiting in a singularly dramatic manner, what it considers to be unacceptably deviant behaviour.....(it) achieves a stronger sense of its own identity...’

<sup>xiii</sup> Waters, Thomas ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes, 1750–1900’ *Journal of British Studies* 54 (July, 2015) 632-653, 633

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*, 632

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid*. See also Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth Century England* (1971) London. On the Victorians’ enduring beliefs in folk tradition (ghosts, witchcraft, and precognition) as an alternative scientific wisdom. See further

Henson, Louise, 'Phantoms Arising from the Scenes of Our Too-Long Neglect': Charles Dickens, Victorian Chemistry, and the Folklore of the Ghost' *Victorian Review* (26) (1) (2000) 6-23

<sup>xvi</sup> See also Obelkevich, James, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford, OUP, 1976, 262) on how the educated classes rejected magic (as cited by Waters, *ibid*, 2015, 633)

<sup>xvii</sup> Waters (2015, 634)

<sup>xviii</sup> Freeman, Janet H 'Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (24) (4) (1984) 683-700, 697

<sup>xix</sup> Sexton, Kristi - *Jane Eyre: Jane's Spiritual Coming of Age* *Brontë Studies*, (39) (3) (September 2014) 178-86

<sup>xx</sup> Burkhart (1961, 177) adding that, for Jane at least, this is really is a rather 'gloomy reward.'

Presumably, her inheritance would have served to spruce the place up, however.

<sup>xxi</sup> Scarre, (1987, 39). See also Trevor-Roper, Hugh, *The European Witch-Craze of the 16th And 17th Centuries* (New York, Penguin, 1991).

<sup>xxii</sup> Martin, Robert K "'Jane Eyre" and the World of Faery' *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal - Literature And Ideas* (Summer 1977) 10 (4) pp. 85-95, 94

<sup>xxiii</sup> On the witch-trials generally, see also Levack, Brian P *The Witch-Hunt In Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987); Bartel, Pauline *Spellcasters: Witches and Witchcraft in History, Folklore, and Popular Culture* (Dallas: Taylor Trade, 2000); Barry, Jonathan, Hester, Marianne and Roberts, Gareth, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On the Salem witch trials - which offer useful comparison in terms of gender, [in]justice, and powerlessness - see also Hill, Frances *'The Salem Witch Trials Reader'* (United States, De Capo Press, 1943); Starkey, Marion L *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (United States, Anchor, 1949); Story, William L *True Stories of Courage and Defiance from the Salem Witchcraft Hysteria of 1692* (Massachusetts, Willart Publishing 2001).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Freeman (1984, 695)

<sup>xxv</sup> De Blecourt, Willem, Hutton, Ronald, La Fontaine, Jean, *'The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century'* (6) (London: Athlone Press, 1999, 150)

<sup>xxvi</sup> Brauner, Sigrid *'Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany - How witchcraft in Germany first came to be associated with women'* (Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, 18). See however Sanders, Andrew, *'A Deed Without a Name-The Witch in Society and History'* (New York, Berg, 1995) on the numbers of accused men; Monter, E William *Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Brighton, Harvester, 1983) outlines how age and gender stereotypes of 'the witch' may easily break down in times of (moral) panic, and how if incidents of 'demonic possession' are examined instead, children and men do figure more prominently.

<sup>xxvii</sup> See further Barry et al (1996, 20) on how in Switzerland, witches were blamed for violent weather, whilst in France, episodes of 'diabolic possession' were more of a concern. In Germany the focus was apparently on having intercourse with Satan, whereas in England it was often the presence of a 'familiar' (or 'imp') that served as evidence to seal a witch's fate (p 20).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Martin (1977, 86)

<sup>xxix</sup> Lerner, Christina, *'Enemies of God - the Witch-hunt in Scotland'* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981); See also Cohn, Norman *'Middle Ages: Europe's Inner Demons- An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt'* (London, Heinemann, 1975) on the overlaps between religious heresy and occult sorcery.

<sup>xxx</sup> Kieckhefer, Richard *'The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft, and Magic in Late Medieval Europe'* *Journal of Medieval & Renaissance Studies* 24 (Fall, 1994) 355-85

<sup>xxxi</sup> Brauner, (1995, 5)

<sup>xxxii</sup> Oster, Emily *'Witchcraft, Weather and Economic Growth in Renaissance Europe'* *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* (18) (1) (Winter 2004), pp. 215-228

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Andreski, Stanislav, *'Syphilis, Puritanism and Witch Hunts'* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1989); See also Estes, Leland *'The Medical Origins of the European Witch Case: A Hypothesis'* *Journal of Social History* (17) 2 (1983) 271-301 on the relevance of the medical revolution.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Sanders (1995, 7) See also Kieckhefer (2011, 7) on how the first wave of 'modern' European witch trials (1435-1500) was scattered and somewhat ad hoc in nature, followed by near-cessation (1500-1560) but then erupted again in a 'great wave' of widespread mass trialling from 1560-1750.

<sup>xxxv</sup> See also Brauner (1995) on the 'universal constant' of gender, and the art of 'high magic' as performed by scholars, alchemists and nobility; Ehrenreich Barbara and English Deirdre *'Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A history of women healers'* (London, Contemporary Classics, 1976) argue further that male corruption in medicine may well have been an underpinning factor in the need for witch hunts.

- xxxvi Quaipe (1987, 133)
- xxxvii *Ibid.*
- xxxviii Scarre (1987, 16). See however Garland, Anna, 'The Great Witch Hunt: The Persecution of Witches in England, 1550-1660' 9 *Auckland U. L. Rev.* (2003) 1152 -1182, on how much witch-hunt scholarship is incorrect, with some early historians basing their works on inaccurate analyses and folkloric accounts. Early research suggested that the Church was responsible for spreading hysteria over witchcraft: later on, more comprehensive regional studies tended to identify the preconditions for witch-hunting as cultural, legal and geographical.
- xxxix *Jane Eyre* p 392
- xl *Jane Eyre* p 385
- xli *Jane Eyre* p 378
- xlii Scarre (1987, 34). See also Briggs, Robin *Many Reasons Why: Witchcraft and the Problem of Multiple Explanation* in Barry et al, (1996) 49-63
- xliii Scarre, (1987, 7) noting how four key characteristics became the accepted European norm, namely, the performance of harmful magic ('maleficia'); attendance at 'Sabbats' (derived from the Jewish 'Sabbath' and highlighting the anti-semitic elements of the hunt; 'strigae' (night-flying) and diabolical pacts sealed by copulation and evidenced by some 'mark' on the body, which was impervious to pain.
- xliv Garland (2003, 1166)
- xlv *Ibid* 1165
- xlvi *Ibid*
- xlvii Ehrenreich and English (1976). Brauner (1995, 35) too, argues that midwives were especially prone to accusation given their close association with life, death, pain relief in labour, and contraception. They could thus prevent 'new souls for God' from being created, as did 'lying in maids' who were also frequently accused of practising witchcraft when a child or mother suffered illness, deformity, or death.
- xlviii Jackson, Louise 'Witches, Wives and Mothers: Witchcraft persecution and women's confessions in 17<sup>th</sup> century England' *Women's History Review* (1995) (4) (1) 63-83
- xliv Monter, E William *Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Brighton, Harvester, 1983)
- <sup>1</sup> Brauner (1995, 36): See also Trueblood, Leigh A 'Female Genital Mutilation : A Discussion Of International Human Rights Instruments, Cultural Sovereignty And Dominance Theory' *Denv J Int'l L & Pol'y* (28) 2000 437 - 467 at 449 on the apparently 'poisonous capacity' of the female body.
- li Shires (1992, 162)
- lii *Jane Eyre* p 31
- liii Jackson (1995). By having the accused 'judge herself and her behaviour' the law could deny having fabricated the concept or status of witch. A witch's 'confession' was crucial to securing conviction; by having the accused 'participate' in their own condemnation, society clearly justified a radical derogation from the usual norms of criminal justice.
- liv *Jane Eyre*, 9
- lv *Ibid*
- lvi See further De Blecourt et al (1999, 167) on how a 'weather witch' could 'produce thunder, rain, hail, whirlwind and frost.'
- lvii See further Russell (1980, 100) on a particularly English witch trial, where 'an elderly pastor of Brandeston, John Lowes, was condemned for sinking a ship from Ipswich by magic.'
- lviii *Jane Eyre*, 11.
- lix *Ibid*
- lx *Ibid.*
- lxi *Ibid.* As De Blecourt et al (1999 p 167) noted, it was widely believed that witches could 'change into any animal.'
- lxii *Jane Eyre*, 31
- lxiii *Ibid* 15.
- lxiv See Riddell, William Renwick 'The Trial of Witches, Secundum Artem', 21 *Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology* 257 (1930) 257-260, p 259 on the overarching need for confession: '...common justice demands that a witch should not be condemned to death unless she is convicted by her own confession.'
- lxv On Matthew Hopkins, Witch Finder General of England (formerly an unsuccessful lawyer), see further Russell (1980, 100)
- lxvi *Jane Eyre*, 18.
- lxvii *Ibid*, 327
- lxviii *Ibid*, 31
- lxix *Ibid* p 17

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- lxx Martin (1977, 89)
- lxxi *Jane Eyre*, 18
- lxxii Gilbert Sandra and Gubar Susan 'The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination' (Yale University Press: New Haven 1979, 357)
- lxxiii *Jane Eyre* 18
- lxxiv *Jane Eyre* 268
- lxxv Rapaport, Herman 'Jane Eyre and the Mot Tabou' in *Between the Sign and the Gaze* (US, Cornell University Press, 1994)
- lxxvi *Jane Eyre* 34
- lxxvii *Ibid* 21
- lxxviii *Ibid* p 34
- lxxix *Ibid* 25
- lxxx *Ibid* 35.
- lxxxi De Angeles (2001 138)
- lxxxii Garland (2003, 1158) argues that 'the notion of an inheritance system resonated with the common belief that witchcraft stayed in a particular family and was handed down from generation to generation.'
- lxxxiii *Ibid*
- lxxxiv Russell (1980, 100)
- lxxxv Martin, (1977, 89)
- lxxxvi *Jane Eyre* p 36
- lxxxvii *Ibid* She delivers '...passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and other ballads.'
- lxxxviii *Jane Eyre*, 27
- lxxxix Martin (1977, 89)
- xc Garland (2003, 1171)
- xci Vrettos, Athena 'Victorian Psychology' in Patrick Brantlinger and William B Thesing 'A Companion to the Victorian Novel' (2007) Oxford, Blackwell
- xcii *Ibid*
- xciii See further Freeman (1984, 685)
- xciv Freeman, 286
- xcv As Vrettos (2007, 75) notes in respect of the generally harsh methods of Victorian child care: '...child-rearing became a matter of taming children's animal instincts and re-inscribing on the mind of the child the process and progress of civilization.'
- xcvi Martin (1977 86)
- xcvii *Jane Eyre*, 77
- xcviii Russell (1980, 94)
- xcix Martin (1977, 89)
- c *Ibid*
- ci *Jane Eyre* 80, even though 'the spell by which [she] had been so far supported began to dissolve' shortly afterwards.
- cii Gilbert and Gubar (1979 , 369)
- ciii *Ibid* 347
- civ *Ibid*
- cv *Jane Eyre* 93
- cvi Hill (1943, 5). A disturbingly livid Miss Scatcherd calls her a 'hardened girl!'
- cvi *Jane Eyre* 65
- cviii Vrettos (2007, 75)
- cix Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 336) observing also that there is an 'archetypal scenario for all those mildly thrilling romantic encounters between a scowling Byronic hero (who owns a gloomy mansion) and a trembling heroine (who can't quite figure out the mansion's floor plan).'
- cx *Ibid*
- cxii On the concept of incubi, see further Russell (1980, 64)
- cxii *Jane Eyre* 206
- cxiii *Jane Eyre* 143
- cxiv Martin (1977, 89)
- cxv *Ibid*
- cxvi Jackson (1995, 70)
- cxvii On the significance of (figuratively) walking in another's shadow, see further De Angeles (2001, 17)

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- cxviii *Ibid*
- cxix *Jane Eyre* 208
- cxx *Ibid*
- cxxi Martin (1977, 88)
- cxxii Grudin (1977, 145)
- cxxiii *Ibid*
- cxxiv *Jane Eyre* 365
- cxv Matus, Jill 'Strong family likeness: *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*' in Heather Glen (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 99-121, 112.
- cxvii Martin (1977, 29)
- cxviii Grudin (1977, 148)
- cxviiii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 360)
- cxvix Grudin, (1977, 152)
- cxvi See further Esther Godfrey 'Jane Eyre - from Governess to Girl Bride' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, (2005) (45) (4) 853-871, 856, on the dangers of the 'theatrical excess and sexual threats inherent to marriages between older men and younger women.'
- cxvii Jane's attitude makes sense however if we accept that, as a witch, she would wish to pass on her magical or folkloric abilities only to a worthy novice, as Bessie seemed to. Adele's childhood does at least seem far removed from Jane's own abusive one, as does her carefree nature (Jane's occasionally unreliable narration notwithstanding).
- cxviii Matus (2002, 111)
- cxviiii *Ibid*
- cxviiii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 361)
- cxvix Grudin (1977, 157)
- cxvix *Ibid*
- cxvix Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 339)
- cxvix *Jane Eyre* 288
- cxvix Martin (1977, 37) adding that the brownie is 'an English equivalent of Hermes, the mischievous, trickster god, represented as the phallos,' and citing Katherine Briggs *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967) 38-39 who argues that the brownie owes much to '...the classical Lar and is a ghost of hearth sacrifices...a fire god, a property god.'
- cxli *Jane Eyre* 366
- cxli *Ibid*
- cxlii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 343)
- cxliii *Ibid* 353
- cxliiv Grudin (1977, 155)
- cxliv Matus (2002, 116)
- cxlvi *Jane Eyre*, 386
- cxlvii *Jane Eyre* 400
- cxlviii *Jane Eyre* 402
- cxlix *Jane Eyre* 403
- cl Solomon (1963, 216) adding that 'true religion, not the frigid religion that will characterize Rivers, is described in terms of water.'
- cli Gagnier, Regenia '*Money, The Economy and Social Class*' in Brantlinger and Thesing (2007) pp 48-66, 64, with the 'pessimistic image of entropy ...contradicting the high Victorian optimistic image of progress.' See also Vrettos (2007, 76) on how such 'instinctual behaviour,' for the Victorian psychologist, was viewed as akin to that of the (so-called) 'savage races,' requiring harsh methods of discipline to 'develop rational faculties and habits of self-control.'
- clii Grudin (1977, 157). See also Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 363) on how marriage might serve as 'one of the traps which patriarchal society provides for outcast Cinderellas.'
- cliii *Ibid*.
- cliv See further Gagnier (2007, 64) citing Virginia Woolf in '*A Room of One's Own*' (1929), where the author compares *Jane Eyre* with Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) to argue that 'Brontë, with all her splendid gift for prose, stumbled ...with that clumsy weapon in her hands' insofar as the author 'succumbed to her "indignation" and with being at war with her lot.' (p.63)
- clv Gettelman, Deborah ' "Making out" *Jane Eyre* ' (Fall, 2007) *ELH*, (74) (3) pp. 557-581, 557
- clvi *Ibid*
- clvii *Ibid* 564

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- clviii Burkhart (1961, 177)
- clix *Jane Eyre* 432
- clx *Jane Eyre* 481
- clxi *Jane Eyre*, 498
- clxii *Jane Eyre* 484
- clxiii Sexton, Kristi - *Jane Eyre: Jane's Spiritual Coming of Age* *Brontë Studies*, (39) (3) (September 2014) 178–86
- clxiv *Jane Eyre*, 521
- clxv Kaplan (2007, 15)
- clxvi Matus (2002, 113)
- clxvii *Ibid* 116
- clxviii Godfrey (2005, 856)
- clxix Kees (2005, 875)
- clxx *Ibid*
- clxxi Bartels, Sarah 'A Terrific Ogre': The Role of the Devil in Victorian Popular Belief' *Folklore* (2017) 128 (3) 271 -291, 272
- clxxii Silver, Carole G. 'Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness' (2000) Oxford, Oxford University Press
- clxxiii Morris, Kathryn 'Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates' *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* (4) 2 (2015) 181-202, 196
- clxxiv Freeman (1984, 695)
- clxxv Herbert, Michael 'The Nineteenth And Twentieth Century Novel' in Nicholas Roe *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide* (pp 620-629) (Oxford: OUP, 2005 620-629, p 625) on how Brontë thus achieves 'passionate evocation of feeling...' for those so excluded.
- clxxvi Shires (1992, 157)
- clxxvii Eliza's very un-English, non-Protestant joy notwithstanding: 'I shall be quiet and unmolested...I shall embrace the tenets of Rome and probably take the veil.' (279)
- clxxviii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 341)
- clxxix Russell (1980, 14)
- clxxx Kaplan (2007, 15))
- clxxxi Matus (2002, 119)
- clxxxii *Jane Eyre*, 516
- clxxxiii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 364)
- clxxxiv Tillotson, Geoffrey 'A View of Victorian Literature' (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, 200) noting that 'Jane's inheritance comes too late and she renounces most of it.'
- clxxxv Matus, (2002, 119); See also Godfrey (2005, 855) on how by the book's end, 'Jane slips from the androgyny associated with her working-class background and her age into parodies of femininity and eventually into a legitimized form of female masculinity.'
- clxxxvi Godfrey (2005, 867)
- clxxxvii *Ibid*
- clxxxviii *Jane Eyre*, 505.
- clxxxix Matus (2002, 118)
- xc Freeman (1984, 695)
- xcii *Jane Eyre*, 516
- xciii See further Vrettos (2007, 75) on how this may represent 'acute sentimentality.'
- xciiii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 340)
- xcv Godfrey (2005, 867)
- xcvi Guy, Josephine M 'The Victorian Social-Problem Novel: The Market, The Individual and Communal Life' (London, MacMillan, 1996, 161)
- xcvii Gagnier (2007, 64). See also Russell, Corinna 'The Novel' in Roe (2005) p 624, on how Brontë created her 'journalizing governess,' and how a first-person narrator can 'withhold as much as she discloses.'
- xcviii Gilbert and Gubar (1979, 367)
- xcix Shapiro, Arnold 'In Defense of *Jane Eyre*' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, (Autumn 1968 (8) (4) pp 681-698 p 683
- cc Matus (2002, 111)
- cci Godfrey (2005, 871)
- ccii Martin (1977, 86)



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<sup>ccii</sup> Armstrong, Nancy, 'Emily's Ghost: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Fiction, Folklore, and Photography' *A Forum on Fiction*, (1992) 25 (3) 245-267, 246

<sup>cciii</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>cciv</sup> Tillotson (1978, 195)

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