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# The "Infernal World": Imagination in Charlotte Brontë's Four Novels

Cara MaryJo Cassell

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THE "INFERNAL WORLD":  
IMAGINATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S FOUR NOVELS

by

CARA M. CASSELL

Under the direction of Paul Schmidt

ABSTRACT

If you knew my thoughts; the dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up and makes me feel Society as it is, wretchedly insipid you would pity and I dare say despise me. (C. Brontë, 10 May 1836)

Before Charlotte Brontë wrote her first novel for publication, she admitted her mixed feelings about imagination. Brontë's letter shows that she feared both pity and condemnation. She struggled to attend to the imaginative world that brought her pleasure and to fulfill her duties in the real world so as to avoid its contempt. Brontë's early correspondence attests to her engrossment with the Angrian world she created in childhood. She referred to this world as the "infernal world" and to imagination as "fiery," showing the intensity and potential destructiveness of creativity. Society did not draw Brontë the way that the imagined world did, and in each of Brontë's four mature novels, she recreated the tricky navigation between the desirable imagined world and the necessary real world. Each protagonist resolves the struggle differently, with some protagonists achieving more success in society than others. The introduction of this dissertation provides critical and biographical background on Brontë's juxtaposition of imagination/desire and reason/duty. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman*

*in the Attic* supplies the basis for understanding the ways that the protagonists express imagination, and John Kucich's *Repression in Victorian Fiction* defines the purposefulness of repression. The four middle chapters examine imagination's manifestations and purposes for the protagonists. The final chapter discusses how the tension caused by the competing desires to express and repress imagination distinguishes Brontë's style.

INDEX WORDS: Charlotte Brontë, Imagination, Duty, Reality, Reason, Repression, Romance, *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor*, *Shirley*, *Villette*

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IMAGINATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S FOUR NOVELS

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CARA M. CASSELL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the College of Arts and Sciences

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2007

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DEDICATION

For Charlotte Brontë, Caroline Cassell, and Kerri Williams—with gratitude and affection.

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Dr. Edwards, mother of Florence and Jack, told me in the early days: “The only good dissertation is a done dissertation.” *Now* I understand.



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### A Precarious Balance: Imagination and Reason

If you knew my thoughts; the dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up and makes me feel Society as it is, wretchedly insipid you would pity and I dare say despise me. (Charlotte Brontë, 10 May 1836, qtd. in Barker 37)

Before Charlotte Brontë wrote her first novel for publication, she admitted her mixed feelings about imagination to her friend Ellen Nussey. Brontë feared both her friend's pity and, worse, her condemnation. She struggled to nurture the imaginative world that brought her pleasure and to fulfill her duties in the insipid world so as to avoid its contempt. At the time that Brontë wrote this letter, the Angrian world that she and her brother Branwell created in childhood engrossed her. She referred to this world as the "infernal world" (K. White 36), and that reference and her letter to Ellen noting the fiery quality of imagination show the intensity and potential destructiveness of creativity. The real world, or society, did not draw Brontë the way that the imagined one did, and in her novels, her characters navigate between the tempting allure of their imagination and the practical necessity of society. With each novel, Brontë recreates the struggle between the impulses of imagination and those of duty or reason.

The meaning of the word *imagination* morphs within the novels.<sup>1</sup> In general, the word refers to those products of the mind that are not practical or logical, “the power of the mind to consider things which are not present to the senses, and to consider that which is not taken to be real” (Martin). Depending on character and circumstance, the word suggests fantasy, hope, fear, artistic meditation, image creation, memory, nervous depression, or anticipation. Imagination contrasts with reason, reality, duty, conscience, and society.<sup>2</sup> Some of the novels’ settings treat imagination more hospitably than do others. As a result, some protagonists triumph with full autonomy, with imagination and practicality serving the character equally well. Other protagonists must repress their imaginative inclinations, except when the imagination allows them to predict unpleasant outcomes, in order to cope with society and its demands. The character’s success in achieving a satisfying balance between imagination and reason depends in large part on the type of novel that Brontë wrote.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it has different meanings and uses among philosophers. Kant, for example, identifies two important purposes of imagination: to reproduce (an idea of something from prior experience) and to produce a synthesis of experience (Manser 136). Coleridge, as put forth in *Biographia Literaria*, further classifies imagination as “a way of discovering a deeper truth about the world” (Manser 137). Another notes that imagination is “the mental faculty *sometimes* thought to encompass all acts of thinking about something novel, contrary to fact, or not currently perceived” and that imagination is always intentional, that is, the verb is directed toward an object (Russow 361, italics mine). Brontë’s collective published works demonstrate imagination’s having both purposes identified by Kant and filling all the customary definitions.

<sup>2</sup> The philosophical answer to the question, “What is reason?” is that “one should discern, so far as possible, what meaning is attached to ‘reason’ by an author” since philosophy does not provide a secure footing for defining the word (Warnock 84). This process of discernment is the one that I follow to determine how Brontë uses these key words in her intentionally published novels.

Though all of the novels have to some degree been deemed “imaginative autobiography” (Hook 9), each falls into a slightly different genre of fiction. *The Professor* tells the story of the self-made man, and self-made men must largely repress imaginative expression in order to succeed in society. *Jane Eyre*, with its tendency toward Gothic romance, most satisfyingly integrates imagination and reason. The political commentary of *Shirley* again requires reason to dominate because *Shirley* is mostly a novel about characters’ struggles to find their place in society. Finally, the last-completed novel, *Villette*, tells the story of the self-made woman, and, again, the protagonist credits her success in business to her practical, not her visionary, skill.

Both imagination and perseverance led to Brontë’s literary success, demonstrating that she navigated successfully through these opposing forces. Appreciation for Brontë’s art and influence is evident from the time of her first-published novel, *Jane Eyre*. Lawrence Jay Dessner writes, “Charlotte Brontë’s mature novels were immediately acclaimed in her own day, and [...] the power and appeal of at least *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* have not faded” (7). Brontë’s contemporary, Margaret Oliphant<sup>3</sup> recognized Brontë’s influence, commenting: “Perhaps no other writer of her time has impressed her mark so clearly on contemporary literature, or drawn so many followers onto her own peculiar path” (qtd. in Showalter 105-06) and

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<sup>3</sup> Joan Bellamy offers a more expansive overview of Oliphant’s views on Brontë’s influence.

Ten years ago we professed an orthodox system of novel-making. Our lovers were humble and devoted ... and the only true love worth having was that ... chivalrous true love which consecrated all womankind ... when suddenly, without warning, *Jane Eyre* stole upon the scene, and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed the invasion of *Jane Eyre*. (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 337)

Brontë's heroines do not necessarily find "humble and devoted" lovers; instead her characters may never capture love, but they do find themselves and take their readers on the journey to self-actualization. After metaphorically traveling with Brontë, George Eliot wrote, "I am only just returned to a sense of the real world about me, for I have been reading *Villette*, a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*" (qtd. in Hughes-Hallett vi). Through art, Brontë expressed her imagination, but her art also served practical purposes, and certainly she had to repress her imagination as she attended to traditional duties to her father and her students. Though she successfully balanced imagination and reason, her characters show the difficulty, and often the impossibility, of achieving that success. As Eliot's comment suggests, Brontë enables readers to escape into the world of her imaginative creation, but, like Eliot, they must return to the real world, a world that requires one to ignore imaginative flights except as recreation for the most privileged people.

Brontë's work transports her readers from their everyday existence to the worlds that she created. Her worlds have inspired other writers, ranging from Louisa May Alcott (Butterworth-McDermott 26) to Jasper Fforde (Hateley 1023). A single character from *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason, launched Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and numerous detailed studies on the significance of the mad woman in the attic, most notably Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's lengthy study.<sup>4</sup> Not only has Brontë's work brought her readers much pleasure, but the exercise of writing also provided entertainment and escape for Brontë and her siblings and rebelled against the overly fact-valued world that evolved from the Romantics' emotionalism. In the Victorian society that valued reason, this escape induced guilt, and novelists engaged in the debate of reason's and imaginations values. Brontë's *Villette* was published one year before Charles Dickens published his satire on the fact-filled world of England, *Hard Times*. Near the end of *Hard Times*, Thomas Gradgrind laments that his trust in facts may have been misguided:

Some persons hold [...] that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. [...] I have supposed the head to be all-

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<sup>4</sup> Chris R. Vanden Bossche, in "What Did *Jane Eyre* Do? Ideology, Agency, Class, and the Novel," provides an overview of the various criticisms that have been applied to the novel and argues that no one fully explicates the novel. *Jane Eyre* herself begins in rebellion against the Reeds, seemingly succumbs to conventionality in marrying Rochester (52), and then suggests continued rebellion in her writing the text years after her marriage (47). Vanden Bossche argues that this novel both reflects and produces a complex understanding of class structures and the individual's place.

sufficient. It may not be all-sufficient; how can I venture this morning to say it is! (222)

Gradgrind wonders if he has neglected “that other kind of wisdom” (222), as, indeed, his daughter’s collapse shows that he has. *Hard Times* shows the effects of lives built entirely on logic, yet the Victorian world trusted the “wisdom of the Head.” Brontë’s characters, however, question to what extent they also should trust the “wisdom of the Heart.”

Neither Brontë, nor Dickens, nor any other Victorian writer invented this conflict between imagination and reason in English literature. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer’s Miller touched on the dilemma, telling the audience: “Men may dyen of imaginacioun, / So depe may impressioun be take” (ll 3612-13). Nearly four centuries after Chaucer’s tale, Dr. Johnson’s *Rasselas* suggests the truth of the Miller’s statement. *Rasselas* hears of the potential horror of imagination in “The Dangerous Prevalence of the Imagination”:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Johnson’s fiction, like Chaucer’s, Brontë’s, and Dickens’s, reflects the distrust of imagination that has been explored in philosophy at least since the time of Plato. Plato identified the “psychological problem” of people’s “trying their hand at legislation, and imagining that by reforms they will make an end to the dishonesties and rascalities of mankind—not knowing that in reality they are cutting away at the heads of a hydra” (Durant 20). In general, Plato viewed imagination as a hindrance to clear knowledge (Manser 136), and he was disconcerted “that emotional identification is to some extent indifferent to the barrier between reality and make-believe” (Janaway). David Hume revisits Plato’s concern preceding Johnson’s long work of fiction. David Hume wrote in *Treatise of Human Nature*: “Nothing is more dangerous to reason than flights of imagination” (qtd. in Manser 136). Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, describes imagination as a “blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever” (qtd. in Manser 136). *Rasselas*’s experience with imagination shows its power for reform and its potential to cause harm, the double-edged sword that Brontë later examined.

No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability. All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can control and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any deprivation of the mental faculties: it is not pronounced madness but when it becomes ungovernable and apparently influences speech or action.

This explanation of imagination shocks the Prince: everyone is vulnerable to imagination's lure; to surrender to imagination is to surrender to insanity. Control over the faculty is key. He is moved to confess:

I have frequently endeavoured to image the possibility of a perfect government, by which all wrong should be restrained, all vice reformed, and all the subjects preserved in tranquillity and innocence. This thought produced innumerable schemes of reformation, and dictated many useful regulations and salutary edicts. This has been the sport, and sometimes the labour, of my solitude; and I start when I think with how little anguish I once supposed the death of my father and my brothers.

The Prince's imagination seems productive until he adds the immoral element of nearly wishing for his family's demise. Such thoughts were his hobby and norm. The chapter concludes with the assertion that repeated exposure to fantasy induces one to believe the fantasy and neglect the reality. Dr. Johnson's *The History of Rasselas* suggests that reason's influence is key to mitigate the dangerous snare of imagination. This fear of



imagination contrasts sharply with the one Darwin presented a few years after Brontë's death. Darwin called imagination "one of the highest perogatives of man" and wrote in *The Descent of Man*, "By this faculty he unites, independently of the will, former images and ideas, and thus creates brilliant and novel results" (qtd. in "Imagination"). Of Brontë's narrators, only Jane Eyre anticipates the reverence for imagination that Darwin will show; she explicitly tells the reader that she values dreams and intuition, yet she is like the other Brontë protagonists in that she does not make such a confession to other characters. Brontë's main characters intuitively trust imagination but hide it from society. They continue the tradition of struggling to balance reality and imagination.

This cultural suspicion of imagination led to Brontë's need to justify her imaginative escape. The Victorians expected women particularly to serve practical roles in society, and imaginative activities were luxuries in which clergy's daughters should rarely indulge. Describing Brontë's own conflict, Donald Stone explains: "writing meant an escape from reality, and as the need for that escape intensified so too did the opposing spirit of conscience and reason to warn her away from the lures of the imagination and to direct her toward a realistic goal" (104).<sup>6</sup> Each of Brontë's novels provides material for thorough examination of these "opposing spirits." Indeed, Donald Stone's generalization

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<sup>6</sup> D. Stone's chapter on Brontë provides an overview of her struggle between the desires of duty and imagination. His aim is to describe the Romantic impulse shown in a variety of Victorian novels, not to examine the "conscience" of duty versus the "lure" of imagination.

proves correct: for most of the protagonists, as the pressure intensifies, they may escape temporarily to imagination, but imagination ironically turns to guide them to dutiful behavior that will satisfy their conscience.

Brontë's novels contain a human truth that transcends the circumstances of women in the nineteenth century, and the characters' words reveal truth that transcends a specifically feminist lens.<sup>7</sup> Like the Victorians, modern men and women live between their dreams and practical duties. Few live artistic lives or can dwell in the imagination, but people's dreams often provide motivation and a sense of meaningfulness in life, whether or not those dreams are being realized, and thereby serve a practical role in society, to increase productivity, and serve the individual by increasing the quality of interior life. Brontë's characters struggle to balance rival tensions that remain part of people's lives today. The characters' opposing desires to express and repress imagination show us to ourselves.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar provide a framework in which to recognize the many ways that the works of nineteenth-century women writers expressed imagination, and John Kucich explains why repressing one's imagination may have been desirable in the Victorian period. All three of these scholars specifically examine Brontë's work, but

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<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Fraser identifies Brontë's three-fold alienation: "from being a woman, from being ambitious, and from having a secret world of writing" (186). These second two factors are at least as important as the first to convey the isolation that characterizes the human condition and to enable Brontë's novels to appeal to modern readers.

Gilbert and Gubar do not examine the potentially productive or pleasurable aspect of repressing one's imagination, and Kucich does not examine the breadth of imaginative expression in Brontë's work. Gilbert and Gubar are specifically interested in the nineteenth-century woman novelist's struggle for imaginative expression in a society governed by oppressive patriarchy. In many ways, their premise of oppression supports Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal of Brontë as an extraordinary heroine of oppressive circumstances. Kucich's study focuses on the pleasurable effects of repression to the characters' interior lives. He examines the repression of libidinal desires in the works of several Victorian novelists. Brontë's characters express and repress imagination to fulfill both practical and emotional purposes.

Brontë, through her correspondence and her characters, overtly weighs the consequences of expressing imagination. The characters choose circumstantially to express or repress their imaginations. In general, the characters feel vulnerable when they express their imagination to other characters, powerful when they choose to repress their imagination, and frustrated when outside forces cause the repression. In these feelings, people today are like Brontë's characters. This concept of choice's relationship to power is simple. Brontë and her characters, however, are complex, and the study of their words on imagination offers examples of how many people manage the coexistence of imaginative and real experiences. Donald Stone describes Brontë's complexity and

reveals her potential to hold a mirror to modern society when he writes that she was “not quite a Victorian novelist in that her focus is invariably on the individual existing in a largely hostile world and her standards are those of the individual and not society,” and she is “not fully a Romantic either because of her gloomy sense of human nature and her religious doubts concerning the unaided individual’s ability to achieve truth or happiness or salvation” (100). Perhaps, then, Brontë’s works reveal as much about the mindset of the disillusioned post-World Wars era as they do about her own. Humans generally struggle to find security in the expression of imagination and power in its expression.

Brontë’s correspondence provides a basis to understand her own struggle with the desires to express and repress imagination. Her life as much as her work has been a source of gossip and scholarly study since she first published a novel (*Poems* captured neither the public’s attention nor curiosity about its authors), and her personal correspondence provides the first tool to interpret this struggle that her characters repeatedly endure. She published anonymously under the pseudonym Currer Bell, thereby creating a separate identity responsible for her imaginative expression.<sup>8</sup> With the mask of Currer Bell, Brontë protected her imaginative expression, and therefore, she was

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<sup>8</sup> Marianne Thormählen argues that all three of the Brontë authors derived their pseudonyms from contemporary literary women. In Charlotte’s case, Currer is the last name of Frances Mary Richardson Currer, a scholar of whom Brontë would have heard while working as a governess for the Sidgwicks. The name Bell, Thormählen theorizes, may have been derived from Arthur Bell Nicholls, then a new curate to Patrick Brontë, or from the surname of Dr. Andrew Bell, a person who argued for the education of the lower classes.

secure and powerful in her secret identity. Brontë told her publisher that “in creating Currer Bell, she felt like a wizard who had created a particularly powerful spirit” (K. White 87).

Public response justified her cover. Upon the publication of *Jane Eyre*, reviewers immediately began to speculate about the gender of the androgynously named author and about the autobiographical sources for such a novel. To those reviewers, via her publisher, Brontë wrote: “To you I am neither Man nor Woman—I come before you as an Author only—it is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me—the sole ground on which I accept your judgment” (16 August 1849, qtd. in Barker 243).

Contemporary attitudes necessitated the protection of a pen name. In this time, women’s “creative imagination was often seen as a threat to religious beliefs and domestic responsibilities” (D. Stone 135), and the still unmarried Brontë used her disguise as a means to protect both her privacy and reputation. In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elizabeth Gaskell emphasizes Brontë's attention to duty and allows Brontë's imaginative work to remain somewhat a mystery, keeping the mask in place. Modern readers may reasonably conclude that Gaskell’s protection would have pleased Brontë. Indeed, Brontë wrote to Gaskell “Currer Bell will avow to Mrs Gaskell that her chief reason for maintaining an incognito is the fear that if she relinquished it, strength and courage would leave her, and she should ever after shrink—from writing the plain truth” (qtd. in Barker

250). In this case, the pseudonym had a practical purpose; it protected the writer's ability to portray truth that transcends the Facts that Charles Dickens criticizes.

Brontë's fear that revelation of identity would prevent her from telling emotional truths was well founded. John Maynard declares that "from the earliest Freudian readings of Brontë [...], there has been a marked tendency to diminish Brontë's work into a mere personal expression of despair over her early traumatic experiences" (ix). Brontë herself resisted such diminishment; she valued, even as she protected, the imaginative aspect of her work, repeatedly arguing for art's prerogative to reshape reality. In reply to G. H. Lewes's advice, following the publication of *Jane Eyre*, that she confine her novels to realism, she asked:

[I]s not the real experience of each individual very limited? And, if a writer dwells upon that solely or principally, is he not in danger of repeating himself, and also of becoming an egoist? Then, too, imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation? (6 November 1847, qtd. in Gaskell 330)

In this response, she questions the role of unflagging attention to reality in fiction, and she celebrates imagination's power. Brontë recognizes that through her imagination, she can live vicariously, and she argues for the writer's duty to draw from vicarious experience.<sup>9</sup> Brontë's questions echo the words of Elizabeth Hamilton, written nearly forty years earlier; Hamilton wrote: "Truth [...] must sometimes permit herself to be arrayed by the hand of fancy. When she appears thus decorated, some care is, however, necessary, lest the attention should be so much engaged by the drapery, as to overlook the symmetry and proportions of the figure which it conceals" (qtd. in Armstrong 104). Brontë's correspondence attests to her desire for her entire work, the truth and the drapery, to be evaluated together. According to Carol Bock, Brontë, "Like Byron and Scott—indeed, probably due to their influence—[...] tried to balance the claims of the actual and the ideal in her writing," and,

This preoccupation results in some of the most striking thematic and formal elements in her later work: the emphasis on the dangers and rewards of introspective daydreaming in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*; the incorporation of Gothic horrors, like Bertha Mason and the ghostly nun of *Villette*, into contexts that are otherwise credibly mundane. (19)

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<sup>9</sup> See also Franklin Gary's "Charlotte Brontë and George Henry Lewes."

Brontë's narrators generally derive from ordinary experience: unwealthy, hardworking, often marginalized people. To this common experience, Brontë adds a "coloring of imagination," as Wordsworth would describe it. Most of her protagonists share their dreams with the reader, even when morés dictate that they do not share these dreams with other characters.

Brontë risked her reputation when she wrote fiction, and some scholars, including Gaskell, felt the work did not reflect the virtuous woman who created it. However, other scholars have studied Brontë's work on her terms: for author's achievement, not for a man's or woman's character. For example, Maynard writes that he does not agree with those who limit the scope of Brontë's achievement and the range of her novels to her experiences; instead, he finds her work "much aware of trauma and loss and much concerned with the independence of women but [...] above all a triumph of art and psychological understanding over the circumstances of her life and century" (ix). By using both intellectual and imaginative powers to create the worlds of her novels, Brontë writes stories that transcend her time and personal experience. She not only draws on her own experiences, "early traumatic" as Maynard notes, but she also conveys imagined experiences to tell her tales.

Confusion of whether to study the work or the author challenged Brontë's original biographer. Much of Brontë's writing about her work was destroyed by the time that



Gaskell interviewed Brontë's friends, and Gaskell's own friendship with Brontë shaped her interpretation. As noted by Kathryn White, Gaskell "had the unique advantage for a Brontë biographer of having known her subject and access to both Mr Brontë and [Brontë's husband] Mr Nicholls" (101); Brontë and Gaskell's correspondence attests to their friendship, and perhaps to Gaskell's bias. White writes that "Gaskell found Charlotte's tragic life a fascinating source of gossip, which was to taint her portrayal of her friend in the *Life* a few years later" (K. White 93). White criticizes Gaskell for portraying the citizens of Haworth as "rude savages" (16) so as

to protect the Brontës' personal morality from the accusations of coarseness and brutality that had been directed at their novels. If [Gaskell] suggested that the Brontës merely wrote about the violence and amorality of those around them, their own reputations would remain intact. (17)

According to White, Gaskell's *Life* nears historical fiction. In the case of all the biographers, Gaskell and White included, their interpretation of the facts of Brontë's life are imaginative exercises in which they create a character who both is and is not Brontë.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, their portrayals—Gaskell's in particular—provide a basis for understanding how Brontë may have regarded imagination. Because her works, rightly or wrongly, are

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<sup>10</sup> Lucasta Miller argues in *The Brontë Myth* that Charlotte Brontë deliberately created this character who is both forthright and demure.

viewed as at least semi-autobiographical, her conflicted feelings about imagination suggest that the characters' replay of these struggles portray Brontë's resolutions to the conflict, and her keen insight is timeless.

On the other extreme from White who finds Gaskell's portrayal of Brontë's family too harsh, Rosamond Langbridge, writing in 1929, finds Gaskell too soft. Langbridge describes Gaskell as too lenient on Patrick Brontë and too understated in her portrayal of Charlotte Brontë's "unprotracted misery" (1). Langbridge identifies Brontë's life as "surely, the saddest life that one has ever heard of," and she quotes Mary Taylor, one of Brontë's lifetime friends, as saying the reality that was shown in Gaskell's *Life* was "not so gloomy as the truth" (3). Langbridge largely blames Mr. Brontë for the children's misery, arguing, with bias, that he was "the ugly product of a hideous religion" (7). She uses Gaskell's "excellent man" phrase ironically, and writes that Patrick Brontë "considered his children in the light of pests and nuisances, muzzled their youthful sportiveness by a ban of silence [...] and was evidently so terrible to them [...] that he could only induce them to reveal their open thoughts to him under cover of a mask" (7). Gaskell's account does support the silence of the household and the mask anecdote, if not Langbridge's interpretation. Such portrayals suggest that repression dominated Brontë's life, since her few years at school was her only time of any significant length from her father's house. Langbridge asks "What possible entertainment could those six little Irish

creatures, highly-strung and imaginative as they all were, find in silence and soundlessness?" (13).

The answer to Langbridge's rhetorical question likely would surprise her. In the nursery began Brontë's penchant for writing as she and her siblings created stories together. John Kucich finds that Brontë's times of quiet served her craft well. He writes, "For Brontë seems to have identified her fictional world as a locus of pure inward vitality and expansion, in opposition to the claustrophobic, lifeless world of everyday reality that she regarded around her" (55). The repressive nature of her environment, then, invited expansion through imagination. Brontë's Roe Head journals—writing not done at home—reveal her frustration when school duties interrupt her fantasies, interruptions that do not frustrate Brontë at home. Brontë's writing freed her, and acknowledging this freedom leads logically to supposing that her storytelling in the nursery may not have been the result of the miserable, oppressive childhood that Langbridge imagined. Instead, her environment limited her distractions from imaginative play and provided relative quiet for the shared imaginative experiences necessary for the budding artists: Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne.

Supporting Gaskell's portrayal, one editor of *Life*, Alan Shelston, claims that modern biographers have asserted that *Life* damaged Mr. Brontë's reputation; however, Shelston writes, "For the real effect of the portrayal we need look no further than the fact

that it in no way impaired Patrick Brontë's and Mrs Gaskell's admiration for each other" (27). Kathryn White asserts that Mr. Brontë "was a supportive and liberal father" who became "the father of genius" (6). The truth about the Brontës' home life likely lies between the rosy picture painted by White and the gloomy one shown by Langbridge; perhaps, indeed, modern readers must return to Gaskell, even if we do have to infer much, to discover as nearly as possible how Charlotte Brontë controls the expression and repression of imagination so that her spirit and her conscience peacefully coexist.

Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* appeared in two successful versions: the first, which appeared in 1857, and the third "Revised and Corrected" that appeared later that same year (Shelston's note). Editor Shelston explains the context for the revision and shows the most heavily revised chapters in an appendix. The woman, by then widowed, with whom Branwell had an affair and the family of the Reverend Mr. Wilson who ran the Clergy Daughters School threatened legal action because of the negative descriptions portrayed in *Life*. Further, Mary Taylor, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Martineau had written to offer points of clarification or further detail. The revised edition reflects their corrections and largely eliminates offenses to the unnamed woman and Reverend Wilson (Shelston Appendix A, 527-28). Nevertheless, in both the first and final editions, Gaskell writes so that the reader travels with her to meet Charlotte Brontë and her family.

Gaskell begins her description in Keighley, journeys to the quieter village of Haworth,

and ends chapter one at the memorial tablet for most of Brontë's immediate family.

The tablet reveals that Brontë's mother, Maria, died about one year after arriving in Haworth, Brontë's two elder sisters died four years later and within six weeks of each other, and then her three younger siblings all died within six months of each other.

Gaskell points out that the writing on the tablet begins with adequate space for the first memorials, but by Charlotte Brontë's death, no room remained, and her death is noted on a small plaque that hangs below the original. With such an introduction, the reader prepares for a story of suffering and loss, and Gaskell does not disappoint the reader with her portrayal of Brontë's bravery in the face of these losses and her attention to the care of her family. Gaskell emphasizes Brontë's attention to family responsibilities, and subsequent scholars frequently read Brontë's novels through a biographic lens.

Continuing her attention to Brontë's virtuous duty, in the second chapter Gaskell describes the hardy, independent, and somewhat begrudging character of the local people.<sup>11</sup> Gaskell contrasts the locals' ways with the Brontës' manners and gentleness.

As soon as, in the chronology of the biography, Brontë comes of age to write, Gaskell allows her to speak for herself through her journals and letters. The final chapter

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<sup>11</sup> Frances Twinn notes that Gaskell herself had conflicting views of the setting—views obtained through her correspondence with Brontë, conversations with their mutual friend Janet Kay-Shuttleworth, and Brontë's novels published by 1853. Twinn finds a "paradoxical" (156) portrayal of the moor that coincides with the complicated relationship that the novels show between, among other forces, imagination and society.

describes Brontë's funeral, and in this conclusion, Gaskell indirectly appeals to the reader's sympathy with Mary Taylor's assertion of Brontë's attention to duty:

She thought much of her duty, and had loftier and clearer notions of it than most people, and held fast to them with more success. [...] All her life was but labour and pain; and she never threw down the burden for the sake of present pleasure. [...] She herself appealed to the world's judgment for her use of some of the faculties she had,—not the best,—but still the only ones she could turn to strangers' benefit. They heartily, greedily enjoyed the fruits of her labours, and then found out she was much to be blamed for possessing such faculties. Why ask for a judgment on her from such a world? (526)

Patrick Brontë commissioned Gaskell, mourning the loss of her friend and the loss of talent from this world, to write his daughter's biography. This biography becomes a eulogy. In the conclusion, Taylor's voice, rather than Gaskell's, scolds the public for not appreciating the woman whose work they admired. Through Taylor's letter, Gaskell asks the public to understand that Brontë's life engendered her work, and Gaskell appeals to the public's gentler nature as they remember Charlotte Brontë and, more than her talent, her virtue shown through her devoted attention to her duty. *Life's* purpose, then, is to invite public understanding of and tribute to an extremely private individual, and, in a

way, to assert that Brontë's talent never interfered with her fulfilling her expected role in society. According to the biography, fulfillment of this role, rather than her genius, determined her worth, and Brontë's characters endured the same moral scrutiny as did their creator.

Later scholars more sharply criticized Brontë than did Gaskell. Shelston, perhaps believing that Gaskell failed to communicate adequately Brontë's weaknesses, calls Brontë a reluctant recluse whose "depth of emotional feeling and her psychological instability, reinforced by her situation, could only find vicarious outlet in her novels" (12). Such a claim minimizes the art of Brontë's work; indeed, it suggests that her creativity made her unstable. His claim of instability was later refuted by Maynard, but Shelston's point about Brontë's vicarious outlet is common among Victorian and Brontë scholars. For example, Nancy Armstrong's claim in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* supports Shelston's belief that Brontë used writing not only as an escape but as a means of living, however vicariously. Armstrong writes "that written representations of the self allowed the modern individual to become an economic and psychological reality" (8). Brontë's fictional autobiography enabled her to achieve financial independence and to write herself to life. Brontë had limited experience in society, but—especially if one accepts that authors in some degree live in each of their characters—her interior world became exterior as the novels bridged Brontë's interior life and society. In the words of

Blaise Pascal: “We arrive at the truth, not by the reason only, but also by the heart.”

Brontë’s published writing integrates imagination and reality for the author and explores this theme in a way that applies to the larger population.

Brontë’s novels explore a truth about character and psychology that defies the confines of the physical world, yet Brontë grounds these novels in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. The extraordinary events are, perhaps, credits to the Gothic tradition that allow for ways of knowing beyond sensory perception. In the words of Eugenia DeLamotte,

at a symbolic level, [Gothic novels] give voice to all sorts of unnamable—and perhaps unthinkable—discontents with the very ideology they overtly espouse. Those discontents, in their relation to the issues of self-defense, knowledge, and repetition, and transcendence, circle continuously around the theme of the boundaries of the self. (151)

This claim is similar to Gilbert and Gubar’s explanation that “mad or monstrous women” are a way that “female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them. [...] the madwoman in literature by women is not merely [...] an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the *author’s* double” (78). The author’s imaginative expression, then, serves as a medium to reveal a truth about her existence, a truth that extends beyond



physical truth, a truth that relies on imagination rather than facts for its existence.<sup>12</sup>

Like the author's life in society, Brontë's characters have rather ordinary existences peppered with extraordinary Gothic events. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas explains the role of the Gothic in Brontë's novels. She describes the Gothic as "the Romantic period's version of fairy tales for adults. [...] it was an atmosphere of anti-realism, which could be employed alongside or underneath her realistic narrative, that suited Brontë's needs" (70). Brontë's characters experience dreams, ghostly visions, and extended selves in the forms of their mad doubles, all very much part of the Gothic tradition, and these experiences are expressions—and projections—of imagination that allow the characters to come to deeper knowledge of themselves. As the audience vicariously encounters all that the characters do, it too questions whether to trust these seeming products of the characters' imaginations. A rational person can distinguish between the interior world of the imagination and the exterior world of society, and a fully integrated person can draw from the experiences of both worlds to achieve fullness of life. With the characters, the readers have reason to question the imaginings presented in the novels: Is the personified Reason leading William Crimsworth to opportunity or to ruin? Does Jane Eyre truly hear

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<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Rodolff, in "Providential Encounters in Charlotte Brontë's Fiction," identifies one further way that romance, or fortunate but unlikely encounters, manifests in the novels: through fortunate, chance meetings, such as Crimsworth experiences when he meets the lost Frances in the graveyard, Jane Eyre when she falls upon her cousins' home, and (Rodolff does not mention) Lucy Snowe when she faints in front of Père Silas and Dr. John.

Rochester's voice, and is that voice calling her to harm or to love? Beside the characters, the audience struggles to navigate between the world's facts and imaginative creations.

To assume that Brontë was not psychologically whole, however, as Shelston did when he assumed "her psychological instability, reinforced by her situation" (Gaskell 12), diminishes her life's work and assumes that she was incapable of balancing the competing desires of imagination and duty. Without this balance, Brontë likely would have suffered the same end as her brother, but she never succumbed to ruinous temptations. Brontë's letters and work consistently show her capability. In the words of John Maynard,

The end that provides the measure of her life's work is the major art of *Villette*, not the misfortune of her death—a death that has been read romantically as a kind of suicide of her spirit. [...] the important point is not to read the work as if it were the life. Out of the often terrible conditions of her life, Brontë found the strength to present a major impersonal vision of experience in her art. (ix)

Her struggle with imagined life and real life continues the universal story, and just as Brontë's (and Shelston's and Maynard's) readers are not dying from forays into imagination, neither did Brontë. Maynard refutes other writers who believe that Brontë

died as a result of her unhappiness and rejection of marriage and pregnancy.

Langbridge, for example, claims that Brontë's "imagination was at the root of all her ills"

(182). Specifically, Maynard refutes Dr. Phillip Rhodes, who in 1972, diagnosed Brontë

as dying from "'unconscious rejection of the baby' and 'failure to achieve satisfactory

psychological relations with most others'" (218). Brontë's own letters run contrary to

Rhodes's notion. Maynard collected Brontë's records—letters, death certificate, medical

records—and asked Dr. Gerson Weiss of New York University Medical Center to

examine them. Dr. Weiss concluded that "there is no ground for using the facts of her

death to establish a psychological illness. It should be noted indeed that Brontë's mental

health seems good in the records we have of her life before and after marriage" (224).

Brontë faced painful losses in her life and often felt ill-at-ease in company; she was self-

deprecating about her appearance but confident in her talent, and her life-long

correspondences attest to her ability to have "satisfactory psychological relations." She

convinced her father to allow her to marry, and her letters to Ellen indicate her

contentment with married life. She had begun another novel after her marriage, and her

strength in facing the tribulations earlier in her life suggest that adversity would not cause

her to waste away and that she likely died, as her own doctor surmised, of a tubercular

wasting illness (Maynard 224). Throughout her life, Brontë showed strong powers of

self-knowledge and self-reflection; surely less than one year of marriage could not have

ended all her resourcefulness. Modern readers, then, have no need to question the psychological reliability of Brontë or her work. She and her characters question whether they are better served by expressing or repressing their imaginative impulses. These are the questions of sane, balanced people, not of people whose nervous depression (as Brontë called hypochondria and as she and nearly all her protagonists experienced) kills them.

The conflict between imagination's temptation and woman's duty is manifested in Brontë's own life and in the lives of her characters—female and male. Charlotte Brontë's fertile imagination both serves her well and tempts her sorely, as her letters attest. In her letters to Ellen Nussey, Brontë tends to hide her passion for writing and her devotion to her imaginative world but voices her frustrations when students interrupt her private thoughts. Brontë constantly was torn between her desire to escape into imagination and her sense of duty. In a few instances, she could simultaneously fulfill both desires. Indeed, writing with her siblings may have been one of the ways that Brontë served her surrogate-mother role as the eldest living child. At the age of thirteen, Brontë described the writing that she and her siblings produced as “our plays” (Bock 1), clearly an imaginative experience that allowed Brontë to fulfill her responsibilities to the small society of her family and to express her imaginative creations. Her correspondence

repeatedly shows that Brontë justifies her indulgence in imagination by connecting its expression to her duties.

Brontë's brief correspondence with then English Poet Laureate Robert Southey reveals the particular problem of female imaginative expression in the Victorian age. In Southey's response to Brontë's poetry submission, he notes that Brontë has talent as a poet, but because of others' comparable talent and Brontë's sex, Southey advises her to pursue her writing only in rare leisure time lest she fail in her domestic responsibilities. He writes, "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be" and that when Brontë is called to domestic duties (i.e., to marriage), she will "not seek in imagination for excitement" (qtd. in Gaskell 173). Gaskell excuses Southey's dismissal of Brontë's passion, saying that Brontë likely "used some high-flown expressions, which, probably, gave him the idea that she was a romantic young lady, unacquainted with the realities of life" (167); however, Gilbert and Gubar attribute his dismissal entirely to the patriarchal system that dominated literature. They point out the groundbreaking work done by Brontë and other women writers of her day to create a place for women to be writers when they note that, as Southey's letter affirms, literature "cannot be [the business of a woman's life], the metaphor of literary paternity suggests, because it is physiologically as well as sociologically impossible" (8); Brontë, then, must defy physiological and sociological limits, and she attempts to do so without ruffling her

contemporaries' patriarchal feathers.<sup>13</sup> She humbly replies to Southey even as she defends herself. Judith Barker notes that Southey's comments "must have cut Charlotte to the quick, for they described her own struggles at Roe Head as vividly and accurately as if he had actually seen her drifting off into Angrian fantasy and being brought abruptly back to reality by the demands of her pupils" (46). Her imaginative world tempts Brontë to abandon attention to society, but she assures Southey that her responsibilities to her father and family are paramount. When Brontë accepts the post in Miss Wooler's school, for example, she obeys "duty—necessity— [...] stern mistresses who will not be disobeyed," as she wrote to Ellen (July 1835, qtd. in Gaskell 156). Brontë asserts her attention to duty even as she structures her life—by returning home, for example—so as to fulfill the needs of her interior world.

Other biographical information reveals the extent to which Brontë struggled with the competing desires of imagination and duty. Kathryn White explains that while at Roe Head, Brontë's "obsession with Angria was conflicting with her duty and the passion of her thoughts frightened her" (39). White calls these dual mistresses of imagination and duty "the harsh light of economic necessity [...] and] the 'infernal world' of Angria" (36), "infernal" because Brontë could neither surrender to it nor free herself from it. Her life

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<sup>13</sup> Laurie Stone asserts that Brontë decides early in her career that she has "good creativity," with a God focus, and "bad creativity," in which idolatry for imagination itself takes over. She writes her novels with an attempt to portray the "good creativity" (65).

attests to her fulfillment of duty, even to the point that Elizabeth Gaskell portrays her as a woman who entirely devoted herself to her family's, and particularly her father's, comfort. Gaskell writes that "it must likewise be borne in mind—by those who, surviving her, look back upon her life from their mount of observation,—how no distaste, no suffering ever made her shrink from any cause which she believed it to be her duty to engage in" (211). Though Brontë escapes into her Angrian fantasies, she continues to fulfill her commitments to the Brontë household, unlike her unfortunate brother. Contrary to Gilbert and Gubar who see the oppression of the nineteenth century, Carol Bock credits Brontë's stability in part to her role as a woman. Bock writes, "Without doubt, the social expectation, [that] as a woman, she would recognize her duty to eschew self-indulgent daydreaming also encouraged her to face the world of actuality" (3). The demands of being the eldest living daughter perhaps saved her from Branwell's fate. Had Branwell been a woman, he likely would not have believed that his artistic gifts were sufficient to earn a living, nor would he have been free to surrender himself to a seemingly unrequited love and then smother his sorrow in alcohol and drugs. In short, the duties and expectations ascribed to women may have saved Brontë from the fate that a man's freedom would have allowed. Brontë, who watched her brother's demise, would have known all too well the damage that ignoring one's duty causes. To Southey, and perhaps for her own reassurance, Brontë defends her having talent's call to write and the

ability to manage both imagination and society's obligations, replying in a letter, "You do not forbid me to write; you do not say that what I write is utterly destitute of merit. You only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties, for the sake of imaginative pleasures" (Gaskell 174). Here, "real" implies the daily work of women, and imagination seems to be a silly indulgence, yet these "imaginative pleasures" also were real to Brontë, who best demonstrates her ability to manage these personal and familial demands by writing much of *Jane Eyre* while she nursed her father through weeks of recovery from cataract surgery (Stryker, ii) and kept her imaginative endeavor secret from him until its publication—a secret that must have given her much pleasure when she presented the novel with its favorable reviews.

Brontë's work suggests her self-awareness. Elaine Shuttleworth and Carol Bock, among others, have made convincing arguments that Brontë was fully aware of the psychology of her characters. Brontë's awareness of some forms of nineteenth-century psychology and the ways that she used her knowledge of psychology in characterization is one of the features that makes her novels compelling to her contemporary and later readers. Through her awareness, Brontë may have achieved—at least in part—what John Stuart Mill argued that women were unlikely to do: "to overcome the influence of male literary tradition, and to create an original, primary, and independent art" (Showalter 3). Brontë's art distinguishes itself through her understanding of the motivation for



imagination. Sally Shuttleworth connects Brontë's awareness with her effectiveness as a writer. Shuttleworth writes:

[T]he rise of physiognomy and phrenology at the end of the eighteenth century, and the re-emergence of interest in the decoding of physical form, can be linked, together with the concomitant development of medical psychiatry, to the fundamental transformations in social and cultural organization and systems of control taking place at that era, and to the correlated emergence of new interiorized models of selfhood. (59)

Although physiognomy and phrenology now are outdated fields, her characters' frequent reliance upon these methods clearly shows that Brontë took part in this new understanding of the self engendered by these early sciences, and the new "interiorized models of selfhood" suggest that she would recognize the value of interior life generally, and imaginative life particularly, whether or not it is repressed. Shuttleworth also notes that Brontë herself could have read *Manual of Phrenology*, available in nearby Keighley, and she did visit a London phrenologist "who gave a surprisingly accurate diagnosis of his anonymous caller's character" (57). Shuttleworth further explains that "The individual was, for the phrenologist, the site of warring forces [. . . and] Internal contradiction was not simply an occasional occurrence, but a necessary state of being" (62). Seemingly in compliance with this model, Brontë's characters struggle with

competing desires.<sup>14</sup> This internal world, and the character's choice to reveal that world or to repress it, characterizes Brontë's novels. At the time that Brontë published, writers generally were limited by the Utilitarian age's emphasis on "nothing but Facts. [for] Facts alone are wanted in life" (Dickens 11). Women writers were limited by their domestic roles—in Brontë's case, as a daughter—and by "evangelicalism, with its suspicion of the imagination and its emphasis on duty" (Showalter 15); nevertheless, by confronting these limits in her work, allowing characters to struggle with and even surrender to imagination's call, Brontë pioneers new writing territory for the female novelist. Brontë may not have rebelled against limits in her personal life, but, as Barbara Leah Harman argues, she "valued and praised those who argued on behalf of wider opportunities for [women]—in moral life, politics, education, and employment" (23), and Brontë herself wrote in such a way that she created a "wider" understanding of the complexities of imagination. Her understanding of the psychology of the day enabled her to create characters who, like their reading contemporaries, struggle to succeed in the world of facts and to satisfy imagination's impulses.

Sally Shuttleworth suggests that Brontë's awareness of the psychological theories of her time would have led Brontë to understand the conflict within herself and within her

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<sup>14</sup> Sue Lonoff examines the published copies of Brontë's *devoirs*, written while a student in Belgium. In this examination, Lonoff notes that the essays show Brontë characteristically waging arguments with herself.

novels of whether to express or repress imagination. Her knowledge of *Blackwood's* content, which carried stories that show the era's "medical interest in sleep, dreams and hallucinations" (Shuttleworth 12), and such works as *The Manual of Phrenology* and Graham's *Domestic Medicine*, the latter of which was her father's "well annotated" (Dessner 15) "secular Bible" (Shuttleworth 27) would have contributed to her understanding of the mind's workings. Shuttleworth notes that part of Brontë's appeal to her contemporaries was "less that [her work] managed to capture as never before the inner workings of the mind, than that it incorporated into the novel contemporary psychological discourse, thus offering the dual appeal of familiarity and originality, and establishing a reassuring sensation of realism" (3); more specifically, Shuttleworth notes that "the same rhetoric of regulation and control, and of deciphering the outer signs of concealed inner states, ran throughout medical discussions of physiological and psychological help" (12). Thus a modern reader reasonably infers that Brontë's awareness of psychology contributed to her characters' expression—private and public—of their inner states, and, more specifically, their imaginative states. Modern readers gain insight to the early Victorian mind and to common human struggles that link us with the Victorians.

The word *imagination* connotes fanciful as well as creative thinking—fanciful in the sense that fairy tales are fanciful and tell of what cannot be, and creative in the sense

of envisioning what could be in the way that scientists or political leaders do. The term *imagination* is “slippery,” according to Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks in *The Female Imagination*. Spacks calls imagination a “power that penetrates the inner meaning of reality but also a power that creates substitutes for reality”; she further writes that “In one way or another, imagination has been for many women the seed of grace, and often the subject as well as the impetus of their writing” (6). Spacks claims that her study on female imagination “depends upon psychological and literary awarenesses more than political ones” (7), and these awarenesses are obvious in Charlotte Brontë’s work, and, indeed, are the ones that fit the traditional view of woman’s sphere. DeLamotte also recognizes the interplay between the actual world and the imagined one. She asserts that “the most private demons of the psyche can never be separated from this persistent preoccupation with the social realities from which those demons always, in some measure take their shape” (vii). Like Elaine Showalter, I am “uncomfortable” with the idea of a female imagination because such a concept “runs dangerously close to reiterating the familiar stereotypes” and “suggests a deep, basic, and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world” (12), but Spacks’s observations about imagination as an “impetus” of writing and a means to see the real world more clearly or to create a new world prove particularly true in the case of Charlotte Brontë. DeLamotte credits Brontë’s imaginative insight, writing that Charlotte Brontë “saw most

clearly, and portrayed most brilliantly, what the Gothic had always known: the way the perils of the soul in its darkest night reflect, in magnified and revealing forms, the quotidian realities of life in the daylight world of money, work, and social rank” (vii).

Brontë’s characters’ struggle to succeed in society and to engage in the soul’s imaginative work offers insight to our deepest selves.

The characters experience imagination in a variety of ways. Judith Williams, in *Perception and Expression in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë*, writes “To see something is to admit awareness; to name it is to recognize it; and to utter it is to bring it forth, as the etymology implies” (1). The characters in Brontë’s novels often “see” and occasionally “utter it,” thereby revealing their imagination and its conflicts to the reader. More often, however, these characters will keep their imaginings to themselves, as, in many cases, did their creator, leaving other characters or even the reader to surmise what secret thoughts the character may have. To illuminate these secret imaginings, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* introduce the meaning of their title by noting that “Both in life and in art, we saw, the artists we studied were literally and figuratively confined” (xi). The title, then, refers in some respects not only to Brontë’s Bertha Mason but also to the artist herself, confined by her gender, her historic and geographic location, her finances, her religious convictions, and her personality. Gilbert and Gubar assert that the madwoman figure in Brontë’s novels, as well as novels of other female writers of her

time, serves as a double for both another character and the author to act out some of their rage against the confining circumstances. Like Spacks, Gilbert and Gubar find the female authors' imaginations to be "the seed of grace" and "the subject as well as the impetus of their writing" (Spacks 6). In their study, Gilbert and Gubar examine a variety of ways that the authors use imagination to escape their own confines and the ways that the authors use imagination as a subject. In Brontë's work, they find that Brontë shows her own and her characters' imaginative creations through the madwoman figure, the imagined double, dreams, art, fantasies, romance, and visions of escape. They acknowledge that some male writers include these features as well, but that nineteenth-century women are in a particularly difficult situation because of societal pressure to repress their imaginations, even as the woman novelist finally ceases to be an anomaly (xi). The characters express the tension of their creators, and Gilbert and Gubar find that "What distinguishes [... a female author] from male Romantics [...] is precisely her anxiety about her own artistry, together with the duplicity that anxiety necessitates" (82). Brontë's art, then, becomes a means of controlling and expressing a power that Brontë otherwise felt compelled to suppress. This conflict at times induces pleasure as much as suffering, for in the repression of imagination—or its public utterance—the character hoards a secret treasure.

Victorian society at large was uninterested in women's political voices.

Harman notes that the women in Brontë's novels are quite similar to the women at political events: "present at, but screened off from, significant public experiences" (1), and this vantage point in society may have largely contributed to Brontë's hero/heroines' extreme reticence to claim a more public role. On first glance, "the refusal of self-expression appears to us as a martyrdom of creative potential" (Kucich 35), but this reticence does not necessarily indicate an intellectually or emotionally poorer life.

Brontë herself seems to have enjoyed disguises as a means of feeling greater safety or fun. Besides her pseudonym, for example, Harman notes that Brontë "enjoyed talking about herself in the third person, and she liked as well the disguise that she assigned to [publisher Smith]" in their letters (16). She felt safety in this play, "sensing that these covers protected her from the risks associated with exposing her feelings in her own person and provided her with the freedom to say things that she might otherwise have kept to herself" (Harman 16). Janet Gezari has written about Brontë's disguises as defensive conduct, a way of protecting herself, a way that began with the mask game that her father originated (2). Gezari describes the conduct as defensive, but asserts that Brontë's "defensiveness is not just self-protective but an engaging enterprise of intelligent and imaginative countermoves" (4); Sally Shuttleworth echoes this sentiment: "The erotic interplay which occurs throughout Brontë's fiction is similarly not just a defensive

game designed to protect the boundaries of a pre-existent self, but is rather actually constitutive of selfhood” (39). Brontë's reticence may have been a means of inviting or taking part in stimulating interchange with others or an integral part of her self-knowledge; likewise, her characters at times will use their repression flirtatiously or to gain or retain power in their interior world.

John Kucich has written extensively about another purpose for repression: to intensify internal experience. His work *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens* focuses primarily on repression and its ability to intensify libidinal experience, but his work also illuminates the power of repression to intensify any internal process, such as imagination. *Repression*, as defined by Kucich, is more a case of “refusals of expression,” rather than “refusals of knowledge” (3); in other words, repression is an awareness of feeling or thought that is deliberately withheld from others. Of Brontë's work, Kucich writes “repression heightens and vitalizes emotional autonomy rather than threatening or suppressing it” (2-3). He asserts, “the nineteenth-century novel is both a reliable cultural document and an effective agent of social transformation” (4). This understanding of repression as not only necessary but also productive shows a shift in our understanding of control. Kucich explains Foucault's ideas about repression when he writes:



By positing the necessity of repression [...] as the producer of a modern subjectivity that is centered on internal rather than external definition, Foucault undermines our culture's fixation on desire as the central measure of social and psychological freedom. (14)

Brontë's characters obtain freedom, at least in part, through their ability to maneuver through the internal, subjective world of imagination. All of her characters ultimately succeed in society, and they choose to express or repress their imaginative creations circumstantially. Their struggle results from a large interior life rather than from insecurity or instability. About Brontë's work, Kucich notices that

If there is an imaginative shift in Brontë's mature fiction, it lies in this deepened sense of how repression can be used to destabilize internal states. For the power of repression is often separated in the later novels, from any relationship of conflict with others, and is explored in purely subjective terms as a heightening of emotional dislocation. (68)

Brontë's earlier writings show characters "who are dominated by their abandonment to passionate feeling [... and] Charlotte Brontë most explicitly alters her [later] writing to place it under the sign of repression" (Kucich 34-35) because, "In general, complete surrender to passionate expression in Brontë's fiction is always viewed as a diminishment of feeling" (Kucich 49). Brontë's first novel written for publication, *The Professor*,

features a character who absolutely resists this abandonment, though her later novels to varying extents reward imagination's expression, but the characters always balance their imaginative expression with rational thought. The characters' freedom, then, rests in their ability to control their internal world, to fantasize, to express their internal world to others, or to delay or entirely repress that expression.

Imagination's repression would have been a source of both pleasure and pain for Brontë and her characters. Kucich categorizes repression as "the nineteenth-century cultural decision to value silenced or negated feeling over affirmed feeling, and the corresponding cultural prohibitions placed on display, disclosure, confession, assentation"

(3). His work shows that repression can be a source of power for an individual instead of, as it has been traditionally viewed, a hindrance. Kucich acknowledges the coexistence of pleasure and pain when he introduces his argument, writing that the term *repression* "helps preserve the self-conflictual, self-divided interiority that withdraws from the spheres of action and speech," and that repression "has been ahistorically tied to fear, guilt, or avoidance as, instead, a nineteenth-century strategy for exalting interiority"

(2). Kucich's insights inform interpretation of the repression of any pleasure, and particularly so interior a pleasure as imagination. Brontë's characters suit her age in that they value silenced feeling and prohibit confession, and yet they are the the author's imaginative creations, and they themselves respect the internal experience.

The insights particularly of Gilbert, Gubar, and Kucich provide a structure in which to examine the importance of characters' decisions to express or repress imagination in Brontë's novels. This structure is important because much of Brontë's commentary about her work has been lost; indeed, every indication is that Brontë deliberately withheld from almost everyone correspondence about her work.<sup>15</sup> According to biographer Judith Barker, "Mary [Taylor] was Charlotte's confidante for ambitions and frustrations, particularly in the literary field, from which Ellen was deliberately excluded" (19), and the letters that Brontë wrote to Taylor were destroyed by the time of Gaskell's interview. Though Ellen Nussey preserved Brontë's letters, these letters do not explain Brontë's thoughts about her writing. For example, at a time that Charlotte was consumed with the writing she shared with Branwell, when she was approximately seventeen years old, she maintained her relationship with Ellen through letters,

letters in which Charlotte often struggled to find something to say, not least because she could not share the consuming passion and fervent activity of her imaginary worlds with her friend. Ellen could know nothing of the hundreds of thousands of words she and Branwell, writing

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<sup>15</sup> Franklin Gary asserts that "the nine letters which she wrote to [George Henry] Lewes, rather than the many which she wrote [to others] seem [...] to bring us closest to the problems of writing fiction as she herself saw them" (518).

in partnership as they had since childhood, poured out on the adventures. (Barker 27)

Ellen *could not* know because for Brontë to share this secret, particularly with one who might distrust imagination's call, would diminish the pleasure of the writing adventure.

Repression of this sharing made the writing all the more rewarding. Brontë did hint at impulses that drove her, however, when she wrote to Ellen:

I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in—that few very few people in the world can at all understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities, I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can, but they burst out sometimes and then those who see the explosion despise me and I hate myself for days afterwards. (1836 letter, qtd. in Barker 40)

This letter reveals some of the internal conflict caused by the simultaneous desires to express and repress imagination. To admit that she has these “peculiarities” is to invite questions from Ellen about them; to deny that she is proud of them is to recognize that pride is a temptation in this case, and certainly her claim that “few very few” are capable of understanding is a proud claim. She admits that she tries to “conceal and suppress” these peculiar impulses, but their force reveals itself when she writes that “they burst out [in an] explosion.” Brontë's writing, certainly a primal force, is made more intense and

more pleasurable through her deliberately withholding it until she is ready for it to be revealed, and her letter shows the age's prohibition of confession. Kucich writes that "nineteenth-century novels show us how, through the insular dynamics of repression, private and exclusive emotional experience can be rendered more intense, and more central to self-definition than any form of interpersonal experience" (2), and Brontë's self-definition is strongly related to her control over when to share and when to repress her work. Such control is "a staple of Gothic romance," according to DeLamotte,

which, despite its own rhetorical extravagance, took as one of its favorite subjects the restraint proper to female discourse. When they choose to speak, Gothic heroines can soar to rhetorical heights far beyond their enemies' range, but again and again they also choose to remain silent, even if it means remaining persecuted and misunderstood. (150)

This choice, to speak or to remain silent, recurs for Brontë's heroines, and often their choice occurs when they must choose between attempting to engender a world they have imagined and the real world that conflicts with their desire, as examples from the novels will show.

According to Donald Stone, Brontë follows a pattern in each of her novels; "for her protagonists she sought a realistic fulfillment that would deliver them from the lures of romance but would still contain that romance" (109). As Kucich puts it: "Brontë's

characters always vacillate between extremes of expression and repression, whereas secondary characters tend to adopt one extreme or the other” (50). In this quest, the protagonists struggle with the decision to express or to repress imagination, and, as Kucich points out, to polarize these decisions to express and to repress is to oversimplify Brontë’s work (37), for she writes in such a way that “both gestures are affirmed, and are to some degree reversible” (38).

*The Professor* is perhaps Brontë’s most deliberate attempt at realism. In it, she writes the story of the self-made man. Her preface alerts the reader that no sudden changes of fortune will befall the characters, and that her protagonist will have only what he himself can earn. William Crimsworth in many ways represents Brontë’s readers. He has no especial fortune or talent, and he desires, at least initially, a safe haven in which to reveal his true self. Initially the reader may sympathize with Crimsworth, a young person alone in the world. He wants to fulfill his duty and to be independent, and he works toward those ends. He dreams of romance, of love and ideal location, and repeatedly he learns that repressing his romantic imaginings will enable him to have some control and to secure at least one of his dreams. As he learns these lessons, he becomes more like his boorish counterpart, Yorke Hunsden, in his treatment of the simultaneously dutiful and fanciful Frances Henri, who expresses through her writing the imaginative impulses that Crimsworth represses. Hunsden initially attempts to force the revelation of Crimsworth’s

inner self while protecting his own, and Crimsworth in turn appropriates Henri's revelation without sharing his. This stubborn self-protection characterizes those with power in the novel, even if it does not endear them to the reader. Donald Stone describes Brontë's determined adherence to reality: "she was as determined as her main characters not to resort to the dictates of impulse. One result of this holding back is that when romantic feeling breaks free in the novel it generally does so in an unpleasant or vindictive manner—taking the form of Crimsworth's hypochondria" for example (113). Crimsworth's repression dominates the novel. Brontë's and Crimsworth's stubborn commitment to reality deny the novel the charm that imagination's expression in *Jane Eyre* offers, but *The Professor* nevertheless vividly portrays imaginative and practical impulses that have universal application.

*Jane Eyre*, an exception to Brontë's tendencies as a novelist in that it contains an almost unqualified happy ending, characteristically explores the theme of imagination's expression and repression. Donald Stone writes that in *Jane Eyre*,

Brontë endeavored more successfully than she ever would again to accommodate the conflicting claims of reason and feeling. Reality would be achieved by showing the dangers of yielding to impulse, but wish fulfillment could be attained too once temptations were overcome. (113)

Indeed, this balance, the only perfect balance of imagination and reason in any of the mature novels, likely explains the story's enduring success. As a young and outcast child, the title character finds comfort in imaginative expressions: books with colorful illustrations, stories from the servant Bessie, and her projection of feelings onto her doll. Her love for art, literature, and home continue throughout the novel. The happy ending occurs when Jane finds a Rochester, a man who values both her imaginative side and her staunch attention to duty. Jane loves him and herself enough to flee the temptation to live as Rochester's mistress, and she thereby attends to her duty. Ultimately, they both are rewarded with a blissful ten years of happy marriage and children.

*Shirley*, Brontë's most confusing novel, provides the ending one would expect in a Romance in which the female co-protagonists each happily marry one of the novel's heroes, but the third-person narrator speaks ironically of their happiness. Donald Stone writes, "a world of struggle, hunger, and deprivation was indeed Brontë's idea of reality, but while her sympathies were with the sufferers, her imagination went out to the conquerers" (122). Written during the sad time that Brontë is burying her siblings, she tries her hand at political fiction. In addition to issues of imagination's expression and repression that are overtly discussed by co-protagonists Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone, Brontë preaches about the position of women and workers. She embeds the novel with unpleasant realities, with minor characters whose lives do not support



imaginative thinking, and with protagonists who are likely to fall to an extreme of imaginative or factual thinking and who do not manage interior or societal demands.

Of *Villette*, Brontë's final complete novel, Donald Stone writes, "Despite her insistence that she was avoiding the 'spirit of romance' in *Villette*, Brontë had, in fact, written a novel with a split focus, romantic where Graham and Paulina are concerned, 'realistic' in Lucy's case" (128). "Realistic" here means full of "suffering and loss," as Brontë's own life was during the period of solitude that she wrote the novel (D. Stone 126). In this split, *Villette* exemplifies the tension which characterizes the human condition. On one hand, some people may dream of romance, and those dreams come true. On the other hand, containing one's interior life and striving for success in society are the surest means of survival. The interior life is one that we create, and it follows the dictates of our hearts, but its dreams may not be viable in an uncooperative, even adversive, world. The imaginative world does not disappear. Lucy Snowe writes her memoir of her journey to reach the happiest days of her life, but she cannot live in those days, and the joy that she anticipates to follow those days is almost thwarted by M. Paul's family's interference and is ultimately taken by a giant storm that seems to drown all that she loves throughout the novel.

The following chapters will explore each of these novels and the extent to which the characters freely express their imagination and the both painful and pleasant results of

its repression. Art, romance, dreams, fantasies, which include imagined death, travel and anticipation of the new destination often juxtapose the imagined possibilities against the reality and thus lead to a psychological tension as the character exists in the space between the experienced world and the imagined one. This tension is important to Brontë's contemporaries as well as to modern readers because the characters experience and attempt to resolve the universal struggle to determine when one should succumb to the desire of one's heart and when one should face the often stark reality of life. Through the main characters in each novel, Imagination assumes place as an entity that struggles to exist despite characters' attempts to squelch it and despite reality's rude intrusions. The tension of whether or not the narrator will allow imagination an opportunity to shape character and plot advances the novel and shows an individual's struggle over whether to believe the wisdom of the head or the heart.

Brontë differs from other popular novelists of her time in that she does not always clearly resolve the issue of whether imagination or reality triumphs in the lives of the characters. No one can. Brontë uses imagination to lead her readers to confront the real tension in which we live. For example, at the end of *Shirley*, Brontë seemingly pairs happy couples, and Caroline Helstone hopes that her home's setting will remain pastoral, a lovely, romantic vision, yet Brontë's third-person narrator intrudes to say that the reader may imagine beauty, happiness, and contentment, but in fact, factories will conquer the

landscape, and strife will occur in Caroline's lovely setting. In the last chapter of *Villette*, Lucy Snowe spends the three happiest years of her life in one paragraph, experiences the wrenching worry as M. Paul begins a voyage at last to return home and then a storm claims all that traveled in the sea, and stops short to tell the reader to imagine that Lucy and M. Paul live happily ever after. In short, the reader is simultaneously asked to imagine the ideal and to face the real, and "real" generally means the unpleasant. Miriam Bailin explains the role of reality in Brontë's works: "Realism is put into sadistic relation with romance rather than serving as a corrective to it" (263).

The reader suffers in the state of tension between expressing and repressing the imagination that the characters explore throughout the novel. The author invites the reader into the imaginative process of creating the story's ending and then forces the reader to compare that imagined end with a darker reality. The characters face this tension throughout the novel, and Brontë's novels force the readers to face this tension even before we return to "the world about [us]."

Repression Rules *The Professor*

“You cannot reason at all,” said Hunsden; “there is no logic in you.”

“Better to be without logic than without feeling,” retorted Frances [...]. “I suppose you are always interfering with your own feelings, and those of other people, and dogmatizing about the irrationality of this, that, and the other sentiment, and then ordering it to be suppressed because you imagine it to be inconsistent with logic.” (*The Professor*, 263-264)

Frances Henri’s scornful reply to Yorke Hunsden encapsulates the tension between logic and feeling, and more generally between reality and imagined possibility, that dominates Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor*, which in 1857 was her posthumously published but first-written novel about a young man who makes his way in the world.<sup>16</sup> Hunsden loudly and brazenly applies his logic to leap from erroneous conclusion to erroneous conclusion; in contrast, Henri, seemingly meeker, recognizes the coexistence of sentiment with logic and seems to see others’ characters more clearly than does Hunsden. Indeed, *The Professor* shows the power of imagination connected with intellect and feeling, such as Henri possesses, to be superior to Hunsden’s fancy that feeling is inferior to reason and that one necessarily negates the other; nevertheless,

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<sup>16</sup> Annette Federico argues that assuming a male persona was critical to Brontë’s learning to have “the voice of authorship” (324), and this voice conformed to Victorian expectations since the novel is about power (323). William Cohen argues that the most remarkable feature of the male narrator is that it enabled Brontë to imagine being “inside *any body* at all” (445); in short, Brontë both “emphasizes and disrupts the idea of the body as a container of the self” (448).

repression of imagination ultimately proves to be the most powerful choice for the novel's protagonist.

Because *The Professor* has never achieved the popularity of Brontë's other novels, a short plot summary may be useful to move forward in examining Crimsworth's tendency toward and fear of imagination. The narrator and protagonist, William Crimsworth, falls between the blustering Hunsden's rejection of feeling and the idealized Henri's balanced acceptance. Crimsworth introduces himself to the audience by means of the copy of a letter that he had written to a former schoolmate who had moved away and never replied to this letter. Crimsworth briefly tells of his parents' deaths, his time at Eton, and his decisions not to enter the clergy nor to marry his cousin but instead to work for his older brother in business. These decisions effectively sever his relationship with his mother's brothers, who had paid for his education. His brother Edward behaves boorishly to William, and their mutual acquaintance, Yorke Hunsden,<sup>17</sup> forces circumstances so that William leaves Edward's employment. With a letter of introduction from Hunsden, William moves from England to Belgium and obtains a position and boards as a teacher in Monsieur Pelet's school for boys. He simultaneously teaches English lessons for Mademoiselle Reuter, who owns the school for girls that is

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<sup>17</sup> Sue Ann Betsinger refers to Hunsden as the "third participant" who is "essential to the moral development of the hero and instrumental to the achievement of every good thing in life" (101).

next door to Pelet's school. There, Crimsworth falls briefly in love with Mademoiselle Reuter, is disillusioned, comes to love a fellow instructor, Frances Henri, and ends his employment with Mademoiselle Reuter. Mademoiselle Reuter and Monsieur Pelet marry; Crimsworth leaves his employment with Monsieur Pelet and marries Henri. Crimsworth and Henri together meet Hunsden, whom Crimsworth continues to view as a bully. The Crimsworths eventually establish their own school and thus their independence. They retire to England to raise their son Victor on property near Hunsden's home. Crimsworth's story of his making his way in the world also tells the story of the choices that one must make between practical matters and idealistic wishes.

These relationships with Frances Henri and Hunsden dramatize the conflict between reason and imagination. Kucich asserts, "In the pairing of Hunsden and Crimsworth, we have the first instance of Brontë's familiar confrontation of expressive and repressed characters [...]" (2). The blustering Hunsden denies imaginative impulses, highlighting the limited imaginative expression of which Crimsworth is guilty. Of Crimsworth's attraction to Henri, Dessner writes, "there is nothing in the novel to eliminate the suspicion that his love for Frances is largely a result of another this time unobstructed projection of his own imagination" (58). In marrying Henri, Crimsworth embraces his imaginative ideals; in befriending Hunsden, Crimsworth, almost in spite of himself, recognizes the necessity for logical choices, even at the expense of his ideals.

Both Hunsden's and Henri's characters escape the confines of reality. His is too judgmental, and hers too angelic; their dearest companion, however, Crimsworth, realistically portrays the struggles that an artistic mind will endure as it chooses between pragmatism and idealism. Crimsworth's imaginings, his hypochondria, his romances, his delving into Frances's writing, all reveal his penchant for the imaginative, yet his story is of a man who works to earn his independence, who makes systematic choices to aid that independence, and who delights in withholding his artistic mind. Because, in the end, Crimsworth earns his independence through sheer pragmatism and forces others to reveal their ideals while repressing his own,<sup>18</sup> repression dominates.

In her preface to the novel, Brontë notes that his struggle is intentional, and she herself faced it in publishing *The Professor*. The Penguin edition's editor, Heather Glen, introduces the story "offered to the reader less as the confessional autobiography of a peculiar individual than as a fictional example of a quite distinct and influential contemporary genre—that of the exemplary biography of the self-made man" (10). Such a form had recently become popular among Brontë's contemporaries, and the mixed critiques that Brontë received upon submitting *The Professor* and upon publishing *Jane Eyre* led her to believe even more fervently in the power of this novel and in the

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<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Ruth writes about this struggle in the larger context of the "paradox of professionalism" (279) when she describes the self-made man's simultaneous movement to and away from the market.

importance of its realism. Brontë states in her preface, “I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs—that he should never get a shilling he had not earned—that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station” (37); in short, she predetermined that she would write a realistic story of the self-made man. Again in the preface, she writes somewhat ironically that “Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real; on trial the idea will be often found fallacious: a passionate preference for the wild, wonderful, thrilling—the strange, startling, and harrowing—agitates divers souls that show a calm and sober surface” (38). Bock reminds us to credit Brontë’s judgment: “if we are to respect the author’s judgment of her own motivations, then we must accept the view that Brontë liked *The Professor* because it seemed more ‘real’ to her than her most popular work [*Jane Eyre*]” (67). Crimsworth often seems to long for the wonderful, but he deliberately assumes the façade of an ordinary clerk because this position is the opposite of what his uncles would have chosen for him, it contradicts his brother’s assumptions about Crimsworth’s wishes, and it is entirely disagreeable to Crimsworth himself; in short, he is as contrary as, Brontë implies, her audience is. He chooses the practical over the imagined ideal sometimes for sheer contrariness, as the audience claims to want the real, yet they secretly prefer the idealized world of imagination. Brontë faithfully provides the realism in *The Professor* that her editors and audience claim to want, yet the



response to the work is that it lacks engaging romantic qualities, that publishers “would have liked something more imaginative and poetical—something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos, with sentiments more tender, elevated, unworldly” (Brontë, Preface to *The Professor* 37).

Brontë consistently defended her realism to her publishers. When asked for a second novel to follow the enormously popular *Jane Eyre*,<sup>19</sup> Brontë suggested that the publishers accept *The Professor*, writing, “the middle and latter portion of the work, all that relates to Brussels, the Belgian school etc. is as good as I can write; it contains more pith, more substance, more reality, in my judgment than much of ‘Jane Eyre’” (qtd. in Glen “Introduction” 8). Her stance, then, opposes critics who, Glen cites, claim that *The Professor* is “a rather clumsy fictionalization of autobiographical concerns—concerns to which Charlotte Brontë later gave more successful expression through the female voices of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe” (8). Gilbert and Gubar individuate this novel, writing,

The narrator and the author are more carefully distinguished from each other in *The Professor* than in any of Brontë's other mature novels.

Moreover, the use of the male narrator, as much as the book's ‘plain and homely’ style, suggests an attempt by the female novelist to objectify her

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<sup>19</sup> The critical response to *Jane Eyre* reveals the contrary nature of Brontë's audience because it was criticized for its unrealistic elements, such as Eyre's hearing Rochester's voice call to her from miles away.

vision of the story she is telling, to disentangle personal fantasies from its plot and cool the ‘burning clime’ of wish fulfillment. (315)

*The Professor*, then, is a deliberate attempt by the author to subdue the fancifulness of her own imagination even as she constructs a work of fiction for her audience. In her defense against the claim that *The Professor* is a clumsy beginning, Brontë writes in her preface that although *The Professor* was the first novel that she submitted for publication, she had written and destroyed earlier works because they contained “ornamented and redundant composition, and [she had] come to prefer what was plain and homely” (37). Glen defends the novel’s worth with the claim that “much that appears ‘unpleasant’ is in fact significant: part of a coherent imaginative interrogation of values and assumptions, which Charlotte Brontë is often assumed to have shared” (9), and the autobiographical form allows Brontë, “with an often quite chilling acuteness [to chart ...] the most intimate recesses of the personality [... and to expose] their disquieting implications” (19). Frequently in Brontë’s novels, the “realistic” choices of the characters are the unpleasant ones, suggesting the desirability of the imagination over reality. Crimsworth frequently makes the unpleasant choice, but as Gilbert and Gubar state:

to speak of *The Professor* in terms merely of roles and repressions is in a sense to trivialize the young novelist’s achievement in her first full-length book. For even if this novel is not the judicious, ‘plain and homely’

*Bildungsroman* its author hoped it would be, if its plot does not always seem adequate to the complexities of its hidden intentions, it is nevertheless of considerable importance as a preliminary statement of themes which were to be increasingly significant throughout Charlotte Brontë's career. (335)

We may, perhaps, wish that reality were more pleasant, and we may wish for a happier end for Brontë's characters, but mixed results consistently conclude the novels, yet her acute perception of our contrary wishes allows the novels to transcend Brontë's time.

In *Crimsworth*, Brontë explores the consequences of expressing and of repressing one's imaginings. *Crimsworth* marries a woman who allows him to pry into her private thoughts, and her artistic expression is the channel through which he first accesses these thoughts; he himself delights in withholding his imagined anticipations from most of the other characters, and occasionally even from the reader. Through his narration, *Crimsworth's* struggle becomes the readers', and his resolution becomes ours to accept or reject. *The Professor* is a novel about the struggle for control. *Crimsworth* battles with himself as he weighs his artistic tendencies against practical realities, and that struggle becomes external as *Crimsworth* sees these sides of himself in Frances and Hunsden. *Crimsworth* learns that to dominate, he must repress the external expression of his own imagination and study the expression of other characters.

Crimsworth presents himself as an author to his audience. Not unreasonably, Brontë's and Crimsworth's audience often will assume them to have similar struggles,<sup>20</sup> particularly in the choice to express or to repress imagination, to follow one's heart or to fulfill one's duty. Crimsworth resolves the argument:

Novelists should never allow themselves to weary of the study of the real life. If they observed this duty conscientiously, they would give us fewer pictures chequered with vivid contrasts of light and shade; they would seldom elevate their heroes and heroines to the heights of rapture—still seldomer sink them to the depths of despair; for if we rarely taste the fullness of joy in this life, we yet more rarely savour the acrid bitterness of hopeless anguish; unless, indeed, we have plunged like beasts into sensual indulgence [...] (186)

This lecture addressed to the audience seemingly comes from Brontë herself until Crimsworth resolves that confusion a page later when he acknowledges that his speculations were inspired by his “best pupil” having been “snatched from [his] hands and put away out of [his] reach.” Unpleasant reality interrupts his romantic ideals about

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<sup>20</sup> In the introduction to *The Professor*, Heather Glen argues, “*The Professor* seems less a clumsy attempt to hide its author's ‘real’, feminine concerns behind the mask of a male narrator than a fictional imitation of a genre that [...] was overwhelmingly masculine” (11). Clearly, then, many readers did regard the novel as a mask for the author.

forming Frances Henri to suit himself, much as a sculptor would shape the clay. This reality inspires him to remind the audience that novelists should confine themselves to the real; i.e., they should repress romantic, imaginative impulses in the plot, just as no one should overly indulge in imaginings lest he/she suffer in the extremes portrayed in novels. Readers and writers alike, he states, will maintain a well-balanced existence, free from extraordinary highs or lows, if they will simply contain themselves to the study of reality, repress imaginative ideals. Much like Lucy Snowe will in *Villette*, Crimsworth consistently disciplines himself to follow this rule, and he warns the audience in the beginning that this discipline is his intent. Because the letter that began the novel presumably does not reach its intended reader, the old schoolmate, Crimsworth determines to collect his autobiography for the larger reading public. He prepares the audience by writing:

The leisure time I have at command, and which I intended to employ for his private benefit, I shall now dedicate to that of the public at large. My narrative is not exciting, and above all, not marvellous.<sup>21</sup> (47)

Thus commitment to reality, and repression of the exciting, rules this novel, but Crimsworth repeatedly shows his natural tendency to imagine and occasionally to lose

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<sup>21</sup> Within the quotes, I have maintained the spelling and punctuation of the Penguin Classic edition of *The Professor*. Except in rare cases, those choices are unmarked.

himself in the imaginative world. In his indulging in fantasy, as well as in his toil, the audience can find their experiences. Though Crimsworth controls the expression of his imagination when he speaks with other characters, he shares most of his imaginings with his audience, allowing us to know what he perceives, misperceives, and wishes to be true. He withholds this sharing from the other characters as a means of holding power. If they cannot have access to his thoughts, they will not know his errors, his humiliations, or his dreams. His struggle with hypochondria, his attention to his dreams, his anticipations, and particularly his attempts to interpret female character reveal that Crimsworth's imagination runs rampant, and his experiences also teach him that to keep his thoughts repressed will enable him to have the most power in his relationships and to avoid the humiliations that may follow vulnerability.

Crimsworth twice falls victim to hypochondriac melancholy—once in the timeframe of the novel and once prior to this setting. To Brontë, hypochondria was not a figment of a morose imagination, but a real disease (Glen 312), and the medical theory of her day supported her opinion. In Heather Glen's note on the text, Glen cites Thomas John Graham's *Modern Domestic Medicine*, previously mentioned as the medical Bible of the Brontë household, of 1826 as describing the symptoms of hypochondria as follows:

Sometimes the hypochondriac is tormented with a visionary or exaggerated sense of pain, or some concealed disease; a whimsical dislike

of particular persons, places or things; groundless apprehensions of personal danger or poverty; a general listlessness and disgust; or an irksomeness and weariness of life; in other instances; [*sic*] the disease is strikingly accompanied with peevishness and general malevolence; they are soon tired with all things; discontented; disquieted ... often tempted to make away with themselves; they cannot die, they will not live; they complain weep, lament, and think they lead a miserable life: never was any one so bad. (311-312)

Certainly Brontë's letters and biographies reveal her to have suffered from many of these feelings, and Crimsworth shows himself to have a variety of these symptoms throughout the novel.<sup>22</sup> In particular, though, he names two instances of hypochondria, negative manifestations of imagination. Crimsworth discusses both experiences together to compare their purpose and power. He writes:

I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly, but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria.

She had been my acquaintance, nay my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space

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<sup>22</sup> In her 1986 article for *Explicator*, Janet Butler notes that the second occurrence of Crimsworth's hypochondria occurs at the time he should be happiest. Butler agrees with other scholars that Crimsworth's ailment reflects Brontë's own struggle, and she asserts that Brontë creates happiness in fiction that she did not experience in real life; however, the fiction's "happiness" is not unqualified and arguably is achieved.

of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me,  
 she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills,  
 where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over  
 me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to  
 her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone. (253)

Several aspects of Crimsworth's description reveal the connection of hypochondria to imagination. The personification of hypochondria as a woman, indeed as a lover and a mother, most obviously connects the two. In hypochondria the audience sees many of the qualities this motherless and friendless child lacks. In his boyhood, she was his "guest"; he "entertains" her; she "lay" with him and "ate" with him and took walks with him before "holding" him in her arms. She is the clandestine relationship that distracts him from his daily activities. The audience cannot help imagining the remains of Crimsworth's mother as he describes being held in "arms of bone." He describes himself as a victim, much as one would who was bedazzled by a lover who proves unfaithful. His room was "invaded," and he was her "prey." In all instances, this preoccupation in his imagination compels him more forcefully than do his daily duties. Crimsworth himself recognizes the sad factors that would have contributed to his hypochondria. He contrasts the previous circumstances with the present:



But my boyhood was lonely, parentless; uncheered by brother or sister;  
 and there was no marvel that, just as I rose to youth, a sorceress, finding  
 me lost in vague mental wanderings, with many affections and few  
 objects, glowing aspirations and gloomy prospects [...], should lift up her  
 illusive lamp to me in the distance, and lure me to her vaulted home of  
 horrors. No wonder her spells *then* had power; but *now*, when my course  
 was widening, my prospect brightening;  
 [...]—why did hypochondria accost me now? (253-254)

His reality would not seem to invite this negative manifestation of imagination, yet it does. In this description, Crimsworth again chooses an imaginative character, this time “sorceress,” to describe the disease. He here invites sympathy as he exists powerless in the force of a supernatural creature.

Yes, his prospects brighten, but he, who has never known family or lasting affection, logically would fear the opportunity to claim both and reasonably would mistrust the likelihood of his achieving his dream, and here the audience understands his plight. Just as he stumbled alone through his boyhood in “vague mental wanderings,” he reveals repression as the natural choice for him in this situation. In boyhood, he had no one with whom to share the tormenting imaginary companion; in adulthood, he could share this plague with Frances Henri, but instead he battles alone:

I had gone about as usual all the time, and had said nothing to anybody of what I felt; but I was glad when the evil spirit departed from me, and I could again seek Frances, and sit at her side, freed from the dreadful tyranny of my demon. (254)

He seeks out companionship only after his imaginary demon has left him. He recognizes that no true demon possesses him; at no point does he allude to an exorcism, yet he separates his Frances and his chance for real happiness from his all-consuming negative fantasy.

Just as he separates his negative dreams from Frances, likewise he never reveals to her the dreams that give him hope. Dreams, whether day dreams or night dreams, occur when one allows one's imagination to follow its inclinations. Crimsworth believes in his imaginative inclinations as much as he believes in his sorceress, and his dreams send him powerful messages. Crimsworth finally finds Frances Henri, who disappeared from his employer's school. After leaving Henri's home, without fulfilling his wish to propose, Crimsworth spies a rainbow. Later, he dreams:

I at last fell asleep; and then in a dream were reproduced the setting sun, the bank of clouds, the mighty rainbow. I stood, methought, on a terrace; I leaned over a parapeted wall; there was space below me, depth I could not fathom, but hearing an endless dash of waves, I believed it to be the

sea—sea spread to the horizon; sea of changeful green and intense blue: all was soft in the distance; all vapour-veiled. A spark of gold glistened on the line between water and air, floated up, approached, enlarged, changed; the object hung midway between heaven and earth, under the arch of the rainbow; the soft but dusk clouds diffused behind. It hovered as on wings; pearly, fleecy, gleaming air streamed like raiment round it: light, tinted with carnation, coloured what seemed face and limbs; a large star shone with still lustre on an angel's forehead; an upraised arm and hand, glancing like a ray, pointed to the bow overhead, and a voice in my heart whispered—

‘Hope Smiles on Effort!’ (205-206)

His poetic language, full imagery, and personification of Hope reveal his penchant for imaginative thinking, yet ultimately this dream yields a practical message: he must exert effort so as to fulfill his hopes. Hard work, reality, and fulfillment of duty makes one's dreams come true. His trust in this dream and a later one shows how he uses imagination to chart a path for his life. The dream that follows the rainbow dream ultimately leads him to quit his job with Monsieur Pelet. To all outward appearances, this choice is a simple one for a teacher who wishes to advance, but the reasons revealed to the reader are

based on Crimsworth's imaginative speculation. Crimsworth attempts to justify his decision logically:

I could not conceal, nor did I desire to conceal from myself the conviction that, being now certain that Mdlle Reuter was destined to become Madame Pelet, it would not do for me to remain a dependent dweller in the house, which was soon to be hers. Her present demeanor towards me was deficient neither in dignity nor propriety; but I knew her former feeling was unchanged. Decorum now repressed, and Policy masked it, but Opportunity would be too strong for either of these—Temptation would shiver their restraints.

I was no pope—I could not boast infallibility: in short, if I stayed, the probability was that, in three months' time, a practical modern French novel would be in full process of concoction under the roof of the unsuspecting Pelet. (214)

Crimsworth's imaginings convince him that the morally superior choice is to leave his present employment. His predictions are based more in imagination than reality, however, and they seem to be an outcropping of the "groundless apprehensions of personal danger" that are symptomatic of hypochondria or over-confidence.

No matter what Crimsworth claims, his experience in romance seems largely to be based on novels that he found to be unsatisfactory. He claims to have seen adultery firsthand, commenting,

Limited as had yet been my experience in life, I had once had the opportunity for contemplating, near at hand, an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example, I saw it bare and real, and it was loathsome. (214)

The reader may well doubt his claim, however (and perhaps a modern reader will consider instead the fate of Brontë's brother, who was part of such a triangle), since we follow his journey from school to his first work as a clerk, to this moment, and see no signs of treachery. Further, a few pages earlier, Crimsworth describes Pelet's coming home "in a state of unequivocal intoxication" and "raving dreadfully" about Crimsworth's treachery, now known because Mademoiselle Reuter indicated that she had fallen in love with Crimsworth (208). Pelet, then, would not be "unsuspecting" of Crimsworth's and Reuter's potential affection. Finally, almost immediately before Crimsworth's prediction, he reveals that as soon as he had declared to Mademoiselle Reuter that he intended to find Frances Henri and to resign from Mademoiselle Reuter's employment, Reuter returns "to her senses; her sagacity, her judgment, so long misled by

the fascinating delusion, struck again into the right track the moment that delusion vanished,” and she persuaded Pelet again to love her (212). The future Mrs. Pelet is a practical and sensible woman, and her “delusion” may well have been a figment of Crimsworth’s imagination. Crimsworth’s opinion that her “former feeling was unchanged,” while complimentary to him, may easily be another example of his romantic fantasies that reveals that his extremely limited experience with women have led him to trust his imaginative speculation. Nevertheless, he does trust this speculation, and another dream suggests a next step in his life.

Just as he compliments himself for realizing that he must leave Pelet’s employment in order to avoid moral disaster, a dream comes to him to guide his future romantic relationship. He writes:

From all this resulted the conclusion that I must leave Pelet’s and that instantly; ‘but,’ said Prudence, ‘you know not where to go, nor how to live’; and then the dream of true love came over me: Frances Henri seemed to stand at my side; her slender waist to invite my arm; her hand to court my hand; I felt it was made to nestle in mine, I could not relinquish my right to it, nor could I withdraw my eyes for ever from hers, where I saw so much happiness, such a correspondence of heart with heart; over whose expression I had such influence; where I could kindle

bliss, infuse awe, stir deep delight, rouse sparkling spirit, and

sometimes waken pleasurable dread. (214-215)

Logic tells him that he may make a mistake to leave Pelet's since he does not have other employment, but imagination counters Prudence's claim. Imagination gives him a "dream of true love" and reminds him of Frances Henri and suggests the possibility that he can further exert his control by refining her better to suit himself. Imagination provides the spark for Crimsworth's romantic interest in Henri, dormant until that spark. When Crimsworth first meets her, he regards her as plain as a woman and ineffective as a teacher. After instructing her in English lessons, he mentally (as usual, withholding his fonder thoughts) gives her a constrained compliment that he "found her possessed in a somewhat remarkable degree of at least two good points, viz. perseverance and a sense of duty" (159). His compliment shows his ignorance of her imaginative qualities and value for the two qualities he deifies while working for his brother. His imagination does serve him with inspiration to court and to propose to her, but his logical and unfeeling proposal reveals how repression rules his demeanor. The text invites the reader's sympathy because it shows how his experiences have taught him to value repression.

Crimsworth's journeys frequently provide opportunities for his imagination to work as he anticipates the end result. For example, as William Crimsworth approaches his brother Edward's house, William begins the approach with somewhat hopeful

imaginings, yet ends them before he reveals that the results could be disappointing. He tells the readers: “‘Edward is rich,’ thought I to myself. ‘I believed him to be doing well—but I did not know he was master of a mansion like this.’ Cutting short all marvelling, speculation, conjecture, etc., I advanced to the front door and rang” (42-43). This decision to squelch conjecture proves a protective skill as Edward quickly makes clear that he will share neither wealth nor opportunity with his younger brother. The work bores William, but Edward’s behavior ultimately leads to William’s change of employment. William narrates:

The thing itself—the work of copying and translating business letters—was a dry and tedious task enough, but had that been all, I should long have borne with the nuisance; [...] I should have set up the image of Duty, the fetish of Perseverance, in my small bedroom at Mrs King’s lodgings, and they two should have been my household gods, from which my darling, my cherished-in-secret, Imagination, the tender and the mighty, should never, either by softness or strength, have severed me. (62)

William reveals several important aspects of his personality in this passage: (1) Duty and Perseverance place at least second in his affection; (2) Imagination comes first in his heart but not in his actions; (3) Imagination is a treasure to enjoy in secret and to



withhold from others; (4) Revealing Imagination is unsafe. In a sense, by not providing supportive companionship, Edward forces his brother to be a self-made man who focuses first upon duty and only secretly upon the desire of his heart. As William reveals his disappointment with the reality that confronts his fantasy, he again reveals the trend that characterizes his behavior in the novel: repressing the fantasy to extol duty and toil. For example, upon seeing Edward's town, X—, for the first time, William comments:

I said to myself, 'William, you are a rebel against circumstances; you are a fool, and know not what you want; you have chosen a trade and you shall be a tradesman. Look!' I continued mentally—'Look at the sooty smoke in that hollow, and know that there is your post! There you cannot dream, you cannot speculate and theorize—there you shall out and work!' (48)

William's actions here emphasize his tendency for repression of ideals. In this soliloquy, he twice reveals that he is a lonely man who trusts no one else with these thoughts.

Besides reminding himself that he chose this profession, or got himself into this mess, he specifically tells himself that he will not be able to dream in the polluted environment of the hollow. His repression here is willful, and he seems to use it as a punishment for himself. He is a "fool"; he needs a job where he cannot "dream." Of Crimsworth's assessment of the landscape, Kucich points out that "In [Brontë's] novels, the word

‘romance’ is frequently identified with withdrawal, and with otherness” (56); in a sense, then, Crimsworth indulges in romantic fantasy as he notes the landscape’s desolation. His imagination enables him to view himself as an isolated example of culture in a barren place.

William annoys Edward with his absolute control in the face of Edward’s abuse. Eventually Hunsden pushes William to extract himself from Edward’s tyranny and then supplies William with a letter of introduction to enable him to find a job as a professor in Brussels. When Crimsworth embarks on this journey, he surrenders temporarily to imagination as his ideal becomes palpable to him. The stresses and irritations of travel disappear in the anticipation of the journey:

When I left Ostend on a mild February morning, and found myself on the road to Brussels, nothing could look vapid to me. [...] Yes, at that epoch I felt like a morning traveller who doubts not that from the hill he is ascending he shall behold a glorious sunrise; what if the track be strait, steep, and stone? he sees it not; his eyes are fixed on that summit, flushed already, flushed and gilded, and having gained it he is certain of the scene beyond. [...] I mounted now the hill in shade; there were pebbles, inequalities, briars in my path, but my eyes were fixed on the crimson peak above; my imagination was with the refulgent firmament beyond,

and I thought nothing of the stones turning under my feet, or of the thorns scratching my face and hands. (87)

Clearly Crimsworth's imagination provides the optimism for his journey. He compares himself to an imaginary traveler who delights in the journey and sees not the roughness of it; likewise, Crimsworth anticipates the happy end, and he does not recognize current difficulties. His imaginative powers enable him to avoid the discomforts of travel. He dwells in this illusion until his duty recalls him to the necessity of earning a living. He describes his living another fantasy before returning to reality:

I lingered over my breakfast as long as I could; while it was there on the table, and while that stranger continued talking to me, I was a free, independent traveller; but at last the things were removed, the two gentlemen left the room; suddenly the illusion ceased, reality and business came back. I, a bondsman just released from the yoke, freed for one week from twenty-one years of constraint, must, of necessity, resume the fetters of dependency. Hardly had I tasted the delight of being without a master when duty issued her stern mandate: 'Go forth and seek another service.'

(89-90)

Crimsworth's tendency is to linger in the fantasy, but the personified duty forces him to abandon this imagined ideal and return to reality. The optimism of the previous day does

not diminish, but his capacity to imagine himself as independently wealthy does, and the need for survival compels him to repress his imagination and resolve to fulfill his duty. The image first brings Crimsworth courage for the journey, and then its repression allows him to meet his practical needs. At this incipient stage of his independence, Crimsworth employs his expressive and repressive faculties.

Finally, with Frances Henri, Crimsworth envisions an England more welcoming to him than the one of his childhood. Henri professes that she has always dreamed of going to her mother's land, England, that England is her "Canaan" (203). In Henri, Crimsworth has a vision that England could also be his promised land. He records a conversation with his future bride:

Frances Henri: "Will [the tea] make you think yourself home for a moment?"

William Crimsworth: "If I had a home in England, I believe that I would recall it," I answered; and, in truth, there was a sort of illusion in seeing the fair-complexioned, English-looking girl presiding at the English meal, and speaking in the English language. (201)

This illusion eventually leads to the Crimsworths' leaving Belgium to settle in England. Their imagined possibility of what their motherland has to offer sparks this journey. As Crimsworth speaks to Henri, however, he withholds his perception of her as an English

woman. He suggests the possibility, but he does not reveal the extent of his belief. In the case of relating to women, Crimsworth's early lessons consistently taught him that repression keeps him safe.

Prior to meeting his sister-in-law, Edward Crimsworth's wife, William Crimsworth indulges in speculating on his power over women. He has been quite clear in the novel that his cousins, who were offered in marriage by his uncles, are unacceptable to him, and he wonders, "Shall I, in conversing with her [Mrs. Crimsworth], feel free to show something of my real nature; or—Further conjectures were arrested by my entrance into the dining room" (45). His fantasy that his sister-in-law will show him sympathy, indeed, will invite him to reveal his "real," that is his kinder, self abruptly ends when he meets her. She dotes on her husband and is friendly to William until her husband indicates that she should treat William more as a piece of furniture than as a relative. Later, at the Crimsworths' party, William resents that he must repress his nature. He tells the audience:

Dancing began; I should have liked well enough to be introduced to some pleasing and intelligent girl, and to have freedom and opportunity to show that I could both feel and communicate the pleasure of social intercourse—that I was not, in short, a block, or a piece of furniture, but an acting, thinking, sentient man. (56-57)

Clearly William's power over his sister-in-law is insufficient to cause her to attend to him, and she lacks either sufficient confidence or virtue to treat William as he believes that her inclination leads her. Further, his subservient position in his brother's house forces repression of his nature. When Crimsworth's repression is forced, he resents the oppressor because in that situation, repression does not equal control.

The next significant meeting with a woman occurs in Brussels. Crimsworth goes to meet with Madame Pelet, his employer's mother. Here, Crimsworth shows that fiction is indeed dangerous for him as it has biased his mind. He narrates:

Just as I laid my hand on the handle of the dining-room door, a queer idea glanced across my mind.

'Surely she's not going to make love to me,' said I. 'I've heard of old Frenchwomen doing odd things in that line; and the *goûter*? They generally begin such affairs with eating and drinking, I believe.'

There was a fearful dismay in this suggestion of my excited imagination, and if I had allowed myself time to dwell upon it, I should no doubt have cut there and then, rushed back to my chamber, and bolted myself in; but whenever a danger or a horror is veiled with uncertainty, the primary wish of the mind is to ascertain first the naked truth, reserving the

expedient of flight for the moment when its dread anticipation shall be realized. (101-102)

His idea about Madame Pelet is a queer one indeed, but his reasoned analysis for staying reveals Brontë's sensitivity to human motivation and psychology. Crimsworth visits Madame Pelet because he desires, even more than self-protection, to verify his imagination with reality. In this instance, he again learns that he should keep secret his imaginings as reality again contradicts his ideal; Madame Pelet shows no interest in seducing him.

Upon first meeting Mademoiselle Reuter, the first young and unmarried woman that Crimsworth encounters, he reveals his tendency to idealize handsome women:

And my eyes had a pleasure in looking at Mdlle Reuter, especially now, when the twilight softened her features a little, and, in the doubtful dusk, I could fancy her forehead as open as it was fully elevated, her mouth touched with turns of sweetness as well as defined in lines of sense. (109)

He casts her in a romantic light of evening, soft lines, pleasure, yet she temporarily quells his emerging fantasy: "Her 'Bon jour, monsieur,' was quite polite, but so orderly, so commonplace, it spread directly a cool, damp towel over [his] 'vives impressions'" (112).

Always Mademoiselle Reuter controls her emotions and her expressions. One can only

imagine that she recognizes, as does the reader, Crimsworth's romantic illusions, even when he believes his fantasies about her to be real. He compliments himself:

I am growing wiser [...] Look at this little real woman; is she like the women of novelists and romancers? To read of female character as depicted in Poetry and Fiction, one would think it was made up of sentiment, either for good or bad—here is a specimen, and a most sensible and respectable specimen, too, whose staple ingredient is abstract reason.

(119)

Crimsworth's initial impression of Mademoiselle Reuter is particularly important when one considers his later fantasy that she is enamored of him.<sup>23</sup> This fantasy must have been obvious because Monsieur Pelet teases Crimsworth that Mademoiselle Reuter will “leave the print of her stealing steps on [Crimsworth's] heart,” and Crimsworth characteristically denies that such a thing could happen (123). Later Crimsworth claims to the reader that Reuter deliberately enticed him, that “she persevered, and at last [...], her finger [...] touched [his heart's] secret spring, and for a moment the lid sprung open [... and] whether she stole and broke it, or whether the lid shut again with a snap on her fingers, read on, and you shall know” (134). Coyly Crimsworth withholds his response

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<sup>23</sup> Annette Tromly asserts, “Crimsworth's innocence is not ennobling, but constricting—his pride not a source of dignity but of self-aggrandizement” (29). Thus, Crimsworth's illusions serve as an argument for repression and against overblown imagination.



to her advances—if indeed she made advances. Crimsworth easily could have misinterpreted her behavior because of his fantasies about her. Boards on his window blocked his view of her garden, and when Crimsworth sits with her in the garden, he remarks to himself that “It seemed as if the romantic visions of my imagination had suggested of this garden” and “a revelation dawned in my mind that I was on the brink of falling in love” (135). Crimsworth seeks a place to belong, a place to reveal his vulnerable and romantic self, but with all of the women he first meets, self-protection clearly necessitates repression. Mademoiselle Reuter, predominantly practical, will not lower her position by marrying one of her employees; Crimsworth capitalizes Poetry and Fiction, yet he admires Reuter for her abstract reason. With his limited experience, he idealizes her, but their relationship evolves so that his reason provides his safety.

Upon overhearing Monsieur Pelet and Mademoiselle Reuter’s garden discussion of Crimsworth’s being in love with Reuter and of her lack of interest in him, Crimsworth reigns his fantasies about her and relies on logic. He writes:

Reason was my physician; she began by proving that the prize I had missed was of little value: she admitted that, physically, Zoraïde might have suited me, but affirmed that our souls were not in harmony and that discord must have resulted from the union of her mind with mine. She

then insisted on the suppression of all repining, and commanded me  
rather to rejoice that I had escaped a snare. Her medicament did me good.

(142)

Crimsworth's penchant for imagination reveals itself even as he extols the virtues of reason. Imagination enables him to personify Reason as a doctor who provides the cure for his sore heart, and she is the lawyer who "proves" that the union would not have satisfied. Her logic soothes his wounded feelings. Crimsworth's reason and imagination work in concert to encourage him to repress romantic expression in order to have power over others. After attending to Reason's lesson, Crimsworth claims that "I felt half [Pelet's] master, because the reality of his nature was now known to me" (142), and Crimsworth promptly uses the same masterful tone with Mademoiselle Reuter that he quickly learned to use with his students, again so that he can maintain his belief that he is the more powerful one.

As Crimsworth meets his female students, he anticipates that they will be "with their dark nun-like robes and softly braided hair, [...] a kind of half-angels"; however, "The light titter, the giddy whisper, had already in some measure relieved [his] mind of that fond and oppressive fancy" (114). By the end of the first lesson with them, Crimsworth convinces himself that he welcomes the difference between his fantasy and the reality. He writes,

Happily, I felt in myself complete power to manage my pupils without aid; the enchantment, the golden haze which had dazzled my perspicacity at first, had been a good deal dissipated. I cannot say I was chagrined or downcast by the contrast which the reality of a pensionnat de demoiselles presented to my vague ideal of the same community; I was only enlightened and amused. (117-118)

Again, his disillusionment teaches him that repression of one's kinder self and reservation of one's fantasies lead to control over others. In lessons, he controls his class by his imperious demeanor, and they have no influence over him because he has escaped from the "golden haze." His daily lessons, however, further reveal his naiveté, and he admits his innocence:

Daily, as I continued my attendance at the seminary of Mdlle Reuter, did I find fresh occasions to compare the ideal with the real. What had I known of female character previously to my arrival in Brussels? Precious little. And what was my notion of it? Something vague, slight, gauzy, glittering; now when I came in contact with it I found it to be a palpable substance enough; very hard, too, sometimes, and often heavy; there was metal in it, both lead and iron.

Let the idealists, the dreamers about earthly angels and human flowers, just look here while I open my portfolio and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature. (126)

Not surprisingly, “nature” portrays these girls in an unflattering way. He admits his experience is limited, and he has previously relied upon his imagination to provide an understanding of female character. Disillusionment, perhaps disappointment, cause him to sketch his students in the worst possible light. Many students take the class, but he describes only unpleasant ones until he gives attention to Frances Henri.

Crimsworth’s early descriptions of Henri are deliberately vague. Of her physical appearance, he writes, “You cannot tell whether her nose was aquiline or *retroussé*, whether her chin was long or short, her face square or oval; nor could I the first day, and it is not my intention to communicate to you at once a knowledge I myself gained little by little” (152). Through his description, or lack thereof, he toys with the reader. He invites our imagination to paint a picture of his future love and to discover her appearance as he himself did. At first, he hardly notices her; later, he realizes that she is more attractive than he thought; finally, he believes that he alone recognizes her beauty and her worth. As Crimsworth’s attention to her increases, he allows us to see her more clearly; though, indeed, since he writes his story from a retrospective point of view, he does provide us clues from the first meeting that she contrasts favorably to the other

teachers in the school. When describing Frances, he provides more detail, indicating, perhaps that in retrospect he recognizes the importance of this first view though at the time he did not. In the text, he deliberately withholds this memory from us to engage us in constructing the story, just as he engages Hunsden in the romance by withholding details. When, on his visit to Belgium, Hunsden believes the rumor that Crimsworth is enamored of Mademoiselle Reuter, soon to be Madame Pelet, Crimsworth allows Hunsden to maintain his misapprehension. Crimsworth delights in Hunsden's false information, writing:

I made no reply—I let him think so, not feeling inclined to enter into an explanation of the real state of things, and as little to forge a false account; but it was not easy to blind Hunsden; my very silence, instead of convincing him that he had hit the truth, seemed to render him doubtful about it [...]. (229)

Crimsworth's coy repression of romantic truth to Hunsden is similar to Crimsworth's withholding his description of Mademoiselle Henri to the reader. In both cases, the audience, the readers as well as Hunsden, engages more actively in the story because we must imagine the truth. Crimsworth remains powerful as the narrator of his story because of the information that he deliberately represses. We must imagine the story until he unveils the truth. His repression recruits us in the story-making process even as it

maintains his power as narrator and describer. Later, in the same meeting with Hunsden, Crimsworth again shows how his secret knowledge empowers him.

Crimsworth asserts that Madame Pelet's

blandishments, her wiles had been seen but by me, and to me only were they known; but they had changed me, for they had proved that I *could* impress. [...] it took the sting out of Hunsden's sarcasm [...] during the interval of silence by which alone I replied to Mr. Hunsden, I made up my mind to be for the present wholly misjudged by him, and misjudged I was [...]. (231)

Crimsworth can delight in Hunsden's judgment because Crimsworth, in a sense, controls it. Crimsworth could alter Hunsden's opinion simply by revealing his hope that he will one day marry Frances Henri; instead, since his future remains uncertain, he chooses to be misjudged rather than to be vulnerable by telling what he hopes will be true.

Crimsworth has gained confidence from Madame Pelet's secret flattery, indeed, flattery that is so secret that we readers know about it only by reports, not by witnessing it.

Again, Crimsworth's repression of romance and imagination allow him to maintain control.

Crimsworth finally decides to bring Hunsden closer to his heart's desire, and he uses a metaphor so that he can tell Hunsden of Hunsden's misjudgment yet not reveal specific truth. Crimsworth tells Hunsden:

Hunsden—you spoke of grapes; I was thinking of a fruit I like better than your X— hot house grapes—an unique fruit, growing wild, which I have marked as my own, and hope one day to gather and taste. It is of no use your offering me the draught of bitterness, or threatening me with death by thirst: I have the anticipation of sweetness on my palate; the hope of freshness on my lips; I can reject the unsavoury, and endure the exhausting. (232)

Crimsworth designs this speech to show his upper hand. He likes his fruit “better”; he has “marked” as his own this “wild” fruit. He admits his hope, making it almost a certain reality by calling it an “anticipation,” and yet he delays telling Hunsden that Frances Henri is the object of his hope and his romantic fantasies. Through the metaphor, this vague and imaginative description of his desire, Crimsworth can maintain control.

Crimsworth's ideals of Henri entwine with his dreams of control. Early in the romance, he shows how imagination shows him comfortable with and in control of Henri, as he never could have been with Mademoiselle Reuter:

I thought she might possibly be wishing for her master, I knew I wished for my pupil. Imagination began with her low whispers, infusing into my soul the soft tale of pleasures that might be.

“You will find her reading or writing,” said she; “you can take your seat at her side; you need not startle her peace by undue excitement; [...] Be as you always are; look over what she has written; listen while she reads; chide her, or quietly approve; you know the effect of either system [...] you have the secret of awakening what expression you will, and you can choose amongst that pleasant variety. [...] you know that few could rule her as you do; you know she might break, but never bend under the hand of Tyranny and Injustice, but Reason and Affection can guide her by a sign. Try their influence now. Go—they are not passions; you may handle them safely.” (224-225)

Crimsworth has an imagination so powerful that she takes a palpable form that speaks to him. She creates a vision in which he controls Henri. Henri’s chosen occupation *would* be disturbed by him, no matter what Imagination claims to the contrary, because his judgment will interrupt her occupation. In Crimsworth’s imaginative vision, he withholds his thoughts except to “chide” or “approve” so as to create his desired response in Henri. She becomes a player in his play. According to his imagination, “few could



rule her” as he does because he has the “secret” to controlling her. His Reason and Affection serve as her guides while he reads *her* imaginative expression in the form of her writing and passes judgment. Meanwhile, he keeps his own imagination safely concealed.

In an earlier encounter while Henri sat as a student in his class, Crimsworth recognized Mademoiselle Henri’s capacity to repress her thoughts, particularly her pleasurable thoughts. When he returns one of her first assignments to her with “Bon” written on it, he writes, “she smiled, at first incredulously, then as if reassured, but did not lift her eyes; she could look at me, it seemed, when perplexed or bewildered, but not when gratified; I thought that scarcely fair” (152). Unfair, perhaps, but similar to the way that Crimsworth represses his own pleasant thoughts from her as a means of maintaining his impenetrable nature. So determined is he to remain invulnerable, Crimsworth resists Imagination’s tempting appeal. He replies to the pleasant vision:

‘I will *not* go,’ was my answer to the sweet temptress. ‘A man is master of himself to a certain point, but not beyond it. Could I seek Frances to-night, could I sit with her alone in a quiet room, and address her only in the language of Reason and Affection?’

‘No,’ was the brief, fervent reply of that Love which had conquered and now controlled me. (225)

Crimsworth does not surrender and pursue the tempting vision that imagination presented because to do so would reveal his own romantic impulses. Incapable of confining himself to “the language of Reason,” he must deny himself the pleasure of her company because he prefers to meet her when his imagination is repressed but hers is revealed because, he thinks, in this circumstance, he maintains the power. In Glen’s words, “The emphasis is less on the surface of propriety and indifference than on the processes of repression and denial by which it is produced. In one way, the negation of impulse appears as an assertion of choice and control” (Introduction 22).

Several times earlier in the novel, Crimsworth shows this type of repression, and Glen comments on it particularly in the case of a conversation between Crimsworth and Pelet:

Yet, as Freud has famously argued, and as the example just given demonstrates, the use of the negative exposes a self-division that is the reverse of ‘integrity’, or individual wholeness: to deny an intention is to reveal its unconscious presence. In literature, alone among the arts, that which is negated can be given its full imaginative weight. (Introduction 22)

Love replies “no” to Imagination’s urging to speak to Henri in the language of Reason, and this negation shows the reader the importance of Crimsworth’s romantic imaginings;

he simultaneously withholds them, for propriety or for pleasure. Yet the reader feels their impact. Never before has he had to deny himself the company of a woman because of Imagination's urgings. Crimsworth shows remarkable control when he works with his future wife, and he describes his method:

Constancy of attention—a kindness as mute as watchful, always standing by her cloaked in the rough garb of austerity, and making its real nature known only by a rare glance of interest, or a cordial and gentle word; real respect masked with seeming imperiousness, directing, urging her actions, yet helping her too, and that with devoted care: these were the means I used, for these means best suited Frances' feelings, as susceptible as deep vibrating—her nature at once proud and shy. (176)

With her, as with all others, he wears a mask. Indeed, this mask seems similar to the one he wears with the classroom of unpleasant girls. There, “in less than five minutes [he] had buckled on a breastplate of steely indifference, and let down a visor or impassable austerity” (115). His armor in class resembles his mask with Frances. Does Frances see beneath this mask? Perhaps. Ultimately she marries him, asking first only if he will be just. According to Crimsworth, Frances also wears a mask. Following their marriage, Crimsworth describes her:

So different was she under different circumstances, I seemed to possess two wives. [...] Firmness, activity, and enterprise, covered with grave foliage, poetic feeling, and fervour; but these flowers were still there, preserved pure and dewy under the umbrage of later growth and hardier nature: perhaps I only in the world knew of existence, but to me they were ever ready to yield an exquisite fragrance and present a beauty as chaste as radiant. (273-274)

In both descriptions, their “real nature” is the kind and poetic one, and the mask is the imperious and firm one. The face that he presents to the world is the unpleasant one; the inner world is the kinder one. He chooses the unpleasant one in order to master the outer world.

Imagination exists as a character in this novel. In personified form, she works in concert with his reason. Crimsworth surrenders to her courtship when she appears as hypochondria and marries the submissive expression of her in Henri. He listens to her as she guides him in dreams, but he represses her so that she remains his secret treasure. Never is she allowed to make him vulnerable. Repression, for Crimsworth, proves to him his power and dominance.

### A Perfect Balance: Jane Eyre's Imagination and Reason

Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition. (*Jane Eyre* 258)

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, both duty and desire guide Jane. She strives to fulfill productive impulses: she wants to love and be loved in return by both God and select people, to have a home on earth and never to jeopardize her home in heaven. To a greater degree than with Brontë's other protagonists, Jane Eyre's reason and imagination work together to guide her to the life she desires. As a little girl, Jane Eyre lives in a household that values only duty in her, shows only duty to her, and rewards her for nothing. This household lacks the balance that Jane Eyre ultimately will achieve, and without their help, she integrates both duty and imagination. *Jane Eyre* shows the journey of a child with capacity for reason and imagination, a tendency to fall to one radical extreme, and well-used lessons that lead her to an integrated personality that manages both.

Brontë's second novel allows the "sudden turns" that she did not allow in her first, and the result is a "passionate directness [rather] than the cool, unromantic irony" of *The Professor* (Glen "Charlotte" 50).<sup>24</sup> The novel opens with the approximately ten-year-old Jane glad that the weather is too dreary to take a walk, and it ends ten years after her marriage to Edward Rochester. In between, Jane moves four significant times and takes on at least two false identities in her journey to find a place for herself. Her relatives' cruelty causes Jane to have a nervous breakdown, and this weakness that was

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<sup>24</sup> Patricia Spacks contrasts *Jane Eyre* to *Shirley* as well; Spacks sees *Shirley* as a return to "the realities of the world [Brontë] inhabits" (66).

caused by imagination's overwhelming her leads to her first move: to Lowood School. She is glad to leave Gateshead, but she is sent to Lowood not by choice, and her aunt intends it to be a punishing, rather than a salutary, place. There she meets Helen Burns and Miss Temple who show her kindness and who demonstrate how they can exert their will without the trauma that Jane has experienced. Jane discovers pleasure in art while at Lowood, and then she seeks new challenges in a different part of England by applying for a position as a governess.

This application takes her to Thornfield where she serves as governess to Adèle and meets her future husband who is then secretly married. Jane, now a young woman of about eighteen, sits silently in society as visitors comment on what an unfortunate and stupid person a governess must be, but she speaks her mind to her employer, shares her paintings with him, and engages with him in storytelling. Jane, however, knows only half the story that they create together, and the "bad animal" that was locked in the red room at Gateshead is "still lurking somewhere" (Gilbert and Gubar 349). Jane's inability to understand clearly shows that she has not yet fully integrated imagination and reason. As Rochester describes their future marriage in fairy tale terms, his wife plots his harm while sequestered in the attic. After the near-bigamy is discovered while Jane stands with Rochester at the altar, Jane makes her third significant journey toward yet greater integration.

She sneaks away from Thornfield, accidentally leaves her money in a coach, and wanders homeless for several days. Nearly starving, she collapses on the porch of the Rivers family, people who will later be revealed as her cousins. Here, Jane takes on the first of her two false identities; she lies about her last name so that Rochester would be

unable to find her. She reveals her true identity when their mutual uncle dies; a letter arrives to show that Jane will inherit enough money to make her independent. She creates a happy home with them, but St. John, the head of the family, disapproves of the extravagance of the decorations, saying that Jane should look beyond “the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilised affluence” (432). Nevertheless, he proposes to Jane because he believes she will benefit his missionary work.

Jane’s fourth journey could have been with St. John, but she hears Rochester’s voice call her, and she returns to Thornfield—the only place to which she has ever deliberately journeyed—and discovers it in ruins and Rochester maimed and widowed. She takes on her second false identity, the guise of a servant, to reintroduce herself to Rochester.<sup>25</sup> She and Rochester marry and live in a nearby cottage, Ferndean. Jane moves from the gate where she is locked out of the garden, to the low place that nevertheless nurtures her that she may rise up to face the thorns and trials, and these trials prove her worthy to settle in the peaceful and lush Ferndean.

Jane’s Gateshead relatives’ inability to balance imaginative and logical impulses eventually leads to their demise: Cousin John, under the grandiose impression that the world will be subject to his whim as his family has been, dies as a penalty to his high living. Aunt Reed dies alone and bitter—alone because although Jane returns to show that she has forgiven the mean aunt, Aunt Reed will not accept the forgiveness; alone because Aunt Reed’s daughters languish at Gateshead, one without judgment and the other without feeling, glad for their mother to die. In the early years of Jane’s life, Aunt Reed maintains Jane only because she must fulfill a promise that she made to her late

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<sup>25</sup> John Kucich sees these false identities as “theatrical self-negation,” a form of self-pleasing repression (68).

husband. She does not love Jane. She does not indulge Jane with the same understanding of childhood with which she overindulges her own children. Indeed, from Jane, she expects silence and invisibility. Were Jane to adhere to Aunt Reed's expectations, she would become miserably dutiful; should Jane surrender to entire rebellion, she would lose touch with reality, as the critical red room scene reveals.

When Jane becomes visible, punishment follows. One punishment casts Jane into the "red room," the room in which Uncle Reed had passed away. Gilbert and Gubar argue that this punishment, "the most metaphorically vibrant of all her early experiences, forces her deeply into herself" (340). Here, as elsewhere, Jane's ability to trust her inner self serves her well and helps to engender the changes that ultimately will bring her to well-deserved happiness. While in the red room, Jane contemplates the injustice of her punishment: "I dared commit no fault; I strove to fulfill every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night" (10), in contrast to the treatment of cousin John Reed, who had provoked the attack that led to Jane's punishment. Jane attempts to fulfill her station in the house to earn love, and when Aunt Reed does not supply that love, Jane's reason enables her to see the injustice. The child's imagination and reason commingle to create the personified Reason and Resolve that acknowledge her mistreatment:

'Unjust!—unjust!' said my reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power; and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die. (10)



The child has little control, but her imagination provides a forum for reason to remind her of what control she does have—of her place and of her body. She may run away—as, indeed, she essentially does when her fit causes the doctor to recommend boarding school as a means to escape the harsh emotional conditions of Gateshead—or she may starve herself to death. Jane luckily escapes in a more moderate way than she first imagines. Physical death by starvation, while an extreme measure, would more quickly end her suffering than would maturing in the loveless house. This motif of “Escape through flight or escape through starvation [...] recur throughout *Jane Eyre*” (Gilbert and Gubar 341). Through imagination’s ability to show Jane that her situation is not inescapable and through reason’s ability to show her punishment as unjust, rather than deserved, Jane maintains her integrity, even in an atmosphere that entirely denies love and other human emotions to her.

With her actual world bleak and devoid of affection, Jane finds means to create an affectionate world in her imagination. The adult narrator reflects on one method she used to experience love:

I always took my doll; human beings must love something, and in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. (25)

Jane, like Brontë’s other protagonists, does not entirely trust imagination, as she shows by describing the toy as a “graven image,” an object that puts the faithful child’s soul in peril. However, rather than dwelling on the peril, the now-loved narrator writes that her devotion merely puzzles her; nevertheless, she justifies herself: “human beings must love

something.” In the absence of a person willing to receive her affection, Jane comforts and cares for her doll. The doll, then, does not substitute for God but for human companionship, and the narrator’s soul escapes reproach. This act of imagination enables her to envision a family as it ought to be experienced, and so the act serves a practical purpose. In her imagination, the child creates a world where someone, the doll, welcomes her attention and love, a world that prepares her to give and receive genuine affection later in life.

After Mr. Brocklehurst’s presentation, Aunt Reed, who for mean reasons denies Jane love, sensibly believes that Lowood School will accept only expressions of duty from Jane. Helen Burns and Miss Temple, however, foil Aunt Reed’s scheme. Both Helen and Miss Temple prove allies to Jane, and both help Jane to find a balance between imagination and reason.<sup>26</sup> Helen offers affection unconditionally to Jane. In the society of Helen and Jane, according to Michael Vander Weele, “reason and passion both become enriched by the other, one leaning toward respect and the other toward wonder” (20). When Mr. Brocklehurst attempts to defame Jane’s character by repeating Mrs. Reed’s lies, Helen’s understanding look first indicates to Jane that his plan will fail. When Jane tells Helen that she could not bear to have her neck switched, as Miss Scatcherd has just switched Helen’s, Helen replies with a reminder of duty: “Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it. It is weak and silly to say you

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Reger points out the significance of the single paragraph that breaks from Brontë’s chronological narration: the paragraph in which Jane describes the marker that she had placed on Helen’s grave. Reger argues that Helen provides the rebellious Jane with the necessary strategies to free her from Brocklehurst’s doctrine, and thus Helen serves as an agent to help Jane find balance. As an adult, Jane does not neglect her duty to this young teacher.

Gilbert and Gubar point out the significance of the surnames of Jane’s allies. Temple, of course, alludes to the spirit, and Burns, they claim, also indicates spirit as Helen burns with “spiritual passion,” visions of “freedom in eternity,” and “fever for liberty” (346).

*cannot bear* what it is your fate to be required to bear” (56). Helen, who accepts duty as God’s action in her life, prevents Jane from surrendering all her energy to rebellion. At Lowood, Jane gladly performs her duties to worthy recipients—namely, to Miss Temple. In this accepting atmosphere, she discovers her talent for art, a means to record her imaginings for others to share. This period of her life nurtures both the practical and the artistic sides of Jane’s nature, both of which will serve her to maintain her integrity as she becomes more independent.

Helen Burns does not nurture Jane’s imagination, though she accepts it. Helen serves more as a grounding point, a source that helps Jane balance her imagination with duty. Jane, who has found solace in books, sees Helen reading. This book proves uninteresting to Jane because it lacks tales of fairies and genii and other fantastic creatures that inspire Jane’s imagination (49). Helen herself possesses imaginative ability, but she accepts Miss Scatcherd’s view that such abilities should be squelched, hence the text that Jane finds rather dull. In this early stage of Jane’s development, she is drawn to fantasy, though she respects reality. For example, when she recuperates at Gateshead, Bessie offers to bring her a book. Jane wants only *Gulliver’s Travels* because she believes it to be “a narrative of facts” (16). Fairy tales discourage her because she believes the elves have fled England; thus the tales of a fanciful England are false. Travel, on the other hand, can take her to the Lilliputians or the Brogdingnagians. Jane prefers this book because she reads it as a factual account; it appeals to her reason. She needs to believe that such places have space on this earth, if not in England. Her young life has been strictly limited to the environment immediately surrounding Gateshead Hall, yet she dreams of a great voyage that will take her to see the sights that Gulliver saw.

These same ideas are echoed later when she speaks to Mr. Rochester about the elves having fled England and still later when they imagine escaping together to Europe. The fanciful and the factual weave together in Jane's own narrative as she combines her hopes with her duty. The story that Jane tells "is a masterful combination of fact and fancy, of actual happenings and imagined possibilities" (Stryker iii). Jane, as narrator and author, claims her liberty to reveal fact or fancy as she chooses. She tells the reader, just before the narrative jumps ahead eight years: "But this is not to be a regular autobiography. I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest" (86-87). In line with Brontë's philosophy, Jane allows reality only to suggest, never to dictate, her narrative.

Following Miss Temple's marriage and departure from Lowood, an unnamed discontent encourages Jane to expand her experience, and she obtains a position at Thornfield, Edward Rochester's estate. Upon waking to her first day there, Jane imagines a world in which imagination and both pleasant and unpleasant reality coexist. She comments:

The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in [...] External have a great effect on the young. I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me, one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils. (104)

Indeed, her intuition in the small room proves correct, though she could not have anticipated some of the thorns: that her fiancé would be already married, that when he finally was widowed, he would be maimed. One of the greatest pleasures, however, will be that her future husband will cherish her imaginative side.

Jane periodically describes her life by using literary tropes. For example, as Jane begins the new chapter about her life at Thornfield Hall, she frames it in terms of a new scene in a play: “A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote, with such large figured papering on the walls as inn rooms have; such a carpet, such furniture, such ornaments on the mantelpiece, such prints [...]” (98), and she draws on the insight that novels can give: “Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind” (99). She invites us to engage in the storytelling, to use our own experiences and imaginations to create the room at the George Inn. We share the excitement of the curtain’s opening; we share the tension of wondering what will come.

Later, when Jane returns to the now-ruined Thornfield, she describes the experience by employing a different literary type, and she asks the reader to “Hear an illustration” (469). In the illustration, the lover finds his beloved on a mossy bank, and she is dead. By the time that Jane’s investigation is complete, she learns of the death of Bertha Mason and the downfall of Rochester. This time, through her description, she takes part in the fairy tale, though she previously declined to take part in Rochester’s dramas.<sup>27</sup> Nels Pearson points out that this metaphor is both an attempt “to capture the emotion of the scene in words” and the use of the male voice. He argues that “for Jane, the male and female perspectives are not unique, the loss or separation is *itself* unique, and in recounting the events [...] she can easily slip from a female to a male perspective”

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<sup>27</sup> Note that Jane will act in this play, now that Rochester is free of his other brides, Bertha Mason and Blanche Ingram. Joanne E. Rea examines the significance of Jane’s *not* acting in the first play—the charades put on by Rochester and his guests—a play, she claims, that easily could have been entitled “Bridehell” rather than “Bridewell” (77).

(29). Jane's voice is androgynous because she herself is autonomous. With her choosing herself over the then-married Rochester and her newly acquired financial independence, Jane now has conventionally masculine power, and she has transcended the gender limits of her world. She can fulfill both duty and desire, just as she can switch from female to male voice, because she has power in both worlds; she has choice. Surrendering to Rochester's initial proposition would have thrown Jane out of the balance of reason and imagination; accepting it would have fulfilled desire only, unbalanced by duty.

The novel also shows Jane's resistance to those who attempt to appeal only to Jane's reason or sense of duty, and though she wants to do her duty, she defines that duty for herself and does not allow others to determine it. St. John Rivers, Jane's cousin and second suitor, values only Jane's dutiful behaviors, diligent study, and faithful devotion. Jane wants to please him, but she feels that "to do so [she] must disown half [her] nature, stifle half [her] faculties, wrest [her] tastes from their original bent, force [her]self to the adoption of pursuits for which [she has] no natural vocation" (440). Because of his one-sided appreciation for Jane, the relationship is doomed. Jane has complete integration of mind and heart, and she resists accepting conditions that do not allow her to follow the inclinations of both.<sup>28</sup> When St. John proposes to her, he regards his proposal as absolutely logical. He follows an extreme of Christianity that entirely endorses reason and ignores feeling. Jane and his sisters, however, recognize the human value of Christianity. For example, when Jane asks his sister Diana,

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<sup>28</sup> Joan Peters examines the evolution of Jane Eyre, the character and the narrator, and argues that her character develops psychologically and rhetorically to find her voice even as the novel struggles as a literary form to "find its own best voice as a genre" (219). Rivers's one-dimensional appreciation would not allow for the fullness of such a voice.

“Would it not be strange, Die, to be chained for life to a man  
who regarded one but as a useful tool?”

Diana replies, “Insupportable—unnatural—out of the question!”  
(460)

The women here understand what St. John does not: that the values of the heart are at least as valuable as duty and reason.<sup>29</sup> Though both God and husband could use the tool, the tool could not love either. Jane cannot surrender to a life entirely devoid of imagination,<sup>30</sup> and when she considers it, even for a moment, she immediately hears Rochester’s voice calling her. That her hearing connects with her internal world, she affirms the following morning. As Jane begins her journey back to Thornfield, she remembers Rochester’s cry: “I recalled the voice that I had heard; again I questioned whence it came, as vainly as before; it seemed in *me*—not in the external world” (466). With this declaration, Jane reveals the power of her imagination to know truths beyond those present in her immediate world, and her ability to trust her imagination—as she returns to Thornfield—as she trusted the personified reason when she left it.<sup>31</sup>

Jane Eyre consistently attempts to fulfill her duty, and she employs her imagination in this effort. She counsels her heartbroken self to accept her station when

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<sup>29</sup> John G. Peters argues with those who assert that the novel is essentially Christian feminist in perspective; instead, he notes, *Jane Eyre* portrays a journey toward individual Christianity, one in which the heroine values materials in this world, but not more than those of the next (“We” 60), and one in which each person has equal access to God. As later events in the novel show, Jane will not take a secondary role in her life.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Langford describes the Gothic elements in *Jane Eyre*: “the novel contains a quality of imagination and insight which borders on the visionary and prophetic” (228), and the call from Rochester gives firm basis for this theory.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Fjågesund, in his examination of the novel’s Samson and Delilah motif, cites the reunion of this Samson and Delilah as both a sign of Brontë’s “constant conflict between her own desires and needs” and “her equally strong sense of duty” (452) and as a remaking of the story in which the heroine’s return to the hearth provides a secular redemption for the hero. In this reunion, the heroine fulfills both desire and duty.

Rochester seems to love Blanche Ingram. She deliberately explains to the reader that she does not feel overwhelming love for her students or Adèle, only a sense of duty and some affection. She leaves Rochester, going against her heart, because to remain as his mistress would violate the laws of man and God and would diminish herself in her own eyes.<sup>32</sup> Jane consistently demonstrates duty, but events show that she fulfills that duty through imagination and intuition in concert with reason. With duty or reason alone as guide, Jane Eyre would seem more like Brontë's less popular characters—the Professor, for example. Jane Eyre remains popular partly because she uses imaginative, romantic tendencies to navigate through her life's journey. Prior to meeting Rochester, Jane wisely kept her imagination a private affair, providing solace to her lonely existence. Immediately upon their meeting, however, Jane finds a partner to share her acceptance of imagination, again distinguishing her among Brontë's characters.

Even in her youngest years when duty alone was expected of her, Jane acknowledges her imagination through the terms she uses to describe herself. The child Jane describes herself in similar words to those that Rochester will later use, words that reveal her connection to the imaginative world. In the red room, the young Jane sees herself in the mirror:

the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms  
[...], had the effect of a real spirit. I thought it like one of the tiny  
phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented [...].

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Yuen argues that Jane Eyre faces “Two Crises of Decision”: the first brought about by Rochester's proposition, the second by St. John Rivers's proposal. In each case, the decision shows that Jane has “a sense of her own rights” (218). Although Yuen describes Jane's decision-making as a cerebral process, the text shows the power of Jane's imagination as she ruminates over the correct course.



Superstition was with me at that moment; but it was not yet her hour for complete victory—my blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour. (9)

Not only does Jane speak of herself in the third person, but she calls her reflection “strange,” seeming a character from Bessie’s fiction. Her objective vision of herself, then, shows her to be a phantom, fairy, or imp. She recognizes the spunk that, at this time, protects her from hysteria, but she foreshadows her fit with the acknowledgement that Superstition would have “her hour for complete victory.” The reflective narrator understands that imagination can carry a person beyond reason. The adult nearly always manages to balance these competing impulses, though the child does not. Both as a child when rebelling against Aunt Reed’s coercion and an adult who resists St. John Rivers’s imperialism, Jane claims that she knows no moderation when faced with an absolute will, yet as she matures, she does show moderation in blending her trust in imagination and reason. The child becomes hysterical with her imaginings of her dead uncle’s meeting her there; the adult will have dreams that usefully guide her away from moral or physical danger. Both are imaginative, but the adult chooses her response to imagination’s impulse, and the child surrenders to hysteria.

Arguably, Jane attracts Rochester because of her faith in her imagination, and he attracts her because he embraces her fanciful side. Identifying one another with imaginary characters and traits becomes common in their relationship. Their first meeting occurs while Jane recalls a fairy tale. While returning from an errand in town, Jane hears a horse approaching. She narrates,

In those days I was young, and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind—the memories of nursery stories were there amongst other rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give. [...] I remembered certain of Bessie's tales, wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a 'Gytrash'; which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me. (120)

She justifies her fantasy with her youth, but she acknowledges that maturity enables her to enrich her imaginings. The sound of Rochester's horse invites fantasy, but the sight of Rochester interrupts her fancy: "The man, the human being, broke the spell at once. Nothing ever rode Gytrash" (120). Fantasy and reality meet, and at this moment, she chooses reality. She calls her memories of fiction "rubbish," but clearly she loses herself in them and separates herself only when reality conflicts with her inner vision. The fictional world that has always drawn the lonely child draws Jane to Rochester, and him to her.

In their first conversation at Thornfield, Rochester identifies Jane with fairy-creatures. He tells her: "When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse" (131). First he admits that she reminds him of fairy tales, and then he believes her to be a fairy creature. His belief in her connection to the imaginative world increases with their acquaintance. Upon Jane's telling him that she has no relatives, he again

connects her to imaginary creatures, saying that she is related to “the men in green.”

Jane engages in the play with her reply:

I shook my head. “The men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago,” said I, speaking as seriously as he had done. “And not even in Hay Lane, or the fields about it, could you find a trace of them. I don’t think either summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more.” (131)<sup>33</sup>

Jane’s reason (and the contrariness with which she and Rochester interact) causes her to deny that the men in green remain in England; she does not deny, however, her connection to them. Rochester intuitively believes that she may be their distant daughter; indeed, as an orphan, she may. By connecting Jane Eyre to elfin creatures, Rochester reveals his penchant for fantasy, and through this flirtation, imagination’s product, humor, unites them.<sup>34</sup>

After their flirtation progresses to a mutual exchange of affection, Jane claims a relationship with nature that shows that she could be a child of “the men in green” perhaps the woodland nymph that Rochester imagines. After learning of Rochester’s love, she declares to the reader, “Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy” (281). Rochester, too, shows that he envisions himself as a fantasy creature, though a less happy one in the next example. When Jane asks Rochester what he did after he brought his wife

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<sup>33</sup> Warren Edminster observes, “the passing of the fairies becomes symbolic of the flaws and corruption of Jane’s world, and Jane is herself repeatedly identified as a fairy, out of place in the cold, rational, patriarchal society of Victorian England” (22).

<sup>34</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes that when Rochester uses a fairy tale structure to communicate to Adèle his upcoming marriage to Jane, Adèle argues with reason and Jane later refuses to be part of “a dubious [...] tale of someone else’s invention” (398). At this point in the novel, Jane has already achieved what Rochester still must learn: one cannot live entirely in fantasies.

to England, Rochester's reply speaks of imagination: "What did I do, Jane? I transformed myself into a Will-o'-the-wisp. Where did I go? I pursued wanderings as wild as those of the March spirit" (340-341). Imagination certainly does not always lead to happiness, nor do the associations of Jane with fantasy characters. As their relationship progresses, so does the pressure to keep secret Rochester's marriage. Jane surprises him, and he connects her to less complimentary creatures.

When Jane wakes Mr. Rochester in his burning bed, he immediately connects her to imaginary creatures: "In the name of all the elves in Christendom, is that Jane Eyre?" he demanded. "What have you done with me, witch, sorceress?" (161). These questions imply that Jane has caused the danger, conjured the fire. She reasonably ignores the insinuations, even as she insists that he move to safety. In another uncomfortable, though less dangerous time, Rochester again associates Jane with a fantasy creature, but again the creature is less fanciful and pleasant than in the early flirtation. Upon Jane's return from Mrs. Reed's deathbed, Rochester compares Jane to an apparition. He calls Jane to him. She approaches, attempting to hide her feelings, and Rochester says:

"And this is Jane Eyre? Are you coming from Millcote and on foot?"

Yes—just one of your tricks not to send for a carriage, and come clattering over street and road like a common mortal, but to steal into the vicinage of your home along with twilight, just as if you were a dream or a shade.

What the deuce have you done with yourself this last month?" (267)

Jane reminds him that she returned to her ill aunt, who has since died. Rochester's response again almost insults her.

“A true Janian reply! Good angels be on my guard! She comes from the other world—from the abode of people who are dead; and tells me so when she meets me alone here in the gloaming! If I dared I’d touch you to see if you are substance or shadow, you elf!—but I’d as soon offer to take hold of a blue *ignis fatuus* light in a marsh!” (267)

His love for and dependence on her cause him to chastise her for having been away, and because reason does not support their feelings for each other, here he blames her absence on a sort of death and her return on a visit from the “other world”—a state that makes her too dangerous and frightening—too much a creature of the mind—to touch.

For both Rochester and Jane, her command of reason and imagination cause as much pain as pleasure. Jane’s imaginative vision of herself demonstrates sorrow at least as often as it serves as an escape. Following the interrupted wedding, Jane describes herself in the ephemeral terms that Rochester previously had used. As she prepares to leave Thornfield, she encounters “a pearl necklace that Mr. Rochester had forced [her] to accept a few days ago,” and she leaves it because, she says, “it was not mine: it was the visionary bride’s, who had melted in air” (352). Here, in a moment of utter loss, Jane grieves the loss of the bride that Rochester created through his lavish gifts and that she created through her love for him. Rather than blame Rochester for his betrayal, she mourns the loss of the imaginary bride that they together created.

Just as Jane and Rochester create a bride founded in wishful thinking, Jane’s misunderstanding, Rochester’s half-truths, and their mutual love, Jane learns at Lowood that she can create and lose herself in alternate worlds when she draws or paints. With this initial discovery, imagination begins to provide Jane with more nourishment than

does the scanty supply of food at Brocklehurst's school. Jane remembers her first successes at the school:

in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb 'être,' and sketched my first cottage (whose walls, by the bye, outrivalled in slope those of the leaning tower of Pisa), on the same day. That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was want to amuse my inward cravings. I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands--freely pencilled houses and trees, picturesque rocks and ruins, Cuyplike groups of cattle, sweet paintings of butterflies hovering over unblown roses, of birds picking at ripe cherries, of wrens' nests enclosing pearl-like eggs, wreathed about with young ivy sprays. I examined, too, in thought, the possibility of my ever being able to translate currently a certain little French storybook which Madame Pierrot had that day shown me! (77-78)

In this passage, Brontë employs "*ekphrasis*, which refers to language that describes a work of art within a literary work" (R. White 21). This discussion of her early art reveals the character's growth toward the integrated self that she achieves to narrate the novel.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Roberta White explains, "To confront and solve whatever painterly problems may haunt and intrigue her, the woman artist must find and claim a space in which to work, and that staking out of a space is, however remotely, a political act" (15) because the character makes space for something that is important to her individuality. White also notes that the artist's work is frequently described as unfinished, not in a negative way, but in a way "that bespeaks potentialities and possibilities" (16).

Not coincidentally, the child Jane, who understands both reason—and the unreasonable deprivation of her surroundings—and imagination, first assuages her physical needs with visions of warm and filling food—the practical world she inhabits. When Jane discovers her talent for art, the physical needs become secondary to her passion to draw and to translate fiction. In the imaginative world of art, Jane finds comfort. There she can create her own world through her drawings or live vicariously through the stories created by another artist. The pictures described above convey hope—images of spring, life, and harvest—in the bucolic setting. She shows the ability to envision a cheerful life different from her circumstances. Her later art continues to reveal a Romantic tendency: nature’s beauty blending with the pallor of death.

Jane, as the more mature artist, shares her work with Rochester. Their appreciation for the power of art and imagination unites them. On first examining her work, Rochester remarks on her ability to envision the subject of her painting and then to portray it. He then must affirm that she continues to have this ability, this breadth of imagination. Gilbert and Gubar assert that the paintings, while conventionally Romantic, “function ambiguously [...] to predict strains” in their relationship (357). Rochester may know Jane’s powers of prediction because by the end of the examination, Rochester connects elves to Jane’s thoughts as he sees them in her paintings. This connection is yet another way that he acknowledges Jane’s imaginary world and associates her imagination with otherworldly power.

[Rochester asks:] “Where did you get your copies?”

“Out of my head.”

“That head I see now on your shoulders?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Has it other furniture of the same kind within?”

“I should think it may have. I should hope—better.” (134)

As Rochester surveys the paintings, Jane describes them. Her character’s understanding of imagination—and trust in Rochester—shows in that she willingly shares the paintings, though she admits that they are “nothing wonderful.” She reveals their potential, and the value of the sights in her mind:

As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived. (134)

Jane has the ability to imagine “striking” images, but she does not have the skill to create those images. Still, Rochester empathizes sufficiently to realize what these paintings mean to Jane. He encourages her to describe the artistic trance that she experienced as she worked, and he asks if she were happy in the work. To that, she replies yes. Then he asks about the work itself, and the work, like the character, is in its incipient phases of maturing.

“And you felt self-satisfied with the result of your ardent labours?”

“Far from it, I was tormented by the contrast between my ideas and my handiwork. In each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realise.”

“No quite, you have secured the shadow of your thought; but no more, probably. You had not enough of the artist’s skill and science to



give it full being; yet the drawings are, for a schoolgirl, peculiar. As to the thoughts, they are elfish.” (134-136)

Rochester’s questions seek to connect the heart of Jane with the images on the canvas. As he points out, the artist is untrained, yet she possesses vision and the means to communicate it. He seems able to imagine the original vision, and he uses the art to access to Jane’s inner self. Jane tells us that the art is a poor imitation of the vision she originally conceived, testifying to the strength of her inner vision. Rochester, however, seems more interested in how the work possesses her. Unlike St. John Rivers who discounts Jane’s art, Rochester wishes to know if her work makes her happy, and at this early stage of their acquaintance, he recognizes, in Jane if not in Bertha Mason, a need to have “a power of vision which might overpass that limit [of the skyline that surrounds Thornfield]; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life” (116). Their shared love of art inspires Rochester to desire to travel with Jane to these regions she has never seen, to visit the cathedrals and the museums of new lands. Jane, at last, has a companion who joins her in imaginative creation and who will imagine what the artist’s spiritual eye saw.

Besides using her art as a means to access Jane’s thoughts, Rochester offers Jane’s work to the public. Rochester becomes the link that enables Jane to expand her ability to share imagination. She tells us: “One day he had had company to dinner, and had sent for my portfolio; in order, doubtless, to exhibit its contents” (138). Rochester compliments his discerning eye as much as her innate talent. Jane placidly accepts Rochester’s display of her work, perhaps as an affirmation of the value of her talent, or perhaps as a means to communicate her imaginative self with a larger audience. Unlike

Brontë's other characters who in some way compromise their imaginative selves to succeed in society, Jane Eyre accepts her imaginative side and allows it to be vulnerable to society's scrutiny.

In its own way, this vulnerability enables Jane to combat the frustration that others may have felt not to share their imaginations. Though she is vulnerable to their scrutinizing eyes, she has choice: the choice to produce her art and the choice to display it. The unfocused rebellion she felt against her early tyrants now shows as strength when she willingly shows her true self. Society's response is of no consequence to Jane; her voice is heard. Jane's audibility contrasts sharply with Bertha Mason's, whose voice Jane mistakes for Grace Poole's. This contrast becomes clear as Jane reflects on the condition of women while walking near Bertha's tower, the place where she most clearly "articulates her rational desire for liberty" (Gilbert and Gubar 348). There, Jane reflects:

Women are supposed to be very calm, generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; [...] It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (117)

With Jane, Rochester does not condemn her or laugh at her for desiring a larger world. Rochester admires her imaginative capacity, displays its expression to others, and seeks to explore with her. As narrator, Jane's realistic eye enables the reader to view the watercolors that first draw Rochester's attention. They, too, are in process rather than signs of polished talent, but they reflect the raw imagination of the character.

Through Jane's full description, we see both the romantic vision—the ephemeral clouds, the evening light—and the images of death, disembodied forms, beautiful in their pallor, reaching, seeking, longing.<sup>36</sup> Rochester claims only that the thoughts are “peculiar,” yet the reader recognizes the competing desires with which the character must contend. Jane occasionally fantasizes about death as a means of escaping the present's unpleasantness, such as when Aunt Reed locks her in the red room and when she wanders homeless and penniless before meeting the Riverses. The paintings, created as “one of the keenest pleasures [Jane has] ever known,” (136) suggest that even in tranquility, death remains close to her imagination and closely associated with art. The beauty of nature and the reality of early and even violent death unite in the imagination of this character who draws such scenes. Perhaps, too, these paintings suggest melodrama in the still-maturing character.

Besides serving as a means of escape, Jane uses art as a sort of punishment for not seeing reality. Again, imagination and reason coexist to enable Jane to maintain balance in the real world to give her imagination voice in the real world by creating it in the portrait (48). Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane of the gorgeous Blanche Ingram's imminent visit, and Jane scolds herself for her romantic fantasies about Rochester. Her reason tells her that wealthy men do not love their poor, plain governesses. She scolds herself for the hope that she had cherished and pulls herself from the fantasies that, were they to become

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<sup>36</sup> In her 2001 article for *Explicator*, Susan B. Taylor shows a strong connection between the three paintings and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The paintings together, asserts Taylor, “create a self-portrait of Jane and her nature” and “represent visually Jane's struggle with her own passionate, overreaching nature” (184). In “Image and Text,” Taylor contrasts the image of the large cormorant with the small Jane Eyre and argues that Jane has [unknowingly] painted her alter-ego, Bertha Mason (8-9). Thomas Langford cites these paintings, painted before Jane and Rochester's meeting, as an example of one of Jane's “presentiments” (229), and he describes the three paintings as representative of each phase of Jane's life: Lowood, Thornfield, and Marsh End.

public, would jeopardize her situation. She uses Memory and Reason to put herself on trial. The judge speaks with this admonishment:

That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life; that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar. [...]

It does good to no woman to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, *ignis-fatuuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication. (173)

Further, the “sentence” is to draw herself in uncomplimentary, harsh charcoal lines and to draw Blanche Ingram with soft colors on smoothest ivory. This punishment is to save Jane from fantasies that would ruin her career and her dignity, but it also serves as an outlet for “feeling elaborately entertained” (Glen “Charlotte” 127). Of course, she and the reader come to realize Rochester truly does love her and his attention and compliments are sincere. At this moment, however, Jane determines that imagination will not take her over, as it did in the red room. She will not be folly’s fool; instead, she demands only “sense” from this moment. She represses her romantic fantasies, but she uses her her imaginative outlet—her art—as a means simultaneously to express this unpleasant reality and to force her fantasies into submission. Nevertheless, Jane’s aesthetic sense must have been awakened by Mrs. Fairfax’s description of the lovely Blanche Ingram, much as it was later inspired by Rosamond Oliver, the object of St. John Rivers’s infatuation. In both cases, Jane produces remarkable likenesses—particularly remarkable when the reader recalls that Jane sketched Blanche Ingram from Mrs.

Fairfax's description. When Rosamond asks Jane to sketch her as a present for Mr. Oliver, Jane "felt a thrill of artist-delight at the idea of copying from so perfect and radiant a model" (407), more pleasant than but similar to the thrill that Jane feels as she fulfills her challenge to paint Blanche Ingram exactly as Mrs. Fairfax had described her. The creative process absorbs Jane and calms her—as, in both circumstances, Jane grieves the loss of Rochester. Jane shows the ability to use her imaginative faculties to alleviate the pain of reality, but she does not separate from reality. The art provides her with temporary asylum, as she grieves for Rochester and as she misses him during her visit to Gateshead.

When she returns to Gateshead. Bessie greets Jane warmly, but otherwise Jane receives a cold greeting from her aunt and cousins. Nevertheless, the young adult Jane continues her means of comforting herself. She carries her art with her because, as she says, art supplies her with "occupation or amusement" (254). Her first sketch there shows her thoughts in line with Rochester's as she sketches the characters that he often associated with her. She draws from "the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination: [...] a naiad's head, crowned with lotus flowers [...]; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow's nest, under a wreath of hawthorn bloom" (255), and then her fantasies shift to real possibilities: she sketches a face—Rochester's. Her drawing becomes her imaginary friend. She writes: "There, I had a friend's face under my gaze; and what did it signify that those young ladies turned their backs on me? I looked at it; I smiled at the speaking likeness; I was absorbed and content" (255). Just as the younger Jane comforts herself with the belief that her doll appreciates her attentions, the older Jane creates a friend for herself in the portrait of Rochester. Her art serves multiple purposes: contentment,

escape, punishment, reason, and fantasy; likewise, her imagination expresses itself in a variety of ways helpful to her development.

Fantasies enable Jane Eyre to envision a life beyond her current circumstances, and they warn her of danger. Jane trusts dreams and argues on their behalf in the novel. She tells us:

Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs: and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life; because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist: (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives [...]) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man. (239)

In her argument, she mentions ways that presentiments, sympathies, and signs help, and these forms of aid come to her later in the novel. Her dreams come to her as signs, usually of moral or physical peril. In dreams she realizes that Rochester cannot fulfill his responsibilities in his first proposal, though Jane's logical mind has not yet learned the truth. Jane seems to view her dreams as the Biblical dreamers did: God's conversation with humanity. In Jane's dreams, contrary to popular conception, imagination and reality unite to protect Jane from spiritual harm. Certainly the "wholly estranged relatives" that she mentions become her relatives—the Rivers with whom she feels a sense of unity, even before they know that their parents are siblings. Finally, Nature works compassionately for man when the wind carries Rochester's calls across miles and embeds these calls in Jane's heart.

At Lowood, we first see Jane ponder the power of dreams. As she witnesses the punishment of the patient Helen Burns, Jane notices that Helen seems removed from the moment. Jane believes that she could not bear the shame of the punishment, but she says that Helen “looks as if she were thinking of something beyond her punishment—beyond her situation, of something not round nor before her” (52). Helen’s ability to escape the present humiliation inspires Jane to consider how Helen can simultaneously accept the punishment and seem removed from it. Jane asks:

I have heard of daydreams—is she in a daydream now? Her eyes are fixed on the floor, but I am sure they do not see it—her sight seems turned in, gone down into her heart; she is looking at what she can remember, I believe; not at what is really present. (52)

Jane observes Helen fulfill her duty—accept her punishment—by mentally traveling to a more comfortable place. As she fulfills her duty, she escapes it with the same daydreaming strategy. Helen admits escaping boredom in the same way that she escapes humiliation. She falls into a dream world when uninterested in Miss Scatcherd’s lesson; Helen calls this behavior wayward, but in actuality, she provides Jane with a useful tool of rebellion. Helen escapes the harshness of Lowood with dreams of the home that she knows. Jane constructs her pleasant dreams from her imagination, but as with her art, a corpse-like interruption not infrequently intrudes on her pleasant dreams. In these tendencies to escape through dreams and to surrender to unpleasant interruption, Frederick Ashe identifies Jane Eyre’s primary struggle: to overcome “tenacious pessimism” brought about by her unhappy childhood (121). Jane triumphs in this

struggle as shown by her writing this autobiography, absent of the ironic tone that intrudes in *Shirley* and *Villette*.

Jane Eyre's dreams mix reason with imagination and serve as a guide to her at least as often as they serve as an escape. Jane describes in most detail the dreams that she has while at Thornfield. For example, on the night of the fire, Jane's thoughts dwell on her conversation with Rochester in which he confesses the possibility that he fathered Adèle. Jane tells us, "I wished I had kept my candle burning; the night was drearily dark; my spirits were depressed" (159). The light would help to lighten her spirit and to ward off dark dreams, but in the depressed state, signs come to her more easily. She writes:

A dream had scarcely approached my ear when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow-freezing incident enough.

This was a demonic laugh—low, suppressed, and deep—uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin laughter stood at my bedside—or rather, crouched by my pillow; but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing. (159-160)

With sleep comes a dream, and the dream flees from the real threat of Bertha Mason, blamed on Grace Poole here and elsewhere. Jane follows the fleeing dream to the sound, which, in her dreamlike state, she believes leads her to a goblin, but it eventually leads her to save Rochester from attempted murder. Jane trusts the impulse of the dream enough to follow the sound, though she does not know where it leads. Her intuitive trust enables her to save Rochester and to emerge victorious in this most dangerous encounter with Bertha Mason.



Later, after Jane has observed Rochester's and Blanche Ingram's courtship, Rochester leaves Thornfield for a few days. He returns in the guise of a gypsy. After the Sibyl dismisses Jane, Jane returns to awareness as if she awakened from sleep. She asks:

Where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still? The old woman's voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all were familiar to me as my own face in a glass—as the speech of my own tongue. [...] she drew her bonnet and her bandage closer about her face, and again beckoned me to depart. The flame illuminated her hand stretched out; roused now, and on the alert for discoveries, I at once noticed that hand. (219)

During the fortunetelling, the disguised Rochester implies that he recognizes Jane's virtue, but because of her relative youth to his age, and her innocence to his vices, he must stay the course he planned—removed from involvement with her. With her in a dream and him in disguise, they enter an imaginative world where he can believe that he will see her innermost secrets, and as the gypsy, he asks probing questions. Jane, however, has reason enough—even in her dreamlike state—not to share her feelings when she chooses not to share. The command to leave seems to come when Rochester reaches his most vulnerable. Indeed, she realizes who he is—and perhaps the import of his questions—while he withdraws into his costume and gestures for her to go away.

The Thornfield dream that plagues Jane most frequently involves a child. This dream shifts form to foreshadow several of the key changes in Jane's life, proving that the dreams are the "presentiments" that Jane never derides. She has reason to fear

dreams that involve children because of a story that she overheard Bessie tell. Jane recalls:

When I was a little girl, only six years old, I, one night, heard Bessie Leaven say to Martha Abbot that she had been dreaming about a little child; and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or one's kin. The saying might have worn out of my memory, had not a circumstance immediately followed which served indelibly to fix it there. The next day Bessie was sent for home to the deathbed of her little sister. (239)

Jane tells the potentially doubtful audience that she would have forgotten Bessie's superstition had not events proven it true. Jane's own dream, then, must cause the audience anxiety as we interpret it prophetically, as Bessie's dream gives us reason to do. Jane tells us that she repeatedly dreams of a child. Seven nights of repetition—surely some new world order is in the making. The new world begins when Leaven, Mrs. Reed's coachman, meets Jane to tell her that Mr. John died the previous week and that Mrs. Reed ails and asks for Jane. For Jane, that new world comes when she finally makes peace with the Reeds and learns that indeed a relative exists who cares about her well being. Just as the child-dream warned Bessie of her young sister's death, Jane's dream marks the death of the mercurial John. Jane does not know what harm the dream may anticipate; nevertheless, she becomes anxious before the news arrives.

Following Mrs. Reed's death, Jane's dreams again show her uncertainty of whether or not she will achieve happiness. Jane begins her return journey to Thornfield.

“I was going back to Thornfield, but how long was I to stay there? Not long. [...]

“The question followed, ‘Where was I to go?’ I dreamt of Miss Ingram all the night. In a vivid morning dream I saw her closing the gates of Thornfield against me and pointing me out another road; and Mr. Rochester looked on with his arms folded—smiling sardonically, as it seemed, at both her and me.” (265)

In her wakeful art at Gateshead, she draws Rochester as a friend, but in her unprotected dreams, she portrays him as unkind both to herself and his supposed fiancée. Blanche Ingram, the known threat, in the dream does what Jane fears most: pushes her away from the place she regards as home. In Jane’s imagining, Rochester not only does not prevent Jane’s removal, he behaves as a snide observer. While Rochester’s love for Jane seems sincere, his cached wife certainly disables his ability to keep Jane safe at Thornfield.

Prior to Jane and Rochester’s scheduled wedding, worrisome dreams again assault Jane. Rochester must leave Thornfield for a few days. As Jane frets over her imaginings, she longs for Rochester’s return. Some mysterious event has occurred, and Jane teases the reader by not showing us the event until she reveals it to Rochester. Instead, she blames her nervousness on “hypochondriac foreboding” (304). That she calls her fears “hypochondriac” shows that she believes that these fears are not grounded in reality; instead they are signs that, as in the red room, Superstition has found an hour for “complete victory.” Instead of reading these dreams—for dreams partially disturb Jane while Rochester travels—as actual “foreboding” of ill, Jane views them as superstition. Throughout her life, intuition has served her well. Because she so desperately longs for

home and love, she dismisses these feelings as invalid. She presents the signs to the reader that all is not well with Rochester, yet she overlooks these signs in her quest for joy.

Finally Rochester returns, and Jane reveals the secret that troubles her: two dreams that awaken her finally to face Bertha Mason, though Jane does not then know her. Rochester's gift of the veil may have sparked these dreams though Jane denies its influence at first. When Rochester suggests that rather than a ghost's startling her, she has seen her wedding veil in a strange light, she tells Rochester: "besides the delicacy and richness of the fabric, I found nothing save Fairfax Rochester's pride; and that did not scare me, because I am used to the sight of the demon" (308).<sup>37</sup> In this suggestion, Jane maintains her composure and asserts that she has not had a false vision. Joan Peters says of Jane's narration that her telling this tale simultaneously to Rochester and the reader obliterates "altogether the distance between the narrative discourse and the fiction, so that fiction and narration do in fact absolutely converge" (228). Jane's narration of a dream pulls the reader into the character's struggle to determine reality from imaginings. In this pull, the reader accepts the warning of Jane's dream and consequently accepts the value of knowledge that comes from imagination. Jane so desperately wants to share her dreams with Rochester because she wants him to assure her that these dreams, and the meeting with Bertha Mason, are not signs to warn her. Part of her mind suggests that she

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<sup>37</sup> Laura Haigwood notices that while Jane unwillingly accepts Rochester's gifts, she remembers briefly that she has an uncle who may wish to benefit her, "but the imaginative prospect of future independence is not in itself sufficient to remove the present threat" (5). Jane uses her dream, an imaginative creation, to prompt Rochester to engage with her in the struggle between hope and a foreboding sense, but until Rochester's conversion, such as prompt proves ineffective.

should pay attention to these dreams while her desire for her own home causes her to ignore their potential.

She goes on to describe the first dream in which she carries a sick child and struggles to catch up to Rochester. This dream serves as a sign of events to come, and, Mary Poovey asserts, the dream “symptomatically acts out what cannot make its way into the psychologically realistic narrative” (141). Jane Eyre cannot at this moment in the novel know the barrier that separates her from marriage to Rochester, but she can sense it, and through the report of the dream, she tells Rochester that she knows something is not right. She may hesitate to tell Rochester directly that her intuition informs her that she cannot then marry him; indeed, she may be unable to tell herself, but her dream can speak for her, and in this case, it appears to be a premonition. A few days after the dream, a storm of consciousness follows Jane as she leaves Rochester. She knows that he needs her, and she knows that to stay as his mistress would degrade their love. She alone carries responsibility for the wellbeing of their love—the babe that shivers while she feels cold and unable to comfort it. She carries the joy of knowing that the love is strong and the responsibility to execute the correct action when she learns that their marriage cannot be. While she carries this caregiving duty, she literally suffers the ravages of a storm, wandering homeless. Rochester, in his complacency that he can do as he chooses, withdraws further from Jane. At the confession of this dream, however, Rochester does not relieve Jane of her doubt-filled burden.

Jane, through another dream, gives Rochester a second chance to confess, and her dream foretells another event. In this dream, Jane once again carries a weak child who is heavy to her, but this time her journey is not on a road but through the ruins of

Thornfield. Once again, Jane confesses her distance from Rochester and her sole attempt to protect the infant—their incipient love. Once again her dream foretells the future—that Thornfield will become a ruin, but Rochester, not Jane, will fall from it. Once again Rochester fails to confess the reasonable basis for her fears. Jane desires not to trust the dreams, and Rochester has not yet gained sufficient honor to speak truthfully to Jane. He embraces her imagination only at a superficial, flirtatious level, even when the dream immediately proceeds an actual threat.

This dream ends with physical danger to Jane. She awakes to see her wedding attire and a woman in her room. She describes the intruder: “It seemed, sir, a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell” (310). While under the influence of the dream, Jane sees Bertha Mason for what she is to Jane<sup>38</sup>—an example of the dreadful future that could become Jane’s, the bedmate of Rochester, and Rochester’s death-wish. Jane sees the intruder as “the foul German spectre—the Vampire” (311) and tells Rochester that she fainted when Bertha Mason extinguished the candle and left Jane in darkness. Jane emphasizes that this faint is the second time only that fear steals her consciousness—the first time was in Aunt Reed’s dreaded red room, another place where Jane’s imagination forces her to grapple with the supernatural. In both cases, Jane’s fears prove reasonable—knowledge of lovelessness and a lack of protection; in both cases, she blames her imagination. Gilbert and Gubar

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<sup>38</sup> Julia Miele Rodas argues that Bertha Mason not only serves as Jane’s double, as Gilbert and Gubar state, but also as Rochester’s double—alike in their passions and temper. Rodas’s argument invites a more extended investigation to the ties that draw Jane, Rochester, and Bertha Mason together. Mary Poovey points out that Jane notices that women are like men (147) in her mental argument for women to exercise their faculties (141).

view this confrontation with Bertha Mason as “the book’s central confrontation [...], with her own imprisoned ‘hunger, rebellion, and rage’ a secret dialogue of self and soul on whose outcome, as we shall see, the novel’s plot, Rochester’s fate, and Jane’s coming-of-age all depend” (339). In this central conflict, Jane *should* trust her intuition, but she does not. Her coming of age will depend on her response to the truth of Rochester’s current marriage and her ability to maintain her own integrity.

When Rochester fails to protect Jane’s integrity and she suffers humiliation prior to their wedding, Jane’s imagination guides her by means of a dream. This time, she trusts herself because Rochester has proven himself untrustworthy. The night following their interrupted wedding, Jane tells us:

That night I never thought to sleep; but a slumber fell on me as soon as I lay down in bed. I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red room at Gateshead; [...] a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—

“‘My daughter, flee temptation!’

“‘Mother, I will.’”

“So I answered after I had waked from the trancelike dream.”

(351)

When in the red room, Jane imagines that her dead Uncle Reed will come to avenge her of her aunt’s mistreatment, and superstition reigns and Jane becomes afraid. In this

dream, the mother that Jane never knew comes to her to protect her,<sup>39</sup> and Jane accepts this vision. She answers aloud *after* she wakes, demonstrating her faith that the imaginary world of dreams and the physical world of responsibilities and duties can merge together. To fulfill duty, Jane leaves Rochester. Arlene Young argues that the wandering that follows Jane's flight is "melodramatic" and "devoid of the spirit and humor" Jane previously showed (326); however, this journey necessarily occurs because it is the one that allows Jane's innate resources—not her schooling or her work—to guide her. Jane must pass this test of utter solitude in her quest for her integrated self. Instead of moving to a specific destination, Jane moves away from temptation. Alone and resourceless, she faces herself. This journey leads to Jane's confirming her complete integrity. She will again be tested in the unfamiliar world of Morton, and her reason and intuition will unite. Jane survives because of both her understanding of how society works and her intuition.

In Morton, Jane returns to the life that she knew before Rochester: a life of duty and decorum with private dreams to remind her of her desires. Once she finds her cousins (unknownly at first), she becomes a school mistress and lives much as she did before she left Lowood. Only in dreams does she indulge her desire for Rochester. She confesses:

At this period of my life, my heart oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection: [...] I used to rush into strange dreams at night:

[...]—dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with

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<sup>39</sup> Beth Kalikoff explains that Jane Eyre is in danger of falling due to a conventionally Victorian reason: "because of the powerfully appealing possibility of romantic love and social mobility" (358). Kalikoff specifically discusses Jane's desire for security, rather than social mobility, and she understates the pull of Jane's passionate love.



agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr.

Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him—the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. Then I awoke. (405)

She confesses the passion of her dreams seemingly privately to her reader. In the dreams, she reunites with Rochester, unprotected by her reasonable mind and unencumbered by duty to the laws of God and Man. Through Jane's confession, Brontë furthers Jane's friendship with the reader, a quality that separates this novel from Brontë's other three intentionally published works. Here, her storyteller trusts and works cooperatively with the reader. This narrator allows her voice, in the forms of her hopes, dreams, and fears, to be heard.

The most Gothic of all the novel's events is the moment when Jane and Rochester communicate across the miles that separate them. Jane, in her role as reasonable narrator, claims that she does not expect the reader to believe in such supernatural phenomena, but she relays the events so that we can. The fictional character narrates a story embedded in the larger narrative so that the audience will believe that this fantastic event could occur in reality. She describes Rochester's experience with the long-distance communication:

Reader, it was on Monday night—near midnight—that I too had received the mysterious summons: those were the very words by which I replied to it. 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. If I told anything, my tale would be such as

must necessarily make a profound impression on the mind of my hearer: and that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart. (496)

Jane protects the vulnerable Rochester from the full truth that cannot logically be explained. The readers, however, are privy to her private thoughts, and Jane's phrasing adds a religious element to the knowledge as she echoes the phrasing from the New Testament that the Madonna "pondered these things in her heart" (Luke 2:19). For Jane, as for Mary, the events were too wonderful to be spoken immediately, but they can be confided years later.

Jane Eyre, Brontë's most popular character, concludes her novel as a heroine who has victoriously integrated imagination and reason. She escapes the fates that befall her Gateshead cousins: the washiness of "feeling without judgment" and the bitterness of "judgment untempered by feeling" (258). Neither of the young girls with whom Jane begins her life will establish loving homes, which Jane seeks from the beginning and secures by the end. Jane's next teachers, the models of Bessie, Miss Temple, and Helen Burns, show Jane how a woman can fulfill her duties and remain true to herself. Jane's suitors initially tempt her to one extreme: Rochester to imagination because of his denial of reality, and St. John to reason because of his rejection of emotion. When Jane's desire for Rochester tempts her, reason, duty, and imagination unite to protect her from dissolving the strong individual that she has begun. When St. John overwhelms her with logical reasons for them to marry so that she can help him fulfill his duty to God, Jane realizes that her sacrifice of imagination in marriage to him could help him fulfill his duty

but would prevent her from hearing God's call to her. Jane's imagination and reason temper each other so that she makes choices that enable her to have relationships both with God and her loved ones. The early unfocused rebellion, the models of integrated women, the adolescent temptation culminate until Jane Eyre emerges as the integrated novelist who fearlessly tells her story ten years after her triumph. The novel satisfactorily concludes with the security and equality that Jane envisioned: duty and imagination, dreams and reason, art and verbal expression, Jane and Rochester, the storyteller and the audience, all achieve an equal place in Brontë's most balanced narrative.

“Such is the way of the world” in *Shirley*

Note well! Whenever you present the actual, simple truth, it is, somehow, always denounced as a lie: they disown it, cast it off, throw it on the parish; whereas the product of your own imagination, the mere figment, the sheer fiction, is adopted, petted, termed pretty, proper, sweetly natural: the little, spurious wretch gets all the comfits, — the honest, lawful bantling, all the cuffs. Such is the way of the world [...]. (*Shirley* 587)

Brontë’s narrator, like Brontë herself, struggles with the audience’s competing desires for realism and fantasy. The narrator’s end-of-novel warning that “they” will spurn truth and welcome imagination encapsulates the expectation that guides co-protagonists Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar as they determine how to navigate successfully through maidenhood and to marriage, the conventionally romantic fate that awaits even the independent Shirley. Though intuition and reason unite to enable the heroines to have an integrated understanding of truth, their society does not have that same vision. Caroline and Shirley consequently protect their understanding of the truth from public abuse. Each heroine expresses her wishes only rarely to the other one, and almost never to any other character. Usually they speak their imaginings about Mother Eve or mermaids in hypothetical terms that express their understanding of how social interactions work in a general way rather than a personal one. As the narrator observes, they live in a commercially driven community, and the truth that comes from intuitive knowledge rarely receives acceptance, but the figment of imagination—especially in the form of bias—is nurtured.

Autonomous characters master the various aspects of real and imaginative life, but the narrator's conclusion, that "such is the way of the world," resigns itself to a world that does not tend toward wholeness. Certainly Brontë's experience with publishers and critics supports the narrator's conclusion. At the time of *Shirley's* publication (1849), *The Professor* remains tucked in Brontë's cupboard, the self-made-man novel denounced by its potential publishers as lacking sufficient romance. With *Jane Eyre*, Brontë presents a more traditional romance that, nonetheless, receives criticism for its fantastic flights. Brontë attempts a third type of novel with *Shirley*, a "condition of England" novel (Hook 9).<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Jay Dessner criticizes the work, writing "by moving from personal to public themes [...], from romance to realism, Charlotte Brontë was putting her worst foot forward" (83); however, other scholars see *Shirley* as continuing Brontë's investigation to determine how to balance imagination and duty. Andrew and Judith Hook claim that in addition to her historical presentation, Brontë attempts "very much what she attempts in her other novels: a bringing together of the world of romantic hope and fulfillment [...] and the real world of pain [...] and responsibility" (18). Regardless of one's assessment of the novel's value, *Shirley* clearly deviates from the "imaginative autobiography" (Hook 9) that *Jane Eyre* fans likely expect while continuing to explore the personal and public valuing of imagination. This novel suggests that survival in the real world may necessitate complete repression of imagination, that society rejects real truth in favor of its fictions. That *Shirley* will not

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph Dupras and Rebecca McLaughlin argue that *Shirley* is more a "woman question" novel, but Gisela Argyle argues that, in *Shirley*, Brontë attempts several subgenres. One such subgenre is the political novel. Jack Jones, trade union leader, asserts, "Charlotte Brontë was popular among political activists" (qtd. in Duckett 165), and Pam Morris argues that Brontë uses the novel to engage with the debates that followed the 1832 Reform Bill. Despite the differences in specific interpretations, scholars agree that Brontë writes this novel with an explicitly political agenda.

develop as creative autobiography first shows itself in that, unlike Brontë's other novels, this one lacks a central protagonist,<sup>41</sup> a critical element for autobiography, imaginative or otherwise, and for the audience's identification with a character who integrates imagination and realism.

In Brontë's third novel, two heroines share the protagonist role: one, Caroline Helstone, a reticent young woman just leaving childhood, and the other, Shirley Keeldar, a confident and outspoken heiress who has recently entered adulthood. Gilbert and Gubar claim that this sharing serves a distinct purpose in the novel. They write,

That Shirley is Caroline's double, a projection of all her repressed desire, becomes apparent in the acts she performs "for" Caroline. What Shirley *does* is what Caroline would like to do: Caroline's secret hatred for the curates is gratified when Shirley angrily throws [one of] them out of her house after they are attacked by her dog. (382-83)

In this example, one heroine acts upon an idea that the other had repressed earlier. The divided heroine role corresponds to divided impulses that characterize Brontë's novels. Both heroines value the imagination, but they treat it differently. Usually, Shirley controls her imagination's expression to please herself; Caroline represses it to please others. Together, these two characters demonstrate the opposing impulses to express and repress the imagination. The narrator frequently describes Shirley as imaginative, authentic, and powerful. Caroline, in contrast, represses her imagination and power to abide by conventional rules. She resents this repression, but she conforms to convention

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<sup>41</sup> Brent Kinser cites a letter from Jane Welsh Carlyle that shows that Brontë retains her anonymity in literary circles (Carlyle wishes to meet the author of *Shirley*) and shows that scholars of the time saw the two protagonists of the novel as two representations of Carlyle: Caroline as she was, and Shirley as she saw herself.

all the same. For example, the narrator, commenting on behalf of Caroline who has noticed Robert's cooler responses to her, says, "A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing: if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery" (128). Repression is the natural state for women. Caroline may have imagined, felt, even known that she and Robert had begun a courtship, but to question his emotional abandonment would betray her dignity. She suffers because she does not articulate her dreams, but in her world, self-preservation and dignity insist that she keep her imaginings to herself. Caroline frequently envisions herself with Robert, and these dreams offer escape from the real world of their separation, but reality, in compliance with the novel's theme, rudely intrudes and takes Caroline from the hospitable and expansive region of her imagination to her "narrow chamber," "rain," and "the sob of the mournful east" wind (189). In her imagination, she and Robert thrive; in reality, she describes herself as a "thin illusion" (189). When Caroline faces the dichotomy of what her heart tells her is real and what Robert demonstrates, her vitality fades, and she becomes a shadow, nearly a figment of others' memories.<sup>42</sup> In Caroline, Brontë demonstrates what happens when the real world utterly denies the truth that dreams reveal.

The narrator's voice, belonging to neither Caroline nor Shirley, periodically asserts the realism of the story and ultimately concludes with the weary resignation that "they" (587) value figments of imagination and abuse reality, again demonstrating

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<sup>42</sup> Miriam Bailin argues that "In *Shirley*, somatic disorder becomes the primary form of self-assertion, convalescence the measure of comfort, and physical dependency the enabling condition for intimacy" (257). This process of illness's ultimately leading to intimacy/romance occurs at least three times in the novel: with Caroline and her mother, with Robert and Caroline, and with Shirley and Louis. Illness, then, becomes the agent that allows the characters to fulfill their hopes.

society's complicated response to imagination. The narrator, who, she suggests, would convey only reality if the audience would permit such unpleasantness, closes the story as a romance but asserts that the happy glow results from the reader's wishes and the narrator's apparent reluctance to disillusion the audience. Through this conclusion, Brontë simultaneously offers a romantic, fairy-tale ending and a hint that only foolish readers will believe it. Brontë emphasizes her irony in the novel's end by titling the final chapter "The Winding Up" and by claiming "I think the varnish has been put on very nicely" (Brontë 588, Gilbert and Gubar 397). Under the varnish, however, the reader can glimpse Brontë's suggestion that "Happy endings [...] will not be quite so easily arranged in this fallen world, for history replaces mere romance in a world of stony facts" (Gilbert and Gubar 398). Most scholars conclude that *Shirley* leaves readers unsatisfied because of these "stony facts" and because the "winding up" suggests that Shirley has repressed her spirit and that industry has overtaken Caroline's pastoral home.<sup>43</sup> In short, repression—and unpleasant reality—rule *Shirley* in the same way that it presided in *The Professor*. Audiences prefer Jane Eyre's balance of imagination's expression and repression, perhaps because her autonomy represents what many people would like to have: imagination, will, and circumstances to suit ourselves in its expression.

Throughout the book, Brontë presents characters that struggle with the competing impulses to express and repress imagination. The narrator herself struggles with these impulses. As the narrator, Brontë asserts repeatedly that reality dictates the characters

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<sup>43</sup> According to Weber, a condition-of-England novel "sees society ideally as an integration network or a blended space, and considers how the gulf between rich and poor can be bridged. This has been the overriding concern of condition-of-England novelists" (133). Weber sees Dickens's *Hard Times* and *Shirley* as particularly exploring the worker/capitalist relationship, with Robert Moore showing the "underlying assumption [...] of the common interests of workers and capitalists, an assumption frequently made by middle-class Victorian novelists" (134).



and circumstances, but in personal correspondence, the author claims that the work is entirely fictional and any resemblance to persons living or dead results from coincidence. The two protagonists and the other characters serve as foils for each other: the indebted Robert Moore claims that the impoverished cannot afford imagination, but the enlightened Moore recognizes the nonsense of his earlier thoughts; the narrator and Shirley overtly contrast Shirley's imaginative powers with the impotence of her uncle's; sweet Caroline wishes that duty not require the entire subjugation of self, and Shirley—through four-fifths of the novel—demonstrates that one can have one's self and fulfill one's duty. In Caroline, the audience recognizes the pain of repression as she denies her fantasies about her beloved, but in Shirley, the audience catches a glimpse of repression's pleasure as Shirley contains the secret to her love's arrival. Embedded in the struggle to determine the value of expressing or repressing imagination are the narrator's strong disapproval of women's forced servitude in uninteresting occupations, questions about the role of marriage in the lives of both men and women, and the protagonists' consistent faith in the power of imagination to speak through art and nature. While the narrator ultimately causes reality to dominate and suggests that imagination will have no place in the commerce-driven future, the characters do not allow imagination entirely to surrender to this grim prospect as they honor imagination in their lives.

Brontë demonstrates two minds when she, in the roles of narrator and author, disagrees about the book's basis in reality. The narrator frequently reminds the reader that—however imaginative the reader may find the character portrayals—these portraits entirely represent truth. In the novel's first paragraph, the narrator returns us to the beginning of the century and speaks figuratively of the shower of curates that have landed

in the parish as if she would take us to a fantastic land “once upon a time,” a land where imperfect drops of people can fall from the sky. She reins in this fancy to instruct the reader who may expect romance to

Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something as unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. (39)

With her somewhat ironic caution comes a division of minds. When she tells us to reduce our expectations to a low standard, she undermines the value of realism. In language that reminds us of commerce—strikingly unromantic language—she establishes a foil for imaginative leanings. Just as Robert will not fulfill his romantic dreams until he fulfills his business duties, the reality of commerce must survive, whether or not art, nature, or dreams do.

Another assertion of the book’s reality appears as Chapter 18’s title: “Which the Genteel Reader is Recommended to Skip, Low Persons being Here Introduced.” With this title, Brontë sardonically warns of the impending report of reality’s harshness; this report did not occur, however. Instead, the chapter offers conversations with respectable workingmen, William Farren and Joe Scott, and the two protagonists. The narrator may refer to the readers as “genteel,” but she shows the common men as full of sense, rather than “low,” and thereby upholds the Romantic aspects of the novel while discussing contemporary challenges.<sup>44</sup> The readers wishing for romance receive it in the form of the

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<sup>44</sup> In the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explains his purposes in writing the poems, namely, to convey the “essential passions of the heart” in the “plainer and more emphatic language” of ordinary men. Farren and Scott champion the workingmen and speak common sense.

common men's perspectives, and the narrator achieves a political agenda of offering controversial opinions on women's status, laws governing workers, and other rebellions against the status quo. The narrator, in her omniscient role, guides "genteel" readers away from unpleasant contradiction of the status quo, takes readers through a sample of English history, and foretells future events, including the fate of the characters, now gone from the earth.

The final chapter continues to display the narrator's competing impulses of imaginative romance and history/realism as "The Winding Up" initially returns the focus to the curates and neatly metes out their rewards and punishments, even as the narrator withholds Mr. Malone's fate. Gilbert and Gubar claim that the delivery of justice in the final chapter provides "an almost cynical excess of concession to narrative conventions" (396). Brontë's humor, however, prevents cynicism from dominating and allows the novel to show the struggle between convention and imagination. The reality of Malone's fate, she teases us, will offend our sensitive tastes, and so we imagine what terrible deeds he must have committed. Elizabeth Gaskell reports that Brontë's husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls, recognized himself—and laughed loudly—at Brontë's portrayal of the curates, thereby demonstrating both that Brontë treated them with humor and that she recognizably based at least these characters on real people. In public, however, when asked by her publisher W. S. Williams if she will be identified because of her specific references to the people and character of Yorkshire, Brontë asserts the fiction of the novel—perhaps repressing the real for her own purposes. She replies to Williams, "the book is far less founded on the Real, than perhaps appears. It would be difficult to explain to you how little actual experience I have had of life, how few persons I have

known, and how very few have known me” (Gaskell 382). The author, then, claims that she writes a work of imagination, and with this difference in the assertions of the author and the assertions of the narrator, Brontë partially satisfies the competing desires for realism and romance.

The voice within the novel continues to assert the reality of the book, especially, it seems, when the narrator wishes to offer a tribute or to comment upon society’s wrongs. Of all the characters, gentle Caroline, modeled after Anne Brontë, most frequently is described in fantasy terms, especially as a fairy or as one whose life is read by others. Her tendency toward fancy, however, is attributed to her young age. The narrator tells us that Caroline “was just eighteen years old; and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced. Before that time, we sit listening to a tale, a marvellous fiction; delightful sometimes, and sad sometimes; almost always unreal” (121). Caroline, then, should be forgiven for her romantic notions; in the novel’s setting, she is, after all, a child who just begins to enter adulthood and the “crushing” (122) experiences that comprise reality. Once again, Brontë’s word choice shows reality to be unpleasant, almost unbearable, and Caroline’s experiences in early adulthood support this suggestion. As Caroline leaves the childhood world where she can indulge in daydreams, she abruptly enters a world where she likely will exist on the periphery, unloved and unregarded. When Caroline first begins her visits to the old maids whose fate, she believes, she will share, the narrator comments upon society’s unkindness to women, another instance in which unpleasant reality prevails. We meet the saintly Miss Ainley, and the narrator again asserts the novel’s truth, admonishing us, “You must not think, reader, that in sketching Miss Ainley’s character, I depict a figment of imagination—no—we seek the

originals of such portraits in real life only” (198). The narrator seems to believe that her audience will accept the emotional truth of the story only if the factual truth is affirmed; the author, however, speaks about the novel differently in her letter to Ellen. To Ellen, Brontë writes, “You are not to suppose any of the characters in ‘Shirley’ intended as literal portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to *dictate*” (Gaskell 388). The contrast between Brontë’s reflective analysis of her work and the commentary from the narrator—presumed to be Brontë/Currer Bell—demonstrates the tension between the competing urges to express and repress imagination.

The character Robert Gérard Moore represents the industrial merchant, and he, initially at least, speaks of the imagination in commercial terms. His language contrasts with Caroline’s dreaming. Caroline, like Moore, wishes to provide for herself (and the reader knows that she imagines herself working beside the one she loves). She imagines that as a boy, she would aid Moore as his apprentice. Moore scoffs at her dream and the benevolent outcome, claiming, “The poor ought to have no large sympathies; it is their duty to be narrow” because, he says, “Poverty is necessarily selfish, contracted, groveling, anxious” (99). Caroline argues that without large sympathies and impulses of the heart, no lowly person would be happy. Happiness, like sympathy and imagination, for Moore falls far behind his valuing of provision. Moore himself squelches his own imaginings of love. He first tells Yorke that he, Moore, cannot consider marriage, “that marriage and love are superfluities, intended only for the rich” (180). As his character

develops, he does imagine marriage, but at first only in commercial terms.<sup>45</sup> He proposes to Shirley, and she rejects him because rather than offering love, he offers an uneven financial contract. This rejection ultimately pulls Moore back from losing himself to his ambitions, and he then imagines marriage to his rightful mate, the one who can balance his ambition with kindness, but he marries Caroline only after he has achieved his ambitions. That Moore takes his duties seriously is admirable; that he does not value the responsibility of love equally with business contributes to the overall suggestion of the novel that unpleasant reality will conquer softer imaginings.

Other characters, however, provide a balance for Moore's pecuniary perspective. As a woman and an old maid, for example, Miss Ainley lacks Moore's strength, youth, and status, but she shows that the poor can have "large sympathies" and act unselfishly. She designs Shirley's charity program maximally to benefit the community. Indeed, imagination and large sympathies are her saving graces, for, writes Patricia Spacks in *The Female Imagination*, old maids (and others who are impoverished according to Moore's definition) "can sustain their freedom only in their imaginings" (308). The imagination is affirmed in the materially poor Miss Ainley because she imaginatively, sympathetically, and creatively uses what she has to help others and thereby to expand her influence and her otherwise potentially narrow world. Brontë's narrator tells us that Miss Ainley leads by example, and her example serves to show that our imaginations enable us to dream beyond our circumstances. The author's letters testify to her belief that imagination serves us well. Her correspondence about the novel *Shirley* shows that, as is true for

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<sup>45</sup> Philip Rogers, in line with Moore's initial view of marriage and with the scholars who read *Shirley* as political fiction, links the church bells that ring twice in the novel with political events—proposal to Caroline/repeal of the Orders of Council and wedding day/Salamanca victory/Wellington tribute.

Miss Ainley, creative work frees her from the constraints of reality. The imaginative power of creation, rather than the actual drudgery of composition, enabled her to escape misery. Upon the submission of the manuscript, Brontë wrote to William Smith Williams that “whatever now becomes of the work—the occupation of writing it has been a boon to me—it took me out of dark and desolate reality to an unreal but happier region” (qtd. in Barker 243), again affirming her claim that the work should be read as fiction. To James Taylor, Brontë describes her effort to write the novel as an “eager, restless endeavor to combat mental sufferings that were scarcely tolerable” (qtd. in Barker 294). Brontë’s testimony and examples within the text suggest that imagination may share the victory with reality in the tendencies that divide the novel. For readers who may look for love, imagination, and virtue to struggle and then triumph as they should in romances, this tension helps to propel the narrative, but in most cases, the characters fair differently from Miss Ainley, and reality partially or entirely triumphs.

Many characters experience desires both to express and repress imagination, but a few characters apparently do not have imagination or have chosen entire repression as their method of social survival. Caroline’s uncle Helstone, for example, lives so sternly that his wife apparently dies from lack of affection, and her death does not change him, for his ward Caroline likewise nearly wastes away until she finds her mother’s love. Caroline’s mother, while capable of affection for Caroline and Shirley, whom she had served as governess, likewise advises the girls to repress their imaginations. One instance of this advice occurs when Shirley invites Caroline to go on a seaside vacation, and Caroline agrees, responding poetically of the waves that she has seen and heard in her dreams. As they anticipate the trip, they say that they expect to see a mermaid or

two.<sup>46</sup> Mrs. Pryor, later known as Caroline's mother, interrupts them to ask if they realize that their ten-minute conversation has been "rather fanciful." When Shirley asks if there is harm in their fancies, Mrs. Pryor responds, "We are aware that mermaids do not exist: why speak of them as if they did? How can you find interest in speaking of a nonentity?" (250). The girls then end their imaginative speculation, because of respect for Mrs. Pryor's advice or because of the reality that only reason thrives in their mercantile culture.

As a key leader in the Yorkshire area's commerce, Mr. Yorke represents success, kindness, and industry. He does not, however, have an imagination. The narrator expands at length on this deficit in the second Mr. Yorke chapter. Among her comments about him are: "his God and heaven were those of a man in whom awe, imagination, and tenderness lack," and since Yorke has taste, "who cares for imagination?" (77). Finally, the narrator delivers her most derisive of the comments: "As Mr Yorke did not possess poetic imagination himself, he considered it a most superfluous quality in others" (78). Yorke's dismissal, however, is particularly unfortunate since of all the characters, his daughter, Rose, possesses the best balance of imagination and practical knowledge. According to Judith Williams, "Rose is one of the few figures who can unite the heroic and the real, the imaginative and the actual" (73). The minor character, and the daughter of the most expressly unimaginative character, serves the novel as an example of the well-balanced individual. Rose's balance will enable her to maintain her selfhood in the face of her highly directive mother. The narrator tells us that Rose has many thoughts

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<sup>46</sup> Tara Moore uses this mermaid example to argue that of the co-protagonists, Caroline, who protests Shirley's patriarchal portrayal of this and other myths, is the more intent on defining her role for herself, rather than on accepting the established roles (479).



that she withholds from her mother, and “It is agony to her to have these ideas trampled on and repressed. She has never rebelled yet; but if hard driven, she will rebel one day, and then it will be once for all” (167). Rose acknowledges to her mother the value of the duties and skills that Mrs. Yorke teaches, but she defends her inner self as well, using the parable of the talents: “I will *not* deposit [my talent] in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things [...] least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder” (385). Rose has confidence to express aloud her inner voice, but most characters prove to be of divided loyalties to their actual and their inner experiences, to their valuing of imagination and reality.

Of the main characters, Shirley Keeldar and the Moore brothers best demonstrate the competing desires to express and repress imagination. Robert Moore overtly reveals his divided nature, his struggle between the impulses of the imagination and heart and the impulses of business and reason. Two months after Uncle Helstone forbids Caroline to communicate with the Moores, Caroline happens to meet Robert, and she admits that she has often walked near the Cottage to be near him. Robert responds poetically that he henceforth will “imagine that Caroline may be leaning over [his] shoulder reading with [him] from the same book” and “fancy the flutter of every little bird over its nest [...] made by [her]” (257). He then tells Caroline that he feels divided. He says, “I find in myself, Lina, two natures; one for the world and business and one for home and leisure” (258). This separation of the public self of business, commerce, and competition from the personal self of kindness and comfort is typical of the Brontë characters that struggle with the decision to express or repress imagination. Like William Crimsworth, Robert

Moore believes that his imaginative self will hinder his business ambitions. Only at home, with his sister and cousin Caroline, can he be vulnerable enough to express his imagination for to do so is to reveal an important part of one's inner self and to give the listener power. At home, Moore treats his loved ones with sympathy; he reads Shakespeare—when instructed by Caroline—so that the literature can advise him against the error of ruthless ambition. When separated from home by long work hours and worry over the fate of his mill, Moore loses connection with this side of himself and from this loss—and the unimaginative Yorke's recommendation—comes his ill-fated proposal to Shirley. In Robert Moore, the narrator shows a character with both imaginative and reasonable sides. His tendency toward reality—which Brontë most often shows as unpleasant—causes him to need the fairy-like Caroline to balance his personality, and Brontë, for all her irony, allows Robert and Caroline to have that completion by marrying them in the end.

Shirley first appears as a perfect foil for Caroline—an autonomous integration of imagination and reason as well as a powerful, confident expression of what Caroline would like to be. Throwing out the rude curate Mr. Donne, refusing to surrender in marriage to Sir Philip's inadequate poetic courtship, funding a charity program that brings relief to the poor and assuages the animosity toward mill and land owners—Shirley achieves what Caroline dreams to do. By the novel's end, however, she seems to have forced herself into a role that Caroline feared—entire “abnegation of self” (190)—in order to achieve a happy match. Though the novel seems to conclude with Shirley's surrendering herself for the sake of love, she first demonstrates a mature, controlled, and reasoned understanding of how to recognize a good spouse. When she and Caroline

discuss Uncle Helstone's, Mrs. Pryor's, Mrs. Yorke's, and Miss Mann's negative opinions about marriage, they discuss imagination's role, and Shirley shows a balance of imagination and reason in her thoughts on the subject. Shirley says that we "believe," "fancy," and "imagine" (224) that the beloved will be an exception to the rule described by the elders, and then she declares that she does not think passion is trustworthy, that the initial fancy should be tested rationally. She claims that a woman should observe how the beloved treats animals, his parents, his siblings, the women he meets, and she should note whether he is just, honest, and conscientious. If he demonstrates these qualities and she feels joy and peace in his presence, then the elders' rule may prove false. In this conversation, Shirley approaches love with the certainty that her imaginings and her empirical observations can lead her to the right decision.

Other characters also vouch for Shirley's capability. When Shirley confesses to Louis Moore, her beloved, though he does not yet know it, that she has become nervous, Louis, without knowing the cause, assures her that if she is anxious, then she has good reason, and her fears do not result from overindulgence in imagination—a compliment not often given to women in the novel. For example, Helstone, who, the narrator tells us, generally views women "as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule" (138), also recognizes Shirley's power; he willingly submits to Shirley's sense and knows her as "Captain Keeldar," though, indeed, Shirley pampers his ego as a brother of hers would not have had to do. In Shirley's masculine identity, Anne Longmuir sees a similarity to Anne Lister, whom Emily Brontë lived near in the two years before Lister's death. Lister was "a nineteenth-century landowner, whose extensive diary reveals numerous affairs

with women” (145).<sup>47</sup> More moderately, Barbara Leah Harman claims that Shirley demonstrates what “Brontë imagines [...] a woman might do if she were a man of public stature,” and, Harman observes, “[Shirley’s] role is both extraordinary in its play of opportunities and limited in its actual powers” (23), as shown by Shirley’s application to Helstone to approve the charity program that Shirley funded and Miss Ainley planned. With Shirley’s first claiming power and then surrendering it, Brontë must account for this change even if it ultimately serves convention to dominate imagination.

One possibility for the change is chosen repression. Earlier in the novel, Shirley shows that she will choose repression for her own pleasure when Caroline asks who nestles in Shirley’s heart, “But Shirley only laughed gaily at this question and alertly started up. ‘I have dreamed,’ she said: ‘a mere day-dream; certainly bright, probably baseless!’” (238). Shirley’s noncommittal response allows her pleasure of the daydream, protection of ego should the daydream prove baseless, and power of having someone know that she keeps a secret. For her marriage, Shirley may choose a conventional social role in order to achieve a conventionally happy match for herself and experience these three pleasures. Gilbert and Gubar assert that the surrender shown in the chapter “Old Copy Books” is a form of repression—though not a powerful one—and an “attempt on Brontë’s part to come to terms with the silences of even the most inspired women” (393).<sup>48</sup> They find this repression to be similar to Francis Henri’s: both women fall in

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<sup>47</sup> Longmuir writes convincingly of numerous similarities between Lister and Shirley Keeldar. Interestingly, although Longmuir connects Charlotte’s knowledge of Lister to the character Shirley Keeldar and even to Charlotte’s relationship with Ellen Nussey, Longmuir does not note that Shirley was modeled after Emily.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Gargano argues with the traditional view that Shirley is “mastered” by her schoolmaster, Louis Moore. Instead, Gargano views the schoolroom at Fieldhead as a “sanctuary” of “intellectual and

love with their “masters,” and both are “mastered” by them after their schoolgirl writing demonstrates both imagination and keen intellect that suggest they may escape conventional submission. Following her engagement, each woman exerts her vision through her fiancé. Shirley’s complete “fall,” claim Gilbert and Gubar, does not suggest Brontë’s approval of the character’s submission; instead Brontë “repeatedly calls attention to [Shirley’s now] buried talents” (393-94), talents that the younger Rose asserts she will not bury.<sup>49</sup> The competing impulses to express and repress imagination show as, on one side, Brontë suggests that the heroine controls her fate by choosing public repression while achieving her private dream, but on the other side uses language that denies control. The narrator first describes the affianced Shirley as “fettered,” “conquered,” and “bound” to the wedding day (592) and unwilling or unable to choose even her veil, then she tells of a remark that Shirley made a year later: “Louis [...] would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern” (592). In this comment, the narrator suggests that Shirley remained in control by forcing Louis to fulfill her will. Shirley had repeatedly asserted to Caroline and Uncle Sympson that she wanted a husband who was her “superior,” but her implication that she forced him to “rule” suggests that she has shaped him, thereby making her his master.

Another possibility for Shirley’s choosing to silence her voice is that she may not realize its power. The narrator and Shirley’s actions show her power to the audience, but

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emotional exploration” (779). This view suggests that Shirley’s choice to return to this state is the choice of an emotionally and intellectually integrated person.

<sup>49</sup> McLaughlin argues with Gilbert and Gubar that Shirley did not “fall” at all; instead, she banters with her uncle when she says she wants to be commanded and mastered by her husband. McLaughlin views *Shirley* as Brontë’s proclamation that female power and marriage can coexist; however, Kate Lawson, who views the novel as being as much an examination of religious dissent, argues that the marriages silence the female voice of dissent (741).

Shirley—perhaps in tribute to her model, Emily Brontë—does not share this view of herself. The narrator explicitly states that Shirley does not realize that her gifts of vision and imagination are special:

[S]he does not know her dreams are rare—her feelings peculiar: she does not know, as never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green. (374)

Though she may be ignorant of it, one of Shirley's gifts is that of unusual imagination. Echoing Wordsworth's language in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the narrator describes Shirley's conversation with her cousins, the Misses Sympons: "Without deviating from her wonted rule of discussing with them only ordinary themes, she imparted to these themes an extraordinary interest: the sparkle of her spirit glanced along her phrases" (465). Susan Ostrov Weisser notes, "It is not difficult to trace much of Charlotte's imagery to the Romantic sense of harmony in man and nature, their high valuation of imagination and imaginative freedom" (95). In this instance of the conversation with her cousins, Shirley does not intend to express her imaginative observations, but her spirit so overflows with this impulse that it is insuppressible, and common topics receive uncommon commentary from Shirley.

The narrator separates Shirley from the characters that lack imagination. Shirley has the power to escape the fate of most women; her inheritance coupled with her imagination give her independence. She funds a charity program to make her community more to her liking, and she uses her imagination to escape the petty concerns that enslave so many of her sisters. When Helstone tells Shirley that the congregation will escape to their picnic without a battle with the Methodists, Shirley tells Caroline "I'll borrow of

imagination what reality will not give me” (299). Shirley recognizes the differences between reality and imagination, but she values both and allows both to enrich her life. On the other hand, the men in the novel who do not understand Shirley cannot because they lack imagination. Like Mr. Yorke, who cannot “read” Shirley, Shirley’s Uncle Sympson cannot understand her because, the narrator says, different impulses guide them. The narrator describes Uncle Sympson in public terms: “despotic” and “worldly,” but Shirley she describes as “spirited,” liking “freedom,” and “romantic” (443). Shirley’s characteristics again link her to the imaginative Romantic writers. Uncle Sympson, on the other hand, acts as a tyrant who will marry Shirley for political and conventional reasons, reasons that do not suit the equally strong-willed and more integrated Shirley who balances reason with imagination. When Shirley will reveal to her uncle her and Louis Moore’s intentions, she asks Moore to attend the conversation because, she says, her uncle’s ideas are “not clean,” and he would be better “if he could add his imagination to the contents of Mrs Gill’s bucking-basket, and let her boil it in her copper, with rainwater and bleaching powder” (581). Shirley provides an imaginative antidote for Uncle Sympson’s character flaw. According to Shirley, in whom imagination and reason more equally weigh, Uncle Sympson’s imagination dwells only in low, mean thoughts. He considers status and wealth; Shirley declares she will not marry without love. Shirley’s intuition and romantic feelings cause Louis to appeal to her, and the novel shows that she has tested these feelings against the reality of his behavior—following the procedure that she and Caroline had discussed. Of the main characters, Shirley integrates imagination and reason most completely, thereby making her fate all the less satisfying.

Shirley lives so authentically in the first part of the novel, that her ultimate quietness seems disingenuous. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas phrases the dichotomy this way: “In raising Shirley so high, in spirit and potential, as an agent of social change, Brontë can only disappoint us to show her reduced, as wife of the magistrate of the district, to appearing in fine array on public occasions” (45). Like Jane Eyre, Shirley inspires the audience to celebrate what an autonomous woman can do; when she ceases to provide that inspiration, we wonder why the heroine of the novel has fallen. Gilbert and Gubar accuse Shirley of “becom[ing] enmeshed in a social role that causes her to duplicate Caroline’s immobility. For example, she gratuitously flirts, thereby inflicting pain on Caroline, who is tortured by her belief that Shirley is a successful rival for Robert Moore’s love” (383). Brontë shows that Caroline and Robert wrongly doubt her sincerity and seems to anticipate the audience’s accusation of Shirley’s moral fall. Shirley defends herself when she responds to Robert’s suggestion that she led him to believe his proposal would please her. Robert reports Shirley as saying that such flirting would make her “a traitor to all my sisters” (500), and he saw her righteous indignation as a fair response to an unfounded insult. In Shirley’s outrage, she shows the reader—who may have followed Caroline to unwillingly believe that Shirley wanted Robert for herself—that she never betrayed Caroline. On behalf of Shirley, Harman argues that Shirley’s surrender “Rather than signaling a fatal identification with the male, as Gilbert and Gubar propose, her complex performances embody a refusal wholly to confine herself to the experiences of one sex or the other” (28). Shirley takes on typically male roles in her acting as Captain Keeldar, and she assumes entirely female parts when she surrenders to Louis Moore. Because the novel ends with her seeming surrender to one gender role—and the



less powerful one—the audience cannot help but view the heroine as fallen, though, indeed, Brontë may simply use the resolution as a means to explore the only possibilities available in the real world.

In *Shirley*, Brontë expands her exploration of the roles of imagination and reality, heart and head, desire and duty from the individual to the communal. While continuing to work through individual characters, Brontë adds commentary about the evolution of English society from the early nineteenth century to the omniscient narrator's present. Her correspondence insists upon the text's fiction, asserts the power of creative work to escape life's pain, and argues for the value of imagination to tell its story, regardless of the dictates of reality. The narrator, however, argues for the authenticity of the characters and the unpleasantness of reality. Caroline, Shirley, and their mates demonstrate imaginative qualities and come across as the most autonomous characters. Undoubtedly, they will fulfill their duty. Ultimately, the men and Caroline seem to have created lives in which they can, to varying degrees, fulfill their duties and their imaginative impulses. However, the title character who at first shows herself to be most autonomous falls noticeably silent at the end of the novel, and because of this silence, the audience must feel that she has conformed to the societal pressure that encouraged Caroline's repression. We shared Caroline's wasting earlier in the novel, and we are left saddened as we imagine Shirley's spirit diminishing.

A Perverse Pleasure: Imagination's Repression in *Villette*

There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored. (*Villette* 561)

Lucy Snowe, *Villette*'s protagonist, shows her spirit as well as her perversity in her pleasure to be ignored. She proudly accepts the knocks that fate gives her, and her pride prevents her from expressing her wishes, even when those wishes may be fulfilled. This contrary spirit forces her, like Crimsworth before her, to be vulnerable to imagination's lure to insanity and determined to defeat its reign.

Of all Charlotte Brontë's protagonists, Lucy Snowe reigns as contradictor extraordinaire. Whereas the reader trusts the other characters to manage imagination in order to achieve some goal—Crimsworth to act based on his ambition to achieve independence, Jane Eyre to secure a loving home, Caroline Helstone to be guided by her superego, and Shirley Keeldar to pursue her heart's desire—only Lucy Snowe, in Brontë's last completed novel (1852) takes pleasure in repressing the words and actions that could lead to the fulfillment of her fantasies. Until her farewell meeting with M. Paul Emmanuel, Lucy keeps her wishes secret from all the other characters, and, indeed, she perversely refuses to articulate them for the readers.<sup>50</sup> If Brontë were attempting to write romance when she wrote *Villette*, then her attempt sorely disappoints genre readers because Lucy does not obtain the autonomous blend of imagination and pragmatism that satisfies readers of romance. Instead, Brontë gives us an almost unreliable narrator who withholds information, refusing to share dreams as well as facts with even the readers,

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<sup>50</sup> Eva Badowska points out the similarity between *persevere* and *perverse* as it applies both to Lucy Snowe's and Paulina Home's labor, devotion, and interiority (1517).

and who contents herself with surviving rather than thriving, the latter a necessary component to inspire romantic audiences. Lucy's contentment results from the avoidance of pain, as she admits (94), rather than from the fulfillment of desire, but this trait seems inevitably embedded in her, for she repeatedly finds reality unpleasant and imagination disregarded. In such a world, where one cannot be "rightly known," survival dictates imagination's repression—for Lucy Snowe if not for her more privileged counterparts.

*Villette* seems to be *The Professor* retold with a female protagonist. An elderly Lucy Snowe tells the story of her experiences from the age of about twelve until she reaches independence in her early twenties. She is apparently an orphan at the beginning of the novel, and she gives no details about her home life. On a routine visit to her godmother's house in Bretton, she meets Polly Home and Polly's father. Graham Bretton, her godmother's son, a teenager at this time, seems fun-loving and careless to the serious narrator. Lucy loses contact with this family, and the relatives with whom she lives are taken from her. She works briefly as companion to Miss Marchmont, who dies before changing her will better to benefit Lucy. Lucy takes her small salary and departs for Belgium to become a teacher. On the boat to Belgium, she meets Ginevra Fanshawe who mentions that she goes to school in a village called Villette. Lucy determines to try to find employment there. Mishaps in the transport threaten her, but luckily a nice Englishman, later known to be Graham Bretton, assists her, and she winds up at Ginevra's school. The doctor who serves the school also turns out to be Graham, now called Dr. John. Lucy conceals her identity until a prolonged period of isolation during the long vacation leads to her nervous breakdown, and she fortunately is taken to Dr. John for care. There she reunites with her godmother. Events suggest that Lucy and Dr.

John will develop a romance, but on the first event that could be called a date, they reunite with the Homes, now wealthy nobility, the de Bassompierres. Graham and Polly instead become the romantic partners, and the Protestant Lucy vows friendship to the Catholic M. Paul, a contentious teacher in the school. Their friendship progresses to vows of love, against the wishes of M. Paul's friends and relatives. Before embarking on a three-year engagement to aid Madame Walravens, the mother of M. Paul's now-dead first love, M. Paul establishes a school and asks Lucy to serve as its headmistress until he returns. She completes her career in the school because M. Paul dies in a storm at sea during his return journey.

Lucy Snowe invites readers' sympathy because although she only hints at the most tragic events of her life,<sup>51</sup> she nevertheless conveys that reality consistently schemes to force her into a lonely subsistence, drowning her hope for permanent connections in the forms of family and true friendship. This scheming is unique to *Villette* as is the absolute absence of any familial relations to the main character, as if she dropped into the world without anyone to take responsibility for her. Margaret Smith, editor to the Oxford edition of *Villette*, observes that of all Brontë's novels, only this one portrays a sense "of helplessness against destiny" and claims that this helplessness is the novel's source of power as it conveys "the real fear, relentlessly faced and analysed, which haunts Lucy Snowe" (xiv). Reality, then, in this novel is more than the occasionally unfriendly world that most of us share; reality is the manifestation of destiny, which for Lucy Snowe seems always to be isolation and drudgery. Her ability to face, endure, and survive this paradoxical existence partially elevates her to a heroic level. Lucy Snowe must realize

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<sup>51</sup> In Chapters 4 and 42, she describes the deaths of her family and M. Paul—and in both cases, she invites "happier imaginations" to believe otherwise than the tragic end.

that she cannot control the storms that take her hope, but she can and does repress imagining the hope's fulfillment. As with classic heroes, she must separate from her family and the world she knows, and she must become master of the new world. In Lucy's case, this mastery requires that she repress her imagination and her feelings, an atypical quality in heroes for whom hope works to fulfill their greatest desires. This repression, then, may be the factor that prevents her from reaching a heroic end to her journey, though the resolution may be heroine-ic, a not untypical end for real women.

The unclear circumstances that take her relatives (alluded to at the beginning of the "Miss Marchmont" chapter, in language that suggests they suffered the same fate as M. Paul) compel Lucy into the heroine's journey. At Miss Marchmont's, Lucy learns of memory's power to comfort old age, which suggests the reason that Lucy writes this memoir when her hair "lies now at last, white under a white cap, like snow beneath snow" (55). "Comfort" does not equal happiness, as Lucy proves when the memories that she relives are not her happiest; the happy ones she glosses over in a single sentence in the last chapter. Instead, Lucy records a story of her journey to independence, if not to happiness. Besides knowledge, the initial independence that she gains at Miss Marchmont's gives her a certain power to master the challenges that she will face in her battle with destiny. Miss Marchmont's death forces Lucy into the journey where she must prove herself to the gatekeepers—hotel attendants, boat drivers, Mme. Beck, Madame Walravens,<sup>52</sup> and M. Paul, all of whom she must pass before she can enter her next world.

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<sup>52</sup> In her 1989 article for *Explicator*, Janet Butler asserts that Mme. Walravens's street provides another example of name significance. Butler claims that the English translation of "*mages*," wise man, sets this

On the sea to her new world, she learns from fellow passenger Ginevra Fanshawe of a school in Vilette, and Lucy resolves to apply there for a position. These seemingly coincidental meetings converge to push Lucy to meet her fate, and Lucy acknowledges this convergence. In such circumstances, her intuition as much as her reason must guide her. As she wanders, lost, through the city streets, she comes upon a house that turns out to be the very school where she hopes to find employment. Lucy then tells us that “Fate took me in her strong hand; mastered my will; directed my actions” (79). Surely with such strong intervention from fate and such a blameless existence, Lucy will master the new world and end happily, even heroically. No. Instead, Lucy ends much as she began, wealthier and more independent, but with only the distant friendship of her godmother and Mrs. Bretton’s associates, and without the life-transforming passions for man or endeavor that would mark a more heroic end and would show that her imagination had served her well.

In *Vilette*, *imagination* carries multiple meanings. Lucy refers to it as fear particular to women, such as she, Mrs. Bretton, and Polly experience when they imagine what terrible fate may befall their men who are out in the blizzard (348), or as fear particular to isolated people, such as her imaginings when she does not hear from her friends for an extended period (341). She also refers to imagination as hope and fancy. Lawrence Jay Dessner defines these last two meanings: “Often [imagination] means merely ‘hope,’ hope that Dr. John loves her. Often its referent is vague, but apparently some special kind of pleasurable day-dreaming. Yet we have been told quite definitely that ‘I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive

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street at the center of Catholic conspiracy to separate M. Paul and Lucy. Further, the name is a sly reference to then Cardinal Wiseman, Nicholas Patrick Stephen.

imagination' (I, I, 10)" (103). Because she lives in a world in which imagination is untrustworthy, Lucy unsurprisingly and repeatedly asserts that she is not imagination's fool. Just as Mme. Beck wishes to protect M. Paul because he has an "unreliable, imaginative temperament" (600), Lucy strives to show that she does not need such protection by preventing others from thinking that imagination dominates her. For example, she vows to keep secret her sightings of the ghostly nun lest Dr. John and others believe her to suffer from hypochondria (229).<sup>53</sup> Lucy shares their distrust of imagination, embracing it only when it leads her to believe pain is imminent. Gilbert and Gubar assert, "Lucy *is* the nun" and "immobilized by internal conflict" (412, italics mine). She cannot assert her beliefs because she finds the reason-filled world around her to be unwelcoming. She surrenders to imagination as she eavesdrops at the festival because these fancies predict pain, her knowledge of reality. She enters the festival, disguised and under the influence of opium, and this disguise enables her boldly to subvert her role and act as the voyeur that she has observed Mme. Beck to be.<sup>54</sup> By the time of the festival, Lucy knows M. Paul's first love, Justine Marie, to be dead, and then she hears that Justine Marie is to join the party on which Lucy eavesdrops. At this point Lucy, in her role as the retrospective narrator, comments:

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<sup>53</sup> Tang Soo Ping argues that Lucy's "ready identification" of herself with the ghostly nun "is just the kind of self-mockery that makes Lucy's loneliness and suffering as much self-inflicted as it is caused by external factors" (26). If Ping is correct, then her assessment offers a reason that Brontë may have felt the necessity for the sharp turn in volume three—away from Lucy and Graham's budding romance. Lucy's own nature would not allow the idyllic romance to proceed.

Walter Allen (qtd. in Lenta 422) also made this assertion, citing loneliness as the dominating characteristic of Brontë's heroines, and Margaret Lenta suggests that the accompanying bitterness is an essential part of the novel's tone of protest. She writes, "the object of the novel is to insist that Lucy Snowe's view is a valid one, that it is one which thousands of [oppressed] women are compelled to take" (432).

<sup>54</sup> Alain Lescart notes particularly that Lucy takes on the role of the *grisette*, hides in her gardener's disguise, and ultimately uses the role to defy the men's world (109).

Ah! when imagination once runs riot where do we stop? What winter tree so bare and branchless—what way-side, hedge-munching animal so humble, that Fancy, a passing cloud, and a struggling moonbeam, will not clothe it in spirituality, and make of it a phantom? (579)

With this ghost of Justine Marie, Lucy's hope that she has M. Paul's friendship surrenders to her fear that this friendship will melt "like a dream, as once before had happened" (511), presumably when her unarticulated dreams about Graham Bretton passed unfulfilled. Lucy's imaginings, that M. Paul has forsaken their friendship, that he is engaged to his relative, must be true, Lucy believes, because they foretell her suffering.

When imagination does not predict fear of suffering, Lucy tends to deny it. In most instances of denial, Lucy's actions or thoughts belie the complete repression. Just when Lucy asserts to the reader that she does not have the "curse" of an "overheated and discursive imagination," she counters that assertion by telling us that when she entered a room that Polly inhabited in Bretton, she believed the room to be "haunted" (14). The denial presumably makes Lucy a more credible narrator, but to imagine this six-year-old as a ghost, even while Polly mourns for her absent father, requires an active imagination and shows that "she is susceptible [...] to seeing things" (Peeke 226) when she feels strong emotion. This moment reveals to the reader that Lucy has the potential to be the imaginative heroine that romance readers expect.

Until meeting Polly, Lucy lived a somewhat privileged existence, though her extended visit to Bretton, she mysteriously hints, results from an unnamed complication at home. By the time that Lucy reaches adulthood, however, reality has begun to assault her happiness, and again Lucy denies imagination's ability to influence her; instead, Lucy



consistently asserts that she acts from necessity. Lucy's necessity invites reasoned responses, not imaginative ones. When the orphaned Lucy interviews with Miss Marchmont, Lucy recognizes the hardship of serving a suffering and bad-tempered old lady, yet she perseveres in her duty to support herself, telling us, "though I forced myself to *realize* evils, I think I was too prosaic to *idealize*, and consequently to exaggerate them" (44). Practical experience, in the forms of subsequent visits and Miss Marchmont's sudden pain attack to which Lucy provides help, enables Lucy to see that she can endure the hardship of waiting upon a sufferer. Lucy says that Miss Marchmont's strong nature invited Lucy's sympathies, and Lucy adds the parenthetical assertion, "(such as they were)" (44). This parenthetical note reveals that the older narrator, at least, denies that Lucy has strong emotional attachments; she denies that her heart can easily feel affection for another. This denial, as the novel progresses, seems more to result from a belief that fate does not intend her to have close relationships rather than an absence of affection. The older narrator apparently lives alone, after a long career as a teacher/headmistress (a career often discounted in other Brontë novels and by Polly in this one), reflecting on the events that led to her setting up the school on behalf of M. Paul. This older narrator may tell us the story of how fate conspired for her to have solitude throughout her life, or she may, now that she is old, blame fate for what became a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this latter case, the young Lucy initially must rely upon herself, and she then interacts with others so that only in the case of nervous breakdowns may she create interdependent relationships in which she reveals her inner world, her

imagination. In short, these relationships may exist only when their beginning is not her “fault,” such as when illness forces her to reveal imagination to others.<sup>55</sup>

In her conscious mind, Lucy denies her imaginative inclinations to her readers, and often, but not always, to herself.<sup>56</sup> After Miss Marchmont’s death and before Miss Marchmont can change her will to benefit Lucy—thwarting a truly romantic end to this period of Lucy’s life—Lucy travels to London. After a long, wet, February journey, Lucy arrives for the first time in the capital city. The narrator projects her pragmatism onto the reader: “My reader, I know, is one who would not thank me for an elaborate reproduction of poetic first impressions” (55). Lucy has the poetic impressions, as the world *reproduction* suggests, but the older narrator refuses to recreate them because she imagines the reader to be as practical as herself or because she does not wish to reveal her inner world of imagination. Even with the reader, then, Lucy will not reveal the thoughts that would lead us to close relationship with her. Occasionally, though, Lucy admits that she has an imaginative side. Shortly after she begins work as governess to Madame Beck’s children, Lucy reflects on her existence:

I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (94)

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Eva Badowska notes that Lucy attributes her disorientation at the beginning of volume two to a “Genii-elixir” (168, qtd. on 1514)—an imaginary creature’s drug that induced her vulnerability to imagination.

<sup>56</sup> Lucy “ignores one of the most prominent themes of mid-century autobiography by flatly refusing to acknowledge the cost of retrospection” and constructs a tolerable life by imposing order on her memories (Carlisle 265).

In this reflection, Lucy's complicated relationship with imagination shows. She admits that she has two lives, including one of fancy. The life of reality is a life of subsistence. Survival only is its greatest accomplishment. The life of imaginative thought does not invite trust as it is fed with necromantic joys, that is, dark magic, kept secret from the judgmental eyes of society. The life of reality enables survival and community but not joy; the shameful, though happier, life of imagination must remain hidden from society. The two lives may not integrate into one full life for Lucy. For Lucy to end as the romantic heroine, however, she must master both worlds. In part, the tension of the novel rests on our interest to discover if she will succeed in mastering both worlds, for if she does, then, as our heroes present our ideals, the readers may as well.

Lucy's complicated response to imagination results not only from the external judgment of society, of which Brontë gives some indication, but also from her own distrust of it. On the journey to Villette, Lucy poetically describes the scenery and imagines that she sees an enchanted land before her. Then, when the reader may feel hopeful with the narrator, she tells us: "Cancel the whole of that, if you please, reader [...] 'Day-dreams are delusions of the demon'" (69). Both the imagery and the denial of it remind the reader of Crimsworth's responses on a similar journey. The older Lucy continues to distrust the likely results of imagination's expression. Even as the storyteller, she cannot present a poetic landscape without reminding the reader that such dreaming causes trouble. It gives us a false truth, a "delusion." Indeed, her language suggests that the fantasy puts one's soul in peril. Maureen Peeke sees this denial as Lucy's assigning the reader "to take up a moral position and guard against her too vivid

imagination” (225). Lucy’s inclination toward imaginative thinking wars with her belief that her survival and dignity depend upon absolute attention to reality and its truth.

Lucy’s ventures into artistic realms provide ground for her to comment on this war. An inward voice tells Lucy to “go to Villette” (72), and Lucy follows this instruction, enjoying the scenery as she travels. Lest we think her romantic, she explains:

Of an artistic temperament, I deny that I am; yet I must possess something of the artist’s faculty of making the most of present pleasure: that is to say, when it is of the kind to my taste; I enjoyed that day, though we travelled slowly, though it was cold, though it rained. (74)

In this instance, the “artist’s faculty” complements her survival needs, enabling her to endure the slow, cold, rainy journey. Since the imaginative temperament promotes survival in the real world, Lucy can acknowledge its existence, but she tempers the acknowledgement by crediting it only when it serves a practical purpose. For example, as Lucy describes at length the larger-than-life Cleopatra painting, she is uncomfortably enchanted by it, but she tells us that art’s value lies in its ability to imitate nature:

It seemed to me that an original and good picture was just as scarce as an original and good book; nor did I, in the end, tremble to say to myself, standing before certain *chef d’œuvres* bearing great names, ‘These are not a whit like nature. Nature’s daylight never had that colour; [...]’ And yet there were fragments of truth here and there which satisfied the conscience, and gleams of light that cheered the vision. (249)

The narrator finds original and good books to be as rare as paintings of the same caliber, and paintings must tell “nature’s” truth to appease her judgment.<sup>57</sup> Violations of nature prick her conscience, though in this instance she observes and does not create, suggesting again that fancy jeopardizes one’s soul. Here in the center of the narrative, as she leads the reader to believe that her God-relative relationship with Graham will develop into romance, she tells us that books and paintings must reflect reality. Whatever follows in her book, this passage assures us, which in the end is distance from her friends and tragic loss of her beloved, will reflect Lucy Snowe’s real experience, unadorned with poetry.

Lucy tells us that “an ignorant, blind, fond instinct” inclines her to art. These negative adjectives show how the war between reality’s and art’s value battles within her. Because this inclination for art is a shameful one, Lucy “dearly liked to be left there [in the museum] alone” (248) where she may keep her thoughts hidden. If not alone, however, Lucy likes to walk with Dr. John because she finds his opinions exactly match her own. She dislikes M. Paul’s intrusion because he limits her viewing by taking her away from the enchanting Cleopatra and forcing her to view only portraits that show a very limited experience in woman’s life. She also resents him because he potentially may separate her from Dr. John. M. Paul forces Lucy to look at paintings that inspire fierce discussion; Dr. John shares paintings that allow Lucy’s thoughts to blend with his own. Does M. Paul see that Lucy squelches her expression when she visits Dr. John? Lucy, even in retrospect, does not tell us enough of their conversations to answer that

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<sup>57</sup> I believe that Lucy’s fascination with Cleopatra and later with Vashti shows that she challenges her notions about art and about limitations on the roles of women; however, Gilbert and Gubar argue, “Lucy’s imagination [...] is touched by neither the paintings at the museum nor the performances at the civic concert” (421).

question. Nevertheless, she does show us that Dr. John enables Lucy to deny her imaginative side, as she does when they visit the theater.

Lucy tells us that she has “half a wish” for a close relationship with Dr. John, a half that she flings away because she recognizes “its exquisite folly” (128). Because of this folly and her fear of Dr. John’s scorn, she will not confess to him that their unchaperoned outing to the theater could be considered a date (319). Lucy represses every expression that could show Dr. John that she has this half wish. This repression may be the self-fulfilling prophecy at work; he writes her letters that at first seem to her “very kind” but in retrospect not so kind as she first thought them to be (305). To these “dream[s] realized” (299), Lucy writes two responses and mails only the one in which reason dominates.<sup>58</sup> In one she expresses her heart; in the other, she, perhaps coldly,<sup>59</sup> reflects the response that she believes he wants to receive (316-17). She reads the letters that Polly later writes to Graham, and she notes that Polly’s letters adhere to propriety even as they enable Graham to guess her feelings. Dr. John does not have difficulty feeling affection, first for Ginevra (who clearly teases him), then for Polly. What if Lucy had responded to him with her heartfelt letter? She cannot, however, and such speculation denies the character’s nature. These two responses coincide with Lucy’s two lives, the imaginative and the real. To Dr. John, she gives the “real” life, the life that tells the version her perceived reality dictates. For herself, and repressed from us readers, she expresses her hopes and dreams, the imaginative life that must remain secret.

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<sup>58</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas argues that Reason dominates discussion in the novel, and Imagination dominates the writing—Graham’s letters to Lucy and Lucy’s discarded letters (50).

<sup>59</sup> Joan Quarm asserts that the reasoned response was one of a “cold Victorian Miss” (5).

Dr. John encourages Lucy's repression. He responds kindly to her nervous depression when she collapses at the end of the long vacation, and Lucy tells us that, in spite of what she has heard to the contrary, Dr. John was always kind to her. Lucy's disclaimer serves to warn the reader not to become too attached to Dr. John. His minimalizing Lucy's expressions that do not seem logical show condescension rather than kindness. He disbelieves her statements and blames hypochondria for her depression (196-98) and for her seeing the nun (310-11). In contrast, M. Paul, who responds authentically if not kindly, has a nun of his own that he also keeps secret, and whenever he tries to push Lucy into a particular mode of behavior, she rebels against his push. However, when Lucy's reality differs from what Dr. John expects to be true, she cooperates with his cues that she ought to repress those thoughts.

Lucy, who has never seen acting before, attends the theater with Dr. John and sees the greatest actress of the age, Vashti. As with Cleopatra, the image of powerful womanhood fascinates Lucy; Dr. John, however, overlooks that Vashti acts and instead condemns her actions as he would a real woman's (323-25). When Lucy sees the artistic, imaginative woman condemned, she learns to repress imaginative thoughts in order to please Dr. John. Such repression of self may have been the dictate that made Brontë change focuses in the third volume. To George Smith, the model for Dr. John (M. Smith xv),<sup>60</sup> Brontë admits that she has led the readers to expect a more conventionally romantic resolution for Lucy, but, she says, although the end does not suit, volume three develops as it is compelled to do, perhaps as Lucy's fate compels it. Although Lucy's life has taken a sudden turn from conventional romance, this turn frees her to be herself.

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<sup>60</sup> Joan Quarm notes that Smith was "disconcerted" by his portrayal in the novel and that the novel conveys Brontë's "unconscious prejudices against certain types of men" (1).

More puzzling than her repressing her fancies from Dr. John's knowledge, however, is Lucy's occasional tendency to repress her imagination from her own utterance. Surely the heroine admits the fullness of her imaginative and logical thoughts to herself. Lucy, however, has a strong sense of self-censorship. Any hopeful thought, any romantic fantasy threatens Lucy's stability because disappointment has plagued her. Through this self-censorship, Lucy enables herself to avoid pain. How can she be disappointed if she never hopes? After her thoughts have (she suggests but never states) turned toward Dr. John and before she reveals to us that he is Graham Bretton, Lucy intercepts a note while she walks through the garden at the outer edge of Mme. Beck's school. She wonders if it is a *billet doux*, and no sooner does she have the thought than she immediately assures us that she never expects to receive one. She tells us: "into the realm of feelings and hopes which such prospects open, my speculations, far less my presumptions, had never had warrant to intrude" (136), but in the same sentence she reveals that the other teachers "go out" into town, socialize, and presumably indulge in the hope that they may receive notes of admiration. Lucy is like them in station, and people of her station clearly do expect to make acquaintances and marry. Lucy represses this hope, taking fate's part to insure her isolation. Later, when Lucy buries Dr. John's letters, that act itself a form of repression, she takes a "sad, lonely satisfaction" (368) in separating herself from the sorts of letters that she believes she will no more receive. In the burial, she is both "hid[ing] a treasure" and "bury[ing] a grief" (369)—both repressions that protect the romantic heart that she denies from her own judgmental scrutiny.



That Lucy dreads her own judgment becomes clear at Mme. Beck's fête and shows the reader that she has not yet claimed her own voice. After a student becomes ill, M. Paul forces Lucy to take the hero's role in the performance. Lucy loses herself in preparing for this role (after M. Paul locks her in the hot attic with rats and beetles), but she cannot change herself enough to look the role, by wearing trousers in the scene, for example. Against M. Paul's insistence, she stubbornly remains true to herself and shows through her protest about costume the uninhibited, heroic voice that she *could* have if she just *would*. She tells us, though, "it was not the crowd I feared, so much as my own voice" (173). That authentic voice threatens her; if her imagination escapes through her acting, then she shows herself and the audience her hopes and passion. In acting opposite Ginevra, who, like M. Paul, evokes Lucy's more authentic if more curmudgeonly voice, Lucy improvises the tones and actions so as to reinterpret the scene. She indeed expresses her artistic side, and then immediately vows never to act again (174). She reveals too much of herself, too much potential to be other than she appears. Carol Bock argues that Lucy welcomed the spotlight only because it focused on "a fictitious character behind whom the 'real' Lucy Snowe feels safely concealed" (131). Lucy must conceal her heart until she knows that it will be met with kindness. Later in the evening, she converses with Dr. John and has power over him because she knows who he is, but she has not yet told him (or the reader) that she recognizes him. Lucy's repression of her hopes protects her, and repression of knowledge empowers her. For a personality that hopes only for the absence of pain, such protection and power encourage repression.

To reveal hopes to an unworthy audience would diminish the character in her own eyes. For example, after Lucy has revealed her true identity to Dr. John and Mrs.

Bretton, she earnestly weeps and prays not to hope for too much from them. This prayer implies that their loyalty to her is not sufficiently strong to remain faithful through the trials that fate has in store for her. The next day, she justifies her prayer for moderation:

These struggles with the natural character, the strong native bent of the heart, may seem futile and fruitless, but in the end they do good. They tend, however slightly, to give the actions, the conduct, that turn which Reason approves, and which Feeling, perhaps, too often opposes: they certainly make a difference in the general tenor of life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall. (224)

Further, she delivers a homily to instruct the reader what to do with the precious interior life. She elaborates: “As to what lies below, leave that with God. Man, your equal, weak as you, and not fit to be your judge, may be shut out thence: take it to your Maker—” (224). Lucy determines to keep her dignity by keeping her interior life away from the judging scrutiny of society. When imagination manifests itself as hope, Lucy represses its expression. Circumstances have shown Lucy that fate does not intend her to have close friends. Indeed, her hopes are best confined to herself and to God.<sup>61</sup>

Through acting and through relation with Dr. John, Lucy would be known, but not “rightly known,” and thus the reader who champions Lucy, as her first-person narration invites us to do, wants her to find relations who will allow her authentic voice to be

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<sup>61</sup> Maynard and others have noted Brontë’s (and the parallel with Lucy) confession to the Catholic priest to be the result of desperate loneliness (21). This confession blurs the lines between keeping one’s hopes repressed from man so that only God sees them.

heard. We sympathize with her need to repress her imagination to retain her true self.

Lucy, however, does not feel the audience's sympathy, and she steps away from her role as storyteller to become secret keeper. For example, while the reader keeps hope that Lucy and Dr. John will marry, Lucy describes his benevolence and then stops herself short, claiming "But stop—I must not, from the faithful narrator, degenerate into the partial eulogist" (247). Panegyrics cannot be true in Lucy's reality-stricken world, and to descend to expressions of praise would diminish Lucy. She returns to reality with her comments about humanity's imperfections. Lucy partially allows the reader to retain romantic fantasies about Dr. John because she fails to show us his imperfections, though she claims that he has them like everyone else, but she will not go so far as to convince us of his virtues. She does not hide her own faults, however. Instead she seems to test the reader's ability to know her authentically and to remain loyal. With the reader, she determines to show herself in harsh illumination so as to avoid idealizing herself.<sup>62</sup> She hopes for too little. She takes perverse delight in sacrificing her comfort and luxuries for the unworthy Ginevra Fanshawe, reserving a roll and half her coffee for Ginevra each night and grumpily accepting Ginevra's burdensome weight when they walk together.

Throughout the novel, Lucy provides clues that she knows how romantics wish the outcome to be but that such an outcome would be contrary to her fate. She, in contrast to them, does not expect a happy end. Philip Rogers examines one instance in which Lucy hints at the likely unfulfilling outcome. For example, the name "Faubourg Clotilde," the next-to-last chapter and the location of Lucy and M. Paul's school, points to a literary hoax in which a set of contemporary poems were attributed to a medieval

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<sup>62</sup> Ironically, Brontë criticized Balzac for "forever holding up in strong light our defects," (Houghton 302), but this strong light is the one she shines on her most observant character, Lucy Snowe.

woman, Clotilde (“Fraudulent” 126). Rogers argues that this name alerts the “*very* knowing reader” that the chapter is “a hoax perpetuated to satisfy her editors’ and readers’ expectations” of a happy ending. This hoax demonstrates the tension between hopeful imagination and unpleasant reality. The two can never mix, at least not for Lucy. As the plot repeatedly moves toward hope fulfillment and then crashes in disaster, Lucy’s repression enables her to maintain her composure while the readers suffer. The elderly narrator rarely states her hopes to the reader; she admits her fears, but not her dreams, and so the readers can only project their hopes onto Lucy.

Lucy’s only outcry for herself comes after several sleepless days when she cries out to M. Paul “My heart will break!” (600) so that he will not allow them to separate without renewal of their friendship. M. Paul’s strong friendship offers the readers hope for a conventionally happy end, but Lucy knows better. This cry, however, does show the reader that Lucy finally will assert her own voice. In this cry is Lucy’s true independence; in this moment, Lucy becomes the heroine of her own life, if not one who has mastered any worlds beyond her own.<sup>63</sup> Fate and man have conspired against Lucy’s hope-fulfillment, but she *will* seize this chance to secure the one true friendship that she has been promised. She makes herself vulnerable to Mme. Beck’s ridicule and M. Paul’s rejection, but she trusts her interpretation of M. Paul’s fidelity and she respects her own need enough to risk condemnation because the gain, no matter their response, is of her voice. With Lucy’s outcry comes the final sign that she will assert herself in society and not simply protect herself through repression.

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<sup>63</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas asserts that Lucy’s story shows the heroine who “moves from observational realist, an accurate window to those around her, to that of subject of her own text” (48). This outcry shows the completion of that journey and is the moment that prepares Lucy to write the story of her life.

Lucy's repression enables her to play with the reader. She invites the reader to engage in the process of creating the story. Will the reader, like Dr. John, care so little for Lucy Snowe that we cannot see through her eyes? Or is the fault Lucy's, that she enjoys her self-possession so much that she will not surrender her knowledge even for the sake of storytelling? Margaret Smith makes the case that Lucy represses her knowledge for her own sake because repression strengthens feelings (ix), and the heroine whose interior world does not aid her social progress must delight in holding the knowledge from those who would have it. Lucy, like Crimsworth, tells the story of the self-made person. Brontë creates lifelike characters who should not be blamed for recognizing the dangers of revealing too much of their inner selves.

### The Ever-Present Tension

[I]s not the real experience of each individual very limited? And, if a writer dwells upon that solely or principally, is he not in danger of repeating himself, and also of becoming an egoist? Then, too, imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation? (Brontë, 6 November 1847, qtd. in Gaskell 330)

The reader may expect sharp irony at this point to match the tone that concludes Brontë's final two novels, which invite readers to envision what happiness they will, yet imply that only fools will delude themselves that great happiness could exist in the real world. For Brontë, however, this tone does not constitute irony as much as it does her distinctive brand of realism. The novels reflect a real psychological tension: the necessity of hope and the reality of sorrow. Brontë's complex characters faced both, and they employed their resources as best they could to navigate between a fool's paradise and a pessimist's perdition.

In each of the four novels, Brontë recreates the battle for the character's self-hood and locates the primary field in psychological tension caused by the interior world of imagination in conflict with duties to the external world. Brontë recognized that people

must live in that quandary. If either side dominates, then the individual cannot succeed in society. Each novel juxtaposes the protagonist against other, usually flat, characters that show what happens when the character relies upon only one force.

*The Professor*, Brontë's novel with the fewest twists of fortune, shows William Crimsworth's elder brother living entirely in industry and without feeling. The reader may first suppose that the impressionable narrator will succumb to his elder brother's example; instead, Brontë creates her most Victorian character. Imaginative William entirely represses his imagination's expression so that he attains the success that he desires in society. William views himself as dominant because he *has* imagination and represses it, in contrast to his brother who lacks that faculty and M. Pelet who does not control it. In personifying, and more importantly deifying, Perseverance and Duty, the younger has turned his imagination into a force to pursue Duty. Luckily for him and readers who admire imagination, neighbor Yorke Hunsden intervenes, and forces William Crimsworth away from his unhealthy inclination to surrender all to duty. In purchasing Mrs. Crimsworth's portrait from the ruins of her elder son and giving it to the younger son who admired her soft and intelligent features, Hunsden symbolically presents William with his mother and inspiration for using his imagination as well as his reason. Nevertheless, Hunsden keeps secret his personal wishes, or dismisses them as

unrealistic, and ultimately does not secure his romantic goals. He deliberately aids Crimsworth to achieve what he himself cannot: an integration of imagination and reason.

Crimsworth's integration does not show the autonomy that Jane Eyre's does, however. He maintains his social power through cool reason. When M. Pelet, for example, in drunken rage, loses face before Crimsworth, he empowers Crimsworth to dominate. Crimsworth cannot fully live while he remains only cool and reasonable, however. Only when he accesses Frances's interior world through her writing does he find the necessary balance for an integrated life. Frances, in true ladylike fashion, modestly expresses her poetry only when she believes herself to be alone, but her poem provides Crimsworth with hope that his fantasy can be realized. Brontë presents Crimsworth as strongly tempted by both reality's perseverance and imagination's hypochondria, and the qualities that enable the human spirit to triumph emerge as he negotiates a space for himself between the two extremes. Though the novel does not present a heroic character, it does show how Crimsworth needed both his imaginative and realistic visions to gain independence, to create a place for himself, and to fulfill his dreams. Through marriage to Frances, he achieves an integration of the two in his life, but he does not reflect the autonomy of Brontë's most popular character.

Of Brontë's protagonists, Jane Eyre most resembles her creator in that she reserves space in her interior world for imagination's expression. Beginning as the most



oppressed of Brontë's heroines, Jane Eyre emerges as the most heroic. She is uncompromising of herself, but not inflexible as is Lucy Snowe. Caring for herself even when no one else will, she rebels against her relatives' disdain and maintains her sense of self worth. The Reeds demand that Jane show only duty, but her imagination overrides their power as it leads to her collapse and release from their captivity. Later, Jane meets characters who demonstrate the possible effects on Jane were she to surrender only to duty or only to imagination. Of all Brontë's characters, Bertha Mason Rochester, who Gilbert and Gubar convincingly argue is Jane's double, most dramatically demonstrates the results when one surrenders entirely to imagination or desire. She suffers in confinement, despised by the one who should most wish her well-being. Only companionship with the salaried Grace Poole distracts Bertha from her interior world as she schemes in the furthest regions of the house. Though Rochester repudiates Bertha, he similarly serves as a foil to Jane. Driven by desire, he would create another Bertha by mock-marrying Jane, or worse still, having Jane as his mistress. Jane recognizes that he eventually would feel contempt for her, and then Jane, like the first Mrs. Rochester, would be left without resources and without helpful companions, with only her desire and memories to serve her. Surrendering to her desire would be tantamount to imprisoning herself in a bower beyond the succor of society.

Jane flees this fate and meets yet a third foil who demonstrates the effects of a life entirely based on reason. Jane would repress half of herself—her imaginative half—to serve St. John, but, she claims, she would shortly die in such a bondage. As badly as she would wish to please St. John and to please God, she would nevertheless be every bit as trapped as is Bertha Mason, removed from her homeland and the society that she knows, fulfilling only St. John's wishes and never her own. To choose such a life would kill Jane just as if she threw herself from Bertha's tower. Jane's logic tells her that marriage to St. John would soon kill her, and she prays for guidance to do God's will. At the moment she must reply to St. John's proposal, she hears Rochester's voice calling, as if God sanctions her relationship to Rochester and approves of her integration of reason and imagination. The Rochesters serve their god, Desire; St. John serves his, Duty. Neither one of these gods can claim Jane Eyre because her god must be large enough to incorporate both drives.

Brontë's condition of England novel demonstrates the effects of industrialism on human reason, emotion, and imagination. Because of its industrial setting, characters are more mechanistic, and Brontë shows less possibility for reason and imagination to coexist harmoniously, and less heroism in the characters; all ultimately compromise their ideals to succeed in the community. Reason dominates most of the unbalanced characters that surround Shirley and Caroline. Sir Philip, Shirley's would-be suitor, proves one

exception. He inadequately writes poetry, and though he may demonstrate reason in his other pursuits, in his pursuit of Shirley, he demonstrates feeling unbalanced by intellect. Shirley rejects his advances as decisively as she does the unfeeling marriage merger that Robert Moore proposes. Robert experiences a conversion similar to Rochester's in that he better integrates reason and imagination, business and home, making him more worthy to marry one of the heroines. Uncle Helstone, however, a leader in society, never does, and his deficiency does not bode well for the future. Instead of advancing to embrace emotion and imagination, he, of all the characters, best exemplifies the effects of a personal life based entirely on reason. His coldness kills his wife, and Caroline, too, withers in his care. Repeatedly, Caroline asserts that he never shows unkindness or stinginess to her, but he dismisses her attempts to create a different life when she wastes under her current one. His entire disregard for her wishes shows the effects of the evolving industrialization that encourages people to treat others like machines, to expect that proper maintenance will yield productivity. Brontë's ironic tone that concludes the novel portrays a larger reality: a community in which childhood ideals cannot succeed in adult society. The novel ends in marriage, as romantic conventions dictate, but the adults, such as Uncle Helstone and Mrs. Pryor, see marriage less romantically than the heroines, and, indeed, the readers cannot help but see Shirley's marriage, in particular, as a compromise of the ideals she and Caroline previously shared.

Brontë's last completed novel shows a sadder world than the previous creations. The heroine cannot have integration of reason and romance because she must live outside of community, even while making her living in society. She, like her protagonist predecessors, must make her own fortune in the world, but for Lucy, that fortune must be confined to materialism, and her heart must remain sequestered from other characters and from the readers. In *Villette*, the forces that tempt Lucy to an extreme of reason or imagination are more subtle than in other novels primarily because Lucy adheres to the Victorian convention of repression, almost satirizing it with her extreme control. Lucy views Catholics corporately as delusional, and seeking comfort in the ritual of confession shows, in her mind, a potential to surrender to imagination. Ginevra Fanshawe serves as one foil for Lucy because she so overtly takes advantage of others to fulfill her desires. Lucy lacks the ability to acknowledge her wishes or her right to have and express them: Ginevra recognizes no restraint in expressing hers, and her actions point out another foil: Dr. John.

In his infatuation, he is incapable of seeing any vice in Ginevra; he cannot recognize her insincerity and he entirely lacks restraint in his indulgence of her. In the same vein, he cannot separate Vashti's playacting from the actress's character. Conventuality dictates Dr. John's desires: Ginevra first appears virtuous, and then Polly proves to be the angelic model. When he views them as the ideal of womanhood,

he admires them. Lucy, responding to his dictation, represses her desires when with Dr. John so as to fulfill the model, but in so doing, she forces Brontë to change the course of the plot away from the marriage between Lucy and Dr. John that readers expect. Lucy's adherence to conventionality prevents her from integrating reason and imagination sufficiently to achieve mastery of both realms. Lucy's life entirely lacks romance, and she conveys the essential solitude of the human condition. In such a world, she reveals only her reason because imagination proves superfluous to survival.

The characters' struggle derives from the facts that they cannot live entirely separate from society and they must remain loyal to their interior life. In the heroic quest for selfhood, the characters cannot abandon half the impulses that drive them. To separate from society would violate Brontë's attempt to portray some "real experience," though limited for each person. To abandon interior life would be suicide. Somehow the characters must reconcile their duties to the external world while protecting and attending to the products of their imaginations: hope, fear, escape, vision, foresight, and desire.

In the integrated characters' interior lives, imagination and reason interplay and support each other. Brontë's question in her letter shows this interplay: "When [Imagination] shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them?" She credits imagination with presenting an inspiring vision and wonders if people have the responsibility to try to transform the vision to concrete reality. As Brontë

asks this question, she recalls Plato's and Hume's and Kant's explorations into the imagination. To what extent does imagination serve humanity through its ability to make use envision progress? To what extent does it threaten us so that our surrender to it causes us to lose control of reality? Brontë recreates this interplay for her characters and through her use of foils. All the protagonists fear imagination's domination, but only the characters who express their imaginations find connection with others in the society. Brontë and the characters recognize the irony that they need imagination to thrive in the very society that encourages its repression.

When characters overtly try to repress imagination, they often personify Reason. This imaginative act often protects characters from wrong-doing in society. Jane Eyre's imagination instructs her to "flee temptation"; Crimsworth's tells him to leave M. Pelet's employment. Hearing voices that are not physically present, a result of intuition or sympathetic relationship with nature, allows Jane Eyre and Rochester to reconnect and to expect God's blessing on their union. When characters surrender entirely to imagination, the resulting hypochondria overwhelms them, but tender care in the real world pulls the characters back from imagination's crucible, again showing the crucial balance between the competing impulses. Lucy's friendship with Dr. John and Caroline's recovery in the presence of her mother both result from physical care for this mental distress. Crimsworth cheats his real love, Frances Henri, by accepting the attentions of an old mistress,

Hypochondria, and his hope for a better life with Frances enables him to reject Hypochondria's seductive force. The imagined vision, such as Crimsworth's hope for life with Frances, enables the characters to overcome the forces that separate them from their wishes. Both reason and imagination are required for the characters' well-being.

Brontë shows the characters' struggle for self-hood as a heroic journey, particularly appropriate since self-hood, like the quest for heroism, is a journey that the character must take alone. Each individual creates the world inside her/his mind and must interpret the exterior world based on this interior life. Like the classic hero, the character must master the everyday world and experience some triumph in the unknown world. The individual's relationships in society comprise the known world; the unknown world is the interior world of the imagination. Brontë's characters are most heroic when they urgently write imagination's dictation and create the ideal that they imagine in the real that they share.

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