FAIRY TALE BILDUNGSROMAN: CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S DEPLOYMENT OF FAIRY TALE TROPES AND NARRATIVE LOGIC IN JANE EYRE

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters
in
English

By

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Washington, DC
April 6, 2018
Many thanks to Professor Pfordresher, who helped turn disjointed ideas into this thesis.
His generosity and passion for the subject were irreplaceable.

For grandpa, who read to me.

Many thanks,
Dan Dougherty
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I
Introduction

The opening lines in Disney’s famous song within the film of the same name “Beauty and the Beast” summarize well the plot of the film and the significance of the old fairy tale: “Tale as old as time, true as it can be. Barely even friends, then somebody bends unexpectedly.” Perhaps more than any other, “Beauty and the Beast” is the fairy tale which has become ingrained in our cultural lexicon. Vivid illustrations, animation, and storybooks spring instantly to mind at the mere mention of the beautiful Beauty or the fearsome Beast, and for good reason. The story has been told across all mediums, and written and rewritten countless times. These tellings predate any written record of the tale, and, through the reconstructions made possible by the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification of fairy tales by plot elements, modern scholars have pieced together the likeliest origin story for “Beauty and the Beast.”

In a survey of the roots of Indo-European fairy tales, anthropologist Jamshid Tehrani argues that “Beauty and the Beast” specifically has “been told since before even English, French and Italian existed” (Tehrani 9). He further notes that “Beauty and the Beast” “can be securely traced back to the emergence of the major western Indo-European subfamilies as distinct lineages between 2500 and 6000 years ago, and may have even been present in the last common ancestor of Western Indo-European languages” (Tehrani 9). In his phylogenetic study, Tehrani points to the shared group of the earliest fairy tale narratives which predate even the Indo-European language (ATU
and reveals the history of “Beauty and the Beast” (ATU 425C) as it emerged into western Europe and Germany many centuries before Jack Zipes estimates it was first written down, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Tehrani fig. 1, Zipes). Novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve wrote her version of the tale, the oldest surviving written variant, in 1740, titled *La Belle et la Bête*, in a larger collection of fairy tales titled *La Jeune Américaine, et les contes marins*. Her novella-length story was later cut in length by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756, a French author who moved to England to take up work as a governess, and included in a collection of moralistic tales for young women titled *Magasin des enfans, ou dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusieure de ses élèves*. The first English translation of this didactic text was published only a year later in 1757, and became widely read and distributed, with no less than four editions printed within the following twenty years.

Perhaps most important about this first English printing of the tale is that the stories within are all told by the narrator figure “Mrs. Affable,” governess to “Lady Sensible” (aged thirteen), and her six younger sisters, flanked by scriptural dialogues (Leprince de Beaumont 3). The double-frame narrative, fictional governess and young wards, scriptural lessons, surrounds the fairy tales and makes them the most desired portion by their privileged position at the center of the text. At one point, for instance, one of Mrs. Affable’s charges asks, “We have been half an hour at table; shan’t we have a story Mrs. Affable?” (Leprince de Beaumont 63). The young girls all chorus religion, but in matters of fairy tales it is Mrs. Affable alone who speaks. There is, then, a dimension of knowledge that can only be passed to the young girl by the old woman, something
which must be taught separately and intimately before it can be chorused. In his *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bruno Bettelheim iterates this point when he posits that the fairy tale provides a didactic purpose to the children who delight in hearing them: “In order to master the psychological problems of growing up...a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious...It is here that fairy tales have unequal value” (Bettelheim 6-7). Leprince de Beaumont, through a female narrator and to a female audience both imagined and real, accomplishes this task in her text.

The imagined female narrator certainly existed in many forms in reality, transcending the page. In Dickens’ fifteenth article of “The Uncommercial Traveler,” for example, he relates the stories of his nurse who would tell him tall tales, in the same paradigm of female servant passing the stories on to the young children of the house. This unilateral process of female oral transmission, however, is not only vitally important to understanding the pivots to the fairy tale at the turn of the nineteenth century, but is also hotly contested. In 2012, Willem de Blécourt published a monograph entitled *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print: On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm*, wherein he argues that “genuine fairy tales” were transmitted in written form at the beginning of the nineteenth century, not by word of mouth (de Blécourt 5). This would necessarily dispel the imagined oral tradition suggested by Tehrani and Zipes, and divorce the anthropological lineage of the genre from the finished product delivered by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm for the first time in 1812. Perhaps the safest compromise to make is that even de Blécourt grants that the Brothers Grimm wanted their reader to believe that the
tales were transmitted orally by older women, implying that such a distinction carried with it authenticity and suggests a long tradition even if de Blécourt questions the validity of these anthropological claims (de Blécourt 154-157).

The famous collection by the Brothers Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, was first published in 1812 but underwent frequent revision, including and excluding tales as well as content. It is within this collection where most of the battle is fought regarding the presence and deletion of female voices. Specifically in a tale which he believes can be sourced to one specific woman (Mary Hassenpflug), Zipes writes that “The editing changes made by Wilhelm Grimm from 1819 to 1857 [to the “Frog Prince”] indicate that he was anxious to de-eroticize the tale and to emphasize the moral of listening to the father and keeping one’s promises” (Zipes 20). Likewise, Donald Haase, in his introduction to the essay anthology *Fairy Tales and Feminism*, writes that it became clear that “the two brothers had revised tales so that that they reflected or shaped the sociocultural values of their time” (Haase 10). This suggests a feedback loop, acted out throughout the seven editions of their collection the brothers produced during their lives; what once shaped sociocultural values may, in the later editions, have become reflective instead. Thus, the gradual changes and omissions to the collection are of especially important detail.

One such omission is “Blaubart,” or “Bluebeard,” present in the 1812 edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* but absent after 1815. Like “Beauty and the Beast,” it features a young woman and a monstrous husband. In the original 1812 edition, a widower several times over with a long blue beard takes a new, young bride, whom he gives the full run of
his castle save for one room. When he is out, curiosity gets the better of her, and she peeks inside the forbidden room, only to find the mangled corpses of each bride who came before her. In her shock, she drops the key to the forbidden room in a puddle of blood, which she finds to be unremovable. The bride tells her sister, and, when Bluebeard returns home to see the key has been bloodied, she tricks him just long enough for her brothers to arrive and slay the murderous husband (trans. Zipes, 203). This story finds its earliest known printing in Charles Perrault’s 1697 *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* with only minor alteration between the two.

Bettelheim groups both “Beauty and the Beast” and “Bluebeard” under the same “Animal Groom” cycle, young women adjacent to monstrous husbands (Bettelheim 297). Considering the two against each other may shed light not only on the moralistic purpose of the first, but also the curious omission of the second in later editions of the Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Bettelheim writes that “It is characteristic of fairy tales to state an existential dilemma briefly and pointedly. This permits the child to come to grips with the problem in its most essential form” (Bettelheim 8). So, what precise lesson is to be gained at the junction of the two tales, the two husbands? If “Beauty and the Beast” accomplishes according to Bettelheim the delivery of the lesson that the young girl, in loving her husband, “must be able to transfer to him her earlier, infantile attachment to her father,” erasing oedipal attachment, how does the failed marriage in “Bluebeard” relate (Bettelheim 284)? Bettelheim steps back at this point, and works through the reasons he does not believe “Bluebeard” is a fairy tale given within his early definition: “there is no development of any of the characters; although evil is punished in the end,
this in itself makes neither for recovery nor for consolation” (Bettelheim 299). A possible reason for the omission of the tale is that, unlike “Beauty and the Beast,” it does not successfully convey the moral of the animal groom story, that the adult man (and a confrontation by the young girl of her own sexuality) is frightening, but not lethal. This is perhaps why “The Frog Prince” remained in the place of honor at the start of the first volume of the collection while “Bluebeard” is cast aside.

If “Bluebeard” does hold value for the child, it may instead be in that moment of punishment. In his introduction Bettelheim states that in the mind of the child the line between good and evil is black and white without shades of gray. Across the canon of popular tales, it is universal that “crime does not pay...the bad person always loses out” (Bettelheim 9). At the junction of Bluebeard and Beast, the good husband is returned to human form, and is happy, while the wicked husband is killed and disgraced. Simply, “Presenting the polarities of character permits the child to comprehend easily the difference between the two, which he could not do as readily were the figures drawn more true to life” (Bettelheim 9). Tales such as the two mentioned can show the child the acceptable and unacceptable extremes of behavior, and through this lesson he or she can infer, over the course of growing up, the shades of gray in between. This function of perpetuating morality and norms can be copied and adjusted as necessary across cultures and time periods, with the core of the piece of fiction (as seen even in modern recreations of fairy tales) staying totally intact; the work of the Brothers Grimm to add to and subtract from their own collection is perhaps the most influential, but by no means the last instance of this perpetuation of morality.
Given how permeating these stories were in Victorian households, it is no surprise that modern critics have paid close attention to the references in the realist novels of that era to these tales. Charlotte Brontë is one such author whose prose is littered with such references, calling back to a childhood spent listening to and reading fairy tales. Her interest in fairy tales, folklore, and myth run throughout her work from even the early stages of her life; the Juvenilia, co-authored by Charlotte and her three siblings, holds two fictional worlds generated from the imagination of the Brontë children. Her novels spring up with these references to fairies, pixies, and more: in Villette, Paulina is an Undine, and in Shirley Miss Mann has a goblin’s grimace. Brontë’s profound interest in these stories led to a subsection of Jane Eyre studies identifying and analysing the littered references with regard to the narrative they inhabit.

What has been missing from this field of study has been the connection between the fairy tale and the bildungsroman, specifically the ways that the dotted references to fairy tales inform the generic form of the bildungsroman. If the fairy tale is the genre of moral education of the very young child, then the bildungsroman certainly fulfils a similar purpose for the young adult, and even adult reader. Franco Moretti has argued that the bildungsroman had contained the unpredictability of social change, representing it through the fiction of youth: a turbulent segment of life, no doubt, but with a clear beginning, and an unmistakable end. At a micro-narrative level, furthermore, the structure of

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1 See Karen Rowe, “‘Fairy-born and Human-bred’; Jane Eyre’s Education in Romance”; Paula Sullivan, “Fairy Tale Elements in Jane Eyre”; Abigail Heiniger, Jane Eyre’s Fairytale Legacy at Home and Abroad, and Jessica Campbell, “Bluebeard and the Beast The Mysterious Realism of Jane Eyre”.
the novelistic episode had established the flexible, anti-tragic modality of modern experience. Finally, the novel’s many-sided, unheroic hero had embodied a new kind of subjectivity: everyday, worldly, pliant—’normal’. (Moretti 230)

This description sounds remarkably similar to Bettelheim’s description of the symbolic purpose of the fairy tale, aged up appropriately. Where the fairy tale settles anxieties about emerging into the world and out from the home, the bildungsroman moves the reader into wider society and settles the anxieties of adulthood, eventually moving back into the formation of a home for oneself. It is a fundamentally ‘anti-tragic’ generic form, one which assures that the world of the protagonist will yield a happy ending and, typically, a marriage; just as the fairy tale prince weds the princess after many trials, so too does the bildungsheld eventually find a peaceful family life. Like the many unassuming fairy tale protagonists (most particularly the ‘youngest son’), the bildungsheld is meant to test his or her limits and the limits of their circumstances, imparting on the reader the knowledge of which of their actions to emulate, and which of their mistakes to leave behind.

As a kind of sequel genre, the bildungsroman does succeed in this purpose. Unlike the fairy tale, the characters live in worlds with shades of gray, but where good still always triumphs over evil. It is a more complex version of the same message, a valuable educational tool that can pick up where “Sleeping Beauty” leaves off. In many cases, this is true. But, in Brontë’s work, and especially in Jane Eyre, first published in 1847, the educational aspect seems to raise as many issues as it addresses. In a novel which explicitly calls to the fore fairy tale elements, seemingly to remind the reader of
the connection between its plot and characters and the older stories which Brontë was familiar with, the bildungsroman and the fairy tale seem to come into conflict. There is, for example, no grand reintroduction into society, a hallmark of both genres which is sorely missing as Jane and Rochester retreat to Ferndean.

This is of course even more perplexing because at first blush, because the two genres act independently to perpetuate and replicate social norms in the next generation. At the intersection, the conventions of each meet opposition in Brontë’s characterization of Jane, who will not succumb to marriage and child-rearing in the household at the first sign of a well-off suitor, and who does not await a savior while quivering in fear. At moments when Brontë invokes the fairy tale directly, often by name, Jane’s role within it shirks the role of submissive, subservient woman to the various domineering men around her. She is never the damsel in distress, always an incomprehensible fairy creature, confounding those around her.

Jane’s unconventional relationships with other, especially male, characters in the novel have been written about at length by feminist critics including Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their landmark book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, as well as Karen Rowe’s contribution to *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. The ignition of study into fairy tales and feminism coincided quite neatly with *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and the 1970s and 80s provided much discourse on the two areas of literature, rekindled in the present moment in a joint enterprise between the two fields in novels which feature elements of the bildungsroman and the fairy tale. Abigail Heiniger and Jessica Campbell have each
written on the ways the fairy tale elements which appear in Jane Eyre help to create the setting necessary for the progression of Jane and Rochester’s relationship, as well as the importance of a woman writer continuing the tradition of the fairy tale (orally passed on by women) with a female protagonist. I will argue further that Brontë invokes the plot elements of the fairy tale and references specific tales extensively to instill in the reader false expectations for the narrative, which are dispelled, and continues the use of those references to pen an alternate bildungsroman ending which, while still existing in the same generic framework, allows for radical female subjectivity and self-governance.

This ruse occurs in the ways Rochester is built up to be, but never truly becomes, Bluebeard, and his eventual transformation into a kind of Beast. By the end of the novel a new possibility has opened in which Jane is cast as a fairy-analogue, creating a new path for female development outside of the deterministic frame set in male bildungsromane. The deeper and more important tension of the novel was not, therefore, in the mysteries surrounding Rochester and the eventual reconciliation between the lovers, but in Jane’s non-standard development against a society which would rather have her forced into the good/evil binary of the other women of the text, a binary shared with every character in the fairy tale genre. The end result of this new proposed developmental arc sees the bildungsroman and the fairy tale held against each other not searching for similarities, but for differences and hypocrisies; separately, the two affirm societal norms, but when seen simultaneously, iconoclastic sentiment can creep into both the narrative and the narration.
II

Dueling Animal Grooms:

Fairy Tale Precedents and False Leads

I mentioned in the introduction that Brontë engages in a kind of literary ‘bait and switch’ with regards to her usage and dissolution of fairy tale tropes and the ‘laws’ of fairy tales. It is therefore pertinent to examine the ‘bait’ before moving to the ‘switch.’ Brontë establishes this precedent, that the reader can understand *Jane Eyre* in a purely familiar fairy tale mode, in the developing character of the child Jane and the adult Rochester. She does this by likening the two both linguistically and in the ways they act and are acted upon with fairy tale precedents; Jane is compared to Cinderella, Beauty, and the wife of Bluebeard, while Rochester teeters between the Beast and Bluebeard. These comparisons are drawn and crafted with the express intent of being torn apart and confounded, but understanding the work Brontë does in the early stages of the novel is pivotal to understanding the unsettling of traditional bildungsroman and fairy tale values in its later stages.

Karen Rowe writes that “popular tales for young girls, including *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, [and] *Beauty and the Beast* portrayed acquiescent females who cultivated domestic virtues in dreamy anticipation of a prince’s rescue by which the heroine might enter magically into marriage” (Rowe 69). And, when the reader is

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2 For my purposes, I will be using Andrew Lang’s 1889 translation of Perrault’s original “Bluebeard’ and “Cinderella” in his *Blue Fairy Book*, and Jean-Marie Leprince de Beaumont’s original 1756 translation of “Beauty and the Beast.”
introduced to the young Jane, she certainly seems fit for Cinderella’s role. She thinks of her guardian as “Mrs. Reed,” not “Aunt Reed,” displaying some measure of the distance between mother and step-mother, along with an “insuperable and rooted aversion” between the two, originating in Mrs. Reed (Brontë 33). Further, her cousins are more than able analogs to the wicked stepsisters which populate Cinderella’s household, torturing the young Jane “not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually” (Brontë 12). Mimicking Cinderella’s exclusion from the ball, Jane is “of course, excluded” from “the usual festive cheer” of Christmas and New Years celebrations which her cousins are permitted to enjoy (Brontë 34).

This continued torture shared across Jane Eyre and Cinderella induces in the reader the same responses (pity, anger) but for different reasons. In Cinderella, the soon-to-be-princess’s “innocence is stressed; her virtue is perfect”; she does not deserve mistreatment on any grounds (Bettelheim 246). Jane, occupying a similar role, shows instead of pure virtue marked interiority and rationality through her auto-narrative process; Jane is not the perfect young lady, and in her youth especially is prone to fits of rebellious rage, but our view into Brontë’s world comes through Jane, and Jane alone. Sympathetic bildungsroman readers, shocked though they may be by this youthful rebellion, still feel righteous anger when the young heroine is mistreated. In The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettelheim argues that, metaphorically, the Cinderella story brings to the surface in the child reader or listener “hope of being able to disentangle herself from her…predicament by finding a love object to whom she can give herself without guilt or anxiety…the story assures that entering the lower depths of existence is but a
necessary step toward becoming able to realize one’s highest potentials” (Bettelheim 249). Rowe further calls marriage in these female-led tales the “highest calling” of the heroines, as compared to the derring-do of their male counterparts (Rowe 69). If we take the young Jane as a Cinderella analogue, then Brontë is guiding readerly expectations by showing Jane at this lowest of lows with the implication being that she will soon rise above and find her prince.

Furthermore, during her education at Lowood, Jane “venerates Miss Temple (like a fairy godmother) as a paragon of compassion and learning, who transforms Jane into a respectable governess” (Rowe 75). Her eight years of learning and teaching fit Rowe’s “domestic virtues,” as Jane’s teaching skills translate neatly over to her new position. Though a governess may not a princess be, readers of realist fiction of the period were deeply familiar with the comedic novels which assured a wedding at their end. Miss Temple is the metaphorical fairy godmother because she provides Jane with the things necessary for Jane to succeed in the moment, the skills to seek out employment and to earn a wage. Of note is that Jane is content to remain at Lowood until Miss Temple leaves, married; once she is gone, Jane relates that she

was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me. I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits...I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character. (Brontë 100)
Miss Temple is like the fairy godmother\(^3\) in that she stays only for a time while imparting her gifts, but her presence is later revealed to have been stifling Jane’s exploration; Moretti’s configuration of the bildungsroman requires “travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost” (Moretti 4). This troubles the “Cinderella” model to the breaking point. To move on with her development narrative, Jane must shake off the false-home that Miss Temple made Lowood, and with it the “subdued character” she appeared to be.

To this end, Jane takes up work and changes locales. Her new job shifts the paradigm of her fairy tale positioning immediately. She looks at a hallway in Thornfield, her new home, and thinks it “a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle”, a very on-the-nose gesture towards the true nature of its owner (Brontë 126). Gone are her orphan days of abuse; Jane is an adult, sexually mature, and marriageable. Campbell states that, “At a basic plot level the arrival of a young woman in an imposing house with an intimidating, suspicious master is equally evocative of ‘Bluebeard’ and ‘Beauty and the Beast’...It is long unclear whether Rochester will be a Bluebeard figure or a Beast figure” (Campbell 236). Jane faces a new challenge, namely sifting through Rochester’s secrets and determining his internal character along with the reader, discovering if he is murderous husband or redeemable prince. This is, on its surface, the task of the fairy tale heroine, and the bildungsheld; the determination of moral character as protagonist and reader work in tandem is a hallmark of both genres. Thus, when Rochester proves many times more complicated than such a binary, Brontë has in essence unmade (and remade) this

\(^3\) Not a fairy in the traditional sense, but a wish-fulfilling, perfectly helpful creation of the fairy tale which bears the same name.
fundamental task for a new purpose, in giving Jane autonomy outside of the moralistic binary.

Despite the plethora of surface similarities, Brontë is actually destabilizing and negating the connections between Rochester and the animal grooms at each turn. Bettelheim offers three criteria for the animal groom story cycle, common elements shared between the tales in some guise or another; the reader does not know why (or how) the animal groom was made into an animal; an evil sorceress was the transformer of the animal groom (but goes unpunished); the father, not the un-present mother, compels the heroine to join the animal groom out of her love for him and obedience to him (Bettelheim 283). These plot elements, which help to categorize a tale as an animal groom tale, are not only left incomplete, but are toyed with by Brontë in such ways that they remain in the forefront of the narrative but never actually reach a state of fulfilment.

In Leprince de Beaumont’s version of “Beauty and the Beast,” the Beast only explains his circumstances after he has been returned to human form: “a wicked fairy had condemned me to remain under that shape till a beautiful virgin should consent to marry me: the fairy likewise enjoined me to conceal my understanding” (Leprince de Beaumont 53). This clearly satisfies Bettelheim’s first narrative requirement; the ‘why’ is totally absent, and the ‘how’ exists only in the flick of a magic wand. The requirement to transform back into a prince, and the inability to speak about the nature of his curse, likewise facilitate the narrative instead of explaining it. Suffice to say, Rochester is afforded no such cover from scrutiny. The ‘why’ and ‘how’ of his becoming the man he is are laid bare for the reader; his unhinged ranting throughout the twenty-seventh chapter
of the novel paints a vivid picture of the formation of his marriage and the consequences of it. His decision to return to England comes with a strange twist as he addresses himself: “Let [Bertha’s] identity, her connection with yourself, be buried in oblivion: you are bound to impart them to no living being. Place her in safety and comfort: shelter her degradation with secrecy, and leave her” (Brontë 356). He will keep Bertha close to home, in a way that the wicked fairy never was, denying his connection to her even as he keeps her within his domicile.

More peculiar still is the ‘why’ of the matter. There is no indication of moral wrongdoing by the Beast in Leprince de Beaumont’s telling; one day he was a prince, and the next day a malignant fairy made him a monster. Rochester shows that he is far from morally perfect not only in his treatment of Bertha, but of his treatment of Jane after Bertha has been revealed to her. The Beast proposes marriage each evening, and Beauty rejects him. His response to these rebukes is “I know too well my own misfortune; but then I love you with the tenderest affection: however, I ought to think myself happy that you will stay here” (Leprince de Beaumont 49). He is gentle, and happiness comes finally for him because Beauty is won by “the goodness of his temper” (Leprince de Beaumont 53). Rochester continues his bigamous proposals (“Jane, you understand what I want of you? Just this promise—‘I will be yours, Mr. Rochester.’”), demonstrating that he is not of perfect moral character, nor even perhaps decent moral character (Brontë 363). It is through the flaws in Rochester’s character that the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of his metaphorical beastly transformation manifest, a far cry from the innocent victim that is the Beast.
Additionally, Bettelheim’s ‘sorceress’ role can be filled by Bertha herself. Coupled with her “demon-hate,” Bertha is likened to a “vampyre” and a “goblin” (Brontë 355, 327, 356). She is compared to supernatural creatures who harm human beings out of the very maliciousness of their natures, and her biting and attempted blood-sucking do not lessen these links. But, despite these comparisons which come so freely to Rochester, her “evil doings” are far more complex and difficult to understand than a fairy who works magic on a whim without real motive (Bettelheim 283). Most modern readers would argue that Bertha does not have ‘evil doings’ at all, and that even if she does, she certainly doesn’t go unpunished. Her declining mental state, confinement, isolation, mistreatment, and eventual death sum to far greater than the tribulations Rochester undergoes. Not only that, but she is brought from the global periphery to the center of the novel, literally bound by Rochester, the opposite of the sorceress who fades away entirely after working her magic.

Bettelheim’s final requirement of female sacrifice is, at least on the surface, not possible for Jane, as she was orphaned at a very young age. However, despite Jane’s lack of father, Brontë plays with this trope throughout the novel. Rowe points out that Jane’s bildung diverts from typical male bildung because “interiority, self-sacrifice, and romantic love hardly figure as primary motifs or the major crises of development” in those male-centered novels (Rowe 70). And, demonstrably, Jane does sacrifice, for various reasons, her own comfort, happiness, and wealth, despite the lack of a literal father. Father surrogates in the novel seem to induce in Jane not familial duty, but revulsion. Mr. Reed’s ghost haunts the red room and drives her to fear. Mr. Brocklehurst
is “a black pillar...the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital” (Brontë 38). Jane’s narration highlights the blatantly phallic adult male, a monolith to patriarchal authority typically present in the fairy tale father which, when followed, always conspicuously leads to the daughter’s well-being.

In the aforementioned “The Frog Prince,” for example, the king, when his daughter wants to renege on her deal with the frog, “became angry and commanded her to do what she had promised. There was no helping it; she had to do what her father wanted” (Grimm, trans. D.L. Ashliman 4). Soon after, she is wed to the frog-turned-prince, and, after following her father’s command, lives happily ever after. Jane feels no love, and certainly no duty, to Brocklehurst. She further describes that “he seemed to me a tall gentleman; but then I was very little” (Brontë 39). Reading this scene by Bettelheim’s conception of the animal groom tales, this incomprehensibly large, terrifying man shows Jane’s inability to show the typical “oedipal love for her father” (Bettelheim 284). He is the brobdingnagian monster, not the paragonic paternal love object. Under his command, rather than flourishing, many girls and young women fall sick and wither; his authority is sourced in the same patriarchal frame as a fairy tale king’s, but the results are all too different.

Rochester, by virtue of the age gap between himself and Jane, complicates this matter further. When Rochester alludes to this age gap and his suitability as her father, Jane reacts with an “uncharacteristic pique that reveals her discomfort” (Anderson 116). According to Bettelheim, the animal groom cycle helps bridge the gap between the
socially unacceptable oedipal love in young girls and the acceptable sexual love of another adult man; the Beast is the example par excellence. See, for instance, the fear Beauty feels upon first hearing the approach of the Beast: “at night, as she was going to sit down to supper, she heard the noise Beast made, and could not help being sadly terrified” (Leprince de Beaumont 47). She soon comes to see his gentle nature, and he promises her that “you alone are mistress here” (Leprince de Beaumont 47). Here is the acceptable form of the transfer of Oedipal love, frightening, but also guiding and formative. At once, Beauty can deduce the nature of her captor.

A more muddied instance is Bluebeard; the original Perreault text which was translated to English was printed with a coda to “Bluebeard”: “Curiosity, in spite of its appeal, often leads to deep regret. To the displeasure of many a maiden, its enjoyment is short lived. Once satisfied, it ceases to exist, and always costs dearly” (Perreault, trans. Long 295). There is a symbolic connection between curiosity, the short lived enjoyment and long term consequence, with unacceptable (extramarital or otherwise) sex. This plays back into the morality binary Rochester seems to teeter upon; all sex must be labeled as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but the manifold complicating factors leave the reader with the impression that there are other possibilities outside of those provided implicitly.

Bluebeard is metaphorically unacceptable because his secret inner nature has not been discovered by the young woman prior to the wedding, and therefore he was an unacceptable husband, and an unacceptable father substitute. So, because she intentionally draws the connection to Rochester as a potential father substitute, “Brontë reminds us that he is the ‘unnatural father’ of the fairy tales, hoping to marry his
daughter, just as she suggests that he is Bluebeard, the ‘unnatural husband’” (Anderson 117). It is no coincidence then that the moment of unveiling occurs at the altar, at a point when Rochester would necessarily be revealed as a Beast figure in line with the originating tale. This great unmasking relies on, in addition to a reader familiar with the tropes of the fairy tale, a reader familiar with the tropes of the bildungsroman in a very literal way; as Moretti claims, the development narrative is fundamentally a comic narrative form.

From the introduction of his home to that moment on the altar, the reader is led by Brontë’s deployment and troubling of these familiar ‘rules’ to believe that their task is to judge Rochester on the Bluebeard/Beast axis for the purpose of determining his suitability as a husband. This necessarily keeps the reader focused on Rochester, the looming specter over Jane’s time at Thornfield. But, through all of the above, Brontë weaves a secondary narrative by which, through understanding Jane, the reader can come to understand Rochester even before Bertha’s explicit, named entrance into the text. The very first time Jane catches sight of Rochester, she mistakes his companion animals as a wandering ghost:

It was exactly one form of Bessie’s Gytrash—a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: it passed me, however, quietly enough; not staying to look up, with strange pretercanine eyes, in my face, as I half expected it would. The horse followed,—a tall steed, and on its back a rider. The man, the human being, broke the spell at once. Nothing ever rode the Gytrash: it was always alone; and goblins, to my notions, though they might tenant the dumb carcasses of beasts,
could scarce covet shelter in the commonplace human form. No Gytrash was this.

(Brontë 132-3)

Rochester is introduced as a “only a traveller,” the human who breaks the illusion of the fantastical (Brontë 133). The human form is as ‘commonplace’ as the threat of the supernatural is incomprehensible; Jane describes the ‘Gytrash’ only in parts, but Rochester as a singular figure. Rochester is beyond ordinary; in his humanness, he has transcended mere commonplace and become a creature so thoroughly anchoring he can end thoughts of the supernatural with his mere presence. Rochester is given no further physical description at this time, as the only relevant information is confirmation of his humanity. Rochester is therefore rooted in a realist mode. This is in contrast to Jane, who seems to break out of this frame altogether.

Conversely, Rochester tells Jane “you have rather the look of another world. I marvelled where you had got that sort of face. 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: I am not sure yet” (Brontë 143). Both perceived the other as a type of magical creature, but Jane’s certainty that Rochester was human is contrasted to Rochester’s uncertainty in Jane’s humanity. Jane and Rochester’s first encounter also follows a pattern which reappears throughout Jane Eyre, the buildup to the supernatural which fails to fully emerge. George Levine writes that “Supernatural intervention feels, in the context of realist fiction, to be something out of a different genre, the fairy tale perhaps” (Levine 95). Brontë, save one moment of telepathy which I will speak on later, does not cross the border into the purely supernatural, but keeps the sense of magic and
the impossible hovering always just outside the realm of possibility, especially in moments of nocturnal apparitions which Jane the narrator offers no explanation. In a realist novel such as *Jane Eyre*, it is obviously impossible for a Gytrash to run into Jane on the road, but the suggestion of the impossible (fairy tales, magic) manifesting in her life follows Jane.

Srdjan Smajic coined the term “supernatural realism,” a realism for gothic novels and other realist novels which insist on their realism but which still dabble into suggestions of the paranormal. Brontë peppers *Jane Eyre* with both moments meant to induce doubt (Is that a Gytrash? What did Jane see in the mirror in the red room? Is there a monster hiding in Thornfield?) and subtler descriptors and metaphors comparing the normal to the supernatural. Smajic explains that when a ghost or other supernatural creature appears “in what is generally regarded as a realist novel, the predominant assumption is that the text is momentarily deviating from its guiding principles, bending or breaking its own rules of verisimilitude and plausibility: it is now doing something else, something contrary to its ‘nature’” (Smajic 2). He argues that this is not necessarily the case; the very verbiage used to discuss supernatural intervention, “interfere,” “infiltrate,” etc., belies the truth that the realist mode is tied to the dominant mode of thought, while the supernatural has “traditionally been theorized as oppositional, subversive, parasitic” (Smajic 2). Just as Brontë coopts and subverts the dominant genre of development in her female bildungsroman, she infiltrates it with suggestions of the impossible.
The symbolic function of this shift in genre is that the novel is always threatening to break the realist frame entirely, but never quite does. The gradual doubt that the reader feels never finds an outlet; it builds, but a ghost never actually appears, although many are suggested. That which may at first appear to be abnormal or unexplainable is actually mundane, or at least plausible. But, as seen above, Rochester’s connection with the Bluebeard/Beast binary perpetuates well beyond Jane’s early realization of his humanity, and his early ‘disqualification’ from analogue with the supernatural Beast on grounds of his normalcy. To the contrary: once his attempted bigamy is brought into the open, Rochester insists upon himself as Bluebeard. His one-sided conversation with Jane before she leaves Thornfield is telling: “you must regard me as a plotting profligate—a base and low rake who has been simulating disinterested love in order to draw you into a snare deliberately laid, and strip you of honour and rob you of self-respect...you are faint still, and have enough to do to draw your breath” (Brontë 345-6). He projects upon himself a summary of the Bluebeard story; the lord of the castle seeks only to simulate love, for nefarious ends. The verbs Rochester describes his actions with, stripping and robbing, are violent, and preserve the undercurrent from the fairy tale of inevitable murder. His last remarks call a violent death to mind, a struggle to even continue to breathe. Furthermore, when Rochester says, “you must regard me,” he introduces a double significance. On the surface, Rochester is filling Jane’s mouth with the words he believes she would be saying; he supposes that she regards him in this way. Another possibility is that Rochester is making a demand of Jane, ordering her to regard him in the way that he describes, commanding that she see him as Bluebeard.
Rochester admits himself to be, in as many words, the crooked, vile animal groom who will not transform into a handsome prince and doting husband. He is human, and, therefore, Bluebeard is the only husband he ever could have been. Additionally, “there is no development of any of the characters; although evil is punished in the end, this in itself makes neither for recovery nor for consolation” (Bettelheim 299). At this crossroads, Rochester demands that Jane think of him as the analogue to the murderous groom. He suggests, in doing so, that he will not develop beyond this state: not into a handsome prince, and not away from the evil husband. He purports to be, in a word, stagnant, and wishes that Jane see him this way as well, unable to develop beyond what he is at that moment.

Of course, this never comes to pass. Rochester is not stagnant. He develops as the novel progresses, ultimately shedding the skin of Bluebeard and becoming a man Jane deems suitable for marriage. But, as demonstrated above, Rochester does not have any magic to him; he is ‘only a traveller.’ He shares this trait with Bluebeard the character and with the tale itself. His life is perfectly plausible, and the only touches of the fantastical come from the ways he perceives Jane, and the metaphorical magic key locking away Bertha. However, at the point Bertha starts the fire which will burn Thornfield to the ground, Rochester emerges from the Bluebeard persona he has crafted for himself and takes up a bit of the magic around him; it is only after that climactic moment that he reaches out and telepathically communicates with Jane, an objectively supernatural occurrence in the text. One, not coincidentally, which has a close cousin in Beauty and the Beast. After taking a leave from the Beast, Beauty is detained by her sisters and made
not to return within the given week. After ten days have passed, “She dreamed she was in
the palace garden, and that she saw Beast extended on the grass-plat, who seemed just
expiring, and, in a dying voice, reproached her with her ingratitude” (Leprince de
Beaumont 51). While not carrying ingratitude, Rochester’s plea is one for help, and a plea
of yearning, just as the Beast cries out. Against all odds, Rochester has tossed off his self-
imposed edict of non-development, and become something that he once was not.

Counter to the tale, he is rewarded for his noble act with debilitation. Still, if, as
Campbell argues, this is the moment when he becomes the handsome prince, then he
certainly does not look the part. Despite his disfigurement, the novel does insist upon
Rochester’s redemption in this scene, and scholars including Mary Antoinette Smith have
read the fire as purgatorial; there is a price to be paid with physical torture and suffering
for redemption and ultimately salvation. In this reading, Bertha’s inferno was, in
actuality, an immolation; Rochester sacrificed part of himself to emerge a changed man.
But, coupled with his sudden bout of telepathy, it is possible to instead read his
disfigurement as his final transformation into the Beast.

It is strange to consider this; the Beast returns to princely form at the end of the
fairy tale, and all traces of magic are scrubbed away, leaving behind a happy, ordinary
couple. Instead, Jane describes Rochester in ways she never has before:

his port was still erect, his hair was still raven black; nor were his features altered
or sunk: not in one year’s space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be
quelled or his vigorous prime blighted. But in his countenance I saw a change:
that looked desperate and brooding—that reminded me of some wronged and
fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged
eagle, whose gold-ringéd eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that
sightless Samson. (Brontë 497-8)

Jane sees Rochester as the same in some physical features, and radically different in
others. His bearing is the same, but now is he is a “wronged and fettered wild
beast” (Brontë 497). He is an animal now, and one which is “caged.” These are the
descriptions of the Beast in the beginning of the fairy tale; he is wild, almost feral, and
feels trapped underneath the curse.

But, Rochester’s redemption has already occurred. There is no curse left to break,
and his beastly countenance will never go away. This situation is the total inverse of the
Beauty and the Beast narrative; Jane at first thought that the creature she looked upon
was a monster when he was merely a man, and now, in his beastly form, she seeks to find
happiness with him. For his part, he lived comfortably when he was demonstrating his
worst character traits, and now, after his heroism is exposed, he suffers. These inversions
help shape the last pages of the novel, and the reading of Rochester as becoming fairy
tale archetype. Jane addresses him, “for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or
something of that sort...your hair reminds me of eagles’ feathers; whether your nails are
grown like birds’ claws or not, I have not yet noticed,” and demonstrates her clear
knowledge that he has become the Beast (Brontë 503). He, like the Beast, is an
amalgamation of animal parts. Jane’s joke about his nails shows that she accepts this
change in him, and is more comfortable around him now than she had been prior. Despite
his debilitations, only now is he “paradoxically stronger than he was when he ruled
Thornfield, for now, like Jane, he draws his powers from within himself, rather than from inequity, disguise, deception” (Gilbert and Gubar 369).

The language of the fairy tale has finally wrapped its tendrils around Rochester. His earlier insistence on being regarded as Bluebeard never actually takes root in Jane (“I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart’s core”), and she had already decided him to be perfectly human (Brontë 344). In this single instance, Jane tells him, “I find you rather alarming, when I examine you close at hand: you talk of my being a fairy, but I am sure, you are more like a brownie” (Brontë 505). A brownie, a sort of hobgoblin, is the first and only direct comparison ever made by anyone comparing Rochester to a fairy tale or supernatural creature. Jane, who has been likened to all manner of creatures, turns the tables on Rochester and welcomes him to the fold. The ending of “Beauty and the Beast,” two human lovers integrating into society, is suggested as the comparison to the ending to *Jane Eyre*, two lovers, both now labeled inhuman, retreating into the wilderness.

Rochester, a man turned beast, is paired with Jane, whose humanity always seemed to be in question. From his exposure to her and desire to become suitable for her, he was transformed physically in a way that reversed the outer/inner paradigm; turned from presentable (albeit not particularly handsome) but potentially evil to monstrous but kind. It appears to be a transformation that is only palatable in that it brings Jane and Rochester together. But, this was a necessary change, and not necessary only because the female bildungsroman narrative needed Bertha out of the way and Rochester needed a redemption. Campbell concludes that “The moral of [stories with a pixy-led male suitor]
is that human beings cannot abide in Elfland” (Campbell 241). Rochester, in his former state, could not have survived out in the wilderness with Jane, the analogue to the pixy-suitor. He was too human, and needed to be made into the Beast, or at least an approximation of the Beast, to wed the fairy-Beauty.

After laying the bait for the majority of her novel, Brontë pulls the switch as Jane looks upon Rochester’s changed face. It appeared at first that Rochester was Bluebeard or the Beast, Jane his ordinary human suitor, but step by step Brontë deconstructs this expectation that Rochester is the one around whom the fairy tale bildungsroman hinges: it is Jane. Jane is the crux of the fairy tale of *Jane Eyre*, and it is her foreign nature, her fairy-ness, which necessitates Rochester’s radical change if the two are ever to be wed. Through the conventional, familiar fairy tales about passive women and terrifying suitors, Brontë creates a new type of heroine, one who forges out into territory previously unconsidered in the crafting of bildungsroman or fairy tale women.

Jane thinks of herself as a ‘thing,’ not a human, at times. With regards to the Reeds, she thinks that “They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities...a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment” (Brontë 19). At this point, so early in the novel and in Jane’s development, this ‘thing’ is wholly negative; she sees herself as subhuman. Later, “Five times, Rochester calls Jane the predominantly negative ‘thing,’ which in the mid-nineteenth century could be used not only ‘in contempt or reproach, usu. suggesting unworthiness to be called a person,’ but also, thanks to Brontë’s
beloved Byron, ‘a particular supernatural or other dreadful monster’” (Campbell 241). Jane herself thinks that she “I had rather be a thing than an angel” (Brontë 302). By reading both possible meanings of ‘thing,’ and in reading Jane’s eventual ownership of the word as a descriptor, we can come to see it as an indicator of Jane’s development and acceptance of who she is as someone who exists outside a binary.
III

Women in *Jane Eyre* and in Fairy Tales:

Fairy-Born, Human-Bred

The centuries-long story of the development of female characters in fairy tales had reached a low point which was perhaps most embodied by Hans Christian Andersen’s 1837 version of “The Little Mermaid,” in which the mermaid is forced to sacrifice herself and relays that her hope for reprieve is that “every day on which we find a good child who pleases his parents and deserves their love, God shortens our days of trial...But if we see a naughty, mischievous child we must shed tears of sorrow, and each tear adds a day to the time of our trial” (Christian Andersen, Trans. Hersholt). So reduced is her agency that she is wrapped up entirely into the moral lesson, that good behavior might help to prematurely end her suffering (and this, after she willingly died to let the prince live!).

Ruth Bottigheimer explains that

Between 1400 and 1700—that is, during most of the early modern period—girl’s and women’s literary roles in novella collections shifted dramatically in ways that set the stage for the emergence of the modern fairy tale heroine. At the beginning of this period, novella heroines held their own against a world brimming with antagonists, using mother wit to sustain their social and sexual independence. Two centuries later, girls had become frightened damsels, their mothers had retreated into the shadows, and maids and sisters who had formerly lent their mistresses a helping hand had disappeared. (Bottigheimer Location 1008)
The reasons for this diminishing are manifold, but by Brontë’s time these fairy tales, often much older and with many discrepancies between versions, were collected and homogenized by male compilers into neat and bundled forms. The fairy tale woman is similar to the bildungsroman love interest in the male-led instances of the genre; she waits to be acted upon, wooed, saved, wedded. Karen Rowe, in fact, argues that Brontë raises these fairy tale circumstances only to wholly abandon them, Jane symbolically casting off that tradition and forging a new tradition of her own (Rowe 70).

I have argued above for a reading which continues to represent the fairy tale ‘magic’ throughout the second half of the novel which Rowe sees Brontë abandoning, but this discrepancy does not mean that I disagree with Rowe’s fundamental argument; the novel does consciously shift modes, but not before a thorough probe and dissection of the female archetypes which populate the bildungsroman and the fairy tale. After this scan, I will argue, Brontë suggests that Jane’s new direction is no longer the Victorian fairy tale heroine, but a more ancient and invasive character type which was scrubbed from the widely disseminated fairy tales in urban centers, spoken of primarily by women to other women in an oral tradition which dates back in Europe as far as Martin Luther if not farther.

Jane encounters two paragons, one wholly virtuous, one portrayed as entirely sinister, in Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason. This binary finds symbolic root in the Mary/Eve dichotomy, each biblical woman possessing virtue or vice in a way which embodies the popular perception of female gender roles (Kühl 171). The emergence of the fairy tale into the dominant cultural zeitgeist in re-packaged form is one such instance
of this good/evil binary being repainted to serve its same old purposes in the repression of female autonomy and sexuality. The bildungsroman taking up paragonic women, often surrounded by deeper, more morally complex men is another such instance. In a sense, this sequence of genres, from initial binary to shading only the male half of the equation with gray, helps perpetuate even more effectively the initial moral binary women were forced into.

Though Coventry Patmore’s deeply sexist poem “Angel in the House” would not begin release until 1854, Brontë’s novel features its own angel in the house, Blanche Ingram. She is perfect from her first name which suggests whiteness (purity, cleanliness, holiness, goodness, etc.) to her last name, a common German surname referencing a fertility goddess Ing. Blanche “is the ideal nineteenth-century Angel or classical goddess—an unrealistic male-created ideal...Like an angel or Olympian coming to earth, Blanche and the other women descend the stairs in a ‘bright mist’ of white skirts” (Heineger 24). Jane relates that “[Blanche’s sister] was too slim for her height, but Blanche was moulded like a Dian” (Brontë 200). Further, Blanche, “played [piano]: her execution was brilliant; she sang: her voice was fine; she talked French apart to her mamma; and she talked it well, with fluency and with a good accent” (Brontë 201). Before even meeting her, Jane imagines Blanche: “the august yet harmonious lineaments, the Grecian neck and bust; let the round and dazzling arm be visible, and the delicate hand; omit neither diamond ring nor gold bracelet; portray faithfully the attire, aërial lace and glistening satin, graceful scarf and golden rose” (Brontë 187).
Blanche is the fairy tale princess, perfect and perfectly desirable, while still having no depth to her character. She is everything, but nothing, an object to be won and admired like the marble statues she is compared to. She is simultaneously a parody and yet still a fantasy, both irony and romance. She literally descends from above unto the morals below, a domestic goddess. Having Jane relate these things to the reader herself conveys scenes of the pathetic; Jane berates herself in the mirror for failing to live up to Blanche in looks or status, and hides behind curtains. Holding Blanche as an ideal is not only ridiculous, but, Brontë suggests, painful and caustic to her sympathetic female narrator. Blanche denigrates Jane whenever possible, commenting to Rochester upon seeing her “You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi—an—were they not, mama?” (Brontë 205). She is perfectly desirable in a vacuum, possessing every possible desirable trait, but comes off to Jane, and through her the reader, as undesirable and cruel. Thus, one side of the binary is negated, and made undesirable in the world of *Jane Eyre* even though it symbolically stood for the whole of female desirability.

Of course, Blanche’s opposite is no more realistic. Bertha, according to Rochester, is unambiguously his personal hell on earth:

I lived with that woman upstairs four years, and before that time she had tried me indeed: her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong, only cruelty could check them, and I

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4 Here meaning ‘trouble’ or ‘menace’ rather than a male analogue to the Succubus.
would not use cruelty. What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant propensities! How fearful were the curses those propensities entailed on me! Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste. (Brontë 353)

Rochester’s formation of Bertha’s character is, as Heineger suggests of Blanche, a male-created vision which does not really exist. Rochester’s word choice plays on extremes; her intellect is as small as her propensities are great. She, like Blanche, is a woman who is only talked about in extremes which ultimately render her less than human. At two points, Rochester uses specific words which merit further discussion. First, the choice of ‘developed’ calls to mind the genre of the novel itself. Bertha, Rochester claims, underwent her own kind of development narrative, but veered off the proper course that Jane was considering in marrying him. Important to note is that Bertha’s mother forecasts Bertha’s own fate, much like Mrs. Ingram is the matchmaking lady of society that Blanche is on the path to become. Jane, of course, has no living mother to predict her path in such a way, but her deceased mother, we come to learn, married for love and was disowned because of it; if there is such a model for Jane, then it is a model based on autonomous choice and personal feeling, not destiny or society.

The strange deployment of ‘unchaste’ at the end of Rochester’s speech pulls forth another question. Was Bertha unchaste as her husband suggests, or does Brontë use that word to call to her reader’s mind advice books such as the 1791 text Advice to Unmarried Women: To Recover and Reclaim the Fallen; and to Prevent the Fall of Others, into the
Snares and Consequences of Seduction? Kühl explains that adulterous women, or women who engaged in premarital sex, “were immediately put into the category of a fallen woman and to redeem themselves after that was nearly impossible” (Kühl 176). The narrator of the text employs heavy biblical allusion, and indicates that “There are among you some, who are not yet sensible how wretched their condition is,” suggesting that ruin is always waiting, possible, and can happen without the woman even knowing (Anon. Advice to Unmarried Women 8). Even outside the religious context of the term ‘fallen woman,’ the moralistic fairy tale shares this same attitude. Once the narrator has marked a woman as ‘the evil queen’ or ‘the wicked witch,’ she is damned. Likewise, ‘unchaste’ conveys the typical fear of female sexuality running abound and overtaking the dominant order. The co-opting of the fairy tale by male writers helps to soothe this fear, as does the flattening of female characters in the bildungsroman. Brontë calls that fear forward, including it as a not insignificant choice in Rochester’s rant.

For the reader to buy-in to Jane’s eventual decision on an alternate path in life, the reader must acknowledge that Blanche, perfect in every way, is not actually desirable. In a social landscape which was soon to produce “The Angel in the House,” Brontë was calling attention to the troubling tendency to start, even in the simplest children’s literature, conditioning children to aspire to Blanche with the threat of Bertha as the only viable alternative. Brontë works most effectively because she takes up the two genres which perpetuate these norms most vigorously, operating in both at times, and creates a narrative with the goal of unsettling those norms. The reader must likewise see through
the painting of Bertha as a monster who must be locked away and trotted out as an example of what not to become.

I have said much about Rochester’s fairy tale lineage, but Jane too finds herself betwixt and between. She is no Belle: “while Aunt Reed mimics the role of ‘evil stepmother’ to perfection, and while Rochester is sufficiently Beast-like in appearance, Jane is, quite pointedly, no Beauty” (Cadwallader 235). Georgina, another of the text’s Blanche-esque beautiful women, is likewise shallow and cruel. Cadwallader argues that “Beauty has become a shorthand marker for virtue and merit, a way to ‘cut corners’ in the education of upper-class women like Georgiana. And, significantly, these cut corners have telling results: as an adult, Georgiana is shallow and self-centred” (Cadwallader 239). Unlike Rochester’s flirting with the idea of Bluebeard, Jane is never in the running for Belle, as her appearance, not her inner nature, disqualifies her: an appearance the reader has known about from the start of the novel. There are no cut corners, and her auto-narration ensures that her cleverness and interiority are conveyed to the reader. By narrating her own story, Jane has power than not only any fairy tale female, but any fairy tale character of any rank, gender, or power. The very first ‘I’ in the novel begins the work of establishing the possibility for an alternate end point, distinct from witch or princess.

Jane’s other possible outcome, the murderous spouse of Bluebeard, does depend on her inner character. Why, then, is there never for a moment the possibility of a turn against Rochester? Strangely, for the same reason as the above; the reader has known Jane’s inner nature, relayed by her, without mediation save her older self. She is an
outsider even in her pairing with Rochester, no true analogue to a fairy tale character from the popular stories of the time. She may stand alone like the fairy tale woman in the face of challenges, but the qualities which unite them across tales elude Jane: she is almost the beautiful Cinderella, abused by her step-family; almost Beauty, faced with the beast. Connections to the gamut of fairy tale heroines, such as Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, or Snow White, all fail because their beauty is their primary and most recurring descriptor, which Jane lacks. This destabilizes the reader trained to read fairy tales for their moral content. We are meant to sympathize with Jane, but she is no Belle. Likewise, the reader deduces that she is no sorceress. Thus, the reader has been guided to expect some third option, a place for the heroine to go that did not exist in the morals of children’s literature.

Brontë takes pains to show Jane’s uniqueness early in the novel, and, by her own reckoning, Jane knows herself to be both strange and fairy. As she is locked away in a room for punishment, “All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit” (Brontë 18). The red room is transformed into a dark, cold hollow. Jane does not see herself as herself, but imagines the girl in the mirror as an amalgamation of parts that are unfamiliar to her. Her eyes could show her own fright, or be eyes “of fear,” of inducing fear in others. Jane does induce fear; confronted with Jane, Mrs. Reed’s “usually composed gray eyes became troubled with a look like fear; she...gazed at me as if she did not know whether I were child or fiend” (Brontë 34).
Likewise, she lets loose a “wild involuntary cry” when her emotions spill over, scaring herself and the staff (Brontë 21).

Jane thinks the figure in the mirror is “like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie’s evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers” (Brontë 18). The distinction between fairy and imp is perhaps a non-distinction; Heiniger writes that “supernatural beings were not so easily pigeonholed in the 1840s; it took much of the nineteenth century to solidify the opposition between conceptions of the fairy as good and the goblin as bad” (Heiniger 241). What matters most here is that Jane inserts herself as the non-human trickster of the popular kind of stories within which weary travelers would come into contact with and either flee from or perish because of the fairy creature. She is scared of herself both because of her strange appearance, but also because she knows even here that she does not, cannot, fit into the society around her.

Jane is called a ‘fairy’ by herself and others on many occasions. Rochester, especially, seems keen on doing so. On one occasion, he asks of Jane, “Tell me now, fairy as you are—can’t you give me a charm, or a philter, or something of that sort, to make me a handsome man?” (Brontë 283). Rather than telling him that she is a human, and has no magic, she jokes instead that “It would be past the power of magic, sir” (Brontë 283). Rochester tells little Adele, Jane’s ward, that “Mademoiselle is a fairy,” and as he prepares to marry her says, “I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings” (Brontë 309, 299). After Jane accepts his proposal, “when [she] appeared before him now, he had no such honeyed terms as ‘love’ and ‘darling’ on
his lips: the best words at my service were ‘provoking puppet,’ ‘malicious elf,’ ‘sprite,’ ‘changeling,’ &c” (Brontë 315). These are not the words he would use to describe Blanche, but seemed to come quickly to his lips in descriptions of Bertha. Blanche, this suggests, can be cast off, while Jane and Bertha are irremovable from his mind. The ‘malicious’ fairy which comes and forever alters the life of the Beast is echoed, something stronger and stranger than Rochester cares to admit. Campbell further explains that “When Rochester calls Jane a fairy, he does not just mean to praise her for being adorably petite. He is testifying to her strangeness, her ability to bewitch him, her alternation between granting and withholding physical affection, her seeming to stand for something that he desperately desires but doubts he can ever truly possess” (Campbell 241).

Bertha is linguistically linked to Jane through her descriptions, and because Rochester desires Jane, there lingers the sense that Bertha too was marked with this desirable and bewitching strangeness. He imagines Bertha having put “curses” on him, and yet he “saw her and heard her daily: something of her breath (faugh!) mixed with the air [he] breathed” (Brontë 353, 354). She is repulsive, but simultaneously intoxicating and “alien” (Brontë 353). Other women, too, are given the ‘fairy’ descriptor at times. Georgina, for example, has “fairy plates and cups” which “were her property” (Brontë 37). This would further complicate the discussion of supernaturality and otherness, but the descriptor is later stripped away from her: “The other was as certainly Georgiana: but not the Georgiana I remembered—the slim and fairy-like girl of eleven. This was a full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as waxwork, with handsome and regular features,
languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair” (Brontë 263). Georgina, despite her youthful nastiness, was fairy-like. As an adult, still petty and cruel, she has lost that descriptor. Something has necessarily happened to cause this stripping away.

There are of course the physical descriptors; Jane was and is quite small, while Georgina is now “full-blown.” One possible understanding of the fairy descriptor could be that it only applies to small people, but, as Campbell noted above, that is not really the reason for its usage when ‘petite’ would have sufficed. She is also beautiful, “fair as waxwork,” and in all ways traditionally attractive. But, Georgina, in her youth, was also striking; servants outside the red room Jane was locked in comment that “at any rate, a beauty like Miss Georgiana would be more moving in the same condition” (Brontë 31). Jane, of course, is called a ‘toad’ by the same servant in the same breath. There is still however an element of the physical at play here. The similarities in the way Jane describes Georgina and Blanche are apparent. What is more compelling is perhaps the outright, over the top marriageability Georgina now possesses. Everything in the description combines together to paint the picture of the now highly sought after young woman, “blooming and luxuriant” as well as “voluptuous and buxom” (Brontë 263). These descriptors are descriptors of heavy fertility. In as many words, Brontë is telling the reader that Georgina is now ready and willing to find a husband and start a clan of a family, and she has the figure to match. The reason for this, in the context of the good/ evil woman binary, is that the ‘fairy’ descriptor marks an untamability which was exceedingly common in the female fairy characters in the stories told before the socially
acceptable versions were compiled. Bertha, like Jane, is never tamed. She is put away, but still feared, resented, and never totally under Rochester’s control.

In understanding why Jane seems so foreign to the characters around her, it seems most compelling to think her, as Rochester assesses, a Changeling. Metaphorically, she fulfills the role of this creature: the Changeling was said to be a fairy infant, crib-swapped at birth with an ordinary human infant, who would never be heard from again. The fairy would be reared by the human family, exhibiting strange behavior and acting differently than the humans around it. Eventually, the fairy would return to fairyland, and the family would only then realize the dupe. Jane addresses this herself: “for as to the elves, having sought them in vain among foxglove leaves and bells, under mushrooms and beneath the ground-ivy mantling old wall-nooks, I had at length made up my mind to the sad truth, that they were all gone out of England to some savage country where the woods were wilder and thicker, and the population more scant” (Brontë 26). This is not to say that Jane is literally non-human, but instead that Brontë gives Jane the role of the non-human to gesture towards a path outside of this binary. Jane’s own attempt (and failure) to find her metaphorical ‘people’ further supports this; she sought to be free of a world with only that duality, and, failing to do so, will make do with what she has. Note also the similarities to the ending of the novel, when Jane quite willingly retreats into thick, wild woods, with a population of only a few, where she had earlier imagined the fairies (her ‘people’) having retreated to as a young girl.

This designation, applied by characters in the novel (‘You mocking changeling’), is not merely a happy coincidence, nor is the end of Jane’s uniqueness that she is an
outsider (Brontë 505). Carole Silver argues in Strange and Secret People: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness that the reduction in power of the fairy bride, and the fairy woman in general, was part of what made the fairy tale as acceptable as it was in Victorian England; “By diminishing the claims to superiority of the fairy bride, neutralizing her sexuality...Victorian folklorists rendered her acceptable to themselves and their society” (Silver 105). Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” demonstrates this, as does the gradual narrative downshift from fickle quasi-goddesses to temporary brides (Selkies, Swan Brides) to, finally, the repenting, helpless Mermaid.

Jane is the return of the potent, deterministic fairy, symbolic Changeling which is inserted into an unknowing society. In his Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden Martin Luther muses on the Satanic child-theft, and in his 1891 text The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology Edwin Sidney Hartland relates a deep history of legal cases involving a parent being excused for infanticide if it was under the pretense of trying to expose the Changeling which their human baby had been switched with. Jane Eyre here engages in a bit of meta play; Jane is a Changeling-analogue, but likewise the reader has been hoodwinked, expecting a tamable young woman and receiving the refractory fairy instead. This reality is mirrored in the treatment of Jane by Mrs. Reed and her brood, abusive and angry, and she in turn replies with rages which justify their expectation of who she is.

Brontë invokes the features of this older character archetype by turning back the clock, beginning with contemporary stories and tales, and reverting back to and exposing the still-prevalent fear of female sexuality and determinism via the tales which never
made it to the compilations of popular tales, but which still spread generation to generation by a rich oral tradition. The Changeling is an invading force and preys on the fear of domestic invasion, symbolic of societal invasion. A primal terror that an outsider might become an insider, with all the unknown that comes with such an intrusion. Jane has ‘invaded’ the bildungsroman, a female character no longer content to wallow in passivity or wholesale exclusion. Through the folktale Changeling, *Jane Eyre* blends together the fear of an unstoppable invasion with the slow act of seeing that invasion play out as Jane envisions and then lives out situations and a path of life not standard in the female bildungsroman genre.

The extensive effort Brontë takes in making apparent the binary of good/evil woman by sourcing it in two didactic and popular genres of her time is made even more significant by Jane’s narrative which exists in some sense outside of it, breaking it down. Jane as the Changeling analogue comes with the implicit suggestion that *any* young woman could be fulfilling that same role, inciting the fear that the invasive act has already happened, and that it will continue to happen. The rose-cheeked princesses and damsels and wicked witches are easy enough to identify, but are never true to life. Brontë pens Jane to exist in the tremendous gap between those two stars, suggesting the rest of the constellation. Because this nebula can be traced back through geography and time, always existing on the periphery, the act of perpetually negating the autonomous and powerful female character out of the fairy tale seems to be ultimately sisyphusian. Even in Brontë’s ‘retelling’ of “Beauty and the Beast,” Jane has begun to display the traits and
powers which will drive her to self-determine her destiny in the later chapters of the novel.
The biggest specter looming over the proposed integration of these twin genres is that the sympathetic reading which I perform, which leads to a liberating message, is sourced in texts that reaffirm and perpetuate societal norms. The nineteenth century bildungsroman engages in the gleeful churning of generation after generation of young people who are indoctrinated (and indoctrinate in turn) the dominant mode of thinking and acting, domestically and in society. The fairy tale, taken from the hearth and from the mouths of women, had been made to perform this same function on children, preparing them for the more complicated novels which would continue the same teaching of good and bad, right and wrong. Should not then the fusion of the two only perform an especially cloying affirmation of the standard set of social mores? If Jane Eyre is the sequel to “Beauty and the Beast,” then it would perform just this function. However, there has been a trend in Jane Eyre studies that suggests, through the removal of some of the elements of the fairy tale, the novel becomes a new kind of bildungsroman.

Scholars including Rowe, Paula Sulivan, and Yuriko Notsu have argued that Jane Eyre can be read as the demystification of the fairy tale, leaving behind the bildungsroman form which shows remnants of the fairy tale it once was. Notsu specifically uses the term “Disenchantment” for this generic wood-carving, removing the magic while preserving the moral sentiment, underdog nature of the text, and the
structure. This would source the novel in the female-originated fairy tale tradition, while still explaining its apparent form as Victorian novel. I find this idea of disenchantment less than ideal not because it is inherently invalid, but because it connotes a removal, a lessening. Considering that modern bildungsroman studies are already acutely aware of the shrinking of the genre “under the lens of scholarship...until, like a figure in Wonderland, it threatens to disappear altogether,” it may be more productive to view *Jane Eyre* as engaging in *addition* rather than subtraction (Redfield 41).

This is the crux of the reading of *Jane Eyre* as a fairy tale bildungsroman; it is possible to see Brontë removing elements of one genre to write convincingly another, but also equally possible to see her integrating elements of the fairy tale into an established bildungsroman frame with intent to question and subvert. The existence and identifying traits of a true ‘female bildungsroman’ has been historically in question, with Susanne Howe writing a survey of the bildungsroman in the early twentieth century which totally omitted female-led texts, and feminist critic Susan Fraiman questioning with her very chapter title, “Is There a Female *Bildungsroman*?” (Friaman 1). This is in no small part because eighteenth and early nineteenth century instances of the genre incorporated a set of tenets which have been used to define the bounds of the genre, the vast majority of which were prohibitive to the extent that female characters could not complete all (if any) of them; could a young woman employ radical self-determinism, undergo formal apprenticeship, or test her feet in the waters of tumultuous romance with no social backlash? No. The early generic components of the bildungsroman necessarily precluded heroines. Howe goes further and claims that women in male-centered bildungsromane are
“more or less symbolic of the stages [the protagonist] has reached on his pilgrimage” (Howe 50). They are flat characters compared to the eager, autonomous protagonist, barely more human than a sign on a building marking it as a place of learning or an opportunity for apprenticeship.

Fraiman explains that “apprenticeship seems to imply choice...Wilhelm and his kinsmen look around, ask themselves where their unique talents lie, and self-consciously determine to cultivate those talents” (Fraiman 5). As demonstrated in the whore/madonna binary which permeated early Victorian culture, the forked road does not allow for the plethora of paths available to Wilhelm and his successors. Further still, those paths can be traveled with leisure; Fraiman reads Wilhelm as ambling along, while Jane is undeniably forced into flight. Sarah Maier, who does argue for the existence of a female bildungsroman, still envisions a literary landscape which mirrored Victorian reality, “where boy-children are encouraged to be independent while the girl-children are schooled in dependency” (Maier 319). Further, there lies the impossibility between Fraiman’s notion that a female-led bildungsroman could only occur under extreme tumult and Marianne Hirsch’s tenet for the genre which necessitates that “Society is the novel's antagonist and is viewed as a school of life, a locus for experience. The spirit and values of the social order emerge through the fate of one representative individual” (Hirsch 295). The society is necessary for bildung, but the heroine cannot undergo such a journey because it is impermissible save for harrowing circumstances; this plays out practically when “the entire arc of the literary text is disrupted by the encouragement of young women to remain passive and selfless rather than to become active agents of their own
subjective maturation” (Maier 319). Unable to self-determine but asked to do so, the heroine of romance novels becomes repressed wife, never fulfilling the promise of bildung.

The integration of the fairy tale into this male-dominated paradigm questions the single fork in the road and wonders about a sea of possibility through four fairy tale tenets outlined by Bernheimer, “flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic, and normalized magic,” and the subversive ways which fairy tale logic undoes many of the assumptions of the bildungsroman (Bernheimer 64). In “Beauty and the Beast,” for example, Belle is beautiful and kind, and those are her main character traits; she is flat, and her description abstract. Bernheimer explains that intuitive logic is “a sort of nonsensical sense...first this happened, and then that happened. There is never an explanation of why. In fact the question why does not often arise” (Bernheimer 67-8). Following from this, the reader does not take offense when “This is not logically connected to that, except by syntax, by narrative proximity” (Bernheimer 68). Belle’s father plucks a flower on someone else’s property, so Belle herself must live forever in the castle of a Beast. This feeds into the normalization of fantastical elements; if the narrator says that a rose is magic, or that a spyglass lets the viewer see other places in the world, then it is true and indisputable.

Regarding Jane Eyre, it is most helpful to break these four tenets down into two sets, flatness/abstraction, and intuitive logic/normalized magic. Flatness has been seen in previous chapters; Rochester is Bluebeard or Beast, and Jane must become Blanche or Bertha. With abstraction, “Not many particular, illustrative details are given. The things in fairy tales are described with open language: Lovely. Dead. Beautiful” (Bernheimer
67). Blanche is pure, beautiful. Bertha is tainted, ugly. This should raise objections in any reader who has even perused *Jane Eyre*, because Jane’s depth of character and consciousness transcend fairy tale linearity in manifold ways, just as Rochester transcends simple good or bad. This is precisely the point; the bildungsroman employs flat characters including Wilhelm’s romantic interests or *David Copperfield’s* Edward Murdstone under the pretense that they teach lessons to the reader through the character. Marking signpost points in life and showing ‘true evil’ in the wicked stepfather are hallmarks of the genre. The overt inclusion of fairy tale motifs with these flat characters, however, demonstrates their absurdity; when placed beside flat fairy tale archetypes, the difference between Blanche and the perfect princess dwindles away to nothing.

In this comparison of flat and round characters, Jane stands out as especially exceptional. She calls out to the reader directly, addressing them in the same voice as she narrates her own life. She shirks adjectives typically put to fairy tale characters and flat bildungsroman characters, as she is no beauty, nor is she ugly. She is orphaned, unable to be located in the typical eldest/youngest son/daughter paradigm. She is many things, thus can become many things. The reliance on one-note descriptions for characters defining their entire being causes this linearity, and Jane’s deep character defies it. Because Blanche is named Blanche, the reader can surmise everything about her without additional authorial effort. Blanche sees the fork in the road, and abides by it. Because Jane escapes these linear possibilities, she can in some way transcend the fork.

Thus, the adjacency of the two genres takes the societally affirming natures of both and pits one against the other, leading to a questioning of the validity of those very
affirmations. The depth of characters adjacent to flat characters engenders sympathy, and
disdain for archetypes like Blanche, who could have been portrayed positively if located
in either the bildungsroman or fairy tale context alone (see, for example, Snow White or
Agnes Wickfield). The second pair of narrative tools emerges in the very first sentence of
Jane Eyre, and establishes one of its guiding principles which continues on through to its
final pages. The novel begins, “There was no possibility of taking a walk that
day” (Brontë 10). The novel is narrated in a first-person retrospective style, but there is
no indication of the titular narrator in this sentence. It is important to compare this
opening sentence to similarly first-person narrated bildungsromane of the period. David
Copperfield begins, “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether
that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (Dickens 4). Great
Expectations opens, “My father’s family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name
Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than
Pip” (Dickens 6). The Captain’s Daughter: “My father, Andréj Petròvitch Grineff, after
serving in his youth under Count Münich, had retired in 17—with the rank of senior
major” (Pushkin 1).

Each of these opening sentences locates the reader, at the minimum as in
Pushkin’s novel, with the scale of the novel, and with the voice of its narrating character
connected directly to that character. David’s journey will mark him a hero, or not; Pip
establishes a generational divide which is core to the bildungsroman, and the legacy he
takes up; Pyotr locates himself in history and in his family. Each beginning is rife with
possibility and potentiality. Jane’s first conveyance to the reader is that there is no
possibility (at least no possibility inherent to her world that she is not obliged to create).

Further, the class of bildungsroman with a third person narrator still conveys the same information as the prior examples: Thackeray’s *Pendennis* begins “One fine morning in the full London season, Major Arthur Pendennis came over from his lodgings, according to his custom, to breakfast at a certain Club in Pall Mall, of which he was a chief ornament” (Thackeray 6). Austen’s *Emma*: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (Austen 4). Jane’s introduction of herself, by herself, omits even her own name.

The closest contemporary analogue may be Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, which begins, “A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace” (Eliot 3). There is a geologic conflict occurring here, mentioned before a single character, despite the first-person narration. There is an inhibition, the tide both loving and checking, embracing forcefully. *The Mill on the Floss* begins not with possibility, but with a limitation. The land may only go so far before it is stopped by the water. It is perhaps fitting that Brontë’s work, almost seventeen years senior to Eliot’s, likewise begins with the natural elements inhibiting. It is also true that Eliot’s novel has had similar fairy tale scholarship applied to it (typically, as in Amiel Houser’s writings, likened to “The Ugly Duckling”), and that it has been considered a sort of rewriting of both genres in the same way that *Jane Eyre* can be read as working in a similar way.
The pair of intuitive logic/normalized magic works in these opening words because they issue a proclamation. The water embraces the land; this is an indisputable fact. When Brontë writes that “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day,” there was no possibility of taking a walk (Brontë 10). The language of the fairy tale narrator who proclaims the impossible possible, and dictates logic and narrative, has been put to paper through Jane’s self-narration. *David Copperfield*, like *Jane Eyre*, tells the story of a lived life, with details that have been set in stone at the time of writing. And yet, David narrates tenuously while Jane proclaims. David leaves judgement to the reader, framed by the sentiment that the verdict is pending, but Jane takes an active role in defining what is and is not possible. She therefore transcends normal narrative power by not only self-narrating, but also by taking the reigns of a much more powerful kind of narration in fairy tale narration, which can set laws and mores which do not exist in reality or in realist fiction. Here again the blended genre rears its head; the reader does not question *that* it is impossible to take the walk (employing the power of the fairy tale narrator to define what is and what is not discussible), but still is invited to ask *why* the walk is impossible.

The goalposts have been moved and reversed. In some ways the typical first person bildungsroman narrative performs the literal opposite duty that *Jane Eyre’s* opening sentence performs. Nothing is impossible for the endlessly self-deterministic hero, but the *why* is always subsumed; social convention and ‘common decency’ are implied and encoded, but need not be explicitly written. The first sentence of the novel plays against this presupposition and comments on the hypocrisy of it. By limiting her heroine but still instilling in her authority, Brontë points to this aspect of the
bildungsroman, that heroines do not share by default the infinite pool of autonomy that their male counterparts partake of, and Jane Eyre primes the reader to ask questions and negotiate this societal reality. This can only be accomplished so succinctly and effectively by willingly giving up the language of the first-person bildungsroman, and taking up the mantle of a different type of narrator entirely.

This opening sentence also engages in the same type of literary play which Brontë engages in as outlined in earlier chapters with Rochester and his fairy tale analogues; at the point it sits in the text, this single sentence is removed from the context which will later give it color and lead to new understanding. It is indeed funny; the reader expects the young girl to want to go outside, but she herself “never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons” (Brontë 10). The narrator steps properly into the center of the novel, and Jane Eyre looks to be operating ‘correctly’ in the standard narrative style. The proclamation still lingers and looms, however, over the rest of the novel. In proclaiming an indisputable limitation, Brontë has already broken away from one of the hallmarks of the bildungsroman, limits set only to be broken, and has done so in the very first line of prose. The novel continues as if such a proclamation had never been made, but, just like the fairy traits inscribed in Jane, it suggests the motion of the narrative well before it has actually played out.

Jane invades the human-dominant realist novel as a Changeling analogue, but also invades the realist narrative mode with powers which should be impermissible; she adopts a non-realist narrative perspective, and thus gives herself powers which should be precluded to her. Smajic’s suggestion that the very language of the supernatural requires
the same language as that of a spy infiltrating the nation is key here; the fairy tale has invaded the bildungsroman, and the male narrator has been replaced by a young woman who subverts the conventions assigned to female characters in realist novels. Just as the juxtaposition of flat and round characters calls scrutiny to the conventions of the deployment of flat archetypes, the narrative voice Jane takes up questions the merit and necessity of realist auto-narration. She is at once the absolute center of the text she narrates, but also capable of proclaiming universal truths like an omniscient, omnipotent fairy tale narrator. In this, Brontë can also redefine and call attention to the morals and lessons conveyed by the genre she has Jane narrate, passing on a different message even when the actual plot of the novel still has adheres to the journeyings of the traditional bildungsroman. Jane still conveys things ‘as they are,’ but with the addition of the capacity to rethink previously established social mores through her hybrid narration style.

Perhaps the greatest ‘infiltration’ of all is that Jane, fairy analogue, creeps into the text as the young, helpless orphan. She proclaims, but then is beaten and humiliated by her adoptive family. As outlined in Bettelheim’s discussion of the elements in the Animal Groom cycle of tales, the fairy woman must enter and exit the tale before it really even begins, and yet Jane (and Bertha) lingers. In the fairy tale, this removal of powerful female figures serves a functional end: fairy women have frightening power over male characters, and must not linger so that their influences can be overcome and male dominance and heteronormative futurity reasserted through a happy marriage. Jane defies this by entering the text and becoming its beating heart, totally inseparable from it; she cannot be shunted. So, once the other characters find themselves bewitched, enamored,
and otherwise unable to look away from Jane, it is clear that it is already too late, that
Jane has and will continue to impact her localized reality in the novel without any
possibility of her removal. This was ultimately made possible, and had its seeds laid, in
Jane’s first sentence of narration; the reader has become complicit in Jane’s expression of
narrative power by this innocuous decree.

It would be an oversimplification to see Jane as a reformed fairy witch, or the first
cracter campaigning for proto-feminism through autonomy. The ending of the narrative
itself conforms to the norms of the bildungsroman, seemingly returning onto the
predetermined track. But, it is true that Jane expresses radical autonomy in alignment
with those fairy characters, in the center of a development narrative rather than at its
borders hindering it. Society is in a way the antagonist of the novel, but Jane has been
gifted with the tools to actively fight against it instead of the submissive nature required
to acquiesce to it. It would also be an oversimplification to claim that Jane has
determined every detail of her happy ending, or that Rochester has become wholly
dependent on Jane, but the ending of Jane Eyre certainly seems to suggest to the reader
that Maier’s concept of female dependency and male independence is being challenged in
the final chapters. In a particularly fitting connection between the early text, young Jane
looking at herself in the mirror, and the ending, Jane emerging into the clearing where
Ferndean sits, she imagines “ferny dells in moors,” and casts herself as a fairy emerging
in that locale before the eyes of travelers who have lost their way (Brontë 18). So, Jane
has seen a fantasy in the looking-glass, and has made it happen.
The supernatural which creeps up to but never into Jane Eyre is realized, finally, in Jane. The magic of the text is there, understated, questioned even by Jane herself (its very source). The magic has been normalized both in the way Bernheimer intended to convey, but also in the literal sense that the magic has been integrated into the genre of normality, of ordinary everyday life. Jane imagines the magic and the fantastical having left England long ago, but here she remains, the last bastion of something that has no place in the traditional bildungsroman. Brontë, despite her many machinations which led to Jane’s radical autonomy and unique self-determinism, is loyal to the premise of both her chosen genres which dictates that, in the end, there must be some kind of reconciliation between her heroine and society. Because of the work performed throughout the novel, this reconciliation need not be a reunion, and the bildungsroman heroine can be both happily wed without a humiliating position of subservience which would have stung all the more after her many flights from entrapment.

The final retreat to Ferndean stages Jane willingly removing herself from the metaphorical stage of the bildungsroman out in visible society, only leaving Ferndean infrequently to visit family. If this can be seen as shunting the radical female from the text, then it is willing and performed by Jane herself, and does not scrub her nor her voice from the novel; St. John’s letter provides concluding words, but he is marked for death and is hopeless. Jane, meanwhile, lives in an endlessly wild and free, remote locale where she no longer suffers under the judgmental eyes of the people who fill out Brontë’s world. The fairy woman has ‘left,’ but she takes with her the object of her affection and continues to live and thrive. No words or thoughts are spared for Blanche and her ilk; the
conventions of the fairy tale require that the fairy woman leave, but when she is the
center, she takes the lens of the novel with her.

This final location for Jane in the wilds of England can be read as a ‘fairy tale
household,’ as removed from society as it is possible to be. The Victorian house is
typically read as a microcosm for society, and indeed Thornfield is such a microcosm.
But, with only a minimalist staff and without the intention to leave very often, Ferndean
seems more like an intimate, fitting abode. The name suggests, from its latin root, that
this wild place is the chief place to be amongst the natural grottos still remaining in
England. There is no intention from Jane nor Rochester to ever fully reintegrate, and the
thought seems almost absurd; here, they have found happiness, and out in the world await
only troubles. This ending is, in my view, a renegotiation of what was once
foundationally set in stone. The heroine must be married, but here it is to a suitor of her
explicit choosing, and only after he has become more suitable. She becomes a mother, but
only on her own terms, in her own place, away from prying eyes. She remains fiercely
independent, financially and spiritually. All made possible, ironically, because Brontë
recognized and used elements from two generic traditions which historically prohibited
the above.

It will still remain a point of contention whether or not a female bildungsroman
can even exist as such; the term bildungsroman is so loaded and fraught with contention
that it may be true, as Fraiman argues, that it is invariably tied to a male model of
development. In this case, a new term perhaps ought to be coined, or the more generic
‘development narrative’ put in place, to incorporate female development under the same
umbrella. I will posit that Brontë, without the knowledge of the almost two centuries of literary criticism which would follow, was using Jane to think through the earliest germs of this ongoing conversation, at the crossroads of these definitions. By incorporating the female-originated fairy tale into the male-dominated bildungsroman, Brontë readopts the fairy tale from the male re-tellers she would have been familiar with in her youth, while also representing the development of young women in ways which bestow upon them competence and autonomy.
In the many decades between the first publishing of *Jane Eyre* and the current literary landscape, the typical form of the bildungsroman has undergone many changes. First to static and anti-developmental plots, and even foraying into the actively anarchistic. With the full span of that history on display, it would be easy to dismiss *Jane Eyre* as another iteration of the classical form of the genre, a single (albeit exceptional) gear in the propaganda machine that the nineteenth century English bildungsroman is stereotyped to be. In some ways, the novel does show its age; Bertha and the colonial perspective are scrubbed clean to make way for the happy ending, and the marriage between Jane and Rochester seems a bygone conclusion even as Jane experiments with an alternative household with her cousins. *Jane Eyre* is, as Jed Esty puts it, a bildungsroman entrenched in the national era of the genre, not the global era which would follow on the tails of the Victorian period.

Brontë subscribes to many of the tropes and plot devices of this era of the bildungsroman, but deviates from them meaningfully with regards to one of the biggest assumptions of the genre, that the society and the empire built upon the land is the locus and crux of development. There is no Brontëan London to speak of. Jane moves through the space associated with the development novel, from childhood home to finishing school to vocation, but shuns the social world at Thornfield, the closest analogue to a big city in *Jane Eyre*. In this regard, Brontë does seem to be engaging with the stereotypical
basis of the national era of the bildungsroman. Although reality and the passing of history would pivot the bildungsroman in a different, more global direction, the turning inward at the end *Jane Eyre* is worth perhaps more consideration in understanding its rich afterlife.

The wilderness retreat to Ferndean, and the narrative work to reach it, hint at a more tethered relationship to the land itself, and the centuries of development in the ecology, civilization, and psychology of England. *Jane Eyre* ends in a timeless way, but not in a way willingly blind to the centuries of external forces which shaped the circumstances in England at the time of its writing. Indeed, the reclamation of the fairy tale, and of the fairy character, suggests that Brontë is aware that her bildungsroman depends intimately on the land beneath Jane’s feet, and the culture and folktales which were so tied to the people of that land. London seems in comparison a transient, ever-changing thing, even as in other bildungsromane it represents an eternal truth, rooted forever in literal and symbolic space as a paragonic metropole. The tales of the land told by word of mouth and passed on generation after generation have lived against all odds, and as they seep into novels like *Jane Eyre*, will continue to live. By looking backwards in time and back towards a genre of childhood rather than young adulthood, Brontë makes the comparatively recent development of the English bildungsroman seem locked in its historical moment instead of perpetually applicable and all-encompassing, while the old fairy stories of the moors and dells of the British isles become once again subversive and new.

*Jane Eyre* does not end with a true recognition of the global scale of the development novel, nor the reader recognizing that development was impossible all along.
in the circumstances of the novel, but Brontë’s intentional deviations from the conventions of the bildungsroman still hold merit. Perhaps because the deck was stacked against a literary heroine and the female author who wrote her into being, *Jane Eyre* becomes introspective and turns away from the outside world in a symbolic rejection of the promise of the bildungsroman with all its glitter and gold. By the logic of the fairy tale, the narrator says she is content, so she is content. She is content despite not subscribing to the ideology of the motion from rural to urban, from unruly to tamed, and thus has opened a new path by writing it into being with narration. Every aspect of the novel, brick by brick, lay the foundations which will eventually give Jane the power to self-determine.

The fairy tale bildungsroman is interwoven with the history of the people who have come before, and calls forth the voices that have been suppressed by reigniting the genre they once told. It cycles back through the plots of fairy tales and folktales even before them, demonstrating that the new novel plots find their origins in those genres which cannot be totally erased. Perhaps Brontë’s greatest magic trick of all was taking the bildungsroman and reintroducing to it the fairy tale, which had become a male-written vehicle for morality, using the clashing edges of what seemed to be two genres in unilateral agreement to subvert the expectations of both. The typical bildungsroman props society up and acts as didactic tool to continue its success, but Brontë’s narrative operates using the language and form of that genre to question the validity of the lessons being taught.
The above analysis may seem at points too optimistic, or too sympathetic, especially in light of the focus in bildungsroman studies on the stories of people and places which novels like *Jane Eyre* are typically understood as hiding from view. I believe however that it is important to remember that Brontë does envision a different kind of bildungsroman from the bildungsroman set in and wholly dependent on the heart of a global empire, even if the novel is still in some ways dependent on its local space in England. This intent to make something new, to consciously reject the given form of the genre and the standard protagonist, as well as the integration of a different set of governing principles for narration, may pardon some of these concerns. *Jane Eyre* should be seen as an addition to the bildungsroman canon, but also an early example later followed up on by Modernist and Post-Modernist writers of questioning the genre from within it.

The deployment of fairy tale tropes and ultimately fairy tale logic helps shape *Jane Eyre* into the novel that it is. These additions to the established bildungsroman help break down the binary of realist and fantastical, weaving the development novel and the fantastical together into one coherent whole. Brontë’s narrative leads the reader down a path which seems familiar, but which soon veers off course, and which conceals until the reader has gone too far that their ways of approaching the novel have rendered them blind to her machinations. Jane, not Rochester, is the source of the fairy tale subsumptions in the text, and it is Jane who has the power to create and to decree. *Jane Eyre* is a bildungsroman, but also in many ways a fairy tale. Brontë transports the reader to a narrative world of childhood, with female voices reemerging to the forefront and
dictating truths about the world inside the novel, while simultaneously making them aware of the social impossibility of female development within the male frame. it is perhaps this juxtaposition, absolute authority adjacent relative social powerlessness, which lies at the core of Brontë’s female bildungsroman and of the representation of female development in Victorian literature.
Appendix

Figure 1. Aarne-Thompson-Uther Fairy Tale Types
Figure 2. Gustave Dore’s “Bluebeard” (1862)
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