READING SINCERITY IN THE NOVELS OF ANN RADCLIFFE AND CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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
Master of Arts
in English

By

Shirley M. Lung, B.A.

Washington, DC
April 18, 2012
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1
Sincerity and Suspicion in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. 9
Restoring Sincerity in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* ......................... 33
Conclusion: Exploring Insincerity in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* ............... 74
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 81
INTRODUCTION

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

-Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

In a letter to critic G.H. Lewes, Charlotte Brontë writes of her fellow woman writer Jane Austen:

I have not seen “Pride and Prejudice” till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. These observations will probably irritate you, but I shall run the risk. (Gaskell 274)

Brontë characterizes Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* as almost too-neat and exaggeratedly passive, desiring instead a landscape beyond “elegant but confined houses.” Brontë juxtaposes extensive natural imagery with fenced-in estates, demonstrating the “accurate” but sterile quality of Austen’s novel. For Brontë, Austen’s deep immersion in cultural practices causes her to ignore the natural, basing her observations on social constructions rather than pre-constructed, unmediated images. Despite Austen’s commitment to identifying oppressive or discriminatory rituals, she offers in Brontë’s reading only a surface narrative that fails to question the authority of the very institutions that oppress, reproducing structures of patriarchy in new forms. In contrast, Brontë’s own works take a step back to view the entire social establishment as culturally-constructed and therefore, inauthentic. For her, authenticity and sincerity derive from the natural, which should be the only regulator of behavior. Culture, then, represents an obstacle to sincerity because it forces unnatural expectations upon individuals. Therefore, Brontë views
patriarchal expectations of behavior as oppressive because it stands in the way of achieving a sincere self.

I use this interplay of the natural and the cultural as one of my central ways to consider sincerity as it relates to the female imagination. Lionel Trilling raises one definition of sincerity as “the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one’s own self” (5), which will be my definition of sincerity in this project. Such a definition appears straightforward but belies many questions. Which self, then, is the “true” self? Brontë’s Jane Eyre professes that one’s nature is unchanging, so only one true self exists and that self has its origins in nature. For Brontë, that one’s nature remains immutable anchors the definition of sincerity because only under that condition can one consistently be true to one’s self. In other words, one’s sincerity depends upon the reflection of one’s nature in one’s gestures, emotions, and actions; therefore, one must have a singular, essential, definitive characteristic to show in one’s daily life. At some point in history, sincerity took on a moral significance, which led to the pinning down of representations of good and evil.

Such representations arose from the development of a national culture, in which citizens conceptualized themselves as a part of a larger symbolic body that shared the same values. During the time in which Ann Radcliffe and the Brontë sisters were writing, the word “culture” itself shifted in definition. As Raymond Williams notes,

Before [1780], [culture] had meant, primarily the “tending of natural growth,” and then, by analogy, a process of human training. But this latter use, which had been a culture of something, was changed, in the nineteenth century, to a culture as such, a thing in itself. It came to mean, first, “a general state or habit of the mind,” having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean “the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole.” Third, it came to mean “the general body of the
“arts.” Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean “a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual.” (xiv)

The growing specification of culture demonstrates the move towards an established common code of morality and behavior. For my project, I examine the pinning down of the moral aspect of sincerity, creating cultural representations of ethical behavior. As culture complicates a word so tied to instinct and nature, does sincerity bifurcate into “avowals” and “actual feeling,” no longer intersecting and no longer truly “sincere?” Indeed, in a culture where patriarchy constantly produces and reproduces itself in different forms, can women be true to themselves? I specifically investigate the effect of the male-authored representations of female propriety on the female imagination. It is possible, that is, to have a sincere female imagination if it is always mediated by men? Trilling, for instance, describes sincerity as a primarily male project:

And yet at a certain point in history certain men and classes of men conceived that the makings of this effort [to be sincere] was of supreme importance in the moral life, and the value they attached to the enterprise of sincerity became a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years. (6)

Rather than producing legions of plain-speaking men and women, this “enterprise of sincerity” resulted in the rise of its opposite, artifice. Sincerity and artifice became not only linguistic counterparts but also moral inverses. As a result, sincerity signified all that was good while artifice represented evil. Such strict alignments allowed little room for subtle moral shifts that failed to conform to the paradigm. Therefore, several misalignments occurred as the generally-sincere were shown also to practice harmless forms of artifice that Trilling calls, “innocent feigning” (14). These incongruities demonstrate not only the instability of such moral categories but also the need for a reevaluation of sincerity and its vexed moral implications. In my thesis, I examine the gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe and the Brontë sisters for strains of resistance
against the cultural conception of sincerity and possible redefinitions that gesture towards natural behaviors.

I chose novels written in the gothic genre because of its ties with female authorships and its built-in narrative opportunities for not only female resistance but also reconfigurations of moral hierarchies. The gothic itself, in its relative or stock characters and conventional plot structures, appears to be a genre built out of artifice, but such obvious narrative conventions allows for rewriting. Jerrold Hogle discusses the contradictions within the genre:

The reason that Gothic others or spaces can abject myriad cultural and psychological contradictions, and thereby confront us with those anomalies in disguise is because those spectral characters, images, and settings harbor the hidden reality that oppositions of all kinds cannot maintain their separations, that each “lesser term” is contained in its counterpart and that difference really arises by standing against and relating to interdependency. (11)

Populated by strictly enforced moral oppositions (good/evil, sincere/artificial, protagonist/antagonist), the gothic has a clear narrative trajectory in which good will always triumph over evil. Commonly, the entrapped heroine will overthrow her captors, restoring the social and moral hierarchies of the beginning. However, that surface tale belies another narrative. As Hogle notes, these oppositions collapse into one another, unearthing the “hidden reality” that those in authority seek to bury. The artifice of the gothic comes from the fact that its ostensible oppositions conceal that they do not actually exist, exposing what Leslie Fiedler calls, “a deathly chaos” (Fiedler, qtd in Hogle 5). Moreover, the strict enforcement of these categories reveals the anxiety and fear that evil is closer to good than anticipated.

Having only male models of female psychology, women writers of the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century found themselves in a bind that proved dangerous. Sandra Gilbert
and Susan Gubar describe the problems that early women writers had: “...such self-denial may become even more self-destructive when the female author finds herself creating other works of fiction that subordinate other women by perpetuating a morality that sanctifies or vilifies all women into submission” (69). Because patriarchal structures are so widespread and amorphous, these women writers ran the risk of unwittingly reproducing such oppressive fiction by following male models. However, luckily for these women writers, the collapsible oppositions of the gothic provide ways to subvert patriarchal structures in barely perceptible ways. Gilbert and Gubar describe the way that successful female authors interweave messages of female empowerment and criticisms of patriarchy into seemingly inoffensive texts: “In effect, such women have created submerged meanings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, ‘public’ content of their works, so that their literature could be read and appreciated even when its vital concern with female dispossession and disease was ignored” (72).

As a pioneer of the gothic genre, Ann Radcliffe established many of its common tropes. Because she wrote during a time when women writers had what Elaine Showalter calls, an “uneasy” relationship with their “professional role” (17), she frames many of her stories with a surface narrative and a hidden or submerged narrative. By using such a structure, Radcliffe seems to follow male-authored models, but she also begins to develop her own model within the hidden narrative, which is one of the first signs of a developing female-authored female imagination that goes beyond the basic offerings of male authors. Gilbert and Gubar note that early male-authored representations of women only provide them with two choices: monster or angel (46). The domestically-inclined and self-effacing angel keeps the hearth warm for her husband, happy to retreat into the private sphere. In contrast, the monstrous woman exemplifies
excess in both desire and appearance. Radcliffe’s gothic utilizes both characters, but the opposition blurs as the hidden and the surface narrative intersect. Suddenly, the angel behaves decidedly un-angelically as she leaves the seclusion of the private sphere for public spaces. The monstrous woman, in contrast, becomes almost heroic as she acts to put her plans into action. The conflating of categories emphasizes the lack of control that patriarchy has over its creations.

Here, it is useful to take up Judith Butler’s conception of the performative: “The call is formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject” (121). In our context, authority figures call women into existence by using the morally-freighted labels of angel or monster. Before such a call, women lack a viable social identity. However, once they are called into existence, women are hailed into an injured subjectivity. Butler describes the inability of the performative to contain the subjects that it calls into existence: “It is this constitutive failure of the performative, this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience” (122). Once women are called into existence, they are enabled to resist further violation within the space between the call and the effect. Radcliffe uses a similar method to rewrite the angels and monsters of her novels.

Radcliffe’s novels question the sincerity of these representations of women because they fail to encapsulate all of the characteristics of the individual women. If the avowal (the representation) does not agree with the actual feelings (non-representative qualities), do the patriarchal visions of women doom them to insincerity? Furthermore, Radcliffe highlights the difficulty that women endured because they had to choose either to be true to themselves and risk the label of monster or suppress aspects of themselves in order to fit into the representation of
angel. By adding a hidden narrative, Radcliffe compromises the patriarchal representations and quietly subverts such structures. However, according to Butler’s framework, Radcliffe’s characters depend upon male models in order to come into existence. Therefore, these characters can only function subversively, which also proves to be problematic for the female imagination because it implies that it is simply anti-male rather than specifically and distinctively female.

In an analogous example, Judith Butler describes the heterosexual appropriation of drag:

To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that ‘imitation’ is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. (125)

Similarly, by implying that resistance is only a reactionary response to the male-configuration of the female imagination still subordinates women and privileges the male perspective. Butler draws another connection between female sincerity and the feminist claim that drag is misogyny:

The problem with the analysis of drag as only misogyny is, of course, that it figures male-to-female transexuality, cross-dressing, and drag as male homosexual activities—which they are not always—and it further diagnoses male homosexuality as rooted in misogyny. The feminist analysis thus makes male homosexuality about women, and one might argue that at its extreme, this kind of analysis is in fact a colonization in reverse, a way for feminist women to make themselves into the center of male homosexual activity. (127)

Like feminist project to “reverse colonize” drag, discovering female sincerity in male-authored structures implies that resistance only manifests itself in the form of women hating men. The problem of such a characterization is that it rejects the fact that women have agendas other than defying men, focusing solely on injury and violation rather than any kind of distinct imagination-building that does not desire to be resistance.
In contrast, Charlotte Brontë creates female imaginations that discard the male mold altogether. While resistant to patriarchy, Brontë does not devote her entire energies to subverting patriarchy. For Brontë, the female imagination is distinct from male models because male writers cannot produce authentic female characters. A firm believer in that being true to oneself means being true to one’s nature, Brontë asserts that one simply cannot authentically reproduce another’s subjectivity. Writing in the first-person narrative point-of-view, Brontë allows her readers to immerse themselves in the female imagination, an individual and distinct imagination. Through Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre, Brontë presents her characters’ sincerity through their unsuppressed emotions and desires.
Anxiety underlies Ann Radcliffe’s novels even though a triumphant ending for her heroines is all but assured. While these female characters encounter hazardous situations in the plot, this lingering doubt represents the actual threat to their social and psychological selves. Because the dangers are never fully realized, it is this possibility of danger that serves to demonstrate the uncertainty in the lives of women under patriarchy. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar identify eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary and cultural representations of women as either “monster” or “angel” (29). Born of male anxiety, these clear-cut demarcations and distinct moral categories seek to contain women in what Gilbert and Gubar call “external lineaments” (15), ignoring and repressing their interior life. As a result, the pressure to portray the sincerely good “angel of the house” leads to a superficial representation at best. The woman writer, especially, has to contend with these socially-constructed categories of herself when she begins the process of writing and also when she herself creates female characters. Stepping out of the domestic sphere, the professional woman writer has to tread carefully in a society where “women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (Gilbert and Gubar 53).

These feelings of anxiety and fear that female writers experience manifest themselves in covert ways in their writing. Because women were long accustomed to repressing any conflict that may endanger their portrayal of the virtue in their private lives, female writers are especially alert to boundaries between the exterior and the interior. As Ellen Moers writes, “Despair is hardly the exclusive province of any sex or class in our age, but to give visual form to the fear of
self, to hold anxiety up to the Gothic mirror of the imagination, may well be more common in the writings of women than of men” (107). It is my argument of this chapter that Ann Radcliffe “[gives] visual form to the fear of self” through her representation of sincerity in her novels. She employs the same rigid moral categories of good and evil that the gothic often showcases, but she uses them to clandestinely describe the unexplored female interiority. In other words, she creates a world that splits the surface model of sincerity into one that has both an interior and exterior. The surface displays of virtue that patriarchy forces women into portraying becomes only one half of the story in Radcliffe’s gothic. By separating sincerity into a surface component and a depth component, Radcliffe is able to explore a female psychology outside of patriarchal restrictions.

In her novels, Radcliffe relies upon the distinct separation of good and evil as the “Gothic mirror” to the angel/monster categories that women have to inhabit in society. These categories of good and evil fail to hold up as characters exhibit both positive and negative qualities. While the narrator vigorously attempts to police the boundary, the failure is not unintentional. By constructing a moral framework that imitates the reality of women, Radcliffe sets up the groundwork for opposition and resistance against the real-life categories women have to contend with. The collapse of the moral framework that the narrator tries to enforce, therefore, is itself an act of resistance that demonstrates the inherent flaws of a strict system of classification.

It is the presence of suspicion that complicates these heavily-freighted moral categories. The narrator introduces insincerity initially by presenting antagonists as artificers. Once doubt enters the narrative, sincerity becomes subject to suspicion. Along with the narrator’s suspicion, the characters suspect each other. Antagonists constantly and wrongly suspect the sincerity of
protagonists while protagonists also persist in suspecting antagonists. Suspecting sincerity, wrongly or accurately, creates a space in the narrative for ambiguity, which the narrator attempts to ignore. The questions that suspicion raises highlight the complex nature of sincerity, and more importantly, the fact that sincerity does not appear on the surface. In fact, Radcliffe’s mode of resistance is almost entirely beneath the surface. It is ambiguity that hints at an embedded and hidden narrative behind this one. Ambiguity reveals that resistance is two-fold. First, the superficial moral framework collapses to illustrate the untenable quality of strict categories. Second, once that framework collapses, it exposes the presence of the secondary hidden narrative. Within this narrative is a code of ethics that governs not only the characters, but also the narrator. The presence of this code of ethics is never directly stated, but it oversees all of the moral developments within the plot. In this way, it has a kind of ghostly presence; it is ubiquitous but untraceable. This code of ethics helps answer the question that Susan Wolstenholme asks: “If [the woman writer] can speak only from a masculine-coded perspective, where (if anywhere) is there room for subversion? For alterity?” (7, my emphasis). The ghostly nature of this code allows “subversion” and “alterity” within the hidden narrative. It allows women to speak “as a woman” (Wolstenholme 7). It not only presents itself in direct opposition to a strict morality that seeks to contain the subjectivity of women, but also presents and imagines alternatives to patriarchy.

The code of ethics not only upholds the ambiguous nature of morality but also casts doubt upon the judgments of the narrator. Because Radcliffe’s novels are written from the third-person omniscient point-of-view, we have to assume there is truth in what the narrator says while simultaneously doubting other parts of narrative judgment. While selecting parts of the narrative
to distrust or trust may appear arbitrary at first glance, I think that ambiguity also serves to
identify moments of judgment as opposed to moments of observation. When the narrator does
not gratuitously praise a protagonist or denigrate an antagonist, his comments lessen and
narrative intention becomes uncertain. In these moments, reading sincerity takes on extra
importance. It is here that the hidden narrative makes its appearance.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the narrator initially classifies Madame Cheron (later
Madame Montoni) as an antagonist who obstructs her niece Emily’s relationship with
Valancourt. However, later, Madame Cheron’s moral position becomes much more ambiguous
and less defined. Her character takes on emotional layers and develops an interior life, which the
role of angel of the house did not permit women of the time. Radcliffe alters patriarchal
standards in favor of a society that allows Madame Cheron to openly resist her husband and her
oppressor. Madame Cheron enters the novel as Emily’s guardian after her father’s death. Her
first descriptions characterize her as superficial and frivolous. For example, she accidentally
happens upon an impromptu meeting between Emily and Valancourt. Described as an
occasionally cruel character, Madame Cheron’s accusations imply Emily behaved without
propriety by encouraging Valancourt:

> “Who is that young man?” said [Emily’s] aunt, in an accent which equally implied
inquisitiveness and censure; “some idle admirer of yours, I suppose? But I believed,
niece, you had a greater sense of propriety than to have received the visits of any young
man in your present unfriended situation. Let me tell you, the world will observe those
things; and it will talk—ay, and very freely too.” (*Udolpho* 113)

Madame Cheron appears to be concerned with her niece’s well-being when she calls attention to
her questionable behavior, yet her tone betrays other motivations. Her “inquisitiveness” at
discovering Emily in a compromised situation reveals her joy, rather than genuine disapproval. By affecting an air of superiority, Madame Cheron feigns an appearance of moral misgivings in order to conceal her true delight. As a result, Madame Cheron’s exposed insincerity casts doubt upon her actual moral state while Emily’s actual propriety frees her from any suspicion.

Revealing that the angel/monster categories are never far behind criticisms of female propriety, the content of Madame Cheron’s speech warns Emily of the dangers associated with the failure to appear angelic. However, instead of merely identifying this commonly-circulated piece of advice as useful and practical, Radcliffe analyzes its implications, specifically the problem of its very practicality. She demonstrates that it, interestingly and ironically, aligns morality with appearance by emphasizing that “the world will observe” Emily’s perceived lack of propriety. These angel/monster categories credit only the surface properties of morality. Surveillance, then, becomes the visual function of society, which serves to police the boundary between propriety and impropriety with threats of defamation. By enforcing morality through superficial interpretations of sincerity, “the world” finds itself implicated in the act of not looking deep enough, of only seeing the surface. The fault, then, lies with the world, not with Emily. In addition, by making Madame Cheron the mouthpiece for these words for caution, Radcliffe illustrates not only the dangers of accepting shallow interpretations of the truth but also the need to look beneath the surface for sincerity.

Luckily for Emily, the narrator observes the previous scene between Valancourt and Emily, proving Madame Cheron’s speculation to be false. Moreover, the third-person omniscient narrator sees Valancourt’s interiority and ascertains the innocence of their exchange:
Valancourt kissed her hand, and still lingered, unable to depart, while Emily sat silently, with her eyes bent on the ground; and Valancourt gazed on her, considered that it would soon be impossible for him to recall, even in his memory, the exact resemblance of the beautiful countenance he then beheld. (*Udolpho* 112)

The importance of interiority lies in its ability to reveal innocence below the surface. Madame Cheron judges the interaction between Emily and Valancourt at face value, assuming that they were engaging in inappropriate behavior. In contrast, Radcliffe promotes the opposite idea by locating sincerity in the depths rather than on the surface. As a result, Emily can enter generally forbidden spaces without fear of monstrous behavior. The knowledge of Emily’s behavior and Valancourt’s harmless intentions invalidates both categories of angel and monster while it expands the range of actions that women can perform. Unlike actions that change depending upon circumstance, sincerity is immutable because it is rooted in intention. It is the intentions of both antagonists and protagonists that define them as antagonists or protagonists, not their behaviors or actions. In other words, Valancourt’s thoughts of Emily’s beauty exonerate him of wrongdoing despite the fact that it may be socially improper for the two youths to meet without a chaperone. Likewise, Madame Cheron’s self-satisfaction upon discovering the two of them in what “the world” would interpret as an illicit act proves her superficiality even if her words suggest her concern for Emily.

Later in the same scene, Madame Cheron tellingly gives short speech with a starkly opposite message:

“Oh, then, this it seems is a younger brother!” exclaimed her aunt, “and of course a beggar. A very fine tale, indeed! And so my brother took a fancy to this young man after only a few days’ acquaintance? But that was so like him! In his youth he was always taking these likes and dislikes, when no other person saw any reason for them at all: nay, indeed, I have often thought that the people he disapproved were much more agreeable than those he admired. But there is no accounting for tastes. He was always so much
influenced by people’s countenances! Now I, for my part, have no notion of this; it is all ridiculous enthusiasm. What has a man’s face to do with his character? Can a man of good character help having a disagreeable face?”—which last sentence Madame Cheron delivered with the decisive air of a person who congratulates herself on having made a grand discovery, and believes the question to be unanswerably settled. (Udolpho 115)

Here, Madame Cheron contradicts her focus on appearances. She emphasizes “good character” over agreeable face, showing an ostensibly inconsistent message. In this speech, she implies that meaning lies beneath the surface. Interestingly enough, it does not appear that Madame Cheron distrusts all countenances, only agreeable and handsome faces, which she seems to believe, belie a untrustworthy nature. This detail is integral to finding consistency in both her arguments. When she happens to see Emily and Valancourt in a compromising situation, she trusts it. However, when it comes to handsome faces (like Valancourt’s), she searches for something contradictory under the exterior. This suspicion of visually-pleasing objects and surfaces also indirectly calls the image of the angel into question. The narrator never suspects Emily’s angelic nature, so Madame’s Cheron’s suspicion does not wound her reputation. What, then, would be the purpose of Madame Cheron’s curious disdain of seemingly perfect appearances? I think that this message declares the image of the angel to be defunct. The effect of this renunciation is not to revoke Emily’s good deeds or kind temperament, but rather, it does the opposite. By liberating Emily from such superficial representations of sincerity, Radcliffe and Madame Cheron give Emily the possibility of being sincere. By discovering Emily to have motivations and intentions beneath her pretty countenance, she can be a sincerely good character rather than one that the narrator merely labels as sincere.
The second part of Madame Cheron’s speech serves to demonstrate her own motivations: the narrator tells us that she assumes an air of self-congratulation, highlighting her selfish desires and ambitions from the beginning of their conversation: “Madame Cheron would proceed, with all the self-importance of a person to whom power is new” (*Udolpho* 113). It appears that Madame Cheron seeks only to satisfy her desire for power and status. Because she is Emily’s aunt and guardian, Madame Cheron wields power over her, but as seen in most of Radcliffe’s novels, the ties and obligations of family relationships do not hold when the one who has power seeks to dispossess or harm the one who does not. In this instance, Madame Cheron uses her power to shame Emily. She seems willing to say anything to attain that feeling of superiority over Emily. While barely noticeable, this persistent desire to be better than Emily plays an important role in the narrative. Madame Cheron’s speeches force the narrator to compare the two of them, making her a foil to Emily. However, by identifying Madame Cheron as a foil, the narrator also identifies her as a heroine who, unlike Emily, openly resists Montoni. While she is not the heroine of the primary narrative, she becomes the heroine of this hidden narrative, demonstrating ways to combat patriarchy despite the judgment of the narrator and the fury of Montoni.

As a character who the narrator designates as an antagonist, though not the most harmful one, Madame Cheron’s rebellion becomes difficult for the narrator to describe. Instead, the narrator opts to characterize her as only inconsistent rather than discover the importance of her ostensible inconsistencies. The narrator later distinguishes tendency to debate meaninglessly as a fixture of Madame Cheron’s (by now, Madame Montoni’s) nature:
[Madame Cheron]…had a disposition which delighted in contradictions, and which taught her, when unpleasant circumstances were offered to her understanding, not to inquire into their truth, but to seek for their arguments by which she might make them appear false. Long habit had so entirely confirmed this natural propensity, that she was not conscious of possessing it. (Udolpho 315)

Madame Montoni’s pleasure in winning arguments and finding contradictions rather than pursue truth serve to highlight her lack of heroic qualities. While the narrator criticizes Madame Montoni and further injures her reputation, the narrator also more subtly labels these behaviors as unscrupulous. Rather than vilifying Madame Montoni, the importance of this observation is the establishment of dissimulation as negative. By doing so, the narrator, unwittingly, draws attention to the plight of women contained within the narrow bounds of angelic behavior. Madame Montoni’s manipulation of arguments only mimics the manipulation that women have to perform in order to appear angelic. In identifying falsification as negative, the novel seeks to undermine and destabilize the moral framework that narrator upholds. Like most forms of resistance in the novel, this strain is also indirect and hidden within the narrative.

Similarly, Emily’s reaction demonstrates that sincerity neither needs to be on the surface nor needs defense against suspicion. After struggling to contain her indignation, Emily cannot give voice to her aunt’s misperception because an explanation is unnecessary: “And, till she recollected that appearances, did, in some degree, justify her aunt’s suspicions, she could not resolve to humble herself so far as to enter into the defense of a conduct which had been so innocent and undesigned on her part” (Udolpho 114). Emily’s declaration that her appearances do not warrant suspicion shows that if her intentions with Valancourt are “innocent and undesigned,” then her behavior is necessarily also innocent and undesigned. Indeed, if she had
felt the need to justify or explain her actions to her aunt, it would be a concession that she did commit some wrongdoing. Since Emily complies with the code of ethics that underpins the novel, her reaction serves to heighten her esteem in exchange for this momentary upbraiding. Her silence highlights the fact that Madame Cheron wrongly accuses her rather than her meeting with Valancourt. While it emphasizes her victimhood and her powerlessness, this mute protest also shows the immutable quality of sincerity. She neither lies nor justifies because her actions have no fault. Even if appearances change or deceive, her intentions always remain the same.

In contrast, the narrator continues to doubt Madame Montoni’s sincerity because of her questionable motivations. The narrator, rather a little too gleefully, points out such faults: “‘What impropriety!—why, that of receiving the visits of a lover unknown to your family,’ replied Madame Cheron; not considering the impropriety of which she herself had been guilty in exposing her niece to the possibility of conduct so erroneous” (Udolpho 114). It can also be said that Madame Montoni looks into the “Gothic mirror” and projects her own faults upon Emily. In this way, Emily becomes the scapegoat for Madame Montoni’s indiscretions, such as tastelessly marrying the questionable Montoni at her old age.

However, the narrator actually scapegoats Madame Montoni in an effort to bolster Emily’s goodness and sincerity. In Radcliffe’s novels, where there are moments of alleged sincerity, suspicion inevitably follows. In order to analyze the implications of Madame Montoni’s antagonism, we must examine her death. In her last moments, Madame Montoni gradually loses her desire for power as a result of Montoni’s ever-growing erratic and oppressive behavior. As he and his band of thieves continue to loot neighboring towns, Madame Montoni and Emily become his captives in the secluded Castle of Udolpho. While the narration focuses
heavily on Emily’s plight and her separation from Valancourt, Madame Montoni often receives ambiguous treatment as she declines in health and power.

As Madame Montoni and Montoni’s marriage begins to sour, her situation becomes more and more akin to that of Emily. Nonetheless, the narrator casts a suspicious eye on Madame Montoni’s interactions with Emily:

[Emily] placed herself in a chair near her aunt, took her hand, and with one of those looks of soft compassion which might characterize the countenance of a guardian angel, spoke to her in the tenderest accents. But these did not soothe Madame Montoni, whom impatience to talk make unwilling to listen. She wanted to complain, not to be consoled; and it was by exclamations of complaint only that Emily learned the particular circumstances of her affliction. (*Udolpho* 284-285)

In this moment, Emily attempts to comfort Madame Montoni, yet she appears to spurn her angelic words in favor of more complaining. The narrator refuses to sympathize with Madame Montoni because of her status as villain, continuing to make use of her as a way to demonstrate Emily’s good nature. The description of Emily’s goodness here seems more heavy-handed than usual as Emily takes on the representation of a guardian angel. Her forgiving personality ascends to new heights while Madame Montoni reaches new levels of pettiness. This contrast illustrates the narrator’s commitment to strict moral categories of good and evil. This scene is especially striking because the narrator seems to force these two apart during a moment of possible female comradeship or bonding, separating angel from monster. However, this overemphasis on one character’s goodness and another’s narrow-mindedness serves to reveal the moral framework’s instability rather than effectively demonstrate its steadiness.

The narrator attempts to show Madame Montoni’s bad nature to be as unchanging as Emily’s good one. Madame Montoni’s selfish qualities shine through even in times of distress:
“Emily saw that her misfortunes did not admit of real consolation, and condemning the commonplace terms of superficial comfort, she was silent; while Madame Montoni, jealous of her own consequence, mistook this for the silence of indifference or of contempt and reproached her for a want of duty and feeling” (Udolpho 286). As previously, Emily refuses to indulge in emotions false to how she truly feels, while Madame Montoni, as usual, misreads Emily’s good intentions. This reaction reduces any sympathy that the reader may harbor for Madame Montoni in her devastating situation. It also raises the question of why the narrator persists in identifying Madame Montoni as a negative spiteful character even as she begins to enter emotionally ambiguous territory. In the previous description, the narrator overtly attempts to force the separation of these two women, as if acknowledging the ambiguity of Madame Montoni detracts from the goodness of Emily. As the narrator almost gratuitously criticizes Madame Montoni, the reader’s attention pulls away from the plot and begins to suspect the narrative voice. The narrative inability to contain these characters within distinct categories reflects Radcliffe’s method of resistance: creating these clear-cut boundaries serves only to mask anxiety and then, not for long.

As her circumstances take a turn for the worst, her relationship with Emily changes for the better, and her status as scapegoat becomes obvious. After Montoni threatens Madame Montoni with incarceration if she does not surrender her estates, she gathers all her energy into overt resistance, which the often-grandiose narrator noticeably does not glorify. After Emily beseeches her to give up her estates, Madame Montoni replies, “‘Are you sincere, niece?’—‘Is it possible you can doubt it, madame?’” Her aunt appeared to be affected. ‘You are not unworthy of these estates, niece, I would wish to keep them for your sake—you show a virtue I did not
expect” (Udolphi 313, my emphasis). Because Madame Montoni here behaves in a way contrary to her identified nature, the narrator resists long comments and simply lists the dialogue, calling her only “affected.” Nevertheless, this comment allows appeals to the code of ethics that the novel has established. Slowly, Radcliffe lures her readers into the novel by mirroring the clear-cut demarcations that present themselves in society, and then she blurs the boundaries by limiting narration.

Finally, in Madame Montoni’s final moments, the narrator rather cautiously describes the change that had taken place in her personality since the onset of her illness: “In the morning Emily found Madame Montoni nearly in the same condition as on the preceding night; she had slept little, and that little had not refreshed her; but she smiled on her niece, and seemed cheered by her presence, but spoke only a few words…” (Udolphi vol.2 41). Her sickness seems to have evaporated the callousness of her nature. As a result, the narrator no longer elevates Emily at the expense of Madame Montoni. When Montoni enters the room, instead of the complaining superficial woman she has been portrayed as, Madame Montoni becomes “a persevering spirit contending with a feeble frame” (Udolphi vol.2 41). Finally, Madame Montoni gives up her contradictory nature and redeems herself with sincerity. She expresses her true wishes to Montoni even though her resistance is futile. The transformation of Madame Montoni serves to show the outright resistance that women in society cannot attempt without encountering ostracism. Her journey to sincerity legitimates her form of resistance although this legitimacy is never stated directly. Like Madame Montoni, Emily is also eventually confronted with the choice whether or not to relinquish her inheritance to the evil Montoni. Unlike Madame Montoni, she chooses to do so because he deceives her with the promise of liberation. While both women
exhibit sincerity in their resistance, the openly oppositional heroine dies while the one who conforms most closely to male-authored types of women survives. It is a bittersweet victory for Radcliffe, as for Emily, because such an ending shows only the success of hidden or subversive forms of resistance.

In order to fully understand the later ambiguous treatment of Madame Montoni, we must analyze the role of villains in Radcliffe’s novels. Susan Wolstenholme suggests that gothic narratives intimate “an ambivalent relationship between villain and heroine” (23). I would also add that this ambivalence is intentional and integral to the plot development. Radcliffe’s consciousness and authorization of the ambivalence between antagonist and protagonist further illustrates the blurring of boundaries and the collapse of moral categories. She questions the composition of heroes and villains, searching for similarity rather than difference. Wolstenholme goes on to say that “This complex relationship of affinity and hostility between fair maiden and dark villain, apparent in Radcliffe, becomes a convention of later Gothic-marked fiction” (23). Even though she focuses primarily on heroines rather than female villains, Wolstenholme indicates an interesting relationship between women (“maidens”) and villains, who are mostly male in Radcliffe’s novels. The previous example of Madame Montoni, then, sheds light on this “complex relationship” because she is a reformed villain, a woman, and heroine. Her multiple roles not only continue to blur boundaries, but they also raise the question of how to read sincerity. Which role reflects her inner self? Which role does Radcliffe acknowledge?

In order to answer these questions, we must examine the villain in The Italian, the monk Schedoni. Like Madame Montoni, Schedoni also has a propensity for showing off his cunning:
The elder brothers of the convent said that he had talents, but denied him learning; they applauded him for the profound subtlety which he occasionally discovered in argument, but observed that he seldom perceived truth when it lay on the surface; he could follow it through all the labyrinths of disquisition, but overlooked it, when it was undisguised before him. In fact he cared not for truth, nor sought it by bold and broad argument, but loved to exert the wily cunning of his nature in hunting it through artificial perplexities. At length, from a habit of intricacy and suspicion, his vitiated mind could receive nothing for truth, which was simple and easily comprehended. (Italian 34)

In an almost identical passage to that which described Madame Montoni’s nature, the narrator observes that Schedoni also does not care for truth and seeks to win arguments. Where Madame Montoni seeks to falsify truth, Schedoni desires to “hunt” truth through “labyrinths of disquisition.” For both characters, seeking truth becomes a test of their skill and a vindication of their conceit. Truth is not an end, but a means to overcoming a perceived sense of inferiority. Madame Montoni wants to prove herself to be more cunning than Emily while Schedoni seeks to justify his intelligence when passed over for promotions within the monastery. This perceived sense of inferiority represents a degree of their self-awareness of their roles as villains. While she portrays herself outwardly as having “too much kindness [and] too much generosity” (Udolfo 285), Madame Montoni also suspects that Emily’s dislike of her stems from her overbearing personality. As a result, she develops a double-consciousness, which resembles the bifurcation of the narrative structure. While narrator dismisses Madame Montoni’s words as nonsense, her speech suggests that we look below the narrator’s commentary on her character.

Similarly, Schedoni also exhibits a consciousness of his own wrongdoings, albeit, more obvious than that of Madame Montoni. After he discovers Ellena to be his daughter, Schedoni suddenly feels intense guilt: “Schedoni, meanwhile, to whom her thanks were daggers, was trying to subdue the feelings of remorse that tore his heart…” (Italian 248, my emphasis). His
admission of remorse and acknowledgments of his ambitions both demonstrate his awareness of his crimes. Both Madame Montoni’s and Schedoni’s cognizance of their roles as villains illustrate reasons for why they look deeper for truth or discover ways to distort truth. As villains on the outside, they look beyond the surface for a space where they represent neither criminals nor foils to protagonists.

In their search for sincerity, they meet where representations of criminals and women intersect. Wolstenholme declares that “Women and criminals are alike, not only in acting as the unruly elements of a culture, its disruptive forces; they are its scapegoats and the bearers of collective guilt, and here they are also similar in being the embodiments of stories to be unfolded, the walking representations of tales to be told” (21, my emphasis). As disruptors of society, both criminals and women fail to meet cultural expectations, but their condemnation allows them freedom to resist and overcome not only the representations that society burdens them with but also structures of oppression. Because of Madame Montoni’s gender and Schedoni’s darkness and foreignness, society abjects monstrous characteristics onto them because doing so allows society to deal with what Jerrold Hogle calls “the tangled contradictions fundamental to their existence” (7). Hogle asserts that in order to maintain “the patterns of social normalcy,” characters like Madame Montoni and Schedoni must be condemned (7). As sacrifices for the general good, Madame Montoni and Schedoni must be reduced to representations of villains and women so that patriarchy can continue to enforce untenable moral categories. Therefore, it appears that patriarchal structures rescue Emily by killing Madame Montoni, but Radcliffe redefines the terms of this rescue. By allowing Madame Montoni the freedom to articulate
grievances that both she and Emily share, Radcliffe changes the monstrous woman into a heroine.

When Emily and Madame Montoni discuss Montoni’s offer of their freedom in exchange for their property, Emily attempts to convince Madame Montoni to surrender the estate in order to secure her freedom. Madame Montoni reacts with rage: “What! Would you have me submit then to whatever he commands—would you have me kneel down at his feet, and thank him for his cruelties? Would you have me give up my settlement?” (*Udolpho* 287). While the narrator frames her as irascible and imprudent, Madame Montoni’s rage reveals the indignity that both she and Emily face. Her “monstrous” candidness, ironically, allows her not only to question the oppressive nature of patriarchy but also to make her into a powerful opponent. Under the guise of a complaint, Madame Montoni vents out her anger and the collective anger of women at being restricted and controlled. In this way, Radcliffe uses monstrous characteristics blur the lines of good and evil.

Wolstenholme proposes that “Radcliffe suggests a radical mistrust of representation, particularly of the stage of representation of which she makes such free use” (19). Wolstenholme’s assertion that Radcliffe has a “radical mistrust of representations” yet makes “free use” of them reveals an interesting way that the two narratives interact in her novels. By evoking representations of angelic women (like Emily or Ellena), Radcliffe uses these representations as ways to tell two narratives. While they are heroines in the surface narrative, they become objects of suspicion in the second. Madame Montoni suspects Emily’s angelic appearance of being false while Schedoni suspects Ellena of marrying Vivaldi for social mobility. While these suspicions may be unfounded, they importantly shift doubt from villains to
heroines, revealing not only the culturally-informed constructions of moral representations but also their inherent insincerity. Radcliffe rescues marginalized villains from their representations by showing them as equal to the task of open resistance and by subverting traditional notions of heroism. Furthermore, she liberates socially-confined angels of the house by allowing them alternative standards of good behavior.

In rewriting heroism, Radcliffe concentrates a large amount of energy on her protagonists. As I have previously argued, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the narrator attempts to separate Madame Montoni and Emily by comparing the former’s spitefulness to the latter’s virtue. In the secondary narrative, Madame Montoni is the heroine while Emily compromises her beliefs for her safety. Do Emily’s compromise and her calculation, then, render her insincere? Does her angelic countenance make her an object of suspicion? Madame Montoni and Schedoni suggest that we suspect all representations and exert energy in digging for the truth, but I argue that the heroines are not detractors or obstacles to resistance. In contrast to the narrator’s support of Emily at the expense of Madame Montoni, Radcliffe supports both Emily and Madame Montoni. Emily and Madame Montoni are comrades who battle the same oppression under patriarchy. Consequently, Radcliffe beckons us to look below the surface for Emily’s character as we have for that of Madame Montoni. If representations of monstrous women are untrustworthy, then representations of angelic women are also untrustworthy. Both categories seek to contain women under the power of the patriarchal structure, forcing the suppression of sincerity and eliminating the female imagination.

The often-tenuous relationship between Emily and Madame Montoni serves also to reveal Emily’s true self, in addition to that of Madame Montoni. It is Emily’s concern for her
aunt that ultimately shows what lies beneath the representation of angel. The narrator consistently identifies Emily’s continued support and sympathy for Madame Montoni despite the latter’s arrogance. Indeed, Emily’s relentless search for Madame Montoni places her in dangerous situations, yet she braves the unknown in order to find her aunt. After much deliberation, Emily even opposes her “guardian” Montoni by secretly searching for her aunt. After unfruitful result, she, rather reluctantly, enlists the services of the questionable porter Bernardine who offers to aid her: his proposal

Made her look around for some lurking danger—the more suspiciously, perhaps, because she had frequently remarked the unpleasant air and countenance of this man. She now hesitated whether to speak with him, doubting, even that this request was only a pretext to draw her into some danger: but a little reflection showed her the improbability of this; and she blushed at her weak fears. (Udolpho vol.2 3, my emphasis)

Emily carefully considers Bernardine’s request before she consents. This search has several important implications. First, Emily’s seclusion in the main castle doubles for the relegation of women to the private sphere. When she decides, on her own accord, to leave, she violates not only the domestic image of the angel, but also Montoni’s authority. This transgression goes undetected, for the most part, because of her duty to her aunt. The narrator emphasizes her filial nature repeatedly in order to maintain her angelic appearance. Unlike Madame Montoni’s unflattering representation, Emily’s image requires careful framing by the narrator. Any kind of impropriety could prove hazardous for our heroine. Indeed, the true danger of the search is the threat of being discovered outside of her social bounds.

Another implication of the search is the danger that Emily perceives to be directed at her. Not completely unlike the villain Montoni, she eyes Bernardine suspiciously and speculates (correctly) that he may wish to harm her. Even after she decides to take up his offer, she never
fully dispels her doubts about his character. This type of reflexive calculation ultimately saves Emily from being captured by Bernardine’s employers as she cautiously searches the turret in which she believes Madame Montoni is detained. As in this instance, her natural suspicion of those around her proves quite keen as she escapes many dangerous situations. However, suspicion implies a natural distrust of others, conflicting with representations of naïve and inexperienced heroines. Emily’s suspicion, bordering on paranoia, forces an uncomfortable comparison between her and Montoni. While Montoni’s paranoia results from his malicious deeds, Emily’s suspicion nonetheless brings her into ambiguous territory. Here, both the “fair maiden” and the “dark villain” have to carefully select those they trust in order to survive. However, the contrast lies in their success rates: Emily’s survival is all but guaranteed while Montoni’s failure and demise is just as certain. This crucial difference demonstrates the significance of the surface narrative: both characters have to conform to their roles as heroine and villain as well as perform the successes and failures that the roles call for. While the surface narrative contains few cases of overt resistance, Emily’s victory over Montoni, the monstrous representative of patriarchy, illustrates not only the satisfactory conclusion that Madame Montoni martyred herself for but also the functions of suspicion. Emily’s suspicion arises over concern for her own welfare, but she exhibits no suspicious behavior herself. In contrast, Montoni behaves suspiciously from the start of his relationship with Madame Montoni. In this manner, suspicion and suspicious behavior designate triumphs and losses.

Often resulting from superstition, suspicion drives the supernatural factor in Radcliffe’s novels. When a mysterious figure appears, the servants and sometimes the protagonists suspect the supernatural rather than the natural. Because Radcliffe’s supernatural always reveals itself to
be natural, she implies that nothing hides below the surface, directly contrasting with her dual narrative framework. However, the supernatural’s relationship with suspicion is useful because it further illustrates why we should not dismiss the surface narrative as merely a distraction or a cover-up. The surface narrative interacts with the hidden narrative in several ways, and not always detrimentally. Unlike the probing personalities of Madame Montoni and Schedoni, those of the protagonists neither arouse the narrator’s suspicions nor reveal any malevolent intentions. As a result, the surface narrative benefits protagonists despite having many problematic implications within its moral framework.

Therefore, suspicion acts as a survival mechanism for the protagonists in much more important ways than for the antagonists who will fail regardless. On the surface, suspicion becomes a singular way for protagonists to evade capture by antagonists and invent solutions if they are unable to escape. Because protagonists do not have dubious intentions, their suspicion is commonly described as investigative or curious. As a type of intuition, then, suspicion becomes valorized as survival instinct; however, occasionally, protagonists will wrongly suspect someone. Misdirected suspicion on the part of a protagonist calls the innocent object into question, destabilizing not only the surface narrative but the hidden narrative as well.

*The Italian* contains the highest number of moments of suspicion. More than Radcliffe’s other protagonists, Vivaldi and Ellena rightly and wrongly suspect many of those around them, including their family members. What is most striking about this novel is the almost complete lack of close and trusting parent-child relationships. On the contrary, parents and guardians become the object of their children’s suspicion, which lacks both hesitation and any kind of in-depth deliberation. For example, once Vivaldi’s mother, the Marchesa di Vivaldi, and her
advisor Schedoni kidnap Ellena and imprison her within a convent, she (Ellena) meets a kind nun named Olivia whom she immediately chooses to befriend. When she observes Olivia praying in the chapel, Ellena quickly discerns that she is kind and admirable simply from observing her countenance: “Ellena was not only soothed, but in some degree comforted, while she gazed upon [Olivia]; a selfishness which may, perhaps, be pardoned, when it is considered, that she thus knew there was one human being, at least, in the convent, who must be capable of feeling pity, and willing to administer consolation” (Italian 87, my emphasis). Here, Ellena relies heavily on her intuition and correctly discovers an ally. While her confidence in Olivia derives largely from appearances, Ellena’s friendship with Olivia includes the approval of the narrator and highlights the accuracy of protagonist’s suspicions.

However, Ellena’s later confinement and cruel treatment by the Abbess leads her to suspect even Olivia of being a malefactor. Commanded by Marchesa di Vivaldi, the abbess pressures Ellena to prepare to take orders to enter the church. Alarmed, Olivia attempts and fails to convince the abbess to change her mind. After much deliberation, Olivia gently advises Ellena to compromise: “Whatever may be your resolution, I earnestly advise you, my sister, to allow the Superior some hope of compliance, lest she proceed to extremities” (Italian 95). Her advice recalls Emily’s suggestion that Madame Montoni give her inheritance in order to protect herself. Ellena’s reply is analogous to that of Madame Montoni: “And what extremity can be more terrible than either of those, to which she would now urge me? Why should I descend to practice dissimulation?” (Italian 95). Radcliffe consciously alters her narratives in this final novel, creating a heroine who does openly resist in her surface narrative. However, Ellena has much more at stake than Madame Montoni. Madame Montoni’s concession only means the loss of her
property, whereas, Ellena’s surrender would damage her reputation irreparably. Furthermore, as a villain, Madame Montoni can practice dissimulation or participate in open resistance without injury to her reputation. In contrast, Ellena stands to lose not only the narrator’s sympathy but also risks the loss of her status as heroine. However, by locating such a choice in the surface narrative, Radcliffe allows dissimulation to be a consideration even if Ellena rejects the idea of it. In doing so, she blurs the line between villainy and heroism, demonstrating that both require similar choices.

The lines continue to blur after Ellena decides against insincerity. Olivia’s suggestion incurs Ellena’s suspicion and she curiously begins to doubt her friend’s good intentions:

As Ellena concluded, and her eyes glanced upon the nun, unaccountable suspicion occurred to her, that Olivia might be insincere, and that, at this very moment, when she was advising dissimulation, she was endeavoring to draw Ellena into some snare, which the abbess had laid. She sickened at this dreadful supposition, and dismissed it without suffering herself to examine its probability. (Italian 97)

While this suspicion would later prove unfounded and Olivia actually turns out to be Ellena’s mother, that Ellena does suspect Olivia alone demonstrates the anxiety of protagonists. Olivia’s mere suggestion of dissimulation causes Ellena to suspect the friend she in whom she initially placed so much confidence. Despite the fact that Ellena dismisses this thought, she does “examine its probability,” causing shadows of doubt to follow Olivia. Even though the narrator identifies this suspicion as “unaccountable,” it still carries significance. First, it serves to elevate Ellena’s character by emphasizing her commitment to the truth: she will not take part in dissimulation even if it means self-preservation. Second, it, in turn, serves to indicate the difference between Ellena and her mother. While kind-hearted and pious, Olivia is willing to consider artifice as a way to escape punishment. Even though she is not an agent of the abbess,
she no longer represents the same kind of angelic goodness that Ellena represents. Her “fall” serves as a reminder that one can easily and quite quickly change from angel to monster. A stain on a woman’s reputation persists long after the reasons for it disappear. Through Olivia, Radcliffe criticizes the almost arbitrary nature of these moral labels that intimidate women into submission. The very possibility of becoming monstrous is enough to confine them to a limited range of behaviors.

Despite abiding by traditional narrative conventions on the surface, Radcliffe questions and reimagines the code of morality that such conventions produce. By creating a hidden narrative beneath her surface one, Radcliffe manipulates the structures of patriarchal oppression through her distribution of suspicion. Employed by both villains and heroines, suspicion paves the way for the exploration of abjected interiorities beyond their flat representations. While it alternately condemns and aids characters, suspicion provides access from one narrative to another, encouraging the scrutiny of motivations and moral labels.
RESTORING SINCERITY IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S JANE EYRE AND VILLETTÉ

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 much show.

--David Copperfield, David Copperfield

They involve the idea of the ‘double’ (the Doppelganger), in all its nuances and manifestations—that is to say, the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other—what we could call telepathy—so that the one becomes the co-owner of the other’s knowledge, emotions and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other’s self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged. Finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations.

--Sigmund Freud, The Uncanny

Despite writing many decades after Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Brontë still experienced similar social constraints as a woman writer. With patriarchy largely underpinning the social system of the Victorian era, Brontë had to contend with the specific moral belief that a woman’s proper place was the private sphere of the home. Despite the greater visibility of women writers and activists during the nineteenth century, Elaine Showalter contends that their success rates were much exaggerated due to “the overreaction of male competitors” (40). In fact, the rise of women working outside of the home incurred not only the disdain of male novelists but also a general backlash that revealed deep patriarchal anxieties about the limits of women’s professional and personal freedoms. In the preface to the 1850 edition of Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, Brontë herself gently acknowledges the discomfort of traversing between public and private spheres. Highly self-conscious of the glare of patriarchal disapproval, the three sisters chose gender-neutral but “positively masculine” pseudonyms:
While we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine,’—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. (Brontë, qtd in Gaskell 228-229)

Brontë’s thinly-veiled complaints about the discrimination she and her sisters faced show her simultaneous awareness of and objection to the widely-circulated and accepted paradox of being a writer and being “feminine.” Confronted with what Lauren Goodlad calls “a conservative mystification of domestic and feminine personality” (543), Brontë, cautiously, attempts to create a sincere female subjectivity outside of male constructions.

Indeed, it was during the Victorian period that previous similar notions of “femaleness” took on a permanent and internal quality. Mary Poovey notes that “the characteristic feature of the mid-Victorian symbolic economy [is] the articulation of difference upon sex and in the form of a binary opposition rather than a hierarchically ordered range of similarities” (6). Thus, the character of the angel in the house praised by eighteenth-century conduct books (Gilbert and Gubar 23) became almost biologically grounded, therefore justified. It is not coincidental that such occurrences overlapped the growing cultural significance of sincerity. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that the second generation male Romantics defined sincerity as internal and immutable: they “condemned the trivial world of getting and spending” and “glorified the ‘buried life’” to an ontology” (402). This cultural retreat inward further checked women’s social progress by burdening them with an almost “instinctive” domesticity. While certain aspects of women were stereotyped in the gothic or epistolary novels of the eighteenth century, it was not

---

4 For a more detailed explanation of Matthew Arnold’s 1852 poem “The Buried Life,” refer to Gilbert and Gubar 401-402 and Trilling 5.
until the nineteenth century that they were, in a sense, pinned down as the sincere, true, and natural behavior of women.

In Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House*, his steadfast and self-effacing narrator Esther Summerson represents the ideal (male-authored) Victorian woman who not only behaves correctly on the outside but also demonstrates the correct instincts, differing from the female philanthropist Mrs. Jellyby. Once she arrives at the Jellyby estate, Esther appropriately reacts with alarm and confusion at the chaotic domestic scene:

Nobody had appeared belonging to the house, except a person in patterns, who had been poking at the child from below with a broom; I don’t know with what object, and I don’t think she did. I therefore supposed that Mrs. Jellyby was not at home; and was quite surprised when the person appeared in the passage [who]…announced us…Mrs. Jellyby, whose face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our own faces…received us with perfect equanimity. (52, my emphasis)

With her commitment to extra-domestic affairs and lack of concern over her household, Mrs. Jellyby threatens middle-class domesticity by destabilizing the role of the mother. As a result, Mrs. Jellyby becomes an enigmatic figure who lacks a narrative context, alienated not only from many of the other characters but from also the contemporary audience. As she fails to meet both Esther’s and Dickens’ expectations of a mother, Mrs. Jellyby ceases to belong to the text, becoming an outlier. Esther describes Mrs. Jellyby’s countenance as forever bearing a “curious, bright-eyed, far-off look” (Dickens 380). By removing herself from the domestic, she forfeits her opportunity to be present entirely. Therefore, Esther’s disorientation and discomfort in this not-so-domestic space is only natural. Her response shows not only Dickens’ anti-feminist stance but also his and many Victorians’ disapproval of women who venture outside of the home.

---

b For more on the expansion of the philanthropic enterprise in Victorian Britain, see Goodlad 541-543.
Dickens’ anxiety about women taking on semi-professional vocations is also manifest in his insistence on the *unnatural* way that Mrs. Jellyby behaves. Through Esther, he characterizes her actions as indicative of going against her constitution because she surprises Esther at every turn. It is this kind of rhetoric that naturalizes the domestic space as an extension of the female body with the woman as creator and representative of the domestic, and also, the domestic as emblematic of the woman. By attaching such significance to the domestic, Victorians ultimately justify manacleing women to the home by arguing in favor of a natural propensity for home-making. As a result, it becomes the woman’s inherent nature to make the hearth and foster a warm family life. Poovey asserts that this maternal instinct, “invoked by contemporaries to define woman’s nature,” “accounted for the remarkable fact that women were not self-interested and aggressive like men, but self-sacrificing and tender” (7). By invoking the natural, contemporary critics were able to define femininity as they pleased, confining not only fictional women but also real women to purview of male authorship. Always in danger of trespassing social boundaries, women now, in addition, had to contend with the natural. Therefore, if she disregards her domestic duties, then she not only opposes social regulations but also natural ones.

Here, the natural self stands for the sincere, what the Romantics would call “the inner and more valid self” (Gilbert and Gubar 402). By fashioning woman as sincerely frail, virtuous, and maternal, male authors and patriarchy create a population of women who know themselves only as they are written and read, who have no other conception of femaleness outside of male constructions. For example, Gilbert and Gubar trace the phenomenon of female-specific sicknesses to the nineteenth century’s “aesthetic cult of female fragility delicate beauty” (25) that male authors praised as ideal. Met with such expectations, women attempted to embody them by
“[killing] themselves into art objects” (Gilbert and Gubar 25). Seeking to please and, more importantly, to shield themselves from reproach, women took up such destructive habits as “tight-lacing, fasting, and vinegar-drinking” (Gilbert and Gubar 25) in order to be what their “nature” dictated. This backwards logic, reinforced by the argument that posited an unchanging natural instinct, effectively foreclosed many possibilities of female self-reflection and deeper examinations. Eventually, women became their own keepers, applying patriarchal standards of behavior among themselves, just as Esther judges Mrs. Jellyby.

Consequently, by focusing her energies on her philanthropic cause, Mrs. Jellyby denies the only definition of femaleness that she has been presented with and gradually disappears, almost in a ghostly manner, from the narrative. Dickens simply issues a corrective by reinstating the next generation, in the form of her daughter Caddy, as a proper wife and mother, excising and replacing Mrs. Jellyby. However, this erased woman is not so easily dismissed. Dickens and other male authors conjure Mrs. Jellyby and other imperfect women who fail to conform to patriarchal standards of femininity in order to criminalize them, but once conjured, this ghostly figure haunts the spaces and gaps of the novel by her very absence. Judith Butler describes this kind of conjuration as inclusive of the possibility of resistance: “Interpellation thus loses its status as a simple performative, an act of discourse with the power to create that to which it refers, and creates more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent” (122, my emphasis). Butler refers to the potency of repetition in resisting patriarchy or other types of oppression: “…repetitions of hegemonic forms of power which fail to repeat loyally and, in that failure, open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims” (124). However, in characterizing resistance as “resignification” or an
empowering “repetition of hegemonic forms of power,” it can only be reimagined from an extant template of violation. Resistance, then, lacks generative or creative powers because, as Butler writes, “There is no subject prior to its constructions” (124). However, she adds a somewhat promising caveat: “neither is the subject determined by those constructions” (124).

In other words, authoring antagonistic characters also enables those characters to resist the existing code of morality imposed upon them. With this power that the author accords them, these characters can redefine the narrative. Like the male-authored Mrs. Jellyby who perpetually haunts the spaces of the novel not only as a reminder of the social punishment women receive for participating in extra-domestic activities but also as a reminder of the roles that women can occupy outside of the domestic, women writers can resist by making use of their restrictive social roles. Elaine Showalter writes that “eighteenth-century women novelists exploited a stereotype of helpless femininity to win chivalrous protection from male reviewers and to minimize their unwomanly assertion” (17). Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar point to the duplicity that women writers had to employ in order to produce literature: “largely ignored by critics…most successful women writers often seem to have channeled their female concerns into secret or at least obscure corners [of their novels]” (72, my emphasis).

Both Showalter’s and Gilbert and Gubar’s observations seem to characterize the type of gothic fiction that Radcliffe wrote in the late eighteenth century. As I have argued, Radcliffe’s hidden narrative represents her preoccupation with patriarchy’s tendency to produce and enforce the strict dialectic of angelic and monstrous women. In her novels, Radcliffe exploits male models of these two types of women and secretly empowers them to resist patriarchy. In addition to taking advantage of the dual narrative format, Radcliffe also destabilizes the narrative terrain
outlined by male writers. There is an element of the uncanny in her novels beyond the presence of false supernatural occurrences. Sigmund Freud asks, “under what conditions [does] the familiar become uncanny and frightening?” (124). One way to answer the question lies in Radcliffe’s formulation of her literary world. Subtly, she reproduces patriarchal tropes, yet she also defamiliarizes them. Her heroines are still virtuous and angelic, yet once they are placed in dangerous situations, they become resourceful and suspicious, shrugging off their naïveté. The familiar male-authored tropes become uncanny when Radcliffe slightly adjusts their purposes. Unlike the responsible and self-deprecating Esther Summerson who receives her reward for good behavior in the form of her age-appropriate husband Dr. Woodcourt, Radcliffe’s Madame Cheron behaves contrarily for the sake of being contrary and always speaks her mind regardless of audience. Her utmost desire is not to gain a husband but rather to preserve her inheritance and ensure its passage to another woman, her niece. Unlike male-authored heroines, Madame Cheron sacrifices herself not for her husband or notions of domesticity, but rather for a fellow woman, for sisterhood. To the end, she resists compromise, gaining the affections of her niece and the narrator. The would-be monstrous Madame Cheron, then, becomes a heroine, although secretly of course.

However, the successes of Radcliffe’s heroines, while important, still stand as a concession, meeting halfway between male models of literature and her greater aspirations of female liberation from patriarchy. Where Radcliffe resists by stealth, reimagining the male-authored heroine, Brontë discards the mold altogether and begins anew with the figure of the abject woman at the margins, the Mrs. Jellyby haunting the hearth. While much of the criticism surrounding early women writers praise them for “reclaiming” or “reappropriating” the female
character for feminist purposes, Brontë never accepts those characters from the male canon as valid interpretations of female interiority. She rejects those notions of femininity as fully as her defiant heroine Jane Eyre “resisted all the way” (JE 7, my emphasis). However, this is not to imply that she was not aware or did not acknowledge the existence of such characters and such established normative behaviors. In fact, it is this awareness that prompts Brontë to create a heroine built on virtues that she deems virtuous rather than one that is virtuous merely in name. Brontë’s heroines do not resist by subversion, but rather, they resist without subversion. Like the morally ambiguous Madame Cheron, they simply speak their minds. Unlike Madame Cheron, while they may be quick-tempered or stubborn, they are unquestionably heroines and define the moral order of their respective novels. The source of their morality, then, is their single-minded sincerity. In other words, Brontë restores sincerity to the female imagination by necessarily disavowing the ideal Victorian and patriarchal representation of femaleness.

In the very first chapter of Jane Eyre, Brontë demonstrates young Jane’s as well as her own cognizance of Mrs. Reed’s standards of manners and etiquette, noting that Mrs. Reed made clear to Jane that “until [she] can speak pleasantly, remain silent” (JE 3, my emphasis). This order underscores the importance of “[speaking] pleasantly,” especially for women of the time. The implication of this message is that if Jane cannot speak pleasantly then she must not speak at all. Mrs. Reed, as a reproduction of the patriarchal voice, prefers silence over a disagreeable voice, over conflict and discord, paving the way for a one-note heroine who only keeps the peace or remains quiet if she cannot. For example, Dickens’ self-sacrificing Esther Summerson dispenses nominally good advice to those around her, but upon closer examination, her advice only demonstrates Dickens’ effort to maintain the middle-class lifestyle: she tries to save Richard
from his dependency on the Chancery suit, rescue Caddy from her industrious mother, and accept her much older guardian’s proposal should he truly desire to marry her. However, it is obvious that, as many critics have remarked, Esther suppresses and represses many of her desires in favor of satisfying her friends and family. Indeed, when she first receives the household keys at John Jarndyce’s estate, she can barely contain her disappointment: “I showed [Ada] the keys, and told her about them, that it would have been insensibility and ingratitude not to feel encouraged” (Dickens 89). These keys represent her mirthless obligations, which Dickens acknowledges, yet the fact that Esther fulfils them anyway gains his approval. Later on, whenever Esther meets with dissatisfaction, she, masochistically, jingles her keys as a reminder of her “fortunate” situation. Fittingly bleak, Esther sifts through many layers of mediation to find her happiness. In contrast, Brontë’s Jane, Esther’s foil and double, desires only to have her independence from the mean-spirited Reed family and later, from her oppressive fiancé, Rochester. When Esther speaks pleasantly to keep patriarchy alive, Jane refuses to be silent.

From the beginning of this fictional autobiography, Jane speaks and exposes the ill-treatment that she received at the hands of the Reeds. She first encounters the abuses of a patriarchal system at the hands of her cruel and brutish cousin John Reed:

[E]very nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired; because I had no appeal whatever against his menaces or his infliction: the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him, and Mrs. Reed was blind and deaf on the subject: she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me; though he did both now and then in her very presence: more frequently however behind her back. (JE 5)
As an unveiled account of the horrors she suffered from an out-of-control young man, Jane’s sentiments draw a stark contrast between the powerlessness of the oppressed and complete agency of the abuser. While this example represents a local instance of patriarchy, Jane and Brontë, no doubt, have patriarchy-at-large on their minds. While John represents a monstrous version of patriarchy, Mrs. Reed, a fellow woman, stands as his defender, further complicating Jane’s battle. Jane and Brontë make it clear that patriarchy is not simply a system of men oppressing women but also includes women who are aware and complicit. Indeed, no matter how much John wronged Mrs. Reed, she stands firmly in his corner: “[John Reed] called his mother ‘old girl’ too, sometimes, reviled her for her dark skin, similar to his own; bluntly disregarded her wishes; not unfrequently tore and spoiled her silk attire; and he was still ‘her own darling,’” (JE 9). His disrespectful actions do not diminish her affection because she is the much scrutinized maternal figure. Unless she wants to receive the same treatment as the unfortunate Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Reed must behave and support the terror-inspiring behavior. In Mrs. Reed, Brontë presents a maternal character who fails to restrain her children, protecting them by concealing their wrongs. Although she displays a different kind of blindness from Mrs. Jellyby’s “far off gaze,” she is just as parodic because she sees neither far off nor close by. She simply cannot see anything. As a mere cog in the system, Mrs. Reed pretends not to see her son’s abuses for the sake of her own preservation.

As in the command she gives Jane, Mrs. Reed herself must “remain silent” and accept the reality of her situation. As a variation on that command, the intentional “blindness” and “deafness” of Mrs. Reed double for silence and reveal the breadth of negligence and feigned ignorance surrounding the oppression of women within the population of women themselves.
Brontë points to the weaknesses in a mother who concerns herself so much with the domestic that she loses not only her sense of justice but also that of selfhood. Through Jane, Brontë demonstrates her own anger at the effaced woman forced into blindness and hypocrisy. While Dickens simply allows Mrs. Jellyby to disappear into the margins, Brontë fully brings Mrs. Reed’s compulsory hypocrisy from the darkness. She illuminates the pitfalls of blind obedience and devotion while she exposes the lurking shadows of the domestic space. Claimed by such shadows, Mrs. Reed must govern without a voice, which is an impossibility, as Jane points out. Always in danger of society’s rebuke, Mrs. Reed simply cannot avoid hypocrisy. It is Mrs. Reed’s silence that earns her not only Jane’s rebellion but her frustration. Jane rationally expresses her disbelief again and again at Mrs. Reed’s inaction, filling pages with John’s overt transgressions and lack of punishment. Stemming from her belief in resistance, Jane’s frustration becomes the rage that so many critics have noticed. Jane lets loose her complaints once Bessie and Mrs. Reed incarcerate her in the red room: “I dared commit no fault: I strove to fulfill every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night” (JE 9). Like the daily efforts women expend to imitate the angel of the house, Jane similarly attempts to “fulfill every duty” despite personal objections. Here, emulating a standard takes on extra importance because it reflects the very real situation that contemporary women have to endure. By refusing to comment on the validity of that duty, Jane suggests the possibility that it is not. She challenges its morality by pointing to its impossible-to-fulfill conditions, pairing it with unfairness. While her captors lock her in the secluded red room in order to subdue and quiet her, Jane publicizes the secrets of her private punishment. Unlike Mrs. Reed, Jane does not hold back, bemoaning the injustice (JE 9) of her treatment.
In this household, Jane represents an alternative to the silence: the voice of sincerity. Where Mrs. Reed pretends not to witness or hear, Jane, like a voyeur, narrates all that she sees and hears. More importantly, she narrates her opinions and beliefs, developing a female psychology that male authors did not create. The overflow of Jane’s sincere feelings contrasts greatly with Mrs. Reed’s repressed silence and cursory conversation. However, it must be emphasized that the Mrs. Reed presented to the reader is Jane’s impression rather than a complete or objective portrait. This detail serves neither to cast doubt nor confirm Jane’s account, but rather, more importantly, discloses her values and maps out the sources of her anger. Jane perceives Mrs. Reed as her opposite in every way, pitting Mrs. Reed’s icy glare against Jane’s fiery rage. Therefore, it is from Jane’s avid and clear dislike that we can glean the weight she places upon truth and its counterpart, sincerity. In their final encounter before Jane leaves for Lowood, Jane lets Mrs. Reed know her feelings: “I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare, I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed…” (JE 26). In response, Mrs. Reed does not discredit what Jane says, but instead, she deflects: “What more have you to say?” (JE 27). The cold and controlled Mrs. Reed issues Jane a challenge, defying her to say more, daring her to speak to her soul’s content. Growing in passion, Jane loses control and her will takes over, listing the ways in which the Reed family wronged her. Rather than escalating the fight, Mrs. Reed again replies with a curt question: “How dare you affirm that, Jane Eyre?” (JE 27). Completely enraged by this point, Jane’s harangue finally touches upon what really bothers her: Mrs. Reed’s apparent apathy towards granting justice. Rather than calming Jane, Mrs. Reed’s indifference has the effect of
fanning the embers, sending Jane into an invective. Beyond frustration, Jane unfolds her philosophy of ethics:

   How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so; and you have no pity...And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions, this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted. You are deceitful! (JE 27, my emphasis)

Basking in her triumph, Jane’s final accusation somewhat relaxes her because, at long last, she frees herself from the same charge. In addition to voicing her grievances, the threatening tone of Jane’s reply seems to be at odds with her stated desire for truth. Until this point, however blinding her rage seems to be, Jane does not express a wish for vengeance. In this speech, she threatens Mrs. Reed not with the inherent horror of her hypocrisy but rather with the exposure to the masses. Here, Jane’s documentation and publication of her ill-treatment becomes almost malicious rather than upstanding. Furthermore, Jane devises a use for sincerity outside of its simple existence, saving herself by shaming her aunt. Not only does Jane take the label of “good woman” for herself, but she also implies how dangerously close Mrs. Reed is to being a “bad woman.” Unlike Radcliffe’s Emily who offers Madame Cheron the benefit of the doubt, Jane portrays Mrs. Reed far less generously. Although she constructs her moral universe with a focus on justice, Jane’s desire for vengeance drives her to criticize Mrs. Reed in problematic language. By calling her a “bad woman” rather than simply “bad person,” Jane ironically reproduces the very rhetoric that enclosed her within untruths. In other words, Jane’s play on the angelic-or-monstrous framework reveals that criticisms of women, even those by other women, derive largely from patriarchal origins.
However, her revelation of Mrs. Reed’s hypocrisy does not produce the expectant sincere reaction. While she “looked frightened,” Mrs. Reed neither acknowledges any sort of double narrative nor unmask herself; she simply regains control. After Jane takes the conversation to the furthest limit Mrs. Reed allows, Mrs. Reed brings it back to domestic concerns, asking, “Jane, you are under a mistake: what is the matter with you? Why do you tremble so violently? Would you like to drink some water?” (JE 27). Similar to her refusal to recognize John’s abuse, Mrs. Reed redirects the problem back onto Jane by pretending not to understand the content of her speech while only processing its attendant rage. As an initially static character, Mrs. Reed betrays no change of heart as, ironically, it is Jane who crosses into socially tentative behavior. Despite Jane’s first-person narration and her sympathetic portrayal of herself, she does not completely convince Mrs. Reed of the correctness or even the importance of her ethics. Perhaps even in spite of Jane’s persuasion, Mrs. Reed retreats into the safety of silence. In fact, it is because of Jane’s public outbursts that Mrs. Reed decides to maintain the peace by sending her to the isolated Lowood School for girls. While Jane’s accusations may suggest otherwise, Mrs. Reed’s careful response details her awareness of the same kind of oppression that Jane finds so unbearable. By feigning ignorance rather than being ignorant, Mrs. Reed shows that she is just as mindful, or even more mindful, than Jane of the severity of patriarchal hierarchies. After all, she has to care for children who disrespect her authority and obey her late-husband’s orders to look after Jane. To be sure, Jane never reveals Mrs. Reed’s full name until her death, calling her only by that of her husband. In this light, her worldly experience exceeds Jane’s idealism, causing her to choose not to see. By describing Mrs. Reed as silenced in a similar way as Dickens’ Mrs. Jellyby, Brontë leaves room for alternatives to Jane’s open resistance. For every righteous Jane
Eyre, there is a ghostly Mrs. Reed pressing on silently. For Brontë, creating a sincere female imagination does not simply entail resistance to male models, but rather a deeper examination of the choices that women make.

Indeed, what Susan Wolstenholme calls Brontë’s “realist mode” (57) comes, in part, from her attention to divergent reactions to patriarchy. Therefore, that Jane’s relationship with Mrs. Reed, rather than that with her exaggerated son, occupies a much more vital and nuanced role in the narrative is no surprise. Even though John is the one she dislikes the most, he along with Brocklehurst are flat characters who serve as male representatives of patriarchy, highlighting its hypocrisy and its violence. While Mrs. Reed represents an early antagonist in Jane’s life, Brontë’s tone does not suggest complete revulsion, setting author apart from narrator. Rather, Mrs. Reed’s stoic demeanor and her refusal to give Jane a complete victory uncovers her own sort of defiance, separate from Jane’s intense anger. While Mrs. Reed certainly acts in more muted ways than Jane, her ability to stay in control and govern her household does gain her some sympathy from Brontë. Like Radcliffe’s female villains, Mrs. Reed’s power comes from abiding by patriarchal rules, but she stops short of a full embrace. As I argued earlier, Mrs. Reed’s self-awareness changes the terms of her complicity, making her an example of the evils of patriarchy rather than specifically evil herself. She represents the degenerative effects that patriarchy has on women, forcing them to choose silence rather than be implicated in outright criminality. Like Jane when she is falsely labeled a “liar,” Mrs. Reed quietly stews at being an actual liar. In some ways, her disquieting silence actually overpowers Jane’s free expression of her emotions. While Mrs. Reed and Brocklehurst punish and criminalize Jane unfairly, as the narrator, Jane can give
full vent to her feelings of injustice, but Mrs. Reed reacts only curtly. Indeed, that Mrs. Reed’s controlled demeanor and cold eyes do not match Jane’s level of intensity is unsettling.

However, that is not to say that Mrs. Reed’s hatred of Jane is any less than that of Jane because she did not openly express it. Mrs. Reed’s hatred, which Jane senses over and over in her childhood and which Mrs. Reed later confesses on her deathbed, arises out of her desire for Jane to participate in her silence. By refusing, Jane not only uncovers Mrs. Reed’s hypocrisy but also invalidates her position by offering an alternative. Because of social propriety, Mrs. Reed buries her resentment, never letting Jane know her true feelings even though Jane does correctly intuit her intentions. It is only when she is dying that Mrs. Reed re-enters adult Jane’s life, ready to complement Jane’s childhood admission with one of her own. Their second confrontation on Mrs. Reed’s death bed mirrors the first, reversing their positions with Mrs. Reed speaking plainly and Jane as the quiet interlocutor. In this scene, Jane’s anger at Mrs. Reed’s indifference to injustice gives away to her desire for reconciliation. Although not new, this emphasis on forgiveness reveals Jane’s inherent desire to be understood as she understands herself, seeing herself reflected in someone else. Largely authored by male writers, the female imagination and psychology undergoes several layers of mediation before identification. As Brontë attempts to create a new and authentic female imagination, she still reproduces some of the same tropes adopted by male writers, namely that of mediating the female identity through someone else, usually her lover. Here, Jane’s fierce independence belies her larger desire of being loved and still larger desire of being understood. Sadly, as she opens herself to Mrs. Reed once more, hoping for a closer relationship, she will discover no friend in this fellow woman. Instead, she will find herself disappointed until she meets her match in Rochester.
This wish to identify with someone else begins with Jane’s childhood feelings of loneliness and isolation. Despite the fact that her cousins abused her and Mrs. Reed shunned her, she was always ready to forgive them. For example, young Jane longed to pardon Mrs. Reed and receive her love: “Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering. But I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did: while rending my heart strings, you thought, you were only up-rooting my bad propensities” (JE 13). Even in her youth, Jane gives Mrs. Reed a prepared justification for her actions, wanting to believe Mrs. Reed did all in ignorance. It is in that same spirit of reconciliation that Jane arrives back at Gateshead after years of absence:

Well did I remember Mrs. Reed’s face, and I eagerly sought the familiar image. It is a happy thing that time quells the longings of vengeance, and hushes the promptings of rage and aversion: I had left this woman in bitterness and hate, and I came back to [Mrs. Reed] now with no other emotion than a sort of ruth for her great sufferings, and strong yearning to forget and forgive all injuries—to be reconciled, and clasp hands in amity. (JE 183, my emphasis)

Eager to be on the road toward amends, Jane attempts to create a possible linear progression of their relationship where they start as antagonists but end as friends who “clasp hands in amity.” She describes the change in her own personality from bitterness to acceptance, hoping that Mrs. Reed will react similarly. However, her earlier justification of Mrs. Reed as ignorant of her actions proves false as “again, [Mrs. Reed] regarded [Jane], so icily, [Jane] felt at once that her opinion of [her]—her feeling towards [her]—was unchanged, and unchangeable” (JE 183-184). Mrs. Reed’s unchanging animosity and Jane’s residual hope lead to this second confrontation where Jane, once again, does not receive the answer she wishes for. As I argued, Jane and Mrs.
Reed’s conversation mirrors their first talk but their roles reverse with Jane now giving curt replies to the mentally-unstable Mrs. Reed.

This time, however, Mrs. Reed’s illness clouds her faculties, and she does not recognize Jane, allowing her to comfortably admit her feelings: “I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands—and so much annoyance as she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition, and her sudden starts of temper, and her continual, unnatural watchings of one’s movements…I wish she had died!” (JE 184). Mrs. Reed points out Jane’s erratic behavior and her lack of cooperation, declaring that she never understood Jane despite Jane’s constant efforts at pleasing her. Curious, Jane continues to probe Mrs. Reed for answers: “A strange wish, Mrs. Reed: why do you hate her so?” (JE 184). Jane betrays no emotions to Mrs. Reed’s assertions as if she dissociates herself from the reality of the scene just as Mrs. Reed has. Mrs. Reed tells Jane that a large part of her dislike stemmed from her late husband’s superior treatment of the infant Jane: “Reed pitied [young Jane]; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age” (JE 184). Young Jane’s “incomprehensible disposition” coupled with Mr. Reed’s even more puzzling adoration fueled Mrs. Reed’s hatred, leading her to finally confess the suppressed feelings that she harbored for so long. Because she could neither express her resentment against her “naturally weak” (JE 185) husband nor openly admit of her abuses toward Jane, Mrs. Reed simply misdirected her hate at Jane and allowed her children to torment Jane, pretending not to see. Mrs. Reed’s relationship with her husband imposed on her a sense of her own inferiority and powerlessness, an effect that derives from living under a patriarchal social system. Mrs. Reed can only mediate her responses by blaming Jane’s unusual behavior or
expressing glee at her son John’s different temperament: “John does not at all resemble his father, and I am glad of it: John is like me and like my brothers—he is quite a Gibson” (JE 185). In light of this revelation, Mrs. Reed’s blind embrace of her like-minded son, an embraced sanctioned by patriarchy, demonstrates her desire not only to live vicariously through her son but also to prove her own worth in such a way that she cannot personally convey. Even though Mrs. Reed cannot berate her husband or negatively judge his actions, she can allow her son to denigrate his niece/daughter. This mediated revenge indicates Mrs. Reed’s own hatred of patriarchy, a hatred that Jane intuits and understands.

As Mrs. Reed’s temper escalates, Bessie persuades her to take a sedative, bringing her back to the “normal” condition that patriarchy reduced her to. Ironically, it is only under the cover of illness that Mrs. Reed can directly articulate her grievances and, in a sense, become the petulant child that Jane was to her. Similar to the relief that young Jane experienced, Mrs. Reed’s catharsis in her sickness or madness liberates her from her household duties and allows her to disclose the failures of maintaining the façade of domestic bliss. Driven to financial ruin by her son’s gambling debts, Mrs. Reed refuses to shield him any longer, telling Jane, “There is another thing I wished to say. He threatens me—he continually threatens me with his own death, or mine…” (JE 185). It is not a coincidence that Mrs. Reed associates her much-prized son’s death with her own because he represents her failed hopes for triumphing over her husband. With John Reed’s professional and personal downfall, Mrs. Reed somberly realizes her mistake in living through someone else: “I am come to a strange pass: I have heavy troubles” (JE 185). Here, Mrs. Reed focuses more on her own dire situation than that of her son, slowly discovering her suppressed individuality through her madness. Like Jane, Mrs. Reed oversteps proper social
boundaries, taking liberties reserved for men. However, Jane’s rage speaks with a “man’s voice” (JE 190) while Mrs. Reed’s madness is male-authored as distinctly female. Nevertheless, like Jane’s punished behavior, Mrs. Reed’s madness is something to be cured and tranquilized. Through the anguish of Mrs. Reed’s unexpressed rage, Brontë enacts her own scathing criticism of patriarchy and its anesthetizing effect, cowing women into submission. The fact that even in sickness Mrs. Reed has to stealthily tell Jane her anger at her husband demonstrates Brontë’s revulsion of a social system that cripples women to the extent they lack an unmediated consciousness, where they always think through someone else’s lens and framework.

While her daughters and Bessie dismiss Mrs. Reed’s final words as the ravings of a delusional woman, Jane does not treat Mrs. Reed like a madwoman, justifying not only the legitimacy of Mrs. Reed’s unhappiness but also the sincerity that comes from passion. In her childhood, Jane taught herself to suppress her true feelings in an unsuccessful bid for Mrs. Reed’s affection, but the indignity she suffered from Mrs. Reed’s character assassination sent her into a fit of passion. After experiencing “the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph” (JE 27) from her uncontrolled overflow of emotion, Jane has since placed a high value on not only willful spirit but also sincerity and authenticity. Therefore, when Rochester begins courting the prideful and empty-headed Miss Ingram, Jane assesses her rival on the basis of her passion or lack thereof. Unmoved by Miss Ingram’s superficial show of knowledge, Jane salvages her own feelings by listing Miss Ingram’s faults:

She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat the sounding phases from books; she never offered, nor had an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but
she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity: tenderness and truth were not in her. (JE 147, my emphasis)

Coldly investigating Miss Ingram’s disposition from afar, Jane mainly observes Miss Ingram’s lack of natural behaviors untouched by culture or breeding. Indeed, to both Jane and Brontë, Miss Ingram embodies another failure of society’s expectations for women because, as a pure derivation of culture, she stands as an exaggerated form of female perfection as envisioned by patriarchy. In fact, Jane juxtaposes superficial characteristics with their authentic or sincere counterparts, explicitly demonstrating however close in definition they may appear, the former could never double for the latter. Jane’s style of description almost disassembles and objectifies Miss Ingram’s historically overwrought body by implying her unsettling artificiality. Like Frankenstein’s monster, Miss Ingram is a patchwork of angelic features that produce a monstrous counterfeit of women.

Privileging the natural over the cultural, Jane, then, defines the perfect woman as “endowed with force, fervor, kindness, sense” (JE 148), someone with “an opinion of her own” rather than a compilation of those of others. This description of the ideal woman introduces the possibility of a female mode of thought independent of male authorship and rooted in the natural instincts of the woman herself. While Brontë never overtly discredits the contemporary belief that women instinctively gravitate towards the domestic, her examples of the spectralized Mrs. Reed, dying before her death, and the monstrously-exaggerated Miss Ingram show that such enforced behaviors are not only unnatural but also dangerously detrimental. Furthermore, Brontë imagines female subjectivity in Jane, redefining the natural against the cultural. The separation of the natural from the cultural paves the way for many criticisms including that of insincerity.
By returning the definition of natural to its emotional roots, Brontë validates scenes of female madness or rage by turning to their inherent sincerity rather than a constructed form. In doing so, she expands not only the range of behaviors for women but also uses that platform to question other cultural practices, including marriage.

Jane’s love for Rochester shows itself in the same passionate way as her rage, overcoming her restraint in spite of her efforts. The very fact that Jane unexpectedly came to love him demonstrates the sincerity of her emotion rather than the calculation of social mobility:

My master’s colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth,—all energy, decision, will,—were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me: they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him: the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously revived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me. (JE 138)

Aware of cultural standards, Jane refuses to apply to them to her love, touting the uniqueness of Rochester’s stern features as beautiful. Because she does not conform to the standards of male-authored heroines, Jane cares neither for Rochester’s appearance nor his fortune. However, questions of autonomy do preoccupy Jane as her observations are curiously laden with descriptions of power. In fact, her feelings lead to the shift in power within their relationship as Rochester “took [her] feelings from [her] power and fettered them in his.” That Jane illustrates her love with imagery of force and bondage reveals Jane’s fears of commitment. Indeed, she does not celebrate her love for him but rather mourns the loss of her agency. Her description of love germinating and growing within her soul also implies being overcome by her lack of control. Indeed, her feelings are a source of great consternation for Jane as she has sought to
maintain her independence throughout the novel. Indeed, her desire for love and for independence often conflict with each other because the former eliminates the possibility the latter. Since emotions govern actions for Jane, she finds herself in this bind despite her largest efforts to extricate herself. Unlike the triumph she experienced after giving into her rage, Jane’s reluctance at relinquishing control demonstrates the negative aspect of succumbing to one’s nature. Indeed, she confesses that “he made [her] love him” as if he forced her against her wishes, showing no happy surrender but rather a beleaguered resignation to the temptations of love.

Jane, however, justifies her uncontrollable passion and the loss of her autonomy with the worthiness of its object. While Jane and Rochester are from neither the same class nor generation, she nevertheless feels a strong connection to him. In fact, the nonchalance of Rochester’s upper-class guests towards his plain features only serves to heighten Jane’s conviction of their similarities:

I expected their eyes to fall, their color to rise under it; yet I was glad when I found they were in no sense moved. “He is not to them what he is to me,” I thought: “he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;--I am sure he is, --I feel akin to him,--I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth ever sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves that assimilates me mentally to him…For when I say I am of his kind, I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract: I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him. (JE 139)

Here, Jane attributes the fact of their similarities and affinity to nature and biology rather than cultural norms. By comparing herself to her cultural superior, Jane gestures toward gender equality, proclaiming the “tastes and feelings” of women are not only similar but equally valuable as those of men. Indeed, their connection seems to go beyond the gender divide into an
imagined space of cultural neutrality where Jane and Rochester are simply similar. In this space without patriarchal hierarchies, sincerity determines one’s worth, lifting the fiery Jane and lowering the artificial Miss Ingram. Within this framework, it is only love, not patriarchal expectations or domestic duties, that can chain one to another. Therefore, not only will Jane be fettered to Rochester but he, in turn, will be fettered to her.

However, Rochester manipulates Jane by devising an elaborate scheme to discover and obtain her love for him. By pretending to court Miss Ingram, Rochester appears to abide by cultural expectations of a man in his class, disappointing but not surprising Jane. Because she understands Rochester’s disposition, Jane guesses he selects Miss Ingram based on their corresponding stations in life rather than any kind of emotional attachment: “[Jane] felt he had not given [Miss Ingram] his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure” (JE 147). Dejected, she resists herself to Rochester’s inferior choice:

It surprised me when I first discovered that such was his intention: I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife; but the longer I considered the position, education…of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram, for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. (JE 148)

For the first time, Jane acutely and despondently justifies their social difference, allowing that long time cultural indoctrination can prevail over nature to the extent that two become indistinguishable. By employing such a ruse, Rochester at once subverts cultural expectations and proves their hollowness and insignificance. In this parody of Victorian matchmaking, Brontë, through Jane, identifies the unfulfilling nature of merely following “motives so commonplace.” Through Rochester, Brontë continues her mockery by implying that such a match would only be employed as a farce. Moreover, his first marriage to Bertha Mason shows
the hazards of such dishonest courtship rituals, destroying his life for the sake of her inheritance. Sharply aware of such pitfalls, Rochester realizes that only Jane, his intellectual and spiritual equal, can be his wife.

This trick ushers in Rochester’s active pursuit of Jane, giving him control over both Jane’s feelings and her autonomy. Prior to his confession, he continues to bait Jane with suggestions of her departure to Ireland and his own impending marriage, slowly dissolving her hopes that she mistook his preference. However, even as Rochester tortures Jane, she attempts to hold onto some control, not allowing Rochester to dictate her feelings: “This was a blow: but I did not let it prostrate me” (JE 199). Jane’s language of aggression, here, recalls her former description of Rochester’s charms. For Jane, love always implies the loss of freedom. Struggling to control her emotions, she finally breaks down when Rochester forces her to confess her unhappiness at being away from him: “I said this almost involuntarily; and with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out. I did not cry so as to be heard, however, I avoided sobbing…wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved” (JE 200). Little moved, Rochester maneuvers for Jane to give a clearer confession, asking her, “It is a long way to Ireland, Janet, and I am sorry to send my little friend on such weary travels: but if I can’t do better, how is it to be helped? Are you anything akin to me, do you think, Jane?” (JE 201). Confronted with parting forever, Jane hazards no reply: “I could risk no sort of answer by this time: my heart was full” (JE 201). Encouraged by Jane’s silent agony, Rochester begins his own declaration:

Because I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little
frame. And if that boisterous channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad
between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I’ve a nervous
notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you,--you’d forget me. (JE 201)

Rochester’s words moves Jane to “sobbing convulsively,” leading her to lose complete control:

“The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and
struggling for full sway; and asserting a right to predominate: to overcome, to live, rise, and
reign at last; yes,--and to speak” (JE 201, my emphasis). Jane’s silence gives way to her
“vehemence of emotion.”

Her description of losing control mirrors her childhood rage with its liberating effect
giving Jane power “to speak.” Brontë characterizes this shift to sincerity as unstable yet
commanding, allowing Jane to wrest power from Rochester’s grasp. Freed from her former fears,
Jane takes courage and unashamedly confesses her feelings:

I have talked, face to face, with what I reverence; with what I delight in,--with an
original, a vigorous, an expanded minded. I have known you, Mr. Rochester; and it
strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you forever. I
see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death. (JE 201)

Articulate and almost defiant, Jane now dares Rochester to continue to prod her with probing
questions. Her secret now out in the open, Jane breathes as sigh of relief as she decides that she
must leave, alarming the formerly-calm Rochester into dropping his façade as well. At the height
of her passion, Jane launches into a nearly identical version of her speech to Mrs. Reed:

I tell you I must go! Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I
am an automaton?—a machine without feelings? And can bear to have my morsel of
bread snatched from my lips, and drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you
think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?—You
think wrong?—I have as much soul as you,--and full as much heart! And if God had
gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to
leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the
medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: --it is my spirit that
addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal—as we are! (JE 201-202)

By referencing “a machine without feelings,” Jane acknowledges her complete surrender to emotion, warning Rochester not to try her patience. Interpreting his questions as taunts, Jane pridefully asserts that she has “just as much soul as [Rochester does],” claiming that in a “medium [without] custom,” they would be equal. Deeply injured by his trickery, Jane threatens him with the same treatment if she had wealth and beauty. By alluding to his cultural assets, Jane shows the cruelty in mocking those without any. Downtrodden by vapid heiresses like Miss Ingram, Jane disdains his entire class as foolishly culture-obsessed. Unleashing her frustration upon him, Jane quickly asserts her own worth. Like her belief in their spiritual connection, Jane’s conviction in their spiritual equality demonstrates her dismissal of not only patriarchy but also “mortal flesh” as forms of artifice. To Jane, everything down to one’s body is socially mediated to the extent that true sincerity in mortal form seems to be impossible.

Jane’s “purist” argument lays the groundwork for her next claim. Despite the fact that Rochester frantically kisses her and agrees that they are spiritually equal, Jane pushes him away and continues to berate his choice: “for you are a married man—or as good as a married man, and wed to one inferior to you—to one with whom you have no sympathy—whom I do not believe you truly love; for I have seen and heard you sneer at her. I would scorn such a union; therefore I am better than you—let me go!” (JE 202). Since Jane believes that sincere actions must only be motivated by emotions and instinct, she declares herself to be not only his equal but also his superior. With such a pronouncement, Jane shakes off Rochester, asserting, “I have spoken my mind, and can go anywhere now…I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free
human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you” (JE 202). While pride may play a part in her decision to leave, Jane’s outpouring of emotions returns her to her independent state and enables her to leave Rochester. The cathartic release of her confession empowers her to “exert” her will and value her independence in addition to her love.

However, Rochester prevents her departure by sincerely telling Jane that he desires her “to pass through life at [his] side—to be his second self, and best earthly companion” (JE 202). Here, Rochester confirms Jane’s belief in marriage, neither exercising the power from his cultural status nor asserting his rights under patriarchy. By reciprocating both Jane’s love and her ideology, Rochester willingly surrenders the remnants of control to Jane, becoming plainer and plainer in meaning, “You—you strange—you almost unearthly thing!—I love as my own flesh. You—poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are—I entreat you to accept me as a husband” (JE 203). However, Rochester phrases his proposal as a demand, telling the elated Jane that he “must have [her] for [his] own—entirely [his] own” (JE 203). Charmed by his affection, Jane notices neither his possessiveness language nor his narcissism.

Once she agrees to marry him, Jane feels the tug between her love for Rochester and her desire for independence more acutely. In preparation for their marriage, Rochester declares that he will shower her with jewels, making Jane uneasy. Still cheerful, she gently tells him, “Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds so unnatural and strange” (JE 206). Tellingly, Jane rejects his offer because jewels appear “unnatural” on her, asserting her choice in the matter: “I would rather not have them” (JE 206). By stating that her body falls under her control, Jane makes clear that she is not only independent from Rochester but also that she will not take his possessiveness lightly. Her apprehension grows as he ignores her request and declares that he “will [himself] put the
diamond chain round [her] neck…” (JE 206). Rochester’s threat of forceful appropriation of her body disturbs Jane, causing her to insist upon her already-established identity. Commanding Rochester not to “address [her] as if [she] were a beauty,” Jane takes control of her image and reminds him, “I am your plain, Quackerish governess” (JE 206). Their conversation continues in discomfort, coming to a head with Rochester announces, “I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty” (JE 206). Armed with her consent in marriage, Rochester openly displays his desire for cultural acknowledgment of their union. While Rochester does not appear to have employed any artifice in his final confession to Jane, his seemingly drastic transformation from disdaining the worldiness of Miss Ingram to wanting recognition for his new bride shows the extent of cultural influence. However, while Rochester attempts to integrate Jane into his class, his always-present possessiveness, rather than a conscious desire to assimilate, seems to be the primary driving force behind his project. His irreverent attitude and their master-servant relationship previously obscured this trait from Jane’s notice, but it is her expectation of equality in their romantic relationship that further highlights his deeply-rooted desire for control.

Distressed, Jane finally confronts Rochester:

And then you won’t know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in harlequin’s jacket,—a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady’s robe; and I don’t call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. Don’t flatter me. (JE 206)

Alarmed by Rochester’s desire to remake her in the image of his class, Jane clings to her humble articles of clothing, unwilling to compromise. Rochester’s imposition brings Jane’s fragile self-identity into the forefront. Having to defend her integrity from a young age, Jane develops a clear sense of her identity and remains true to herself, basing even her moral behavior upon sincerity.
To Jane, Rochester’s cajolment represents a direct violation of her moral code. Furthermore, Jane views love as free from flattery, which she only registers as insincere. While she does not disavow the transformative qualities of love, Jane firmly resists the notion that their relationship gives them license to change one another. In contrast, for Jane, love refers to the affinity between two unchanging souls; thus, focus on the material and the superficial only detracts from love. Therefore, when Rochester, like Mrs. Reed and Brocklehurst, attempts to change Jane’s notions of herself, she becomes intransigent.

Beyond choosing Jane’s clothing and jewelry, Rochester also attempts to change her constitution, calling her an “angel.” As if responding to the social label of “angel of the house,” Jane pointedly replies, “I am not an angel and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither except nor exact anything celestial of me,--for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you; which I do not at all anticipate” (JE 207). While humorous, Jane’s literal interpretation of angel nevertheless shows her disdain for unrealistic expectations. The power dynamic in their relationship becomes painfully clear as Jane defends herself from Rochester’s seemingly harmless suggestions. Without animosity or antagonism, Jane’s resistance to Rochester’s orders serves only to remind him of her extant identity and discourage his expectations for change. Indeed, Jane attempts to maintain the independent spirit of their pre-engagement relationship dynamic. This is not to say that Jane lacks desire for control herself but rather that Jane views control in relation to the individual. Therefore, control manifests itself in either suppression of emotions or a form of defense from the manipulation of others. In contrast, as demonstrated through his extensive scheming, Rochester seeks to control entire situations. As a result, Jane reacts to his overbearing nature by consistently emphasizing the equality of their
relationship, noting that her expectations for him will conform to his for her. By asking him to forgo his expectations for angelic behavior, Jane herself will also follow suit. Since Jane’s conception of love extends beyond the limits of “mortal flesh,” her standards reveal her disregard of gender norms. Therefore, Jane’s respect of Rochester’s personhood derives not from an expectation of her gender but rather from her personal affections for him.

While Rochester’s possessiveness preoccupies Jane, she becomes defensive when Mrs. Fairfax suggests Jane be on her guard: “It is an old saying that ‘all is not gold that glitters;’ and in this case I do fear there will be something found to be different to what either you or I expect” (JE 211). Mrs. Fairfax alludes to Jane’s very attraction to Rochester because he sympathizes with her and welcomes her fiery personality. Captivated by the very fact that he does not appear to “glitter,” Jane mistakes his selfishness and idiosyncrasies for sincerity. Rochester’s gruff and exacting nature sets him apart from the “antipathetic” handsome youths that Jane finds no sympathy with, leading to her conviction that he is of “her kind.” Offended by Mrs. Fairfax’s advice, Jane asks, “Why?—am I a monster? Is it impossible that Mr. Rochester should have a sincere affection for me?” (JE 211). Until meeting with Rochester’s welcoming embrace, Jane endures a childhood replete with criticisms of her “monstrous” behavior. Therefore, the fact that Jane asks if she is too monstrous to be loved shows not only her insecurities but also her deep-seated fear that he does not sincerely love her. Mrs. Fairfax quickly allays her anxiety by identifying the problem of Rochester’s personality: “No: you are very well; and much improved of late; and Mr. Rochester, I daresay, is fond of you. I have always noticed that you were a sort of pet of his. There are times when, for your sake, I have been a little uneasy at his marked preference, and have wished to put you on your guard…” (JE 211, my emphasis).
Mrs. Fairfax’s insight confirms Jane’s suspicions that Rochester seeks to make her into “an ape in harlequin’s jacket.” Flustered and alarmed by Mrs. Fairfax’s observation, Jane “impatiently” dismisses her and pretends “all was right” in her relationship (JE 211). While Jane registers Rochester’s possessiveness, she now fully realizes the extent of her powerlessness, serving only to provide him with entertainment as a “pet.” Despite the fact that Rochester would deny such a charge, his recent behavior makes it hard for Jane to set aside her apprehension.

Jane temporarily quells her fears as Rochester humors her by answering her questions and compromising some of his requests, allowing Jane to reflect positively, “I can keep [him] in reasonable check now and I don’t doubt to be able to do it hereafter: if one expedient loses its virtue, another must be devised” (JE 219). Once she regains some of her control, Jane freely admits her growing love: “Yet after all my task was not an easy one: often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven” (JE 219). Jane’s reverence of Rochester almost borders on obsessive, compelling her to simply obey him. Her concession that she “would rather have pleased than teased him” demonstrates Jane’s slow assimilation into Rochester’s world. Her former protests about being an “angel” give way to angelic behavior as she conforms to social pressures. As if hypnotized by Rochester’s charms, Jane finally allows him to mediate her identity: “He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol” (JE 219). Jane’s devotion manifests itself in dark imagery as Rochester “eclipses” the sun in her world. He blurs her vision and casts a shadow over her world, reducing her to the status of “pet.” In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë portrays romantic love as the impetus for female self-
effacement, countering many of the male-authored narratives that celebrate marriage plots.

While Rochester loves Jane, his controlling nature and possessiveness take a toll on her sense of self, shrouding her in darkness where he represents the only light. Brontë demonstrates that even in requited love relationships, patriarchy still retains dominance. For Brontë, the purely natural type of love that Jane envisions cannot exist because cultural hierarchies extend into all spaces. Despite her independent spirit, Jane eventually succumbs to the call of her idol, reconciling with Rochester. As a result, culture prevails over nature, and Jane loses her identity or at best discovers one mediated by her husband. By the end of the novel, Jane’s fantasy of a purely independent consciousness remains a fantasy, illustrating a sincere female imagination to be perpetually at odds with patriarchal norms.

In her final novel Villette, Brontë creates an alternative to the romance of Jane and Rochester in that of Lucy Snowe and Monsieur Paul. While she resembles Jane Eyre in her desire for independence, Lucy observes the world around her more than she participates, heightening her role as voyeur. Gilbert and Gubar describe Lucy as “Locked into herself, defeated from the start” (400). Where Jane ultimately surrenders her independence to the patriarchal institution of marriage, Lucy suppresses her thoughts deep within herself, preserving her independence but sacrificing her existence in the process. While Jane merges into what Elizabeth Freeman calls “chrononormativity” (3), Lucy remains oddly stationary because she actually enacts Jane’s fantasy of sincerity. In her quest for an unmediated and natural consciousness, Lucy commits to no culture, drifting from one place to another. Her style of

---

*c For a more detailed discussion on “chrononormativity,” see Freeman 3-5.

65
narration also reflects her detachment and resultant immobility, intimately describing the lives of others while effacing herself.

Brontë explores Lucy’s haunted psychology, creating an anti-heroine who replaces her own story with those of others. Ginevra Fanshawe, Paulina Bassompierre, and Madame Beck represent aspects of Lucy’s personality that she has repressed because all three derive from male-authored female characters. Dissatisfied with Ginevra’s superficiality and Paulina’s childlike simplicity, Lucy decries their existence, consciously choosing to be not-Paulina and not-Ginevra. However, in her efforts to resist such categorization, Lucy becomes nothing; archiving the experiences of other women becomes her experience. Gilbert and Gubar describe the narrative difficulties inherent in such a task:

Obviously, Lucy’s life, her sense of herself, does not conform to the literary or social stereotypes provided by her culture to define and circumscribe female life. Resembling Goethe’s Makarie in that she too feels as if she has no story, Lucy cannot employ the narrative structures available to her, yet there are no other existing alternatives. So she finds herself using and abusing—presenting and undercutting—images and stories of male devising, even as she omits or elides what has been deemed unsuitable, improper, or aberrant in her own experience. (419)

Presented with restrictive narrative conventions, Lucy neither conforms nor successfully creates what Gilbert and Gubar call “a fiction of her own” (419). Unwilling to tell her own stories according to patriarchal models, Lucy observes the women are her as she disappears into the margins. Like the apparitional Mrs. Jellyby or the heavily-mediated Mrs. Reed, Lucy spectralizes herself, leaving the novel without a completely present heroine. Brontë uses the gothic lens to examine a form of sincerity that derives from nature, one uncorrupted by culture. Unlike her silenced ghostly counterparts, nonconformist Lucy becomes the heroine, telling her tale from the margins and bringing her historically and culturally haunted consciousness to the forefront.
While never a heroine of her own story, Lucy becomes the object of her own examination most often when she feels overwhelmed by passion. Initially infatuated with Dr. John her childhood friend who she meets again in Villette, Lucy does not directly acknowledge her feelings, yet her descriptions of his qualities reveal the depth of her emotions. Dr. John’s lust for Ginevra, who Lucy believes to be inferior to him, arouses her anger as she asserts, “I declare, where Miss Fanshawe is concerned, you merit no respect; nor have you mine” (V 270). Once in the safety of her own room, Lucy considers Dr. John’s superior qualities: “He was not made of common clay, not put together out of vulgar materials; while the outlines of his nature had been shaped with breadth and vigor, the details embraced workmanship of almost feminine delicacy: finer, much finer, than you could be prepared to meet with; than you could believe inherent in him, even after years of acquaintance” (V 270). Similar to the “antipathetic” handsome youths that Jane disdains, Dr. John’s good looks that are almost effeminately beautiful capture Lucy’s heart. However, even in her adoration, Lucy hints at his flaws:

Indeed, till some over-sharp contact with his nerves had betrayed, by its effect, their acute sensibility, this elaborate construction must be ignored, and the more especially because the sympathetic faculty was not prominent in him: to fee, and to seize quickly another’s feelings, are separate properties; a few constructions possess both, some neither. (V 271)

While Lucy appreciates Dr. John’s beauty, she values “sympathy” just as much as Jane does. Dr. John’s inability to intuit Lucy’s affections and correctly interpret her feelings distances him from her and foreshadows his misreading of her. Indeed, Dr. John’s lack of sympathy also renders him incapable of a sincere relationship because he can only see the superficial characteristics of a future partner.
His relationships with both Paulina and Ginevra originate from their beauty rather than their intelligence or their sincerity. Despite the fact that Lucy approves of Paulina more than Ginevra, Lucy still criticizes the former for her inconsistent behaviors and affected childishness. As the ideal angel of the house, Paulina immediately renews her romantic relationship with Dr. John who approves of her not because of her virtue but rather because of her pleasing appearance and obedient personality. As a traditional articulation of the marriage plot, their union follows the linear chronology of love, courtship, and marriage. Narrating only the milestones of their relationship, Lucy reduces them to cogs in a system, almost relegating their narrative to the side. For Lucy, they are ghostly because they lack depth and definition. While they earn her blessing, her portrayal of their rushed courtship and uninspired letters expose them as empty shells of characters who merely inhabit their culturally-defined roles. Their lack of reflection and matter-of-factly engagement emphasize their anonymity and unoriginality. For Lucy, spectralization entails not only repression of emotions but also the complete absence of sympathy. For single women like Lucy, such unions haunt her imagination because they appear to be the only choice that society allows for women. Both tempted by and critical of such marriages, Lucy immobilizes herself, remaining independent yet stagnant.

Disheartened by her prospects, Lucy nonetheless proves to be a sharp observer as she finds more faults with Dr. John’s nature. At the height of her infatuation, Lucy begins to notice that he only has the “outlines” of a perfect nature:

I have been told since, that Dr. Bretton was not so nearly perfect as I thought him: that his actual character lacked the depth, height, compass, and endurance it possessed in my creed. I don’t know: he was good to me as the well is to the parched wayfarer—as the sun to the shivering jail-bird. I remember him heroic. Heroic at this moment will I hold him to be. (V 354)
Lucy’s account recalls Mrs. Fairfax’s warning to Jane: “all is not gold that glitters.” While Dr. John’s regard flatters Lucy, marriage with such an unsympathetic person would render her worse than a non-participant, entrapping her in patriarchal structures of oppression. Misreading Lucy as “quiet” and an “inoffensive shadow” (V 454), Dr. John shatters Lucy’s idealization as she proclaims, “With a now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke” (V 455). Lucy almost expresses betrayal at Dr. John’s misapprehension, defining herself as neither “quiet” nor “inoffensive.” Filtering Lucy through a cultural lens, Dr. John only processes her silence as a single woman rather than reads her “eyes, or face, or gestures.” For him, unassuming Lucy is inseparable from the small value that society places upon her. Like Jane, Lucy allies herself with nature, creating her a role for herself despite Dr. John’s and society’s rejection. Lucy asserts that she already has a role that nature gave her, rejecting, in turn, Dr. John’s cultural estimation of her.

Lucy meets her match in the grim Monsieur Paul whose stern exterior belies his kindness and sympathy. Upon seeing him, Lucy discovers his appearance to be almost ghostly: “A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition, with his close-shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide quivering nostril, his thorough glance and hurried bearing” (V 179). Paul’s foreignness, darkness, and ghostliness together make him an ideal partner for Lucy because his defects make it possible for them to be equals. Unlike Jane and Rochester’s marriage, Lucy and Paul’s relationship lack the uneven
power dynamics produced by the cultural dialectics of master-servant and wealthy-poor. Aware of the prevalence of cultural expectations and standards of behavior, Brontë creates a couple that not only feels a mutual spiritual connection but also inhabits similar rejected cultural spaces. Haunted by and haunting culture, Lucy and Paul also share a belief in the supernatural, seeing the same ghosts. Unlike Dr. John’s refusal to read Lucy’s features, Paul sees and reads correctly all aspects of her:

I knew it somehow before you told me. I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike—there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe your forehead is shaped like mine—that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star. Yes, you were born under my star! Tremble! For where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their destinies are difficult to disentangle; knotting and catching occur sudden breaks leave damage in the web. (V 531-532, my emphasis)

While they have different religions, Paul, like Jane, proclaims that he and Lucy “are alike.” Paul uses natural imagery and the language of fate to explain their similarities, implying that they are destined to be together. Tied by “the threads of destiny,” their fates are written in nature, which makes them “difficult to disentangle.” By attributing attraction to destiny, Brontë firmly connects these two together, allowing them to survive on the periphery.

However, Paul’s temperamental personality does share similarities to Rochester’s overbearing nature. Convinced of her hidden intelligence, Paul leaves books for Lucy in order to enrich her talents. In addition, he gives her lessons, holding her to high expectations. While it appears coercive, Paul’s teaching allows Lucy a choice in her education. Moreover, Paul does not attempt to change or redefine Lucy’s nature, but rather, he aims to improve what is already
there. He acknowledges Lucy’s intelligence and gives her tools to help her flourish, should she choose. Where Dr. John assigns Lucy a role as his “unoffensive” and also unimportant acquaintance, Paul supports Lucy’s ambitions by challenging her. For example, in their first interaction, Paul asks her to undertake a literal role in his play: “I apply to an Englishwoman to rescue me. What is her answer—Yes, or No?” (V 186). Here, Paul not only sees her where Dr. John ignores and forgets her, Paul also gives her the option of participation. Excited for a rare opportunity to display her skills, Lucy agrees to help him under the condition that she can choose her garments. Playing a man’s part, Lucy decides that she will not wear all of the costume, earning fellow teacher St. Pierre’s ire: “‘You must not resist,’ pursued St. Pierre—for resist I did” (V 193). Uncompromising, Lucy refuses to sacrifice her agency even for the sake of the company, telling Paul: “And I will, monsieur; but it must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me. Just let me dress myself” (V 194). Paul does not force his opinion upon Lucy: “Monsieur, without another word, took the costume from St. Pierre, gave it to me, and permitted me to pass into the dressing-room” (V 194). Despite the fact that Paul holds a higher position in the school than Lucy does, he follows her judgment because of mutual respect from their cultural and spiritual equality.

After Lucy acknowledges her feelings for Paul, he reciprocates but soon departs Villette, promising to come back. During his absence, Lucy teaches at the school that Paul organizes for her, devoting her energies to expanding her school and enrolling new pupils: “M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life” (V 711). Having intuited her profession ambitions, Paul helps her set them into action, allowing her to have a purpose beyond her role as his lover. Unlike Rochester who obscures Jane’s sense of herself, Paul
removes himself from the center of her world, allowing her not only to have a profession but also to decide her beliefs: “Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for Lucy” (V 713). By recognizing Lucy’s nature as separate from his own, Paul fulfills what Jane desires from Rochester: a spiritual union that allows women to maintain their independent identity. Understanding Lucy’s natural disposition, Paul embraces it of his own volition, gaining her admiration and her love: “I thought I loved him when he went away; I love him now in another degree; he is more my own” (V 714). Where Rochester forces Jane to assimilate into his world, Paul becomes a part of Lucy even in his death.

Paul’s death at sea ends Lucy’s hope for marriage but allows her to keep her independence. That their relationship ends without marriage serves to illustrate alternatives to the traditional trajectory of social life, creating a different but legitimate chronology. Unlike Paulina and Dr. John’s relationship, Lucy’s courtship with Paul lacks many if not all of the traditional milestones that track progress. In addition to the failure to wed, Paul and Lucy spend the bulk of their romance apart, faithfully corresponding through letters. Rather than an “outline” of events, their relationship marks growth by a deepening of love alongside individual growth. In Lucy, Brontë finally creates a heroine who maintains her sincerity throughout her romantic relationship. Where naïve Jane believes that similar “tastes and interests” can sustain love, Lucy identifies similar natures to be just as vital. For Jane, Lucy, and Brontë, sincerity has always existed within the female imagination because of its roots in nature. The oppressive force of patriarchy suppresses it, driving it below the surface. Brontë illustrates a possible restoration of
sincerity to the female imagination through Lucy; however, her haunted psychology reveals many layers of repression. With the aid of Paul, Lucy liberates herself.
CONCLUSION: EXPLORING INSINCERITY IN EMILY BRONTË’S WUTHERING HEIGHTS

The Victorian period witnessed the rise of the feminist movement, which produced just as many reactionaries as it did activists. During this heated time for women’s rights, female activists, in particular, struck out against perceived patriarchal threats to their cause. In one specific instance, early entrepreneur Mary Taylor criticized Charlotte Brontë’s Shirley for what Ellen Moers calls “[its] hesitant attitude toward work for women” (19). Moers categorizes Charlotte Brontë as “not a feminist so much as she was a writer of the epic age,” “drawing ‘parallels in silence’ between her personal condition and that of other classes and races of mankind that suffered under oppression, and threatened to rebel” (19). While I argue that Charlotte Brontë’s feminism was more pronounced than Taylor notes, Brontë does universalize suffering across minority populations, advocating not just sincere female subjectivities but also distinctly individual subjectivities. Indeed, Brontë’s Jane Eyre promises not to force Rochester to change his personality if he does the same for her, upholding equality within a relationship. However, Jane’s discomfort lies primarily with the fact that one individual interferes with the agency of another rather than the fact that Rochester asserts his male privileges to oppress her. Rooted in the natural, Brontë’s concept of sincerity ignores cultural constructions of gender, defining sincerity as a strictly individual trait. While such frameworks stress the inherent equality of everyone, they also ignore specific cultural acts of oppression. Because both Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre find their consciousness mediated, positively or negatively, by their male partners, they lack a purely female imagination even though it may be sincere according to Brontë’s definition.
In Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, she presents an unmediated female imagination in the character of Catherine Earnshaw who belongs to neither her husband Edgar Linton nor her soul mate Heathcliff because of her insincere nature. In her childhood, Catherine quickly becomes insincere due to her interactions with her father, alternating gentleness with insolence. Catherine feigns insolence in order to wield power over Heathcliff, incurring her father’s anger. When she attempts to endear herself, her father refuses to humor her: “That made her cry, at first; and then, being repulsed continually hardened her, and she laughed if I told her to say she was sorry for her faults, and get to be forgiven” (394-395). Unlike the uncontrollable emotions that Charlotte Brontë’s heroines have, Catherine’s disciplined feelings are the first signs of her insincerity and distance from nature. Indeed, despite her wildness, she calculates all of her actions, hiding any sadness. Spurned by her father, Catherine hardens herself to those around her, affecting to laugh when they become serious. Therefore, Nelly feels uncomfortable around the insincere Catherine who never expresses her true feelings.

In addition to calculation, Catherine employs culturally constructed feminine behavior to soothe her father’s ire, earning her his approbation. Her father attributes her gentle moments to her female nature, asking her, “Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?” (395, my emphasis). Young Catherine turns to face him and laughs, asking in return: “Why cannot you always be a good man, father?” (395). Catherine’s question reveals not only her understanding of gender norms but also her defiance. By switching out only the gender of the question, Catherine identifies that as their essential difference rather
than morality or generational difference. Therefore, her defiance registers only on the
gender-level, frustrating her father specifically because of her unfeminine behavior.

Catherine’s question also brings patriarchy to the forefront, casting doubt upon its
moral value. As the local patriarch, her father recalls imagery of monstrous women in order
to shame her into obedience. Not only does she not obey, she refuses to be ashamed and
laughs at his challenge. However, her defiance differs from that of Jane Eyre because
Catherine is less concerned with the integrity of his claim than the source of its power.

Well-aware that her father prefers both Heathcliff and Hindley over her despite the
similarity of behavior among the three, Catherine learns that Mr. Earnshaw’s bias derives
from the little worth that patriarchy settles upon women. Thus, her experimentation with
different behaviors (gentleness or insolence) reveals the limited range of conduct she can
successfully engage without becoming monstrous. Catherine’s early understanding of
gendered power dynamics foreshadows the way that she will manipulate cultural
expectations of women in order to obtain her goals.

After she injures herself, Catherine stays at Thrushcross Grange for five weeks,
becoming culturally-informed:

Instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to
squeeze us all breathless, there lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified
person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long
cloth habit which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in.
(401)

Only by changing her appearance, Catherine becomes “a very dignified person” and gains
the approval of Hindley’s wife and Nelly Dean. Simply by molding herself into the image
of the angel, the beautiful Catherine captures the affections of residents of Wuthering
Heights. Catherine’s outward transformation recalls both Jane Eyre’s refusal to change her habits and Lucy Snowe’s resistance to the male costume, but unlike Jane and Lucy, Catherine views a change of garments as only a change of garments. Because she does not care about being true to her nature, Catherine quickly becomes a cultural creation, not dissimilar to Charlotte Brontë’s Miss Ingram or even Ann Radcliffe’s heroines.

Because of Ann Radcliffe’s dual narrative structure, her heroines always run the risk of being insincere. Like Catherine, Radcliffe’s heroines occasionally overcome danger through their understanding of cultural standards. Usually demure, these heroines conform to patriarchal expectations not only because of survival but also because of an intrinsic conviction in their validity. For example, in The Mysteries of Udolpho, Emily declines Valancourt’s offer of elopement because her filial duty to her aunt prevails over her emotions:

The conflict she had suffered, between love and the duty she at present owed to her father’s sister; her repugnance to a clandestine marriage; her fear of emerging on the world with embarrassments, such as might ultimately involve the object of her affection in misery and repentance—all this various interest was too powerful for a mind already enervated by sorrow, and her reason had suffered a transient suspension. (159)

Despite her love for Valancourt, Emily worries for how her reputation may suffer if she agrees to a “clandestine marriage.” Unlike Jane Eyre, Emily subdues her emotions and decides to leave under Montoni’s orders. However, also unlike Catherine, it is Emily’s sincere belief in modesty and propriety that forces her to choose her duty, not her ambitions or narcissism. As a result, Emily emerges as the sincere heroine while Catherine appears artificial and almost immoral. While both women observe cultural rules, it is this difference
that demonstrates Catherine’s individuality over Emily’s self-effacement. Emily’s devotion
to Valancourt reveals her mediated consciousness. Emily’s anxiety primarily arises due to
fear over Valancourt’s reputation: “Above all, she dreaded to involve Valancourt in
obscurity and vain regret…” (159). Unlike Catherine’s power over Heathcliff, Emily’s
commitment to Valancourt effectively subjugates her needs to his, taking away not only her
volition but also her independence. Because of such measures, Emily preserves herself and
survives under patriarchy. However, because she lacks sincerity and self-deprecation,
Catherine fragments and perishes.

After creating her cultured self, Catherine has to manage her two personas.
Catherine displays her new refined personality in the company of the Lintons while she
shows “her rough side” to those at Wuthering Heights. Catherine quickly gains the
affections of both Linton and Isabella, “acquisitions that flattered her from the first, for she
was full of ambition—and led her to adopt a double character without exactly intending to
deceive anyone” (411, my emphasis). By adjusting her behavior according to situation,
Catherine appeases those around her and satisfies her ambitions. For Nelly, Catherine’s
ambitions to gain everyone’s flattery lead to her downfall, but her inconsistent conduct also
has more practical uses. Having learned the importance being demure and submissive from
her father’s wrath, Catherine also changes herself for the sake of survival. By conforming to
patriarchal expectations of her, Catherine gains some control over her fate. By attempting to
be in everyone’s good graces, she is able to manipulate those with more power than she.

Nelly attempts to naturalize Catherine by emphasizing the unintentional quality of
her actions: “she was not artful, never played the coquette…” (411). By gesturing towards
Catherine’s innocence and inexperience, Nelly generates not only sympathy for her fallen mistress but also makes her more transparent. After Edgar proposes to Catherine, she confides in Nelly, asking for advice. Through their conversation, Catherine’s conflicted nature becomes clear as she decides to follow her ambitions rather than her nature: “And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband” (419). As Nelly notes, Catherine’s weakness is her pride, which she gains from her cultural status. As Linton’s wife, Catherine would receive many social benefits, yet they come at the cost of her sincerity. As Nelly threatens to leave, Catherine drops all her pretences and explains her choice:

I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn’t have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know how much I love him; and that, not because he’s handsome, Nelly, but because he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire. (421)

Catherine chooses culture over her nature, but she acknowledges that Edgar will never have her love. In fact, her language of her love resembles both Jane Eyre’s description of her affinity with Rochester and Monsieur Paul’s explanation of his and Lucy’s shared destiny. For the first time, Catherine reveals her nature and her rejection of it, demonstrating her awareness of her choice of social mobility. Because Heathcliff doubles for her nature, Catherine rejects both at once, acknowledging their inferiority to her cultured façade.

Unlike Heathcliff who remains true to his nature, Catherine does not have the luxury of such a choice. As Catherine’s conversation with Nelly implies, a woman’s choice of husband determines her future. With such considerations in mind, Catherine marries Edgar
for the sake of self-preservation. Her decision represents both a criticism of patriarchy for forcing her hand and justification of her insincerity. Like Radcliffe, Emily Brontë develops an insincere female character in order to demonstrate the cultural pressures on women. Both authors create heroines who are sensitive to the demands of patriarchy, yet one chooses sincerity and meekness while the other chooses insincerity and ambition. One survives at the cost of her individuality while the other self-destructs due to her inability to maintain her two lives, demonstrating the impossibility of having at once an unmediated and sincere female imagination. Unlike Charlotte Brontë’s firm support for both sincerity and the natural, Emily Brontë introduces additional elements of the cultural. While her sister’s heroines persist in looking inward, Emily Brontë’s Catherine illustrates why women have to look outward. Unlike Lucy and Jane who marry their respective soul mates, Catherine consciously decides to separate herself from Heathcliff, yet Catherine pays for her decision with her life. Driven mad by her insincerity, Catherine dies because patriarchy forbids her to select her love for Heathcliff. For Catherine, sincerity is not only impractical for women but also dangerous, threatening to “degrade” and destroy their social existences. Charlotte Brontë’s openly resistant heroines disdain insincere blind followers of culture, yet Emily Brontë’s Catherine demonstrates that conformity derives not from ignorance but rather from hyperawareness of the pitfalls of culture.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


