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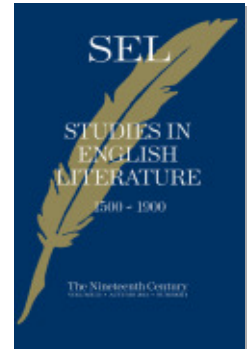
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## Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and the Grimms' Cinderella

MICAEL M. CLARKE

Readers attempting to place Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in the nineteenth-century novel tradition have been puzzled by Brontë's bold mixing of genres and by the immense and powerful ideological dialectic that seems to "close down" at the novel's conclusion to an apparently thin monological stream. Richard Chase exemplifies this critical mystification: "The Brontës' tremendous displacement of the domestic values toward the tragic and mythical, though it falls short of ultimate achievement, gives their work a margin of superiority over that of other Victorian novelists."<sup>1</sup>

Chase's statement reflects the difficulties many critics have with the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*, an ending that often leaves readers wondering what happened to the woman who once so stirringly declared women's desires for independence, replaced by a Jane now apparently living only for Rochester. Has Brontë failed to extricate her vision from the apparently downward-tending "domestic" to achieve the "tragic and mythical" and therefore failed to fulfill the vision she seemed to offer women? Or is it perhaps that Brontë is raising the domestic to the level of the mythical? An examination of Brontë's use of the Cinderella tale in *Jane Eyre* points to the latter conclusion: *Jane Eyre* fuses the domestic to the mythical.

A recurring question regarding *Jane Eyre* is how to read the novel in terms of women and men. At times, Brontë seems to offer a clear expression of woman's self-assertion, as when Jane declares that "women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do."<sup>2</sup> And yet, at the novel's conclusion, Jane has narrowed the field for *her* efforts to just one man—Rochester. Miss Temple has been swallowed up by marriage. Mary and Diana Rivers visit Jane just once a year, and even Adèle, an orphan with whom Jane Eyre

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might be expected to sympathize, has been sent away to school because Jane's "time and cares were now required by another—my husband needed them all" (chap. 38, p. 396). Has Jane Eyre sold her soul?

Various analyses have accounted, often brilliantly, for a conclusion that leaves Rochester injured and dependent on Jane as his "prop and guide" (chap. 37, p. 395). Chase, famously, viewed Rochester's injuries as a form of "symbolic castration."<sup>3</sup> In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar interpret the novel in terms of female rage that is counterbalanced by a conclusion that tentatively and incompletely suggests a world of sexual equality.<sup>4</sup>

Other critics have praised Brontë's conclusion. Adrienne Rich describes it as presenting alternatives "to convention and traditional piety, yes, but also to social and cultural reflexes internalized within the female psyche." The most important of these alternatives, according to Rich, is Brontë's radically redefined understanding of marriage, not as something that "stunts and diminishes the woman; but [that is] a continuation of this woman's creation of herself."<sup>5</sup> And John Maynard interprets the novel's conclusion as "a clear assertion of loving sexual union," achieved only after "the difficulties [Brontë] sees in sexual openness" have been overcome, and after the fears, suppressions, and repressions that drive Jane Eyre into "panicked flight" are incorporated into the complex process of her sexual awakening.<sup>6</sup>

One of the keys to the power of *Jane Eyre* is Brontë's deployment of multiple genres. The realistic novel enables her to delineate the development of a character over time and to represent in detail the social circumstances that shape her. And, by incorporating elements of allegory and the Bible, Brontë deploys elements of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, such as its thorough and perceptive analysis of moral judgment and freedom of will and its inclusion of the supernatural as an active force in human life.

Brontë adhered to the Anglicanism that her father, Patrick, preached in St. Michael's Church, next door to their home in Haworth, but her work demonstrates considerable ambivalence regarding Christianity's cultural legacy in reference to women. The fairy tale element that is so important a part of *Jane Eyre* allows Brontë to include elements of magic and fantasy, and thus to escape the epistemologically restraining effects of realism. More importantly, fairy tale enables Brontë to reach beyond the moral and ethical constraints that Christianity sometimes enjoins upon women and to convey an alternative religious vision.

The Cinderella tale is only one of several fairy tales that inform *Jane Eyre*; allusions to "Beauty and the Beast" and to "Bluebeard's Castle"

present Rochester simultaneously as a good man hidden beneath an ugly exterior and as an ogre husband with multiple former wives, whom he keeps hidden in a secret room in his castle. Allusions to *Arabian Nights*, furnished by Jane herself as she resists Rochester's attempts to shower her with luxurious gifts, suggest parallels between the power of a sultan over his harem and the power of the English gentleman over women. By associating Jane with Scheherezade, Brontë asserts the power of narrative: like Scheherezade, Jane Eyre employs narrative to save lives, her own as well as those of other women, and, in Nancy Workman's words, to assert "a woman's claim to sexual autonomy and creative freedom."<sup>7</sup> Neither the fairy tales nor *Arabian Nights* is any more susceptible to easy interpretation than is *Jane Eyre*, and all serve to convey Brontë's complex and sometimes ambivalent attitudes toward her materials.

The general resemblances between *Jane Eyre* and the Cinderella tale are obvious, and several critics have elucidated them.<sup>8</sup> This study proposes to demonstrate that Jane Eyre is more than a "generic" Cinderella and that Brontë's novel resembles the German tale in specific ways. This resemblance to the German Cinderella tale provides an important key to Brontë's ethic of female intelligence, activity, pleasure, and integrity.

Generic resemblances between *Jane Eyre* and the Cinderella figure include lost mothers and cruel mother substitutes. Jane's Aunt Reed parallels Cinderella's "wicked stepmother" and her cousins Eliza and Georgiana Reed the stepsisters. Like Cinderella, Jane Eyre becomes a kind of servant: "Bessie now frequently employed me as a sort of under nursery-maid, to tidy the room, dust the chairs, etc.," and is restricted to observing the pleasures of her more fortunate siblings (chap. 4, p. 25). "From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded: my share of the gaiety consisted in witnessing the daily apparelling of Eliza and Georgiana, and seeing them descend to the drawing-room, dressed out in thin muslin frocks . . . I would retire from the stairhead to the solitary and silent nursery: there, though somewhat sad, I was not miserable" (chap. 4, p. 23). Later, as Rochester entertains the ladies from whom it seems he, like the prince in Cinderella, is to choose a wife, Jane Eyre is still in exile in the domestic regions of Rochester's castle: "And issuing from my asylum with precaution, I sought a backstairs which conducted directly to the kitchen . . . I could not proceed to the schoolroom without . . . running the risk of being surprised with my cargo of victualage . . . a sound of music issued from the drawing-room" (chap. 17, pp. 146-7).

In both narratives, the Cinderella figure undergoes a period of testing, marked by a series of demeaning "feminine" tasks. The Grimm Brothers' Cinderella, "musste . . . von Morgen bis Abend schwere Arbeit tun, früh vor

Tag aufstehn [sic], Wasser tragen, Feuer anmachen, kochen und waschen."<sup>9</sup> [From morning until evening, she had to perform difficult work, rising early, carrying water, making the fire, cooking and washing.] Both Cinderella and Jane Eyre are rendered unattractive by dull, shabby clothing, and both long for escape to the excitement, beauty, music, and perhaps the sexual pleasure represented by the ball. Clearly, Jane Eyre is the classic Cinderella: poor, despised, and mistreated. But Brontë would have known both the French and the German versions of the tale, and it is significant that she specifically chose to deploy the German version in *Jane Eyre*.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's first volume of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* appeared in Berlin in 1812 and was an immediate success, appearing in seventeen editions between 1812 and 1858. The first English translation, by Edgar Taylor, appeared in 1823 in a collection entitled *German Popular Stories*, which was equally popular in England. Thus, Brontë could easily have known two versions of the Cinderella tale: the Grimms' version, and Charles Perrault's "Cendrillon," first published in France in 1697 in *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé*. Brontë read both French and German and could have read both versions either in English or in their original publication languages.

Thanks to Walt Disney, most Americans today are more familiar with Perrault's version, in which Cinderella rides to the ball in a pumpkin pulled by white mice that a fairy godmother has transformed into a coach and horses. This Cinderella must leave the ball by midnight because, at the stroke of midnight, her coach will turn into a pumpkin and her clothes into rags.

The German version is rougher but, to my mind, preferable. In the Grimms' version, Aschenputtel is told by her dying mother to be always "fromm und gut . . . und ich will vom Himmel auf dich herabblicken" (p. 93) [pious and good . . . and I will watch over you from heaven]. After her father remarries, Cinderella is made to sleep next to the hearth and among the cinders or ashes, hence her German name, Aschenputtel. One day her father goes on a journey and asks his daughters what gift he can bring them. The stepsisters request fine clothes and jewelry, while Cinderella asks only for whatever branch first strikes her father's hat when he begins his return home. Cinderella plants the branch on her mother's grave and waters it with her tears so that a beautiful hazel tree grows up over the grave. And every time Aschenputtel goes to her mother's grave to weep and pray, a bird comes to fulfill any wish that she speaks.

When news of the prince's ball reaches the family, the stepsisters command Cinderella to dress them. They laugh at the idea that she might wish to go too. But she pleads so persistently that her stepmother, to put her off,

makes it a condition that Cinderella perform several tasks before she can go: to remove first lentils, and then peas, from the ashes of the hearth. After the family leaves, however, the bird from her mother's grave summons two white doves to pick up the lentils and peas, and brings a beautiful dress and gold and silver (not glass) slippers.

In the Grimms' version, Aschenputtel leaves the ball voluntarily: "Es tanzte bis es Abend war, da wollte es nach Haus gehen" (p. 96). [She danced until evening, and then wanted to go home.] She goes to the ball three times in fact, each time running away and hiding from the prince, and each time her father helps the prince search for her, once chopping down a tree with an axe, once destroying a dovecote in which they think she is hiding.

At the conclusion of the Grimms' tale, the prince reaches Aschenputtel's home with the golden slipper and the stepmother tells her eldest daughter to cut off her toe in order to fit into the shoe, for, says the mother, when you are queen you will not need to walk. But, as the prince rides away with his false bride, the bird calls to him that he should look at the trail of blood she leaves behind, and he realizes the deception. The second sister is advised by her mother to cut off her heel, and again the bird calls out to the prince, who returns once more to the house.

Now the prince asks Aschenputtel's father whether he has any other daughters, and he answers "No . . . there is only a little stunted Aschenputtel here; she cannot possibly be your bride" (p. 98). But the prince insists, and Aschenputtel washes her face and puts on the golden slipper, and the prince, drawing near, recognizes her. As they leave the marriage ceremony, the birds peck out the two stepsisters' eyes.

The Grimms' version of the tale includes important religious and mythic elements lacking in the French. The mother in heaven, her suffering daughter on earth, and the bird that mediates between them suggest a female holy trinity that parallels Christianity's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are joined to the pre-Christian symbolism of a tree growing out of the mother's grave, of the hearth, and of the peas and lentils that signify connection with a powerful, benevolent mother—half-divine, half-human—and with the hearth, the domestic, and fertility.

Another element that distinguishes the German from the French version is that, in the Grimms' tale, Cinderella leaves the ball on her own initiative; indeed, "es entsprang ihm so geschwind, dass er nicht folgen konnte" (p. 97) [she sprang away from him so quickly that he could not follow her]. She seeks pleasure, not a husband, and there is no threat of public humiliation to force her to leave the ball, as in the French version.

*Jane Eyre* echoes the German Cinderella in many ways. A brief survey will demonstrate how skillfully Brontë evokes the tale's central symbol—

the hearth. Welcoming hearths, for example, signify the precious caregiving qualities associated with the hearthkeepers. Miss Temple's hearth provides the first home for Jane's intellect and spirit, and this sacred space is illuminated by the moon, also traditionally associated with female deities: "Some heavy clouds, swept from the sky by a rising wind, had left the moon bare; and her light, streaming in through a window near, shone full both on us and on the approaching figure, which we at once recognised as Miss Temple . . . [Her apartment] contained a good fire, and looked cheerful" (chap. 8, p. 61). Gradually, Brontë expands on this "good fire": "The refreshing meal, the brilliant fire, the presence and kindness of her beloved instructress . . . had roused [Helen Burns's] powers within her. They woke, they kindled: first, they glowed in the bright tint of her cheek . . . then they shone in the liquid lustre of her eyes . . . which had suddenly acquired . . . radiance" (chap. 8, p. 63).

Every homecoming in this novel is associated with a hearth and domestic caretaking: at Thornfield, Mrs. Fairfax in her "snowy muslin apron," with her knitting and her cat, welcomes Jane Eyre to her "snug, small room; a round table by a cheerful fire" with an invitation, "you must be cold; come to the fire" (chap. 11, p. 83). When Jane returns to visit her dying aunt at Gateshead, Bessie, the one person in the Reed household who had treated Jane kindly and the source of her knowledge of fairy tales, presides in a lodge that is "very clean and neat: the ornamental windows were hung with little white curtains; the floor was spotless; the grate and fire-irons were burnished bright, and the fire burnt clear" (chap. 21, p. 199). In Brontë's private history, Bessie bears a close resemblance to "Tabby," the kindly servant who, after Charlotte's mother's death, fed the children generously and, in Winifred Gérin's words, "cared for their frail bodies."<sup>10</sup>

David Lodge points out that *Jane Eyre* "contains about eighty-five references to domestic fires" as well as some dozen references to hearths, about forty-three figurative and ten literal references to fire, and four to hell-fire. In *Jane Eyre*, Lodge demonstrates, Brontë conveys "a very significant cluster of emotions and values" by means of fire imagery, developed and expanded with remarkable fluidity from literal description into lyrical evocations of passionate and spiritual states of being.<sup>11</sup>

At Moor House, the hearth represents family, intellectual companionship, emotional intimacy, and even life itself, as a shivering, exhausted, and starving Jane looks in from the outer cold and darkness on a "room with a sanded floor, clean scoured; a dresser of walnut, with pewter plates ranged in rows, reflecting the redness and radiance of a glowing peat-fire." Near the hearth, "amidst the rosy peace and warmth," sit two "young graceful women—ladies in every point." Their faces look "thoughtful almost to se-

verity,” and yet, Jane feels, “I seemed intimate with every lineament” (chap. 28, pp. 292–3). Like Miss Temple’s, their names are significant: Mary and Diana represent Christian and mythical figures who symbolize female chastity and integrity. On the other hand, Rochester’s “bed of fire” makes clear that the domestic embers may be fanned into the demonic, uncontrolled fires of a mad wife’s rage, and Helen Burns (her name indicates Brontë’s deliberateness), who has “only a father . . . and he will not miss me,” dies by a fever signifying the destructive quality of self-abnegation that is preached to women by Christian ministers such as Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers (chap. 9, p. 71). Thus, hearthfire in *Jane Eyre* represents all that is needful, desired, and inspiring, but also that which has a terrifying potential for devastation and destruction.

And what of the saintly mother in heaven? Brontë takes this invisible but actively intervening figure from the Grimms’ tale and transforms her into an image that resonates with powerful echoes of ancient female deities, especially that of the moon-goddess. In doing so, she defies conventional expectations that the novel be realistic and presents a supernatural figure straight out of the Grimms’ *Cinderella*: a mother in heaven who watches over, guides, and inspires Jane in crucial moments.

Moon imagery is essential to *Jane Eyre*. Not only does the moon shine full on Miss Temple in the passage quoted above, it is also clearly associated with Jane’s mother in the scene in which Jane struggles to decide whether to stay with Rochester after learning that his mad wife still lives. Jane falls asleep and dreams of the moon breaking through clouds:

a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—“My daughter, flee temptation!”

“Mother, I will.”

(chap. 27, p. 281)

The moon also illuminates Jane’s first doubts about Christian teachings: “the moon rose with such majesty in the grave east . . . And then my mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell: and for the first time it recoiled, baffled” (chap. 9, p. 69).

Moonlight “streamed through the narrow window near my crib,” it brightens and gleams on Jane’s first meeting with Rochester, “her glorious

gaze" rouses Jane Eyre just before Bertha's first attack, and illuminates Jane's declaration of love and independence (chap. 5, p. 34). Rochester, too, remarks the effect of the moonlight, as he reminds Jane that she "glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal" (chap. 25, p. 230). In every case, Brontë associates the moon with a kind of sacred presence.

Before the abortive marriage ceremony, the moon foreshadows Jane's isolation and suffering. On the eve of Jane's intended wedding, the moon's "disk was blood-red and half overcast; she seemed to throw on me one bewildered, dreary glance, and buried herself again instantly in the deep rift of cloud." Soon afterward, she "shut herself wholly within her chamber, and drew close her curtain of dense cloud; the night grew dark; rain came driving fast on the gale" (chap. 25, pp. 243–4). But that very night, after Bertha Mason's visit to Jane Eyre's room, during which she rips the bridal veil, the moon once again "shone peacefully," as if relieved, having warned her daughter (chap. 25, p. 251).

Again and again, Brontë uses these symbols—the hearth and the moon—to represent a heavenly mother and virgin moon-goddess, offering Jane Eyre a spiritual integrity lacking in the version of Christianity represented by Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers.

After St. John Rivers has insisted that Jane Eyre marry him, for propriety's sake, and so that he would be possessed of "a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life and retain absolutely till death," the moon again plays a decisive role in Jane's peril of soul (chap. 34, p. 357): "I contended with my *inward dimness of vision, before which clouds yet rolled*. I sincerely, deeply, fervently longed to do what was right; and only that. 'Show me, show me the path!' I entreated . . . All the house was still . . . *the room was full of moonlight*. My heart beat fast and thick; I heard its throb. Suddenly, it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities . . . I saw nothing; but I heard a voice somewhere cry—'Jane! Jane! Jane!' nothing more" (chap. 35, p. 369, emphasis added).

Again Jane has had a vision, described in terms that stretch the limits of the realistic novel and that is a religious, rather than a gothic, element. It is related to the conversion experience so typical of Victorian autobiography—in this case a woman's conversion experience:

I broke from St. John, who would have followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. He obeyed

at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way—a different way to St. John’s, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving—took a resolve—and lay down, unscared, enlightened—eager but for the daylight.

(chap. 35, p. 370)

In order to understand how the Grimm Brothers’ Cinderella infuses *Jane Eyre* with its religious significance, we must consider the tale itself. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were essentially folklorists who collected tales, legends, myths, fables, anecdotes, jokes, and *Sagen*, from both oral and literary sources. Their goal was, in part, to “reconstruct the ancient mythological pantheon preceding Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> The Cinderella tale has a life far outside of the Germanic or Teutonic traditions; the earliest known version to feature a lost slipper was recorded in ninth-century China, where it was already a well-known part of the oral tradition.<sup>13</sup> W. R. S. Ralston surveyed “scores of variants” of the tale and found that one significant feature that most variants share is “the idea that a loving mother may be able, even after her death, to bless and assist a dutiful child.”<sup>14</sup>

A question we must ask is whether the Cinderella tale reinforces negative stereotypes of women. Some critics charge that the tale posits passivity as a feminine ideal, such as is exemplified in the Disney song, “Some Day My Prince Will Come.” And the “Cinderella Complex” has come to mean a female fear of success. If this is all there is to the tale, then *Jane Eyre* would not benefit much from its borrowing. Karen E. Rowe, in fact, argues that Brontë “tests the [Cinderella] paradigm . . . and finds it lacking” because it “subverts the heroine’s independence and human equality.”<sup>15</sup>

But there is a way to read Cinderella that is consistent with Brontë’s feminist spiritual themes. Jack Zipes notes that folklorists August Nitschke, in *Soziale Ordnungen im Spiegel der Märchen*, and Heide Göttner-Abendroth, in *Die Göttin und ihr Heros*, trace the Cinderella tale back to matrilineal societies and associate some of the tale’s variations with moon worship and matriarchal rites.<sup>16</sup> Marie Louise von Franz, in *The Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales*, traces in the tales female archetypes from Greek mythology, in particular the dual image of motherhood represented by Demeter, goddess of fertility and grain and also of sorrow and revenge.

And Sigrid Fröh, in *Die Frau im Märchen*, argues that Cinderella is not a demure, passive victim but rather an active, clever, scheming girl who ultimately makes the prince kneel to her in her ash-stained dress, that is, in

her own identity, and that the tale represents the prince's ultimate subordination to Aschenputtel's will!

In the final analysis, the Cinderella tale offers two apparently conflicting perspectives on women's roles. On the one hand, Cinderella does seem to teach that humility, obedience, and long-suffering acceptance of household drudgery will be rewarded through marriage and living happily ever after, in triumph over all those competitive other women. On the other hand, Louise Bernikow argues in *Among Women* that the Cinderella tale represents remnants of ancient pre-Christian religions in which the hearth was dedicated to goddesses such as Vesta and Hera and tended by priestesses, and that the tale's hearth, tree, and peas and lentils (grain) all symbolize the sacred. Cinderella's association with the hearth and her thrice-daily ritual visit to her mother's grave link her in particular to Vesta, goddess of the hearth, and to the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome, powerful guardians of the sacred fires of home and state.

According to Bernikow, the Cinderella tale represents a conflict between two kinds of female principles: the mother signifies the importance, even the sacredness, of women's roles and work, including housework, as symbolized by Cinderella's association with the hearth. The other female principle is represented by the stepmother and is male centered, always in competition with other women for male approval, hoping for idleness ("When you are Queen you will not have to walk") and willing to mutilate one's self and one's daughters to gain the prize, a husband.<sup>17</sup>

Jane Eyre's family is essentially like Cinderella's, but, as this is a novel and not a fairy tale, Brontë is able to use the novel's realism to explore the social and psychological forces that destroy women's integrity. Mrs. Reed's continual indulgence of her son's selfish cruelty, for example, represents society's overvaluation of the male, and, after years of profligacy, John Reed's suicide kills them both.

Eliza and Georgiana Reed represent the dilemma many women confront regarding marriage or spinsterhood (a recurring Brontëan theme). Georgiana is described by her sister Eliza in terms reminiscent of Mary Wollstonecraft: "you seek only to fasten your feebleness on some other person's strength: if no one can be found willing to burden her or himself with such a fat, weak, puffy, useless thing, you cry out that you are ill-treated, neglected, miserable" (chap. 21, p. 207). Georgiana finally makes "an advantageous match with a wealthy, worn-out man of fashion," while Eliza chooses the only alternative she knows and has herself, in Jane Eyre's view, "walled up alive in a French convent" (chap. 22, p. 212). Putting this family behind her, Jane Eyre continues her pilgrim's progress in search of a better way.

Like Cinderella, Jane Eyre runs away from the too-powerful prince, though others sell themselves daily to such men, even, step-sister-like, deforming themselves in a vain attempt to meet their requirements. The issue between Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester after the interrupted marriage ceremony and revelation of Bertha Mason's existence is not so much Rochester's deception, nor the moral question concerning his still-living wife, as it is a question of male power versus female integrity. This has been the issue between them from the first.

Although Jane Eyre is attracted by Rochester's strength of character, she fears it in a world where men are encouraged to misuse their power. From the very beginning, Jane's wariness, her sometimes prickly independence, her bantering replies to Rochester, and her refusal to accept his gifts establish power as a key issue between them. And indeed, Rochester has long abused his privileges: as a young man, he married for money, using women for sex but wishing to possess them exclusively with no obligations in return. He is a distant domestic despot who mocks the feminine qualities of his ward Adèle and forms no close attachments but lies to and teases women mercilessly. Yet, he is much admired and sought after in society. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, that is all that need be said about society.

The scene—moonlit, of course—that leads to their engagement is filled with the language of equality: Jane's emotion asserts its "right to predominate," her spirit addresses his, "equal—as we are!" and he responds that "My bride is here . . . because my equal is here" (chap. 23, p. 223). Shortly thereafter, when Rochester has informed Mrs. Fairfax of their plans to marry, she begins a litany of warnings on the theme of inequality: "He is a proud man," "Equality of position and fortune is often advisable . . . He might almost be your father," and, "Try and keep Mr. Rochester at a distance . . . Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" (chap. 24, pp. 232–3).

Most telling of all is Rochester's resort to threats of violence when he realizes that his deception will not work and that he may be balked of his desires: "Jane! will you hear reason? . . . because, if you won't, I'll try violence . . . Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man . . . beware! . . . his still voice was the pant of a lion rising." Brontë makes the underlying issue clear when Jane responds to Rochester's "It would not be wicked to love me" with "It would to obey you" (chap. 27, p. 278).

Jane Eyre's humble social position has, like Cinderella's, a double function. As emblems of unjust limitations placed on women, Jane's poverty and her life of service as under-housekeeper, governess, and teacher offer a social critique of women's subjection. But Brontë also asserts the worth of women's work. Its value is suggested by the many images of domestic

peace and intellectual and spiritual nourishment offered by women at their hearthsides. Such service, if performed freely, is noble, and promotes good in others.

In the larger pattern of the novel, at the hearths of Miss Temple, Bessie, Mrs. Fairfax, and Mary and Diana Rivers, domesticity is associated with resistance to the life-denying principles of a tainted social system and with a spirituality that is not anti-Christian, but that seeks to reintegrate ancient maternalist principles into the Christianity that Brontë's father and his curates preached. Had the hearthkeepers more power, Brontë seems to say, the Jane Eyres of the world could fulfill their ambitions and their desire for freedom.

In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell dated 27 August 1850, Brontë wrote:

Men begin to regard the position of women in another light than they used to do; and a few men, whose sympathies are fine and whose sense of justice is strong, think and speak of it with a candor that commands my admiration. They say, however—and, to an extent truly—that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils—deep-rooted in the foundations of the social system—which no efforts of ours can touch; of which we cannot complain; of which it is advisable not too often to think.<sup>18</sup>

Distinctive as he is in his Byronic attractiveness, Rochester is part of a larger pattern of masculine dominance: *vide* John Reed, the Rev. Brocklehurst, and St. John Rivers. At the center of this dominance is a displacement of the rightful relations between men and women by a religious system that places man between woman and heaven. *Jane Eyre* reflects: "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. 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" (chap. 25, p. 241).

Women, by contrast, either become ruthlessly competitive and pettily cruel (Georgiana Reed, Mrs. Reed, and Blanche Ingram), having, in effect, cut off a part of themselves to please men, or they are swallowed up by a world that does not value them (Helen Burns and Miss Temple), as Cinderella fears will happen to her. The third alternative, and "the choice of life" for women, is that represented by the hearth, a "sacred space" where Cinderella's spirit is nourished through divine help, and where loving ser-

vice brings joy. The hearth represents a place where women can, in Virginia Woolf's words, "look past [John] Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view."<sup>19</sup>

This book is neither a simple expression of female rage (though there is anger in it), nor a capitulation to the devalued female roles of nurse and servant. It is, rather, an expression of a maternalist system of values that was known and debated in Brontë's lifetime.<sup>20</sup> Nineteenth-century maternalists such as J. J. Bachofen, Friedrich Engels, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman believed that human society evolved through a number of stages, and that it was not always patriarchal.<sup>21</sup> Some, like Walter Bagehot, believed that woman, whose maternal instinct he considered the source of all altruism, provided the foundation of civilization.

Although Bachofen considered patriarchy superior to matriarchy on the scale of human social development, nineteenth-century feminists saw hope in the maternalist denial of the universality of female subordination: it suggested that equality between the sexes might be the more "natural" form of social organization, positing alternatives for women. And, in the nineteenth century, archeological evidence of mother-goddess figures was deployed for a variety of purposes, sometimes to support theories of the moral superiority of women, sometimes to argue, as did Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, in *Woman and Her Master* (1840), that woman's rightful place in human history had been hidden and suppressed by historians in order to keep women in subjection.

Maternalism offered an alternative vision of relations between the sexes to nineteenth-century thinkers and writers such as Brontë and William Makepeace Thackeray. That such ideas were not foreign to Brontë is demonstrated in *Shirley*, when Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar, sitting in the churchyard while, within the church, "curates . . . hammer over their prepared orations," discuss "what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth." And what Eve was, was not Milton's Eve, for he "tried to see the first woman; but . . . It was his cook he saw." Rather the first Eve, as Shirley describes her, was "heaven-born," "vast," "grand," "a woman-Titan," "Jehovah's daughter," an "undying, mighty being" who yielded the "unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence . . . which, after millenniums of crimes . . . could conceive and bring forth a Messiah."<sup>22</sup> That Brontë would give the heroine who was based on her beloved sister Emily such words and ideas strongly suggests that Brontë herself found them compelling.

Cinderella's virtues then, the *ethos* she represents, are exactly those that the Victorians held to be peculiarly women's virtues, and Brontë's use of the tale in *Jane Eyre* represents a fusing of the German variant's mother-

goddess implications with certain nineteenth-century ideas concerning human evolution and altruism as a female principle. Like the Cinderella tale, the novel is structured upon two competing religious systems, one female-centered and pre-Christian, the other patriarchal and Christian. It is only when the two are viewed together that we can understand Brontë's particular dialectic of fierce independence and romantic, seemingly anti-feminist, ideas about women, duty, and altruistic caretaking.

The structure of *Jane Eyre* is a complex fusion of classical mythology, Christian allegory, and fairy tale, resulting finally in a feminist allegory, a woman's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which those elements of Christianity that demean women's intelligence, will, desire, and integrity are assessed and found wanting. Brontë's is a Christianity reclaimed by the (re)insertion of a maternalist respect for women's work. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë was able to reconcile grief for a lost mother and ambivalence toward the religion of her father. And it is the insertion into the novel of the Grimm Brothers' Cinderella, with its resonances of the supernatural and the mythic, that conveys this feminist ethic.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Richard Chase, "The Brontës, or, Myth Domesticated," in *Forms of Modern Fiction: Essays Collected in Honor of Joseph Warren Beach*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948), pp. 102–19, 119. This article was originally published in *KR* 9, 1 (Autumn 1947): 487–506, but the original article does not contain this sentence. Except in this one instance, all references to Chase's essay will be to the *KR* version.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard J. Dunn, Norton Critical Edn. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), chap. 12, p. 96. Henceforth all references to *Jane Eyre* will be to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text, designated by chapter and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> Chase, p. 495.

<sup>4</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 368–71.

<sup>5</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966–1978* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), pp. 89–106, 106.

<sup>6</sup> John Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 143–4.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy V. Workman, "Scheherezade at Thornfield: Mythic Elements in *Jane Eyre*," *ELWU* 15, 2 (Fall 1988): 177–92, 190.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of Brontë's use of the Cinderella tale, see especially Elizabeth Imlay, *Charlotte Brontë and the Mysteries of Love: Myth and Allegory in "Jane Eyre"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), with particular reference to chapter 8, "Fairy Tales," pp. 69–80. Other discussions include Karen E. Rowe, "'Fairy-born and human-bred': Jane

Eyre's Education in Romance," in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover NH and London: Univ. Press of New England, 1983), pp. 69–89; Robert Keefe, *Charlotte Brontë's World of Death* (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 113–22; Paula Sullivan, "Fairy Tale Elements in *Jane Eyre*," in *JPC* 12, 1 (Summer 1978): 61–74; Charles Burkhart, *Charlotte Brontë: A Psychosexual Study of Her Novels* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), pp. 69–73.

<sup>9</sup>Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Aschenputtel," in *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1888), pp. 93–9, 93. Subsequent references to this edition of "Aschenputtel" will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>10</sup>Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 34–9.

<sup>11</sup>David Lodge, "Fire and Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's War of Earthly Elements," in *The Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 114–43, 116–7.

<sup>12</sup>Kurt Ranke, *Folktales of Germany* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), p. viii.

<sup>13</sup>R. D. Jameson, "Cinderella in China," in *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook*, ed. Alan Dundes (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1982), pp. 71–97.

<sup>14</sup>W. R. S. Ralston, "Cinderella," in *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook*, pp. 30–56, 36.

<sup>15</sup>Rowe, pp. 71, 70.

<sup>16</sup>Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 137–8.

<sup>17</sup>Louise Bernikow, *Among Women* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), p. 28.

<sup>18</sup>Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. and with an intro. by Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 356. The reference to "a few men . . . whose sense of justice is strong" surely refers to William Makepeace Thackeray, whom Brontë praises so strongly in the preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*.

<sup>19</sup>Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), p. 118.

<sup>20</sup>See especially Johann Jakob Bachofen's *Myth, Religion, and Mother-Right* (1861), also Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's *Woman and Her Master* (1840), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1861), Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* (1876–1896), Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* (1869), Friedrich Engels's *Origin of the Family* (1871), Eleanor Marx's *The Woman Question* (1887), Mona Caird's *The Morality of Marriage* (1897), and Frances Swiney's *The Awakening of Women: Or, Women's Part in Evolution* (1897). I am indebted to Florence Boos's discussion of the ideological axes of agreement and difference among these and other writers in her "A History of Their Own: Late Nineteenth-Century Feminist Family History," delivered before the Midwest Victorian Studies Association in April of 1992. Gerda Lerner discusses the problematic yet influential workings of the ideas of patriarchy and maternalism in "Origins," in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 15–35.

<sup>21</sup>Lerner, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup>Brontë, *Shirley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), book 2, chap. 7, pp. 319–21.

<sup>23</sup>Marianne Thormählen's recent study, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), appeared after this essay had been written. Thormählen's analysis is compatible with the views expressed here, in that she demonstrates that a "radical enquiry into religious thought, feeling, and conduct" characterizes all the Brontë works (p. 219). Moreover, she correctly represents Charlotte's critique of Anglicanism

as a sign, not of rejection of the church, but of a loving desire to reform it. Thormählen's study is to be commended for its impressive demonstration of the need for greater contemporary appreciation of the role of religion in nineteenth-century literature.

Thormählen's study, however, focuses on the extent to which Christian institutions and ideas inform the Brontë novels, while my purpose is to show that in *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë includes religious elements that range beyond those provided by Christianity alone.