

A 'Deeper Shade of the Supernatural': *Jane Eyre* and the Occult

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all of my past and present literary teachers and professors who inspired my love for literature. Without you, I would have suffered the grave misfortune of having done something else with my time.

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INTRODUCTION

Jane Eyre is many things: a classic gothic thriller, a fictional memoir, a meditation on religion and morality, a proto-feminist call for the liberation of the English governess. It is also, however, an exploration of the dark, the supernatural, and the uncanny. The role of the supernatural in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is often overlooked, especially as it rests in the shadow of Emily Brontë's deeply brooding and occult *Wuthering Heights*. While the supernatural is certainly visible and almost tangible in Emily's novel, it slips quietly in and out of *Jane Eyre*, teasing the reader (and Jane, too), suggesting a bit here, retracting a bit there, until, finally, one unexplained event changes the reader's entire perception of the novel: the cry across the moors. This event, the moment at which Jane and Rochester hear each other call to the other across hundreds of miles of moorland, is described by its protagonist as a "deeper shade of the supernatural" in what is an otherwise realistic novel (550). In the eyes of the reader, this could be merely another *deus ex machina* plot intervention, but Jane calls it "supernatural." She doesn't respond by claiming that it is a miracle of God, either, as we might expect her to. As a result of this event, the reader is left feeling unsure about whether certain earlier events in the novel were influenced by the supernatural or not – events whose origins were questionable to begin with. Within (and without) the novel, moreover, are several stems of narration, one superimposed atop the other: "Jane the younger" at Gateshead Hall and before leaving Lowood Institution, "Jane the older" at Thornfield Hall and later with the Rivers siblings, "Jane the oldest" allegedly looking back at her life and writing her autobiography, *Charlotte* writing and narrating the novel, and the possibility of Charlotte writing it as her own autobiography.¹ These varying levels of narration

¹ Charlotte Brontë originally published her novel in 1847 with the title *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* under her pen name "Currer Bell."

mirror the multiple levels of reality – natural and supernatural – presented within the story of *Jane Eyre*.

Charlotte Brontë's novel is generally thought to take place between the 1810s and the 1830s, roughly paralleling the progression of Brontë's own childhood and early adulthood.² The famous literary siblings – Charlotte, Emily, Anne, and Branwell (eldest sisters Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis before the age of eleven) – were brought up in Haworth, a small town in the north of England where their father, Patrick Brontë, was appointed perpetual curate in 1820. Maria Brontë (née Branwell), Patrick's wife and the mother of the Brontë children, died of cancer in 1821 (Barker 100, 120).

Jane Eyre in and of itself drew much critical attention for its portrayal of religion and morality, but the revelation that its author was the daughter of a curate (and a woman, at that) only increased this particular attention. Critics were tough on Charlotte for not writing a sufficiently "moral" novel and on her heroine Jane for being far too passionate and un-Christian, especially for the product of a female author (Barker 104). In spite of this, James Obelkevich's research on religion in Victorian England provides an interesting counterpoint to the idea that Charlotte Brontë was completely inundated by orthodox Christian authority and expectations. His work suggests that any sample rural Victorian English village operated, in fact, on Christian worship and beliefs externally, but on superstitious, pagan thought internally or subconsciously. Community members regularly attended the local church and said their daily prayers, but would often rely on decidedly un-Christian expressions and traditions to rationalize the mysteries of everyday life. Brontë's novel, then, which deals with Christian thought overtly and occult

² Charlotte Brontë was born on April 21, 1816 in Thornton, but spent the majority of her life in Haworth. She died in 1855 shortly after becoming pregnant with her first child.

matters more subtly, actually reflects rural Victorian life more fully than the angered, self-righteous comments of her early critics seem to suggest.

Another important aspect of the mid-to-late nineteenth century is the rapid progression of technological and industrial innovation. The first commercial electric telegraph was demonstrated in England between Euston and Camden Town on July 25, 1837 (“ON THIS DAY”). Advances in science and technology – particularly in electricity, like the telegraph – would lead to a massive change in the way Victorians understood communication. Telegraphic communication was still in its early stages when Charlotte Brontë first published *Jane Eyre* in 1847, but the invention’s seemingly instantaneous, non-physical mode of transmission was so extraordinary that writers like Brontë almost certainly used it as inspiration for her descriptions of the transference of immaterial substances – thoughts, feelings, passions, and supernatural energies – over time and space.

During a personal visit to Haworth in June of 2018, I spent a few days exploring the town and its surrounds, which today serves as an everlasting homage to the Brontë family legacy. Each day I would walk past St. Michael and All Angels Church, where Patrick Brontë served as curate, and the Old School Room (site of the school that the Brontë sisters attempted to found) on my way to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, the former Brontë family home, now the major center of current Brontë research and the location of the majority of the family’s remaining personal items, letters, and annotated books. I spent a day studying a few books that Charlotte annotated, and although I didn’t spend enough time in the research library to find anything that might have contributed to my research in any major way, I did find an intriguing pattern of annotation in one of her books. Charlotte Brontë’s copy of Richmal Mangnall’s *Historical and miscellaneous questions* contains an index organized alphabetically with the names of various

historical figures. In the descriptions under the entries “William Murray” and “Samuel Richardson,” Charlotte has crossed out any instance of the title “Mr.” and replaced it with “Mrs.” She similarly crosses out the pronouns “he” and replaces them with “she.” I have found no published explanation for this peculiar behavior. My theories range from a feminist affinity of Charlotte’s to imagine that these male historical figures had wives just as important as their husbands (the wives: “Mrs. Murray” and “Mrs. Richardson”) to a sort of facetious, emasculating diminution of men that she didn’t particularly like (“Mrs.” William Murray and “Mrs.” Samuel Richardson) to a purely fetishistic impulse to gender-bend figures of history in the harmless privacy of her imagination (and her now-not-so-private copy of *Historical questions*). The discovery of these eccentric annotations only served to strengthen my conviction that Charlotte was absolutely capable of writing a novel about the obscure, the unspeakable, the repressed, and the taboo, all of which are represented by the occult supernatural in *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë’s novel, like her sister Emily’s *Wuthering Heights*, is replete with occult references, but *Jane Eyre* masks those allusions with individual agency and Christian loyalty.

The main pillar of my thesis relates to the event of the cry in *Jane Eyre*, and though I had formed this argument before my visit to Haworth, my exposure to the physical geography of West Yorkshire greatly enhanced my understanding of the cry as an event that takes place across the sublime vastness of English moorland. Like the occult, the moors are also rather more famous in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, but they occupy a position just as important in *Jane Eyre* because of the ontological implications for a world in which two people can communicate over such an immense tract of space. Jane once described herself as feeling as though she was on a single point surrounded by an endless sea of space on either side (144): this is exactly how it feels to stand in the middle of an English moor.

One final biographical detail worth mentioning is the role that Tabitha Aykroyd, the Brontë family cook and servant of thirty-one years, played in potentially inspiring the supernatural in both Emily and Charlotte's novels. Aside from addressing the various kinds of supernatural forces and the reasons for their presence in *Jane Eyre*, I am also curious to know *where* Charlotte picked up all of her stories and references to fairies and magical phenomena. One suggestion comes in the form of Obelkevich's argument, as I mentioned before: it is possible that these stories and sayings were simply a part of rural Victorian life (albeit a more shadowed part). On the other hand, "Tabby," as she was called by the Brontë family, very well could have emulated the role Bessie played for Jane when she was a child. Charlotte's mother died when she was five years old, and when Tabby arrived a few years later to serve as nurse and cook for the family, she very well could have been the source of the old Yorkshire legends and tales that populate *Jane Eyre* in one form or another ("Family and Friends"). You can still see Tabitha's grave in the cemetery just ten yards across from the front door of the Brontë family home.

One perspective I chose not to explore in great detail in my essay is *Jane Eyre's* place in the Romantic literary movement. M.H. Abrams in his work *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) explains the title of his book as the romantic tendency to "naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine" (68). He continues, saying that

The Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos; and the resolve to give up what one was convinced one had to give up of the dogmatic understructure of Christianity, yet

to save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values, may surely be viewed by the disinterested historian as a display of integrity and of courage. (68)

While a more cursory evaluation of *Jane Eyre*'s place within the Romantic movement might only elicit the novel's particular attention to human emotion and passion – which, frankly, is also an important connection – Abrams identifies a truth of the Romantic period that applies simultaneously to the mundane and to the metaphysical. The way the romantics went about their daily lives and the way they chose to worship were equally affected by the questions they confronted as members of this period. Just as Abrams suggests, Jane (representing the ideals of the romantic) “resolves to give up” what she must of the “understructure of Christianity,” the strict, orthodox Christian dogma she was taught as a child. As an adult, however, Jane does retain its “experiential relevance and values” and imbues them with her own personal sense of guiding principles.

A more recent critical essay by Srdjan Smajić, “Supernatural Realism” (2009), argues against the idea that the supernatural and the natural, or the human and the divine, are really so separate to begin with. Citing other critics' difficulty or even complete refusal to define “realism,” Smajić argues that

supernaturalism, as far as the nineteenth-century British novel is concerned, is not disruptive but consistently and overtly constitutive of its realism. Literary realism... is not haunted by supernaturalism as the parasitic or saboteurial harbinger of ideological, epistemological, and ontological disruption but instead openly collaborates with it

everywhere weaving it into its formal properties, thematic concerns, and critical self-reflections. (3)

Smajić believes that a novel like *Jane Eyre* needs supernaturalism to better support its realist goal. His instinct is correct insofar as that novel is concerned; the supernatural is *most* often a benign presence in that it is not “parasitic” or a “saboteurial harbinger”; however, as Jeffrey Franklin explains, there is more than one spiritual force at work in *Jane Eyre* and it would be a major oversimplification to say that some forces are “good” and some are “bad.”

Franklin speaks of various spiritual discourses in *Jane Eyre*, and names the Christian discourse (though fractured into many discourses itself) as generally opposed to unorthodox discourse, or “supernatural spiritualism” (460). Franklin goes on to name what is one of the main questions of my thesis with regard to *Jane Eyre*: “Critics long have attempted to rationalize the supernatural elements or have wondered at how Charlotte Brontë was able to fuse ‘Gothic’ elements with ‘realist’ ones in a single narrative structure without rupturing it or the reader’s credibility” (469). He then goes on to partially answer his question, arguing that “the reader is intended to accept the supernatural as ‘real’” in the novel (471). While I am in agreement with Smajić and Franklin in that I believe we are meant to read the supernatural as being a part of Jane’s world, I do not support the argument that the supernatural is meant to bolster the real simply because we “have a limited, arbitrary definition of realism,” as Smajić says (16). I do believe our definition of realism is limited, but this does not mean we cannot distinguish between the natural and the supernatural. A key portion of my essay revolves around the point that the supernatural exists (whether in the world or in our minds) because we *feel* that there is something different, something strange about our circumstances. Furthermore, Jane and her reader are not

privity to the fact that the supernatural is a part of her world, that it is “‘real’ in the novel” until nearly the very end of the book, when they are faced with overwhelming evidence of its presence in the cry across the moors. It is not as simple as deciding whether or not the supernatural exists in *Jane Eyre*. My contribution to this particular debate will be to elucidate the significance of the ambiguity of that question, to demonstrate that the hesitation both Jane and the reader feel toward the existence of the supernatural is what fuels the supernatural itself.

I have chosen to examine the influence of the supernatural in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* not with one, but three separate critical frames. Two nights before Jane’s wedding to Mr. Rochester, she has a series of ominous dreams that, incidentally, serve as an all-encompassing example of the three chapters of my essay. Each dream-event from this isolated evening represents a slightly different kind of the supernatural, all of which are present in the novel at large. The focus of my first chapter is Jane’s personal ontological and theological journey from childhood through adulthood. Similar to Franklin, I distinguish between two basic types of supernatural forces in *Jane Eyre*: the orthodox supernatural (Christianity) and the occult supernatural. I discuss a variety of circumstances and representatives of these two forces that contend for Jane’s approval. In one of Jane’s three dreams from that fateful night, she sees Thornfield Hall in ruins, dark and frequented only by bats. This dream is an actual prophecy of events to come in the novel, and thus most closely resembles a true supernatural episode (of the three dream-events). It represents, then, the sheer prevalence of supernatural forces in *Jane Eyre*, many of which I discuss in the first chapter.

Chapter 2 addresses the paradoxical similarity between the scientific or the natural and the purportedly unreal or supernatural. Charlotte Brontë’s descriptions of supernatural (or seemingly supernatural) events in her novel often contain electrical imagery that establish

connections of energy, passion, thoughts, or words – essentially, immaterial substances – across distance. Jane’s first of her three dreams is a natural event: she sees a “dark and gusty night,” and the rain pelts her as she tries in vain to find Mr. Rochester (368). She “strain[s]” her “nerves” with effort, but her “voice died away inarticulate” despite her attempts to find or to establish a connection with Mr. Rochester (369). This example demonstrates, like many others in the novel, the power of nature and its strange connection with supernatural, impossible events to either bring characters together or to separate them.

Finally, Chapter 3 is framed by two theoretical concepts: Sigmund Freud’s “the uncanny” and Tzvetan Todorov’s “the fantastic.” Using these two theories, I track the moments in *Jane Eyre* that are especially ambiguous (which often points to the supernatural) and that bring about a sense of hesitation or uncertainty with regard to what is real and what is not real. Jane’s final “dream” on that prophetic night perfectly represents this chapter because she cannot be sure whether it was just a dream and not a real event, or if it in fact *did* occur, and it *was* real. In this dream-event, Bertha Rochester rips Jane’s wedding veil apart and approaches Jane menacingly, but Jane blacks out from fear before anything else transpires.

I aim to demonstrate first and foremost that *Jane Eyre*, a supposedly realistic novel, manages to weave supernatural forces into the fabric of its ontological reality without disturbing the reader’s suspension of disbelief. Somehow, we continue to believe that *Jane Eyre* is a realistic (albeit fictional) account of a woman’s progression from childhood to adulthood *despite* the revelation that supernatural forces influence her world and her life. Seemingly against logic, Charlotte Brontë manages to pull off this natural-supernatural world reality precisely by instilling doubt in Jane and in the reader. She peppers her novel with references to both the occult and the orthodox supernatural, practically telling us forthright that they *do* exist, but we are none the

wiser. Brontë's ability to infuse the real with the impossible and the impossible with the real, to echo Abrams, is what allows the reader to see two contradictory forces – the natural and the supernatural – coexist side by side in a novel.

CHAPTER 1

‘IN THE NAME OF ALL THE ELVES IN CHRISTENDOM’

Mr. Rochester hastily splutters out this chapter’s title after being doused in water by Jane, who arrives at his bedroom just in time to save him from being smothered by smoke and flames in his sleep. Disbelieving the sight of his scorched and now drenched bedsheets and bed, Mr. Rochester swears “In the name of all the elves in Christendom, is that Jane Eyre?” and exclaims “What have you done with me, witch, sorceress?” (222). No two phrases could more perfectly capture the metaphysical structure of this novel, which consists of two competing supernatural institutions: the occult and the orthodox. The orthodox refers to the institution of Christianity. As a religion that worships a deity, God, the Christian institution qualifies as one that supports and represents the supernatural. While the occult is not represented by an “earthly” institution, *per se*, it operates as a force in and of itself that matches (and perhaps even surpasses) the orthodox, Christian force.³ Mr. Rochester manages to delineate in one frantic outburst the heavy presence in the novel of both occult phenomena – elves, witches, and ghosts, for instance – and orthodox phenomena – angels, saints, and all manner of beings, rules, and places associated with Christianity. How is it possible, one might ask, that elves can exist in Christendom, two concepts that are part of purportedly separate belief systems? Jeffrey Franklin writes that the abundance of spiritual (or my term, supernatural) forces are representative of the varying sects of Christian thought and the influence of pagan spirituality in Victorian England (471), and James Obelkevich backs this statement with his research on religion in rural Victorian England. While much attention will be given in this chapter to the ways in which Jane, specifically, is influenced

³ I will often refer to the “orthodox,” the “orthodox supernatural” or the “orthodox institution” of Christianity. I use the term “orthodox” in any and all cases to mean “in accordance with what is accepted or authoritatively established as the true view or right practice” (“Orthodox”). I do *not* mean to refer to the Eastern Orthodox Church, a branch of the Christian church.

by and behaves as a representative for these supernatural institutions, my essay explores the various outlets – in behavior, thoughts, or words; or in Jane the biographer’s explanations – through which the occult and the orthodox manifest themselves and attempt to exert control over the characters and the world of *Jane Eyre*.

Jane’s life is characterized by a constant struggle over which institution’s “rules” she should rely upon for answers, for guidance, and even for physical safety. Both as a child and as an adult, Jane is met with various situations that cause her to ask questions about the afterlife and the impossible – ideas related to the supernatural. While she is taught as a child to believe that she must adhere to orthodox explanations of our earthly and beyond-earthly experiences, Jane sees evidence throughout her life that the occult, oftentimes, is a much more benevolent, positive force. In spite of this, Jane does not fully ascribe to one belief set, nor does she delegate the sweeping generalizations of “good” and “bad” to one or the other. Instead, she discovers that the occult and the orthodox institutions in her world can be both be positive and negative to varying degrees. She may have been treated very poorly by orthodox representatives in her childhood, such as Lowood Institution and Mr. Brocklehurst, but in adulthood, Jane often relies on her orthodox principles and faith to help her to make the right decisions. Similarly, the occult frequently scares Jane or presents itself to her in a “negative” way, but this particular supernatural force is undeniably a positive one when considering an event like the cry across the moors, for example. Without the assistance of the occult, Jane would not have made the positive decision to return to Mr. Rochester. In fact, it is worth noting that the orthodox supernatural rarely – if ever – actually manifests itself in Jane’s world, as opposed to the occult supernatural. Though some of Jane’s supernatural experiences are certainly up for interpretation in terms of *which* force was (or if both were) present, most clues point to the occult. I will discuss examples

of actual supernatural events as well as characters who simply act as representatives of the occult or the orthodox in order to demonstrate their effect upon Jane through childhood and into adulthood.

Childhood: Angels and Ghosts

Lowood Institution is appropriately named, having “institution” in its name, as it functions as one of the most powerful and oppressive representatives of the overall orthodox institution in the novel, with Mr. Brocklehurst at the helm. At Lowood, Jane’s world is predicated on whether one is “good or naughty,” the phrase that crops up in the ten-year-old’s mind when she considers “what sort of a girl [Helen] is” (113). Jane is taught to believe that there are only good and bad girls, and good and bad behaviors. Not only are the rules and the institution of Lowood strict on the pupils in terms of punishment, Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster, believes that Christian humility is a mark of behavior only necessary for poor, orphaned girls. He proudly recounts the story of his wife and daughters’ visit to the school where the students, “quiet and plain...with their hair combed behind their ears, and their long pinafores, and...pockets outside their frocks,” were shocked to see the visitors’ “silk gown[s]” (93). According to Mr. Brocklehurst, the fact that the students are amazed by such a display of luxury is proof that the students have incorporated the Christian grace of humility. Lowood and Brocklehurst preach a reality that operates on clear distinctions between class and an accompanying label as either “good” or “bad” depending on how well one adheres to the particular etiquette of one’s class. Jane sees the unfairness and inequality of this system when she watches the tranquil, kind Helen take vehement reprimands and when Jane herself is forced stand in front of all her peers and labeled, unjustly, a liar.

A contemporary of Charlotte Brontë's, Elizabeth Rigby, in her review of *Jane Eyre* printed in the December 1848 *Quarterly Review*, laughably displays the same perception of God and Christianity espousing rigid class principles as Mr. Brocklehurst (and Mrs. Reed, for that matter). She claims that Jane

Has inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature – the sin of pride. Jane Eyre is proud, and therefore she is ungrateful too. It pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, penniless – yet she thanks nobody, and least of all Him, for the food and raiment, the friends, companions, and instructors of her helpless youth.... Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre is pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition. (Nemesvari 18)

As Rigby makes clear, she believes it is sinful to think that one should have been born in a different class or in different circumstances, as that would disrespect God's ultimate plan for each individual on earth. Her opinion is laughable simply because it echoes perfectly the reasons upon which Mr. Brocklehurst and Aunt Reed agree that a poor person like Jane should be kept humble and poor, while wealthy people like Mrs. Reed or Mr. Brocklehurst's wife and daughters should remain wealthy (and, apparently, selfish and decidedly *not* humble). The argument is that because God chose to give you particular circumstances – rich or poor – when you were born, it is disrespectful and sinful to resent those circumstances or even to try to be rid of them. On the other hand, Rigby is not wrong in saying that Jane does not thank God “for the food and raiment,” etc., that she was given in her youth (although she thanks God aplenty in her adulthood). If anything, as a child Jane is more prone to believe that the occult is the source of

particular occurrences in her life, though she does not exactly “thank” the occult, either. My question for Ms. Rigby is, why would Jane thank a God that supposedly wants to keep her restrained by her circumstances: to remain poor, hungry, and snubbed by greater, wealthier people? It should be unsurprising that Jane has such a favorable connection with the occult given her wretched experience with the orthodox.

Helen Burns, Jane’s best friend during her first few months at Lowood, represents a much more positive version of the orthodox than Mr. Brocklehurst. Despite being a lowly, sickly, poor girl, Helen radiates otherworldliness. While Helen the schoolgirl is slatternly and careless, Helen on her own is quite another creature. What is deemed “lazy” and “forgetful” in her studies looks instead humble and sacred as she sits quietly by herself. Jane notes one day that Helen is being punished for some trifle or other, and has been forced to stand to be looked at in the middle of the room. She thinks that Helen “looks as if she were thinking of something beyond her punishment – beyond her situation: of something not round her nor before her. I have heard of day-dreams – is she in a day-dream now?” (112-13). Jane cannot conceive of how Helen can possibly stand so calmly, so seemingly oblivious to the shame she has brought upon herself. She believes that Helen must be either in denial of her punishment or has somehow miraculously found a way to be more concerned with other thoughts, other daydreams. Helen’s position in the novel extends, then, to something greater than simply another young orphan girl at Lowood. She does not allow the world to affect her emotionally – she forgives easily and maintains her inner peace. She is like an angel, if any angels there are in *Jane Eyre*.

Since Helen is destined to die, an aura of sanctity fittingly surrounds her character. The anticipation of her death, in fact, is Jane’s first introduction to Helen, before she has even met her: in the garden where the girls were playing, “I heard frequently the sound of a hollow cough”

(109). Helen's cough, the sound of the tuberculosis that will ultimately consume her, is the first indication of her presence. Though Jane and Miss Temple, especially, feel great pity and sadness as Helen's sickness worsens, Helen never behaves as though there is something very different about her, or as though she fears the idea of dying. On the contrary, it seems Helen knows full well she is going to die, or, perhaps, she knows in a sense that she is already dead – it is for this reason that Helen moves about tranquilly, like an angel. Though she loves Jane, her heightened understanding of the state of her soul causes Helen to behave at times more like a guiding spirit to Jane than a child playmate.

After Jane is humiliated by Mr. Brocklehurst and named a liar in front of the entire school, Helen tries to comfort her by explaining what she believes to be the metaphysical reality of their world.

Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us; and if we were dying in pain and shame, if scorn smote us on all sides, and hatred crushed us, angels see our tortures, recognise our innocence...and God waits only the separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward. (133)

Helen believes that her world is populated by benevolent spirits, or angels, in the Christian discourse. Notably, she does not believe that there is a separation between realms, *per se* – the angels, as Helen makes clear, are all around us on earth – but she does believe in a separation in terms of life and afterlife. The angelic spirits have access to us and can guide or influence us, but we have no power over them.

Jane's developing beliefs, on the other hand, are demonstrated in the following passage, when she *really* considers for the first time what it would be like to die.

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; and for the first time, glancing behind, on each side, and before it, it saw all round an unfathomed gulf: it felt the one point where it stood – the present; all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth; and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos. (144)

Jane's mind, as she describes this experience, has found itself stuck in a liminal place. Ingrained as she has been with the straightforward doctrine of yes or no, good or bad, heaven or hell, Jane finally grasps the profundity of the question of what happens after death. The question leaves her feeling abandoned on the single "point" of certainty: the present. Behind and before her, and all around her, Jane only knows uncertainty. She will later experience a feeling very similar to this one when she runs away from Thornfield and Mr. Rochester, stuck in the wilderness between two places, unsure of the way forward and unable to return from whence she came.

After she realizes just how unsure she is about the world she inhabits, about the state of her existence, Jane asks after Helen, who has been bedridden for weeks with tuberculosis. A nurse tells her that Helen's condition is very poor, and that "she'll not be here long." Before, Jane might have thought the nurse meant Helen was to leave Lowood to be with her family soon, but after her insight, she now understands that Helen "was going to be taken to the region of spirits, if such region there were" (144). Jane's understanding of "the region of spirits" is vague – she has heard Helen speak of the kingdom of spirits, where angels exist, but Jane does not refer

to it specifically with Christian dialogue. The Christian God's realm is normally referred to as a kingdom, as Helen said, but Jane uses the word "region." Similarly, she refers to "spirits" rather than angels. "Spirit" is a broader term that one could take to mean a variety of entities: angels, ghosts, demons, etc. Whether Jane believes this region of spirits is an orthodox or an occult one, or if she simply has a corrupted comprehension of the Christian afterlife, her understanding is divided and unspecific.

Later, while Jane is lying down with Helen, her friend begins to explain that Jane should not be upset when she passes away, as she is going to be with God. Jane worriedly asks her, "Where is God? What is God?" and later, "You are sure, then, Helen, that there is such a place as heaven; and that our souls can get to it when we die?" Helen responds: "You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same, mighty, universal Parent," to which Jane questions in thought, "Where is that region? Does it exist?" (147). As is made clear by her inquiries, Jane struggles to grasp where or what God is, and whether the region of souls and spirits that Helen speaks of truly exists. Helen's perspective of this orthodox supernatural reality is a tranquil, forgiving, loving one, very different from the version of the orthodox supernatural Jane was taught at Lowood and by Mr. Brocklehurst. All in all, the orthodox is still very confusing to Jane. For that matter, the occult is confusing to Jane, as well. Up to this point in her life, she has had multiple run-ins with and questions about the afterlife, or about a world of spirits that exists alongside her own. So far, it has only served to leave her with a vague understanding of reality which combines the orthodox and the occult. Next, I will discuss a few examples of the occult run-ins Jane experiences in her childhood.

As a child, Jane has mixed positive and negative experiences with the occult. Before the servants haul her off to the Red Room to suffer the consequences of a fight that John, her cousin,

had instigated, they recommend Jane to “sit down and think over your wickedness” (69). The word “wicked” can have two separate connotations. In this scene, it is most likely that the servants mean to call Jane sinful: they are using the religious or Christian association of the word. This definition is given as “of a person, chiefly in biblical and religious use; often opposed to righteous,” and further as “bad in moral character, disposition, or conduct; inclined or addicted to willful wrong-doing; practicing or disposed to practice evil; morally depraved” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (“Wicked”). The servants speak of Jane as a member of their nineteenth-century English Christian community who has broken the rules of that community. Thus, she is a sinner, a “bad girl,” but she can sit down and think it over, or repent, and become a “good girl” again. On the other hand, the word “wicked” is very much related to the notion of the occult, of dark magic: think of the notorious “wicked witch.” While this version of the term was coined more recently (the *OED*’s earliest citation for the definition “Designating a stock evil character in a fairy-tale, as Wicked Fairy” is from 1897), the idea of a wicked, evil witch, or a woman in possession of “evil” and occult powers, extends all the way back to the Medieval era. The last “witch” to be burned at the stake in the British Isles was Janet Horne of Scotland in 1727 (Goodare). Obelkevich’s research on religion in Victorian England supports the servants’ use of this word, which can be interpreted in both an orthodox or pagan sense. According to Obelkevich, “Pagan superstition embellished [Christian] rites...without challenging them” (305). Pagan superstition, or “the occult,” rests within nineteenth-century minds in a way that does not dislodge their orthodox, socially acceptable Christian faith. In the society in which Jane grew up, not to be perfectly in line with the rules of her community and her religion was to be wrong and bad and sinful. What the servants may not know, however, is the fact that their idea of righting Jane’s wrongs by calling her “wicked” is just as occult a term as it is orthodox.

Before leaving Jane, the servants remind her again of her sinfulness and the consequences she may suffer because of it. While the servants certainly appeal to the heavenly, Christian justice that would send Jane to Hell for her “wickedness,” Miss Abbott also warns Jane “if you don’t repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney, and fetch you away” (70). The supernatural is alluded to as “something”: something nameless, something indescribable that seems to be a cross between the dark supernatural and the benign, orthodox supernatural. If Miss Abbott were thinking of the orthodox, however, she likely would have called this elusive being a demon or a fiend from Hell. She does not call it a demon; she does not give it any name, in fact. Because the creature remains nameless, it is associated with the occult, the un-Christian supernatural, or those things that cannot be overtly expressed in *Jane Eyre*. Not only does the servants’ dialogue suggest that Jane’s world mixes together both the occult and the orthodox – unconsciously, perhaps – it is used by Jane’s elders as a tool to incite fear in her and to warn her of “falling” from the orthodox and into the occult.

One of those most significant seemingly-supernatural events in Jane’s childhood is her encounter with the ghost in the Red Room. As her fear grows, Jane’s mind is filled with eerie thoughts of the supernatural – unsurprising, given the fact that her uncle died in this room and that thereafter, few people ever entered it. After Jane checks to see if the door really has been locked shut, she passes back across the room and stops in front of the looking-glass, her “fascinated glance involuntarily explor[ing] the depth it revealed.”

All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality; and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like

one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming up out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers. (72-73)

The description of what Jane sees in the mirror is the room and herself. What she sees, however, is less a true reflection of the room's items and inhabitants than it is a vision. Though still quite peculiar, least troubling is the fact that the room is somehow "colder and darker" in the glass; what is truly disconcerting about this scene is Jane's seeing a veritable ghost in her place. The "strange" figure she sees with "white face and arms" and "glittering eyes" looks just like a spirit or phantom from one of Bessie's fairy tales, as Jane points out. That Jane reminds herself of the spirits which appear to lost travelers on the road evokes the moment she first (unknowingly) meets Mr. Rochester, who is coming home to Thornfield with his horse and with Pilot, his dog. Both here in the Red Room and later on the road outside of Thornfield, Jane looks like a ghost to her viewers. The fact that Jane *too* sees a ghost when she looks in the mirror suggests that, even as a young child, she has a capacity to notice that she has some sort of kinship with the supernatural, a notion that develops further in her adulthood.

As night falls upon Gateshead Hall, Jane's hot temper wears away and she begins to contemplate the coming darkness. Strangely, fear begins to mix with comfort as Jane considers the cold, darkness, and death as potentially welcoming, consoling forces. Remembering her earlier desire to abstain from eating and drinking as a means of rebellion, Jane wonders if she "is fit to die? Or was the vault under the chancel of Gateshead church an inviting bourne? In such a vault I had been told did Mr. Reed lie buried" (73). While Jane later dreads the idea of sharing a space with a dead man, she first considers that being among the dead underground in a vault

might actually be an “inviting” experience. She continues thinking of her Uncle Reed: “if [he] had been alive he would have treated me kindly,” and imagines him “bending over [her] with strange pity” (74). Again, Jane counters each of these thoughts with the certainty of the horrible fear she would feel if she actually were to encounter a dead person (a ghost) or attempt to lie in peace in a mausoleum. Even though she fears the potential *manifestation* of the supernatural (in the form of the ghost of her dead uncle), the ghost of Jane’s Uncle Reed in theory is a benign, comforting presence to the little girl.

While considering the promise her Aunt Reed was forced to make to her husband as he lay dying, that she raise Jane as her own child, Jane makes a clear distinction between the orthodox and the occult, something rather unusual in her childhood.⁴ She thought “Mr. Reed’s spirit...might quit its abode – whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed – and rise before me in this chamber” (74). Jane here brings up the question of afterlife. From what is known about Jane’s upbringing and family, it would make sense for her to draw on her Christian education and imagine that Mr. Reed’s soul is resting either in Heaven or Hell, and that he would thus come from one of *those* locations in order to rise before Jane in the Red Room. She does not, however, refer to the afterlife in those terms. It is either the church vault, or, more significantly, in the “unknown world of the departed.” Mention of the unknown is a signal that Jane is referring to the supernatural – something she does not understand, or cannot imagine, something “occult” to her. Another clear sign is the fact that Jane refers to her Uncle Reed’s spirit rather than his soul: the “soul” would be a much more appropriate term to use if Jane wished to speak about Heaven or Hell, but she is speaking instead of the occult supernatural. It is Uncle Reed’s spirit, his ghost, that concerns her, not his soul. If anything, Jane is speaking of a

⁴ As discussed in the section on Lowood Institution, Jane’s understanding of the occult and the orthodox is rather confused and vague while she is young.

generalized notion of the supernatural. The point is that she does not refer specifically to the orthodox, which is what we would expect of her.

Finally, Jane sees something that startles her. As she looks across the room, “a light gleamed on the wall,” and after a moment it “glided up to the ceiling and quivered over [her] head” (74). Frightened that this might actually be the ghost of her Uncle Reed, Jane screams out loud and, after being locked in the room yet again (but this time with what she believes to be a preternatural spirit), she blacks out. The moments leading up to this event, together with the event itself, demonstrate the very mixed experience Jane has with the occult, especially as a child. At times she thinks she could be more comfortable with occult spirits and she often refers to supernatural ideas and manifestations with *occult* associations, such as seeing herself as a fairy or imp, rather than orthodox ones (or, at least, she does not specify that she means to use an orthodox association), but the occult also thoroughly scares her, especially when she has been confronted by it face-to-face. I will discuss the events that transpire in the Red Room again in Chapter 3, giving more attention specifically to the moment when Jane sees the gleaming light and struggles to decide whether it is evidence of a natural or supernatural source.

Adulthood: Martyrs and Beasts

As an adult, Jane becomes much more comfortable around seemingly occult phenomena in her world. Though characters like Bertha, who is heavily associated with the occult, still manage to frighten her, in general she takes on a more straightforward, no-nonsense state of mind when confronted by such thoughts. Even so, Jane almost always concedes to the power of the occult in one way or another. In these moments, though she may initially be against the idea of the occult, it is in fact a positive force in her life that helps and heals her when she faces

adversity. Similarly, the orthodox develops more positively for Jane in her adulthood, but only because she strives to personally embody its positive aspects – those she learned from Helen and Miss Temple, for instance, but also what she develops on her own. Jane’s adherence to the orthodox as an adult is more a matter of personal development of principles – kindness, love, and forgiveness, but also firmness – than it is a strict devotion to the *institution* of Christianity. Alison Searle also discusses Jane’s relationship with Christianity *in terms of* Jane’s own person:

The feminism, faith, and imagination of *Jane Eyre* are primarily biblical in their principled independence...[which] refers to Jane Eyre’s determination to follow her understanding of biblical principles and how they should be applied, despite the alternative and often oppressive interpretations given to these by Victorian society and the people around her. (37)

By using “biblical” as the descriptor for “feminism, faith, and imagination,” various notions related to Jane’s own qualities and convictions, Searle suggests that her “biblical” quality is secondary to her principles. St. John Rivers is the main orthodox figure that Jane meets in the second half of the novel, and though he is a pious, serious man and is completely committed to God, he is not taken to be a very positive representative of the orthodox. His devotion to the mission of evangelism stands in opposition to personal freedom (Jane’s personal freedom and, arguably, that of the Indian people he wishes to convert) and he seems to be motivated only by the thought of achieving personal salvation. Christianity as a supernatural force in the novel, then, turns out to be extremely complex and divided among differing representatives; it becomes more complicated than a simple matter of “positive” or “negative.”

While Jane seems to have a certain affinity for the occult (whether she would admit that or not), it would be unreasonable to make the claim that she completely forsakes her trust or belief in the orthodox supernatural for the occult. Jane relies fairly heavily on her orthodox beliefs throughout the novel, at times reminding herself of the right path, at times reminding others. Jane sidetracks slightly from recounting her memories of what directly followed her black out in the Red Room as a child: “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” (77). Jane’s comment here is a paraphrase of the words spoken by Jesus while he was hanging from the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*The English Bible: King James Version*, Luke 23:34). Clearly, Jane feels motivated to follow Jesus’s example to forgive one’s enemies, which demonstrates her trust and faith in the orthodox force, Christianity. It is only at particular moments when Jane chooses *not* to rely on her orthodox beliefs that stand out in such a fascinating way.

Jane’s reliance upon the orthodox is demonstrated when she appeals to “God,” specifically, several times. In Chapter 27, when Jane confirms that she will indeed be leaving Rochester because of his marital situation, he laments and asks her “What shall I do?” Jane responds, “Do as I do: trust in God and yourself. Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there” (407). Jane’s words serve as testimony for her personal convictions and worldview. She believes in the Christian afterlife, heaven; she believes and trusts in the Christian God to guide her; and finally, she believes in her *own* power to guide herself (“trust in God and yourself”). The only thing she can do to try to have a positive effect on Rochester is to encourage him to also believe and trust in God and himself to keep him out of trouble (moral qualms, more like), which ultimately lead to more suffering. Juliet Barker in her biography of the Brontë family tells us

how Charlotte Brontë saw in her heroine a reflection of the fact that she, Charlotte, had done the right thing in leaving behind the married man with whom she had become infatuated: “The alternative to tearing oneself away from a married lover was to subject oneself to ‘a constant phantom, or rather two – Sin and Suffering’” (603). Jane makes the exact same choice, although in her case she is able to reunite with the man she loves. In the very next chapter, when the Rivers family saves Jane from fatigue and exposure outside their home, Jane narrates the following: “I thanked God—experienced amidst unutterable exhaustion a glow of grateful joy—and slept” (431). Thus, in one of Jane’s lowest moments – a moment, in fact, in which Jane thought she faced death – her thoughts turn to the Christian God in gratitude.

As Searle makes clear in her article, Jane has a deep trust in the orthodox to help her make the right choices, as long as she is wise enough, strong enough, or virtuous enough to see the right path. Though she trusts in the grace of God to lead her aright, Jane, as we know, relies on herself just as much to make the right decision. Jane is disciplined: she knows what the orthodox supernatural endorses as the right path, but it is up to her to *choose* to follow the right path.

Just as her determination to stand up for her purity and integrity as a woman before God on the basis of scriptural principle enabled her to break free of Rochester, so a wholesome confidence in her ability to discern rightly the path of God's choosing and the memory of having been passionately loved, allows her to recognize the foibles as well as the strengths of her newly discovered family and ultimately to resist an idolatrous preoccupation with their good opinion. (Searle, 44)

Searle reminds us that the orthodox supernatural in the form of “scriptural principle” allows Jane to free herself of Rochester, to see both the good and the bad in her cousins, the Rivers, and to resist treating them like idols. However, we must remember that one of the “foibles” of the Rivers – specifically, St. John – *is* in fact his overwrought representation of the orthodox. In other words, the orthodox has warned Jane to beware of the overly-zealous orthodox found within St. John.

St. John Rivers presents something of a challenge for critics in determining where he falls on the spectrum that is “positive” and “negative” orthodox representatives. On the one hand, we can praise his commitment to denying himself earthly pleasure and encouraging others to follow this Christlike virtue. He certainly practices what he preaches, unlike Mr. Brocklehurst, who lived a life of luxury with his wife and daughters while he starved and froze the students at Lowood. On the other hand, St. John seems rather too concerned with self-denial. He is constantly on the lookout for physical and moral immoderation in himself and in others. When Jane recovers enough to come downstairs after the Rivers family saves her from destitution, she notices while waiting for tea that St. John, though he never turns an eye to her, seems to be holding himself back in some way. Once the tea and cake have been brought in, the full force of St. John’s eyes is settled upon Jane, and she notes privately that “There was an unceremonious directness, a searching, decided steadfastness in his gaze now, which told that intention, and not diffidence, had hitherto kept it averted from the stranger” (439). St. John’s supposed lack of interest in Jane at that moment was not the result of timidity – it was, in fact, a determined effort. St. John rightly notes that Jane must be very hungry, but reminds her that it was well she did not eat so much during her sickness. He says to her, “Now you may eat; though still not immoderately” (439). In what seems to be even the simplest of occasions, St. John does not miss

a chance to preach the moral goodness of moderation and self-restraint as it relates to both the mind and the physical body. By giving advice for the maintenance of physical well-being, St. John covertly gives Jane advice for the maintenance of her *spiritual* well-being.

The problem is, do we judge St. John too harshly? He is a priest, after all. It is his duty to be an example to others in his community. Franklin agrees with this uncertainty about St. John's religiosity: "The unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, question is whether he is, like Helen Burns, a 'positive' figure within the discourse of Christianity or a 'negative' one like Brocklehurst" (466). I disagree with the notion that St. John could be as "negative" as Brocklehurst, but Franklin's concern that it seems "unanswerable" whether St. John is more a negative or positive representative of the orthodox is rightly aired. Franklin goes so far as to say that St. John "ultimately proves to possess the most negative qualities of Brocklehurst and to lack the essential ingredient that makes Helen Burns the novel's Christian paragon" (466). Franklin's claim is that for St. John, though he certainly practices what he preaches in terms of self-denial and humility, "his endurance proves to be more a matter of personal ambition" than a pure desire to please God and follow his commands (467). Jane echoes this reading of St. John, who, after watching him reject Rosamund Oliver's advances, she believes he

no doubt, would have given the world to follow, recall, retain [Rosamund]...but he would not give one chance of Heaven; nor relinquish, for the Elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise....He could not – he would not – renounce his wild field of mission warfare for the parlours and peace of Vale Hall. (464)

Though St. John struggles ferociously with his inner desires, ultimately, he cannot and he will not give up his chance to experience “eternal Paradise” by giving in now, even to the kind and lovely Rosamund. Jane finally describes St. John as preferring mission warfare to English parlor pleasantries, highlighting the potentially superficial basis for his “ambition.”

Though Charlotte Brontë does, as Franklin suggests, seem to try to put St. John forward as the paragon of Christian faith by dedicating the final paragraphs of her novel to praising his selfless example, the fact remains that St. John could not and did not understand Jane Eyre’s version of love, faith, and personal conviction. Franklin contrasts St. John’s spiritual discourse, “Evangelicalism,” with Jane’s, which is “spiritual love,” and the God for which “she becomes a missionary,” the “God of Love” (467). Jane, ultimately, holds romantic love in just as high regard as she does her Christian faith. St. John equates this sort of love with the “earthly passions” he tries so hard to stamp down, as opposed to what he believes to be the holier, more humble virtues – denial of one’s physical desires and absolute service and commitment to God.

Jane’s experiences with the occult in her adulthood are, like the orthodox, varied in terms of positive and negative influences. Bertha Mason, however, is the one character in the novel representing the occult who truly frightens and threatens Jane. Bertha has a connection with the more negative, malicious side of the occult – more so than any other character. Despite the fact that on the surface she is opposed to and threatening to Jane, the two actually share a close connection in the novel. Bertha might threaten Jane, but she actually represents the same force – the occult – that *helps* Jane find her way back to Rochester. They both share a close association with the occult (albeit with different implications) *and* the position as wife or partner to Edward Rochester. In ways that the novel itself cannot even express, Jane and Bertha really are fighting

for the same things, but in the moment, Jane can only feel fear towards Bertha for her malicious, negative representation of the occult.

Bertha represents the occult insofar as aspects of the gothic can be equated to the occult. The introductory comments of a recently edited version of *The Castle of Otranto* dutifully explain where the gothic comes from and how it emerged to finally signify what it does today. One of the most fascinating origins of the gothic is attributed to the Protestant Reformation and the expulsion of Roman Catholicism from sixteenth-century England. Nick Groom explains:

If as a national religion Catholicism was ostensibly dead, it refused to lie down, and the superstitious imagination of the [English] people populated all its architectural wreckage with ghosts—the revenants of a Catholic medieval past: vengeful spirits, shadowy monks and nuns, uncanny manifestations. The Gothic imagination—as it would be named centuries later—took shape therefore in the dilapidated wreck of ecclesiastical architecture, and was haunted by the inexorable violence that had powered the political and social progress of the nation. (xv)

What Groom describes in the final sentence of this passage is the traditional setting in which a gothic novel normally takes place: an abandoned church, a crumbling abbey, etc. What is fascinating, however, is how the “Gothic imagination” came to associate Catholicism completely with the darker side of the gothic. The “vengeful spirits, shadowy monks and nuns,” and “uncanny manifestations” are associated with the Gothic *because* of their relationship with a Catholic medieval past. This “dark side” of the gothic is what ties it to the occult: the sense of

wrongdoing, of immorality, of malevolence, of being “other” are all themes that parts of the gothic and the occult share.

Bertha’s character begs to be associated with Groom’s “vengeful spirits” or “uncanny manifestations.” Before I unearth these similarities, however, it is important to take note of Bertha’s personal background. When Rochester speaks of how he fell into his “infernal union” with Bertha, he claims that his father told him “Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty...I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram; tall, dark, and majestic” (395). Both Bertha’s home and appearance point to her Spanish – and thus, Catholic – heritage. Though Bertha ostensibly would have grown up in a British-ruled Jamaica (if the plot of *Jane Eyre* is to be held closely to the time at which Brontë wrote it), the island country had been ruled by the Spaniards for a century and a half upon the arrival of Columbus. If the location is not evidence enough of her Spanish heritage, Bertha’s personal description certainly is. She is “tall, dark, and majestic,” descriptors which might easily be associated with an 1850s-stereotypical description of a woman of Spanish lineage. Not only does Bertha’s being “dark” potentially refer to her darker hair or skin color, being “tall” or “dark” or “majestic” imports a sense of the nineteenth-century “exotic” in her character. Therefore, Bertha’s character is at least subtly Spanish and, consequently, Catholic.

Not only does Bertha fit the malevolent gothic-occult standard of appearance, she matches the description of both “vengeful spirit” and “uncanny manifestation.” The scene in Jane’s bedroom two nights before her wedding offers an almost picture-perfect representation of Bertha as both of these phantoms: dressed in a white “gown, sheet, or shroud” (Jane cannot tell which), Bertha proceeds to take Jane’s wedding veil and throw it over her head, take it off and tear it in half, and finally throw it on the ground and trample on the shreds (371). Other

descriptors of Bertha's appearance, such as her "fiery eye" and the way she "flames over" Jane without the help of any light source, fit with her "vengeful spirit" persona. The fact that she wears the veil then destroys it suggests, on the one hand, that Bertha feels angry and vengeful towards Jane for replacing her as Rochester's wife, inciting a sort of vengeance by ripping up the symbol of Jane's marriage to Rochester. On the other hand, Bertha's motivations for ripping up the veil could be related less to the fact that Jane is about to "replace" her and could be more a desire to hurt Rochester by hurting the people he loves. Either way, it is perfectly acceptable to describe Bertha as vengeful.

Bertha's behavior just before she rips up the veil, however, is what likens her more to Groom's "uncanny manifestation" as Jane's double. When she places the veil upon her head, Bertha completes the embodiment of Jane that up until that point had only been subtly suggested. Jane, the bride-to-be, will wear the wedding veil in just two days to marry Edward. On this fateful night, Bertha, too, wears the wedding veil, and puts a curse on Jane (so to speak) when she rips it apart and crushes it. Bertha *becomes* Jane when she wears her veil. Then, "as Jane," Bertha destroys the symbol of her union with Edward. The proof of this rather symbolic curse arrives in the very next chapter: Mr. Mason and his lawyer declare that the couple cannot be married without committing the crime of bigamy. Jane is torn from Rochester, like the veil, *because* of Bertha. As a representative of the darker side of the occult supernatural, Bertha works to undermine the occult-orthodox accord that has been drawn up between Jane and Edward (subconsciously, of course), and she nearly succeeds in keeping them apart.

Jane's description of Bertha's physical appearance associates the woman with the occult insofar as it is occult, or supernatural, for a human to be like an animal. Animals and beasts in and of themselves are not supernatural creatures, nor are humans. However, Bertha's likeness to

an animal links her to the occult *since she is a human, and humans should not be like animals*.

After Richard Mason and Mr. Briggs reveal the “impediment” to Edward and Jane’s marriage, that it would result in bigamy, Rochester leads everyone to Bertha’s attic room where Jane gives us the following description:

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards.

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (380)

Jane’s description of Bertha once again shows us the blurred line between what is natural and unnatural, between what is earth-born and something supernatural or devilish. She cannot tell whether the creature is human or some strange combination of human and beast. While Jane does not use any words that might specifically indicate a presence of the occult, the line she draws between “beast” and “human being” serves the same function. Bertha is considered occult and animal-like in the same way that the Gytrash, the supernatural animal that Jane thinks she may have run into when she sees Mr. Rochester and his dog for the first time, is occult and animal-like. After all, horses and dogs (and most of the other possible manifestations of the Gytrash) are natural creatures, but the mythology built up around the Gytrash lifts it to the level of the supernatural (the occult). Bertha is later called a “hyena” and a “maniac,” which, again, are not necessarily indicative of the supernatural in a specific way, but do add to her character of unpredictability and incomprehensible rage and aggressive behavior.

Bertha can also be considered analogously to the black specter that Jane faces outside the Moor House after she hears Rochester's cry from across the moors. If Jane and Rochester represent the occult in the sense that they constantly interact with it and, to a degree, come to respect it, then Bertha represents the occult in its darkest and most nefarious form. She represents the occult that is manifested in demons and devils, or in the Gytrash. These creatures are supernatural in that they do not belong to the earth *and* in that their needs or desires are villainous. As I suggested earlier, however, Jane and Bertha are joined symbolically in that they each are "trapped" psychologically and physically: Jane feels that her world cannot offer her, as a woman, more than a position as a governess, and Bertha is trapped both by her mental illness and by the prejudice others feel towards and enact upon her *because* of her mental illness. The two women are also connected, quite simply, by the occult itself. Though Jane in adulthood often rejects the occult and the superstitious thoughts it inspires, it is a major underlying force in her life and in her world. The occult fascinates her and safeguards her in spite of herself.

References to the occult sometimes drop in and out of Jane's autobiographical narration in a way that suggests it is a natural part of her world. Whether this is the result of Jane's interpretation as she narrates the story or an especially honest rendering of events that actually occurred, the supernatural is certainly present in one form or another. After Miss Temple decides to marry and leaves Lowood Institution, where Jane at that time was teaching in her own right, the now-matured protagonist begins to feel that she wants something else out of life. With Miss Temple gone, there is little left at the school that could bring Jane true contentedness. One evening while lying in bed, Jane struggles to come up with a solution to her problem: how to get away from Lowood. Frustrated, she gets up and walks around the room. Jane (the autobiographer) writes that upon returning to bed "A kind fairy, in my absence, had surely

dropped the required suggestion on my pillow; for as I lay down it came quietly and naturally to my mind” (152). The suggestion, of course, is that Jane should advertise herself in the paper as a governess looking for work. This example does not only speak to Jane’s readiness to attribute small, everyday events to friendly supernatural forces, but also suggests that one’s pillow, the mind’s cradle of sleep and vulnerability, is an advantageous location for supernatural contact and influence.

Another event related to the occult transpires after night has fallen on the road between Thornfield and Hay, where Jane is walking to post a letter. This is the first time she meets Mr. Rochester and his dog, Pilot, which she momentarily mistakes for a Gytrash, which I have alluded to already. She recalls the Gytrash from Bessie’s tales as a “North-of-England spirit...which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travelers” (181). Jane sees the horse before she sees the man or the dog, however.

It was very near, but not yet in sight; when, in addition to the tramp, tramp, I heard a rush under the hedge, and close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees. It was exactly one mask of Bessie’s Gytrash, – a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: it passed me, however, quietly enough; not staying to look up, with strange pretercanine eyes, in my face, as I half expected it would. The horse followed, – a tall steed, and on its back a rider. The man, the human being, broke the spell at once. Nothing ever rode the Gytrash: it was always alone; and goblins, to my notions, though they might tenant the dumb carcasses of beasts, could scarce covet shelter in the common-place human form. (181)

This passage demonstrates that although Jane would profess to be a follower of orthodox principles and faith, she does not shun thoughts of the occult. In fact, her personal observations in this passage record like a sort of diversion, an imagination game of “How to Spot a Gytrash,” so to speak. She plays this game using what she can remember from the guidelines Bessie gave her with respect to the Gytrash. She is at first very convinced by the dog, which has long hair and a big head, like a lion, but it passes her without a look from any “strange pretercanine eyes,” as she might have expected from the supernatural creature. The horse also has promise, being tall and formidable, but, as Jane tells us, a Gytrash would never be ridden by a human. She even gives the man a chance, so to speak, but decides it is much too unlikely for a goblin or Gytrash to possess the body of a being as “common-place” as a human. That she even considers him as a candidate, however, suggests that Mr. Rochester has potential to be an occult, supernatural creature.

The Gytrash represents a version of the occult that is ambiguous in terms of whether it is a force for good or bad. Charles Scott in his 1895 etymological review of names associated with the supernatural claims that “No one, so far as I know, has recorded any views as to the origin of [the] word [gytrash]” (95). Charlotte Brontë’s descriptions of the creature in the passages quoted above, in fact, are almost always used as the primary source for defining the Gytrash in and after 1847. Scott suggests that the Gytrash is a compound of *Guy* and *trash*, meaning “hob-thrush,” which essentially refers to a goblin or “any apparition of terror” (95). While we can infer that Bessie likely gave Jane the account of the Gytrash in an effort to frighten her (or to encourage her not to stray away on paths by herself), the elder Jane’s encounter with what might have been three separate Gytrash – the dog, the horse, and Mr. Rochester himself – suggests that not all

Gytrash, perhaps, come upon travelers with ill-intentions. The entry for “gytrash” in *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* defines it as “a type of ghost or apparition” which “appeared after dark in certain spots and was thought to warn of the impending death of a close relative or friend” (“Gytrash”). Here again, though the presence of the Gytrash foretells bad news – death – one can also interpret this behavior as kindly or protecting. The Gytrash sometimes frightens lonely travelers, but it also serves as a guide or protector.

I will end with an example which, appropriately, fuses both the orthodox and the occult and represents Jane’s mixed theological beliefs and principles. The event takes place as a kind of dream-vision that Jane experiences one night after she has learned the truth about Rochester’s marriage to Bertha. While she is sleeping, Jane dreams that she is back in the Red Room on the fateful evening when she saw the moonbeam – or lantern, or ghost – gleam on the wall.

I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come – watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disk. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: 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 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.” (410-11)

The nature of the figure that appears to Jane is extremely ambiguous. At first, it seems as though

the moon itself – “she” – is breaking through the clouds and coming to Jane, but then a “white human form...inclining a glorious brow earthward” appears instead. This description suggests that the figure is a sort of angel, looking down to earth with a “glorious brow,” often a descriptor for Jesus Christ or the Christian God himself. This angel “mother,” as Jane addresses her, also counsels her to “flee temptation.” The mother-daughter relationship present between this angel mother and Jane recalls the father-son, or shepherd-flock, relationship between God and Christ, and between God and his human followers on earth. The fact that this mother warns Jane not to fall to temptation – insinuating that Jane might fall into sin with Rochester if she remains at Thornfield – is also very much associated with traditional Christian thought. The famous “Lord’s Prayer,” undoubtedly the most commonly recited Christian prayer, contains this very message: “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (*The English Bible: King James Version*, Matt. 6:13). Like the Lord’s Prayer, the angel mother encourages Jane to follow the path away from temptation.

I have settled with “angel mother,” but Franklin uses the term “moon-mother” to describe the feminine figure in Jane’s dream (473). His descriptor is just as appropriate as mine, but it also indicates that there is a real debate over the figure’s nature. She is elementally “moon,” “angelic,” “and mother.” While the moon itself is a natural part of the universe (in other words, we *should* be able to say that it is a part of nature), it is not a part of the earth, and, consequently, it is not a part of the “nature” that we often refer to when speaking about natural occurrences on earth. In part because of this, moonlight, the phases the moon, and especially the full moon are all heavily associated with superstitious and supernatural – particularly occult – phenomena. The fact that the mother figure in Jane’s dream grows from the moon into a supernatural figure leaves room to suggest that this angel mother is orthodox *and* occult. She is of the moon *and* of the

Christian heaven. She is Jane's perfect guardian angel: a combination of occult, orthodox, and motherly forces that has been sent in a dream to guide her in her time of trouble.

Interestingly, most critics examine this scene only as it relates to Jane's current situation, whether she should leave Thornfield or not. While both are important, less attention has been given to the implications of the presence this angel mother and her message to "flee temptation" in the time and place of Jane's dream: the Red Room at Gateshead Hall, eight years ago. I have already touched on the fact that the events of the Red Room and the purported ghost of Jane's Uncle Reed are ambiguous in terms of whether they have a natural or supernatural explanation earlier in this chapter. Jane's dream with the angel mother expands upon this event, and suggests that the source of the light was, in fact, natural *and* supernatural. It *was* the light of the moon that Jane saw, but it also was a supernatural figure, an orthodox-occult mother. Though Jane does not often concede to the occult supernatural in the novel, it is striking that the moment when the occult is *most* present in her mind is while she is asleep. The occult manifests itself in Jane's dreams, one of the few places where she admits and accepts the fact that un-Christian supernatural forces are a heavy influence in her life.

Jane Eyre, as I have argued throughout this chapter, has a complicated yet close relationship with the supernatural, both orthodox and occult. These forces have, in a sense, been competing for Jane's attention during the span of her life. As a child she is exposed to very different versions of Christianity, mainly in the form of Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Mr. Brocklehurst, and Lowood Institution. As she grows into an adult, Jane retains the loving, forgiving aspects of the orthodoxy that she learned from Helen's example, but her faith is much more personal and individual. She relies on herself just as much as she relies on her faith in God, and, tellingly, there are moments in her life in which she omits any mention or thought of the

orthodox even though we might expect it of her character – a nineteenth-century young, educated woman from northern England. In these instances, I would suggest that the occult is the main force at work. In my second chapter, I will discuss the most fascinating of all of these supernatural moments in *Jane Eyre* – the cry – which I attribute to the occult. While Jane almost never dismisses the orthodox flat-out, as readers we see her mind moving through the possibilities of the nature of her world and of the events she experiences, and accepting the fact that something *else* is at work. Though she never quite acknowledges the presence and influence of the occult supernatural in her life, it is there nonetheless.

CHAPTER 2

ACTION AT A DISTANCE

Action at a distance has been a contested concept in the history of physics since the ancient Greek period. Aristotle argued against this concept, theorizing that “every motion requires a conjoined mover” (Blackburn). While Sir Isaac Newton is often credited with revolutionizing physics by conceiving of gravity as action across distance, even he “supposed that an intermediary must be postulated, although he could make no hypothesis to its nature” (Blackburn). More to the point, humans – even our most famous scientists and mathematicians – historically have been skeptical of the idea that objects can move without being touched. *Jane Eyre* borrows the concept of action at a distance most directly in the scene of the cry across the moors, but the novel is filled with many such examples.

Many of Charlotte Brontë’s descriptions of supernatural events are charged with electrical, energized imagery, which, almost paradoxically, suggests that her inspiration for the supernatural phenomena in her novel came from real, natural, *scientific* truths. The nineteenth century saw many advances in science and technology, most notably with electricity and the introduction of the telegraph. According to Vermeir, “The electrical relay and the telegraph were introduced in 1835 and 1837 respectively, and the introduction of new technologies and their application in industry accelerated in the second half of the century” (137). Charlotte Brontë wrote the first drafts of *Jane Eyre* at the end of 1846 and into 1847, the year it was ultimately published, which makes it very likely that Brontë at least read about these new scientific advances if she did not experience them for herself in her hometown, Haworth (Barker 600, 621). These technological developments in the early-mid nineteenth century effected massive change in the average person’s understanding of the world – the idea that one could make a

sound, say a word, or think a thought and have those immaterial, invisible forms transmitted across a great distance to another person was revolutionary. The innovations in fields involving the channeling of electricity, especially, were so mystifying in Charlotte Brontë's time that she wrote descriptions of this "magical" transference of energy, passion, electricity, etc., into her novel. Amazingly, the scientific and the supernatural converge in *Jane Eyre* despite their being *complete opposites* because even technology can seem, at times, like magic.

The Cry Across the Moors

While there are many seemingly "electrical" moments and sparks of passion present in *Jane Eyre*, the most important example is the cry that Jane and Rochester hear from across the moors. Jane, in the middle of a very tense conversation with St. John, says that she will marry him if she can be but convinced that it is God's will for her to do so. She "was excited more than [she] had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement the reader shall judge" (519). "What follows" is a series of several extraordinary events: the impossible fact that Rochester's voice calls out Jane's name; Jane's eerie, immediate, seemingly uncontrolled reaction to his cry; and also a disturbing black mass that presents itself to Jane after she hears Rochester's voice.

All the house was still; for I believe all, except St. John and myself, were now retired to rest. The one candle was dying out: 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. The feeling was not like an *electric shock*; but it was quite *as sharp, as strange, as startling*: it acted on my senses as

if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now *summoned*, and *forced to wake*. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, while the flesh *quivered* on my bones. (519, emphasis added)

Jane's excitement, it seems, is really some kind of physical feeling that courses through her body just before hearing Rochester's voice.⁵ She describes this feeling as "summoning" her senses from their previous torpor, sharpening her hearing and vision in expectation. On the one hand, Jane's heightened sensitivity sounds much like the reaction of any animal or human to danger – her heart palpitates, the blood rushes quickly through her limbs ("passing to her head and extremities"), and her "eye and ear" wait upon whatever might come next, as a frightened animal might do in the presence of some unknown danger. On the other hand, Jane's description of her thrilled senses sounds like an extra-sensorial experience. The "inexpressible feeling" summons her senses, indicating that Jane has some supernatural sensibility. Most importantly, while she says that the feeling was not quite like "an electric shock," the fact that Jane mentions electricity indicates that this is the best comparison she can think of. The fact is that Jane's feeling is *not* an electric shock; it is some particular sensitivity to the occult.

St. John must see the change in Jane's demeanor, as he asks her what she has heard or seen. Jane narrates:

I saw nothing: but I heard a voice somewhere cry –

"Jane! Jane! Jane!" Nothing more.

"Oh, God! what is it?" I gasped.

⁵ Or possibly right at the moment of hearing his voice; it is not clear.

I might have said, “Where is it?” for it did not seem in the room – nor in the house – nor in the garden: it did not come out of the air – nor from under the earth – nor from overhead. I had heard it – where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being – a known, loved, well-remembered voice – that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe – wildly, eerily, urgently. (519-20)

Jane knows what “it” is – it is the voice of Edward Rochester – but she cries aloud “what is it” simply in her shock at having heard it. She feels that “it,” Edward’s voice, cannot be placed anywhere in her awareness. Somehow, it does not seem to have come from the space around her (the air), nor above the roof or below the earth. This lack of spatial pinpointing supports the idea that the source of the cry is supernatural. It is just a bit later that Jane specifies what *kind* of supernatural – orthodox or occult – she believes it to be. Her last description in this passage of the cry as “wild, eerie, and urgent,” suggests that she leans toward the latter.

Just following her initial shock, Jane breaks out of her stupor and responds to the voice.

“I am coming!” I cried. “Wait for me! Oh, I will come!” I flew to the door, and looked in to the passage: it was dark. I ran out into the garden: it was void.

“Where are you?” I exclaimed.

The hills beyond Marsh-Glen sent the answer faintly back – “Where are you!” I listened.

The wind sighed low in the firs: all was moorland loneliness and midnight hush. (520)

This passage depicts the cry as especially non-substantial. Jane looks all around in and outside of the house looking for a physical or a visible source of the sound. Wherever she looks, though,

she only sees void and darkness, “moorland loneliness” and “midnight hush.” Later, Jane will describe the moment that she hears the cry as an “inspiration” and an “awakening;” these descriptors bring about the notion of the sublime. Henry Maudsley, a nineteenth-century British psychiatrist, wrote on supernaturalism in his book *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings* (1886), and there he also describes a setting akin to the sublime:

At the present day, the ocean and the desert, the vast solitudes of the barren waters and the vast solitudes of the barren sands, remain the favourite homes of spiritual hauntings and phantoms; for where the senses are overpowered by the dread vastness of nature, so that they cannot fix themselves in definite and steady apprehensions, they, reeling in a bewildered vertigo and producing a panic-like awe, become the easy victims of hallucinations and the prolific parents of superstitions. (41-42)

Maudsley sought to discredit the supernatural in his book, which is why he describes these particular experiences as “hallucinations” and “superstitions.” He is right, however, in terms of how and where the supernatural manifests itself *if* it existed in the real world (lucky for Jane: *her* world is fiction, so it can and does exist). The sublime is often discussed in terms of its vastness; in these cases, the awe that it inspires is directly associated with the unbelievable depth, length, or magnitude of the subject in question. What Maudsley describes as “vast solitudes” – the “ocean and desert” and the “barren waters” and “sands” – are *just* like the English moors. Jane looks into the night and is struck by the vastness, the “void,” the darkness, and the “loneliness” of the Yorkshire moors. The vastness of the expanse before her very well could be what inspired the supernatural cry that, Jane eventually admits, seemed to come *out of her*: the only difference

is that Maudsley believes these “hallucinations” are not real, while they are very real in *Jane Eyre*. The sublime, then, is connected to the concept of action at a distance without an intermediary because it is in some sense the *nature* of the moors, their vastness, and not any physical force, that motivates this supernatural energy to travel across space and connect Jane and Rochester. For the sublime or action at a distance to exist, a substantial barrier or obstacle is necessary: the immensity of the moors fulfills this requirement.

The next day, Jane wakes up early and paces her room, considering the events of the previous night. Specifically, Jane continues to concern herself with the source of the wild, eerie cry. On the one hand, it is rather obvious that Rochester is the physical, human source of the cry. This is affirmed to Jane and to the reader when she meets him at Ferndean Manor and he recounts *his* memory of the event, unaware that Jane has actually heard his cry across the moors. Before she meets him, however, Jane considers several alternative sources to those she considered the night before. She recalled “that inward sensation I had experienced...it seemed in *me* – not in the external world” (521). She wonders if it could have been a “nervous impression” or a “delusion,” but dismisses these possibilities, thinking it to be “more like an inspiration” (521). Jane attempts to rationalize the source of the cry by attributing it to a mere delusion, a trick that her mind has played upon her. That rationalization, however, does not convince her. Jane believes that *she herself*, in fact, is the source of the cry. She remembers the electric feeling that coursed through her body just before hearing the cry, and likens it to an “inspiration.” She describes the feeling as being like an earthquake that had “opened the doors of the soul’s cell, and loosed its bands – it had wakened it out of its sleep, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast” (522). The electricity and the earthquake-like tremors that Jane feels in her body and in her soul are described as natural phenomena. Not only was the event of the cry itself portrayed as

electrical and naturally-sourced, but it appears that the very same electricity or earth-power has entered and altered Jane's self. These forces "awaken" the soul, or spirit, within her.

Furthermore, the fact that Jane feels as though her soul was both "awakened" and "trembling, aghast," all terms associated with the sublime, in expectance of the supernatural event suggests that she has absorbed the power or the energy that was transmitted across the vastness of the moors. That the cry itself and Jane's soul were both affected by this supernatural energy, and that both events were described in terms of natural phenomena, indicates the paradoxical connection between the purportedly "real" and the "unreal," or the natural and the supernatural.

Mr. Rochester's account of the cry confirms the idea that he and Jane were connected across distance by a natural-supernatural force, but his is a more spiritual interpretation of the event. At Ferndean, when Jane goes to meet the blinded Rochester after having heard his strange cry across the moors, any doubts she had about whether she really experienced the event are put to rest. Rochester tells Jane that he involuntarily cried her name aloud thrice, and then heard "whispering on the winds" Jane's reply: "Where are you?" Ruminating over these events, Edward says to her:

I could have deemed that in some wild, lone scene, I and Jane were meeting. In spirit, I believe, we must have met. You no doubt were, at that hour, in unconscious sleep, Jane: perhaps your soul wandered from its cell to comfort mine; for those were your accents – as certain as I live – they were yours! (550)

Here, Rochester echoes Jane's sentiment that the eerie event each person experienced is related to the awakened spirit. Jane, as the reader knows, was not asleep when Rochester's voice called across the moors to her, but, in a sense, her body *was* frozen in a moment of sublimity, of

ecstasy, when she heard his cry. Thus, even though Jane was not sleeping when Rochester called to her, Edward articulates perfectly the experience his and Jane's *soul* had together rather than their physical body or their cognizant mind. The event that transpired between them was not entirely a physical, bodily one (they heard each other, but they didn't see each other) nor was it even a mental, telepathic experience; instead, the connection transcended their minds and bodies and was formed between their souls.

Vermeer's discussion on electricity and the imagination is applicable to Rochester's understanding of his and Jane's impossible communication across the moors. He states that some literary figures "considered the body, the emotions and the soul in electrical terms" and that the "soul too becomes like an electrical conduit, especially in the work of materialist thinkers, and the newly invented telegraph becomes a powerful image of the nervous system" (144). While Rochester's metaphysical interpretation of the cry is perfectly appropriate, there is no denying the event's resemblance to the telegraph and to electrical conduction in general. However, instead of the soul functioning as a nervous system-conduit for emotion and communication across distance, the souls themselves travel across the conduits set up by the larger, more encompassing force of the supernatural, the telegraph lines of the world of *Jane Eyre*, so to speak.

This strange, yet lovely connection between Jane and Rochester extends through the end of the novel. Once Jane is able to find Rochester, they realize that they will be happiest if they remain together at Ferndean. Reunited at this gothic manor, where they will raise a child and live as a family, the couple could not be a greater representation of a "positive" occult. As Jane approaches Ferndean, she notes that the evening is "marked by the characteristics of sad sky, cold gale, and continued small, penetrating rain" (531). When she nears the manor-house itself,

“you could see nothing of it; so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it. Iron gates between granite pillars showed me where to enter, and...I found myself at once in the twilight of close-ranked trees” (531). Jane’s perspective of the house certainly conveys its dreariness, and even suggests characteristics of the gothic. The iron gates and granite pillars of Ferndean are reminiscent of the crumbling abbeys fraught with the ghosts of Catholic “shadowy monks and nuns” (Groom xv). Jane continues to describe the house generally as a place that is imposing, uninviting and unsuitable for habitation. While her first descriptions of the house are not promising, Jane and Edward soon find that they are right at home in what seems to be a very gothic, occult Ferndean Manor.

It takes no more than one day for the couple to start to seem as though they really do, in fact, think Ferndean Manor is a place worth raising children in and sharing their lives together. Sarah Leeves, using fellow critic Yoshiaki Shirai’s interpretations, describes how the feeling of the woods surrounding Ferndean begins to seem more and more comforting to the couple:

As Yoshiaki Shirai writes, “here lies the intricacy of Charlotte Bronte’s depiction of Ferndean: the negative tone disappears, and Ferndean ceases to be an unhealthy place” (129). Shirai argues that nature “now reappears refreshed and full of green in accordance with the mental change in Jane and Rochester” and that because of this “Ferndean ceases to be a damp and insalubrious place” (129). Thus, Ferndean is no longer surrounded by “the gloomy wood” but protects the new couple from dangerous outside forces. Shirai relates them to a Wardian case, a sealed case that allows ferns to live in isolation for many years, saying that like the ferns, the couple can “enjoy an everlasting love self-contentedly and [live] quite free from worldly noise, blessed by the beauty of the natural

surroundings” (129)

Ferndean Manor, as Leves goes on to point out, does not undergo a physical change. What does change is the attitude held by Jane and Edward toward Ferndean, which is reflected in the way Jane the narrator writes about the manor on her second day together with Edward. What is at first an imposing and ancient-looking manor becomes a safe and protective house for the two. When Jane and Rochester were separated from one another, it was the seemingly natural (electrical) quality of the supernatural force that connected them through their cries across the moors. Once reunited at Ferndean, the situation has reversed: it is the seemingly supernatural (the gothic darkness and gloominess) quality of the natural, the trees and the forest, that keeps Jane and Rochester together.

An Impassioned Jane

There are several examples throughout the novel in which Jane is compelled to describe the feelings of electricity, energy, and passion that seem to possess her in response to various incidents. The event that takes place in the Red Room when Jane is a child is not only significant because of the possibility that supernatural forces are at work or because of the uncanniness or vagueness of the incident, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, but also because of the intensity of Jane’s physical reaction. She narrates the following as she observes the gleaming light in the Red Room of her aunt’s house:

shaken as my nerves were by *agitation*, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart *beat thick*, my head *grew hot*; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was

oppressed, *suffocated*: endurance broke down – I uttered a *wild, involuntary* cry – I rushed to the door and shook the lock in *desperate* effort. (74, emphasis added)

This passage, which records Jane's bodily reaction to seeing the gleaming, moving light in the room, is filled with descriptors of restlessness and the overwhelming attack on Jane's sensory system. Her entire body is engaged to its fullest: her nerves are "shaken" by "agitation," her heart "beats thick," her head "grows hot," a sound fills her ears, she feels "suffocated," and finally she "utter[s] a wild, involuntary cry" and "rushe[s]" to shake the door lock in desperation. All at once, Jane seems to have been possessed by an energy that originates outside of her, forcing her to utter the "involuntary cry."

One of the senses that is attacked, Jane's hearing, connects interestingly both to the dream that Jane later has about the Red Room the night before she leaves Thornfield and to the wind that is present in so many of Jane's experiences in the novel (but especially during the cry). I have termed the female figure in Jane's dream the "angel mother," so it follows that had this figure actually been present during Jane's real-life experience in the Red Room, it might have been the owner of the wings that Jane says she heard "rushing" in her ears. The other explanation could be that the wind, which is personified on various occasions, is what Jane hears rushing in or outside of the room. This solution makes sense because Jane speaks of the wind, specifically, on at least two other occasions when she is similarly possessed by some kind of animating spirit. The energy that possesses Jane and the phenomena that hijack her senses, though they are rather frightening in the moment, are the forces that connect Jane to the ghost of her uncle or to the angel mother in the same way that the energy Jane feels during the cry connects her soul to Rochester's.

One of the first few evenings that Jane is at Lowood, she wanders around during the play-hour alone, not having yet made any friends. She notes, however, that despite her lack of companionship she was “not feeling lonely,” as through the window she could “distinguish from the gleeful tumult within, the disconsolate moan of the wind outside” (116). Jane continues her thought, noting that

Probably, if I had lately left a good home and kind parents, this would have been the hour when I should most keenly have regretted the separation: that wind would then have saddened my heart; this obscure chaos would have disturbed my peace: as it was I derived from both a strange excitement, and reckless and feverish, I wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness, and the confusion to rise to clamour. (116).

Perhaps the best argument for Jane’s kinship to the occult comes in the form of the numerous and varied moments in which excitement is inexplicably stirred up inside of her. Jane claims to feel “strange excitement, and reckless and feverish” (116). The fact that Jane experiences this kind of excitement so often makes the event quite ordinary, for *her*. However, other than Rochester and Bertha, perhaps, others around her do not seem to share Jane’s susceptibility for this sort of passion and excitement. It is normal for Jane, but for the rest of the orthodox, conventional people that fill her world, to be seized in an instant by some kind of passion is *not* normal. Because it is specific to Jane, then, it follows that her excitement may be induced by the supernatural – in these moments, it seems she is suddenly possessed by some feeling or spirit of the occult.

In this particular case, the source of Jane's stimulation is the chaotic noise of the girls' voices during play-hour and the howling of the wind through the window. The wind also howled at Jane when she heard the cry across the moors, indicating the possibility that the wind – even though it is a natural element – is related to occult forces in some way. The fact that Jane personifies the wind so that it “howls wildly” drives even further the idea that the power of the occult is uncontrollable and unrestrained, a feeling that is echoed in Jane's own body. Furthermore, Jane wishes for the “gloom to deepen,” a spooky notion that only adds to the spookiness of the already howling wind.

Why Jane is excited by the chaos of the students' voices is less clear, but the fact that Jane wants there to be more confusion and more clamor sounds very much like a desire for utter pandemonium. All of these terms relate to the notion of a demon-infested hell. As I noted in the first chapter, demons and Hell are concepts seen as opposites of the doctrine of the orthodox supernatural, Christianity, and consequently are also associated with the occult (according to the Christian perspective). While the Christian notion of the occult is negative, the forces that incite passion in Jane are not necessarily negative – they are, in fact, often a sign that she is living and breathing and *being* more fully than anyone else in the novel.

Too Close to Touch

Jane's session with the fortune teller and her run-in with Bertha also function as examples of the supernatural's ability to effect change across space *without* physical touch. Before Jane enters the library of Thornfield Hall, where the Sibyl has been seated, Sam, the butler, tells her that he will wait just outside in the hall should she be frightened. Jane responds easily, “‘I am not in the least afraid.’ Nor was I; but a good deal interested and excited” (275). Jane's ease with the

idea of visiting the fortune teller stems from the fact that she, unlike several of the other guests, does *not* believe that the woman actually has supernatural powers. Because the fortune teller represents a supernatural force, though, Jane's statement that she is not "in the least afraid" of this supernatural force demonstrates her developed understanding of and appreciation for the dark, the other, the occult. Furthermore, once Jane actually enters the room and sees the Sibyl, as she calls the fortune teller, she "felt now as composed as ever [she] did in [her] life" (276). Jane is even *more* comfortable around the supernatural than in the rest of the otherwise normal moments of her life.

Twice, the fortune teller is given an opportunity to examine Jane closely to "read" her features, but she never makes any physical contact with Jane. The woman first "approached her face to [Jane's] palm, and pored over it without touching it" (278). Later, she asks Jane to kneel before her again in order to study her face. Jane "knelt. [The fortune teller] did not stoop towards [Jane], but only gazed, leaning back in her chair" (281). This lack of closure of the physical space between the seer's supernatural analysis and the bodily source matches the enigmatic nature of the cry exchanged between Jane and Rochester. Somehow, in both instances, an understanding is come to or a connection is made between two sources without the assistance of physical touch. Of course, the fortune teller has the advantage of being able to observe Jane's features; distance doesn't separate them in terms of sight (or sound, for that matter), as it does in Chapter 37 (or as it *should*, rather). Mr. Rochester shares with Jane a similar connection to the supernatural, and thus his ability to enchant her as the fortune teller, even if he is not *really* a fortune teller, is still connected to the forces of the occult. The guise of the Sybil simply functions as the vehicle through which the supernatural is being expressed in this scene.

Two nights before Jane's wedding, she has what she thought was a dream that a woman with dark hair entered her room and ripped her veil apart, but wakes in the morning to find that the veil *actually* has been ripped, and that there was no dream. Jane tells Mr. Rochester the following about the woman, after she rent her veil:

Just at my bedside, the figure stopped: the fiery eye glared upon me – she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness: for the second time in my life – only the second time – I became insensible from terror. (371)

The woman who entered Jane's room, we later learn, is Bertha. Jane claims that when Bertha came very close to her, snuffed the light, and continued to loom over her in the dark, she fainted from terror for the second time in her life. Jane herself makes the connection between her supernatural experience in the Red Room and the wedding veil episode: these were the only two moments in her life that Jane actually lost consciousness in the face of terror (an indication of the supernatural). Though a significant one, Jane's fainting episode is not the only indicator of the supernatural. Jane describes Bertha as having a "fiery eye," as well as a face that continues to "flame over" Jane even after she has extinguished the actual flame in the room, the candle. Bertha's "fiery" characteristics, the candle flame, and her angry temperament all support the notion that a sort of electricity or energy is passing between Bertha and Jane. Like Jane's experience with the fortune teller, she is admittedly very close to Bertha in terms of distance, but the fact that Bertha *never touches* Jane demonstrates the power of the electrical or supernatural energy that can be passed between two sources across a distance. Bertha's aggressive behavior

and menacing flame indicate almost incontrovertibly that she very much wants to harm Jane physically, but she does not close the distance even once.

There is one final example of actual electricity in the novel that fits into the discussion of intimacy and separation. Right after Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane in the orchard, the two are driven inside by what appears to be a bad thunderstorm. Just as they get up to leave, “a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which [Jane] was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal.” Later, Jane informs us that “Adèle came running in to tell [her] that the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away” (341). This particular tree had been special to Jane and Rochester, but the fact that it was now a “wreck...black and riven,” is less important than the symbolic implication its splitting has for Jane and Edward (363). Rochester had just that afternoon asked Jane if she would join him as his other half, his “second self” (338). She agreed to marry him, and the two were as happy as ever, but the tree’s destruction so soon after his proposal is a clear portent of the difficulties and separation that Jane and Rochester must face. Like the wedding veil rent in half, and like the chestnut tree split by lightning, the union between Jane and Edward is cracked in two. It makes sense that their first reunion occurs over a great distance through a seemingly electrical, energetic force that links their voices and souls together, the same force that split the tree in half.

To conclude this chapter, I will share a passage from one of Jane’s conversations with St. John after he has asked her to come to India as a missionary’s wife.

But my powers – where are they for this undertaking? I do not feel them. Nothing speaks or stirs in me while you talk. I am sensible of no light kindling – no life quickening – no

voice counselling or cheering. Oh, I wish I could make you see how much my mind is at this moment like a rayless dungeon, with one shrinking fear fettered in its depths – the fear of being persuaded by you to attempt what I cannot accomplish! (502)

Jane is aware of her tendency to become excited and inflamed with a thrilling or passionate sensation, much like those I have discussed earlier in this chapter, but she makes it clear that nothing in what St. John is relaying to her causes her to feel that energy. She says that “Nothing speaks or stirs in me while you talk.” While it is true that St. John is referring specifically to Jane’s presumed “powers” to proselytize, by induction we can see that *the orthodox* more generally does not have the ability to excite Jane. The examples laid out in this chapter demonstrate that the occult, on the other hand, does have a powerful, *electrical* effect upon Jane.

CHAPTER 3

‘HALF DREAM, HALF REALITY’

The world of *Jane Eyre* operates within a structure that is somehow both realistic and unrealistic. It is a novel that seems to be *mainly* realistic. It seems to be *mostly* a novel about a clever, bold female character who challenges her station in life, falls in love, and struggles with matters of personal principle – all things a character in a realistic novel might do. It is, however, just as much about a woman who *possibly* experiences a number of very strange, or supernatural, events. How does this novel pull off such an ontologically ambiguous setting, yet maintain its credibility with the reader? Two important theoretical concepts can explain why this novel seems to be on the edge of two different genres. They are Sigmund Freud’s “the uncanny” from his essay of the same name, “The Uncanny” (1919), and Tzvetan Todorov’s “the fantastic” from his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970), both of which are applied by the authors to literature. While these concepts depart from one another in some aspects, on a basic level each one is defined by its ambiguity.

The uncanny and the fantastic operate in liminal situations, ones in which a character feels uncertainty about their reality or about the reality of a particular phenomenon they may have witnessed. Several events in *Jane Eyre* can be treated – at least to an extent – within the theoretical framework of the uncanny and the fantastic: the ghost in the red room, the fortune teller, the three dream-events two nights before Jane’s wedding, and the cry across the moors. The uncanny and the fantastic in each of these situations inspire feelings of uncertainty, bewilderment, and distance from reality in Jane. While Freud suggests that fear is a natural, necessary reaction to witnessing the uncanny, Jane does not always fear it. Todorov proposes

that fear is one symptom associated with the fantastic, but that it is not a necessary condition (35). While Freud's theory of the uncanny inspires much of Todorov's work on the fantastic and illuminates much of the material in *Jane Eyre*, Todorov qualifies the uncanny in a way that makes it more relevant to a reading of the novel. His definitions allow for the uncanny and the fantastic to exist theoretically within *Jane Eyre* and to help explain why uncanny events are ambiguous and strange, but not always feared.

On the other hand, Todorov situates the uncanny in a position relative to the fantastic that is not completely valid in terms of how it functions in literature (or in real life, for that matter). He believes a situation to which a person has ascribed a natural solution is uncanny, while a situation to which a person has ascribed a supernatural solution is marvelous. He says that the fantastic "occupies the duration of...uncertainty" before any attribution has been made (25).

Once we choose one answer or the other [a natural or supernatural solution], we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 25)

Freud rationalizes what and where uncanny feelings come from – real events or experiences from our past – but when we experience the uncanny, we are not consciously aware of the original, familiar thing that makes it uncanny. Todorov separates the fantastic from the uncanny, but in reality, the two concepts are much more closely related. Both character and reader experience the uncanny in very much the same way that Todorov claims they experience the fantastic: on the basis of ambiguity, of hesitation, and in some cases, of fear. Jane would not sense the uncanny

with the fortune teller if she knew in the moment that she (the fortune teller) was Mr. Rochester. The fact that Mr. Rochester is “familiar” to Jane (to use Freud’s term) only creates the uncanny sensation if she is *unable* to concretely place or name the familiar object.

For the purposes of this chapter, then, I will rely heavily on Freud’s concept of the uncanny to unearth situations of familiarity and non-familiarity (between life and death, or natural and supernatural, for instance) and on Todorov’s fantastic to expound upon the ambiguity and the feeling of hesitation, or liminality, in many of Jane’s experiences. As Todorov argues, I will depend upon the fact that the uncanny does not necessarily have to be met with fear, but I will not distinguish as much as Todorov does between the fantastic and the uncanny in terms of “when they appear” during the process of rationalization. In my view, *both* the fantastic and the uncanny can exist in a moment of hesitation, not *just* the fantastic.

The Red Room Ghost

The events that occur in the Red Room fall nicely within a flexible definition of the fantastic. In his book, Todorov’s first of three conditions defining the fantastic is that “the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described” (33). *Jane Eyre* easily fulfills the first part of this condition. Brontë consistently signals to the reader that the world in which Jane lives is like *ours* – Jane is a young orphan living with her aunt and cousins, she has serious interpersonal problems with her family, she later goes to a boarding school, etc. Her experience early on with the Red Room ghost, however, compels Jane and the reader to consider whether it was a natural or supernatural event. Her narration of this childhood

event does not end conclusively, which supports the notion that what Jane experienced involves the fantastic.

In the following passage, Jane describes the moment she saw a strange light and a movement in the Red Room, and how her thoughts wandered from one possible explanation to another.

Shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room: at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred: while I gazed, it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern, carried by some one across the lawn; but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. (74)

Jane considers at least three possible sources for the beam of light that moved through the room. Two are natural: she thinks that perhaps the light could be coming from the moon, a moonbeam. She quickly corrects herself, however, arguing that moonlight should not move. Her second idea comes to her later, while she is (fictionally) writing her autobiography. She says that she “can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern” (74). This reasoning comes after the event, however. In the moment, her only other idea was that the light came from a supernatural force.

When Jane witnessed the strange light moving across her room, she experienced a hesitation with regard to the quality of the light’s authenticity, so to speak. She was not sure if

the light could be rationally explained, or if it had come to her from a supernatural realm. This is the moment in which the uncanny takes hold. True to Freud's original interpretation of the concept, Jane feels dreadful fear upon encountering what, in the moment, she believes to be the ghost of her Uncle Reed, the third possible source of the light. Earlier she had mused upon the idea of meeting her uncle's ghost, thinking it might be a soothing experience, as none might take more pity on her than her own uncle, seeing how Aunt Reed and the cousins had been mistreating Jane against his wishes. She instinctively picks up on the uncanniness of such a hypothetical scheme, however, and Jane's feelings turn from comfort to dread in the face of something that *once* was familiar to her, her uncle, but which *would be*, now, very unfamiliar (in other words, dead).

One might suggest that Todorov's theory of the fantastic cannot be applied to this particular case since Jane, while narrating the sequence of events after the fact, writes that the strange light was "in all likelihood, a gleam of light from a lantern" (74). Although it seems that Jane concludes that the light was caused by something in the natural world, she is actually rather conflicted. First of all, Jane's language is dripping with indecision. While she certainly leans to one conclusion over another, she does not make a truly conclusive statement about the source of the light. Though she might "readily conjecture," the fact is that she still only "conjectures," or guesses. She makes her claim using the phrase "in all likelihood," which is language that sounds like a conclusive statement, but does not entirely settle it. All of this is further emphasized by the fact that decades later, as she is writing her autobiography, Jane is *still* undecided. The fantastic is evinced specifically in situations in which the character or reader cannot decide which is the proper metaphysical underpinning of the phenomenon.

Secondly, the reader, according to Todorov, has just as much or more power than a character in terms of deciding whether the fantastic has been manifested. The second of Todorov's three conditions defining the fantastic is that the "hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character" (33). In his first condition, the reader's reaction is most important. In Todorov's second condition, he clarifies that a character could also experience hesitation, but only as an afterthought to the reader's experience. Though he believes the reader and the character of a novel may experience the same feelings, and that the reader often identifies with the character's feelings, the reader can sense the fantastic on his or her own as well (as justified in his first condition). While in the moment of this scene the reader tends to identify with the character, Jane, just as Todorov suggests, the timeline and the autobiographical nature of the book causes the reader to *look back* on this moment and feel the fantastic, *even* if they could not or did not do so while reading Chapter 2. The ambiguous, natural-supernatural phenomena that fill the remainder of the novel cause the reader to look back on events like that of the Red Room and experience the fantastic retrogressively.

The Fortune Teller

In literature, the supernatural is not always necessarily a component of an uncanny experience, though supernatural events can and do often take place in fiction. On the other hand, uncanny experiences in the natural world can be *attributed* to the supernatural, but I would argue they cannot, or have not, been proven. The idea inherent to this argument is that an uncanny experience makes a person *feel* that the supernatural somehow is involved, even if it is later

proven not to be involved. The goal is not necessarily to *prove* that the supernatural exists or that it plays a role in a particular event, but to demonstrate that uncanny events can make one *feel* like the supernatural exists. Jane's encounter with the fortune teller in Chapter 19, who is actually Mr. Rochester in disguise, demonstrates how the uncanny can bring about feelings of ambiguity with regard to what is real and create a possibility of the presence of the supernatural without its actually being there.

At first, Jane is completely against the idea that the Sibyl can give legitimate fortunes. She tells the woman that she "ha[s] no faith," that she wants her to "prove herself," that she doesn't "understand enigmas" or "riddles," and sarcastically approves of the fortune teller's belated decision to look at her forehead, eyes, and mouth, quipping "Now you are coming to reality" (276-78). While Jane initially rejects the seer's abilities, it doesn't take long for her to fall under a kind of spell – just one mention of the name "Anne Poole" is enough to put Jane on edge. How could the woman know Anne, the strange servant at Thornfield? After this remark, the two engage in fast-paced dialogue, and Jane barely has a moment to point out to the fortune teller that *she* should be telling Jane's fortune; Jane shouldn't be the one answering questions. She replies rather weakly, it seems, to yet another probe by the Sibyl:

"The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator." I said this rather to myself than to the gipsy; whose strange talk, voice, manner had by this time wrapped me in a kind of dream. One unexpected sentence came from her lips after another, till I got involved in a web of mystification; and wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart, watching its workings, and taking record of every pulse. (280)

Jane had been replying to a question about Mr. Rochester, but, as she notes to herself, her reply is directed more at herself than in answer to the gipsy. As the conversation goes on, Jane begins to feel that she no longer has control over her responses: she answers the Sybil without thinking, and she considers the fact that the woman really does have some supernatural ability to read her mind (or that she has employed some “spirit” to watch over her for the past few weeks). The hesitation Jane feels – being “wrapped in a dream” and “mystified” by the woman – designates this as a moment of the fantastic. She is “in-between” solutions for what is taking place, not having decided yet whether she believes there is a natural or supernatural explanation.

Finally, Mr. Rochester seems to leave off his feigned old woman’s voice, and Jane, sensing the change in his words, voice, and manner, drifts into an even deeper trance. She asks herself, “Where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still?” (282). Having listened to the fortune teller speak without interrupting her for some time, Jane finally is distracted when the old woman stops trying to disguise her voice and orders Jane to rise and “leave [her],” as “the play is played out” (282). This statement, of course, is Mr. Rochester’s indirect manner of admitting to Jane that the fortune teller is not who she seems to be. Jane’s dreaming sensation before this, however, pushes Jane towards precisely the hesitation that is described by Todorov on the fantastic. At this moment, she senses the fortune teller as occupying a sort of “middle ground” of reality. The gipsy has been tinged with the uncanny – the familiar yet distant, strange, or scary. This sensation causes her to go even further into her dreamlike reverie before she uncovers Mr. Rochester completely.

Freud’s specific qualifications for the uncanny are not met fully in this scene, as it does not appear that Jane experiences fear in the face of these strange circumstances. She feels only

“mystified” and unanchored, and she relies on the metaphor of the dream to describe this feeling of uncertainty (“Had I been dreaming?”). Thus, in the moment before Mr. Rochester reveals his identity, Jane’s experience matches perfectly with Todorov’s definition of the fantastic. Samuel Weber also challenges the assumption that the uncanny requires the character or reader to experience fear, or that

the uncanny is essentially or exclusively an emotive phenomenon...Such a position misconstrues the peculiar structure of the uncanny, or, more precisely, ignores the fact that the uncanny has a particular structure, which, however intimately bound up with subjective feelings—above all with anxiety—is nonetheless determined by a series of ‘objective’ factors that in turn stand in a certain relation to literary discourse. (1103)

Weber not only challenges the notion that the uncanny is “essentially an emotive phenomenon,” or that it requires fear, he explains that assuming so detracts from the uncanny’s “particular structure” as supported by *objective* factors. Jane does not fear the fortune teller, but she *does* feel confusion because she observes, objectively, that the Sybil recounts certain elements of Jane’s life that are true, but which the woman cannot have had any rational explanation for knowing.

In addition to the fantastic, Jane’s experience with the fortune teller is an uncanny one for two reasons. The first is related to Freud’s discussion of primitive things long repressed in the human memory, but which now appear to us as frightening or shameful. He explains that our ancestors believed in animism, the “idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings” (Freud 12). Though this example is not a one-to-one comparison, Freud’s point is that

phenomena that were comforting or “normal” to our human ancestors – such as hearing a rustling in the bushes or seeing an inanimate object move – because of their belief that spirits inhabited all things, animate or inanimate, are now manifested through the supernatural according to *our* perspective. The rustling, if it cannot be attributed to some small animal or a gust of wind, might be explained in our minds by something supernatural, as a ghost, angel, or spirit. The Sybil’s special powers fall into this category. Her inexplicable ability to discern specifics about Jane’s life and environment leads Jane to consider the possibility that something “unnatural” is going on, that she is in a dream, or in an otherwise unreal situation.

Second, it is likely that the very reason Jane feels such a hesitation, such a confusion between what is real and unreal is because she cannot quite identify the familiar element that is making the situation an uncanny one. The familiar element must be the fact that the woman is actually Mr. Rochester. *He* is familiar to Jane, and it is precisely because she cannot recognize him but instinctively feels that there is something familiar about the fortune teller that makes this encounter an uncanny one.

Portending Dreams

Dreams, as I have noted previously, crop up now and again in *Jane Eyre* as a metaphor to describe the feeling of being unsure whether an experience is real or imagined, natural or supernatural. Two nights before Jane’s wedding to Mr. Rochester, she experiences what she believed to be three separate dreams, but by morning discovers that one must have actually occurred. Her distress and confusion while having the dreams as well as the argument she has with Mr. Rochester when explaining them to him demonstrates the profusion of uncanny and ambiguous happenings in this novel.

As Jane recounts her strange dreams to Edward, the two share a conversation that highlights the blurring of the line between real and unreal. Jane presents to Mr. Rochester the terrific events she experienced two nights before her wedding as a “dream.” She begins by explaining two frightening, anxiety-ridden dreams she had, but follows these up with the wedding veil incident, which turns out not to be a dream (according to Jane). Mr. Rochester, even though he clearly fears the idea that Bertha may have actually entered Jane’s room, convinces himself (and tries to convince Jane) that the strange, dark woman she saw was only a part of Jane’s dreams. First, Mr. Rochester tries to tell Jane that her strange dream was the result of an “over-stimulated brain,” to which Jane replies: “my nerves were not in fault; the thing was *real*: the transaction actually took place” (371-72, emphasis added). By “thing,” Jane is referring to the eerie (or uncanny) event in her dream, the supernatural. While nothing during the event of the veil ripping actually defies any rules of the natural world, what makes it seem supernatural and uncanny to Jane is Bertha’s appearance. Bertha is a woman, a human, but that evening she reminded Jane “Of the foul German spectre – the Vampyre” with a “discoloured...savage face” and “blood-shot eyes” (371). Why are ghosts (“spectres”) and vampires considered uncanny? According to Freud, these entities are related to the old idea of spirits inhabiting all manner of inanimate objects. These are those same spirits, but in the forms of an angel, ghost, or even a vampire. They look human, but do not qualify fully as human (they are either dead, immortal, or display extremely un-humanlike behaviors, such as sucking blood).

Regardless, Jane insists that what she experienced was “real” despite her initial belief that she had simply dreamt about a terrifying supernatural creature. They discuss it a bit further, and Mr. Rochester says that since he cannot explain the “mystery of that awful visitant,” as Jane describes it, “it must have been *unreal*” (372, emphasis added). The two are at odds, Jane’s

believing the event is real and Edward's believing the event is unreal, until Jane reveals her discovery of the evidence, the torn veil, that lay before her in the morning when she rose from bed. Upon hearing this, Mr. Rochester provides a conclusion for the miniature philosophical battle that the two have just engaged in: "It was half dream, half reality" (372). While we know that Mr. Rochester is trying to cover up for the fact that Bertha, his crazed, unpredictable wife, somehow escaped her room and entered Jane's the night before, his "combination" explanation of the state of reality of Jane's dream-experience echoes the mixed sense of supernaturality and reality in the novel. It also closely approaches Todorov's definition of the fantastic, the idea of being stuck midway between a "real" or an "unreal" conclusion.

As it turns out, Jane's first two dreams (the *only* two dreams she had that night, in fact) seem to prophesy her future in spite of Mr. Rochester's belittling doubts. While explaining her third "dream" about the torn veil, Jane tries to tell Rochester that what she saw actually took place, to which he responds, "And your previous dreams: were they real too? Is Thornfield Hall a ruin? Am I severed from you by insuperable obstacles? Am I leaving you...without a word?" (372). The irony in each of Rochester's sarcastic questions is that the answer he believes to be true, "No," is actually "Yes," as a second-reading of the novel reveals. Jane's "dream" about the dark-haired woman is proven to have actually taken place; Thornfield Hall eventually burns down in a fire; Jane and Rochester are "severed" from each other by seemingly "insuperable obstacles," which takes their form in the shape of Bertha, who is still married to Rochester, and whom he cannot divorce; and Jane, not Rochester, will soon leave *him* "without a word" so that she may more easily slip away from the man with whom she has fallen deeply in love.

Two of Jane's three nighttime experiences were dreams and one actually occurred, but all three serve as portents of the despair that is soon to come. This incident can be described both as

the result of coincidence or of the supernatural. The uncanniness of this event explains why both terms are relevant. Freud uses the term “involuntary repetition” to describe what people often experience as a “coincidence” in their life. Jane did not have the same dream many times, though such a repetition likely could have awoken a feeling of uncanniness in her. The uncanny aspect of her experience is the fact that she had three dreams, each of which contains an element which *comes true* in real life. The third was not a dream, of course, but she receives a “message” of sorts when watching the veil being torn apart in the same way that she receives a warning from the other two dreams. While Freud’s definition is more related to the seemingly unceasing repetition of a word, number, color, face, or other signal, the idea of experiencing a particular event or element of an event and then experiencing that same element elsewhere, unprovoked, is very much related to Jane’s experience with the three dreams.

The Black Spectre

In the previous chapter, I discussed the significance of the cry across the moors with regard to its function as a conduit for Jane and Rochester’s souls and as the most blatant example of supernatural activity in the novel. Though the cry itself is an uncanny event, one that inspires the fantastic in the reader and in Jane, it is accompanied by an easily overlooked but extremely peculiar occurrence: the “black spectre.” After the sound of the cry disappears in the night and Jane listens, hearing nothing more than the wind, we suddenly receive the following narration: “‘Down superstition!’ I commented, as that spectre rose up black by the yew at the gate. ‘This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused, and did – no miracle – but her best’” (520). It seems that Jane in this passage is condemning her own superstition, and tries to convince herself that the cry is “the work of nature” rather than of some

strange, dark, supernatural source. She believes this because she hears the wind “sighing low in the firs,” echoing her questions, after hearing the cry. Because of this, she attributes the voice she heard to nature. As soon as the following morning Jane questions this interpretation and considers another possibility, but most curious about this passage is the way she describes her superstition as a “spectre” that “rose up black by the yew gate.” The reason this comment can be overlooked easily is because one might assume that Jane is narrating with a metaphor: her superstition is *like* a black spectre. But the phrase is specific, especially in terms of location. At this point, Jane has run outside and is standing in the garden at twilight. She is looking towards the fence and says, specifically, that a black spectre rose next to a tree “by...the gate.” Jane could have said that the “black spectre filled my mind” or something of that nature, which would make sense if she were speaking metaphorically. Since she does not say this, her comment that the spectre rose by the gate can be taken literally.

What is this “spectre,” this ghost, this black mass that rises before Jane in the garden? What elicits such a forceful reaction from her? A good explanation is given by Jane on the very next page, when she wakes up the following morning and considers the extraordinary phenomenon of the previous night: “I recalled that inward sensation I had experienced... [the voice] seemed in *me* – not in the external world” (521). Jane believes that the voice she heard somehow may have come from inside of her. It is already naturally impossible for a voice to travel such a long distance, but at this point, Jane has entered a situation that is outside of the realm of “natural reality.” That the voice came from inside of her rather than over an incredible distance is not much more unbelievable. It is only right to consider this spectre in the same light. Two supernatural occurrences take place in one night – the cry and the black mass – and Jane admits that one seems to have come from inside her. Why not the other? Anneleen Masschelein’s

discussion of Freud's uncanny appropriately links such a spectre to his concept: "The notion of spectrality is...used to theorize the blurring of the limit between the animate and the inanimate, death and life, fiction and reality" (135). As I mentioned earlier, uncanny situations are often associated with matters of dead and undead, both literally in terms of physical death and mentally in terms of repressed, long-dead thoughts or memories. The ghost, or "spectre," that Jane sees rise before her absolutely "blurs the limit" between real and unreal, or "animate and inanimate," because it represents a dead, repressed, or forgotten entity or thought of *Jane's*. However, since it is manifested in the *real* world in front of her very eyes, the fact that it *exists* and is embodied in her presence, makes it "real."

In addition, Jane originally calls this black spectre her "superstition." Superstitions, of course, are beliefs – related to the mind – and are sometimes associated with the body. One might think of a superstition as coming from a "gut feeling," for instance. Whether of the body or the mind, superstition comes from within. Jane's black mass, then, is a projection of her fears in the real world. It is a manifestation, an embodiment of the dark thoughts and fears that Jane harbors and which threaten to consume her as they "rise up" by the yew gate. If the cry represents the positive, helpful projection of Jane's body and mind, then the black spectre is just the opposite: the dark, negative, fear-inducing and courage-crushing projection of Jane's mind and body.

Freud relates his discussion of E.T.A. Hoffman's short story, "The Sandman," written in 1816, to the double, a phenomenon in which a person sees himself in another being or entity in a way that inspires the uncanny. In "The Sandman," the protagonist falls in love with a doll because she is so lifelike that he believes, having seen her at a distance, that she is a real woman. Freud suggests, along with Jentsch, that "a particularly favourable condition for awakening

uncanny sensations is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (8-9). Of course, the situation with a double is slightly different, as it refers to an entity with which a person feels their identity has been duplicated, while the example of the doll consists only of the doll and whether *it* is animate or inanimate. The example of the doll, however, is actually closely related to the double in that the strangeness a person feels when they believe the doll looks like a human occurs because people identify with animate beings. In other words, if a doll becomes or looks very much like a human to an observer, then the observer has found a double in the doll on the basic level of identifying with another human entity. Jane’s projection of self in the black matter functions much like Freud’s concept of the double. Not only is the possibility that the black mass actually presented itself to Jane an unnatural event of its own right, making it an uncanny situation, the fact that this manifestation is in essence Jane’s double soaks the entire situation with the push-and-pull sensations of familiarity, distance, homeliness, identity, and fear. The black mass is “homely” or familiar because it is a part of Jane, but it is terrifying and should be kept at bay because it is a projected, removed part of Jane that attempts to *return to her* to overwhelm her.

The ontological state of the world of *Jane Eyre* and the events that take place therein do not perfectly conform to the definitions of the uncanny and the fantastic as laid out by Freud and Todorov. The concepts of fear and ambiguity, however, which undergird the uncanny and the fantastic, do serve as appropriate guides to better understand the metaphysical framework that Charlotte Brontë has prepared for both her character and her reader. Jane departs most heavily from Freud’s definition of an uncanny experience in that she does not always feel fear in the face of an uncanny event. She certainly does fear, at times, but Jane is somehow comfortable enough

with the possibility of the occult (or even orthodox) supernatural that she does not experience terror. This does not mean, however, that she is not suspended in the fantastic or experiencing an ambiguous, uncanny event.

Oftentimes, it is clear that Jane's character is experiencing hesitation or doubt. At other times, however, Jane either ignores the peculiarity of her situation or ascribes an otherwise "natural" solution to it so that she can continue on without much concern. In these cases, the reader is left to deal with the fact that an event they just read about *could* be natural or could also be supernatural. This mental shackling is most effectively imposed upon the reader *after* the most inexplicable event of the novel, the cry. Though Brontë's narrator sprinkles supernatural references and frightening, "almost" supernatural events throughout the book, the phenomenon of Jane and Mr. Rochester's voice being heard across an impossible distance is most successful at creating a truly fantastic feeling in the novel. Both the reader and the narrator are caught wondering what could possibly explain the event, but even more so, the reader is driven to look back on all the previous incidents of the novel in a sort of fantastic stupor, wondering whether those events might actually have been explained by the supernatural, too.

CONCLUSION

I would like to close my essay with a discussion of reading and writing as a form of literary exorcism and its connection to the author-character relationship. In Chapter 3, I discussed the “black spectre” that confronts Jane immediately following the cry across the moors and the fact that it not only represents but physically *embodies* Jane’s negative emotions – fear, discomfort, anger, confusion. If we are thinking in terms of Freud, we would call this spectre a “projection” of Jane’s, but another term we can use is “exorcism.” Jane exorcizes her inner fears and superstitions, resulting in the black spectre, but this does not eliminate them. An exorcism should remove the evil or dark force from the body, but Jane’s spectre is in fact given *power* by expelling it from her body. She addresses it, she confronts it, and by naming it she allows it to manifest itself in the real world. Despite this interesting departure from the customary outcome of an exorcism, Jane proceeds to extinguish the spectre in characteristic “witch”-fashion: she shouts “Down, superstition!” and smothers the black form with a sort of verbal spell.

Julio Cortázar, the famous Argentinian short story writer and essayist, wrote about exorcism in terms of the writing process. In his essay “On the Short Story and its Environs,” Cortázar explains that writing fiction “is somehow exorcism, rejecting invading beings by casting them out.” He goes on, saying that “in any memorable short story you get this polarization, as if the author had wanted to get rid...of this being harbored within him, exorcising it the only way he could: by writing it” (35). It is appropriate that Jane Eyre engages in the very activity that her older, narrating self and her author, Charlotte Brontë, engage in through exorcism: creation.

Mario Vargas Llosa, another powerhouse Hispanic literary writer and essayist, also contributes to the debate on the nature of writing fiction in his *Letters to a Young Novelist* by bringing up the novelist's "demons" and the issue of the authenticity of fiction:

What is certain is that fiction is, by definition, fraud – something that is not real, yet pretends to be – and that all novels are lies passing themselves off as truth, creations whose *power of persuasion* depends entirely on the novelist's skill at performing conjuring and sleight-of-hand tricks, like a circus or theater magician...the authentic novelist is the novelist who docilely obeys the rules life dictates, writing on those themes born out of experience and possessed of urgency and avoiding all others. That is what authenticity or sincerity is for the novelist: the acceptance of his demons and the decision to serve them as well as possible. (6)

It may be that Jane really does see ghosts, or really can hear voices across unimaginable distances, or is guided by fairies, or is in fact a fairy herself (as Rochester is constantly teasing her), but the act of writing is also a manner of conjuring ghosts, demons, or spectres. Just as Jane the protagonist conjures the black spectre into her world, Jane the autobiographer conjures her younger self into being by *writing her onto the page*. Similarly, Charlotte Brontë conjures up all of these ghosts: younger Jane, older Jane, Jane the writer, and all the rest of the characters and events that populate her novel. As Vargas Llosa suggests in his essay, when writing novels, the barriers between fiction and reality are easily blurred and broken down. By creating a fictional character who writes her own autobiography, Charlotte Brontë invites herself to the reality-fiction tea party, writing a thinly veiled autobiography *herself* in *Jane Eyre*. Many critics have

noted the striking similarity of certain events in *Jane Eyre* to some of Charlotte Brontë's own personal life experiences. A few of these episodes include Charlotte's time at a girls' institution similar to Lowood, where she lost two older sisters to tuberculosis (just like Helen Burns); her attraction and professed love for a married man whom she met while teaching at a school in Brussels (like Jane, who falls for the already married Rochester); and her dissatisfaction with the scarcity of job prospects for the unmarried Victorian woman, which reflects Jane's disappointment at the thought that her only career opportunity lay in the work of a governess. At what point does Jane Eyre become a real person and does Charlotte Brontë step into the fictional world of her own making? At the very least, we can be sure that Brontë has absolutely chosen to "accept her demons" and "serve them as well as possible" by giving them life through her writing.

One of my biggest takeaways from writing a senior honors thesis is the sheer number of different directions I could have taken my project on the supernatural in *Jane Eyre*. I chose to focus on three main topics: 1) identifying the diversity of supernatural forces and elements in the novel (especially the contending orthodox and occult forces) and discovering the variety of negative and positive representations of those forces; 2) exploring the connection between electricity (a scientific, natural phenomenon) and the supernatural (by definition, above or beyond natural or earthly phenomena); and 3) analyzing the blurred, ambiguous moments of the natural and the supernatural with the help of the fantastic and the uncanny. A few topics I considered researching along my thesis journey and which are still ripe for further discussion and investigation include: the different ways the supernatural is manifested across time in British Georgian, Regency, and Victorian novels like *Northanger Abbey* (gothic and literary), *Jane Eyre* (occult), and *Mrs. Dalloway* (psychological and hallucinatory) as a manner of expressing

inexpressible ideas, or as a tool for either female protagonist or female authorial expression; Tabitha Aykroyd (the Brontë family servant and cook) as the source of Charlotte Brontë's fairytales; the Irish-born Patrick Brontë (Charlotte's father) as a possible source of supernatural tales *despite* his deep Christian faith, owing to his exposure to the deeply mythological and supernatural Irish literary tradition; and identifying where the Gothic literary tradition and purely supernatural phenomena overlap and separate in *Jane Eyre*. Finally, my research on the supernatural and the questions that it raises in terms of the nature of reality and of the authenticity of autobiographical *or* fictional writing could lead to a bigger project on "Ghosts, Autobiography, and Self-Narration" in literature, for instance.

I will end by harkening back to the very beginning: my thesis title, a "Deeper Shade of the Supernatural." Seemingly the biggest obstacles to my project were the frustrating reminders of the fact that my protagonist really did *not* like the occult and barely acknowledged its presence in her world, despite my every attempt to convince her that she *is* the supernatural, the occult, and that it operates all around her. She is its best, most principled, most judicious representative. Jane (and through her, Charlotte Brontë) does something incredible for the occult in her novel: she demonstrates that it can be a force of goodness. This runs contrary to many depictions of the occult supernatural in the literature that precedes *Jane Eyre*.

After Mr. Rochester finishes giving Jane his emotional account of having heard Jane's voice across the moors on the same night she heard his call, she sits quietly, ruminating. Jane ultimately decides not to inform Rochester of this unbelievable coincidence, believing that his mind is already "too prone to gloom" from his recent sufferings, and that it "needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural" (550). I believe that a part of Jane wants to protect her vulnerable companion; I also believe, however, that another part of Jane knows that the

supernatural is on her side, that it is fundamentally a good force, and that she wants to keep that knowledge a secret. Like author, like character: just as Charlotte Brontë tricked her reader into thinking they were reading a realistic novel, but then turned the tables by confirming the existence of the supernatural through the cry, Jane leads us to believe that she is firmly orthodox at heart, only to reveal in the end her true affinity for the supernatural by quietly desiring to keep the knowledge of its existence to herself. *Jane Eyre* really is masked with a deeper shade of the supernatural, but the only ones in on the secret are Jane and her creator (and now you, dear Reader).

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