

## The Princess in the Tower: Gender and Art in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott"

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The Victorian Age has been consistently but variously characterized as a period of crisis in identity and purpose. Of course, this characterization is arguably one which can be used to define any specified moment in time; nevertheless one can easily demonstrate that during the Victorian period, given categories of meaning and identity were under overt and explicit pressure. Sites around which meaning and identity more or less cohered (God, the class structure, colonialism, patriarchy, race) were rigorously challenged and debated, and the multitude of voices in this debate created a cultural tension against which more traditional forces reacted with vigor. Thus, many of the texts produced during the nineteenth century are exercises of appropriation, organizing, labeling, and categorizing. The narrative project often resulted in attempts to contain the excess which challenged, even as it created, a narrative which structured dominant ideology.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is this truer than in the discourses of gender, which were, in fact, prolific enough to receive a category and label of their own: "The Woman Question."<sup>2</sup> And no one more explicitly articulates the Victorian fondness for tidy (and restrictive) categories of identity and meaning, particularly when it comes to gender, than Alfred, Lord Tennyson,<sup>3</sup> if, as has often been pointed out, "The Princess's" king is to be taken at and as his word:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:  
Man for the sword and for the needle she:  
Man with the head and woman with the heart:  
Man to command and woman to obey;  
All else confusion. (5.437-441)

In short, the conservative voices of the era felt that if gender categories were not maintained as binary oppositions, catastrophic chaos would surely ensue.

On the other hand, as has also often been pointed out, no one seems to more explicitly resist these gendered binaries than Charlotte Brontë's most popular heroine, Jane Eyre, when she argues:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (112-113)

It is hardly any wonder that the more conservative Victorian journals like *Blackwood's* and *The Quarterly Review* warned that *Jane Eyre* might very well bring about unwanted and uncivilized revolution (Oliphant 257; as qtd. in Politi 58).

And yet, more recent critical analysis has frequently shown that in two of their most popular texts, "The Lady of Shalott" and *Jane Eyre*, Tennyson and Brontë readily identified with heroines who problematize each of the texts' conceptual positions. In Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," the Lady is an artist who weaves the societal images reflected in her mirror. Patriarchy's denial of her as an artist-subject, however, results in the loss of her art and her death. Likewise, *Jane Eyre* is also an artist, a verbal weaver of societal images. But unlike the Lady of Shalott, while she and her art survive patriarchal attempts to reassign her to her "proper" feminine role, this survival is not predicated upon the deconstruction of gendered binaries but on an inversion of them. After all, by the end of her story, Rochester, the would-be patriarch, is maimed and blind, and Jane is his "prop" and "guide"; in a world ordered by clearly demarcated, hierarchized and gendered categories of identity, someone has to wear the pants in the marriage, and Jane's art, her text, survives as a kind of justification for the fact the pants-wearer in her marriage to Rochester is she. In other words, as Jina Politi argues, "contrary to conscious intentions," *Jane Eyre* ends up celebrating "the very ethos upon which bourgeois capitalism and its patriarchal ideology rest" (56). Or, to apply Patricia Waugh's general observations about textual strategies, the rhetorical mechanisms of both "The Lady of Shalott" and *Jane Eyre* subvert their overtly expressed meaning (329).<sup>4</sup> By directly juxtaposing these two very popular texts and heroines, I not only hope to show how they reiterate Nancy Armstrong's thesis that Victorian texts tended to represent femininity as a specific category of identity which insisted upon her

interiority and subjectivity (4) but also to emphasize how they simultaneously reiterated gender definitions as binary oppositions which confined women's subjectivity to these private, interiorized spaces. In short, I hope to show that these two texts illustrate a woman's power was very limited, and her subjectivity was only granted if it were appropriatable by and contained within traditional and patriarchally determined narrative structures.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, by unpacking the ways in which these texts and their heroines are in dialogue with what the Victorians umbrellaed under the heading "The Woman Question," I wish to investigate both the answers the texts posit to this "question" as well as that which escapes and resists the answers they submit.<sup>6</sup> To put it another way, if in general the mechanisms of power structures work to appropriate discourses, rebellious or complicit, into a narrative which validates and maintains their claim to power (see Greenblatt 272), I wish to investigate those parts of the discourses which disrupt and stand outside of such structures. These alternative narrative directions may arguably lie outside the cultural narrative they participate in and gesture toward paradigms which necessitate the collapse of strict polemical and hierarchized oppositions (namely regarding gender) as they intersect with art and the female artist.

"The Lady of Shalott" is written early in Tennyson's career and articulates, as Joseph Chadwick (referring to Arthur Hallam's commentary) points out, the Romantic aesthetic ideal which theorized that poetry and imaginative subjectivity could only exist in isolation and autonomy (13-14). As Chadwick goes on to argue, when autonomy is defined as separateness and privacy, the characteristics of the idealized Romantic artist are the same characteristics which define the Victorian feminine ideal: both share "self-containment, objectified otherness, removal from the flux of life, [and a] participation in a higher order of existence" as ideals (15). It is hardly surprising, then, that in "The Lady of Shalott" the feminine is repeatedly identified with the private and artistic and the masculine with the socially productive.<sup>7</sup> Notably, Shalott is the "private and socially peripheral space" to which the Lady/artist is consigned (Plasa 249). Shalott is defined by feminine images: it is a "silent isle" (l. 17) surrounded by water; it is a "space of flowers" (l. 16) where "lilies blow" (l. 7). The Lady, who becomes, in Ann Colley's words, "continuous with her surroundings" (370) is insubstantial, a half-presence, a "fairy" who is heard but not seen (l. 35); as such she is deprived of subjectivity and de-socialized; she is the object of discourse whose own discourse is a mere echo of that discourse.

On the other hand, Camelot is the "social realm of activity and exchange" to which Lancelot belongs (Chadwick 21). Camelot is a space of

"long fields of barley and of rye," which implies productivity and market exchange. It is peopled by representatives of various classes and occupations: "an abbot," "a curly shepherd-lad," a "long-hair'd page," "village-churls," "market girls," "damsels," and "knights" (l. 50-60). And if the Lady is "continuous with her surroundings," Lancelot is master of his: he cuts a swath in the middle of the field as he appears from "between the barley sheaves" (l. 74). Furthermore, Lancelot himself is "studded" as Chadwick puts it, with "sunlit, phallic imagery" and "noisy, metallic accoutrements—'brazen greaves,' 'shield,' 'gemmy bridle,' 'bridle bells,' 'mighty silver bugle,'" hanging from his "blazoned baldric" (23). Lancelot, in other words, lives in a realm which is consistently aligned with a socially active and masculine environment which functions as the Lady's defining opposite.

And yet the poem's employment of rigidly gendered, and opposing categories forces to the surface the contradictions in the ideology which produced them. First, if "autonomy and privacy" were both "fundamental conditions of femininity and art" as Chadwick has shown (17), the text argues against any denial of the Victorian woman's interiority and subjectivity even if it simultaneously denies her a public voice and the right to tell her own story. Women may not have been publicly acknowledged as artists but rather as art objects which were valued accordingly,<sup>8</sup> and they may, therefore, have been, as Girsilda Pollock writes, desired as the beautiful and "silenced other" (as qtd. in Hassett 289), but, in "The Lady of Shalott," as long as the Lady stays in the tower patriarchal ideology has constructed, she is allowed to be an artist who *is* heard, even if her art is a weaving together of already ordered signifiers with a predetermined signified. "The 'denial of female interiority and subjectivity' and the transformation of the woman's body into an art object" may be employed as powerful symbols "of every artist's loss of 'autonomy' and 'intentionality'" as Constance Hassett and James Richardson citing Barbara Johnson argue, but again, in writing a representation of femininity who is also an artist, Tennyson also, paradoxically, writes against their assertion that the poem is a "'denial of female interiority and subjectivity'" (290). Second, because art is ultimately discourse and femininity is defined by the patriarchal narrative, art and the feminine ideal were reliant upon the social world they were expected to be separate from and in turn, it was reliant upon her (see Chadwick 17).

Because contradiction inheres in the structure of the poem, it is inevitable that the categories of gender, and the boundaries meant to contain them as defining opposites, continue to fail throughout it even if they are simultaneously and continually reconstructed. For instance, the Lady's web-art signifies a domestic handcraft which paradoxically had

powerful associations with domesticity's defining other: the masculine realm of trade and industry. One of the first cottage industries to be displaced by the industrial revolution was weaving. Like many other displaced, skilled hand-workers, the weavers revolted against industrialization by destroying the machines which had displaced them. Subsequent parliamentary debates resulted in laws which made the destruction of the industrialized weaving frames a capital offense. Thus, weaving may connote domesticity and therefore the feminine space, but it also connotes the triumph of industry and productivity and therefore the masculine space.<sup>9</sup> Weaving becomes, in other words, yet another symbol which looks oppositely, for it is both inclusive and deconstructive of the relational delineation between the public/masculine and private/feminine realms.

The inclusion of "market girls" and "a long-hair'd page" amongst the various other images the Lady weaves into her artistic web also collapse gender oppositions in that the gender-signifying adjectives are coupled with their opposing gendered subjects in a kind of subversive, verbal cross-dressing. Furthermore, Shalott itself is a gendered self-contradiction: it is not only a private and marginalized feminine space dewy with watery and fluid images, but it is a space dominated by an obvious phallic symbol: a tower which is a man-made construct signifying a woman's confinement but which, alternatively, if her escape is her curse, must be considered her blessing.

Similarly, the same inability to maintain clearly demarcated gendered boundaries is evidenced in the representations of Lancelot. Lancelot might be marked by masculine accruements of manly power, but he does not have the expected phallic sword (particularly surprising because in Tennyson's other Arthurian poems the sword is a specific and specified marker of a knight's status as a man and knight<sup>10</sup>). Furthermore, if in "The Lady of Shalott," art is feminized, and the socially productive is masculinized, Lancelot, though literally loaded with masculine signifiers, is also initially imaged as a non-productive artist-singer of nonsense words: as he rides across the field he sings "Tirra lirra," words which are non-words, words which escape logo/phallocentric discourse.<sup>11</sup> At the same time and articulating yet another gendered self-deconstruction, Lancelot's "Tirra lirra," like the Lady's weaving, looks oppositely, for, as Carl Plasa has shown, the "Tirra lirra" also references Autolycus' song in *The Winter's Tale* 4.3, and therefore cannot help but connote "promiscuous male sexuality" (254).

This brings us to the contradiction inherent in the text's representation of the Lady's subjectivity as represented by the gaze. If the poem aligns femininity with artistry and thereby represents her as an artist-

subject, ultimately she is granted her status as an artist and subject only insofar as she literally and figuratively stays out of the picture and functions as a mouthpiece for patriarchal ideology: fundamentally she repeats what she is given to see from a position of invisibility. All one can see when one looks for her is the tower of ideology she is trapped within. By the same token, the text contradictorily assigns the Lady the masculine position of see-er while simultaneously working to deny she has the gaze. As Plasa points out, the lady may be "looking at" images in the mirror, but she is "interdicted from assuming the gaze, the 'masculine' position of erotically desiring subject, by the threat of a 'curse' which, like her mirror, 'hangs before her all the year'" (257). Her initial "looking" position, in other words, is appropriated by some omniscient, unseen see-er who marks her every move and threatens to level a curse at her if she does not act according to script.<sup>12</sup> She is to be empty of any intentionality as she signifies an ever-watching patriarchal ideology she records but is not to have any impact on even though (as anyone who has played telephone knows) repetition is always contaminated by the repeater. Still, as Chadwick and Plasa both argue, in so far as the images which the Lady sees are all representations of social institutions like marriage, the market of both material and social exchange, and funerals, the mirror is a symbol of an ideology which reflects what it wants her to see and repeat.<sup>13</sup> Again, her task is to make art of these given images, to repeat the narrative patriarchy wants her to tell, to be its cipher as well as its justification. Consequently, she herself has no reflection and no recognizable self. She seemingly occupies the position of a recorder rather than an active interpreter of her world.

Similarly, as Chadwick argues, "no matter who she is or what she loves, her identity and desires are always already another's" (18). On this level, not only has she been assigned the feminine position, but also, the feminine position is reaffirmed as that of a subject without any intentionality (as impossible as this is illogical), and her art is thereby made non-threatening; it is, in a word, "castrated," "feminized." But then "two young lovers lately wed" (l. 70) are imaged in her mirror, and the Lady speaks her first words, "I am half sick of shadows" (l. 71), and they are words which tell an alternative story, a story which is very specifically her own and therefore insists on a subjectivity which escapes patriarchal containment.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in Lacanian terms, she claims her own subjectivity, as she speaks her entrance into the symbolic, because when she utters her first words, she literally articulates her sense of lack. And then, when Lancelot "blaze[s]" into her mirror, penetrating her space,<sup>15</sup> she is compelled by her desire to look at him, not through the mediation of patriarchal ideology, but directly. As Plasa points out, "Appropriating

the gaze, the Lady enters the position of the desiring subject and so enacts—at the scopic level--the crossing from 'feminine' to 'masculine' gender position" (258).

That the Lady writes her name on the boat that will allow her to literalize her crossing from Shalott to Camelot and thereby publicly articulate her status as a subject, reiterates her insistence upon having her subjectivity publicly acknowledged, for it reiterates her entrance into the symbolic. The fact that "all the knights at Camelot cross'd themselves with fear" when they witness the crossing (l. 166), calls attention to the threat she poses to the ideological structures which would deny her self-defined subjectivity even if she has proven to be a subject. It is hardly surprising that the mirror of ideology "cracks from side to side" (l. 115). She can no longer be trusted to faithfully record its images without including her own interpretation of them (i.e. "I am half-sick of shadows"). Of course, the Lady simultaneously comes under the forever-threatening curse, for if the mirror is a symbol of ideology, then the curse must be ideology's punitive power.

It would seem the first effect of the curse is the loss of her art (l. 114). After all, if being an artist is evidence of subjectivity and if in her "going public" she might bring to light that evidence including her own interpretation of the images ideology presents her, the evidence must be destroyed. The second effect of the curse is not just her a death, but the fact that her death is accompanied by Lancelot, the poem's particularized representative of patriarchy, denying her a subjectivity which is not appropriatable by him as he identifies her as just another "lovely face" (l. 169): an object of feminine beauty. This is underscored by her "snowy white" dress connoting her function as a bride (l. 136). The message seems to be that if a woman will enter into the public/masculine realm, she can only do so as an object whose worth and measure will be determined by the masculine subject who might (if he chooses) possess her. As Chadwick argues, masculine desire (as defined by the poem) can be satisfied through a woman's marriage because transforming her into an object is equivalent to "her annihilation as a subject" (24). She will certainly not be allowed to enter the public realm as an artist, as a speaking subject. In short, at the end of the poem, not only do gendered categories of opposition seem to be back in place, but also the woman-artist of Shalott seems to be effectively silenced.

And yet, while gender categories are reconstructed and while, as Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar have argued, the Lady of Shalott is recategorized as an art-object rather than artist-subject (43), this reconstruction and reassignment continue to be problematized by the narrative. First and most pervasively, even if the ever-shifting play of signifiers is meant

to disguise its architecture, the narrative simply cannot suture over the fact that its entire plot is built on a structure which symbolically makes the creative space synonymous with the feminine space. Second, the Lady's web-art may be lost, but the stories about her web-art (including her interpretation) are obviously not; the Lady of Shalott as the weaver of magic webs becomes the stuff of legend as the poem itself attests. Furthermore, the song she sings to Camelot as she floats into Camelot is heard by everyone in Camelot, all of whom heed her voice, gather around her and then read the name she has so deliberately written on her boat. That the community reads what she has written cannot help but validate her status as a publicly recognized subject, for whether it is conscious of it or not, it recognizes that she speaks and writes. Indeed, even though she is then publicly recategorized as art object, the category cannot help but fail to contain her because in spite of the tragic cost, she is also the creator of that art. Third, while Lancelot may step in, unconcernedly "muse a space," and then attempt to relieve "all the knights' fears"<sup>16</sup> by confirming she is an unthreatening, feminized object of beauty (just another "lovely" face), the speech act itself simultaneously confirms even as it denies the threat she poses—for when he publicly recognizes her by the name that marks her birth into subjectivity and her entrance into the symbolic (earlier in the poem only the reapers whispered her name by moonlight and even then it was only in the context of fairy tale, l. 35-6)—Lancelot publicly reiterates her status as subject and artist; he like the rest of Camelot has read what she has written. Furthermore, there is no indication that the other knights' fears have been relieved.<sup>17</sup> Thus, if the Lady dressing and seeming to offer herself to Lancelot as his bride is the prerequisite for her entrance into the public/masculine realm, and if this implies her "transformation into an object" and "annihilation as a subject" (Chadwick 24), Camelot and Lancelot's self-contradictory response renders her objectification as a prerequisite to public acceptance not only unjust but a lie. Fourth, if the Lady and her story is appropriated by the traditional narrative which allows the woman a place only as that which is man's other, and thereby that through whom he can define himself as a subject who possesses her as object, the fact that she is an obvious subject and an artist to boot, suggests an alternative and recoverable narrative possibility. In the last section of the poem as Plasa argues, although the Lady's "glassy countenance" becomes a mirror by which Lancelot might "behold himself in the act of seeing" and therefore become self-conscious of the patriarchal strategies and blindness which negate female subjectivity and creativity, instead he looks her over and then "overlooks" her (Plasa 258). But perhaps the other knights' lingering fear which disallows the poem from



easy closure suggests they do not so readily “overlook” her, and self-consciousness offers an inroad for change.<sup>18</sup> Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the fact the reader cannot help but regret her death suggests the death of a woman as a publicly acknowledged subject is a regrettable thing. Nevertheless, despite subversive contradictions, deconstructions, and the excess which escapes tidy closure, in the end there is no escaping that the Lady of Shalott is both literally and metaphorically dead as a subject and artist because she would not stay contained within patriarchy’s ideological tower and repeat the ready-made story it gave her.

Of course, this outcome is not surprising even if it is disappointing to the modern reader, for if the way one makes the world mean is by sorting out, categorizing and hierarchizing signifiers into value-coded binaries and these binaries are reiterated (as they almost inevitably would be) as gendered binaries, an intergender intersubjective relationship of equality and mutual power and empowerment becomes nearly impossible. One or the other gender will inevitably be assigned to the status of a powerless other whose function it is to complicitly maintain the other gender in the position of a subjectivity and power. If the ideology producing the idealized feminine and masculine roles is patriarchal, it will necessarily work to deny a woman voice, desire and subjectivity unless they function to sustain the man in that position of power even if evidence insists she speaks, desires and has subjectivity undefined or uncontrolled by him. Thus in “The Lady of Shalott,” despite Lancelot’s brief foray into feminine space, his unconscious participation in feminine discourse (“Tirra lirra”), and his momentary objectification to the Lady’s gaze, in the end the poem works to recategorize him as the subject whose final speech act is the recategorization of the Lady as an object. As an object, the lady is proven powerless to effect the relationship except through a kind of passive aggression which allows her to masquerade as an object even as she feverishly and even desperately works behind this façade to effect and direct his desire with her own.<sup>19</sup> This pattern is consistently repeated in Victorian literature (one thinks of Catherine and her manipulation of Edgar in *Wuthering Heights* or Lucy Snowe in *Villette*). When one looks behind what seems to be the complicit and passive woman’s facade, the woman revealed is often either pathetically desperate (as is the Lady’s case) or connivingly manipulative (as is Catherine or more typically so many Victorian villainesses). In either case her self-contradiction is self-deconstructive and often self-destructive. Often (as with the Lady of Shalott) this self-deconstruction and self-destruction is articulated in her literal death. Thus, as Elisabeth Bronfren has shown, the works of Victorian literature are littered with the corpses of desiring

women who, because of ideological forces, felt they could not claim their desire or were denied this desire and therefore could only prove they did actually desire via their often self-willed deaths.<sup>20</sup> In other words, she can only have her public presence acknowledged through her felt and (she hopes) lamented absence. In the "Lady of Shalott," the Lady can only prove she desired Lancelot (and thereby prove she was a subject undefined by him) by literally dying at his feet. And even then, any recognition of her claim is unconscious at best and denied at worst. The same might be argued about the poem itself which no doubt is one reason why traditional readings of "The Lady of Shalott" ignore sexual politics altogether and discuss the poem as an Arthurian romance which thinly cloaks Tennyson's fear that an artist's engagement with real life results in the death of imagination.<sup>21</sup>

This is certainly not the case for *Jane Eyre*. The Victorians immediately recognized the novel's sexual politics and responded to it according to their position on "The Woman Question." No one makes this clearer than Margaret Oliphant who wrote in her 1867 *Blackwood's* review that Brontë's heroine "dashed into our well-ordered world" breaking "its boundaries" and defying "its principles—and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed" (257). In other words, unlike Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, was considered a very deliberate and self-conscious resistance to the categories of gender as they were defined, produced by and producing of patriarchal ideology.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as Armstrong has shown, in writing female desire as "outside of culture" (in direct and deliberate opposition to, for instance, Austen's representations) Brontë writes "a new basis in nature for the self, thus a new human nature" (192): the woman, she argues, represents history as psychological, as interiorized, and given this is the female space, manages to feminize history itself (191).

Thus, if patriarchally defined narratives identified the woman as an object of desire whose value is determined by the patriarchal representative who wants to possess her, the fact that Jane has value despite her specified plainness insists that a woman's value is not to be found in her external beauty (or lack of it) but in her character, the self which is defined by her interiority. If patriarchally determined narratives denied a female has desire that exists apart from and is uncontrolled by a man, the fact that Jane is consistently and repeatedly defined as passionate and ungovernable in spite of her calm and controlled outward appearance speaks of the uncontainable desire which structures her subjectivity and interiority. If patriarchally determined narratives allowed a woman identity only as the possession of a patriarchal figure, the fact that she entitles her narrative "*Jane Eyre*" as opposed to "*Jane Rochester*," implies

Jane has a distinct identity apart from Edward Rochester even after she marries him. If patriarchally determined narratives identified the woman as publicly acknowledgeable only as an art object rather than an artist, the fact that the text is a woman's story told by the woman herself and the fact that the fictional story is written by a factual woman insists the woman is a publicly recognized artist, and she tells stories worthy of an audience. If patriarchally determined narratives identified the public realm of exchange as masculine, the fact *Jane Eyre* was presented to the public and thrived in the marketplace, insists that the woman and her art belong in the masculine and public world of market and exchange. If patriarchally determined narratives insisted rebellious women had to be punished and contained, the fact that by the end of *Jane Eyre* all the punishing and confining men are punished and Jane is rewarded insists that the confinement of women who disagree with patriarchally determined narratives is, in the words of Jane Eyre herself, "Unjust!" (17) If patriarchally determined narratives would appropriate women's stories to sustain their own, Jane appropriates men's stories to sustain her own.<sup>23</sup>

And yet, as in "The Lady of Shalott," by the end of Jane's story, although, as Armstrong has shown, her interiority and subjectivity is well established (189),<sup>24</sup> the gendered binary structures patriarchy produces and relies on are reiterated and confirmed as well, for they are merely flipped-flopped, inverted.<sup>25</sup> As Beth Newman, in her discussion of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, writes such an inversion may "register a protest against the gender conventions" but it does not "dismantle them" for patriarchal methods of empowerment and identity construction are repeated and reinscribed (453). Indeed, Politi argues that "This ideology which represents the master/servant as locked not in mortal combat but in the bonds of love is one which is writing itself into *Jane Eyre* and, generally, in the text of Victorian fiction" (59). Further, as Penny Boumelha has pointed out in her discussion of *Jane Eyre*, "fantasized female power is continually tethered and troubled by the realist narrative of social determination and patriarchal imbrication" (77). However, the difference in *Jane Eyre* is that there is a battle for ascendancy and power, and it is men and complicit women rather than the rebellious woman who come out the losers.<sup>26</sup> But there are moments in the text which call into questions the struggle for power which binary structures and rigid categorization engender, and these moments function like the contradictions and deconstructions in "The Lady of Shalott" in that they problematize the ideological categories as a way of structuring meaning in general and intergender relationships in particular. This is particularly true at the beginning of Rochester and Jane's relationship,

for unlike Lancelot, initially, at least, Rochester openly and even insistently accepts Jane's status as a self-defined subject.

Because Jane accepts the givenness of a hierarchically ordered world, although she protests against the values assigned to these ideologically determined categories of meaning,<sup>27</sup> she does not question the existence of these categories or their definitions. Protest is, after all, predicated on such recognition, and, as Boumelha has shown, *Jane Eyre* is only too aware of "the kinds and limits of power available to the middle-class white woman in the particular society the novel represents" (74). Thus, although Jane often rails against being defined, devalued and expected to play the part of the feminine, poor, underprivileged, and powerless other, she nevertheless recognizes and therefore validates these categories. And like the Lady of Shalott who grows half sick of shadows and longs to escape her tower, Jane experiences her growing resistance to the restrictive feminine roles she has been assigned as a longing to escape symbolic as well as physical confinement. As she laments from her tower, the parapet of Thornfield:

I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit [of Thornfield's horizon]; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. (112)

When, therefore, Edward Rochester—with his "considerable breadth of chest" clad in a "steel clasped" riding cloak and with his countenance set in "masculine," dark, strong, and stern" lines (116-119)—rides into Jane's life in a context which implies fairy tales, magic and knights (115), the scene becomes a kind of mirror-image repetition of Lancelot's entrance into the Lady of Shalott's life.<sup>28</sup> When Lancelot "flashes" into the Lady of Shalott's mirror, the Lady, having acknowledged her lack and now propelled by desire, determines to break out of her confinement. When Rochester literally falls at Jane's feet, Jane, always having been aware of her lack and now propelled by desire, no longer feels confined: as she puts it, Thornfield "had a master: for my part, I liked it better" (121). In both cases, despite the superficial contrast, the women literally and psychically move toward the object of their gaze and desire and thereby declare their subjectivity. When Rochester's entrance and Jane's response to it is seen through the mediation of "The Lady of Shalott," the first question that arises is whether Jane will end up suffering the same fate as the

Lady of Shalott, and if not how and why not. The second question that arises is why does Jane feel Rochester is her "loyal knight and true" (Tennyson l.63).

One reason why Jane is immediately drawn to Rochester (outside of the obvious sexual attraction) seems to be that even though Jane immediately defines, values and categorizes Rochester as a "master," a representative of the masculine, rich, privileged and powerful subject which has consistently categorized her as its defining and powerless other, Rochester belies her expectations; immediately, he accepts, even demands she act as a subject.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, unlike Lancelot who, in "the Lady of Shalott," seems only able to (literally) see a woman as an object to be evaluated, won or (one might safely assume)<sup>30</sup> rescued (all of which work to confirm his status as a subject), in Jane's words, Rochester "need[s] and claim[s]" her help and offers her "an active thing" to do (118-119). In other words, despite his Lancelot-like entrance into Jane's life, despite her categorizing him as her rescuer, and despite the exaggerated masculine terms Jane uses to describe him, Rochester literally demands that *she* take on the knightly role and rescue him. She may categorize him as her "master" (121) and come to accept and even validate the "domination/subordination structure of [their] social existence" simply because she will *choose* him as her master rather than being forced to serve an unchosen one (Politi 57-8), but he sees her as his equal.<sup>31</sup> When she asks him for her wages, he has "forgotten" he was her employer (137). When he asks her to marry him, he declares, "My bride is here [. . .] because my equal is here, and my likeness" (256).

Unlike Lancelot who is only interested in the Lady of Shalott's exterior beauty and evaluates her based upon her "lovely face," therefore, once Rochester discovers that Jane is an "inmate" at Thornfield (127), he almost immediately desires to know her, to find out what is in her head (128). Indeed, Rochester seems *only* interested in what is in Jane's head (128).<sup>32</sup> For instance, when in response to his first question, "Are you fond of presents?" Jane replies, "they are generally thought pleasant things," he immediately asks, "Generally thought? But what do *you* think" (124). He then goes on to ask her about her childhood, her achievements, and even a possible schoolgirl crush she might have had on her director (126). His response to Jane's art reiterates his refusal to submit to the ideologically prescribed gender assignments to which Lancelot subscribes.

Rather than disallowing her from being an artist because for a woman to be an artist, she must therefore be a recognizable subject, he unquestioningly accepts her in this potential role. Further, he evaluates her art in terms of its originality; that is, he values her art based on the

extent to which it is her own creation. Thus, when he listens to her play the piano, he almost immediately loses interest because he determines she plays “like any other English school-girl” (127). In other words, her piano-playing, like the Lady of Shalott’s web-art, is a mere repetition, an echo of what has been defined as socially and therefore patriarchally acceptable. On the other hand, he is enthralled by her paintings. Even if one accepts Politi’s argument that the paintings “function as signs of the confinement of female sexuality and its consequent fears” because they represent women as dead or bodiless (63), they also function as signs of female subjectivity, for they are the products of Jane’s own imagination. Indeed, after “deliberately scrutiniz[ing]” (127) them and picking out three (128), Rochester finds these three so fascinatingly imaginative that at first he has a hard time believing they are the products of “that head I see now on your shoulders” and wants to know where she got her copies (128). But Jane is not the Lady of Shalott, weaving together images she is given merely to record. Jane’s art is original. And indeed, after Jane reassures Rochester of their originality, he immediately becomes interested in the mind that produced them (128). He wants to know when she did them, how she conceived them, if she was happy when she painted them, how long they took her, how she managed to capture the clearness of the eyes, the strength of the wind, Latmos, and whether she “felt self-satisfied with the result of your ardent labours” (128-30). Though his questions are often couched in the voice of almost imperial command, his genuine interest in who Jane is and what she has done reiterates that he sees her as a subject with an interior life worth knowing and as an original artist whose art is worth engaging with even though, as Robin St. John Conover argues, her triptych articulates a mythos which contradicts the ideologically patriarchal narrative the Miltonic mythos articulates. In the story Jane’s series of paintings tells, Eve redeems an Adam rather than causing him to fall (174).<sup>33</sup> In short, Rochester makes it transparently obvious that his appreciation and attraction to Jane’s art and her has nothing to do with her status as an object of desire or an art object.

If Armstrong has persuasively shown Jane’s art illustrates her subjectivity via her “power to transform cultural objects and to give them new life” (211), Rochester recognizes and validates this power: he clearly sees Jane as a second subject, and the art she creates and the power it represents is certainly part of what draws him to her. Indeed, he is drawn to rather than repulsed by the subversive text she and her art represent. His response to Jane and her art, in other words, completely contradicts Lancelot’s response to the Lady of Shalott and hers. Lancelot has absolutely no interest in the Lady’s interior life, if, that is, even recognizes she has one. For Lancelot, her only value once she has “gone pub-

lic," is in her exterior, in her lovely, dead face. Thus, the only way the Lady can be recognized by him as an artist is if, through a sleight of hand, she turns herself into an art object (for she is the artist who turns herself into an art object), which, of course, may gain Lancelot's recognition of her as an artist and subject, but it an unconscious recognition, and it is also simultaneously and paradoxically predicated on her death as an artist and subject. On the other hand, the fact that Rochester finds Jane is "not pretty" is as unimportant to him (135) as her art and the interior life which produced them is.

As Jane and Rochester's relationship progresses, despite its obvious problematic aspects, it continues to be a relationship between two subjects, sometimes in spite of rather than because of Jane's collusion. For instance, while Jane attempts to repress her desires,<sup>34</sup> much to her annoyance and even anger, Rochester forces her to claim them. Of course, as John Maynard, Terry Eagleton, and Gilbert and Gubar amongst others have pointed out, the tricks Rochester uses to force Jane to claim her desires (i.e., his masquerade as a gypsy fortune-teller or inviting Blanche Ingram, a seeming potential Mrs. Rochester, to Thornfield in a deliberate attempt to stir Jane's jealousy) are manipulative power plays<sup>35</sup> which stir Bertha Mason, a physical representation of Jane's repressed rage,<sup>36</sup> to lash out. Nevertheless, even Rochester's admittedly manipulative power plays illustrate he considers Jane a subject who does desire and himself as the object of her desire. Indeed, as "The Lady of Shalott" illustrates, the passive aggression and manipulation the Lady and so many heroines use (and die of or are punished for) to direct the masculine subject's desire is predicated upon the manipulated's status as an acknowledged subject. Rochester's masquerades only work because he accepts Jane is a subject.

Furthermore, like the carefully constructed gender categories which nevertheless prove to be unstable and contradictory in "The Lady of Shalott" due to the Lady's identification as artist and art-object, Rochester's manipulative ploys illustrate that the gender categories in *Jane Eyre* continually fail to keep Rochester and Jane contained. Rochester is simultaneously the scriptwriter and the scripted actor; he is, in other words, simultaneously and paradoxically both subject and object. Indeed, early in their relationship, Rochester tells Jane that when he speaks to her "I proceed almost as freely as if I were writing my thoughts in a diary" (139). While obviously his statement suggests Rochester is the writer-subject and Jane is a blank slate upon which he can write, it simultaneously suggests just the opposite: Rochester offers himself up as a text-object to be read by Jane the acknowledged subject. And, of course, Jane, too, is not only the subject who desires him but, by this point, the

object of his desire. Furthermore, in the telling of her story, like Rochester, Jane is simultaneously the scriptwriter and the scripted actor; she is, in other words, simultaneously and paradoxically both subject and object. In Rochester's case, despite and even inclusive of Rochester's manipulation and even deceit, it is because of the failure of gendered binaries and because Rochester exploits this failure that Rochester and Jane are able to share an intersubjective relationship as opposed to a subject-object relationship, one which comes to be defined by mutual respect, love, value and mutual empowerment—at least until Jane accepts Rochester's hand in marriage, when, suddenly, Rochester reassigns Jane to the status of a feminized object and assumes the position of the masculine subject with a vengeance.

While Armstrong implies that Jane and Rochester's relationship speaks of female empowerment because it is Jane's desire which defines their relationship (205; 211-212), I am arguing that Rochester's assumption of the position of the masculine subject is at the cost of his recognizing Jane's subjectivity and that his doing so articulates the incredible power and pull of the ideologically dominant narrative just as forcefully as the Lady's reassignment to the status of object does, for if Jane is limited by the society the novel represents (Boumelha 59), so is Rochester. The cost patriarchy exacts from the Lady for not staying put is her death. Patriarchy exacts no such cost from Rochester. It is not his claiming of the position of subject which threatens it, but his having assumed the position of an object and his having assigned the woman the position of a subject which is the threat that must be erased. Thus, despite his earlier flagrant disregard for the gender assignments patriarchy rests on, like Lancelot, Rochester no longer sees the woman he is looking at as looking back. Instead he looks at her through the lens of an ideology which denies she looks at all.

As might be expected, therefore, almost immediately after Jane accepts Rochester's proposed marriage of equality, Rochester becomes Jane's Lancelot in every respect, and he begins to reconfirm the gender categories the development of their relationship had for a moment deconstructed: he submits her to a process of containment and appropriation. Indeed, even during the marriage proposal, Rochester becomes almost Neanderthal in his demand to possess her: "You, Jane. I must have you for my own—entirely my own" (257). He then proceeds to turn her into an "angel," a "sylph," "elf," and "fairy" (262-3; 269); he determines to deck her out in jewels so that "the world [will] acknowledge you a beauty" (261);<sup>37</sup> he smiles at her "as a sultan might" (271). On the morning after his marriage proposal he kisses her and declares with satisfaction, "Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty [. . .] truly pretty



this morning. Is this my pale little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?" (260). When Rochester again defines Jane as a beauty, determined to "attire my Jane in satin and lace," she pleads, "And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket—a jay in borrowed plumes" (261). But he is no longer listening to her, and if he has morphed into her Lancelot, he is attempting to turn her into his Lady of Shalott: the non-human, unseen fairy (Tennyson l.35), the other who, without a reflection she recognizes, has value only insofar as she is an appropriable object. As Politi points out, the mirror he holds up to her at this point "is a vision deprived of subjectivity, an *it* desexualized and fully de-socialized. She is imprisoned and made impotent in 'fairy discourse'" (62). Nevertheless the absurdity of such positioning is far more obvious in *Jane Eyre* than in "The Lady of Shalott." Nothing more perfectly illustrates how false it is than when Rochester looks directly into Jane's green eyes and declares they are hazel (260).

The fact Jane points out Rochester's "mistake" (despite the excuses she makes for it) illustrates that unlike the Lady of Shalott, Jane will not be quite so complicitous with the story Rochester, functioning as an agent of patriarchy, wants to tell. If Chadwick is correct when he asserts masculine desire can be fulfilled either by a woman's marriage or death because the one is "her transformation into an object" and the other is "her annihilation as a subject" (24),<sup>38</sup> Jane will have none of it. Jane will not die at her knight's feet in order to fulfill his desire or ideological expectations. Instead she leaves. And while her obvious reason for leaving Rochester is because he is already married, she also leaves because, in her often-quoted words, "I care for myself" (319).<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, unlike the Lady of Shalott, Jane's story and her art are not silenced when she (re)claims her status as a subject. Jane's story continues without him, and she has yet to write her most important art, the narrative which is her story.

Unfortunately, however, an intergender intersubjective relationship, a relationship which is not defined by power or mediated by patriarchally-defined gender categories, is never fully realized in *Jane Eyre* because the gendered categories Rochester and Jane's relationship initially seemed to dismantle are back in place even if they are still problematized.<sup>40</sup> Most significantly both Jane's return and marriage to Rochester are predicated on Jane's ascendancy to his class (Politi 65) and on his having been blinded and lamed. Her new social status makes their marriage socially acceptable, and Rochester's blindness and lameness require Jane to be the empowered subject in their reestablished relationship: pa-

triarchal ideology and the binaries that support it are effectively reconstituted. Critical consensus is, of course, that Rochester's blindness is a flagrant authorial intervention meant to punish Rochester for his having denied Jane as a subject, for on the scopic level it is a scotomization.<sup>41</sup> But if, as Armstrong puts it, Jane has proven throughout that it is the woman who has the "power to determine the meaning of words and things" (205), Jane now does so by means of the author's vengeance and at Rochester's expense.<sup>42</sup>

On this level, because Rochester will never be able to clearly see Jane, he will never be able to literally or, more importantly, figuratively, objectify or define Jane again, and, furthermore, Jane will forever be the look-er, the see-er, the subject, and Rochester will be the looked at, the seen, the object. As such, because she sees, as she says, "for his behalf" (454), rather than being the defined object whose meaning he determines, she defines the objects he sees and dictates what they mean. As she notes: "he saw nature—he saw books through me" (454). Indeed, Jane spends much of their reunion refusing and then redefining how he defines his world, her, himself, and their relationship (440-450). When he defines himself as "the old lightning-struck chestnut tree," she redefines him as "green and vigorous" (447);<sup>43</sup> when he declares himself infirm and deficient (448), she says he has no deficiencies (449). Finally, Jane tells him she loves him "better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of giver and protector" (449) which, of course, could be rewritten as "I love you better now that *you* are dependent on *my* magnanimousness and protection, now that *I* am *your* Lancelot." In other words, in the end, Jane and Rochester's relationship flips but does not redefine the protagonists' gender positions as they were conceived by dominant Victorian ideology because for the text to simultaneously protest against the structures which engender women's objectification and, conversely, end with the protagonists happily married within that structure, someone in the relationship must be subject and someone must be the subject's other and that someone who must be subject must be Jane.

Even so, an alternative discourse, one which suggests the possibility of an intergender intersubjective relationship mediated by love and not power cannot help but manifest itself because of the obvious contradictions in the text. As Boumelha argues, while critical readings have tended to see the novel as either feminist declaration of female emancipation from patriarchal power structures or as the rearticulation of them as the female outsider who makes good within them, Jane Eyre is finally both (Chap. 2).<sup>44</sup> Thus, Jane may be Rochester's "prop and guide" (451) without whom he was "Doing nothing, expecting nothing; merging

night in day; feeling but the sensation of cold when I let the fire go out, of hunger when I forgot to eat: and then ceaseless sorrow" (440-1), but Jane and Rochester are *also* "soul-mates":

No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's<sup>45</sup> society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms: consequently, we are forever together. (454)

The reader can hardly help but write an alternative ending where such a relationship exists without the man (or woman) having to be literally or figuratively maimed to make such a relationship possible, one in which neither gender is the sole determiner of "the meaning of words and things" (Armstrong 205). Like "The Lady of Shalott," the absence of a desirable or even viable solution to the heroine's predicament<sup>46</sup> suggests the presence of one, and the reader's becoming conscious of a problem suggests the need to find it.

In both Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" the woman is unquestionably represented as a subject with a rich interior life: she has desires, she speaks, she creates art. At the same time, however, in both texts—even in *Jane Eyre*—in the end, her subjectivity is one which can only thrive within the confines of the private realm: in particular, it is only granted if confined within *his* castle, in *his* home. In short, her voice, via her art, is publicly acknowledged only insofar as she retells a story which can be contained within a patriarchally determined ideological structure predicated upon gendered and hierarchical categories of opposition even as she herself sustains them. When the Lady of Shalott writes her name on her boat and thereby attempts to tell her own story within the masculinized public realm she comes under its curse. Lancelot, the narrative's particularized patriarchal representative has the last word, and he explicitly defines the woman as recognizable in public only as an art object, not artist-subject. On the other hand, when Jane Eyre writes her name on her book, Jane, the particularized rebel against the narrative's specified patriarchal representative, has the last word, and she explicitly and at his expense defines herself as artist-subject (even as she is also her own art's object). However, although Jane's voice seeks and achieves public acknowledgement, it is a public voice which is nevertheless and even so contained within the confines of his home which is isolated from the rest of society. Indeed one can hardly imagine a more private space than Ferndean. Ferndean may be, in other words, a

feminine space as so many critics have pointed out, but it is a space within the patriarchal estate, not unlike the Lady of Shalott's island with its phallic towers. Further, her story, just as does "The Lady of Shalott's," reiterates gender categorization even if, in Jane's story, it is the female who is the subject of power within that space: in the end, her empowerment is completely reliant upon his disempowerment.<sup>47</sup> But in spite of, or, indeed, because of the obvious ideological contradictions in both texts, alternative discourses constantly puncture holes in the culturally dominant narrative which produced them and they, in turn, seem to reproduce. In both, the failure of categories of meaning to contain and control that which they are meant to contain and control, namely gender, like the unsatisfying endings, demands the reader acknowledge an alternative discourse which does not construct meaning in terms of domination/subordination structures or a unified, transcendent, meaning giving subject—a discourse in which "And they lived happily ever after" is not a cover story for "and he or she won all the power at the other's expense."

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, both of whom were recognized as representative philosophers, critics, and spokesmen for the Victorian Age, were almost obsessive in their categorizing, defining, and hierarchizing.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" as it relates to "The Woman Question," see Carl Plasa, especially 248.

<sup>3</sup> Both Joseph Chadwick and Carl Plasa discuss the ideologically loaded binaries that the "Lady of Shalott" articulates. See Chadwick 23-29 and Plasa 249. Constance Hassett and James Richardson, on the other hand, argue that when contemporary criticism of Victorian representations of women in art "discredit the hierarchical structure of sexual difference," they also subscribe to the masculine/activity vs. feminine/passivity binaries. Referencing Linda Williams' work on gendered responses to pornography and citing Barbara Johnson, Hassett and Richardson argue that this binary is false (289-90). It seems to me that while this observation is certainly important, the contemporary criticism they cite is not validating gendered binaries but merely pointing out that the Victorians were busily constructing and utilizing them as a way to order their world. As Tennyson's popularity and poet laureate appointment illustrates, the binaries "The Princess" articulate were binaries which were cultural practices or were, at least, the ideals culture aspired to.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted Waugh is not discussing Victorian textual practices but is discussing modernism and postmodernism when she writes that in response to the novels of the 70's which exposed "hidden processes of artistic production," "poststructuralist thoughts now proceeded by exposing the concealed rhetorical mechanisms which both produce and subvert conceptual meaning" (324). Her observations, however, are particularly useful here because Tennyson and Brontë's texts are invested in covering up both.

<sup>5</sup> In her influential book *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History*, Nancy Armstrong argues, "Men generally retained their political identity in writing that developed the qualities of female subjectivity and made subjectivity a female domain" (4). She goes on to add that during the nineteenth century because social difference became subordinate to difference based on gender in terms of identity and value, women were the empowered subject because power "had everything to do with middle-class love" and love was the province of female subjectivity (4). While Armstrong decisively proves her points, I am arguing that woman's subjectivity and intergender love were defined and produced by patriarchal power structures, that both woman's subjectivity and her power were shaped by patriarchal narratives. I am also arguing, however, that women and men in the nineteenth century were, indeed, developing new lexicons and new narratives which disseminated and redistributed power.

<sup>6</sup> As Greenblatt argues, "certain esthetic and political structures work to contain the subversive perceptions they generate," but "those perceptions do not "simply wither away. On the contrary, they may be pried loose from the order with which they were bound up and may serve to fashion a new and radically different set of structures" (166).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Chadwick 28-29; Plasa 248-50; Colley 370-71.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Gilbert and Gubar, who argue the Lady's "last work of art is her own dead body" (43).

<sup>9</sup> For a brief summary of the weaver's revolt and its consequences, see, for instance, Damrosch 17; Abrams 4.

<sup>10</sup> Plasa also points out that in "'The Princess': the old king says that the sword is 'essential to the conception of manhood'" (254).

<sup>11</sup> I am referencing Julia Kristeva's influential discussion on monologic and dialogic discourse in "Word, Dialogue and the Novel" (see particularly 47). However, Tennyson's identification of the feminine with the emotional/heart and the masculine with reason/head would serve just as well as the basis of my argument. "Tirra lirra" is an emotional release which has nothing to do with reason.

<sup>12</sup> In her discussion of the Romance as a genre articulating feminine desire, Tania Modeleski argues that in the history of narration it is almost invariably the

woman who is seen; she comes to believe she is constantly under the ever-present gaze of the masculine subject, and, therefore, she learns to perform for his eyes (53). The Lady of Shalott's relationship to the curse serves as one such example.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Chadwick 20 and Plasa 252.

<sup>14</sup> Plasa convincingly argues that given the fact that the Lady's first words come immediately after she sees the reflection of a newly wedded couple, they are a "demystification of the institution of marriage as adequately expressive of female desire, sexual or otherwise" (252).

<sup>15</sup> Chadwick argues that the Lady experiences Lancelot's flashing into the mirror and singing "Tirra lira" as a devastating rape (23) because he is penetrating her space without her consent. If he is correct and if one argues that her subsequent dressing up as a bride and dying at her rapist's feet is a satiric commentary on sex as experienced by the Victorian woman (which Chadwick does not do), the underpinning logic implies that sex or even rape for that matter is what makes a woman a subject. Pedro Almodovar's "Talk to Her" (released in 2002) says much the same thing. Nothing could be more disturbing.

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting the only ones who are said to be afraid are the knights, patriarchy's particular representatives.

<sup>17</sup> Chadwick, on the other hand, argues Lancelot's verdict has the effect of "neutralizing the threat she poses" (23). This is not evidenced by the poem except in so far as his musing and pronouncing the Lady just another "lovely face" follows immediately after "all the knights cross[ing] themselves for fear" and is preceded by a "but." Whether or not the fear was actually neutralized is implied at best.

<sup>18</sup> Although Colley's discussion of the ending of "The Lady of Shalott" is in regards to Tennyson's attempt and failure "to rescue himself [Tennyson] and his reader from an enclosed and image-bound landscape and move into a recognition of the nonrepresentational" (377), she provides a relative discussion about the poem's rhetorical mechanisms which disallow the poem from closing. (In particular, see 375-8). Hassett and Richardson, referring to Arthur Hallam, note Tennyson was a poet of "sensation rather than reflection" which "will yearn [. . .] against language's borders with the sensuous and the unparaphrasable" (291).

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, when Tennyson rewrites "The Lady of Shalott" as Elaine in "Lancelot and Elaine," the deliberateness of her passive aggressive act is elaborated on. Though not focused on Elaine's passive aggression, Hassett and Richardson include a related discussion on how the Lady's later reincarnation deliberately crafts her death scene to affect Lancelot (see 300-302).

<sup>20</sup> For a further discussion, see Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body*. Of course, the first Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* is a textbook example of a woman who dies as a passive-aggressive retaliation against both Linton Earnshaw and Heathcliff.

<sup>21</sup> For a brief summary of traditional critical responses, see Plasa 247; Kathleen Kelly 283-285.

<sup>22</sup> Gilbert and Gubar outline a brief summary of the horrified reactions some Victorian readers had to *Jane Eyre* and argue they were horrified because (as O'iphan argues) the novel disrupted the order of society (23).

<sup>23</sup> Jane's appropriation of patriarchal narratives in *Jane Eyre* to sustain her own self-identification is not unlike Lucy Snowe's appropriation of patriarchal narratives in *Villette* to sustain her own. One of the clearest examples of this is when Lucy sits in an art gallery contemplating men's idealized images of women which they have literally painted into art objects. Rather than accept, for instance, the "Cleopatra," the so-called "queen of the collection" as a sexually desirable ideal, Lucy ruthlessly critiques her as an overly-fed, lazy, and disorderly giantess who would be impossible to live with (*Villette* 273). Rather than accept Paul's alternative (and culturally validated) versions of feminine desirability which are articulated in paintings of women going to church, praying and mothering, Lucy instead calls them "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities: As bad in their way as the indolent gypsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers" (*Villette* 278).

<sup>24</sup> Armstrong persuasively argues that in the very act of representing desire as divorced from and transcendent of the cultural and political, *Jane Eyre* places value on the personal and private and because the personal and private were the accepted province of the female, the text confirmed female empowerment. Thus, Armstrong goes on to argue, Jane and Rochester's supposedly apolitical marriage makes a "statement" that is both "perfectly personal and perfectly political" (192). What I am contending is that this female empowerment is one which was appropriated if not produced by patriarchally determined narratives, that it was ceded only insofar as it was a function of patriarchal power structures (even in the rebellious *Jane Eyre*). Female empowerment is, in other words, a kind of sleight of hand. Further and therefore, while Armstrong focuses on Jane's desire as a representation of female empowerment (as well as its political implications), I am more interested in investigating the way in which Rochester's desire and the relationship *between* Rochester and Jane works to both empower and disempower the female. See Armstrong 189 and 203-13.

<sup>25</sup> Critical consensus is that Brontë's *Jane Eyre* subverts even as it registers protest against social hierarchies in general and gender in specific. For instance, Helene Moglen writes that Brontë's novel's retreat into myth-like ending "reflects those

social limitations even as it attempts to define new feminist freedom" (143). Terry Eagleton argues Brontë wrote compromises which granted her heroines' power without rupturing the patriarchal order (97-8).

<sup>26</sup> The thesis of Terry Eagleton's *Myths of Power* is that all the Brontës wrote novels of female empowerment.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, during Rochester's wedding proposal, Jane does not deny that she is "poor, obscure, plain, and little" but she does object to being considered "soulless and heartless" and insists she is "equal in the sight of God" (255).

<sup>28</sup> That Rochester is embellished with signifiers of masculine power and virility is commented on by various critics. See, for instance, Maynard 11; Rea 54. Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge the phallic imagery but also add that his fall illustrates the "master's mastery is not universal" (352).

<sup>29</sup> Armstrong argues Rochester represents a form of masculinity which is historically obsolete (192); I (obviously) am contending that Brontë represent Rochester as an ideological construct which was still a force to be reckoned with.

<sup>30</sup> Lancelot, of course, comes to "The Lady of Shalott" ready made with his damsel-rescuing stories in tow.

<sup>31</sup> Politi argues that "the political ideology behind the transformation of this term ["master"] will be that people, i.e., races, nations, classes, and women are happy in inequality and have no reason to revolt against the domination/subordination structure of their social existence so long as they are free to *choose* their masters" (57-8). I do not wish to deny the validity of this argument. However, my purpose here is to stress the fact that at various points in the story Rochester and Jane see each other as equals.

<sup>32</sup> Armstrong uses Rochester's interest in "what's in Jane's head" to argue that subjectivity and interiority was the province of the female. She goes on to argue how Jane's art illustrates how women (Jane being her representation) were redefining the world in terms of the domestic and private. The political implications are enormous See Armstrong 211-12.

<sup>33</sup> Conover convincingly argues that "these paintings correspondingly represent a précis for what follows in the novel, while offering a feminist re-telling of the creation myth. Jane's artwork discloses her growth and maturation and eventual role as a revisionist Eve who redeems Rochester's Adam. This may take three volumes for Jane to achieve, but in the end she creates a contrapuntal Eve, in direct contrast to Milton's model" (174). Conover also provides substantial evidence to make the case that Rochester understands the paintings' symbolic import (184)

<sup>34</sup> For instance, after finding out Rochester is inviting those of his own class to Thornfield and the eligible Blanche Ingram is amongst the party, Jane "called her



sensations to order" and stifles any belief that "the master of Thornfield" would have anything to do with her further than to give her a salary even though she records he consistently "forgets" she was his employee. She then goes on to tell herself to "be sure that is the only tie he seriously acknowledges between you and him: so don't make him the object of your fine feelings, your raptures, agonies, and so forth. He is not of your order: keep to your caste; and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised" (164-5). Earlier Jane had painted a picture of what she imagines Blanche to look like in order to contrast Blanche's imagined beauty and wealth with her own self-perceived plainness and poverty (163) and thereby give herself a visual image of why she should repress her desires.

<sup>35</sup> Gilbert and Gubar argue Rochester's masquerade is "a source of power, and therefore, in Jane's case at least, an evasion of that equality in which he claims to believe" (354). Maynard argues Rochester's strategies for forcing Jane to admit her desire for him is a "kind of attempted rape, a violation of her conscience" (112). In this regard Rochester's penetration is parallel to Lancelot's penetration into the Lady of Shalott's space as Chadwick argues. While Eagleton also argues Rochester's tricks and masquerades are power plays, he also argues that Rochester's role playing and, in fact, his playing a woman's part in them (i.e.: the gypsy) suggest "a more general ambiguity about power which pervades Charlotte's fiction" (31).

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion of Bertha Mason as Jane's double and an embodiment of her repressed rage and/or sexual desire see Gilbert and Gubar, 360-8; Moglen 124-6; Maynard 124.

<sup>37</sup> Moglen argues Jane resists because for Jane to be put on a pedestal "is to be denied selfhood, and it is for herself that she wishes to be loved" (123). See also Moglen 127-8 and Maynard 121.

<sup>38</sup> For further discussion see Politi 62.

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion see, for instance, Moglen 128-32; Maynard 129-30.

<sup>40</sup> As Moglen writes, Ferndean does not solve the problem the text introduces in regards to "fire and blood [. . .] It is simply eradicated" (142). Eagleton argues that the novel's articulation of the Romantic ideal at its conclusion, signifies an "active, worldly, expansive self, but also the conservative impulse to withdraw protectively into some idealized enclave" (21). He goes on to argue the end skirts having to resolve the conflicts it introduced in the social world in order to resolve them in "mythical unity" (32). Likewise Gilbert and Gubar argue that Ferndean's being an "asocial world" of isolation suggests egalitarian marriages which "cir-

cumvent the structures of a hierarchical society" are only possible in "spiritual isolation" (369).

<sup>41</sup> As Politi argues, "*Jane Eyre* constructs a new female stereotype: the highly principled, unattractive woman [. . .] Her role is to protect the English male from falling into 'French' ways, and thus indirectly, she becomes the pillar of the nation" (65).

<sup>42</sup> In the text, authorial intervention is written as God's punishment. It is worth noting God is patriarchy's transcendent signified. For further discussion of Rochester's blindness and lameness as punishing castration/scotomization see, for instance, Moglen 143-44; Gilbert and Gubar 368; Eagleton 32. Maynard, on the other hand, argues that given Rochester later gets partial sight back and fathers several children suggests he receives "a blow" not a castration (138-9). For further discussion on scotomization and gender, Kim Devlin provides a particularly useful summary in her discussion of *Ulysses* (see particularly 135-6).

<sup>43</sup> One cannot help but be reminded of the fact that Rochester had earlier mis-identified Jane's green eyes as hazel when reading this passage, for here Jane mis-identifies this broken man as "green" and vigorous. It seems to emphasize the fact that it is Jane who is doing the defining now, not Rochester.

<sup>44</sup> As Boumelha puts it, "We need not establish our own unitary and providential narrative reading to set besides Jane's" (74).

<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that at this point Jane refers to Rochester by his first name, that is, on equal terms, rather than as her "master."

<sup>46</sup> Blinding and maiming people in order to achieve equality is a horrific answer to the problem of inequality and oppression. At the same time, some governments and institutions still exact such punishments against rebels who threaten their power.

<sup>47</sup> In this sense Ferndean can be seen as the devouring vagina, capable of castrating the man who enters it even as he possesses it.

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