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# Enclosure and Escape, or Escape into Enclosure?: Heterotopias and *Jane Eyre*

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Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is, perhaps above all other things, a culmination of collapsing multiplicities. Numerous scholars have recorded the presence of oppositional elements within the text, but this ambiguous dualism also seems to spill out of the text and comes to define the novel's relationship to the real world as well. *Jane Eyre* has deemed itself worthy of much scholarly and popular attention throughout the centuries, which may be due, in part, to its elusiveness. By looking at the relations and multiplicities that exist not only between but within spaces in *Jane Eyre*, I aim to examine how these spaces function as what Foucault labeled heterotopias. Furthermore, using this theoretical lens, I will explore how the novel as a whole may function as a compensatory heterotopia for its nineteenth-century, female author.

## Heterotopias

In his "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," French philosopher Michel Foucault first introduced the concept of heterotopias as an element of spatial theory. Agreeing with Bachelard's work and phenomenologists' understanding that "we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space," Foucault then extends such thinking to external space by asserting, "The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves...is also, in itself a heterogeneous space...we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (2, 3). He is particularly interested in examining those homogeneous external sites "that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (3). Foucault further delineates these sites – which are simultaneously linked to and contradictory to all other sites – as utopias and heterotopias.

By Foucault's definition, utopias are "sites with no real place;" they represent an ideal society that simply cannot exist in reality and function as a means of illuminating for a society what its values are (3). They contrast with "real places...like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously

represented, contested, and inverted” (3). Foucault gives these latter sites the name “heterotopia.” In order to explain the relationship between utopias and heterotopias, Foucault utilizes the metaphor of the mirror. In looking at our image in a mirror, he says, we are presented with a utopia, “a placeless place” that opens up beyond the surface (4). At the same time, however, the mirror itself is an actual object that exists in reality and therefore functions as a heterotopia. As Foucault explains, “it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there [within the mirror]” (4). In other words, these heterotopic spaces function by allowing us to be in a real space while simultaneously creating a defamiliarization of that same space.

In further refining his definition of heterotopias, Foucault outlines several principles which will be useful in applying to an analysis of *Jane Eyre*. To begin, Foucault asserts that all cultures have heterotopias and that they can typically be classified into two main categories: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. Crisis heterotopias are reserved for those individuals who are in a state of crisis, or who, in other words, are standing at the precipice of an important life stage. Often, these moments of crisis are related to the individual’s de-

veloping sexuality and they are sent to this “other” place to go through a process deemed too inappropriate or personal for regular society. However, Foucault believes that these crisis heterotopias – such as boarding schools and the honeymoon trip— are disappearing and instead are being replaced by heterotopias of deviation. Unlike the preventative measure of a crisis heterotopia, heterotopias of deviation are where “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (5). Interestingly, it is possible for these two categories to overlap, for example, in nursing homes where the elderly are considered both a deviation from the norm and individuals in crisis. Along with this dual categorization, Foucault also points to a heterotopia’s ability to “[juxtapose] in a single real place, several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible,” its associations “to slices of time,” and its tendency to “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (6, 7). As I hope to demonstrate, several of these principles may be applied to the spaces Jane inhabits throughout *Jane Eyre*.

### **The Red-Room<sup>1</sup>**

The first, and perhaps most consequential, heterotopia readers encounter in *Jane Eyre* is the infamous red-room at Gateshead. When ten-year-old Jane fights back against her malevolent, older cousin, John Reed, she is banished to this room as pun-

ishment for her actions. The narrator describes the room as “a spare chamber,” “silent, because remote from the nursery and kitchens; solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered” (Brontë 16, 17). In fact, the only people to inhabit this space—other than the occasional surplus visitor—are the solitary house-maid performing her weekly cleaning and Mrs. Reed who, “at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a certain secret drawer in the wardrobe, where were stored divers’ parchments, her jewel-casket, and a miniature of her deceased husband” (17). Thus, immediately upon its introduction, the red-room is established as an isolated place that only certain individuals may enter for the purpose of completing some manner of ritual or worship. Furthermore, Mrs. Reed’s “certain secret drawer,” containing relics of the past, lends this space a museum-like quality of juxtaposed times (17).

For young Jane, however, the space takes on new meaning as it becomes her prison, a way for Mrs. Reed to “subdue what she sees as Jane’s unseemly passion, a characteristic she views as unchildlike—and which, of course, is also improper in women in Victorian society” (Locy 109). Jane does not travel to this space by choice, but, in fact “[resists] all the way” until her captors “thrust [her] upon a stool...their two pairs of hands [arresting her] instantly” (Brontë 15). Only when the threat of being tied down with garters becomes too shame-

ful for Jane to take, does she submit, promising, “I will not stir” and attaching herself to the seat with her own hands (15). Having thus internalized the prison motif, Jane is “not quite sure whether they had [even] locked the door,” but when she gathers up the courage to check, she finds “Alas! yes: no jail was ever more secure” (17). Clearly, the punitive nature of Jane’s isolation, buttressed by the prison imagery related in this scene, supports the red-room’s identification as a heterotopia of deviation. However, when one considers the significance this place has on Jane’s overall development, one may argue that it also functions as a heterotopia of crisis as well.

Jane’s experience in the red-room has a lasting influence on her psyche, as evidenced by her recollection of the event at other crucial moments throughout her development. Sandra Gilbert goes so far as to suggest that the incident of the red-room “is in itself a paradigm of the larger drama that occupies the entire book: Jane’s anomalous, orphaned position in society, her enclosure in stultifying roles and houses, and her attempts to escape through flight, starvation...and madness” (783). Elaine Showalter’s analysis of the scene may shed some light as to why this form of punishment is so traumatizing to the girl; she explains what happens to Jane in this space “as a metaphoric sexual initiation” (Locy 109). Pointing to “its deadly and bloody connotations, its Freudian wealth of se-

cret compartments, wardrobes, drawers, and jewel chest” as evidence, Showalter believes the “red-room has strong associations with the adult female body” and thus, Jane is being punished not simply for her actions, but for “the crime of growing up” (qtd. in Locy 109). Further supporting this analysis is the placement of the red-room as, significantly, removed from the nursery or kitchens, domestic spaces associated with childhood and female adulthood, respectively. Reading the red-room as a space of sexual transition aligns it with Foucault’s heterotopia of crisis and places greater influence on the change it sparks in Jane. Margot Horne focuses on this noticeable shift; based on a close reading analysis of the first two chapters of the novel, she posits that “what actually occurs in the passage from the window-seat to the red-room can be described in Romantic terms as the critical transition from the unity of innocence to the duality of experience” (200). It is to these dualities in the red-room that I will now turn my attention.

As Horne recognizes, the red-room functions as a container of various dualities, from its physical description to the psychological experience Jane encounters there. The most obvious contrast is, of course, its notorious color scheme:

A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre, the two large windows, with their blinds

always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were a soft fawn color, with a blush of pink in it; the wardrobe, the toilet-table, the chairs, were of darkly polished old mahogany. Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and the pillows of the bed, spread with snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it, and looking, I thought, like a pale throne. (Brontë 17)

Horne links the white and red coloring of the objects in the room to innocence and experience, respectively. While Jane sat in the window-seat downstairs, reading Bewick’s *History of British Birds*, she was free to lose herself, through “the eye of imagination” and with “cool detachment,” to the “death-white realms” of the Arctic zone; however, the intrusion of red onto this color palate suggests, according to Horne, “that experience has forcefully led imagination towards an awareness of inner duality” (Brontë 10)(Horne 210). Furthermore, this “balance maintains the importance of both the warmly passionate heart and the coolly detached eye, of both the element of fire and the element of water,” thus leading us to another binary present

in the red-room (Horne 210). In fact, the red-room helps establish a motif linking images of fire and ice/water to Jane's dueling reason and rebellion that continues throughout the novel. Within the red-room, these contrasting elements are introduced as Jane initially describes that her "blood was still warm" until she "grew by degrees cold as stone... My habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression, fell damp on the embers of my decaying ire" (Brontë 18, 19). Evidently, the physical descriptions of the red-room and Jane's physical experience within this enclosed space are indicative of her fragmented psychological experience.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Jane's dueling personalities should blur within this space, seeing as so many other dichotomous elements are collapsing in on it as well. For instance, there is the subtle, but telling characterization of this place as a holy one—its bed, described as a "tabernacle" was the final resting place of Mr. Reed, and Mrs. Reed seemingly comes back to it to pay tribute to his miniature (Brontë 17). Yet, this holiness is interrupted by Jane's hellish experience and her palpable fear that time will collapse on this space to allow her uncle's ghost to visit her. Furthermore, the "pale throne," situated beside the bed is indicative not of church, but of state, and reminiscent of the patriarchal control Mr. Reed exerted over his household (Brontë 17). In fact, Gilbert labels this space a "patriarchal death chamber," suggesting

that what truly haunts Jane, here and throughout the novel, is the constraint of the patriarchal society she finds herself living in (782). Even this reading becomes convoluted, however, by the power of an opposing presence—now it is Mrs. Reed who controls who inhabits this space and oppresses Jane.

Finally, perhaps the most significant and elusive object in this room of doubles is the mirror hanging on the wall between "muffled windows" (Brontë 17). After finding the door to the chamber locked and crossing back to her stool, Jane passes the looking-glass and "[her] fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed" (Brontë 18). She goes on to explain, "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 speckling the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit" (Brontë 18). Evidently, staring at her reflection prompts a moment of disassociation for young Jane. She does not recognize herself as one whole, which further supports the feeling she had when she was first carried into the red-room: "I was a trifle beside myself; or rather *out* of myself" (Brontë 15). The doubling of Jane in this moment becomes even more significant when one recalls that the narrative style of the novel necessitates it; we are reminded that an adult Jane is narrating these events from her past when she interrupts the story with, "I could not answer the cease-

less inward question – why I thus suffered; now at the distance of – I will not say how many years – I see it clearly” (Brontë 19). Clearly, Brontë is playing with overlapping layers of time and space within her narrative to create this effect.

### **The Orchard**

While many critics have explored the contrasts inherent to the physical and psychological space of the red-room, much less scholarly attention has been devoted to the next heterotopia I will now examine – Thornfield’s orchard. This area is intriguing, first of all, because it is simultaneously an open space and an enclosed one. Throughout the novel, we see Jane’s opinion of these two categories of space vacillating—in chapter one, for instance, the enclosed space of the window-seat is preferred to the cancelled walk outdoors, but later on, she prefers the freedom of walking or taking in the open air from the battlements of Thornfield to the boring, daily routine of life within the house. Jennifer D. Fuller links this motif to Jane’s dual desire for “a connection to the mythic ‘wilderness’ of England...[and] the human need for protective boundaries” which is representative of her need to harmonize a longing for “liberty and safety” throughout the course of the novel (151). Here in the orchard she seems to get the best of both worlds, for “no nook in the grounds [is] more sheltered and more Eden-like” (Brontë 286). Despite the fact that

it is a garden, open to nature and the outside world, this particular orchard is bounded: “a very high wall shut it out from the court on one side; on the other, a beech avenue screened it from the lawn. At the bottom was a sunk fence, its sole separation from the lonely fields: a winding walk bordered with laurels and terminating in a giant horse-chestnut...led down to the fence” (Brontë 287).

As Jane physically wanders through this space, so does her mind, a point emphasized by the various literary allusions made within this scene. The most prominent allusions are those relating to the Garden of Eden; connecting Rochester and Jane with Adam and Eve necessitates associations of temptation, sin, sexuality, and punishment which will be addressed momentarily. At the same time, however, layered over and within the biblical allusions are connections to other texts such as those of Milton and Keats and even children’s nursery rhymes. Clearly, this “paradise” is not one simply of religion, but also of creative fiction. This collapse of narrative space mirrors what occurs within such space as what seems to be the climax of Jane’s and Rochester’s fairytale-like love is later transformed into something tragic and unholy.

What would interest Foucault about this site is, of course, the way in which it juxtaposes a multitude of seemingly incongruous physical spaces within one space. Such collapsing of places is seen through the description of the wildlife contained

within here, including “sweet-brier and southern-wood, jasmine, pink, and rose” (Brontë 287). By filling this space with plants not necessarily native to England, Brontë manages to contain various worlds and cultures within one space in a way that would not be possible elsewhere. Perhaps the most incompatible object in this space, though, is the moth Rochester draws Jane’s attention to, for it “reminds [him] rather of a West Indian insect; one does not often see so large and gay a night-rover in England” (Brontë 288). Of course, we later come to find out that Bertha Mason, Rochester’s wife, is from Jamaica and may therefore be linked to this exotic interloper. Surrounded by such a symbol of foreign sexuality and a multitude of nonnative plants, Jane too becomes exoticized, or at least her desire does.

Recalling the sexual connotations inherent to the Garden of Eden reference, a connection between this heterotopia and the red-room seems eminent. If the red-room is to be read, as Showalter suggests, as Jane’s sexual initiation, this moment in the garden may serve as a critical point of sexual temptation, and thus position the latter space as a second heterotopia of crisis. Brontë’s sensual descriptions highlight this role. As Jane traverses the path, she smells the plants and flowers “yielding their evening sacrifice of incense” and sees the “trees laden with ripening fruit” (287). When Rochester enters, she retreats to the “ivy recess” and

watches as “he strolls on, now lifting the gooseberry-tree branches to look at the fruit, large as plums, with which they are laden; now taking a ripe cherry from the wall; now stooping towards a knot of flowers, either to inhale their fragrance or to admire their dew-beads on their petals” (287). He is clearly comfortable inhabiting this sensual space and interacting with its contents, while Jane feels the need to hide and hopes not to be betrayed by the “crackle of the pebbly gravel” (287). Her reluctance is due to the very real impropriety of their meeting in this secluded space, at twilight, and unchaperoned. But, symbolically, it may also be linked to the gendering of the space itself. Fuller argues that although Jane may seem to be in control when she meets Rochester in an enclosed garden that ““humanizes”” and “[separates] him from his wild, and thus frightening, associations,” the gendering of this space is actually much more ambiguous (158). She makes the important distinction that Jane and Rochester are situated in the orchard and argues that this space “functions as the masculine equivalent to the garden,” thus Jane is displaced from what would conventionally be considered a feminine domain (Fuller 158). The inappropriateness of the situation gives rise to Jane’s conflict between passion and reason, although, interestingly, this time in the negative: “I did not like to walk at this hour alone with Mr. Rochester in the shadowy orchard; but I could not find a reason to allege for leaving him” (Brontë



288). Eventually, individual desires overcome societal constraint and ambiguous gendering, so Jane remains, allowing Rochester's proposal to ensue.

What at first appears as a perfectly utopic moment of Jane finally asserting her true feelings and demanding equality of Rochester before he asks her to marry him is actually, in retrospect, a deeply layered and problematic moment in the text. Gilbert points out that despite Jane's "spirit address[ing] [Rochester's] spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave...and stood at God's feet equal," the two cannot truly be considered equals at this point in the novel (792). The power dynamic of their relationship is imbalanced by Rochester's sexual knowledge and the fact that "*he* will initiate *her* into the mysteries of the flesh" (792). She defends her assertion by analyzing the ways in which Rochester treats Jane after their betrothal; suddenly, he claims a position of superiority and treats her as the inferior, virginal bride. However, there is also the matter of the immorality of his proposal to contend with. Almost as if the heterotopia of the garden is actively speaking out for itself, Jane awakens the morning following Rochester's proposal to find that "the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning...and half of it split away" (Brontë 296). This symbol reminds us that Jane and Rochester are free to enact their passionate desires within this heterotopia, but as soon as they step foot outside its walls, they must contend

with the societal rules which govern their reality.

### **Thornfield**

As we come to find out, the literal reason for the collapse of Jane's and Rochester's euphoric union has been lurking within the walls of Thornfield this entire time. Thornfield itself is a significant space for Jane and the narrative as a whole; as Gilbert notes, "Not only is Thornfield more realistically drawn than, say, Otranto or Udolpho, it is more metaphorically radiant than most gothic mansions: it is the house of Jane's life, its floors and walls the architecture of her experience" (787). Certainly, this analysis is supported by the fact that one of the first spaces Brontë describes within the Hall is a room bearing a striking resemblance to the red-room at Gateshead. As Jane is retiring to her own room on the second floor, she encounters Mrs. Fairfax cleaning the dining room. The older woman then directs her attention to the drawing room beyond which Jane initially describes as a "fairly place" before observing,

Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing room, and within it a boudoir, both spread with white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans: while the ornaments on the pale Parian man-

tlepiece were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire. (Brontë 123)

It seems no coincidence that this room should combine the same oppositions of red/white, window/mirror, snow/fire that were established in the original red-room. Indeed, it too becomes a “prison” for Jane when it is later inhabited by Blanche Ingram and her upper-class friends. Rather than actively resist this prison like she did as a child though, Jane follows the advice of Mrs. Fairfax and learns to negotiate the space by becoming part of the space. Again in connection with her childhood at Gateshead, Jane seeks solace by withdrawing to the window-seat—noting, “the window-curtain half hides me”—but again her peacefulness within this haven is disrupted (202). While Jane is thus obscured, she must listen to those ranked socially superior to her demean her position as governess. In the narration that ensues, Jane expresses a sense of ire reminiscent of that which led to her fight with John Reed as a child. Of course, as an adult, she can no longer violently act out her anger, but it nonetheless lingers, as will be discussed later on. Despite its apparent connection to the red-room in Gateshead then, Thornfield’s drawing room bears more of a psychological resemblance to the small room (significantly located off the drawing room) where Jane’s story began. So where does this place the

real red-room of Thornfield then?

I would argue that a more authentic reenactment of the original red-room episode takes place on the night that Jane attends to Mason, thus shifting the Thornfield red-room to the enigmatic third floor of the Hall. After being awoken during the night by a shrill cry that “ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall,” Jane is brought upstairs by Rochester to assist him in treating the stranger’s mysterious wounds, which she supposes were inflicted by the servant, Grace Poole (Brontë 238). Rochester directs her to a room, “hung with tapestry; but the tapestry was now looped up in one part, and there was a door apparent, which had then been concealed” (Brontë 241). Beside the “large bed, which with its drawn curtains concealed a considerable portion of the chamber” is an “easy-chair” within which she finds a bloodied Mr. Mason (Brontë 242). After giving strict instructions to continue caring for Mason and maintain utter silence, Rochester locks Jane into the room and leaves, causing her to fearfully acknowledge, “Here I was in the third story, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door” (Brontë 243).

Within the walls of this space, Jane again finds herself physically and psychologically confined; she cannot move about the space freely, tied as she is to her patient in the easy chair, and she

may as well be alone, for Mason drops in and out of consciousness and is forbidden from speaking even when he is lucid. Furthermore, echoes from her previous red-room experience begin to encroach on this space. For instance, the contrast of Mason's "ghastly countenance" with the "basin of blood and water" that Jane must continuously dip her hand into by the light of the waning "unsnuffed candle" recalls the images of white and red, ice/water and fire developed at Gateshead (Brontë 243). Similarly, the "great cabinet" across the room, decorated with depictions of the twelve apostles, introduces a religious presence into this space. Such association is immediately perverted, however, by "the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor—of Satan himself—in this subordinate's form" (Brontë 243). Just as she feared her uncle's ghost appearing in the red-room at Gateshead, Jane here fears the emergence of some supernatural, devilish force, although, notably, one contained within the embodiment of a physical being.

Jane's fear is ironic considering she herself is in such close proximity to her own double while situated within this space, according to Sandra Gilbert's analysis. She reads Bertha as the physical embodiment of Jane's double consciousness, "the demon of rage who has haunted her since her afternoon in the red room" (Gilbert 787). While Jane must adhere to certain societal constraints, Roches-

ter's wife is free to take action and physically express Jane's aforementioned, repressed anger. Relating Jane and Bertha in this way and containing them within the walls of Thornfield helps posit this space as a heterotopia of crisis. Jane's experiences are depicted as part of an essential process that requires her to confront and ultimately destroy the separate rage that burns within her and is, significantly, embodied by a figure tied to her own sexuality and marriage. Simultaneously, however, it serves as a heterotopia of deviation for Bertha, and therefore has the potential to do the same for Jane. Much like the psychiatric hospitals Foucault names as a classic example of heterotopias of deviation, Rochester sequesters his "mad" wife to a concealed room on the unpopulated third floor, effectively removing her from society. When Jane is eventually brought into this space, this "room without a window," she encounters a "figure [running] backwards and forwards...it groveled, 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" (Brontë 338). Gilbert uses this description to establish further connections between Bertha and Jane, for it "recalls not only Jane the governess, whose sole relief from mental pain was to pace 'backwards and forwards' in the third story, but also that 'bad animal' who was ten-year-old Jane, imprisoned in the red-room, howling

and mad” (797). Such associations cause Gilbert to conclude that “Bertha not only acts *for* Jane; she also acts *like* Jane” and thus may also serve as a “monitory image” for her, or as Richard Chase proposes, ““a living example of what happens to the woman who [tries] to be the fleshly vessel of the [masculine] *élan*”” (Chase 797)(qtd. in Gilbert 797). If what awaits her as punishment for enacting these desires is containment and a complete withdrawal from society, it is even more critical that Jane destroy her double and bring together her dual consciousness.

But Deanna K. Kreisel reads the containment of the third-story space and its psychological impact on Jane’s consciousness quite differently. She focuses on the power Jane finds as a narrator within this space, ultimately deeming it “a site of narration, of narratability” (Kreisel 105). Kreisel’s analysis of the significance of Thornfield’s third floor to Jane’s narrative power comes down to the space’s heterotopic qualities. For instance, she notes that Jane’s allusion to Bluebeard contributes to the “sense of romantic and sensational possibility,” but what I find interesting is how it functions as a narrative layered on top of narrative within this space, similar to how other literary allusions collapse within the orchard (105). Narrative is not the only element folding in on itself in this space though—time does as well. Jane explains, the old unused furniture stored here “...gave to the third

story of Thornfield Hall the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory” (Brontë 125). Much like Foucault’s heterotopic museum then, the third story becomes a container for the juxtaposition of past and present. This point is significant, Kreisel explains, in understanding Jane’s cognitive state within this space, for “only when she dreams on the third floor, associated with memorial function, are her reveries characterized as narrative” (106). While Kreisel is talking exclusively about Jane and her role as a narrator within the novel here, her analysis can also be extended beyond the plot of the story to consider the role of Charlotte Brontë’s dreams and memories in the creation of the narrative that is *Jane Eyre*.

### ***Jane Eyre* as a Heterotopia**

Kreisel’s article goes on to examine the role of memory and narrative in the process of identity formation noting, “the entire novel is, after all, framed as an extended act of remembrance in the service of identity formation: an autobiography under the emblem of ‘Jane Eyre’” (109). But to whose autobiography is she referring? She seems only to consider this relationship so far as it affects Jane as “author” and narrator of this text, the story of her early years. But can the same questions of how memory, narrative, and identity collide within the novel not also be applied to its real author, Charlotte Brontë? Since the revelation of the true writer

behind the persona of the book's enigmatic, original editor, Currer Bell, much attention has been given to the ways in which Jane's story echoes Charlotte Brontë's own life. For example, Charlotte Brontë lost her mother at an early age, an event which led to her attendance at a boarding school where she ultimately lost her two sisters to consumption. This experience has widely been considered as the inspiration for Lowood and Jane's loss of her friend, Helen Burns. Brontë's subsequent return home gave birth to a rich fantasy life that she enacted with her remaining siblings, perhaps explaining the significance placed on family and the influence of fairytales in *Jane Eyre*. Finally, when she was old enough, Brontë worked for a time as a governess before heading to Brussels to continue her study of languages. There, she developed an affection for her teacher, Constantin Heger, a slightly older—and married—man. A letter written by Brontë to Heger in 1844 contains an apology for a previous letter which was "hardly rational, because sadness was wringing my heart" ("Letter to Constantin Heger" 357). Thus, this relationship seems not only to serve as inspiration for the initially impossible love between Jane and Rochester, but it also hints at Brontë's concern about the balance of passion and reason within the text.

E. Margaret Fulton examines this dichotomous relationship of feelings and logic within the narrative, arguing that through her journey,

Jane "must bring into balance the logical, rational, reasoning, or so-called masculine side of her being with the intuitive, instinctive, spiritual, or so-called feminine side" (433). In doing so, Jane achieves "wholeness or oneness of selfhood" and is rewarded with her happy ending, complete with an egalitarian marriage to the man she loves (433). One could argue that like her protagonist, Charlotte Brontë is also able to "harmonize the two opposites within her being" through her writing (433). In other words, she acknowledges and represents the duality of human nature within the contained space of her novel, for not only does Jane come to embody the dual categorization of the rational male/spiritual female as defined by nineteenth-century standards, but so does Brontë. This fact becomes evident when one looks at the effect her novel had on contemporary readership.

Correctly predicting that revealing their true identities would taint critics' reception of their works, the Brontë sisters decided to publish their early works under male pseudonyms. This, of course, led to much speculation regarding the true gender of *Jane Eyre*'s mysterious author once it gained popularity. A review from the *Weekly Chronicle* is representative of the general air of confusion:

We do not know who 'Currer Bell' might be, but his name will stand very high in literature. We were even tempted more than once

to believe Mrs. Marsh was veiling herself under an assumed editorship, for this autobiography partakes greatly of her simple, penetrating style, and, at times, of her love of nature; but a man's more vigorous hand is, we think, perceptible. (525)

Even the now notoriously scathing review by Elizabeth Rigby addresses this point of authorship, although she sites “incongruities” in descriptions of fashion and social etiquette as “incontrovertible” evidence that the name ‘Currer Bell’ “appertains to a man, and not...to a woman” (507). She then adds a caveat to this conviction, acknowledging, “if we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex” (507). What these reviews prove, beyond mere public and critical reception of the text, is that *Jane Eyre* and its author blurred the seemingly definitive lines between male and female authorship in a way that had never been done before.

Taking this biographical and historical context into account then, one begins to see how time and space are juxtaposed not only within the events of Jane's story, but also within Charlotte Brontë's writing of *Jane Eyre*. The novel functions as a heterotopia in so far as the space between its covers “represent[s], contest[s], and invert[s]” the personal life of Charlotte Brontë and her experiences as a woman in the nineteenth century more generally

(Foucault 3). In other words, we may consider the physical novel as analogous to Foucault's mirror, revealing an unattainable “placeless place” that so closely resembles, and yet is not, reality (3). Similar to the way in which Foucault's mirror reflection forces a reexamination of the space that it reflects, then *Jane Eyre* reveals the anxieties and concerns, the values and beliefs of the nineteenth-century society within whose context it was written. The result is that the novel, much like the heterotopias examined within the story itself, becomes a container of doubles such as memory and fiction, masculinity and femininity, realism and fairytale.

Of course, the natural counterargument to a proposal to read the novel as a heterotopia lies in Foucault's insistence that a heterotopia be a physical space that one can inhabit. He purposefully distinguishes the “external spaces” he is concerned with from the “internal spaces” that make up the primary focus of Bachelard and the other phenomenologists' theories (3). However, these two types of spaces may not be so easy to differentiate after all. Athena Vrettos reminds us that “for nineteenth century theorists the mind was often envisaged as a literal site, and thus subject to the constraints of physical space” (Kreisel 109). Aligned with this theory was a dual concern that “a mind could both become overcrowded with information, facts, and memories and also imprint such data (particularly when their etiology was traumatic) onto its physi-

cal surroundings, creating a quasi-mystical object” (Kreisel 109). If *Jane Eyre* is based even tangentially on Charlotte Brontë’s own memories and lived experiences, could we not then—according to Victorian standards, at least—consider the novel as such a “quasi-mystical object” of imprinted memory that simultaneously embodies internal and external space?

Furthermore, Foucault’s physical, external spaces themselves are not entirely devoid of psychological engagement. For example, is not the mental process that occurs when one holds a novel and engages in the physical act of reading akin to what happens when one visits a theater or cinema? Foucault allows these latter spaces to be deemed heterotopias because they bring together “a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” on the stage or screen (6). But in order for these spaces to function as such, they require the audience members’ psychological participation, for they must engage in a willing suspension of disbelief in order to place themselves within the context of the juxtaposed spaces being presented to them. The same process takes place when one reads a novel like *Jane Eyre*. Foucault also acknowledges the “hammim of the Moslems” as a heterotopia “consecrated to [the] activity of purification” (7). Significantly, he admits that this purification is “partly hygienic” (therefore, physical/external) and “partly religious” (therefore psychological/internal) (7). This is not to

suggest that reading *Jane Eyre* is an act of religious purification, but, rather, that some heterotopic spaces necessitate a level of psychological engagement in order to function properly.

Evidently, when looking at how space functions in *Jane Eyre*, we should consider not only the spaces within the novel, but also the space of the novel itself. In both instances, these spaces function as containers of juxtapositions. Within their bounds, layers of time, space, identity, narrative, and more interact with each other in a way that is not only physical, but psychological as well. Viewing the novel itself as a heterotopic space for its nineteenth-century author places new emphasis on how we are to read the relationship between space and female desire, authorship, and autonomy. Gilbert and Gubar are well-known for their contributions to this research, including their ideas that nineteenth-century female authors, like Charlotte Brontë, use the madwoman figure, like Bertha, as a means to express their own anxiety and rage regarding the patriarchal society that constrains them. They believe that “from a female point of view the monster woman is simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation, and therefore...she [the female author] presents this figure for the first time from the inside out” (79). But what if instead of reading *Jane Eyre* as Charlotte Brontë’s attempt to break out of the constraints of her reality, we instead read it as a heterotopic space she breaks in

to? Doing so would allow us to view the “placeless place” beyond the reflection of the mirror from her perspective and rewrite it as her vision of a utopia—a world where she sees justice done to the boarding school system that led to her sisters’ demise; a world where even seemingly impossible romantic love is reciprocated and actualized; a world that acknowledges the duality of human nature and celebrates the culmination of masculine logic and feminine passion within one individual; and, finally, a world that values imagination and storytelling as much as it values memory and lived experiences

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<sup>1</sup> **Editor’s Note:** Throughout this essay, Red-Room has two different spellings. When direct reference is made to the novel, *Jane Eyre*, Red-Room is hyphenated. However, in two instances, when a literary review of the novel is referenced, Red Room is written without the hyphen.



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