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Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*: the Role of Fairy Tales in the Development of the Heroine

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Resumen:

Este ensayo presenta posibles paralelismos entre la novela de Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847), y los cuentos de hadas. La autora mediante la introducción de motivos mágicos y originarios de los cuentos tradicionales facilita el desarrollo moral y ético de la heroína. Jane Eyre es un personaje creado dejando a un lado convencionalismos y tradiciones presentes en la época Victoriana. Brontë nos presenta una mujer con iniciativas propias y cuya meta es ser independiente. Tomando como referencia los cinco espacios o lugares en los que la protagonista vive durante diferentes periodos de tiempo – Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House y Ferndean – analizaré diferentes cuentos de hadas que guían el desarrollo psicológico y personal de la heroína en cada una de estas etapas. El estilo gótico es un rasgo estilístico propio de la novela, pero también se percibe en ciertos cuentos de hadas utilizados por la escritora, quien mediante la introducción de un género conocido como 'Gótico femenino' proporciona una mirada crítica hacia la situación de la mujer de confinamiento y opresión, intentando recrear de este modo la ansiada libertad. Recorreremos dicho viaje de crecimiento personal con la vista puesta en los cuentos de hadas, parte importante de la cultura popular, y el uso particular de ellos que hace Charlotte Brontë como vehículo para transmitir la creciente necesidad de un cambio de percepción sobre el papel de la mujer en la sociedad.

Abstract:

This essay draws parallels between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and fairy tales. The author, by means of the introduction of magical and mythical motifs originating in traditional folktales, facilitates the moral development of the heroine. Jane Eyre is a character created leaving aside Victorian Era conventions and traditions. Brontë portrays a woman in search of independence. Taking into account the different places visited by the heroine during her lifetime – Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House and Ferndean – I am going to analyze the series of fairy tales which influence the psychological and personal development of Jane Eyre in each of these stages. The novel is classified as a Gothic novel, and this fact may be perceived by means of the intrusion of certain fairy tales considered as Gothic tales. Through the use of what is known as female Gothic, the writer introduces a critical view of the confinement and oppression suffered by silenced women. This private pilgrimage is reinforced by Charlotte Brontë's special use of fairytale's motifs and images as a vehicle for transmitting the increasing need for a change of perception about the role of women in a patriarchal society.

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"Jane Eyre is a tale." (Adrienne Rich, 463)

I. Introduction

Jane Eyre is one of the most acclaimed novels of English Literature, a novel written by Charlotte Brontë and published on October 16th 1847, which encapsulates the emotions and experiences of its title character, including her moral and spiritual development as a woman and her love story with Mr. Rochester. The novel contains elements of social criticism and it is seen as a revolutionary narrative due to its exploration of sexuality, patriarchal society, classism and feminism. The publication of the novel revolutionized the art of romantic fiction since Charlotte Brontë is said to be "the first historian of the private consciousness", serving as the predecessor of writers such as James Joyce or Marcel Proust (Burt 224).

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate how Charlotte Brontë, through the use of fairy tale elements, introduces some components of magic, myth and fantasy in order to escape the restrictive forces of traditional realism. According to Marie-Louise Von Franz, "Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious physic processes". Fairy tales, she adds, "represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. The archetypal images afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche" (1). In the case of *Jane Eyre*, the allusions to certain fairy tales and mythical legends allow the author to extend her narrative beyond the barriers of Christianity and the moral constraint religion placed upon women. *Jane Eyre* is a complex mixture of fairy tale, classical mythology and Christian allegory (Clarke 15). The novel may be considered a feminine version of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In her path towards maturity the protagonist evaluates

those Christian doctrines which hamper women's desire for independence (Gilbert and Gubar 200; Clarke 15). The author delineates the development of the heroine over time trying to represent the social and cultural circumstances that shaped women in the Victorian Era. The heroine, in her mythic quest-plot, witnesses and sometimes experiences the hardest sufferings women had to deal with: starvation, orphanages, madness and entrapment. In the novel, the author is able to reconcile Christianity and female independence by the insertion of fairy tales, their resonances of the mythic and the magical pointing to a feminist ethic (Clarke 696).

This particular *Bildungsroman* unfolds in five different spaces – Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House and Ferndale – which correspond to the five stages the heroine must overcome in her own quest for personal development. The characterization of the protagonist, Jane Eyre, the plot and images reproduced throughout the novel are mediated by these constant allusions to folklore, fairy-tales and myths.

Literature, and concretely the genre of fairy-tales, marks the life of the protagonist. Books will become a kind of shelter for Jane Eyre; but literature also functions as the vehicle for constructing an identity from scratch. Folklore has always been part of history, and on some occasions, it has walked alongside religion. Often, however, folklore – which is associated with paganism –, has collided with religion. It is my intention here to explore the intersection between fairy tale and Christian ethics in the development of Jane. The novel contains explicit allusions to a great number of popular tales, myths and classic works such as the *Arabian Nights*, *Rasselass,* Perrault's "Bluebeard", "The Sleeping Beauty" and "Little Red Riding Hood", and some versions of La Fontaine like *The Babes in the Wood*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, tales of the gytrash, the legend of 'the men in green',

together with biblical references too (Sullivan 61). Moreover, the author includes magical entities such as gnomes, witches or elves in the text. Brontë operates within the heritage of Romanticism, including folklore songs, ballads and fairy tales. Jane Eyre is fascinated by Bessie's ballads and some Gateshead servants' horror tales about ghosts, werewolves and vampires.

Charlotte Brontë, however, breaks away from the traditional female heroine of fairy tales. Jane Eyre is not a princess, but proves to be a woman in search of autonomy and independence. This particular *Bildungsroman* contains a cyclical substructure of journeys which continuously overlap with each other, and, as happens in fairy tales, the heroine returns victorious to her tyrannical origins. Jane, a plain orphan child embarks on a pilgrimage through different places and situations: she begins at Gateshead, then she is forced to move to Lowood – where she encounters starvation. Thornfield is her third stage – her confrontation with rage and madness – and, in Marsh End she lives in coldness and proper Christian submission. In spite of the rigidness of this scenario, she also thrives in the company of her cousins and finds a job. Finally, Jane Eyre finds in Ferndean the culmination of her quest for her own personal and psychological development (Gilbert 779-804). One aspect to take into account is the influence of fairy tales in each of these stages, and this is what I am going to explore in this dissertation. I am going to evaluate the connection between these five spaces in the path of Jane Eyre and the different fairy tales they echo, with the aim of understanding the role played by fairy tale imagery in the novel and the intrinsic tensions between religious concerns and folklore, fairy tales and legends. The following analysis is divided into five parts according to the series of places where Jane stays during different periods of time. (I) The first place in Jane's journey is Gateshead, which can be read against the Grimm Brothers' "Cinderella" and the "Ugly Duckling" in terms of imagery and plot-line. (II)

Secondly, Lowood echoes the forest in "Little Red Riding Hood", where the heroine must confront the dangerous wolf. In Lowood, Jane fights against the forces of religious ethics imposed on her. (III) Thornfield is one of the most influential places in the development of the heroine, bringing to the reader's mind two different fairy tales, "Beauty and the Beast" and "Bluebeard". The former is intimately connected with the love relationship between Jane and Rochester, but it can also display other possible hidden connotations. The latter tale, "Bluebeard" is directly named by the heroine during her stay in this mansion. These two different tales share a common feature: both contain a Gothic background that will be adapted by Charlotte Brontë to another variant of the genre, the female Gothic formula, which originated in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and was brought to perfection in *Jane Eyre*. (IV) The end of this third stage brings the heroine to a turning point in her own *Pilgrim's Progress*. Marsh End, also known as Moor House, is strangely characterized by the absence of any reference to fairy tales. This lack of imagery brings to the surface the tension underlying the whole novel between fairy tale folklore and religion. The figure of St. John Rivers tries to teach Jane Christian submission and she is on the point of abandoning her own convictions and accepting the role assigned to women in Victorian society. However, a supernatural event brings Jane at Rochester's side in Ferndean (V), where she finds her path to liberty and equal love. In a typically fairy-tale scenario Rochester and Jane marry and "live happily ever after…", or not, because the novel's fairy-tale ending has been questioned by some critics.

II. Gateshead: the house of "Cinderella" and the "Ugly Duckling"

Charlotte Brontë, who suffered during her life due to the fact that she felt she was not beautiful enough, wanted to create an unconventional heroine "as plain and small" as herself. Jane is invisible like the air – notice her surname – "poor, plain and little", according to the description made by many characters throughout the novel. Jane Eyre starts her life journey, from childhood to a mature life at Gateshead where she encounters isolation, oppression and humiliation in a family which is not the one she would desire to have. Literature becomes her shelter. Excluded and isolated from the Reed family Jane takes refuge in a window seat where she reads Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Another feature to take into account is that Jane is an orphan, a common aspect in many traditional fairy tales. John Reed, her selfish and tyrannical cousin, acts as the substitute for a patriarchal figure in the house. Moreover, a "wicked stepmother" – her aunt – and two disagreeable "stepsisters" – her cousins Eliza and Georgiana – who act as her tormentors, make Jane's life impossible and painful. She begins this process as an angry Cinderella and an Ugly Duckling, who rebels against hierarchy and oppression: "I know that had I been a sanguine. Brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child – though equally dependent and friendless – Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently**"** [1](19). According to authors such as Gilbert and Gubar, Jane Eyre is "the emblem of a passionate, barely disguised rebelliousness" (337). However, according to her "swan potential", she cannot be "sanguine and brilliant", since neither the Ugly Duckling nor Cinderella assumes this role.

[1] All the quotations of the novel are taken from: Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. London: Arcturus Publishing Limited. 2011.

Reminiscences of classical fairy tales such as "Cinderella" are a constant in *Jane Eyre*. Her path to maturity is going to be marked by the Cinderella motif as the basis for the construction of heroine's identity. According to Anne Williams, *Jane Eyre* " is a novel purportedly heroine-centered around a dark 'Cinderella'" (102). The novel, like "Cinderella" is a "from rags to riches" story. Brontë may have used two versions of the story as inspiration: Perrault's "Cendrillon" (1697); and the Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella" –or "Ash Girl" – (1812). The classic fairy tale is an ancient mythical story told orally since antiquity. The first written version appears in Giambattista Basile's collection "Il Pentamerone" in 1634 and is named 'Cenerentola'. Perrault extends the tale in 1697 adding new motifs such as the pumpkin, the fairy godmother and the famous glass slippers. The tale is republished in 1812 by the Grimm Brothers in their great masterpiece *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. The latter version exerts great influence on the writing of the novel in terms of structure and imagery and gives Charlotte Brontë the opportunity to evaluate the position of women within a Christian patriarchal society combining the story with mystical, magical and pagan elements (Hildardóttir 1-2). This issue is explained by Clarke: "Brontë's is a Christianity reclaimed by the (re) insertion of a maternalist respect for women's work … It is the insertion into the novel of the Grimm Brothers' "Cinderella", with its resonance of the supernatural and the mythic, that conveys this feminist ethic" (15).

As I said before, the tale, and subsequently the novel, is structured on the motif of rising from rags to riches in which the heroine is rescued by a prince Charming. But while in Cinderella the heroine hopefully waits for the Prince Charming to rescue her from her poverty and oppression, Jane Eyre engages in a pilgrimage that will provide her with an equal partner. Jane displays a reversal in the conception of the figure of Cinderella as she portrays an active woman who decides to save prince Charming rather

than wait to be rescued by him. In spite of this difference, the author establishes parallels between the tale and the story told in the novel; both female heroines, Cinderella and Jane, are motherless and defenceless orphans raised by oppressive families and lacking a social status. In Gateshead, Jane, like Cinderella is treated like a servant: “Bessie now frequently employed me as a sort of under nursery-maid, to tidy the room, dust the chairs […]” (25). Both female protagonists carry out certain tasks: house-cleaning, carrying water, cooking, etc. and witness how her siblings / cousins are pampered while they are despised: “From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded: my share of the gaiety consisted in witnessing the daily appareling of Eliza and Georgiana […]” (23). Bessie, through the use of traditional and folkloric songs, echoes the figure of the fairy godmother in the Cinderella tale, giving advice to the heroine. On one occasion her song summarizes the unpleasant conditions children, like Jane or Cinderella in the fairy tale, must endure when they try to rebel:

My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary,
Long is the way, and the mountains are wild;
Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary
Over the path of the poor orphan child. (18)

III.Lowood: the forest where Little Red Riding Hood meets the dangerous wolf

Lowood is the name of the state institution where poor girls receive education in *Jane Eyre*. After a rebellious incident, her wicked aunt decides to send Jane to Lowood, this religious school for girls, the perfect destination for the little orphan. Jane is full of fears and is comforted by Bessie with the following ballad which recalls the terrors she has confronted in the red-room and the patriarchal terrors to come:

> Ev'n should I fall o'er the broken bridge passing,
> Or stray in the marshes, by false lights beguiled,
> Still will my Father, with promise and blessing
> Take to his bosom the poor orphan child. (25)

Although the maternal moonlight will guide her later on after leaving Thornfield, at this point she imagines her life moonless as a hopeless pilgrimage. The words of Bunyan's Christian resonate in Jane's mind: "What shall I do? – What shall I do?" And what she does is to fight against the problems she will encounter along her path with a self-assertive behaviour and straightforward morality which neither a Victorian woman nor Cinderella are supposed to have. In her pilgrimage she will face many disturbing patriarchal figures like Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers, representing the Victorian superego, which trust religion as a way of endurance and correctness. In Lowood, religion and moral rigidity are the basis of the education of the girls; and the term "Father" in Bessie's ballad advances this turn to religion, although the "Father" Jane encounters in Lowood is not precisely benign but is closer the big bad wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood".

The allusions to fairy tales help Brontë to create the perspective of a little child within an unfair and oppressive world. In this concrete stage there is a prominent fairy tale which is useful in terms of imagery and character descriptions and which inspires resistance against the Christian submission imposed in Lowood. This tale is "Little Red Riding Hood". Both Perrault and Grimm's versions admit the danger of female independence and intelligence (Eisfeld 75). The implicit message shows the little girl entering a dangerous terrain by leaving aside the conventional path of patriarchal society and Christian obedience by means of her rebellious behaviour.

The name of the institution itself, Lowood, significantly echoes the fairy tale's forest. Critics and authors such as Conny Eisfeld claim the existence of a psychological explanation in relation to this symbol, suggesting that the path the little girl with her red cape should follow represents her conscious mind while the woods symbolize that which she has yet to explore, her unconscious (75-81). Within the forest and despite the dangers this place brings with it, Little Red Riding Hood, like Jane Eyre, learns to construct her own identity leaving aside the path designated by society. Christian ethics are an important baggage Jane has to bear along her path, sometimes posing a risk to her maturation as an independent woman. The dichotomy between Christian morality and fairy tales is a constant in *Jane Eyre*. The shadow of Calvinism had fallen over the author during her childhood, and in the novel the heroine's life is darkened due to the intrusion of figures such as Brocklehurst –who embodied the negative qualities of religion (Imlay 55-56).

One important figure in the implementation of religious order and Christian rigidity in Lowood is Mr. Brocklehurst, described through literary allusions mediated by the initial apprehension of Jane. Mr. Brocklehurst is conceived as an ugly Brobdingnagian – the giants in *Gulliver's Travels*. Jane loves Jonathan Swift's novel,

and she feels part of "the diminutive people" in the tiny and magical universe of Lilliput. Little Jane is coerced by the presence of this man perceived as a "black pillar" (36) when she looks up. The child feels tiny and insignificant, "an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow's nest, under a wreath of hawthorn bloom" (231). He is depicted as the big bad wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood": "What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! […] what a great nose! And what a mouth! And what large prominent teeth!" (34). Mr. Brocklehurst is described as a "beast", the wolf which wants to devour Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. In this way, the author presents the subjective perspective and impression of the child Jane in the midst of a dangerous world controlled by men. Jane, like Little Red Riding Hood, is a naïve and suggestible child. She is easily convinced by the bad wolf, Brocklehurst, who treats her as an inferior being. However, in Lowood Jane Eyre also learns how to govern her anger thanks to the noble Miss Temple and the delicate Helen Burns. Miss Temple is the perfect fairy godmother who transmits her disciple and shows her that she can become her own godmother and not only a Cinderella. What Jane learns from Miss Temple and Helen Burns, is to compromise; she assumes that pure liberty is unachievable, so she will devote her life to new tasks: "then […] grant me at least a new servitude" (74). In "Cinderella", as well as in "Little Red Riding Hood", the godmother helps her while she waits passively for the hunter to rescue her; however, in *Jane Eyre* the figure of the godmother teaches and gives her guidance, enabling her to take on her process towards maturity in her own way. In Victorian times, the only possibility for a woman to receive education is to become governess. At Lowood, Jane learns how to be a governess in order to gain independence and to reach her own power.

IV. Thornfield: "Beauty and the Beast", "Bluebeard" and female gothic

Her interest and restlessness bring Jane to the central experience of her pilgrimage: Thornfield, a gloomy mansion depicted as a Gothic castle where Jane will have to fight her main battle against madness and sin. Jane Eyre is classified by many authors as a moral gothic novel: the setting is mainly the archetypal scenario where the encounter between a kind of Byronic hero and the quivering heroine takes place (Gilbert and Gubar 337). The gothic atmosphere is emphasized with echoes and allusions to fairy tales such as "Bluebeard" and "Beauty and the Beast," with a great gothic baggage. Furthermore, in 1976 a new approach to Gothic in terms of gender appears when Ellen Moers first uses the concept 'female Gothic'. *Jane Eyre* follows the formulaic plot of female Gothic,[2] in which the female heroine tells her own story of confinement. From Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* onwards, female Gothic narratives tend to be autobiographies in order to preserve the authority of the subject. After a dark and poor childhood, the heroine usually finds employment as a governess in a dark and old castle with a sinister and hidden story behind. This heroine is intimidated by the owner of the mansion, who is mysterious and attractive and frightening at the same time. His wealth and his rude manners fascinate the heroine. She becomes conscious of the mysteries and supernatural risks this haunted 'castle' pose to her. The heroine loves the child she is caring for, and she remains loyal to her master in spite of the fact that she fears that something or somebody is trying to damage her. This threat is often related to a female supernatural force, in this case, the first Mrs. Rochester, the madwoman in the attic. In the end, she becomes aware of the real danger. The heroine realizes that this

[2] More contemporary examples of this female plot are Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn*.

supernatural threat cannot prevent her from being happy with the master who loves her and they marry. The ending implies a lesson about both the real source of the "supernatural" and of all of her fears – which are merely the result of an overactive imagination – and about gaining in self-confidence (Williams 101). Charlotte Brontë expresses women's fear of entrapment within the domestic by drawing upon female gothic conventions. This mode of narrative is a vehicle for the expression of women's dissatisfactions with a male-dominated society and their problematic situations (Heiland 57).

In Jane's first contact with Rochester's mansion she crosses a narrow passage to reach her room which is described "like a corridor in some Bluebeard's Castle" (109). This allusion draws the reader's attention to resemblances between *Jane Eyre* and Perrault's "Bluebeard story". Jane fights to make clear her interior conflict between love and duty: "all of incident, life, fire, feeling that I desired and had not in my actual existence" (112). Rochester can be compared with Bluebeard, both despot and tyrant characters. Bertha is secretly locked at the attic to the end of a long corridor in the same way as Bluebeard's closet at the end of a corridor hides the corpses of his dead wives. In both cases the aim of keeping their wives hidden is to marry again. The allusions to this fairy tale seem to indicate that Charlotte Brontë had read the original book by Perrault. Perhaps, when Jane makes reference to "a certain little French storybook which Madame Pierrot had that day shown me" (77), she is alluding to this fairy tale.

Charlotte Brontë's power arises from her capacity to mythologise her heroine's confrontation with the masculinity exerted by the male characters (Imlay 71). The first meeting of Jane and Rochester is depicted as a fairy tale encounter. Their relationship bears with it a condensed bulk of fairy imagery, characterized by imagination, romanticism and magic. A romanticized setting and mythic elements surround the first

appearance of Rochester as a kind of Cinderella's prince: an icy twilight, a rising moon, a "lion-like dog like a North-of-England spirit called a Gytrash […] [which] sometimes came upon belated travellers" followed by "a tall steed, and on its back a rider" (114). Jane's thoughts are shaped by fairy tales, recalling the Gytrash monster from Bessie's ballads. However, the "warrior" depicted as a kind of supernatural "beast" falls down the horse and requires the heroine's attention and help. Since the beginning Mr. Rochester is perceived as a kind of "beast" by Jane Eyre. This masculine power is mitigated by her own powers. Rochester is conscious about the power Jane exerts over him in spite of her lack of beauty, like the Beast in the tale who recognizes that Beauty has the power to make him happy. From this point onwards Jane and Rochester start their peculiar relationship as servant and master, Cinderella and her beloved prince or even as Beauty and her beloved Beast, who in fact are spiritually equals. However, the prince is always superior to the female character, not because of his rank but because it is he who teaches her the mysteries of love and sex. As a Byronic hero or the mythic Bluebeard, Rochester has superior sexual knowledge and male potency. Once Jane has assumed the sexual knowledge Rochester posseses, the man starts treating her as an inferior; she is now his initiate, his virginal possession: she is described by him in terms of fairy imagery as a plain and not beautiful woman: "mustard-seed", "pale little elf", a "little sunny-faced" (256). After the revelation of Rochester's secret – Bertha's existence – Jane gets angry due to Rochester's concept of marriage. His tyranny in terms of love and marriage reminds the reader of John Reed's despotism, and even Mr. Brocklehurst's hypocresy. "The burden of the past", according to Gilbert and Gubar, is an impediment in her relationship with Rochester. In her pilgrimage towards independence, full maturity and true equality with her beloved, Bertha becomes a barrier the couple has to overcome. But Jane also needs to learn to integrate her

"orphaned alter ego". In two crucial dreams of Jane a phantom baby or child appears calling her back to her past: before Bertha attacks Richard Mason and the night before her wedding. The little child-ghost who appears in all of these dreams corresponds to the description of "the poor orphan child" in Bessie's song and therefore to Jane herself (Gilbert and Gubar 358).

The motif of transformation from an ugly duck to a beautiful swan, or from a beast to a beauty through love is a significant fairy tale element, resembling the story pattern of the "Ugly Duckling" tale and "Beauty and the Beast". Motifs and constant references to the fairy tale of "Beauty and the Beast" span along the narration of Jane's experience in Thornfield. For instance, in terms of the characterization of the hero, Rochester and the Beast in Perrault's tale share this lack of physical beauty: - "But tell me, Beauty, do you think me very ugly?" asks the Beast (Perrault 14); - "You examine me, Miss Eyre" says Rochester; "do you think me handsome?" and "Am I hideous, Jane?" – "Very, sir; you always were, you know" (133). However, in *Jane Eyre* the story offers an ironic twist since far from turning into an attractive man, Rochester ends up looking "worse" than even before. But the protagonists of both stories – Jane and Beauty – decide that "a true heart is better than either good looks or clever brains" (Imlay 72). As the Beast prefers Beauty's honest answer, Rochester likes the frankness of the heroine, rather than the flatter character of Celine. Beauty is a central theme in "Beauty and the Beast", and it has been a central motif of European folklore and tradition due to the influence exerted by the mythic tale "Cupid and Psyche". The conception of the Beast as a fairy tale character presumably derives from the myth "Cupid and Psyche". This ancient mythical story told by Apuleius is another variant of the *Cinderella* tale, making a clear link with "Beauty and the Beast" (Imlay 72). Charlotte is familiar with this myth, and in fact she alludes to it in the preface to *Wuthering Heights* in 1850: "There comes a time

when […] refusing absolutely to make ropes out of sea-sand any longer, it sets to work on statue-hewing, and you have a Pluto or a Jove, a Tisiphone or a Psyche, a mermaid or a Madonna, as Fate or Inspiration direct" (Brontë, Emily 19). Moreover, the figure of Venus in the myth is a distinguished female ancestor of the wicked stepmother of "Cinderella" and the witch in "Beauty and the Beast" – in the latter tale she does not directly appear, but she has cast a spell on the Beast. Brontë's treatment of beauty connects with "Beauty and the Beast" and the oral tradition of fairy tales in which beauty and appearance serve to reveal the inner emotions and behaviour of characters. Women must be beautiful in Victorian fiction; beauty defines the treatment they deserve. This is clear since the beginning of the novel. During her stay in the Red Room in Gateshead, Jane concludes that if she had been a beautiful girl like her cousins, the Reed family would have loved and appreciated her. However, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* subverts the convention of beauty through the lack of attractiveness of her main characters, Rochester and Jane (Imlay 72).

The Beast, as well as Rochester, has a "large library filled with books, a harpsichord and many pieces of music" (Perrault 26). Moreover, both characters are depicted as melancholy, generous and mysterious. Beast allows Beauty to visit her father who is ill temporarily during a short period of time. Although she promises to return in a week, her sisters persuade her to stay away from the Beast a few weeks more. Similarly, Rochester allows Jane to make a brief visit to the Reed family in order to see her dying aunt. However, instead of one week Jane prolongs her absence persuaded by her two female cousins. Both the Beast and Rochester experience a sharp pain due to the absence of their female heroines, and they decide to remain secluded in their castles in solitude. In Perrault's tale the Beast starves himself to death; while Rochester in *Jane Eyre* "would not cross the doorstones of the house, except at night, when he walked just

like a ghost about the grounds and in the orchad as if he had lost his senses" (419). Beauty uses a magic mirror in order to see the Beast over the distance and she decides to return to the Beast after a dream she has where she can see how the beast is dying due to her absence. Jane replaces the mirror by her own dreams of Rochester and she even hears his voice crying "Jane! Jane! Jane*!*" (411). Empowered by the moonlight in her room she is receptive to the bodiless praying words of Rochester; making this telepathic communion possible. In the end, Beauty finds the languished Beast on a "grass plat", and Jane discovers Rochester, blind and ill, advancing "slowly and gropingly towards the grass-plat" when she returns (423). Brontë's heroine learns that Rochester is a good Beast after all (Imlay, 1993):

> He would never have forced me to be his mistress. Violent as he had seemed in his despair, he, in truth, loved me far to well and too tenderly to constitute himself my tyrant: he would have given me half his fortune, without demanding so much as a kiss in return, rather than I should flung myself friendless on the wide world. (443)

Taking into account this conception of beauty and the fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast", the novel portrays Blanche Ingram as the perfect Beauty from the tale in terms of physical beauty (Heiniger 71-72). Blanche claims beauty is the "special prerogative of woman – her legitimate appendage and heritage!" (179). In contrast, Bertha Mason is presented as a kind of "beast" who often gives "wolfish cries" (304). When Jane sees her for the first time, she cannot discern what kind of creature she is: "beast or human […] snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing" (290). In the fairy tale the Beast is indirectly cursed, but here it is Bertha who curses Rochester. Rochester claims that he has transformed into a beast as a way to escape from "the infernal union" (301) with his wife Bertha. However, Rochester is

guilty of his curse, since he married a woman he did not love forced by social pressure and the importance of beauty. He himself claims that Bertha was once as attractive and lovely as Blanche Ingram: "but he told me Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie. I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram; tall, dark, and majestic" (301).

In this part of the novel there are also references to many other fairy tales, especially "Cinderella". The 'change of dress' motif and travelling by carriage are only a few examples of the influence this fairy tale exerts over the novel. Fairy tales, like "Cinderella", preach the real necessity to take care of physical appearance, as a mark of social status such as in the case of "Beauty and the Beast". In the tale, Cinderella is invisible to the prince when wearing her ragged clothes; however, she charms the prince with a beautiful dress. The issue of dressing properly or having the right public appearance is an important feature Jane has to face along her path. Nevertheless, in Charlotte Brontë's novel clothing is seen as a way to diminish women's power and identity. Clothing is associated to sexual and social repression. Although, Jane feels inferior to Blanche Ingram or even Rochester due to her physical appearance, she decides not to accept the expensive clothes Mr. Rochester gives her after she agrees to marry him. She finds his presents degrading and annoying: "the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation.", "if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me" (265). As the previous quotation shows, Jane rejects Rochester's presents as a way of reasserting her independence.

The protagonist's habit of sitting in front of the fire is also a fairy tale convention; Cinderella always sleeps next the hearth, near the ashes. Moreover, the Cinderella motif

by excellence is also alluded to in Jane Eyre. In the same way as Cinderella loses one of her shoes in her escape, Jane is on the point of losing her sandal: "I then quitted my corner and made my exit by the side-door, which was fortunately near. Thence a narrow passage led into the hall: in crossing it, I perceived my sandal was loose" (180). Unlike Cinderella, Jane tries to bring back her footwear. A relevant motif to take into consideration is the presence of a great clock in the middle of the hall in Thornfield. The clock's chime recalls the protagonist "to earth" (chapter 12), is also strikes midnight when Jane and Rochester come in during a great storm (chapter 23) and its sound interrupts Jane when she is recounting her dreams to Rochester (chapter 25). Another important motif in both the "Cinderella" tale and in *Jane Eyre* is the invitation to a ball. Jane is persuaded by Rochester's commanding invitation: "If she resists, say I shall come and fetch her in case of contumacy" (169).

V. Moor House: The domain of Christian ethics

The real need to escape away from Thornfield is marked by the rising of the moon, which will accompany Jane in her journey away from her love and her possessions. Like Jane's dreams, Bessie's lines in her song, – "Why did they send me so far and lonely, / Up where the moors spread and grey rocks are piled?" (25) – were an uncanny prediction of Jane's pilgrimage (Gilbert & Gubar 363-364). Jane and her journey across the moors suggest the hardest stage the heroine must face in her feminine *Pilgrims' Progress* against the tyranny of a patriarchal society. The discovering of Marsh End – or Moor House – offers a possible alternative of what it is a real home for Jane since it is here that Jane encounters St. John Rivers, Mary and Diana. Her male cousin, St. John Rivers, offers Jane a life filled with principles and duties, different to the way of life proposed by Rochester. Her cousin is drawn as the antithesis of Mr. Rochester, the opposition of reason and passion. Rivers is the embodiment of Rationality, Evangelism, Philanthropy, Calvinism, coldness and unhappiness (Imlay 65). Although he is a good man who helps Jane to find a job in a school and takes care of her, he cannot accept Jane as an equal. Jane confronts Christian morality personified in St. John, who tries to imprison the "resolute, wild, free thing" (313) that inhabits in Jane's rebellious soul in a set of "iron shroud" (396) Christian principles. In Marsh End Jane confronts the rigorous self-restraint imposed by religion as an attempt to adhere to the moral standards, but at the same time she seems to have found spiritual support to deal with her pain and grief (Howells 185). St. John Rivers proposes to her a spiritual marriage with the purpose of abandoning England to go to India as missionaries. Jane is tempted by the proposal and in her desperation she seems to be willing to accept the choice of God. But when she desperately prays to Heaven: "Show me, show me the path!" (411),

the answer comes not from God but from Rochester's voice crying her name in one of her dreams. Jane cannot deny her natural impulses: she is still in love with Rochester and going with St John Rivers as his wife to India would be a "monstrous martyrdom" (398).

This fourth stage in her path perfectly portrays the constant tension throughout the novel between religion and the intrusion of fairy tale elements. This ancient dichotomy finds in Marsh End the perfect scenario. The lack of any reference to folklore and fairy tale imagery is, then, an aspect to take into account.

In her pilgrimage to maturity, having found what she considers her true family and knowing she is the legal heir of her uncle in Madeira, Jane achieves her independence as a free woman. According to Gilbert and Gubar, this apparent telepathic communion with Rochester "has been made possible by her new independence and Rochester's new humility" (367). Jane is prepared to escape from her home with the purpose of finding her ultimate goal, loving mutual acceptance with Rochester.

VI. Ferndean: And they lived happily ever after…?

Charlotte was criticized at the time of publication because of the ending of her novel, often interpreted as a sign of weakness. The author follows the convention of a fairy-tale happy ending, an "ever after marriage": "[Rochester] our honeymoon will shine our life long: its beams will only fade over your grave or mine" (441). However, fairy-tale conventions and the realistic mode blend well at this stage and make the story acceptable for both counts (Imlay 79-80).

Many interpretations have been formulated in relation to *Jane Eyre*'s ending; the feminist viewpoint can suggest the real need to make Rochester a dependent being as a result of his blindness. His male patronage must be destroyed; Rochester embodies the patriarchal society empowered at that time, so his injuries may suggest a metaphorical castration that allow him to be redeemed from his past as male dominant. Charlotte Brontë previously introduces this idea of physical mutilation in the story, in chapter twenty-seven the heroine makes reference to a lost hand and the right eye: "No; you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it" (294). In this passage, Jane is lamenting the parts of her body she has lost – metaphorically – by leaving Rochester , a kind of moral Christian sacrifice in order to avoid sin. This idea of sacrifice is reinforced by this allegory of the destructive journey to Whitcross; a kind of Calvary for Jane. Rochester has lost these body parts in truth, whereas Jane feels as if her eye and hand have been cut off from her body (Gilbert and Gubar 368-370).

Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, interpret the novel's ending as the perfect instance of female rage, where the author suggests a possible equality between sexes (367). Rochester falls from his male pedestal built up by the patriarchal system, and due to his injuries he becomes dependent on Jane. She is in charge of her mutilated husband; the heroine exerts her power over him. In popular fairy tales, the female heroine has to go through her path of suffering and lack of power alone, since the prince does not make any sacrifice before their marriage. However, Jane is not willing to play the conventional role of sacrificed women in favour of men. Indeed, Charlotte punishes masculine pride and arrogance offering darkness, agony and isolation (Sullivan 70-71). The destruction of Thornfield represents freedom and justice for both Rochester and Jane. Jane has been freed from the burden of her past, Bertha has died and now there is not impediment for her marriage to Rochester, and this sense of self-pity of the orphan child has disappeared.

The ending portrays two lovers in harmony in their new home, Ferndean, a rural environment where their marriage blooms outside the constraints of Victorian society. This green and ferny landscape becomes a kind of pre-Fall Garden of Eden where the power of nature will restore Rochester's sight of one eye (Gilbert and Gubar 368-369). *Jane Eyre* is concluded with a clear allusion to *Pilgrim's Progress*: "His", Jane tells the reader, "is the exaction of the apostle, who speaks but for Christ when he says- 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me''' (398). Ironically this apostle of celestial transcendence, "the warrior Great heart", is St. John Rivers (Gilbert and Gubar 370). In this almost parodic passage, Charlotte Brontë denies John Bunyan's repudiation of the self as an independent and rebellious being.

The ending does not describe Jane and Rochester's wedding day like in conventional fairy tale endings. The heroine only informs the reader of her marriage with Rochester from the distance of ten years approximately: "Reader, I married him" (440). The synthesis achieved between Rochester and Jane is not one that transcends the limits of human understanding fusing into a fantastic and irrational happy ending, but a union that accepts human limitations where the lovers grow together emotionally and spiritually. Jane as the central consciousness has been able to resolve the ambivalent tension within herself "in a tolerant and humane maturity which recognises man as both a rational and emotional, a physical and spiritual being, God's creature in the fullest sense" (Howells 186).

VII. Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation has been to demonstrate the influence of fairy tales in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. The heroine in her particular *Bildungsroman*, inhabits five different places – Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House and Ferndean – somewhat connected to a set of fairy tales. Stories such as "Cinderella", "the Ugly Duckling", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Beauty and the Beast" and "Bluebeard" accompany Jane along her path towards maturity, trying to counteract the power exerted by Christian ethics. With the introduction of these magical and ancient tales, the author tries to reformulate previous conventions about the role of women, not only in society but in literature. This essay posits that Brontë's use of these ancient stories, adorned with the conventions of female gothic, allows the author to break away from the fairy tales conventional motifs of a passive and powerless heroine as well as the Victorian stereotype of the Little Angel in House. Brontë's heroine develops a critical view of religion and becomes an independent Cinderella. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a fairy tale in itself, reality and imagination are fused creating a world where truth is hidden under the layer of fairy tales.

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