

The Profession of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising, and *Jane Eyre*

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SINCE ITS PUBLICATION in 1847, *Jane Eyre* has been read by its detractors and admirers as the portrayal of a willful female subject who claims her own identity. Readers have failed to note, however, that the most basic and encompassing marker of that identity, her name, tends to emerge when her will is most in abeyance. A key instance of Jane's involuntary self-promotion occurs toward the end of the novel, during her stay with the Rivers family, when St. John Rivers identifies Jane as the relative for whom "advertisements have been put in all the papers" (406). St. John recognizes her as the rightful heir of a fortune before Jane herself does. His proof of her identity consists of a signature in "the ravished margin of [a] portrait-cover," which Jane confronts as if it belonged to another: "He got up, held it close to my eyes: and I read, traced in Indian ink, in my own handwriting, the words 'JANE EYRE'" (407). Jane has failed to answer the advertisements of others, but her unwitting self-advertisement has found its ideal reader.

Jane construes her signature as "the work doubtless of some moment of abstraction" (407) and thus disowns it as the product of her own volition, even as it fulfills the conditions of her uncle's will and her own desires to be financially independent and to belong to a family. Although Jane has consistently refused to speak her personal story to St. John Rivers or his sisters, her unintentional signature publicizes it for her. Through the use of typographical conventions for designating titles—capitalization and quotation marks—the words "JANE EYRE" also emblemize the text itself, suggesting that *Jane Eyre* the novel, as well as Jane Eyre the character, is the "work . . . of some moment of abstraction."

In this essay, I analyze abstraction through close readings of scenes of speech, writing, and advertising in *Jane Eyre* and through a consideration of Charlotte Brontë's dealings in the Victorian literary market. The concept of abstraction is crucial to understanding the relation of writing

to female subjectivity in *Jane Eyre* and in Brontë's literary career because it mediates between apparently contradictory categories: embodiment and invisibility, self-effacement and self-advertisement, femininity and professional identity, fragmentation and wholeness, and profit and loss. *Abstraction* takes on four meanings in *Jane Eyre*, each instantiated by different aspects of the text and all related as ways in which Jane becomes a particular kind of female subject. First, Jane uses the term to mean an absence of will, mind, and attention, as she describes the semiconscious state in which she distractedly signs her real name on her sketch. Second, abstraction becomes a sublation and "separat[ion] from matter, from material embodiment" ("Abstraction," *OED*), which *Jane Eyre* represents as the displacement of an embodied self into writing and visual representation. Third, abstraction involves the externalization or objectification of the self into a partial image, sign, or object, which occurs in the novel as the splitting and alienation of Jane's self into portraits, truncated names, and instrumentalized body parts. Finally, abstraction is the synthesis of the particular into a more general concept or system based on resemblance rather than difference, a concept the novel exemplifies as Jane's rhetorical membership in a professional body of governesses.

The importance of abstraction in *Jane Eyre* is due in part to the text's contemporaneity with the height of British capitalism and imperialism, historical phenomena that moved spatial and human relations in the direction of greater and greater abstraction through developments in areas such as statistics, cartography, a bureaucratic civil service, and a manufacturing system that increasingly organized workers' space and time (Marx 88, 92, 96; Thompson; Poovey, *Social Body*). The capitalist ideology of political economy defined human relations and economic value in terms of abstractions—money, markets, and generalized exchange—while imperialism sought to extend the reach of those abstractions and often justified the domination of other peoples by claiming that Europeans had a greater capacity for abstract reasoning.

Capitalism's tendency toward abstraction necessarily transformed authorship and publishing during the first half of the nineteenth century. The

replacement of patronage with a middle-class market rendered authorship and the sale of books more rationalized, generalized, and generalizing (Heyck 24–28). Advertising rapidly developed as a means of regulating relations among publishers, authors, and consumers. Improved communications and the spread of railway transportation during the 1840s helped create an abstract space, based on imagined proximity rather than face-to-face contact, in which authors and publishers could locate, solicit, and supply a mass market (see Collins 19–20, 191; Sutherland 64). At the same time, a growing number of incipient professionals in fields other than writing sought to convince the public to purchase various types of expertise defined as abstract by uniform standards and credentials and by distinction from the more material skills and goods of artisans and tradespeople.

How did these tendencies toward abstraction affect middle-class women who worked either as writers or as governesses? In the final section of this paper I examine how Brontë negotiated the conflict between the embodiment attributed to women and the increasing abstraction of the publishing, advertising, and professional identities she sought to assume. Brontë's career as Currer Bell, like Jane Eyre's as Jane Elliott, transformed pseudonymity into a form of veiled self-advertisement, into a strategy for disowning the difficulties of female embodiment by exploiting the powers of abstraction.

My argument that Jane's and Brontë's subjectivities emerge most strongly during moments of abstraction and alienation is informed by both Lacanian and Marxist understandings of subjectivity. *Alienation* and *abstraction* are linked terms since alienation, in the structural sense of separation, is the process by which abstraction from the material or the particular occurs. For both Lacan and Marx, alienation is not the absolute loss of the thing alienated but a means of elaborating a relation to that thing. In the Lacanian notion of the mirror stage, subjects attain an illusory but powerful sense of coherence and selfhood only by alienating themselves into such nebulous objects as mirror images (Lacan 1–7). The mirror stage thus anticipates the symbolic stage, in which the subject is alienated into language, into abstract signifying systems and social exchanges, and into such

idealizations as the phallus, which represents lack and “can play its role only when veiled” (288). Lacan’s choice of the phallus as the sign of abstraction suggests that men and women have asymmetrical positions within the symbolic and that women, by lacking or being the phallus, may lack lack itself. The reading of *Jane Eyre* that follows shows how a female protagonist and female author might instead productively attain lack.

Abstraction and alienation are also key concepts in Marx’s readings of labor and of capitalist political economy. In translations of Marx’s writings, *alienation* can mean capitalists’ exclusive appropriation of wealth or the pain experienced by proletarianized workers. My use of the term combines Marx’s positive definition of human labor as a person’s ability to conceive of material products abstractly and to “contemplate . . . himself in a world that he has created” (77) with his critique of capitalism as an increasingly abstract system that subordinates labor, use value, and human relations to commodification and exchange value. Nineteenth-century capitalism worked to link these disparate views by making it possible for workers to perform productive labor (positive abstraction) only through alienation into the structures of political economy (negative abstraction). The subject of capitalism becomes the possessive individual, “human *qua* proprietor of his own person,” who belongs to a society that “is essentially a series of market relations between . . . free individuals” (Macpherson 158). The possessive individual exists by virtue of his ownership of self, labor, land, and objects, but this ownership is constituted less by appropriation than by the ability to alienate possessions through sale to others, which translates the self into money and exchange value. Only through alienation into such abstractions does the subject of political economy come into being.

Convention and law defined the alienated and possessive individual as male, but *Jane Eyre*’s representation of Jane’s abstraction extends to its heroine the imbricated gains and losses attendant on subjection to political economy. When Jane advertises for governess work, she alienates her embodied existence into abstractions (printed texts, truncated names) and thus arrogates to herself the normatively masculine conditions of agency in a

capitalist political economy, which simultaneously limit and enable agency by subordinating it to the abstract laws of the marketplace.

I

My reading of Brontë’s novel and of her strategies as a professional writer questions the critical school that has evaluated *Jane Eyre* as the story of its heroine’s successful attainment of “full personhood” and her transcendence of self-division and alienation. Interpreters of *Jane Eyre* have reacted to a tradition of condemning the heroine as an indecorously outspoken and desiring female subject, a tradition represented most famously by Elizabeth Rigby’s 1848 article in the conservative *Quarterly Review* chastising “a mere heathen mind which is a law unto itself” (173) and by Virginia Woolf’s disapproval of Jane’s and Brontë’s rage in *A Room of One’s Own* (71–73). The feminist critical turn of the 1970s and 1980s, which reclaimed the novel as a parable of female development, praised the “rebellious feminism” that earlier critics had denounced (Gilbert and Gubar 338). In reinterpreting Jane as moving toward “mature freedom” (339) and “a complete female identity” (Showalter 112), critics understood the novel as a cautionary tale about the perils of the split self and interpreted Bertha Mason as a symbol of the disruptive sexuality that Jane must either incorporate or expel.

In turn, however, feminists including Gayatri Spivak, Firdous Azin, and Joyce Zonana have criticized *Jane Eyre* for representing Bertha Mason, India, and “the East” as othered entities that the plot destroys or appropriates in order to make Jane a unified subject. Spivak criticizes the “wholeness” (244–45) that earlier feminist critics embraced; Azin contends that Jane is a “unified Enlightenment subject . . . [produced] by the invocation and subsequent obliteration of the Other subject, differentiated by class, race and gender” (88); and Zonana shows that Jane uses “feminist orientalism” to “secure more rights for herself,” the rights of the unified democratic subject (596). These critics persuasively explicate *Jane Eyre*’s imperialism, but they continue to claim that it consists in the creation of a subject free of internal contradictions; none considers how Jane Eyre’s transformation of her

self into an other suggests that the split subject and the imperialist-capitalist subject may be equivalent.

Yet scenes of writing in the novel depict Jane as being most successfully herself when she suppresses, evacuates, or commodifies her material being. Jane becomes an economic actor and the apparent author of her fate only when she alienates herself into writing, into advertisements, and into an abstract professional body. Writing and the written advertisement in *Jane Eyre* mediate between the embodied and the metaphysical, between the self and objects external to it, between the individual and the social. Writing, which always bears the traces of its own materiality, provides Jane with a medium for the successful transfer of her own embodiment, and alienation into an anonymous advertisement enables “J. E.” to cash in on her self even as she masks it.

Studies of nineteenth-century sexuality and gender ideology have shown that women were characterized by overidentification with their bodies (or were substituted for the very idea of the body) and that many discourses represented female bodies as glaringly visible, material spectacles (Foucault; Poovey, *Uneven Development* 24–50; Bruno 58–76; Shuttleworth). Although *Jane Eyre* begins with that version of female identity, the novel proposes abstraction as a technique for displacing the heroine’s potentially troublesome embodiment and sexualization onto the medium of writing (in the form of a printed newspaper advertisement) and thus for gaining the heroine a place in an economic market. Throughout the novel, Jane realizes her desires for liberty and mobility most successfully through advertising copy and the reproducibility of textuality and print. At crisis points in her narrative, she comforts herself with the knowledge that “let the worst come to the worst I can advertise again” (126); when Rochester’s unexplained absence from Thornfield distresses her, she responds by “involuntarily framing advertisements” (192). Jane uses the medium of the written advertisement to negotiate between absolute self-effacement, represented by Helen Burns, and spectacular, Byronic embodiment, personified by Rochester.

Jane first appears not as a writer, however, but as a speaker, one whose words are identified with her body and are vitiated by that material incarna-

tion. The novel’s second paragraph evokes Jane’s “consciousness of . . . physical inferiority” (39), and the novel’s first chapters establish Jane as a vocal child who cries out to her repressive Aunt Reed, “*Speak I must*” (68). Jane’s “fierce speaking” makes an impression on her auditors but garners her few concrete benefits, and indeed in those opening chapters Jane experiences attacks on her body that often stem from her verbal outbursts or from an insufficiently abstract relation to reading and writing (70). Jane is concerned with equating pictures and words and with making each sign system embody the meaning of the other; when she reads Bewick’s *History of British Birds* she focuses on how “[t]he words in these introductory pages [connect] themselves with the succeeding vignettes” and how “[e]ach picture [tells] a story” (40). That very text becomes a catastrophically material object when her cousin John uses the book to make her bleed. After ordering Jane to “[s]how the book,” John throws it at her, causing her to fall, cut herself, and become a mass of painful sensation: “every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. . . . I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear” (42–43). If those emotions enable Jane to speak up and fight back, her resistance leads only to more violent punishment.

At Lowood School, writing continues to serve as an instrument or weapon that makes girls’ bodies into the objects of sadistic visual attention. Jane attempts to hide her face from Mr. Brocklehurst behind her school slate, but, she reports, “[M]y treacherous slate somehow happened to slip from my hand, and falling with an obtrusive crash, directly [drew] every eye upon me” (97). As in the episode with John Reed, the visibility and the materiality of a written text or a writing instrument highlights and wounds an embodied self, for Jane becomes more conscious of her body after dropping her writing tablet: Miss Temple’s whispered words of comfort go “to my heart like a dagger,” and the other students’ “eyes [are] directed like burning-glasses against my scorched skin” (97–98). Later, Jane reacts with fury and horror when Helen Burns also endures a corporal punishment that involves

writing and must stand with “the word ‘Slatern’” written “in conspicuous characters” and “bound . . . like a phylactery round [her] forehead” (105).

In each of these instances, writing impresses itself on the girls in ways that make them public spectacles. When writing marks the body in *Jane Eyre*, it negates self-authorization. Helen’s willingness to have punishment written on her body culminates in her death by consumption. As Robert Keefe has suggested, Helen poses a seductive threat to Jane, “[f]or Helen Burns is a creature in love with death,” and “death holds a strong attraction for Jane” (98, 100). But Jane appears to take Helen as a countermodel: “the spectacle of [Helen’s] sad resignation gave me an intolerable pain at the heart” (106). At Gateshead, Jane contemplates “never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (47), but at Lowood she learns to adopt a more nuanced stance toward death that entails neither complete rejection nor utter embrace.¹ She begins to construct her subjectivity on the basis of an alien grammar and a system of representation without referents or material grounds: in the paragraphs that follow her account of Helen’s punishment, she writes, “I learned the first two tenses of the verb *Être*. . . . That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper . . . with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings. I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark” (106). As Jane articulates her being (*être*) in an alien language and shifts from material imaginings to more abstract, “ideal” representations, she also accepts Lowood for the liberty its negativity offers: she declares, “I would not now have exchanged Lowood for all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (106).

Jane orchestrates her departure from Lowood to seek work as a governess by reducing her ambitions to become a subject in her own right:

“I want [a position as governess] because it is of no use to want anything better. . . . A new servitude! There is something in that,” I soliloquized (mentally, be it understood; I did not talk aloud). “I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet. It is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment: . . . now all I want is to serve elsewhere. Can I not get so much of my own will!” (117–18)

Jane thus aims to achieve liberty through constraint and settles for a subjectivity of diminished expectations. In the context of her social disadvantages, this approach offers her a way to expand her field of action. Concurrently, her speech becomes less embodied as it takes the form of a silent inner monologue that she explicitly qualifies as mental. Jane’s rhetoric also becomes more abstract as she rejects the personifications of “Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment” for the abstraction of an abbreviated signature drawn from the corpus of the letters of her name.

Jane’s shift from internal speech to a printed advertisement also entails the mental abstraction that produces her involuntary signature at the Riverses’. She represents the advertisement as originating outside herself, during a suspension of conscious thought and deliberate effort. Strictly speaking, she does not decide to advertise at all: after “feverish” but “vain labour,” a “kind fairy in my absence had surely dropped the required suggestion on my pillow.” Jane’s will is thus carried out through a splitting of the self, first into an absent self and the fairy, then into two rhetorical interlocutors—a questioning “I” who lacks knowledge of advertising and a savvy respondent who addresses this “I” as “you”:

[A]s I lay down, [the suggestion] came quietly and naturally to my mind: “Those who want situations must advertise. . . .”

“How? I know nothing about advertising.”

Replies rose smooth and prompt now—

“You must enclose the advertisement and the money to pay for it under a cover directed to the editor of the *Herald*.” (118)

The momentary absence of Jane’s self and her subsequent splitting into the first and the second person constitute profitable forms of self-alienation because they condense her self into a text, “a clear, practical form” (118).

Jane recounts her advertisement as follows:

“A young lady accustomed to tuition” (had I not been a teacher two years?) “is desirous of meeting with a situation in a private family where the children are under fourteen.” (I thought that as I was barely eigh-

teen, it would not do to undertake the guidance of pupils nearer my own age.) "She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music" (in those days, reader, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments would have been held tolerably comprehensive). "Address J. E., Post Office, Lowton, —Shire."
(118–19)

The juxtaposition of the advertisement's text, which is isolated within quotation marks, and the parenthetical asides that pose rhetorical questions, qualify the advertisement's statements, and directly address the reader, highlights the advertisement's nonreferential status: Jane's advertisement does not reflect her person; it constructs her as a third-person object, a "young lady," and alienates her name into mere initials. Yet the near anonymity of "J. E." enables Jane to make a name for herself: *je* spells "I" in French, the foreign language that she later speaks with her pupil and that she is studying when she learns "the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*."² And when Jane arrives at Millcote Inn on her way to Thornfield, the waiter who "answer[s] her summons" asks, "Is your name Eyre, miss?" (125). As a result of her quasi-anonymous advertisement, Jane's name becomes a question to which she can affirmatively respond. Just before she is inspired to advertise, Jane sits in her room at Lowood School and hears "a bell . . . [that] called me downstairs" (117); after she has framed her ad, however, it is Jane who "ring[s] the bell" at Millcote Inn, Jane who summons both a prospective consumer and her self.³ While her advertisement expresses her desire to serve, it solicits and produces a buyer to pay for her services; by invoking that buyer, Jane also invokes her self as a worker with services to sell.

The advertisement's involuntary appearance and abbreviated, semianonymous signature neutralize the danger and unsuitability of female self-promotion. Jane commodifies herself while avoiding the stigma of prostitution often attached to governesses (Poovey, *Uneven Development* 129–31), indeed to all working women and to all professionals who put prices on personal services. Alienation into the third and second persons and into written signs does not disable or degrade Jane. Instead, she profits from this opportunity to differ from her em-

bodied, particular self and others' views of her by entering what she represents as a professional body of governesses.

Jane Eyre's implied arguments for female professionalization reside in the form and content of the notorious pronouncement Jane utters when she mounts the rooftop of Thornfield: "Anybody may blame me who likes" (140).⁴ After invoking an audience whose members' individuality has been generalized into "anybody," Jane outlines her desire to participate in a social space that exceeds the bounds of her body by imagining "a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen" and "more of intercourse with my kind" (140–41). Although Jane's language of romantic plenitude at first implies that she seeks an emotional outlet for feeling, for "exultant movement, . . . trouble, . . . [and] life," her concluding arguments present feeling as an abstract index of humanity that serves as the basis for demanding equal opportunity in the realm of work: "women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do. . . . 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." Addressing a generalized "anyone," Jane invokes the "millions" of women who resemble her and the "masses" of people with whom these women share their discontent (141). As critics have noted, Jane's use of the terms *millions* and *masses* aligns women with workers (Kaplan 172), but it also rhetorically connects women to the "wave of association" that in England was often the first sign of formal professionalization (Larson 5). Jane's generalization of her listeners and of herself as a speaker shifts attention from her individual situation to the shared condition of a collective body, a nascent professional entity.

When *Jane Eyre* was written, real professional opportunities did not exist for governesses, but the rhetorical force the novel confers on this professional body is reflected in Rigby's review, which uses the novel as an occasion to insist that middle-class women confine themselves to unpaid domestic labor. Rigby understands Jane's objection to the gap between existing female capacities and

nonexistent professional opportunities as advocacy of the professionalization of governesses. After criticizing Jane as “not precisely the mouthpiece one would select to plead the cause of governesses” (176) and denouncing the novel’s implied arguments for the professionalization of governess work, Rigby’s review rejects the Queen’s College proposal to license governesses:

What we . . . require and seek for our children is not a learned machine stamped and ticketed with credentials like a piece of patent goods, but rather a woman endowed with that sound principle, refinement, and sense, which no committee of education in the world could ascertain or certify. . . . [N]o governess can teach an art or accomplishment like a regular professor.⁵ (184–85)

Rigby praises governesses for qualities “far too precious . . . to have any stated market value,” but her compliment takes a fundamentally negative form: “no governess can teach . . . like a regular professor.” She argues against any institutionalized form of credentialization and approves governesses’ inability to form professional or trade associations: “the governess [has] no means of resistance. Workmen may rebel, and tradesmen may combine . . . but the governess has no refuge—no escape; she is a needy lady” (179).

In disapproving of the automatization and commodification of women as “patent goods,” Rigby opposed other aspects of professionalization for women. Although professionals did not deal in commodities, they commodified themselves. The term *professionalism*, as opposed to *amateurism*, signified payment for and standardization of services, the abstraction of work into the universal equivalent of money, and the subjection of work to systematic criteria, those “homogeneous and universalistic principles” used to assess and compare different members of the same profession (Larson 13). The generalization inherent in professionalism thus exemplified Locke’s sense of abstraction in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*: “This is called abstraction, whereby ideas, taken from particular beings, become general representatives of all of the same kind” (“Abstraction,” *Century Dictionary*). Professionals also generated and so-

licit an abstract market of “wide and anonymous publics,” a process made possible by the development of railways, telegraph systems, a modernized postal service, and improved roads (Larson 10). In scorning the equation of women and “patent goods,” Rigby placed women above the abstractions of exchange value, standardization, and rationalization deemed necessary for professionalization. However, by equating women with the unmeasurable qualities of “sound principle, refinement, and sense,” Rigby unwittingly suggested that women already *were* professionals, since in contrast to tradespeople, who trafficked in material goods and “the external wants or occasions of men,” professionals dealt in intangible knowledge such as medical theory or the principles of architectural design (“Profession”). In this sense a profession entailed a greater degree of abstraction than the physical labor of a surgeon or builder did (Perkin 258; Kaye), and professionals claimed to have expertise in “an abstract system of knowledge,” which for Andrew Abbott “best identifies the professions” (8).

Whereas Rigby’s review warned that professionalizing governesses would mechanize women and make governesses too powerfully abstract, other writers justified their opposition to professionalization by identifying governesses with the excessive embodiment of “unregulated female sexuality” (Poovey, *Uneven Development* 131). Although not sexualized to the degree that working-class nannies and nursemaids were, governesses often received “dishonourable proposals [and] insulting attentions” and figured in pornographic writings (Adburgham 87; see also Blessington 41, 184; Peterson 15; Renton 191). Advertisements in the *London Times* stipulated that in addition to being well-versed in academic subjects, a candidate “must . . . be lady-like in manners and appearance,” “her person and manners lady-like,” and must supply “the fullest and most explicit communications as to age, health, &c” (Advertisement, 6 Jan. 1840; Advertisement, 24 July 1840; Advertisement, 12 Apr. 1841). By placing the governess’s physical characteristics alongside her pedagogical accomplishments as if the two belonged to the same register, such advertisements suggested that the governess

exemplified her lessons in her person as much as she transmitted knowledge contained in books.

Jane Eyre thus gains professional status not only because she addresses a generalized group of peers but also because she eludes physical scrutiny, advertising her accomplishments in print without reference to her appearance. Throughout her narrative, most famously during her brief engagement to Edward Rochester, she resists identification with femininity as an embodied spectacle. In her conflicts and triumphs after her departure from Lowood, Jane draws not on what Rigby calls her merely "moderate capital of good looks" but on what an *Athenaeum* reviewer describes as her "capital of principle" (Rev. of *Jane Eyre*). The metaphor of "capital" indicates an abstract quantity separable from the self; the attribute of "principle," a spiritual quality distinct from the body.

Jane Eyre culminates with a final instance of abstraction: Jane's instrumentalization through marriage to the blind and crippled Edward Rochester. Although Rochester eventually regains his sight, his right hand cannot be restored. As Jane concludes her tale, she reports, "I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand" (476). Critics have often interpreted Rochester's blinding and mutilation as a form of symbolic castration, but Jane appears to adopt—rather than to triumph over—her husband's bodily fragmentation by transforming herself into a prosthetic part.⁶ Her insistence on the continuity and permanence of her position as a writing instrument and on her absorption into her husband's body ("I am *still his* right hand") and the homophony of *right* with *write* ("I am still his *write* hand") highlight the place of writing in Jane's progress. By using writing to abstract her body into a mechanized body part, Jane accedes to sovereignty through service and becomes the scribe of both her own and her husband's stories.

II

Jane's strategies for abstracting herself into texts and writing instruments parallel Brontë's strategies for advertising herself as the author of *Jane Eyre*. Even though Brontë wrote fiction as a professional author and Jane only advertises herself as a governess, both author and character represent them-

selves through abstractions in order to bypass the scrutiny to which women were subject as writers or governesses.

As Jennifer Wicke's work on Charles Dickens has shown, authorship without advertising was impossible during the 1840s, a period that witnessed "the confluence of advertising and literature" (21). During the first half of the nineteenth century, "[a]uctioneers and booksellers were among the heaviest advertisers in terms of the number of advertisements taken" (Nevett 29). Indeed, an 1831 *Edinburgh Review* article about the taxes on literature surmised that "[a] third part of the advertisement duty is . . . derived from announcements of books" ("Observations" 434), and an 1843 article on advertising noted that although "no trade, profession, or condition in life is entirely free from [puffery] . . . we are by no means sure that [authors] would not take precedence of even quack-doctors and auctioneers" (Rev. of *César Birotteau* 4, 13) in terms of money and effort expended on advertising. As Charles Mitchell stated in an 1846 article titled "The Philosophy of Advertising," "It may now be laid down as an established axiom, that no trade or profession can be followed advantageously without some species of advertising" (Linton 29).

When the authors of the works advertised were women, however, the necessary self-promotion of advertising collided with the self-effacement demanded of them. The unpleasant glare of publicity often hampered female writers, even those who exercised their skills circumspectly in private, and the frequent equation of female writers with the sexualized, embodied figures of the prostitute and the fallen woman belied the increased rationalization of publishing (Mermin xiv–xvii, 17, 21, 39).⁷

Brontë's own career illustrates the double standard used to evaluate men's and women's writing. When critics assumed that Currer Bell was a man, they rarely speculated on his experiences or physicality. When they assumed that Currer Bell was a woman, however, they imagined an autobiographical identity between the author and her heroines and remarked on the traces her embodied experience supposedly left in the text. In a review of *Jane Eyre* for *Fraser's Magazine*, G. H. Lewes wrote that "the writer is evidently a woman" and concluded that the work was "an autobiography

... in the actual suffering and experience" (Allott 84). Reviews of *Shirley* (1849) trumpeted the appearance of what the *Daily News* reviewer called "a female pen" and rhetorically stripped the author down to her female attributes: "that Currer Bell is petticoated will be . . . little doubted by the readers of her work" (Allott 118). The *Atlas* remarked that "there is woman stamped on every page of the present fiction," and the *Standard of Freedom* wrote that "[t]he hand of a woman is unmistakably impressed on the present brilliant production" (Allott 120, 133), while the *Critic* highlighted the notion that a woman's text did not abstract from experience but directly embodied it:

[W]e have come to the conclusion . . . that Currer Bell is a lady. The female heart is here anatomized with a minuteness of knowledge of its most delicate fibres, which could only be obtained by one who had her own heart under inspection. The emotions so wondrously described were never *imagined*: they must have been *felt*. (Allott 141; emphasis mine)

Critics have argued that the tendency to see the woman in the work fostered the use of pseudonyms as shields from personal remarks, but few have asked how nineteenth-century women writers simultaneously publicized their works. Similarly, while scholars have shown that it was difficult for women to think of themselves as professional writers, less attention has been paid to how women nevertheless established professional relationships with publishers and reviewers. According to Mary Poovey, male writers of the 1840s resisted the alienation inherent in the professionalization of writing by modeling their work on an idealized version of women's domestic labor; the entry of women into the literary field was thus particularly problematic, for it threatened to evacuate the category of nonalienated female labor (*Uneven Development* 124–25).⁸ In Poovey's analysis, alienation signifies a painful self-estrangement and psychological affliction (121, 125). That notion of alienation, stemming from Marx's concept of *Entfremdung* (Axelos xxxi–xxxii), points to the emotional and physical state either of a sensationalized body in pain or of a body painfully severed from consciousness (Cvetkovich 174, 179). In this sense,

alienation describes both the proletarian worker's condition under capitalism and Jane's suffering in the first chapters of *Jane Eyre*; it posits an identification with the body rather than an abstraction from it.

In *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*, N. N. Feltes applies the notion of alienation as *Entfremdung* to Victorian publishing history and to women's use of masculine pseudonyms. He describes a transition from a petty-commodity mode of production, in which authors maintained some direct control over their product, to an alienated capitalist mode of production, which proletarianized authors, gave capitalist publishers a monopoly over the means of production and distribution, and transformed books into "commodity-texts" characterized by alienability (6, 8). Feltes's discussion of George Eliot, however, replaces the general alienation of all writers with the specific suffering and alienation of female writers. Feltes maintains that Marian Evans took on the masculine pseudonym George Eliot as her "professional name" because of "her particular woman's material need"; her writing name "specifies the effect of social coercion enforcing feminine subordination on the level of production" and signifies her exclusion from any "professional title" (38, 40, 43). Although Feltes acknowledges the extent to which George Eliot attained professional status and profits, he sees Marian Evans and George Eliot as representatives of a femaleness and a professionalism radically opposed to each other. Feltes's argument that the masculine pseudonym referred to the alienation-as-suffering of the female writer's body helps explain how advertising could hamper women's attempts to exploit publishing's opportunities for profitable alienation-as-abstraction. A woman writer could not promote her work as Dickens did when he gave widely publicized readings of his books (Wicke 51), and publicity from reviews often reduced women to a sensationalized femininity that militated against claims to professional status. Distressed by reviewers' insistence on the feminine garb, hand, and heart of *Shirley*'s author, Brontë was driven to exclaim, "Why can they not be content to take Currer Bell for a man?" (Allott 117).

However, Feltes's interpretation of the masculine pseudonym as a form of negative alienation

occludes the extent to which a woman writer could circumvent the pitfalls of publicity by using a masculine or ambiguous pseudonym. The name Curren Bell enabled Brontë to materialize her professional self in abstract form, to put herself forward while simultaneously receding from view, a paradoxical strategy of self-promotion through self-effacement that is exemplified in an incident from Brontë's juvenile writing career. In 1837, the young Brontë wrote to the poet laureate Robert Southey and received a discouraging reply that included a piece of advice she apparently acted on throughout her career: "the less you aim at celebrity, the more likely you will be to deserve and finally to obtain it" (Spark 64). Southey presumed that his correspondent had used a pseudonym, although she had in fact signed her given name. In replying to Southey, Brontë accepted his censure but also followed a golden rule of advertising expounded (sarcastically) in an 1843 *Edinburgh Review* article: "never . . . omit an opportunity of placing your name in printed characters before the world" (Rev. of *César Birotteau* 2). Ostensibly an apology for her ambition, Brontë's reply multiplied the very signature whose authenticity and value Southey had placed in doubt: "The signature which you suspected of being fictitious is my real name," she wrote. "Again, therefore, I must sign myself, 'C. Brontë.'" That proclamation of her name was followed by a postscript in which she apologized for writing at all—and then signed her initials yet again (Spark 68).

By the time Brontë published her novels, she had chosen to efface her given name completely in order to further the success of her writing name. "If I could," she wrote in 1841, "I would always work in silence and obscurity, and let my efforts be known by their results" (Gaskell 221); after publishing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë exclaimed in correspondence with a reader for the firm of Smith, Elder, "What author would be without the advantage of being able to walk invisible?" (Symington and Wise 2: 174). Indeed, Brontë split herself into Charlotte Brontë and Curren Bell. Charlotte Brontë, the real author, masqueraded in business letters as an intermediary who brokered the Bells' poems. In that guise, she implied to publishers "that she was not acting on her own behalf" yet suggested a nominal

rather than a corporeal status for the Bells "by signing her correspondence 'In the name of C., E., and A. Bell'" (Gaskell 292).

To the extent that her pseudonym enabled her to produce herself as a published writer, as a brand name, Brontë engaged in a process of self-construction deemed a crucial aspect of professionalism (Larson 14). Professional writers depended on the commodification of their names and on the alienation of their books into a network of advertisements through which the names and the books mutually promoted each other. Advertising thus abstracted the author's body into a series of texts, and the written advertisements could even be "decorporealizing" (Wicke 53) because of their distance from the icons, gestures, and speech of earlier advertising modes (Sampson 19–22). Advertisements were also abstract by virtue of their emphasis on form and effect over content (Elliott 117–19), their focus on exchange and sale rather than use, and their generalized address to an anonymous and global public (Linton 30).

Brontë's pseudonym inserted her into and alluded to the literary marketplace and its advertising system. Although pseudonyms seem to mask authors' identities, an overtly artificial one like Curren Bell, which advertises its own fictiveness, constituted a common nineteenth-century ploy known as the "puff mysterious," which aroused readers' curiosity and interest by making reference to an anonymous, "unknown" author (Hindley and Hindley 92–93).⁹ The name Bell itself also signified advertising and publishing to the mid-Victorian public. *Bell's Universal Advertiser* was the foremost advertising newspaper of Brontë's time, and the name Bell was attached to several popular weekly and penny newspapers in the 1830s, including *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, which was "chiefly read in the country" and which carried many book reviews (Grant 133).¹⁰ Stuart and John Bell, the founders of the Bell newspapers, were successful publicists at the end of the eighteenth century; John Bell launched the *Morning Post* "as a Daily Advertising Pamphlet" and also issued *The Universal Catalogue* (a catalog of books that was subsequently called *The British Library*) in 1772 (Elliott 149). Bell was also the name attached to a series of cheap nineteenth-century reprints of poetry and

drama. And an 1875 *History of Advertising* gave *bellmen* as the name for town criers, who advertised news and goods well into the nineteenth century (Sampson 59).

Brontë's choice of the sexually ambiguous first name Currer enabled her to generalize her authorial power in a way that she believed a feminine name could not. To be sure, as Gaye Tuchman suggests, female authorship had a certain market value until the 1870s, and male writers often assumed feminine pseudonyms (48–55). However, that value was limited to the specifically feminine sensibility implied by a feminine name; it rarely translated into the universal currency of genius. Brontë advertised an authorship without reference to a sexed body in order to avoid the invidious standards used to evaluate women's writings, as she indicates in describing her and her sisters' decision to adopt pen names:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because . . . we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice. (Gaskell 286)

By choosing “ambiguous” names, the Brontës prevented attention from fixing on the bodies suggested by feminine or masculine names; indeed, Brontë notes that the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton “veiled [her and her sisters'] own names,” thus emphasizing the nominal and figurative rather than the material and personified existence of the Brontë sisters.

Although “averse to personal publicity” and anxious to avoid any “personal interview” with prospective publishers (Symington and Wise 2: 87), Brontë avidly sought the impersonal publicity provided by writing and encouraged advertisements of Currer Bell's work. She was familiar with advertising rhetoric from her earliest days as a reader and writer; her and her siblings' juvenilia “frequently imitate[d] the format of . . . [news]papers and their specific advertising copy” (Shuttleworth 48–49), and Brontë used that knowledge in her tenacious correspondence with Aylott and Jones,

the firm that printed the Bells' poetry. Written under the cover of Currer Bell, her letters determined the volume's price, its advertising costs, the periodicals to which copies were to be sent for review, and the extracts of reviews to be used in subsequent advertisements (Symington and Wise 2: 89–135). After *Jane Eyre's* publication, Brontë also wrote at length to her publisher George Smith about advertising strategies and sought recognition for the name Currer Bell (2: 147–52). Her suggestions to her publishers resembled those of successful entrepreneurs, who counseled that advertisements helped create the objects they advertised. For example, Josiah Wedgwood, a pioneer in the use of advertising, noted that objects “want a name—a name has a wonderful effect I assure you— . . . it will be absolutely necessary for us to mark them, and advertise that mark” (McKendrick 112, 124).¹¹ Although Brontë told her publishers that she thought reviews were more valuable than advertisements, most reviews differed little from advertisements in purpose, since both sought to affect sales and circulation (Collins 191). The *Edinburgh Review* called favorable reviews “indorsements” (Rev. of *César Birotteau* 14–15) and accused them of being veiled advertisements; indeed, until 1853 favorable book reviews were taxed as though they were advertisements (Turner 82).

Brontë produced names for both herself and her works and used those names to advertise each other; all Currer Bell's books published after 1847 were labeled “by the author of *Jane Eyre*.” Brontë suggested to Smith, Elder that publication of *The Professor* would give the name Currer Bell a recognition value that would help to sell subsequent works by that author. She viewed her works as mutual advertisements for one another: *The Professor* “might be published without serious risk” because the “more striking and exciting” *Jane Eyre* would follow; the success of the second work might increase if its author's name were circulated through the publication of the first; the first novel would retrospectively ride on the second's success, and “thus the interest of the public (if any interest was aroused) might not be suffered to cool” (Gaskell 317). Brontë's self-contained and self-sustaining advertising system was designed to have bodily effects on an abstract public, “arousing” and heating

its interest. Writing from behind a disembodied name, Brontë could then relish the materiality of her books, describing them as if they had bodies. On receiving the first copies of *Jane Eyre* she thus wrote to her publishers, "You have given the work every advantage which good paper, clean type, and a *seemly outside* can supply . . ." (Gaskell 321; emphasis mine).

Although advertisements for *Jane Eyre* named Currer Bell as the author of the novel, the title page of the first edition designated Currer Bell as the editor of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. The editorial device came from earlier forms of the novel in which authors posed as editors to lend veracity to their tales and to authorize the public circulation of autobiographical confessions, whose content required privacy and anonymity. *Jane Eyre's* editor, however, never appears within the work's frame. Currer Bell thus takes on an invisible, phantom existence as an abstract convention that saves Jane from being the author of the text: without the words "Edited by Currer Bell," the reader would assume that Jane Eyre herself had written the eponymous text subtitled *An Autobiography*. Jane Eyre and Currer Bell cover for each other: Jane's story can be published only under the protection of a nonfeminine name, while Currer Bell attains the invisibility that Brontë sought for that name by disappearing within the text that Jane Eyre writes. Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, and Currer Bell all publish under cover of a veiled visibility that exploits print's erasure of the author's body to authorize women's professional participation in a market. This abstraction into market value is both a cause and an effect of capitalism's political economy, and in exploiting that economy and allowing it to exploit them, Currer Bell, Jane Eyre, and Charlotte Brontë share the limitations that Jane avows when she states, "I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (57). If *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Brontë retain a place in a posthumanist and postcolonial feminist canon, it is because they reveal the lures as well as the limits, the profits as well as the costs to themselves and to others, of a woman's alienation into the capitalist marketplace and its advertisements.

Notes

¹For a detailed discussion of Jane's attitude toward death and of death's imbrication with acts of writing and with texts, see Susan Derwin 98–108.

²Mark W. Hennelly, Jr., also notes that "J. E." suggests *je* and calls this "text-self equation" one of the novel's many "reflexive signatures of self-hood" (703).

³London *Times* advertisements from the early 1840s show that governesses and employers advertised in roughly equal numbers; Jane's decision to advertise for an employer rather than to answer a preexisting advertisement thus represents a deliberate effort to call her future employer into existence—the desire Jane serves is an alienated version of her own.

⁴Virginia Woolf viewed this passage as the disfigurement of the novel by an excessively personal rage (71–73), while subsequent critics have been drawn to the scene's cathartic release of anger.

⁵Although established in 1841, the Governesses' Benevolent Institution was less a professional entity than an employment agency and charitable resource until 1848, when its head, F. D. Maurice, founded Queen's College in London to train governesses. In an 1846 essay "On the Relative Social Position of Mothers and Governesses," Anna Jameson emphasized that governesses did not belong to a profession (156, 159). Although Rigby's review nominally referred to the governess "profession" (177, 180), governess work was not professionalized in the 1840s, as architecture was (Kaye), nor did it conform to what Magali Larson identifies as the sociological-ideological definition of professionalism: there was no qualifying exam, standardized course of study, mechanism for exclusion or for recruitment of members, control over fees, autonomy, or prestige (xi, x).

⁶Derwin interprets Rochester's mutilation as a displacement and literalization of the "symbolic embodiment" and "symbolic violence" Jane undergoes in the course of her "achievement of selfhood" (97–98).

⁷For an interpretation of the author-prostitute equation that links prostitution not to embodiment but to the abstraction and alienation of exchange, see Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot" 41–42; "Masked Woman" 27–28.

⁸Women as well as men, however, often modeled their authorial efforts on familial labor, service, and self-sacrifice and resolved the conflict between alienated market production and nonalienated domestic service by assimilating one form of work to the other. Brontë, for example, reconciled her displays of talent with a self-effacing desire to serve, acknowledging Elizabeth Gaskell's dictum that the woman writer must "not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others" (Gaskell 334; see also Mermin 18).

⁹Writing about the pseudonym George Eliot, Alexander Welsh notes that "[p]seudonymity . . . cannot be regarded as solely a defensive maneuver . . . since it immediately fuels speculation and publicity for a successful book" (Mermin 155n11).

¹⁰An 1843 journal article reported that of 616 families who read newspapers in a London parish inhabited by domestic servants and laborers, 283 read *Bell's Weekly Dispatch*, and 23 read *Bell's Life in London* (Altick 342–43); *Bell's Life in Lon-*

don had an average weekly circulation between 17,700 and 21,000, and the name Bell was also attached to a penny weekly, *Bell's Penny Dispatch*, and, as already noted, to *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, which Altick calls the "Tory farmer's old standby" (343, 349). These figures may not be accurate, and I have found no direct evidence that the Brontë family received a Bell paper, but beyond any doubt, the name Bell was overdetermined and easily available as a signifier of newspapers, advertising, and literary editions.

¹¹Daniel Stuart, the proprietor of the *Morning Post*, stated that "[a]dvertisements act and react. They attract readers [and] promote circulation, and circulation attracts advertisements" (Wood 81).

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