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FOLKLORE AND IDENTITY IN *JANE EYRE* AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

by

AMY M. WILSON

Under the Direction of Lindsey Eckert, PhD

ABSTRACT

Charlotte and Emily Brontë both incorporate folk traditions into their novels, which help define and complicate notions of class and identity in their work. This thesis examines the folklore of the novels, including customs, folktales, and material folk culture, and explores how these elements work within the worlds created by the Brontës. While scholars such as Micael Clarke, Lauren Lepow, and Heta Pyrhönen have established the presence of folk tale, ballad, and supernatural motifs in the Brontës' work, few have discussed the ways in which folk culture, in particular, underscores the notions of class and identity.

INDEX WORDS: Folklore, Folk tales, Material folk culture, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Yorkshire

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by

AMY M. WILSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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FOLKLORE AND IDENTITY IN *JANE EYRE* AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this to my mother in thanks for her constant support.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since their publication in 1847, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* have inspired a wealth of scholarship, much of which addresses the novels' themes of class and identity. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane spends much of the novel unaware of her true social status, uncomfortably shifting between the working class and the upper class she was born into. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar allude to this when they identify "Jane's anomalous, orphaned position in society" as a significant source of drama in the novel (341). Class is an even more blatant source of friction and social commentary in *Wuthering Heights*; Abbie Cory describes the novel as "anti-hierarchical" and goes on to state that it "reproduces and disseminates the momentary resistances to class and gender-based systems of power that were part of the social milieu of the era" (6). The class disparities between the Lintons, the Earnshaws, and Heathcliff are one cause of Heathcliff's enmity toward both families, and he exacts his revenge by trying to tear down those distinctions. In my thesis I argue that Charlotte and Emily Brontë define and complicate these notions of class and identity by incorporating folk traditions into their novels. I examine the folklore of the novels, including customs, folktales, and material folk culture, and I explore how these elements work within the worlds created by the Brontës. While scholars such as Micael Clarke, Lauren Lepow, and Heta Pyrhönen have established the presence of folk tale, ballad, and supernatural motifs in both novels, few have discussed the ways in which folk culture underscores the notions of class and identity.

My methodology combines folklore studies with historicist-inspired close readings of both novels. Chapter One features the oral tradition and folk arts. I include an examination of folk tales and folk beliefs such as superstition, omens, and naming practices in *Jane Eyre* and suggest that these call attention to identity and class in the novel. I focus primarily on *Jane Eyre*

in this chapter, since scholars such as Monica Germanà and Jacqueline Simpson have examined the supernatural elements of *Wuthering Heights* at length. Chapter Two then centers on material folk culture and explores how elements such as folk architecture, furniture, and foodways contribute to concepts of identity and class in both novels. These individual elements of folklore, their common background in the oral tradition, and their unique connections to the specific culture and history of West Yorkshire—the region where the Brontës lived and which they wrote about—offer a compelling context in which to study Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s work. My examination reveals the many folk traditions Charlotte and Emily Brontë weave into their novels to call attention to their complex dynamics and how these elements interact with class and identity in their writing. Studying the folklore of the novels in conjunction with the questions of class and identity raised in their work will reveal that despite the then-controversial nature of the novels, at their cores both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* also retain regional folk traditions.

Much of the scholarship concerning folklore in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* has examined folk tale or fairy tale motifs in the novel. Many of these studies consider *Jane Eyre* as a retelling of folktales such as “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast,” or “Bluebeard.” Micael Clarke, for example, has established that Charlotte Brontë likely read the Märchen and household tales of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and Charles Perrault, either in their original German and French or in English translations. Jane Freeman examines the similarities between Jane, Cinderella, and *King Lear*’s Cordelia, while Jen Cadwallader argues that *Jane Eyre* is a retelling of “Beauty and the Beast,” with Jane’s lack of beauty intended as social critique. Heta Pyrhönen, meanwhile, situates the novel as a retelling of “Bluebeard,” with Rochester as the infamous villain who imprisons his wife in a locked chamber. Melissa Dickson examines the connections between *Jane Eyre* and the *Arabian Nights* in terms of agency and power,

particularly for storytellers like Jane and Scheherazade. These studies will provide groundwork for Chapter One as I discuss the relationship of folklore and identity in *Jane Eyre*.

The folktales these scholars have connected to *Jane Eyre* are not native to England. Katharine Briggs points out in her introduction to *Folktales of England* that “fairy tales of the old Märchen type have almost disappeared from oral tradition in England” (xxiii). However, the concept of identity is central to each. Rather than mapping the novel onto one particular tale as previous scholars have done, in Chapter One I assess how Jane’s role is complicated by the question of her identity. I also consider the novel in conjunction with the idea of the identity test common in folktales. This type of test takes on many different forms in folklore; perhaps the most familiar is the slipper test in Charles Perrault’s version of “Cinderella.” In this variant of the folktale, Cinderella must prove her identity by trying on the slipper she left behind when fleeing the ball. Similar identity tests appear in other versions of the Cinderella tale and in other folktales and ballads as well. For instance, many variants of the Scottish folk ballad “Tam Lin” recorded by Francis James Child include a form of identity challenge. In this ballad, a young woman rescues her lover from a fairy queen, who intends to use him to pay the fairies’ tithe to Hell. Lauren Lepow points out that at the beginning of “Tam Lin,” the title character intercepts the young woman, demanding her name and challenging her right to be in Carterhaugh (112-13). Lepow suggests that rather than a passive heroine such as Cinderella, who is largely acted upon by others, Brontë identifies Jane with headstrong, active women like Janet in the ballad (113). However, Jane does not fit tidily into either role; she is a more complex and nuanced character. Rather than attempt to fit her into one characterization or another as other scholars have done, I instead study how Jane displays a blend of characteristics drawn from such folktales and ballads.

I argue that this blend of influences shape how Jane is acted upon and how she learns to assert her own identity.

Other folk tales and folk beliefs are evident in *Jane Eyre*, as well, and they serve to illuminate not only the culture of the time and place in which the novel is set, but also Jane's sense of self. Sarah Wakefield suggests that Jane's status as "other" on the border between the working and middle classes causes Rochester discomfort that he tries to mask by referring to her with fairy names and imagery (66). In their meeting at Thornfield Hall the day after his horse slips on the ice, Rochester asks Jane if she were "waiting for [her] people when [she] sat on that stile," referring to the "men in green" of English folklore (Brontë 122). He continues such references later in this scene when he is looking at Jane's portfolio; Rochester describes the thoughts behind her artwork as "elfish" (126). Such naming continues throughout the novel, but Wakefield points out that it is particularly prevalent in the chapters following Rochester and Jane's engagement. In this section she cites "the most instances of folklore-naming, with numerous mentions of elves, fairies, sprites, witches, and sylphs" (69). In one such example the morning after they agree to marry, Rochester comments on Jane's appearance and asks, "Is this my pale, little elf? Is this my Mustard-Seed?" alluding to the fairy from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as he identifies Jane with these supernatural beings (Brontë 258; Shuttleworth 474). Even when Jane's caution leads her to hold him at arm's length, Rochester's sarcastic, mocking endearments are drawn from similar origins: Brontë writes that "he had no such honeyed words as 'love' and 'darling' on his lips: the best words at my service were 'provoking puppet,' 'malicious elf,' 'sprite,' 'changeling,' &c" (276). Jacqueline Simpson discusses other instances of such naming practices, observing that Rochester uses such language to refer to himself on occasion (50). Jane ultimately rejects being identified with such

otherworldly beings, however, and her character is too flawed and human to fit within the relatively narrow confines of the fairy-tale heroine. In my first chapter I propose that she rejects these labels not just out of pragmatism or rationality, but in part because she still has a healthy respect for the folk beliefs she was exposed to as a child.

The servants at Gateshead Hall expose young Jane to a variety of omens, superstitions, dreams, and tales of supernatural beings, both unconsciously and explicitly in the form of warnings about her bad behavior. Folk beliefs such as these provide a way for groups to pass on traditional values or warnings from generation to generation. The methods used to share this information in the novel vary, as Simpson observes, but echo Elizabeth Gaskell's account of the Brontë children learning local folklore from the family servant.<sup>1</sup> Folk beliefs such as these are evident not only when Jane meets Rochester for the first time, but also when they are reunited. Jane refuses St. John Rivers in part because she hears Rochester's voice calling to her at the crucial moment (419). I argue that the stubborn persistence of these beliefs helps to shape Jane's adult identity and, like her lingering discomfort when mingling with members of the upper classes, contributes to her liminal status treading the fairly rigid line between classes. This is especially clear in the deliberate choices Jane makes when she joins Rochester's fashionable party in the drawing room, taking Mrs. Fairfax's advice to avoid a formal entrance and choosing her occupation with care (Brontë 169-74).

Mary Poovey has examined Jane's liminality and observes that governesses of the time were theoretically responsible for upholding the domestic ideal of marriage and motherhood, but they were simultaneously viewed as a danger to this ideal because they did not fulfill it

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<sup>1</sup> More recent biographers such as Juliet Barker and Claire Harman contend that Gaskell suppressed or altered a good deal of information in her biography in order to present Charlotte Brontë in a more sympathetic light. However, they do not contradict Gaskell about Aykroyd's role in passing along local lore.

themselves. Jane, of course, does not really belong to this liminal space, as she is eventually revealed to be an heiress. However, for a significant portion of the novel Jane identifies more closely and is more comfortable with the lower classes; the folklore she learns from sources like Bessie appears to play a role in Jane's attitude toward class, and I will examine this connection more closely. While Poovey does not discuss folklore in her essay, Jane's lingering belief in the lore she was exposed to as a child appears to factor into her liminal status. Jane continues to value these beliefs and does not seek to abandon them as she takes up her rightful place in society; rather, I argue, she demands that society—and Rochester—accept her without reservation.

In Chapter Two, I shift from this discussion of the oral tradition in *Jane Eyre* to explore the material folk culture of both novels. In *Wuthering Heights*, in particular, Emily Brontë's representations of material folk culture in the form of folk architecture and furniture are significant, but little scholarship studies these elements in depth. Nancy Armstrong examines the advent of folklore collection in the nineteenth century, comparing Lockwood to the amateur folklorists/tourists who travelled to remote locations in search of quaint customs. Graeme Tytler discusses the concepts of house and home in the novel, including the contrast between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, while Brian Voroselo examines the nonspecific locations in the novel. Voroselo ties that lack of a concrete location to the "undefined realm" in which most fairy tales exist (33). Drawing on historical resources about folk architecture in Yorkshire collected by Peter Brears, Nicholas Cooper, Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby, and others, in this chapter I argue that the physical contrast between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange underscores the class tensions in the novel. Furniture, most notably the bed in Cathy's room, also plays a significant role in *Wuthering Heights*; this is another example of

material folk culture. This sort of cupboard bed makes a brief appearance in *Jane Eyre*, too, tucked away in the attic at Thornfield Hall along with other relics of days past, and likewise strengthens the connections between Thornfield and its Yorkshire setting. The construction methods, materials, and designs used in folk furniture, like folk architecture, reflect not only the resources available in a region but can also shed light on class and, by extension, identity.

In the second half of the chapter I discuss foodways, which are another aspect of material folk culture significant to both novels. This is another important way in which groups of people come together. The tradition of passing recipes down orally from generation to generation within a family or group and the distinct foods and preparation methods of a region or culture not only contribute to the collective identity of the group, but also to each member's individual identity. Knowledge of traditional cooking methods and particular regional staples would largely have been communicated by observation and participation within the community, similar to the ways in which folk architecture and furniture building methods would have been shared.

In both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, traditional foodways of their West Yorkshire settings are evident. Peter Brears writes about traditional foods such as oats in *Wuthering Heights* and Alexander Barron examines the significance of bread and cake in *Jane Eyre*. Aside from these notable exceptions, though, few scholars have considered the foodways of the novels. In *Jane Eyre*, food is one of the first ways that Jane participates in her new community when she arrives at Lowood. Barron emphasizes the importance of the various types of cakes and bread in the novel and suggests "in Brontë, the shared consumption of cake bridges physical, social and spiritual distances between characters" (2). Upon Jane's arrival at Lowood she observes the other students eating "a thin oaten cake, shared into fragments," which along with water is the entirety of their supper (Brontë 44).

Brears, Hartley, and Ingilby discuss the importance of oats in the diet in West Yorkshire. Hartley and Ingilby point out that while “the regional dishes . . . vary from district to district, from town to country and from class to class, a staple food was formerly oatmeal, eaten either as oatcake or porridge” (*West Yorkshire* 108). Oats in the form of porridge and oatcake appear in *Wuthering Heights*, including when Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights and notices the oak dresser is partially obscured by “a frame of wood laden with oatcakes” and other foods (Brontë 38). These foods derived from oats are mentioned almost exclusively in connection with Wuthering Heights and not with Thrushcross Grange, suggesting a connection between food and social class in the novel that I examine in greater detail.

What the folklore present in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* accomplishes, in the end, is to enrich the worlds Charlotte and Emily Brontë have created and also to deepen the social commentary of their work. Considering the folkloric elements of each novel—from folktale motifs to foodways—in conjunction with class and identity provides the reader with a more nuanced understanding of time and place within the novels. This also reveals the forces driving the Brontës’ characters and complicating their plots. Ultimately, the traditions and customs incorporated into each novel underscore the values important within their communities and in society as a whole.



## 2 CHAPTER ONE: “MADEMOISELLE IS A FAIRY”: FOLKLORE AND IDENTITY IN *JANE EYRE*

“And so you were waiting for your people when you sat upon that stile?” Rochester asks Jane Eyre the day after their first meeting (Brontë 122). The men in green, or elves, are the people to whom he refers. The discussion that ensues between Jane and Rochester sets the tone for their future relationship. Later in the novel, Rochester uses fairy names and folk terminology to describe Jane, and thus marks her as different from other women. The notion that Jane is somehow “other” is not new; as an orphan, a governess, and a woman with little inclination to participate in fashionable society, Jane is constantly at odds with the world around her and its expectations for girls and women. Despite this, Jane’s own sense of identity is clear, and I argue that it owes much to the folklore she absorbed as a child through oral literature, which play a prominent role in *Jane Eyre*. Throughout the novel, Brontë weaves in elements of folk beliefs, folk ballads, and folktales, using her knowledge to establish connections between characters and also at times for social critique.

Just as material folk culture is important to pass along customs, tangible artifacts and methods for creating art or functional items like furniture or linens, and foodways for subsistence and celebration, folk beliefs and folktales provide a way for groups to pass on traditional values and knowledge from generation to generation. In addition to promoting and preserving cultural values in this way, D. L. Ashliman proposes that people tell stories for fantasy wish fulfillment or entertainment, to express fears or taboos, or to offer explanations for why something is (2-4). Paula Sullivan emphasizes the importance of wish fulfillment and the heroine’s journey in *Jane Eyre* and suggests that beneath its surface a number of cyclical journeys overlap. She argues that this structure of overlapping journeys “seems to be the most important way in which *Jane Eyre*

resembles fairy tales” since Jane, like the heroines of many such tales, returns in triumph to her origin (61). Because it is a wish-fulfillment fantasy, Sullivan says, the novel functions both as a fairy tale and as a dream. Certainly young Jane wishes for an escape from persecution and deprivation. At Gateshead Hall she turns to books such as *Gulliver’s Travels* for respite from her relatives’ animosity, and later, at Lowood School, she regularly devotes time before sleeping to conjuring a “Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk,” seeking an escape or at least a distraction from her hunger (Brontë 74). Later on, the adult Jane is less concerned with wishing for or dreaming about deliverance or rescue, but her earlier folk knowledge—gleaned from reading and the stories she heard in the nursery and elsewhere—persists.

The folkloric elements in *Jane Eyre* fit into two broad categories: allusions to tales drawn from literary sources Jane has read, and knowledge gained through the oral tradition. Brontë incorporates references to many literary works that include elements of folklore, such as Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the *Arabian Nights*, and fairy tales or wonder tales like “Cinderella” and “Bluebeard.” These references all contribute to Jane’s identity in some way, whether by linking her to supernatural beings and thus reinforcing her otherness, or by highlighting Jane’s perseverance and agency. As a child at Gateshead Hall, for instance, Jane seeks comfort by reading a copy of the *Arabian Nights*, which she declares she “usually found fascinating” (Brontë 38). Originally orally transmitted, many of the *Arabian Nights* tales were circulated for centuries before being recorded in manuscript form and later in print. Print editions of the tales have been notoriously unreliable for a number of reasons, including corrupt or indifferent translations, spurious additions, and the tendency of some Victorian translators to bowdlerize texts to remove overtly sexual content. This resulted in texts far removed from the

presumed original oral tradition of the tales, and scholars continue to wrangle with this instability today<sup>2</sup>.

According to Melissa Dickson, Jane's reading of the tales in childhood "was a familiar phenomenon in Britain of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (199). The tales figure outside of fiction as well, with "significant scholarly attention . . . devoted to the fact that writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mary Shelley, De Quincey, Tennyson, the Brontë sisters, and Dickens read the tales in their youth" (199). Attempts by scholars to identify the version of the tales that the Brontës read have been complicated by the fact that no copy of the *Arabian Nights* exists in the Brontë Parsonage Museum today (200). Dickson nonetheless suggests, "it is useful to consider [the tales] as a source for a novel so much concerned with authority and who has the power to tell their story" (198-99). Nancy Workman has examined the common use of a frame narrative in the *Arabian Nights* and *Jane Eyre*, and discusses how this device empowers both Scheherazade and Jane (178). In addition to the parallels between Jane and Scheherazade's agency as storytellers, Dickson contends that the book itself serves as a signifier in *Jane Eyre*. When Jane returns to Gateshead to visit her dying aunt she finds this book, among others, in its usual place on the shelf and the "sudden immediacy of these unchanged objects recalls the sensations of that past time, while marking the temporal remoteness of the experience and the

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<sup>2</sup> Husain Haddawy relates that the earliest known manuscript of the *Arabian Nights*, compiled in the latter half of the thirteenth century, is lost. So, too, is the copy made of it "a generation or two later in what became the archetype for subsequent copies" (xiv). Later manuscripts derived from these developed in Syria and in Egypt, but the two branches diverged significantly. The Syrian versions remained closer to the original manuscripts, while the Egyptian versions became corrupted with indiscriminate changes, including the addition of many unrelated tales to fill in the full one thousand and one nights (xv).

emotional and psychological alterations in Jane herself” (198). Jane recalls the abuse she suffered in the room, such as the occasion when her cousin John threw a book at her (Brontë 11). She has grown and changed since leaving Gateshead, though, and while her painful childhood remains an important part of her identity the memories are no longer quite as bitter or all consuming.

Other folktales are woven throughout *Jane Eyre*, and they too contribute to Jane’s identity. Elements drawn from three different tales are recognizable in Brontë’s text: “Beauty and the Beast,” “Cinderella,” and “Bluebeard.” In *The Types of the Folktale*, an index of folktales and their common motifs begun by Antti Aarne and expanded by Stith Thompson, “Beauty and the Beast” is identified as type 425C (143). The typical motifs of the tale include a father who stays overnight in a mysterious palace and takes a rose from the garden without asking. He must then promise his daughter to the animal or beast of the palace, or else she chooses to go willingly in his place (143). The daughter then requests permission to go to her sick father for a short visit, but returns later than promised to find the beast—or her husband, in some versions—near death. She breaks the spell on him with an embrace; no tasks or other challenges must be completed (143). The daughter, typically the youngest child, is generally described as beautiful and kind.

Jen Cadwallader acknowledges that “while Rochester is sufficiently Beast-like in appearance, Jane is, quite pointedly, no Beauty,” which differs from the usual dichotomy of the couple’s appearances in the tale (235). She proposes that Brontë could have encountered this folktale in several ways, noting that the first English translation of the French tale by Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont appeared in the *Young Misses Magazine* in 1761, and the tale appeared in many fairy tale anthologies published prior to 1850 (237). Cadwallader focuses on

the physical contrast between the tale's heroine and Jane, observing that the youngest daughter in the tale is so beautiful she is called "the little Beauty" as a child, and still goes by Beauty when she is grown. Jane, of course, is "so little, so pale, and [has] features so irregular and so marked" (Brontë 98). Cadwallader points out that this is a deliberate choice:

[Brontë's] decision to cast her heroine in so plain a mould calls for further attention, however, particularly given the dissonance created by Jane's physical dissimilarity to her fairy-tale counterparts. As a contrast to the fairy-tale beauties throughout the novel, Jane's plainness takes on the dimension of social critique. (235)

Jane's plainness, in other words, subverts the trope of the traditional fairy tale or wonder tale protagonist whose outward beauty mirrors her inner virtues.

Rather than rely on her appearance, Abigail Heiniger asserts, "Jane challenges the idea that it takes a beauty to rehumanize a beast" (25). Heiniger illuminates the origins of the oral tradition of European folktales, which involved women, unlike the ancient Greek and Roman myths that were largely an invention of men ("Faery and the Beast" 24). She points out that Brontë's likely acquisition of folk knowledge from the family servant identifies Brontë as "part of this woman-dominated oral tradition of fairy tales. As a child, [she] heard fairy tales in her beloved home on the moor from the household servant, Tabby" (24). Furthermore, Heiniger indicates that Brontë and her siblings incorporated fairy tales into their lives and their stories to escape the harshness of reality (24).

What the story and the novel have in common in this regard is that it is love that ultimately transforms the beast back into a man, and not physical beauty. There are other similarities between "Beauty and the Beast" and *Jane Eyre*, as well. In the original tale, the heroine's older sisters are jealous not only of her beauty, but the fact that she is a better person

than they, hardworking and kind. Jane, too, is contrasted with her rival, Blanche Ingram, as genuine and humble instead of proud and spoiled (Brontë 172-73). It is not romantic love or physical attraction that initiates the transformation in *Jane Eyre*, I argue, but instead Jane's identity, which is loving and compassionate. Brontë "determined to make her heroine plain, small, and unattractive, in defiance of the accepted canon," but with all of these inward qualities intact (Gaskell 235). Jane also, like Beauty, overstays her allotted time when she returns to Gateshead Hall to see her dying aunt; her forgiveness of Mrs. Reed's abuse, including the deception about the letter from her uncle in Madeira, is exemplary of Jane's kindness and compassion (Brontë 240). Jane promises to be gone no longer than a week, but is gone nearly a month, once more proving her superiority to her cousins as she turns the other cheek to help them transition to their new lives after the death of Mrs. Reed (241). It is after her return from this lengthy stay at Gateshead Hall that Rochester proposes to Jane and they first declare their love for each other (255).

In contrast to the relatively straightforward connections between "Beauty and the Beast" and *Jane Eyre*, "Cinderella" is both more structured and has a more complex relationship with the novel. The novel displays a mix of motifs from the two main variations of the tale, classified by Aarne and Thompson as tale types 510A and 510B. While the two tale types are closely connected, there are many significant differences. Both of these Cinderella variants feature a persecuted heroine; in 510A, the heroine is abused by her stepmother and stepsisters and lives on the hearth or in the ashes, dressed in rough clothing. The 510B tales, in contrast, involve a heroine fleeing in disguise from her father, who wants to marry her (Aarne and Thompson 177-78). *King Lear* fits this second category, since Cordelia refuses to love her father more than is appropriate (Freeman 1). In this sense Jane is a 510A heroine, with her persecution coming from

her aunt and cousins in lieu of a stepmother and stepsiblings. The French version of the tale by Charles Perrault follows this tale type. In “Cendrillon,” he describes the stepmother as “the proudest and haughtiest woman that was ever seen” and the stepsisters as “two daughters of her own humor, who were, indeed, exactly like her in all things” (Dundes 31). Likewise, Jane’s Aunt Reed and her spoiled cousins despise her and treat her as a servant (Brontë 36-37). The two variants of the tale also feature some form of magic help; Cinderella is provided for by either her dead mother, a magic tree over her mother’s grave, a supernatural being, or animals such as birds or a goat, sheep, or cow (Aarne and Thompson 177-78). This help is typically female, such as the godmother in Perrault’s version (Dundes 17; Sullivan 61). Cinderella must also meet her prince, and in the 510A tale type that means either dancing in beautiful clothing with a prince who tries in vain to keep her, or being seen by him in church. In type 510B, Cinderella gives the prince hints of the abuse she has endured as a servant girl (Aarne and Thompson 177-78). Jane Eyre follows the 510B type in this sense when she tells Rochester that Mr. Brocklehurst was harsh and miserly to the students at Lowood, starving them and depriving them of any comforts (Brontë 123). Sullivan argues that these individual elements are less important than the overall sense of *Jane Eyre* as a rags-to-riches “‘Cinderella’ success story” (61).

Cinderella must also prove her identity to the prince, and both variants of the tale incorporate a type of identity test through which Cinderella’s true identity is revealed. Jane’s many attempts to assert her identity throughout the novel are even more compelling. In 510A, Cinderella’s identity is discovered through the slipper test familiar from Perrault, but in type 510B she is revealed when she throws a ring into the prince’s drink or bakes it into his bread. The glass of water Jane offers the blinded Rochester could serve this purpose, along with her touch and voice (Brontë 433). Indeed, Jane must pass a series of identity tests before she is

reunited with Rochester. St. John Rivers' interrogation upon their uncle's death is one; in this, he confronts Jane with his own suspicions and the solicitor's account of Jane's recent history. Her emotion upon hearing any news from Thornfield, however minor, is enough to lead her to abandon her alias entirely and take up her own name again (Brontë 380-81). She feels "cold and dismayed" when she learns that Rochester himself did not write in answer to the solicitor's inquiries (380), and vehemently refutes Rivers' assessment of Rochester as a "bad man," telling him, "You don't know him—don't pronounce an opinion upon him" (381). Then, when she has found Rochester at last, Jane must overcome his disbelief and once more prove herself. Her voice is Rochester's first clue, but since he has often imagined her presence this is not enough, and he issues a direct challenge: "*Who is it? What is it? Who speaks?*" (433). Jane does not provide her name; she continues to simply rely on her voice to answer his repeated demands, and on the supporting evidence that Pilot and the servants recognize her, until Rochester is ultimately convinced.

With the sound of her voice not sufficient to prove her identity, Rochester resorts to touch, again not trusting his senses as he gathers Jane close. Again he demands, "Is it Jane? *What is it? This is her shape—this is her size—*" (433). Not until Rochester has pronounced her name himself does Jane confirm her identity verbally; he still questions whether she is simply a "vision," indicating that he has had similar dreams many times before when he says, "Gentle, soft dream, nestling in my arms now, you will fly, too; as your sisters have all fled before you: but kiss me before you go—embrace me, Jane" (434). This time the identity test is physical, and when Jane complies and kisses Rochester he seems close to believing her. Conviction comes when Jane offers a blunt explanation of her newfound wealth; as Rochester observes, "Ah, this is practical—this is real! . . . I should never dream that. Besides, there is that peculiar voice of hers,



so animating and piquant, as well as soft: it cheers my withered heart; it puts life into it” (434). Rather than fitting into a shoe or a ring, simply telling him her name, or performing some other token identity test, Jane ultimately proves her identity to Rochester not merely with her voice or through physical contact, but with her whole self.

Micael Clarke suggests that, rather than the French version by Perrault, Charlotte Brontë was influenced primarily by the German version of “Cinderella” recorded by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. In contrast to the Perrault version, the Grimms’ tale features more religious and spiritual imagery. For example, Aschenputtel’s (Cinderella’s) help in this version comes from her dead mother—who grants Aschenputtel’s wishes with help from a magic tree and a bird—rather than a fairy godmother (Clarke 698). Clarke writes that, “every time Aschenputtel goes to her mother’s grave to weep and pray, a bird comes to fulfill any wish that she speaks” (698). This triad of the dead mother, the suffering daughter, and the bird suggest, according to Clarke, “a female holy trinity that parallels Christianity’s Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (699). He elaborates that the tree growing from the mother’s grave and the peas and lentils that the stepmother spills on the hearth for Aschenputtel to pick up—one of the tests she must pass to be permitted to attend the ball—symbolize not only Aschenputtel’s connection with her mother but also identifies her “with the hearth, the domestic, and fertility” (699). Clarke also highlights the fact that in the German tale, Aschenputtel leaves the ball by choice rather than because time has run out. According to him, this is significant because “[s]he seeks pleasure, not a husband, and there is no threat of public humiliation to force her to leave the ball, as in the French version” (699). Certainly Jane seeks a husband, but not the bigamous, sham marriage that Rochester initially offers, and she chooses to leave rather than submit to his entreaties and become his mistress. While she does endure the humiliation of having her wedding publicly called off mid-ceremony,

Jane's strong moral center ultimately ensures that she avoids the greater potential danger of being cast aside and reviled like Rochester's previous mistresses.

Compared to the complexity of the Cinderella folk tales and their apparent influence on *Jane Eyre*, the influence of "Bluebeard" on the novel is more straightforward, as Sullivan, Pyrhönen, and others have observed. The notorious locked chamber in which Bluebeard keeps his murdered wives is, of course, painfully similar to Bertha Rochester's attic room. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar comment on Rochester's secret, calling it "the secret of masculine potency, the secret of male sexual guilt" (354). Jane herself seems to sense the unsettling truth about the attic room in Volume One, Chapter Eleven, when she describes the passage near the garret staircase as "narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle" (Brontë 107). The comparison reveals as much about Rochester as it does about Jane, if not more: he has hidden the existence of his wife out of embarrassment and guilt, preferring to pretend to the public that Bertha simply does not exist in order to pursue her eventual replacement without impediment.

The second broad category of folklore in *Jane Eyre* consists of folktales, beliefs, and other traditional knowledge acquired through the oral tradition. Folk beliefs are evident early on in the novel. The servants at Gateshead Hall expose young Jane to a variety of omens, superstitions, dreams, and tales of the supernatural. The methods used to share this information vary, as Jacqueline Simpson observes:

Their lore is communicated to her in different ways: the senior maid, "the bitter Miss Abbot," is deliberately threatening ("Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don't, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney

and fetch you away”); but the nurse Bessie, with her “remarkable knack of narrative,” delights the children with “passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads.” (47)

Bessie’s stories, in particular, leave a lasting impression on Jane. Simpson points out that “Bessie has filled Jane’s mind with omens, dreams, elf-lore and ghostly black dogs; the fruits of this imaginative awakening remain long after Jane has ceased literally to believe in such creatures” (47). When Jane has been taken from the red room and brought back to the nursery, it is chiefly Bessie who shows compassion to Jane and who exhibits at least some belief in the tales she has spun; this belief may have reinforced Jane’s own acceptance of the tales. Bessie tells one of the other maids, Sarah, that “it’s such a strange thing she should have that fit: I wonder if she saw anything” (Brontë 19). Bessie and Sarah both seem to believe in ghosts and other apparitions, and their conversation turns to such phenomena, from something “all dressed in white” which passed by and vanished, to a black dog and the appearance of a light over someone’s grave (20). While neither woman addresses Jane directly in this passage, in her state of nervous breakdown these tales nevertheless impress themselves deeply upon Jane.

This belief in—or at least, respect for—the lore she learned as a child lingers with Jane and shapes both her identity and future actions. When, as an adult, she hears a horse approaching as she is walking to Hay, her first thought is of “certain of Bessie’s tales wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a ‘Gytrash’; which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me” (Brontë 112). In her explanatory notes for the Oxford University Press edition of the novel, Sally Shuttleworth adds that the spectral dog is sometimes seen in the form of an evil cow, as well (467). Jane is reluctant to put too much stock into what she calls “the memories

of nursery stories,” but she admits, “maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give” (Brontë 112). She waits to allow the approaching traveler to pass, and it is only when Jane observes that the horse and dog are accompanied by a man that the spell is broken. She says, “Nothing ever rode the Gytrash: it was always alone; and goblins, to my notions, though they might tenant the dumb carcasses of beasts, could scarce covet shelter in the common-place human form” (112). Here Jane attempts to put aside those old stories in favor of reason. However, just as that old belief in the supernatural lingers with Jane into adulthood, tales of such apparitions have persisted in England, particularly in the north. The stories of such beings are passed along to Jane by the maid, Bessie, and she retains a respect for this knowledge even years later, despite her education and social standing.

Accounts of black dogs occur throughout England, according to Katharine Briggs (*British Folktales* 115). Briggs points out that there is “an abundance” of hobgoblins or black dogs such as the Padfoot, Shriker, and others still reported in the north of England (*Fairies in Tradition* 90). Simon Sherwood refers to a Lancashire apparition called a Trash, as well. He explains that these “[b]lack dog apparitions differ from normal dogs in terms of their size, their eyes, and their behaviour” (16). According to Sherwood, they are generally described as larger than ordinary dogs, with large, glowing eyes; in addition, in some accounts they may change in size or shift into a different form (16). At first glance, the dog Jane sees fits the description of the Gytrash well; he is a “great dog . . . a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head” (Brontë 112). She appears both wary about the approaching dog and resistant to the idea that it might be supernatural, but ultimately is relieved by the utterly human appearance of Rochester, which breaks the spell.

The evening after their first meeting on the causeway, Rochester suggests that it is instead Jane who is not human and lays the blame for his accident on her, saying, “When you came upon me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet” (122). Jane is unsure what to make of Rochester at this point and chooses to humor him, perhaps, by replying with the same serious mien that “the men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago . . . And not even in Hay Lane, or the fields about it, could you find a trace of them. I don’t think summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more” (122). Briggs highlights the persistence of such tales, observing that while there are still some fairies and black dogs in the North of England, in the Midlands and elsewhere the fairies have disappeared; in Oxfordshire, she relates, the last recorded sighting was of fairies “going down a hole under the Kingstone at the Rollright Stones” (*Fairies in Tradition* 91). By supposing Jane a fairy in this first interview Rochester sets the tone for their future relations, in which he uses the names of supernatural beings like “elf,” “fairy,” “sprite,” “witch,” and “changeling” to refer to Jane in lieu of conventional endearments and effectively “others” Jane by identifying her with female folkloric figures.

Briggs refers to fairies that leave changelings, or fairy children, in exchange for human children, whom they kidnap and keep for their own. This, she says, is among the most common types of fairy legend; the fairies “covet human children and steal them whenever they can” (*Fairies in Tradition* 115). Traditional precautions against such kidnappings included hanging an open pair of scissors over the child, attaching a pin to their clothing, or draping the father’s trousers over the cradle. Descriptions of the changelings vary from fairy babies who do not thrive to old fairies “near to dotage” (116). Indeed, Jane is in a sense a changeling herself, transplanted from her own immediate family through her parents’ death and placed in a situation with the

Reeds in which she cannot thrive. Early in the novel, Jane pinpoints the essential factor in her aunt and cousins' animosity toward her when she says:

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there: I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage . . . 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; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scape-goat of the nursery. (Brontë 16)

Instead of occupying her rightful place in the family Jane is eventually pushed into the role of a servant, acting as an “under nursery-maid” and assisting Bessie by cleaning the nursery. Heiniger argues that Jane, as a changeling, balances fairy-like power with a human soul, which affords her “the insight to move beyond the prescribed boundaries of both fairy tales and fairy lore because Jane is a human with a soul” (*Fairytales Legacy* 28). As a result of this insight, Heiniger suggests that in Jane, Brontë has created a heroine strong enough to challenge the gender norms of mid-nineteenth century England (19). However, Jane’s strong sense of self-identity grounds her squarely in the human world to begin with, and I argue that her strength lies instead in her persistent rejection of a narrow existence. Jane chafes against the deprivation of her childhood, the limited society of her early days at Thornfield, and her role as governess, always conscious of the wider world and determined to find her place in it. The folk tales she learned as a child may play a part in her identity, but from the beginning Jane is too complex to fit comfortably into one tale or trope. More importantly, she knows she does not fit into such narrow boundaries.

Sarah Wakefield refutes the idea that Rochester uses names such as “changeling” as terms of endearment, instead suggesting that Jane’s “othered” status, on the border between the working and upper classes, causes Rochester discomfort that he tries to mask by referring to her with fairy imagery, as though she is somehow not of this world (66). He does not love a governess, Wakefield argues, but instead transforms Jane into an otherworldly creature. This is evident even early in their acquaintance, not only when he accuses her of felling his horse; later the same evening at Thornfield, when Rochester examines Jane’s portfolio, he criticizes her execution but calls the thoughts behind her work “elfish” (Brontë 126). His characterization of Jane in this manner increases throughout the novel, and is most prevalent following their engagement. Wakefield notes that Volume Two, Chapter Nine contains “the most instances of folklore-naming, with numerous mentions of elves, fairies, sprites, witches, and sylphs” (69). Meanwhile, Simpson observes that Rochester “occasionally uses fairy-tale language of himself . . . mostly, however, it is the mark of his loving yet amused awareness of Jane’s difference from other women” (50). The fairy imagery disappears when their wedding is interrupted, and during Jane’s flight from Thornfield and her subsequent residence in Morton there is no mention of it at all. Simpson suggests that this is because the Rivers family, “fond as she is of them, have not the key to her inner life” (50-51).

In addition to his pet names like “changeling” and “sprite,” Rochester occasionally calls Jane by another name in moments of intense intimacy: Janet. Notably, this happens for the first time when Jane is returning after her leave of absence when Rochester welcomes her back: “‘Pass, Janet,’ said he, making room for me to cross the stile: ‘go up home, and stay your weary little wandering feet at a friend’s threshold’” (Brontë 246). Lauren Lepow points out that in five versions of the ballad “Tam Lin,” the heroine’s name is Janet or Jennet (112). Gaskell relates an

anecdote that establishes Brontë's familiarity with the ballad genre. In it, she vividly describes how animated Brontë became when the two singers began a particular song:

One evening we had, among other guests, two sisters who sang Scottish ballads exquisitely. Miss Brontë had been sitting quiet and constrained till they began 'The Bonnie House of Airlie,' but the effect of that and 'Carlisle Yetts,' which followed, was as irresistible as the playing of the Piper of Hamelin. The beautiful clear light came into her eyes; her lips quivered with emotion; she forgot herself, rose, and crossed the room to the piano, where she asked eagerly for song after song. (Gaskell 405)

While this passage does not list every ballad the two sisters sang that night, it does provide reason to believe that Brontë had been exposed to other Scottish ballads such as "Tam Lin." Lepow points out that at least two versions of "Tam Lin" later recorded by Francis James Child had originally been published by the end of the eighteenth century. While she does not provide conclusive evidence that Brontë knew of the ballad, Lepow does suggest that it may have been among the folklore related by the Brontës' servant, Tabby Aykroyd. The ballad may also have been familiar to Brontë from Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, published in 1802-3. Lepow goes on to analyze the ballad in the context of *Jane Eyre* and asserts that a number of similarities support the idea that Brontë was familiar with "Tam Lin." According to Child, there are common elements in all or most variations of the ballad, such as the name of the heroine (qtd. in Lepow 111).

In addition to their names, the two heroines are also similar in that both are fiery and independent. In Child version 39A of "Tam Lin," for instance, maidens are warned about venturing to Carterhaugh since they must pay some kind of tribute to Tam Lin, such as "[e]ither their rings, or green mantles, / Or else their maidenhead" (7-8). Janet is stubborn and headstrong;



she disregards this warning and goes to Carterhaugh anyway, and when she has plucked a rose and encounters Tam Lin, who demands to know why she has come there without permission and stolen a rose, she confirms her identity as she informs him that she intends to do as she pleases:

“Carterhaugh, it is my own,  
 My daddie gave it me,  
 I'll come and gang by Carterhaugh,  
 And ask nae leave at thee.” (Child 27-30)

In similar fashion, Jane is independent and desires the freedom to explore outside the narrow scope of her world; she wants “more of intercourse with [her] kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within [her] reach” (Brontë 109). Tam Lin and Rochester both seem to appreciate their beloveds’ strong wills, however, and that tenacity is critical to the salvation of both men. Both heroes fall from their horses and thus from grace; Tam Lin is captured by the Fairy Queen, while Rochester’s actual fall is, Lepow argues, “a fall into ambition and infatuation, and it renders him Bertha’s captive” (115). Each faces his own hell; Tam Lin’s is literal, since he will likely be the fairies’ tithe, and Rochester’s is metaphorical (marriage to Bertha).

One area in which the ballad and the novel differ is that in “Tam Lin,” Janet becomes pregnant with Tam Lin’s child. While Jane refuses to become Rochester’s mistress in *Jane Eyre*, her purpose at Thornfield—governess to Adele—creates a kind of mother-daughter relationship between them in which Jane “clings” to Adele just as in some versions of the ballad Janet must cling to her child in order to rescue her lover (Lepow 115-16). Rochester even refers to Jane as Adele’s “petite maman Anglaise,” or little English mother (Brontë 246). Jane and Rochester’s child is manifested in other ways, too, such as Jane’s dream the night before the wedding, in

which she is “burdened with the charge of a small child,” which signals the impending disaster (Brontë 281).

Transformations also figure importantly in both works. Tam Lin and Rochester must each undergo “multiple transformations. Evil powers change them into a number of non-human forms; the power of love ultimately returns them to their true shape” (Lepow 117). Both must emerge from fire and water to make their final, successful transformation. Rochester, of course, survives both fires at Thornfield, and when Jane returns to him at the end of the novel she offers him a glass of water (Brontë 433). Janet must cling to Tam Lin throughout his many transformations, including the final one, in which he becomes a burning coal. She must then throw him into water, and cover him when he emerges, at which point the spell will be broken, he says:

“And then I'll be your ain true-love,  
I'll turn a naked knight,  
Then cover me wi your green mantle,  
And hide me out o sight.” (Child 145-52)

While Tam Lin’s transformations all occur in a single night, Rochester’s are slower and take place over the course of the novel, from the time he meets Jane until they are reunited months later in the closing chapters. Both heroines must ultimately prove their identity in a way, clinging to their lovers as the men face adversity: Janet literally must hold on to Tam Lin as he undergoes terrifying transformations into a succession of animals and dangerous objects, while Jane must seek out Rochester and convince him that she is not a figment of his imagination.

Charlotte Brontë incorporates many elements of material folk culture, folk beliefs, ballads, and folktales into *Jane Eyre*, using them to comment upon or challenge society,

including the disparities between the working and upper classes and the treatment of women. Likely this accounts for why Gaskell admitted in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* that she found her friend's works occasionally coarse or improper, despite their being "otherwise so entirely noble" (401). Elizabeth Rigby, too, deplored the coarseness in the novel, referring to it as "stamped with a coarseness of language and laxity of tone which [has] certainly no excuse" (501). Jane dared to be independent in a time when women were expected to be quiet and submissive, and yet women largely dominate the folklore genres included in the novel. Through her own experience receiving folk knowledge orally and her reading of collections of tales from the Grimms and Perrault, Brontë has woven a complex tapestry of folk knowledge into *Jane Eyre*, empowering her heroine to demand a full, rich life despite her initially bleak circumstances. From foodways, clothing, and sewing to folk ballads such as "Tam Lin" and tales such as "Beauty and the Beast," "Cinderella," and "Bluebeard," there is ample evidence that Brontë drew from many sources to enrich her tale.

### 3 CHAPTER TWO: MATERIAL FOLK CULTURE IN *JANE EYRE* AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elizabeth Gaskell reveals that Brontë and her siblings learned of regional folklore orally through Tabby Aykroyd, the Brontë family's servant. According to Gaskell, Aykroyd "had known the 'bottom,' or valley, in those primitive days when the fairies frequented the margin of the 'beck' on moonlight nights, and had known folk who had seen them" and "[gave] at full length the bare and simple details" (61-2). Material folk culture, too, shares in this oral tradition. Unlike oral narratives and folksongs, however, material folk culture refers to elements of folklore that involve a physical product, with instructions for producing that product transmitted orally within a community. According to Richard M. Dorson, material folk culture "responds to techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art" (2). This heading encompasses such areas as architecture, foodways, textiles and sewing, farming, and furniture design and construction.

These elements of folklore and their unique connections to the specific culture and history of West Yorkshire—the region where the Brontës lived and which they wrote about—offer a compelling context in which to study Charlotte and Emily Brontë's work. Both novels faced criticism upon publication, with reviewers simultaneously praising their power and decrying their coarseness, as with an anonymous December 1847 review of *Wuthering Heights* in the *Spectator* which called the "incidents and persons" in the novel "too coarse and disagreeable to be attractive," while admitting "[the] execution, however, is good" (Newman 345). Elizabeth Rigby's review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review* the following year similarly praises some of the characters and plot elements as "masterly in conception" but finds

the novel “stamped with a coarseness of language and a laxity of tone which have certainly no excuses in [our time]” (501). I argue that these elements serve not just as stage props in the memorable worlds of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* but also provide practical examples of regional and cultural identity in the novels and, at times, vivid reminders of class tensions, such as the animosity between Heathcliff and the Lintons in *Wuthering Heights*.

In the opening pages of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë presents the reader with Lockwood’s conjectures about his new landlord’s status. These assumptions are largely drawn from his observations of the inhospitable appearance of Wuthering Heights. The overgrown grass and hedges are, he presumes, due to the elderly Joseph being the only servant and thus tasked with duties both inside and outside the house (Brontë 37). Lockwood soon turns his attention to the house itself, and he provides the first substantive description of the Heights when he remarks “Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall; and the corners defended with large jutting stones” (38). *Architect* may be a misnomer, however, since Wuthering Heights bears distinctive features of folk architecture common to the probable setting of the novel in West Yorkshire, particularly the house of a yeoman farmer.

The terms *folk architecture* or *vernacular architecture* refer to buildings constructed to suit the needs and traditions of a particular community or region. According to Warren Roberts, folk architecture “is concerned with all traditional aspects of building; the shapes, sizes, and layouts of buildings of all kinds, such as dwellings, barns, sheds, and craft shops; the materials used and the tools and techniques of building” (281). This is in contrast to *academic architecture*, that which is created by formally trained architects, and which is “designed primarily to impress the beholder and please the wealthy classes” who can afford them (281).

Peter Blundell Jones observes that folk architecture has long been the “poor cousin, with a certain patronizing assumption that it is somehow less designed, less deliberate, less imbued with art” (71). He attributes this in part to its relative “lack of written theory on the part of its practitioners, who had no need of it since they passed their skills down by demonstration and orally” (71). Simply put, folk architecture encompasses functional structures that are built not by professional architects, but instead by local builders using materials readily available in their area, such as the stonework that Lockwood describes in the novel. Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby observe that stone had replaced timber as primary building material in West Yorkshire in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries (*Yorkshire Dales* 15). This transition to stone construction fits with the year Brontë provides for the construction of the Heights, 1500. Hartley and Ingilby offer a general term for a particular type of farmhouse noted on deeds from Elizabethan and Stuart times, the “fire house,” described as a farmhouse with a central fire; later, the fireplace in such houses moved to a gable wall (15). Mullioned windows, dated “door-heads” or lintels, and a stone arch surrounding an open hearth are among the features of these types of houses (16).

According to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (hereafter cited as Historic England), the Pennine region is one area of Yorkshire where stone was quarried to produce walls and other structural elements, including “walling stone . . . quoins, mullions, jambs and lintels as well as roofing slate” (6). The high cost of transporting such heavy materials meant that local stone was largely used to minimize expenses, according to Blake Tyson (64). Quoins, or cornerstones, are the “large jutting stones” Lockwood describes as protecting the corners of the house. The deeply set windows of the house are suggestive of the common local style of “deep lintels and quoined surrounds to doorways and window mullions set well back from the wall face in moulded surrounds” (Historic England 6). In his description of Wuthering

Heights, Lockwood goes on to describe the decorative carvings centered around the front door as “a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys,” in which he finds the likely date of construction, 1500, and the Earnshaw name (Brontë 38). Such embellishments were common; mouldings surrounding windows and doors could serve both decorative and functional purposes, as with the inclusion of the date and owner’s initials above or near the door (Historic England 6; Cooper 29-30). As Christopher Dyer points out, a house could also be considered an “item of consumption,” because “then as now, [it] was the single most expensive item its owner acquired” (1). He goes on to state “the size, design, layout, and decoration of buildings resulted from decisions which were influenced by local traditions, changing styles and fashions, and ideas about the social standing of the buildings and owners” (1). Examining each aspect of the structure in relation to the neighboring buildings and the wider region can thus help, Dyer suggests, to place a structure in the correct historical and cultural context. In *Wuthering Heights*, viewing the Earnshaw and Linton houses with all of this in mind underscores the families’ disparate social standing.

Despite the family’s old name, it is clear that the Earnshaws are not wealthy enough to be part of the landed gentry who can live off of the income generated by their land holdings. Graeme Tytler points out that *Wuthering Heights* “is socially inferior to Thrushcross Grange, a house owned and occupied by apparently the only landed gentry living in the neighbourhood” (230). *Wuthering Heights* is a working farm, and before he leaves to walk to Liverpool—a distance of sixty miles in each direction—the “old master” Mr. Earnshaw leaves instructions with Joseph about the work that must be done in his absence (Brontë 64). Likewise, when he discovers Heathcliff in the city, Mr. Earnshaw cannot stay there indefinitely to see that the boy is taken care of; because of his limited funds, he opts to bring Heathcliff home with him instead

(65). The farm is clearly prosperous enough over the next several years that Hindley can be sent to university (69), and he appears to want to move upward socially when he returns home for his father's funeral. Hindley has learned to speak and dress "quite differently" and tells Nelly and Joseph that, as servants, they must keep to the back-kitchen and leave the rest of the house to the family rather than live amongst them as they had in the past (72).

The name and date inscribed above the front door of the house are brought up again when young Catherine Linton visits her cousins at Wuthering Heights and asks Hareton what the inscription says (217). This scene, among others, reinforces the class divide between the inmates of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Hareton is not able to read his own surname above the door, nor the year, and thus is not capable of sharing the family's significance with his cousin, instead telling her "It's some damnable writing . . . I cannot read it" (217). At this point the farmhouse has been somewhat repaired--or is at least somewhat less wild--since Hindley's rapid decline into gambling and drink, but it remains a working farm and not the typical country seat of a wealthy landowner.

The cottage is another type of dwelling mentioned in both novels, and like the farmhouse, it is associated with the working classes or those with limited means, and usually constructed of locally produced materials. In *Wuthering Heights*, Nelly briefly mentions to Lockwood her intent to take young Cathy away from the Heights and rent a cottage, but recognizes that Heathcliff would never allow it (279). A fuller description of a type of cottage appears in *Jane Eyre*, when Jane leaves the Rivers' home, Moor House, to open the school in Morton. Charlotte Brontë describes the two-room cottage as "a little room with white-washed walls, and a sanded floor;" upstairs is the bedroom, with the same dimensions as the room below (358). Further detail on the appearance and construction of the schoolmistress' cottage is sparse, though Brontë writes that



the door has a stone frame (360) and the fireplace has a grate (370). The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England observes that because of population growth, “huge numbers” of cottages were built throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, typically constructed to suit the owner’s needs from readily available local materials such as timber, or later, stone (10). Despite the lack of great detail in the description, it is clear that St. John Rivers believes Jane will find the cottage too rustic for her tastes, perhaps indicating that he already sees through her alias and believes her to be of a higher class than she claims to be. He declares to her that his suggested occupation is neither “eligible nor profitable” (353), and that he “can offer [Jane] but a service of poverty and obscurity” (354). While the location is isolated and the resources available to the school are sparse, though, the salary Rivers offers is the same as her previous position at Thornfield Hall: thirty pounds per year. While at Morton school Jane is responsible for twenty girls rather than just one, and she must keep house for herself with the assistance of an orphan girl engaged by Miss Oliver to help with household tasks (355). However, the position as schoolmistress also affords Jane a greater measure of security and independence than her role as governess. As Millicent Bell observes, since a governess was “poised precariously on the divide between” the working and genteel classes, she was “in danger of collapsing into working-class slavery or even pauperism if she was, as was often the case, summarily dismissed by her employers” (265). As such, governesses’ positions were more unstable than the household servants who, according to tradition, were supported in old age or sickness by their employers (265).

Just as these types of architecture emphasize the use of local materials to construct houses suited to the needs of the community or region, the furnishings of these houses also reflect folk traditions. Indeed, in *Wuthering Heights* the furnishings of the eponymous house reveal a good

deal about the class of its former owners, the Earnshaws. When Lockwood describes the house or family sitting room at the Heights he observes that “the apartment and furniture would have been nothing extraordinary as belonging to a homely, northern farmer with a stubborn countenance, and stalwart limbs set out to advantage in knee-breeches and gaiters” (Brontë 39). Roberts points out that formal training in crafts such as furniture making is a fairly recent innovation; such knowledge was traditionally passed down from generation to generation within a family or “transmitted by the apprentice system wherein a boy learning the craft served for as long as seven years under a master craftsman” (233). These crafts were tremendously important, since many things people could not make on their own or could not otherwise afford were instead obtained from local craftsmen who made products to suit their customers’ needs, including wagon wheels, horseshoes, shoes, textiles, and furniture. Upon his entrance Lockwood’s attention is drawn first to the large fireplace, which he observes is not employed for cooking—in yet another instance where he silently calculates his landlord’s status—and then to the oak dresser with its shelves reaching to the ceiling, and the firearms displayed on the walls. The floor is of uncovered stone, and Lockwood describes the chairs in the room as “high-backed, primitive structures, painted green,” with “one or two heavy black ones lurking in the shade” (38). This is in sharp contrast to young Heathcliff’s description of the drawing room at Thrushcross Grange as related by Nelly, “a splendid place carpeted in crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers” (Brontë 74). The richness of the decoration and furnishings in this room emphasize the class divide between the Earnshaws and the Lintons, who would have had the means both to purchase these luxuries and

to assume the considerable transport costs to have them shipped to their remote area of Yorkshire.

The bed in Cathy's room also plays a significant role in *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë describes the paneled bed as "a large oak case, with squares cut out near the top, resembling coach windows . . . a singular sort of old-fashioned couch . . . [which] formed a little closet, and the ledge of a window, which it enclosed, served as a table" (50). Hartley and Ingleby refer to this type of enclosed "cupboard bed" as a holdover from days when beds appeared in living rooms or other public rooms of the house (*Yorkshire Dales* 28). Lockwood spends his terrifying night at the Heights in this bed, and it is where Heathcliff dies. Lockwood comments on the functional purpose of such a bed, "very conveniently designed to obviate the necessity for every member of the family having a room to himself" (Brontë 50). His assumption that separate bedrooms would otherwise be a necessity highlights his own upper-class background, as a cupboard bed such as the one in Cathy's room instead would likely have relieved family members (and servants) from being compelled to *share* the same sleeping space. The presence of this particular type of bed thus suggests the Earnshaws' status not only in its intended function—to provide more private sleeping space in the house—but also the way in which it likely would have been produced. A bed of this type also makes a brief appearance in *Jane Eyre*, tucked away in the attic at Thornfield Hall along with other relics of days past. Its relegation to the attic may also hint at the upward mobility of the Rochester family, with the bed perhaps a relic from less prosperous days before the hall was built.

In addition to the basic needs of the house and furnishings, crafts involving textiles and sewing are equally vital, especially among communities or groups that must make and repair their own clothes and other linens, and little scholarship studies the significance of these arts in

the Brontës' work. In *Wuthering Heights*, sewing and knitting are mentioned exclusively in connection with Nelly Dean, who performs these tasks while spinning her tale for Lockwood. In *Jane Eyre*, however, sewing and other types of needlework take on a more prominent role. When Jane arrives at Lowood School, she is asked whether she can "read, write, and sew a little" (Brontë 43). Certainly sewing is an important skill for women of the time; as Bell observes, even for middle-class women needlework was an acceptable domestic task taken up within the home (266). It is even more important at Lowood, where the girls are being brought up in order to fulfill a useful occupation in future. Helen Burns informs Jane, "we make our own clothes, our frocks, and pelisses, and everything" (51). Tracy Brain examines the role of sewing in *Jane Eyre* and observes, "In the Lowood sections of the novel, a subtly graded hierarchy of needlework operates" (470). Jane learns to hem first and then once she has mastered this skill she will progress to making clothes, darning stockings, and other more complex forms of needlework. Like folk architecture or furniture produced by methods handed down verbally from one generation to another, these sewing skills would have been taught by oral instruction and by demonstration. Jane has become proficient with a needle by the time she leaves the school for Thornfield Hall, where the hierarchy of sewing is further delineated according to social class.

Plain sewing at Thornfield is relegated to servants such as Grace Poole, who is "ever at her sewing" (Brain 470). When Jane finds Grace sewing new rings onto bed curtains for Rochester's room, Brain observes that "[this] is not fine needlework, but necessary household toil" (470). That toil is compounded by Bertha Rochester when she sets fire to her husband's bed (Brontë 148) and, later, tears Jane's wedding veil in half (284). These actions create more work for the servants (or for Jane, in the case of the veil), who already must sew almost constantly to keep up with the needs of the household, according to Brain:

Seen in the context of the incessant needlework of female servants in the novel, Bertha's destruction of fabric is all the more resonant . . . Again, we are reminded of the importance of fabric items and the fact that households largely needed to produce these themselves and keep them in good repair, in sufficient quantities as well as a manner which was appropriate to the family's social status. (474)

In contrast to the plain sewing involved with supplying household goods such as bed linens, upper-class women practice fancy sewing such as embroidery. In her exploration of the attic, Jane describes objects that were perhaps created by Rochester's ancestors and are both decorative and functional, such as "stools . . . on whose cushioned tops were yet apparent traces of half-effaced embroideries, wrought by fingers that for two generations had been coffin-dust" (Brontë 105). Jane herself, though she has been taught household sewing, chooses at Thornfield to emphasize her upper class status by netting a purse when she must go into company (174). This fancy work is decorative and functional, too, but as Brain points out, "it is not 'everyday-use' sewing. Jane is using silver beads and silk threads, valuable materials" to create the purse (480). This is a hint at Jane's ability to shift roles as she makes a deliberate choice to highlight an upper class accomplishment rather than draw attention to her position as governess.

Jane's position in the house is tenuous; as Adele's governess, she does not fit neatly into either the working or upper classes. I argue that Jane's familiarity with and retention of folk knowledge, such as sewing, that she gained in her childhood and at Lowood aid her in passing back and forth across the class divide. Mary Poovey has studied what she terms the "conjunction between *Jane Eyre* and the historical problem of the governess," focusing on the ambiguous social status of governesses (230). Governesses, according to Poovey, occupied a liminal space that was not quite either upper or lower class, but a sort of hybrid role "between 'well-bred, well-

educated and perfect gentlewomen,’ on the one hand, and, on the other, the ‘low-born, ignorant, and vulgar’ women of the working class” (232). While folklore does not enter into Poovey’s assessment of the class and gender systems at play in the novel, her work illuminates the rigid social structure of the period and Jane’s uncertain place within it. Poovey criticizes the tendency to connect working-class needlewomen with prostitution and low morals in general. She links this to the perception of governesses as problematic because they are caught between classes, working for their living yet expected to uphold the domestic ideal of the upper classes with the wife and mother at the center of the home (236). Jane grows into a woman who is comfortable acting and speaking her mind in either setting despite her declaration at eight or nine years of age that she “should not like to belong to poor people” (Brontë 24). Bell argues that this independence is possible because as the adult Jane takes up her role as rural schoolmistress she teaches “the children of the humble farmers and workers of a country neighborhood [and] she heals, a little, her fearful shrinking from identification with the poor, which is the consequence, as has been seen, of her attachment to caste superiority” (264-65).

Foodways are yet another important way in which communities share knowledge and celebrate together, and in both novels traditional foods and preparation methods are described. Don Yoder describes folk cookery in particular as “traditional domestic cookery marked by regional variation” (325). Cooking and sharing food has long been an important ritual in communities, and the oral tradition is key here as well. C. Anne Wilson recounts that the oldest traditional recipes in Europe had been “passed on from mother to daughter” for generations, “with changes creeping in only rarely when new ingredients or new equipment came within the family’s reach” (1-2). Word of mouth and practical example remained the chief methods for teaching recipes to the next generation, despite the emergence of cookery books as a genre

having begun as early as the late 1600s (Hunter 10). Hartley and Ingilby point out the importance of oats locally, observing “a staple food was formerly oatmeal, eaten either as oatcake or porridge” (*West Yorkshire* 108). Peter Brears, too, calls it an “ideal meal” for the working classes in particular thanks to its low cost, quick and easy preparation, and because it was “hot, nourishing, and filling” (*Yorkshire* 98).

The oatcake was largely the same, thin cake baked on a bakstone and eaten across the region. While the students of Lowood band together in indignation at the burnt porridge and generally poor food they are offered, the type of oatcake consumed at their evening meal would likely have been familiar to most of them, though perhaps known by different names depending on where they were from. On Jane’s first night at Lowood she observes the other students eating “a thin oaten cake, shared into fragments,” which along with water is the entirety of their supper (Brontë 44). Brears records a variety of regional names for the oatcake, and he observes that in Sheffield alone “virtually the same article might be called snap-and-rattle, knap cake, scrapple cake, reed bread, havercake, flannel, slammak, flat-dick, jonta, or even ‘tooa clate’ (i.e. toe-rag)” (*Yorkshire* 106-7). Oats in the form of porridge and oatcake appear in *Wuthering Heights*, as well, such as when Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights and notices the oak dresser is partially obscured by “a frame of wood laden with oatcakes” and other foods (Brontë 38). These foods derived from oats are mentioned almost exclusively in connection with the Heights and not with Thrushcross Grange, again drawing attention to the class disparity between the Earnshaw and Linton families. Indeed, Brears discusses the usual preparation methods for porridge in conjunction with a particular scene in *Wuthering Heights*.

According to Brears, “the easiest way of preparing oatmeal for the table was to make it into crowdy by mixing it with either hot milk or water and allowing it to swell and soften”

(*Yorkshire* 98). The dish might be seasoned further by the addition of fat from meat broth, likely made from beef or pork, “into a hollow made in the crowdy,” which each spoonful would then be dipped into.<sup>3</sup> The preparation of crowdy differs from the method used to make porridge, which was much more demanding. Isabella Linton learns this after her marriage to Heathcliff, when she imperiously takes over the preparation of a pot of porridge from Joseph:

Joseph was bending over the fire, peering into a large pan that swung above it; and a wooden bowl of oatmeal stood on the settle close by. The contents of the pan began to boil, and he turned to plunge his hand into the bowl. I conjectured that this preparation was probably for our supper, and, being hungry, I resolved it should be eatable—so crying out, sharply—“I’ll make the porridge!” I removed the vessel out of his reach, and proceeded to take off my hat and riding habit. “Mr. Earnshaw,” I continued, “directs me to wait on myself—I will—I’m not going to act the lady among you, for fear I should starve.” (Brontë 153)

Isabella is careless as she adds handfuls of meal and stirs the mixture vigorously. Joseph objects to her haphazard method, exclaiming to Hareton that the porridge will be spoiled and “they’ll be nowt bud lumps as big as maw nave,” or nothing but lumps the size of his fist (154). Isabella is likely unfamiliar with how to cook for herself since there is a cook at Thrushcross Grange who prepares meals for the family. She admits that the result is “rather a rough mess” once it has been served into separate bowls, but then encounters further conflict when her upper-class notions of propriety and chosen manner of eating her porridge—with milk—clash with Hareton’s unpolished manners as he drinks the milk straight from the jug (154).

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<sup>3</sup> Beef and pork were the most popular meats; pork, in particular, was valued for its versatility, as Brears notes that “every part of the pig was carefully used in Yorkshire, where even the squeal was reputedly sold on to the Scots, being an essential ingredient for making bagpipes!” (*Yorkshire* 164).



While the foodways in *Wuthering Heights* emphasize the class tensions in the novel, in *Jane Eyre* foodways instead unite groups of people. Alexander Barron examines the way cakes and bread bring characters together in *Jane Eyre*. He suggests “in Brontë, the shared consumption of cake bridges physical, social and spiritual distances between characters” (2). The shared oatcake at Lowood School, Barron observes, is a clue to Mr. Brocklehurst’s miserly nature, “a distorted form of cake, which no one has asked for, which offers no pleasure, and which fails to provide even basic subsistence” (2). The children at Lowood band together in indignation at the poor food they are offered, the small quantity of the oatcake and the burnt porridge they are expected to eat the next morning, and which all “abused roundly” (Brontë 46). In contrast, the lunch of bread and cheese that Miss Temple orders to replace their spoiled breakfast is “brought in and distributed, to the high delight and refreshment of the whole school” (48). Miss Temple, Barron states, confers a semblance of her own peaceful nature on others through this sharing of food, and later in the novel she bestows this attention more personally on Jane and Helen Burns (2). After Jane has been accused of being a liar before the entire school, she and Helen are invited to Miss Temple’s room for tea, which Miss Temple supplements with cake. Brontë writes, “Having invited Helen and me to approach the table, and placed before each of us a cup of tea with one delicious but thin morsel of toast, she got up, unlocked a drawer, and taking from it a parcel wrapped in paper, disclosed presently to our eyes a good-sized seed-cake” (Brontë 72). Cake, often considered a food for festive occasions, lightens the mood in this scene, offering Jane and Helen a taste of what it is like to participate in the ritual of teatime as well as the luxury of having a better meal than they would have received in the refectory, where they are provided with barely enough to subsist. The type of cake here is significant as well, since according to Kristen Komara, “seed-cake, a breadlike cake spiced with caraway, symbolizes the

richness of their communion” (qtd. in Barron 4). In these early chapters of the novel dealing with Lowood, as well as in the later scenes when Jane is wandering, lost, after fleeing Thornfield Hall, the importance of foods such as cake and bread both for basic subsistence and for creating connections is emphasized.

At Thornfield Hall, however, Jane encounters a new experience with foodways. Here she is pressed into the communal experience of preparing food for a large party in a wealthy household. Victorian households, according to Barron, placed high value on proper food preparation (4). Despite her previous lack of experience Jane dives in wholeheartedly to help prepare dishes for the party, pleased to be treated as a member of the Thornfield community. Even though she does not anticipate that she will be invited to enjoy the desserts or other dishes she helps to make, Jane is cementing new relationships and “engaging in an act of communion with her new surrogate family,” according to Barron (4). He again emphasizes the act of making bread and cake in helping to forge those new connections, stating, “in its subtle way, cake is in fact a hallmark of harmonious family life, for Jane throughout the novel—as it was for Victorians at large” (4). Later, when Jane has fled Thornfield Hall and is staying near Morton with the Rivers family, she insists upon helping in the kitchen, picking gooseberries for a pie while the servant, Hannah, makes the pastry for it (Brontë 341). In this scene, Barron suggests, either Jane “wishes to gain strength and vigour from food so that she can properly interact with her ‘fellow-beings,’ or else, more compellingly, she believes she will draw energy from both literal food and social interaction” (5). Rather than being impelled by anyone else to help with the cooking, Jane is actively trying to claim a role for herself in her new community by helping with the necessary tasks of food preparation. This also allows Jane to smooth over her rough

beginning with the fiercely protective Hannah, who initially mistrusted her when she arrived seeking shelter from the rain.

Jane's role shifts yet again when her kinship to the Rivers family is revealed, and she revels in the opportunity to establish her new identity as cousin and equal to St. John, Mary, and Diana. Her thirst for family connections is so profound that Jane tells St. John that he "cannot at all imagine the craving I have for fraternal and sisterly love. I never had a home, I never had brothers or sisters, I must and will have them now" (Brontë 387). This determination to claim her role in the family coincides with the approaching Christmas holidays, and after the inheritance from their uncle has been divided amongst the cousins Jane embarks on preparations for the holiday, cleaning the house and readying it for St. John, Mary, and Diana's arrival. This involves two full days of cooking, as Jane is eager to celebrate the holiday with a traditional Christmas celebration:

"The two days preceeding that on which your sisters are expected, will be devoted by Hannah and me to such a beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince-pies, and solemnizing of other culinary rites, . . . and my ambition is to give them a beau ideal of a welcome when they come." (390)

Brears discusses traditional Christmas foods of the region, such as "goose pies, minced pies, and ale" and "minced meat, made rich with fruit" ("Lake Counties" 109-10). Such foods would have been an essential part of the holiday celebration, and Jane works tirelessly to make sure this first Christmas with her newfound family begins on the right note. Jane participates fully in the ritual of preparing food to be shared with her family, rather than relegating all of the tasks to Hannah or hiring additional help to work in the kitchen.

From folk architecture to folk crafts and foodways, examples of material folk culture are abundant in the work of Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Their presence enriches the whole, bringing to life the Yorkshire settings of the novels in simple and direct fashion. But the architecture, crafts, foods, and other folkloric elements are not mere window dressing. Studying the folklore of the novels alongside questions of class and identity reveals that, at their cores, both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* evince and preserve traditional values and regional folk traditions. The material folk culture found in the novels also helps to establish identity and underscore social class. Whether it is Jane sharing an oatcake with her fellow pupils at Lowood or Isabella Linton haphazardly preparing the evening porridge at Wuthering Heights, the material culture in these novels also works to create communities, or to welcome newcomers into those that are already established.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The folklore incorporated into *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* offers a glimpse at life in Yorkshire in the Brontës' short lifetimes. There was a time in which the rural isolation of Yorkshire had not yet been overtaken by the Industrial Revolution's inexorable progress. From the folk architecture evident in *Wuthering Heights* to the fairy lore, omens, and superstition present in *Jane Eyre*, Emily and Charlotte Brontë's novels provide the reader with a sense of the importance of folk knowledge in Yorkshire in general and for the Brontës and their characters in particular. Their novels serve not only to illustrate these folk beliefs and folk artifacts, but also to preserve these customs for future generations.

In addition to highlighting the importance of folk knowledge, the folklore in these two novels lends authenticity to their Yorkshire settings and sheds light on the identities and status of the characters. The Brontës' incorporation of folkloric elements in their work also hints at the changing attitudes toward the study of folklore in the Victorian era. Richard Dorson describes this shift in depth in his account of "the brilliant history of folklore science in England" (*British Folklorists* v). Indeed the term *folk-lore*, he relates, is credited to the antiquary (folklorist) William John Thoms, who proposed this new designation for the field of popular antiquities in a letter to the *Athenaeum* on August 22, 1846 (1). This was just over a year prior to the publication of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Within that time, according to Dorson, Thoms boasted that his new term had "achieved household currency," at least in England (1).

Paula Krebs discusses this change, as well. She states that "The field of folklore studies was born in the Victorian period" and contrasts the earlier, amateur antiquaries' collection of "customs, songs, and stories" with the newly organized professional societies and publications on folklore that emerged early in Victoria's reign (Krebs 41; Dorson, *British Folklorists* 44).

These professionalized folklorists, Krebs continues, contributed to the nationalistic and imperialist sense of Englishness that was also developing during this era, which tended to marginalize the folk as “old wives,” or as something the increasingly educated middle-class had “transcended” (41).

Krebs and Nancy Armstrong agree that Emily Brontë rejects this “othering” of the folk in *Wuthering Heights*. Instead, she “incorporates folk genres in a way that allows them a status and authority that they could never have had in the accounts recorded by Victorian folklorists . . . in which narrators were always already discredited, old-fashioned, uneducated ‘old wives’” (Krebs 42). For instance, Lockwood seems to fit the mold of the middle-class tourist in search of authentic English folk customs. But according to Armstrong, Brontë instead employs him to create a darker view of English culture, in which the “internal colonialization” inherent in his stereotypical view of folklore “transform[s] respectable English culture into one haunted at the core by possible violations of the family model” (248). Furthermore, Krebs observes, “in the relationship between the folklorist figure of Lockwood and his informant, Nelly Dean, the relative positions of folklorist and folk are not easy to pin down” (42). She argues that while Victorian folklorists identified folk knowledge as “survivals of earlier cultures,” the folklore in *Wuthering Heights* does not fulfill this role (42). Instead Krebs proposes that Brontë “reveals middle-class English culture’s repressed, unwanted links with the cultures of those who were living artifacts of a British cultural past” (42). By doing so, she asserts, Brontë thus breaks with the notion of “the folklorist and the old wife” (42).

*Jane Eyre*, too, undermines this trope. The most vivid example is in chapters three and four of Volume Two, when Rochester disguises himself as an old woman from the gipsy camp to test first Blanche and then Jane. When he is informed of the “woman’s” arrival, Colonel Dent

describes her condescendingly as “one of the old Mother Bunches” (Brontë 191). Mother Bunch, according to Sally Shuttleworth, was “a noted London ale-wife of the late Elizabethan period” who told tales; books of “wise lore” were subsequently named for her (472). Rochester uses this charade to inform Blanche that he is not as wealthy as she hoped in order to test her regard for him. Blanche, of course, fails this test, as she and Lady Ingram are later cold when he pays them a visit (Brontë 254). Blanche also fails in a more immediate sense: she does not even recognize Rochester, perhaps because she sees only the stereotypical “old wife” who has come to tell fortunes and does not look any deeper, unlike the perceptive Jane.

The status and authority the Brontës ascribe to folk knowledge in their work is especially powerful because their characters do not observe or record folklore from a distance. Nor do they reduce it to a quaint relic of times past. Rather, folk knowledge and material folk culture play an active role in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. In *Jane Eyre*, as I have demonstrated, this knowledge is also a key part of Jane’s identity as she navigates the progression of liminal spaces that she occupies for most of the novel.

I have chosen to concentrate on the folklore in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* for this thesis, but the remaining work of the Brontë siblings offers a wealth of possibility for future research. Indeed, further study of the Brontë family could prove the basis for future work encompassing the published works of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë. Such a project could also include the work of their brother, Branwell, as well as the siblings’ juvenilia. Jen Cadwallader observes, for instance, that in Charlotte Brontë’s early efforts at characterization “external qualities mirror inner worth” (3). This is true of many familiar folktales or wonder tales as well: Cinderella is both beautiful and good, while her stepsisters are evil and ugly. Likewise, in “Beauty and the Beast,” Beauty is both lovely and compassionate. This suggests yet again that

Brontë took inspiration from the folktales she encountered as a child. A closer analysis of the siblings' juvenilia may reveal additional folkloric influences that illuminate their work even further.

Despite the radical ideas in their work, the folk knowledge incorporated by Emily and Charlotte Brontë reveals that tradition and ritual are still central values in each novel. Even as the authors interrogate the established social hierarchy and push back against its views on what is appropriate for women of the time, they also critique fashionable society for its shift away from the traditions of the past and its tendency to treat folk knowledge as quaint or rustic. In the end, their use of folkloric elements discards this notion of folklore as passé. Instead, the folklore of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* is vital and complex. As they ground their tales in these familiar rituals and customs, the Brontës reject the notion that such knowledge must be relegated to history.



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