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Mary-Antoinette Smith,
" Becoming Jane: Embedded Epistolarity in Jane Eyre's Writing Herself into Being ",
Cynos, Volume 25 Spécial - 2008,
mis en ligne le 11 mars 2010.
URL : <http://revel.unice.fr/cynos/index.html?id=6169>

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Becoming Jane: Embedded Epistolarity in Jane Eyre's Writing Herself into Being

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Charlotte Brontë's title heroine in *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* peripherally adopts the 18th century epistolary literary convention for the purpose of writing herself into being by the conclusion of her narrative. In employing an innovatively embedded epistolarity Jane devises an intimate letter-writing dialectic between herself and her reader that results in the successful purging of her horrific past, once and for all. This transformational path reflects Michel Foucault's endorsement of "self writing" as a requisite for "care of the self" [*souci de soi*], as well as bell hooks' veneration of the importance of "writing [one's] autobiography" as a means of purgation. Jane Eyre's self-writing facilitates her cathartic ability to emerge as a fully realized independent woman who successfully leaves the traumas of her past behind in order to assume her role as Mrs. Jane Rochester, matriarch of the manor, as a fully developed whole and autonomous self.

épistolarité, récit spéculaire, catharsis, féminisme

I took destiny in my arms and vowed not to let it go until I existed.

— Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Hottentot Venus*

The letter one writes acts, through the very action of writing, upon the one who addresses it, just as it acts through reading and re-reading on the one who receives it. . . . To write is thus to "show oneself," to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence. And by this it should be understood that the letter is both a gaze that one focuses on the addressee . . . and a way of offering oneself to [her] gaze by what one tells [her] about [her]self.

— Michel Foucault, *Self Writing*

Introduction

In their critically acclaimed and comprehensive feminist analysis *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe that many scholarly readings of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* "study the patterns of her imagery, and count the number of times she addresses the reader" (337).¹ This observation fails to credit, however, the literary tradition Brontë draws upon in her heroine's thirty-five unobtrusive acknowledgements of her reader's presence in the novel; that is, the epistolary literary tradition that was popularized during the eighteenth century. To overlook the embedded epistolarity in this novel is to miss the importance of the eponymous heroine's intentional inclusion of her reader's presence, and how she uses an intimate letter-writing dialectic in order to write herself into being.

¹ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar, eds. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

That *Jane Eyre* has traditionally “been read by its detractors and admirers as the portrayal of a willful female subject who claims her own identity” (Marcus 206)² is a given. This is in spite of the fact that it frequently goes unnoticed that when Brontë’s first edition of the novel was published under her pen name Currer Bell its full title was used; that is, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* (1847). That the novel is in fact an autobiographical memoir is what makes Jane’s genre of choice the most compelling in light of such queries as: Why did Jane develop a need to write her life-story ten years into her marriage to Rochester, and what spawned this compulsion? To what purpose does Jane write her narrative? And why did she not simply write a traditional journal for her own private consolation, growth, and/or edification, rather than engage in a text centered on public discourse that derives from embedded epistolarity?

The physical act of Jane documenting her life-story will result in a purging, or catharsis, that will permit her to move unencumbered into the rest of her future life as Mrs. Rochester. In the act of writing her narrative she reflects French philosopher Michel Foucault’s precept of “care of the self” [*souci de soi*] (226)³ as the greatest gift one can give oneself. According to Foucault, this kind of self-nurturing evolvment is a form of *askesis*; or, a process of self-transformation one undergoes autonomously on one’s own behalf. One accomplishes this by documenting one’s life in a *hupomnemata*, or written chronicle that “has a very precise meaning. It is a copybook, a notebook” (272).⁴ For Jane, producing her narrative as a *hupomnemata* “constitutes an essential stage in the process to which [her] whole *askesis* leads ... [and a]s an element of self-training, [her] writing has ... an *ethopoietic* function: it is an agent of the transformation of [her] truth into *ethos*” (209).⁵ The self-training Jane undergoes in copying her life-story onto paper is what gives her increased impetus to transform into her whole-self. Once accomplished Jane will assume to her rightful or “accustomed place” as defined by the original meaning of the Greek word *ethos* in her role as Mrs. Rochester. Part of this evolutionary process requires that the Jane who has married Rochester come to final terms with the traumas of her past, which is why she authors her *hupomnemata* ten years into the marriage.

Evidently there are residual memories and issues with which Mrs. Jane Rochester must come to terms in order to bring closure to her past and fully embrace her future. African-American feminist scholar/activist bell hooks, has observed that the “longing to tell one’s story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release” (84).⁶ In this light, Jane’s *hupomnemata* serves as a memory book in which she records the details of her pre-married life when she was repeatedly made abject to the will of others. Through this death-by-writing *Jane Eyre* dissolves as she writes herself out of her hermetically sealed chrysalis of confinement and comes into being as Mrs. Jane Rochester. The emergent Jane’s cathartic self-writing is poignantly reminiscent of the self-birthing process Gloria Watkins underwent as she morphed into bell hooks:

By writing the autobiography, it was not this Gloria I would be rid of, but the past that had a hold on me, that kept me from the present. I wanted not to forget the past but to break its hold. This death in writing was to be liberatory... Until I began to try and write an autobiography, I thought that it would be a simple task, this telling of one’s story. And yet, I tried year after year, never writing more than a few

²Marcus, Sharon. *The Profession of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising, and Jane Eyre*. *PMLA*, 10:2 (March 1995), 206-219.

³Foucault, Michel. *Technologies of the Self*, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (Essential Works, Vol. 1). New York: The New Press, 1997, 223-251.

⁴Foucault, Michel. *On the Genealogy of Ethics*, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (Essential Works, Vol. 1). New York: The New Press, 1997, 253-280.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶hooks, bell. *Writing Autobiography in Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999.

pages. My inability to write out the story I interpreted as an indication that I was not ready to let go of the past, that I was not ready to be fully in the present. Psychologically, I considered the possibility that I had become attached to the wounds and sorrows of my childhood, that I held to them in a manner that blocked my efforts to be self-realized, whole, to be healed. (80-81)

Jane's ten year delay in writing her narrative parallels hooks' impaired ability to write her autobiography until her life came to an impasse where she could not move forward productively without doing so. In the end, both Jane and hooks are freed from trauma-ridden childhoods through the process of liberatory self-writing, and each sheds once and for all the debilitating memories of their horrific pasts. They differ only in that hooks writes a traditional autobiography, while Jane produces an epistolarity embedded *hupomnemata* rather than a mainstream memoir.

Embedded Epistolarity, *Hupomnemata*, and the Emergence of a Literary Heroine

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is not explicitly epistolary according to the strict eighteenth-century literary conventions defined by Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) or Frances Burney's *Evelina; Or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778). It does, however, serve as a nineteenth-century exemplar of epistolarity as adapted by Brontë's heroine. My reading of the novel imposes epistolarity on Jane's autobiography, and I use the term interpretively as defined by Janet Gurkin Altman:

"[E]pistolarity" (working definition: the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning) is a parameter for reading epistolary literature... [and] the concept of epistolarity is primarily a frame for reading. A work's epistolarity cannot be scientifically measured. It can only be argued by an interpretive act, which involves the critic's description of a letter novel's epistolarity as much as the novelist's or novel's actualization of the letter's potential to create narrative, figurative, and other types of meaning. (4)⁷

Locating epistolarity within *Jane Eyre* differs from most analyses that identify more traditional patterns found in narratives about a protagonist's evolutionary process. Renowned feminist scholar Elaine Showalter points out, for example, the predominance of "[p]sychological development and the dramas of [Jane's] inner life are represented in dreams, hallucinations, visions, surrealistic paintings, and... Jane's growth is ... structured through a pattern of literary, biblical, and mythological allusion" (113).⁸ These primary literary devices interwoven within the novel, it is understandable how readers might overlook Jane's peripheral styling of herself as a *personne qui écrit des lettres*; that is, as an *épistolière* who elusively weaves the convention of letter-writing throughout her narrative as she escorts readers along her self-developmental journey.

Additionally, as a *hupomnemata* in the auspices of an autobiographical memoir, Brontë's novel serves as a gradual rendering of Jane's evolving into her whole-self through a rebirthing process reflective of the fact that "in the specific instance of autobiography, where a life is so intimately joined to the act of writing, one can achieve certain important insights into the possibilities and necessities of self-writing" (Mason 321).⁹ Even though Jane does not know what the end result of her *hupomnemata* will be, the act of "copying" her memories down helps her "in her own unique way, to discover and delineate a self and to tell the story of that self even as it was being uncovered and coming into existence" (Mason 323). As she writes, Jane steadily develops from a willful and displaced orphan with "no father or mother, brothers

⁷ Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982.

⁸ Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

⁹ Mason, Mary G. *The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers in Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

or sisters" (17) into an autonomous "independent woman" who eventually comes into her own as Mrs. Jane Rochester. Her self-writing, thus, serves to validate her nuanced self-development, and her true self unfolds through the epistolary intimacy she establishes in her author-to-reader dialectic. At the beginning of *Jane Eyre* readers are not immediately aware that we are embarking on an epistolary voyeuristic experience that will take us along on Jane's tempestuous odyssey into self-discovery. We are propelled *in medias res* into an as yet unknown world where "[t]here was no possibility of taking a walk that day" (1).¹⁰ It does not take long to realize the degree of contention and discord in the world of our young heroine who is cautioned by a superior named Mrs. Reed: "Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent" (1). As an impressionably spirited girl, Jane is at odds with her environment and the people that populate it, yet she maintains a curiosity for adventure that makes her inquiring and eager to experience life beyond the dreary hellish existence she must endure while living with the Reeds.

As *épistolière*, Jane's author-to-reader dialectic reveals her stalwart endurance of the horrific upbringing of which she frequently despairs: "What a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made of me in those days!" (24). The advantage of these hardships for Jane is that they condition her to expect little by way of kindness and compassion from others while concurrently aiding her in cultivating her own unique code of survivability in the world. Her tenacious resolve will serve as the foundation of her willful determination to grow herself into being, despite the odds that will be beset before her in the future. Feisty defensiveness becomes Jane's *modus operandi* during her pre-pubescent years as she traverses the terrain of her daily life with the Reeds. Predictably, she indiscriminately seals her own fate when she outspokenly defends herself in a rage against Mrs. Reed when Mr. Brocklehurst comes to Gateshead to determine her suitability for admission into Lowood Institution. When accused of being deceitful Jane's venom spews forth as she challenges her aunt's claims, for, as she explains:

Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn... I gathered my energies and launched them... Ere I had finished [my] reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I had ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into un hoped-for liberty... I was left their alone - winner of the field. It was the hardest battle I had fought, and the first victory I had gained... I enjoyed my conqueror's solitude. (29-31)

Unable to go back to her previous pre-vocal life, Jane is spirited away to Lowood where she is free from Gateshead, but she soon discovers the charity school is yet another experience of living in a hellish confinement that demands "'Silence!' and 'Order!'" (38) of her. During her first day at Lowood, for example, she experiences the familiarity of having to hold her tongue in silence. In observing Mrs. Scatcherd's maltreatment of Helen Burns Jane wonders: "How can she bear it so quietly - so firmly? . . . Were I in her place, it seems to me I should wish the earth to open and swallow me up" (44). Fortunately, Jane she finds genuine humanitarian goodwill embodied in Miss Maria Temple who, in keeping with her name, serves symbolically as an umbrella of sanctuary during Jane's adolescent development. While cultivating a close friendship with Helen, Jane is sustained by the wholesome good nature of Miss Temple for whom she has "a considerable organ of veneration" (40). Jane articulates fond memorial impressions of her icon of respite in her *hupomnemata*'s first epistolary reference: "Let the *reader*"¹¹ add, to complete the picture, refined features; a complexion, if pale, clear; and a stately air and carriage, and he will have, at least, as clearly as words can

¹⁰ Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

¹¹ Textual references to *reader* will henceforth be identified with italics (my emphasis).

give it, a correct idea of the exterior of [her]" (40). This reference formally establishes Jane's role as *épistolière* and the reader's role as *auditeur* for the remainder of the narrative.

During her next eight years at Lowood, Jane endures various hardships, including the deaths of many of her peers from a typhus epidemic, as well as Helen's death from consumption. In spite of these losses Jane becomes more self-assured and eventually hires on as a Lowood instructor. When she turns eighteen she recognizes that she will be stifled if she remains at the boarding school, and she makes the excellent choice to seek employment outside of her hermetically sealed environment at Lowood. Unaware of her true marketability, however, she sets the bar low in her newspaper advertisement for what she believes to be a suitable position for her skill level:

"A young lady accustomed to tuition" (had I not been a teacher two years?) "is desirous of meeting with a situation in a private family where the children are under fourteen (I thought that as I was barely eighteen, it would not do to undertake the guidance of pupils nearer my own age). She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music" (in those days, *reader*, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments, would have been held tolerably comprehensive). (79)

Curiously, our *épistolière* makes three parenthetical asides to her reader within this advertisement: the first confirms her qualifications for the position; the second explains why she has chosen a specific age for her potential pupils; the third points to the fact that the women of Mrs. Jane Rochester's day, at the time she is writing her *hupomnemata*, have resumés of learned accomplishments that excel those of the fledgling Jane Eyre of yesteryear. These reader-directed editorial comments further establish Jane's relationship with her reader, while also indicating her vulnerable need to have auditory validation in support of her narrative. Ultimately, Jane's advertisement yields a successful request for her services as governess to eight-year old Adèle Varens at Thornfield Hall, and she bids farewell at last to the confinement of Lowood Institution.

The *Epistolière* Emerges from the Cocoon

As Jane travels to Thornfield Hall to assume her new role as governess she begins her metamorphosis into the woman who will eventually shatter the barriers of nineteenth-century social stratifications by marrying its owner, Mr. Edward Fairfax Rochester. Unbeknownst to Jane, her initial journey to Thornfield is only moderately difficult by comparison to the arduous one that awaits her once she arrives. What she does realize, however, is that she is vulnerably alone and woefully underdeveloped in her growth process. As a result, at this stage of her *hupomnemata* she begins to more heavily rely on overt acknowledgements of her reader's presence as a vicarious voyeur of her memoir. Our *épistolière* begins Chapter Eleven, for example, with cognizant reader intentionality:

A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, *reader*, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote[...] and I am warming away the numbness and chill contracted by sixteen hours' exposure to the rawness of an October day: I left Lowton at four o'clock a.m., and the Millcote town clock is now just striking eight [...]. *Reader*, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind. (85)

No one is there to meet and transport her to Thornfield, and consequently she feels lost, vulnerable, and unsure of what lays before her. The vividness with which this scene is drawn belies the fact that it is being recorded by the pen of the thirty year old Mrs. Jane Rochester. The riveting of these details in her memory can only have manifested from repeated recollections of this journey in Jane's memory throughout the previous decade of her life, and as suggested earlier by bell hooks, by recording them she succeeds in permanently releasing the hold her past memories have on her. Jane will then be free to live her future as an unfolding, rather than having it perpetually clouded by the haunting shadows of her past.

When Jane finally arrives at Thornfield, she meets Mrs. Fairfax and Adèle, and then eventually her employer, Mr. Rochester. He directly proceeds to insinuate himself into her life as a key factor in her metamorphosis, and whether welcome by Jane or not, his wisdom as an older adult serves to facilitate her growth process. He wisely foreshadows, for example, that her maturation process will come with a price when he tells her: “Jane . . . you will come someday to a craggy pass of the channel, where the whole of life’s stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted up by some master wave into a calmer current” (132). Rochester’s imagery is indicative of what Melodie Beattie describes as a vortex experience, in which she observes:

It’s a strange thing when one is in the middle of a vortex. Outside a vortex, one watches and judges. Sometimes one doesn’t even see or feel it. But the closer one gets, the more one is drawn into it. Its power begins pulling one as . . . she gets closer and closer. Then one is sucked into the middle of the experience with a chaotic rush of emotions... They know they’re in the midst of something, learning something. Then, suddenly, it’s time to leave. The energy weakens. They begin to get thrust out - pushed out - but it’s still necessary to pass through the whirling centrifugal force. Sometimes it spits the person out; sometimes they extricate themselves. But it’s always a centrifugal, almost magnetic, push and pull. It’s vortex energy... Vortexes don’t just suck people down under, like eddies in the sea. They heal, energize, teach, empower, cleanse, enlighten, and transpose. They lift people up and set them down in a new place. They bring new energy in. They discharge the old. One is never the same again after a vortex experience. (2-3)¹²

In truth, no one can escape unexpected vortex experiences in life any more than Plato’s prisoner could avoid being compelled out of his proverbial cave and painfully introduced to the process of enlightenment that would forever change his perceptions of reality. Similarly, Jane has no choice in accepting the reality of Rochester’s prediction, or in succumbing to his rather predatory luring of her into falling in love with him.

In spite of Rochester’s understanding of the rigid social stratifications that prohibit relations between employer and governess, he strategizes several ways to attract Jane’s attentions. In addition to demanding that she appear in the evenings along with Adèle, he cultivates a practice of euphemistically nicknaming Jane such “endearments” as *his fairy, imp, angel, pit lamb, sylph, ewe lamb, dove, the apple of his eye*, and more, that is unprofessional of his status as her employer. He succeeds in dubiously disarming Jane’s defenses, and in light of her naïve inexperience, how could she not fall in love as a result of the deliberate seductiveness of her darkly alluring and elusively unattainable employer? With a giddiness indicative of a young woman’s first crush, our *épistolière* shares intimate musings about Rochester by querying and answering:

[W]as Mr. Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, *reader*: gratitude, and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire... I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged. I thought there were excellent materials in him; though for the present they hung together somewhat spoiled and tangled. I cannot deny that I grieved for his grief, whatever that was, and would have given much to assuage it. (137)

Once in love with Rochester, Jane confides to her reader that she was unable to extricate herself from her allurements even after discovering his betrothal to Miss Blanche Ingram: “I have told you, reader, that I had learnt to love Mr. Rochester: I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me - because... I saw all his attentions appropriated by a great lady... I could not unlove him, because I felt sure he would soon marry this very lady...” (173-174). Our *épistolière* further reveals:

¹² Beattie, Melodie. *Stop Being Mean to Yourself: A Story About Finding the True Meaning of Self-Love*. Center City: Hazelden, 1998.

There was nothing to cool or banish love in these circumstances, though much to create despair. Much too, you will think, *reader*, to engender jealousy: if a woman, in my position, could presume to be jealous of a woman in Miss Ingram's. But I was not jealous: or very rarely; -- the nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word... [Rather it was from the] obvious absence of passion in [Mr.Rochester's] sentiments towards her, that my ever-torturing pain arose. (174)

This painful danger zone portends that Jane must undergo severe trials in order to triumph in overcoming them and, as presaged by Rochester, she is destined to fall “into that whirl and tumult” before she can come into being by being “lifted up by some master wave into a calmer current.”

Resurgam — I Shall Rise Again

In seeking her own self-development Jane Eyre proves herself exceptional in embracing rather than avoiding her transformative journey. She courageously elects to go voluntarily into the vortex that either will destroy her utterly or renew her completely. Her uneasy is labored, well-discerned, and takes the high rather than the low road. Our *épistolière* would not wish her chosen path on another, compassionately observing: “Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonised as in that hour left my lips; for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love” (306). Jane leaves Thornfield secretly in the night after learning Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason. Her decision is based on a profound truth she has learned about herself through her growth process thus far: “I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself” (302). With this knowledge at her core, Jane refuses to serve as Rochester’s mistress and has no alternative but to leave. Her journey becomes one that is harsh and bleak, and it takes a toll on her mentally, emotionally, and physically. Commiserate with the intensity of her evolutionary process Jane carefully records her life-altering thoughts at this point in her *hupomnemata*. She describes her inner travels towards self-discovery, as well as the physical travails of her journey. Although this may seem a low point for Jane, it actually represents the highest point to date of her birthing herself towards autonomy. Just as surely as Jane had a tombstone proclaiming “*Resurgam*” belatedly constructed on the grave of her long deceased friend, Helen Burns, she also is able to make the same hopeful claim on her own behalf — *I shall rise again*.

Lost, alone, friendless and at the “craggy pass of the channel” predicted by Rochester, our *épistolière* plummets into the depths of poverty, hunger, and homelessness:

I could not hope to get a lodging under a roof, and ... my night was wretched, my rest broken: the ground was damp, the air cold ... no sense of safety or tranquillity befriended me. Towards morning it rained; the whole of the following day was wet. Do not ask me, *reader*, to give a minute account of that day; as before, I sought work; as before, I was repulsed; as before, I starved; but once did food pass my lips. (314)

Eventually she finds a roof over her head, food for nourishment, and space to continue her self-development at Moor House with St. John Rivers and his sisters, Diana and Mary. During her year there she finds great pleasure in teaching at the village school, and she discovers at last her full autonomous and self-directed essence. Yet something is missing, and Jane is persistently plagued by troubling visions associated with her past:

At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection: and yet, *reader*, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm, this useful existence - after a day passed in honourable exertion amongst my scholars, an evening spent in drawing or reading contentedly alone - I used to rush into strange dreams at night: dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some

exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him - the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. Then I awoke. (350)

If Jane thought she was in love with Rochester while residing at Thornfield, she discovers by being separated from him that her previous feelings of love pale by comparison to the love of her newly emergent self. This discovery the depth of her love compels her more rapidly into the center of the vortex's spinning whirlpool that has contained and constricted her during this penultimate phase of her maturation. To complicate her life John proposes that she become his wife and missionary companion. He is the second man to attempt to impose problematic patriarchal parameters on her life, with Rochester having been the first when he tried to marry her while already married to Bertha, and then he asked her to live in sin with him as his mistress. St. John's proposal is untimely and inappropriate, particularly since they are not in love, and it disregards the fact that Jane does not want to accommodate him. The new Jane confronts him directly, outspokenly challenges his domineering plan, and adamantly refuses to capitulate. In the privacy of her room, however, Jane anguishes over what she in fact should do. Beseechingly she pleads to Heaven: "Show me, show me the path" (401). Her answer comes mystically in the night, calling "Jane! Jane! Jane!" and she recognizes the source as "the voice of a human being - a known, loved, well-remembered voice - that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently" (401). Jane has but two options: remain free and independent, though tormented within the vortex, or confront her past head on, return to Thornfield, and move forward into an unknown future that promises to herald in "a calmer current." Choosing the latter, Jane answers in the affirmative and prepares to complete her journey into wholeness by declaring aloud into the night: "I'm coming! ... Wait for me! Oh, I will come!" (401).

Jane's return to Thornfield takes "six-and-thirty hours" (404) and ends with her prophetic observation: "My journey is closed" (404), although when she arrives she first thinks she has "taken a wrong direction and lost [her] way" (411). Thornfield is burned and in disrepair, and its owner is blind, mangled, and despondent. Our maturely collected *épistolière* adapts readily to these surprising discoveries, noting: "And, *reader*, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity? - if you do, you little know me. A soft hope blest with my sorrow that soon I should dare to drop a kiss on that brow of rock, and on those lips so sternly sealed beneath it: but not yet. I would not accost him yet" (412). She, instead, waits for him to discover her. She also listens carefully as he recounts the details of his life after she left Thornfield and discovers that he, too, has undergone a rigorous vortex experience and transformed into a man who differs greatly from the one she left behind. The new Edward Fairfax Rochester has been redeemed from his former dissipated lifestyle and is now worthy of the newly autonomous Jane Eyre who can confidently confirm: "*Reader*, I married him" (429). As Joyce Carol Oates has observed, this announcement carries the "tacit message ... 'I' married 'him' - not that 'he' married 'me.' What greater triumph for the orphan the governess, the small, plain, and 'Quaker-like' virgin?" (*Jane Eyre*, Introduction xiv).

Conclusion

What made it possible for Jane Eyre to successfully write herself into being by the end of her *hupomnemata* was her own self-fulfilled prophesy that she revealed to Mr. Lloyd at the beginning of her narrative: "I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman" (17). Through the course of Jane's narrative this recognition developed into a signature emblem along her journey to full fruition. As long as she was abject and subject, whether at Gateshead, Lowood, pre-fire Thornfield, or Moor House, she was not fully a woman by her own definition. But once she had survived her obligatory vortex experiences a thoroughly liberated Jane returned to Thornfield and pronounced to Rochester: "I am an independent woman

now... I am my own mistress" (416). She is doubly independent in that she has received her Uncle John Eyre's inheritance, as well as coming into her own autonomous being irrespective of the fortune. This Jane Eyre has become an "independent woman" who validates Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301).¹³ Viewed in the context of de Beauvoir's dialectic of woman as *Other* and man as established *Self*, Jane has successfully matriculated the matrix of oppression that pitted her as abject female *Other* in opposition to the patriarchal and propertied Rochester as the established male *Self*. In terms of woman's alterity within nineteenth-century gender stratifications, to assert herself out of the traditionalism of her subjugation, a woman had to successfully forge an equitable situation between herself and her male counterpart. This challenging prospect required "that woman be allowed to transcend through her own free projects with all the danger, risk, and uncertainty that entailed" (Mussett).¹⁴ In terms of *Jane Eyre*, this reality fulfills the requisite that the title heroine had to overcome a myriad of difficulties to become her whole-self by the end of her narrative.

As a nineteenth-century heroine Jane Eyre proved capable of enduring the perils of her past, and her path to autonomy parallels the kinds of transformative rites of passage de Beauvoir outlines in the penultimate chapter of *The Second Sex*, titled *Toward Liberation: The Independent Woman*. Jane's *hupomnemata* chronicles a journey to wholeness that was fraught with requisite challenges that built her character and confirmed her moral fiber and, therefore, meets de Beauvoir's criteria for becoming an "independent woman." It also reflects the purpose which Plato prescribed to writing a *hupomnemata*. Its inherent value is that it is produced "for the constitution of a permanent relationship to oneself" (Foucault 272).¹⁵

As argued throughout the course of this discussion, Jane's autobiographic *hupomnemata* chronicles her life-story while embedding epistolary elements that aid in her writing herself into being. Her end purpose for self-writing and becoming whole is not, however, to elevate herself above others, but rather to prepare herself for an equitably balanced marital relationship. A male and a female that know themselves fully as separate individual selves, as prescribed by the Oracle of Delphi's directive *Know Thyself* (γνῶθι σεαυτόν or *gnothi seauton*), can achieve perfect balance as paired equals in a thriving amplificatory relationship. At the close of her memoir Jane confirms that she and Rochester have achieved this state of marital bliss largely because she has written herself into being and has mastered (or mistressed) her role as Mrs. Edward Rochester: "One must manage oneself as a governor manages the governed, as ... a head of household manages [her] household ... [and] the point at which the question of the *hupomnemata* and the culture of the self comes together in a remarkable fashion is the point at which the culture of the self takes as its goal the perfect government of the self" (Foucault 272).¹⁶

Although it took until she was ten years married to do so, Jane discovered that true freedom and "perfect government of the self" were characterized by her serving fully and wholly as matriarch of the manor; that is, as Mrs. Edward Rochester¹⁷ of Thornfield Hall. By the conclusion of her narrative, Jane has developed a personal schemata of perfect self-government, and the further cultivation of this model for a life well lived will facilitate her

¹³ de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

¹⁴ Mussett, Shannon. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/>.

¹⁵ Foucault, Michel. *On the Genealogy of Ethics*, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (Essential Works, Vol. 1). New York: The New Press, 1997, 253-280.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ Note: Jane's new married initials E.R. phonetically should be similar to Eyre, thus, she essentially merges more wholly into her very own self while concurrently holding the socially respectable and dutiful title of Mrs. Edward Rochester.

continued growth as she practices self-writing long into her future. It is this fundamental truth that ultimately fulfilled Jane's quest to write herself into being, and it accounts for our *épistolière* being able to assuredly proclaim in closing her *hupomnemata*:

I have now been married for ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest - blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine... All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character - perfect concord is the result. (432)

The Jane that has developed into the woman that can make such statements will be richly rewarded in her union, and a brand of familial harmony will be maintained at Thornfield Hall that will cement the lives of Mrs. Jane Rochester, her Edward, their son, and their "docile, good tempered, and well-principled" (431) Adèle within the dynamic of a well-governed family unit.

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