Fairies and Fairness: The Aesthetic of White Femininity in *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract
The traditional association of whiteness with fairies warrants a closer examination, as this mythological yearning for a specific childlike realm reveals an idealization of a white past. Indeed, the likening of women to a pure, infantile domain reveals an elevation of whiteness, which, by default, degrades people of color as lesser. While there has been considerable scholarship on the racialization of Charlotte Brontë's Haitian character Bertha Mason, the construction of whiteness in conjunction with Jane Eyre's character has remained largely unexplored. I explore these themes of the construction of whiteness through fairies and the romanticization of a white past through a close analysis of humanity in *Jane Eyre*. I first investigate Victorian and Edwardian fairy visuals, moving on to demonstrate how Jane's individuality and feminism gains autonomy with her religious spiritualism. I also show, however, how the faerie language in the novel serves to override and disregard Jane's position as a human being with agency due to Mr. Rochester's aesthetic of white femininity. Through close readings of the supernatural in *Jane Eyre*, I scrutinize how the use of fairy language creates a power imbalance where the dehumanization of women and minorities creates a male fantasy directly opposed to the theme of the individual. I discuss how the sexualization and racialization of women as supernatural beings bolsters the self-serving, problematic construct of the 'human' which continuously labels women and minorities as less than. Therefore, to restructure this racism and misogynistic thought, I propose a decentering of humanity from a white male perspective, seeing women and minorities not as a monolithic "Other," almost supernatural beings, but as equally human and worth of respect and dignity.

The image of fairies in Western society as dainty white women may not appear significant, but merely a byproduct of the plethora of folklore originating from the United Kingdom. Women have traditionally been correlated with nature and the supernatural, so this idea does not initially appear to diverge from that trope[1]. However, the association of whiteness with fairies warrants a closer examination, as this mythological yearning for a specific white childlike realm reveals an idealization of a white past. Particularly during the nineteenth century, fairy artwork, folklore, and fairy tales profited from this notion of white women and white children as fairies. This attraction to purity and children was not uncommon for the Romantic Era, and Victorian Society placed ample value on these values; however, this romanticism often bolstered racist ideals by associating whiteness with purity, which echoes a pattern of colonialist thinking. Thus, the likening of women to a white, pure, childlike realm reveals an elevation of whiteness, which, by default, degrades people of color as lesser. While there has been considerable scholarship on the racialization of Charlotte Brontë's Haitian character Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's wife whom he traps in an attic, the construction of whiteness in conjunction with Jane Eyre's character has remained largely unexplored. I will explore these themes of the construction of whiteness through fairies and the romanticization of a white past through a close analysis of humanity in Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. I will first investigate Victorian and Edwardian fairy visuals, moving on to demonstrate how Jane's individuality and feminism gains autonomy with her religious spiritualism. I will also show, however, how the faerie language in the novel serves to override and disregard Jane's position as a human being with agency due to Mr. Rochester's aesthetic of white femininity.

Acclaimed Victorian artist Richard Doyle demonstrates that fairies were commonly conceived as white women, such as in his print "Dressing Baby Elves". This print, which depicts young fairy boys with adult fairy women, who are presumably their mothers, perpetuates a variety of stereotypes about whiteness, purity, and femininity. The women's white gowns further the aesthetic of whiteness as pure and belonging in the realm of children, as it gives the impression of the Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house," caring for the family and smoothing the household routine. This print depicts the female fairies dressing the young fairies, and from the left background of the image, it is evident that the female fairies are supposed to remain in their place while the young boy fairies go off elsewhere. The image of women as mothers, waiting in domesticity for the return of the male figures who are able, and encouraged, to go on journeys of their own despite their clear youth, orients the male fairies as the subject of the print and the women as objects. Doyle consequently implies that the purpose of women is to exist for the needs of the males. This speaks to the intersection of race and gender, and how western patriarchal traditions detrimentally affect women's positions in general and romanticize women and children in the domestic realm. Overall, unlike other fairy courts or royalty depicted by Richard Doyle, this scene of domesticity does not appear as if intended to surprise or shock Victorian audiences. Indeed, the whiteness of the fairies almost appears beneath notice, as opposed to the women's roles which are more overtly pronounced. This print therefore seems to play off tropes of whiteness and women's roles to craft these popular fairy images which were far from out of place in Victorian society. However, it is worth remarking that this "'Angel in the House' represents the type of cultural mythology that Charlotte Brontë was already challenging

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[1] For more on how this trope informs patriarchal ideals, see Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" *Women, Culture, and Society*, Standford, Standford UP, 1974, pp. 68-87.

in the pre-Victorian era" (Heiniger 23). Therefore, Brontë's feminist agenda combatted this vision of women as fairies but was complicit in upholding and validating the normality of whiteness in fairy thought.

The infamous affair of the Cottingley sisters and their photographs of fairies likewise affords an opportunity to examine the construction of ideal whiteness and gender within turn of the century fairy depictions. In the photograph below of Frances Griffiths and a set of dancing fairies, it is not a coincidence that the brunette female fairies bear an uncanny resemblance to Frances's own brown hair, pale features, and elaborate hairstyle. Through this photograph, it is also evident that fairies were widely assumed to be white women of higher status. In fashionable garments, these white women fairies epitomize the Victorian perception of fairies as white and gendered creatures. While it is not a colorized photograph, it is clear that the women do not have darker skin, and that they are intended to be young, beautiful, attractive women. Thus, there is an element of male fantasy, which even with female creators, is integral to the representation of fairies. However, they do not appear harmful in any manner, merely playing music and dancing. This innocuous nature echoes what was acceptable for women of the time and suggests that women are not violent creatures by nature, but superficial, gentle, delicate, small, lighthearted beings. Since these depictions echo and reinforce assumptions about feminine roles and race, the visual examples therefore demonstrate how impossible it is to separate societal expectations from fantastic worlds. Additionally, even though Charlotte Brontë and the Cottingley sisters were all female, that does not mean that gendered and racial tendencies did not affect their depictions of fairies.

While the visual evidence of Doyle's painting and the Cottingley photograph helps to better understand Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards race, gender, and fairies, it is important to couple that knowledge with written language as well. Victorian scholar Jan Susina comments in her article "'Like the Fragments of Coloured Glass in a Kaleidoscope': Andrew Lang Mixes Up Richard Doyle's 'In Fairyland'" how "[c]onsiderable tension remains between the text and illustration" (101). Thus, one cannot assume that the aforementioned visual artwork acts as representative for all fairy images in the Victorian Era, as it ignores the widespread depiction of fairies as white in written literature. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to *Jane Eyre* as well as other contemporary fairy literature, such as Alice Furlong's poetry for a holistic look into fairy language and whiteness.

Jane's association with fairies does not initially appear out of place since Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is teeming with supernatural language and themes. However, it is essential to parse the varied types of supernatural which Brontë represents. For instance, the feminine power of the universal Mother Nature, shown in the character of the moon, appears to be elevated to the ideal supernatural. It is a common trope to refer to the moon as a feminine entity and the sun as a masculine concept. In Alice Furlong's 1922 poem "The Warnings," the protagonist escaped the dark Banshee and came "Upon the brow o' the Fairy-hill a round gold moon was leaning—/She parted from the esker as the Banshee keened for me" (Furlong). Not only is the moon female, but she is a positive ally within a supernatural context. This trope of the moon as a female guardian who saves female protagonists is furthered by Jane's reference to the moon as "Mother" at multiple points in the novel. Especially when Jane is in need of spiritual or moral guidance, the moon always manages to help "my daughter" (Brontë 411). The feminine supernatural power, such as the moon, is depicted as an organic aspect of nature as opposed to the aggressive male preternatural which this feminized mood actively subverts. It is my contention that not only is this religious supernaturalism feminine, but also that it functions to elevate the feminine to an equal state with the masculine. Therefore, the feminine supernatural actively aids Jane in her quest for autonomy and self-determination, as Jane declares to the male protagonist and romantic interest Mr. Rochester that, "It is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at G-d's feet, equal, as we are" (Brontë 338). Thus, this supernatural entity gives "poor, obscure, plain" Jane power to render her an equal of Mr. Rochester, a richer man of the upper-class aristocracy (Brontë 338). However, it is telling that Jane is not a fairy, nor a supernatural creature when she becomes Mr. Rochester's equal—she is herself, a human being.

Another reason why Jane's supernaturalism is difficult to dissect is that this particular supernaturalism which Jane appears to embrace is not easily classified or categorized due to its various intersections with religion, gender, and geography. While many contemporary Christians looked down upon supernaturalist superstitions as mere offshoots of pagan myths, Jane promotes an intersection of both, one which supports her religious ideologies while also supporting her feminine identity. It is worth noting that Brontë specifically endorses Jane's individualistic Christianity, and that when Mr. Rochester develops a more pious outlook, it appears, by Brontë's pen, to make Mr. Rochester more worthy of her. However, it is significant that Jane does not adopt a typical English folkloric view of fairies, which Mr. Rochester tends to espouse, as that ignores her humanity and categorizes her as one of the fairies, rather than an independent

Christian woman. Additionally, Brontë utilizes the allegedly "foreign" folklore of Bertha to elicit fear and revulsion. Therefore, while Jane's complex supernaturalism is difficult to classify, I will refer to it as her religious spiritualism which is directly tied to Jane's individualism.

It is also not a coincidence that this religious spiritualism is of a feminine nature, for it encourages Jane's feminism and quest for autonomy. For instance, the moon lends Jane the power to leave Mr. Rochester resisting the temptation of becoming his mistress or, as Mr. Rochester phrases it, "the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior" (Brontë 403). Brontë embodies Jane's resistance by personifying the moon who "broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure inclining a glorious brow earthward" (Brontë 411). Therefore, the connection between fairies and the moon goes farther than this correlation in *Jane Eyre*, as is shown in the quotation above, the moon not only functions as a woman, but as a white woman (although the moon's white appearance makes this less surprising). Therefore, the moon furthers this concept of the fae as white and feminine; the specific language used implies that much of her beauty is derived from her whiteness. It is quite significant that the ideal supernatural, and the supernatural with the most authority, is blatantly described as white.

However, the connection between fairies, whiteness, and the night sky with the moon is not unique to *Jane Eyre*, as a variety of fairy stories often take place at night, such as the majority of Eddie Lenihan's fairies do in *Meeting the Other Crowd: The Fairy Stories of Hidden Ireland*. This common darkness in Lenihan's fairy stories makes it unsurprising that the moon, fairies, and whiteness are conceived of together since the setting of the night seems to warrant it to an extent. For example, Lenihan's "Two Changeling Stories" he details how in the middle of the night a man sees "a lady in white" replacing a human child with a changeling (Lenihan 297). This story demonstrates how not only fairies have an inherent connection to the darkness of night, using it as a cover to appear in human lands, but also that their whiteness plays a huge element in identifying them as fairies.

While the moon is not a necessarily a fairy, Francisco Vieco points out in his article "A Changeling Becomes Titiana: The Realm of Fairies in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" that Jane and Mr. Rochesters story functions as a feminist fairytale where the moon as a person signifies Jane's "fairy godmother," and the moon as a place functions as an idealized "fairyland" (Vieco 31, 33). While the moon certainly functions as a motherly guardian for Jane, Vieco appears to be attempting to fit the moon into his thesis about how Jane Eyre functions as a fairy tale. Therefore, I disagree with this specific argument, as "fairy godmother" is a precise term which ignores how the moon functions as a universal mother who does not help Jane go to a dazzling ball to gain a prince. Instead, it acts as a nurturing spirit who, in the Freudian manner functions as a superego, helps Jane to do what is right. The moon encourages Jane to run away from "the prince" Mr. Rochester, who functions as an id, what she materially desires. Therefore, the traditional "fairy godmother" who gifts a Cinderella with gowns and material goods, encouraging her to marry the handsome, rich prince is absent within the novel, making Vieco's connection flawed in this particular argument. Additionally, I will demonstrate that the alleged fairyland that Vieco speaks of is not Jane's fairyland, but a male fantasy of Mr. Rochester, unrelated to the moon as an empowering aspect of the feminine supernatural.

However, when reflecting on fairy language, it is relevant that it is not Jane as a narrator, but Mr. Rochester, who evokes the majority of the fairy metaphors within the novel. This male framing of the preternatural, which leads Jane to faint from terror in the Red Room, is condemned in the novel as misogynistic and limiting to Jane's quest for self-determination, but this male preternatural force ironically functions in the same racial manner. Brontë does not appear comfortable when male characters attempt to wield the paranormal for their own purposes, such as when Jane's deceased uncle's ghost appears. Therefore, when Mr. Rochester attempts to label Jane as a fairy or a changeling, this is not represented as desirable, as "he always sees her as his own fairy, not as an autonomous fairy" (Vieco 27). Since a fairy is a diminutive creature and a human non-entity, Mr. Rochester refuses to acknowledge her as a human being. Therefore, Mr. Rochester's association with the supernatural hinders Jane's autonomy, as he has difficulty acknowledging Jane's power over him, especially as she loses agency in her transition from a paid, independent subordinate under him to his fiancée. In fact, by suggesting that Jane's power comes from the fairy realm rather than an internal spiritual reserve, which is what Jane believes, Mr. Rochester denies her personhood and spiritual ideals.

However, critics, such as Reuben Sass view the fairy language associated with Jane as "spiritually, intellectually, sexually liberat[ing]" through her similarity to the fairy tale archetype of the Swan Maiden (Sass 19). Sass argues that the fairy language in Jane Eyre acts as progressive, since "by viewing Jane and Rochester's relationship from the standpoint of fairy tale archetypes, we are encouraged to strip away the restrictive elements of early Victorian social norms, institutions, and class distinctions" (Sass 20). However, this assumption, which serves as the foundation for the rest of Sass' argument, ignores the power of nineteenth century politics and ethos. As Doyle's artwork, the Cottingley fairy photographs, and Furlong's poetry has demonstrated, it is nonetheless impossible to separate nineteenth century British culture from fairy language and thought. Especially because Mr. Rochester categorizes Jane as a fairy in such gendered and racial terms, it is evident that his fairy language is not only influenced by, but heavily entrenched in nineteenth century ideology. Additionally, while Sass does reference a variety of compelling empowering, feminist moments throughout Jane Eyre which speak to equality through the supernatural, Sass' analysis confounds Jane's individual religious spiritualism with Mr. Rochester's male fantasies which limit Jane's autonomy.

Mr. Rochester's fairy language labels Jane as fairy, playing off of well-known English folklore, represents an idealization of a white past which privileges Mr. Rochester, and men, above Jane, and therefore women. Harris argues in his chapter "Quaintness" that those who cultivate a rustic, country image of the past with materialist, consumerist products that it romanticizes a specific type of past, one which ignores labor and harsh realities. While Harris mostly focuses on the American idealization of the nineteenth century, it is equally applicable for how Mr. Rochester, and other privileged white men, can often revel in nostalgia for a pre-industrialized past where rural isolation made white, affluent men such as Mr. Rochester kings to their own kingdom. By projecting his desires of a pure, child-like woman onto Jane, Daniel Harris argues that people such as Mr. Rochester "reproduce the past selectively, editing out its discomfort, inconvenience, misery, stench, and filth and concentrating instead on its carnal pleasures, its 'warm and homey feelings'" (Harris 25). Rather than confront changing power structures within the nineteenth

century, Mr. Rochester utilizes fairy language to tacitly undermine Jane's authority within her own narrative.

Mr. Rochester's rendition of how he met Jane reframes the narrative, situating Jane as an active initiator who forces him to fall off his horse, rather than a simple bystander who witnessed a man struggle with equitation. He characterizes Jane as "havi[ing] rather the look of another world" and that "[w]hen you came on me at Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse" (Brontë 192). The precise verb phrasing of "you came on me" constructs Rochester as the passive agent, and positions Jane as an active, and somewhat aggressive participant. In reality, Jane was walking, and he rode up near her on his horse, as horses move significantly faster than people, but the way in which Rochester frames this tale, he utilizes the language of the uncanny to place the blame of his injury on her rather than on himself.

Gilbert and Gubar in their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* posit that Mr. Rochester's construction of Jane as magical leads their story to begin "as spiritual equals," as it "acknowledges her powers as much as (if not more than)" Mr. Rochester's (352). However, the accusatory tone of the rendition does not appear to support this claim, especially as Jane denies any power over Mr. Rochester's horse and subsequent injury. In a way, this interaction highlights their inequality, for Mr. Rochester has the privilege to make unfounded accusations without concern for punishment or retribution, unlike Jane as a paid subordinate must worry about every day. Mr. Rochester further asserts that she was waiting "for the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them. Did I break through one of your rings, that you spread that damned ice on the causeway?" (Brontë 192). However, this argument that she was waiting for other fairies directly contradicts what he had just previously noted about her as an active agent. Instead, this comment appears as a condescending comment, intended to affront and provoke Jane. This remark, which plays off superstitions about fairy rings and fairy dance, is directly rooted in English and Irish folklore, but it also accuses her of placing ice on a roadway which inconvenienced him. Jane's agency is key, as Mr. Rochester utilizes a devious paradox to dehumanize her while absolving himself of responsibility.

Paula Sulivan in her article "Fairy Elements in *Jane Eyre*," however, perceives the fairy language in this first scene as "the immediate, intuitive perception by each character of the mysteriously powerful 'presence' of the other" (Sulivan 62). This symbolic reading of this encounter implies sexual tension and awe at the other person's splendor. However, the fairy language is decidedly one-sided. Jane sees Mr. Rochester ungallantly fall off a horse, but when he recounts this first meeting, it is only his language which speaks of the fairies and supernatural. And this language, far from language of romance and adoration, blames Jane for his mishap and characterizes her as an aggressive fae creature. Therefore, this fairy language is far from the language of love or endearment.
These two comments concerning the otherworldly reveal that Mr. Rochester attempts to utilize the supernatural to manipulate the conversation, placing Jane and his circumstances entirely on Jane's shoulders. By referring to her as a fairy, Rochester limits her autonomy, saying that her actions are not really her own, but could be supernaturally attributed. In other words, Mr. Rochester's perception of Jane having power over him leads him to blame her and attempt to

remove this influence. Thus, he utilizes the supernatural to put the responsibility on her, and her nature, rather than his own being. It is her doing the bewitching, while he remains an allegedly passive agent. Although Jane's limited independence appears to contradict her alleged responsibility, it is this absurdity which renders Mr. Rochester's claims utterly false according to Brontë's writing.

This language is nearly identical to how Mr. Rochester portrays Bertha, especially when he recounts meeting her for the first time. At fine parties where Bertha stood out as a stunningly beautiful woman "She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments…I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her" (Brontë 395). Although this passage makes no reference to magical beings, I contend that Bertha, herself, acts as a supernatural entity in this narrative. Mr. Rochester attempts to convince Jane, and readers, that he was hoodwinked, bewitched by the seductive beauty of a foreign woman. The specific word choice of "dazzled, stimulated" and "excited" imply that he had no control over his reaction to "her charms and accomplishments." This case study of Bertha, coupled with previous analysis of Jane, demonstrates how Mr. Rochester implicitly identifies female power with the supernatural, since he was unwilling to acknowledge his complicity and influence, overlooking as well that women may have power on their own without aid from the supernatural. However, whereas Brontë appears dissatisfied with Mr. Rochester's characterization of Jane as a fairy, Brontë does not condemn Bertha's representation, as Vieco argues that Brontë was "not intending to empower contemporary women, but only her Jane" (Vieco 35). However, this overlooks how Bertha's racialization feeds into a larger dialogue about Brontë's personal racial prejudices. Therefore, perhaps Vieco is just in determining that Brontë did not desire to encourage all women to follow Jane's feminist example; however, I argue that she limited the women whom she desired to encourage to middle and upper-middle class British white women.

Mr. Rochester also often appears to utilize the context of fairies and fairy tales to create his ideal male fantasy, since it simultaneously positions Jane as the instigator and object. And when Adèle expresses confusion at one of his fantastical allegories, Mr. Rochester concludes with confidence and clarity that "Mademoiselle is a fairy" (Brontë 353). This short tale explaining their relationship could be an instance of attempting to add magic and mystery to a normal love story by giving it a fairytale ambiance. However, since there exists a plethora of references to Jane as a fairy throughout the novel, the symbolism appears more complex. Thus, when Mr. Rochester fabricates a fairy tale story for Adèle about how he and Jane became engaged, his diction speaks to what he believes Jane's purpose is in his life as well as her agency. In this tale, both parties do not express their emotions verbally, but somehow can mentally communicate that Jane "was a fairy, and come from Elf-land…its errand was to make me happy" (Brontë 353). This explicitly illustrates that Mr. Rochester desires a woman who views him as the center of her universe, who exists only for his pleasure. Yet, this aspiration completely erases Jane's individualism which she cherishes, for it erases her personal history and childhood trauma, and disregards her personal aspirations of knowledge for his own sexual and emotional desires. It is not a coincidence that this also mimics the ideal Victorian marriage, with men's needs superseding those of women. Therefore, Jane's resistance acts as a subtle critique of this hierarchy within traditional marriage.

After explaining that Jane supposedly desired to take him to the moon "out of the common world," Mr. Rochester responds that it would not be possible, as he "had no wings to fly" (Brontë 353). The omission in this sentence implies that Jane does have wings, and thus the ability to fly free where Mr. Rochester cannot. However, when Jane gives him the magical ring, he is able to become her equal, flying with her away to a fantasy land to "make our own heaven-yonder" (Brontë 353). It is significant that as soon as she gives Mr. Rochester material wealth and power through a golden ring that Mr. Rochester begins to use female pronouns for her. By contrast, when Jane meets him, he recounts her as a whimsical "thing with a veil of gossamer on its head," which further dehumanizes her (Brontë 353). Therefore, I contend that this reiteration of their courtship represents a revealing vision of Mr. Rochester's ideal relationship, one of passivity and submission to his will, with material gains on his end. Mr. Rochester, at least at this point in the novel, does not value Jane for her individuality of spirit, but rather for her as an object of affection.

Even as Mr. Rochester toys with Jane before overtly proposing, he asks her to "[t]ell me now, fairy as you are, --can't you give me a charm, or a philter, or something of that sort, to make me a handsome man?" (Brontë 330). Therefore, Rochester appears intent on ascribing the uncanny to Jane for his own egocentric purposes. However, it is significant that even though Jane is very in love with Mr. Rochester and believes that "a loving eye is all the charm needed," that she only verbally responds in a sardonic manner that "It would be past the power of magic, sir" (Brontë 330). Therefore, Jane defies, at least in part, Mr. Rochester's classification of her as a fairy. She further resists this language by playing off the demeaning fairy language to dub Mr. Rochester as "a mischievous hobgoblin from British folklore, to emphasize his surly character and slovenly looks" (Vieco 34). Sulivan considers this a compliment from Jane to Mr. Rochester since, "Brownies secretly perform good services, and she finds Mr. Rochester a sympathetic helper" (Sulivan 62). However, since Jane uses this specific language at the very end of the novel after Mr. Rochester calls her a fairy and directly says "you talk of my being a fairy, but I am sure, you are more like a brownie," the term "brownie" does not seem to relate to his job as a "sympathetic helper," but rather as a slight insult to his character, gently chiding him to stop comparing her to a fairy (Brontë 539). Michael Gouker also explains that much of Jane's discomfort with Mr. Rochester ascribing supernatural tendencies to her person arose from the fact that "Jane (unmarried and poor) is a prime candidate for accusations of witchcraft" (179). Regrettably, one of the realities throughout history is that single women, especially independent ones, are often deemed too dangerous for society, and thus are publicly condemned as witches. Therefore, Jane's resistance to Mr. Rochester's fairy language fits in with her sense of self, as well as the historical realities of the time.

Especially since the name of the eponymous novel is *Jane Eyre*, and that the entire work is permeated with the theme of the individual, Jane appears uncomfortable with this association since it eliminates her individuality and negates her spiritual ideals which are firmly rooted in this individualist ideology. Jane, far from the submissive fairy-like fantasy, does not submit to Mr. Rochester's idealization and labelling of her character and pronounces that, "I am no angel…and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me—for you will not get it" (Brontë 345). While Heiniger believes this to relate more literally to the Victorian "Angel in the House" stereotype forced upon women, Jane's specific response with the word "celestial" does not point to a domestic critique,

but a supernatural one (Heiniger 24). However, that does not necessarily mean that Jane was not commenting on his gender politics; rather that if she were, that it was in relation to her status as a female fairy, a supernatural being in his eyes. By resisting Mr. Rochester's labelling as a supernatural being, Jane affirms her humanity and personhood as a woman.

After Jane leaves Mr. Rochester, it is noteworthy that Jane's individuality is oppressed even further with the religious character of St. John. Brontë unequivocally represents him as a man who continuously subjugates Jane and attempts to eradicate her individual desires, a man who does not make her happy. It is therefore significant that after speaking with him one night that Jane "tripped fairy-like down the field; he, as he strode firmly across, never turned at all" (Brontë 461). The deliberate word choice of "fairy-like" is significant, for it demonstrates how even without using specific words of the supernatural (which St. John would probably view as heretical and antithetical to monotheistic Christianity), that Brontë ties Jane's status as a fairy as a submissive role where her freedom is restricted.

Additionally, one should not underestimate the possessive nature of Mr. Rochester's fairy language, such as when he dubs Jane "my fairy" (Brontë 538). This implication of owning Jane as an object is accomplished by Mr. Rochester recognizing her as a living creature and disregarding her humanity. In this situation, along with the scene where he is thrown from his horse, Rochester's association with Jane and fairies suggests that he is compensating for his own perceived inadequacies, such as his lack of horse riding skill in the former situation, and his blindness and physical disability in the latter. Additionally, Mr. Rochester's claim that Jane is a fairy has large implications spiritually and religiously, for "[a]ccording to Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid', air sprites, or fairies, do not have souls. In contrast, Jane boldly asserts that she has one" and that her "soul makes her equal with Rochester, and she values it more highly than she values her love for him" (Heiniger 26). Therefore, Mr. Rochester, and more importantly, Charlotte Brontë, who were clearly familiar with English folklore from the various instances of employing fairy comparisons, deliberately liken Jane to a soulless being. However, Jane, a religious Christian herself, resists this comparison. Nevertheless, Mr. Rochester's attribution of fairies also represents an iteration of the male gaze, where his assumptions about fairies, race, and gender are revealed.

Mr. Rochester additionally utilizes this fairy language to rationalize his intensely lustful desire for Jane, as he attributes it to her seducing ways that "You mocking changeling—you fairy-born and human-bred! You make me feel as I have not felt these twelve months" (Brontë 540). The repetition of the pointed "you" multiple times coupled with the fairy language in this passage plays into sexist thought of the time about feminine wiles trapping men, which limits women to two roles: the seductress or the idealized pure woman. Mr. Rochester idealizes her using the latter archetype, but it is significant that he idealizes her for her purity and innocence which is all derived from her whiteness.

Jane's alleged innocence and naïveté as a small fairy give Mr. Rochester and excuse to denigrate her to a child-like position. By "defin[ing] her femininity as elfin—that is, confined to a world of fantasy that excludes sexuality—or childlike: 'a little sunny-faced girl…with dimpled cheeks and rosy lips', 'this one little English girl,'" Mr. Rochester demonstrates that he does not desire Jane as an equal partner, but one who is kept in the realm of childlike purity (Wyatt 205). Therefore,

his fairy language stems from a fear of strong women, such as Bertha who "symbolizes a monster of brutal sexuality" (Vieco 32). Mr. Rochester equates female eroticism with power, and thus, desires Jane to have none through the childlike fairy realm so that he can remain a dominant figure[2]. However, it is also worth emphasizing that Mr. Rochester's image of Jane as a pure, angelic figure does not measure up to who she is in the actual narrative. In fact, when Jane leaves Mr. Rochester, she flees the "temptation" of becoming his mistress even though "I thought of him now—in his room—watching the sunrise; hoping I should soon come to say I would stay with him and be his. I longed to be his; I panted to return" (Brontë 412). Clearly, Jane does think of Mr. Rochester in a sexual manner and would like to be intimately involved with him—it her self-respect that stops her from becoming his mistress, not a lack of desire. It is also in Mr. Rochester's best interests to exaggerate Bertha's alleged danger as an exotic monstrous figure, since he addresses Jane, a white woman scared of Bertha's skin color, when he recounts his rationale for locking her up in an attic. Brontë, therefore, is complicit in Mr. Rochester and Jane's racism by rationalizing Bertha's entrapment.

The sole concept which ultimately separates Jane from her gothic double Bertha is that Jane's supernaturalness is deemed harmless, as opposed to Bertha's paranormal nature, which is harmful because she is a woman of color. However, Elaine Showalter explains that the diction that Brontë deliberately chooses to describe Bertha as "'the foul German spectre—the vampyre,' 'a demon,' 'a hag,' 'an Indian Messalina,' and 'a witch"…[are] a traditional figure[s] of female deviance with its own history in folklore" (Showalter 119). Showalter posits that these specific supernatural beings "themselves express a cultural attitude toward female passion as a potentially dangerous forced that must be punished and confined" (119). It is possible to analyze these creature analogies though the lens of female resistance, which would certainly line up with Bertha's figure as "Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead" (Gilbert and Gubar 360). However, I would argue that the common cultural conception of fairies as small, delicate beings (mostly female) leads to a dangerous elevation of the white over other races and ethnicities. It is only their association with British mythology and whiteness which gives them the appearance of being less menacing and relatively innocuous. Fairies are not, in fact, intrinsically gentler or kinder than ghosts, vampires, or other supernatural beings. The terrifying image of a shrieking Banshee and the "Dead man who lies drowned at the bottom of the sea" are normal aspects of English folklore, and can, in a broad sense, be included under the category of fairy (Furlong). Thus, it is whiteness that is sacred, not fairies.

While this analysis of Jane Eyre, fairies, and the construction of whiteness may appear exclusively limited to Brontë or Victorian ideals, it is also vital to remember that J.R.R. Tolkien played off of a variety of these same tropes, especially quaintness, when constructing the natural born leaders of his world in *The Lord of the Rings* as pure, white, naturally brilliant and beautiful elves against the ugly, savage darkness of the primitive orcs, which can even be seen through their languages. The idealization of elves and their past rulership of Middle Earth likewise privileges white, male patriarchal systems much like Mr. Rochester, who desires an exaggerated

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[2] It is worth noting that women are, in fact, sexualized in fairy lore, but that often their sexualization makes them a "dark fairy," such as Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*. On the other hand, the "good fairies" of the same film (Merriweather, Flora, and Fauna) are ones who are gentle, kind, and feminine while being submissive and childlike to their male superiors (in this case, the king).

world that privileges him as a white man above the interests of women and people of color. Minorities and women do not have the privilege to reimagine the past in such a manner, as past subjugation limits this romanticization of a nature-filled, anti-technological existence. This trend of labeling women and minorities as less human through supernatural means creates a self-serving, problematic view of humanity. Therefore, to restructure this racism and misogynistic thought, it is important to decenter humanity from a white male perspective, seeing women and minorities not as a monolithic "Other," almost supernatural beings, but as equally human and worth of respect and dignity.

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