

Reverberations: Trauma and Recovery in *Jane Eyre*

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*I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.*

Rilke. Book of Hours, translated by Joanna Macy

Charlotte Brontë's perennially reproduced frontispiece presents *Jane Eyre* as autobiography, whose craft is supported and--we suppose--enhanced by its male editor. It is a conceit that reveals and conceals according to its contextualization within the conventions and prejudices of the nineteenth century novel or as a trans-historical precursor to postmodern autofiction.¹ In my own novel, *Cologne*, I played many angles of this conceit but none more deliberately than the close alliance between the 'fictional autobiographer' and the novelist, between the teller and the tale. In *Cologne*, eleven-year-old Caroline Whitaker 'cannot sleep at night because she can't bear the thought of Mr. Rochester growing ugly and blind and that woman in the attic troubles her' (Pleydell 141). This allusion to *Jane Eyre* was intended to alert the reader to themes common to both novels, namely traumatic memory and retelling.²

¹ For example, Salmon Rushdie's *Joseph Anton* and J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth*.

² In *Cologne* though this double consciousness (a term not to be confused with Herman's double-think), occurs simultaneously within the tight, discrete space of literary allusion and does not stylistically imitate the alternating passages of Brontë's novel. However, just as the ghost of Uncle Reed bearing down on her in the red-room spooks the young Jane, so Caroline is haunted by images from the eponymous classic stowed under her pillow. Like the embattled Jane, Caroline is on the brink of sleep, caught between specter and nightmare, mental assault and psychic invasion. Like her authorial exemplum, the older Caroline is trying to integrate posttraumatic memory.²

In *Jane Eyre*, the mature Jane, the sanguine and reliable narrator, concedes early in the novel that the incident in the red-room gave ‘...her nerves a shock of which I feel the reverberations to this day. Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering’ (Brontë 52, chapter 3). However, she is quick to qualify, to distinguish the ways the adult mind registers intense emotion from a child’s attempts. ‘Children can feel, but they cannot analyze their feelings: and if the analysis is partially effected in thought they know not how to express the result of this process in words’ (56, chapter 3). The older Jane is making it understood that her young and feisty self, was quite capable of knowledge, but of a ‘partial’ kind—strong on impression and sensation, short on words: the coherent narrative, the integration of images and their meanings, is contingent and reliant, she is instructing us, on adult hindsight. ‘I could not answer the ceaseless inward question—*why* I suffered thus, now at the distance of—I will not say how many years, I see it clearly’(47, chapter 2). Q. D. Leavis in her 1966 introduction to the novel, places a different accent on the same idea: ‘the theme has very properly dictated the form, and [this novel’s] theme is an urgently felt personal one, an exploration of how a woman comes to maturity in the world of the writer’s youth’ (11, introduction). According to Leavis, it is the narrative act of retelling that provides the crucible of an ‘author’s’ wisdom and assurance.

The psychic imprint of traumatic experience is the window through which a subject interacts with her or his world both as epistemology and affective response. The synergy between psychoanalysis and literary theory—and more pertinently trauma theory and therapeutic practice³—derives from the centrality of the hidden, displaced, altered or metonymic in the ‘recovery’ of meaning. Some psychoanalytic luminaries namely Jacques Lacanⁱ, Julia Kristevaⁱⁱ and Melanie Kleinⁱⁱⁱ play this interdisciplinary cusp: And the exemplars of psychoanalytically-charged criticism are those that avoid freighting a living text—in this case a beloved and iconic one—with diagnostic schema that collapse its aesthetic heft and hack at its humanity. For example, Adrienne Rich’s ‘Jane Eyre: the Temptations of a Motherless Woman’ from *Lies, Secrets and Silence*^{iv} and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s ‘A

³ Foundational trauma theorist Cathy Caruth overlaps with Herman in terms of many of the psychological manifestations of posttraumatic stress, including ‘double-think’ and serial reenactments. However, she focuses more on speech acts and bodily sensations, specifically those that realign traumatic experience.

Dialogue of Soul and Self: Jane Eyre' from *The Madwoman in the Attic* are powerful arguments for the reclaiming of the wounded feminine that are—and were—iconic in their own right/write. However, the paradigm this paper engages, Judith Herman's model of 'complex post-traumatic distress disorder', is tipped toward clinical practice. While Herman draws on literary references^v and is cited by scholars of traumatic experience,⁴ her methodology has not, thus far, been applied whole cloth to a literary text. Its appeal lies in its dimension and dynamism, a pristine syntax and succinct conceptual eloquence. Supported by Lacanian heuristics the application of this paradigm to *Jane Eyre* generates a holographic reading that complicates time and place, feeling and knowing, remembering, reliving and even retelling. However, the reading simultaneously unsettles the logic of Herman's therapeutic method, which argues that narrative retelling rights/writes the reiterative and reactive spiral of traumatic wounding. In this reading the dyads of healing and maiming, trauma and recovery are revealed as contiguous and sometimes commingled.

For Herman traumas are rooted in the body as physical violations deriving either from natural disaster, the public theatre of war, sexual and/or domestic assault and child abuse, and in the myriad replays and intersections of these elements.

In her words traumatic experience is:

the moment...the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning. (Herman 33) In *Jane Eyre* 'atrocities' is intimate and/or familial from John Reed's rampage to the brutal-chemistry between Bertha and Rochester⁵. Despite the strong case made for Jane's orphaning as her a priori trauma^{iv}, by Herman's measure John Reed's violent attack is the instigating event as, quite simply, it is the beginning of her story. However, a corollary of Herman's model is that preexisting psychic distress becomes infected

⁴ This includes Jill Matus in *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* and in several essays from *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: The Politics of Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering*, a scholarly anthology edited by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben.

⁵ save perhaps for Jane's presentiment of St. John River's martyrdom in India: "the last mighty victories". "[the anticipation] of his sure reward, his incorruptible crown" (Brontë 477, chapter 37).

with the 'ruddy' afterglow of violent trauma. Jane's sequester in the red-room stimulates a 'tumult' in her brain, a 'consternation of soul' and 'a rapid rush of retrospective thought' that arouses, 'like a dark deposit in a turbid well', the disaffections of past emotional distress (46, chapter 2). Psychic pain is remade as psychic violence, the posttraumatic stress of the red-room is a now trauma all its own.

Herman's post traumatic symptoms, the working components of her clinical paradigm, can be isolated from the whole, noted and catalogued in the margins of even a surface reading of *Jane Eyre*.

Hyperarousal: 'After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment'(Herman 35).⁶ The interjecting adult narrator of the red-room attempts to lay out the young Jane's binary symptomology: on the one hand it is physiological —Jane turns warm, her heart beats thick and she has 'a species of fit'— on the other it is emotional—'an unutterable wretchedness of mind' and 'shaken nerves'. While the narrator struggles to tease these two apart⁷ the thread of nervous ailments read to the modern mind as psychosomatic, emotional in origin by physiological in many of their expressions. Over time Jane learns to manage, or at least curb, her emotional 'excitability' and to keep rage at arm's length as a facet of 'the crazed other'. However, as Rochester is so quick to observe and point out, she remains quick to 'startle' and 'excite'.

Intrusion: "The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep' (Herman 40). Herman continues, '...traumatic memory lacks verbal narrative and context; they are rather encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images...because reliving a traumatic experience provokes such in-

⁶ Herman cites Kardiner's claims that "the nucleus [traumatic] neurosis is *physioneurosis*..."these ' , Herman writes 'are psychosomatic complaints [which] could be understood as resulting from the chronic arousal of the autonomous nervous system" (36).

⁷ Sally Shuttleworth in her chapter "Jane Eyre: lurid hieroglyphics" from *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* contextualizes the narrator's effort. "Medical texts of the era foregrounded the same three concerns which dominate Brontë's novel: the mechanics of self-control, the female body and sexuality, and the insurgence of insanity" (Shuttleworth 148).

tense emotional distress, traumatized people go to great lengths to avoid it' (Herman 40). The bloody episodes and blood-curdling cries of Thornfield redolent of past trauma at Gateshead and Lowood School, intrude on Jane; they challenge her cognitive powers and restimulate the symptomology of posttraumatic stress, most visibly her nightmares.

Constriction. The most intricate of Herman's categories details the personality's intense resistance to posttraumatic intrusions and the lengths to which it will go to avoid them. Herman's aphoristic 'double-think' constructs a mental model whereby the conscious mind subverts the truth to protect the subject from the deeper knowledge she senses. This idea is well illustrated in Jane's dogged belief that Grace Poole is responsible for the mayhem in Thornfield, even when all the evidence suggests otherwise. However this piece of Herman's model is key to this paper. Resistance to high-premium truths, effective in the moment, ultimately compromise the dimensions of the self, not so much Alice Miller's⁸ false self, as a compromised and limited one. This is founded in a semi-conscious impulse to restrict the subject's cognitive and emotional range in order to achieve both amnesia and the flat emotional affect that is preferable to intense anguish. This limited self is also prone to disassociate from present stimuli and in the dissonance that follows to misread them. As an overall consequence she develops 'diminished confidence in ...[the] ability to make plans and take initiative, with increased superstition and magical thinking' (46). The constricted self splits off the colors of its own emotional palette and invests them in others. If and when this fragile integrity falters, it falls prey to hallucination and when it cracks, multiple personality disorder and/or psychosis. The exemplum of Jane's development of a 'constricted' persona is during her sojourn at Lowood School, which she enters enraged and emerges 'plain' and 'little' with few abiding relationships and two constricting frocks to her name.

Herman readily admits her three diagnostic subsets are both unstable and interdependent. They are best understood together, as a dialectal spiral where a stimulus, from within or without, can trigger one component and thereby set the whole in motion. It is a dialectic, she argues, that is 'potentially self perpetuated'(47).^{vi}

Herman's complex posttraumatic stress disorder takes Freud's aphoristic 'compulsion to repeat' and gives it dimension (Herman 41). Psychoanalysis since Freud has been founded in the premise that the templates of traumatic experience determine post-

⁸ See *the Drama of the Gifted Child* for Alice Miller's construal of the aftermath of childhood trauma in terms of the development of faux personae.

traumatic memory, affect and cognition (Freud 14).⁹ In Herman's model they are both psychologically programmed *and* physiologically hard-wired to reproduce and reinvent themselves. To spin this linguistically, these templates function as dynamic metaphors—or allegories—that withhold their own meanings specifically from those compelled—and constrained—to act and reenact them. Meanwhile their genius for metonymic significations and for reinventing particulars within set patterns, renders them all the more treacherous as they recapture past experience and reframe it. In the process they scramble the linear sequence of cause and effect and with it cognitive clarity. Herman's paradigm is therefore a multi-valent mechanism with permutations that oscillate in time and space. It is a paradigm that is, according to Herman, always seeking balance, always to prone to losing it.

The authorial Jane demonstrates insight into trauma's "diabolical" facility for disturbing the coordinates of time and space: this serves to confuse the subject and lure her into danger, while simultaneously baiting her with "supernatural" intimation. This has all the hallmarks of the gothic sensibility so often attributed to the Brontës () Jane identifies dread—from the red-room on—as her younger self's character-logical driver. As the story progresses this same 'authorial' voice takes pains to conflate dread with prescience (dread is ipso facto prescient of a negative future so this elision is a logical one) and to explicate it as a product of trauma past which has about-faced to operate as prescience of trauma to come.¹⁰ This apparent tautology (nicely resolved in Herman's paradigm)¹¹ is invested in

⁹ Herman traces the provenance of her theory of psychological trauma to late nineteenth century practitioners and to Freud in particular, to whom she devotes the first part of her book. However, she takes pains to distance herself from Freud's widely discredited assertion that the Oedipus and Electra complexes are the domestic engines of neurosis, and more trenchantly female 'hysteria'.⁹

The late nineteenth-century studies of hysteria founded on the question of sexual trauma... there was no awareness that violence is a routine part of women's sexual and domestic lives. Freud glimpsed the truth and retreated in horror. (Herman 28)

¹⁰ "Presentiments are strange things! And so are sympathies; and so are signs: and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life; because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies I believe exist... whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man"(249, chapter 21). Brontë along with the narrator may be asserting romantic essentialism, but is also reinforcing truths that defy

Jane's mother and child nightmares, which are a motif woven throughout Bertha Mason's visitations at the apex of the novel ¹², which this paper will now interrogate at close quarters.

Bertha Mason's 'rending [Jane's wedding veil] ¹³in two parts and flinging both on the floor and [trampling] them' on the eve of the new bride's wedding is a tale within a tale, (and tinted with a veneer of the macabre and supernatural) is charged with the symbolic-wattage of allegory. It invites linguistic engagement. ¹⁴.

The application of a Lacanian heuristic further illuminates this allegorical episode. (At the risk, perhaps, of 'rending' its evanescent beauty!) The metonymic valences of the 'veil' take an archetypal sequence, the 'veil' is caul, hymen, shroud (signifiers which consolidate Jane's interwoven biographic traumas), ¹⁵ and conceal them behind a signifier that reifies concealment itself: ¹⁶a veil. Jane introduces the trope of 'masking' in the prequel to her tale of Bertha's visitation, when she accuses Rochester, only half in jest, of the sin of 'pride' for procuring such 'delicate and rich fabric' to 'masque your plebian bride in the attributes of a peeress' (308, chapter 25).

logic in keeping with the more dissociative thinking processes of her embedded narrative self.

¹¹ "There is something uncanny about reenactments. Even when they are consciously chosen, they have a feeling of involuntariness, they have a driven tenacious quality" (Herman 41).

¹² This Madonna child motif is explicitly presented as dual-directional; it foreshadows catastrophe while summoning the psychic terrain of the past: "When I was a little girl, only six years old, I, one night heard Bessie Leaven say to Martha Abbott that she had been dreaming of a little child, and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble" (249, chapter 21).

¹³ Shuttleworth gives attention to the 'rent veil' as a contemporary figuration of Bertha's madness. She cites John Reid, an early nineteenth century medical writer, who described a 'deficiency in the faculty of self-control' as 'the veil is rent, which concealed, the resistance is overcome which controlled them' (qu'ed. in Shuttleworth 165)

¹⁴ This is a trope arguably more dynamic than the ruined chestnut tree because of its prodigious generation of trauma-related metonymy.

¹⁵ Jane describes Bertha as dressed in a white gown, but Jane cannot discern whether it is a 'gown, sheet or shroud'. This metonymic indeterminacy and the introduction of the veil as "[thrown] over her head, and turned to the mirror" introduces Bertha's valence as alter-ego or projected self in keeping with Herman's ontology of the fragmentation of self/ves in the process of constriction and dissociation.

¹⁶ "...traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the traumatized scene in disguised form" (Herman 40).

Yet the signifying action 'rending', equivalent to the signage on Lacan's parallel doors, challenges the signified. 'Rending this veil' augurs revelation of a kind that threatens irreparable damage for 'rending' is an innately aggressive act. This implies that the exposure of singular meaning, Bertha's material existence, will wreak more psychic/physical harm than her remaining Jane's doppelganger, a double bride obscured behind the opposite side of the same veil. This locates Jane in a double 'blind'. The hazy transparency of metaphor-tinted vision creates a tortuous limbo; full disclosure promises harsher pain. Is this postponement a choice or is it the product of posttraumatic stress? The narrative oscillates furiously between these two poles.¹⁷

Throughout her sojourn at Thornfield, Jane has stubbornly suppressed clues to Bertha's existence available to her at every turn. Clever and observant as she is in other contexts, the secrets of Thornfield, blunt her powers of deduction and displace reason with blind affect. She can intuit, encode sometimes, but not decode. She is caught in the world of signifiers without access to the signified. Past trauma it seems has schooled her in dissociation: ironically, it compromises her capacity to preempt more damage in the present.

The mother/child motif that has been established as the trope for the shadow past trauma casts on the future, and in so doing trips the psychological switches that will incur trauma in the future. This trope is embroidered like a triptych into Jane's tale of the 'rent veil' in three digressive asides to Rochester. They serve to underscore a fate Jane is struggling to avert with little hope of success: for fate is programed into the literary form of allegory as allegory prescribes meaning just as omens and signs do. The first iteration of the mother/child motif supports Jane's apprehension (cited above) that the role of Mrs. Rochester will undermine her authentic identity, a premonition rightly construed, wrongly parsed. Here Jane *is* the mother figure 'burdened with the charge of a little child... who [beset with wind and weather] rolls off [her] knee' (310, chapter 25); the closing aperture between ego and archetype reinforces prophecy closing in. The figure's second iteration achieves the high resolution of nightmare and presages Jane's self-imposed exile two chap-

¹⁷ In terms of imagery it is an issue of light and dark, vision and blindness. One moment Jane is enlightened, the next 'insensible'. There is a recurrent motif of lit candles 'enflamed' and 'extinguished'.

ters hence, one that will take her to the 'rent' precipice between life and death. In the figure's third iteration Rochester attempts to wrap the tale up in his own version of an auspicious dream, bidding Jane to dream of 'happy love and blissful union'. But Jane reclaims the tone: 'this prediction was but half-fulfilled. I did not dream of sorrow, but as little did I dream of Joy; for I never slept at all' (61). Finally, eluding the confines of the dream state, the mother/child motif intrudes us embodied in a bas relief eerily reminiscent of Jane's slumbering in the dead arms of Helen Burns: '[Jane takes] little Adele in my arms...so passionless, so innocent.... she seemed the emblem of my past life; and he I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored type of my unknown future day'(314, chapter 25). Again Jane is finely tuned to intimations of past suffering yet dazed and oddly fatalistic, Jane conflates the recent past with the deeper knowledge her full life experience offers her, if she could only 'see' it clearly --and rationally,--enough to act.

Just as Bertha is both trigger and mirror image of a traumatic past Jane cannot discern, Thornfield Hall is the veiled daguerreotype of Gateshead, a two dimensional imprint recast in three. At Gateshead the surreal and the supernatural, its 'goblins', 'demons' and ghosts, were sequestered within the 'tabernacle' of the red-room: beyond the chamber walls, (where the specter of Uncle Reed did *not* 'intrude'), the quotidian prevailed. In Thornfield's environment this diorama inverts. In Thornfield the quotidian is 'phantom-like'. Here the mawkish but predictable servants who normalized Gateshead grow increasingly ghoulish, muting even the garrulous Mrs. Fairfax the epitome of the mundane. Flesh and blood threatens to wax into ghoulish ectoplasm: Jane must labor to feel Rochester's face—its phrenology at best disturbing—^{vii}and persuade herself, and him, that he is real, not a 'phantom...a mere dream.'

Thornfield's illusion of cognitive and domestic normalcy, tenuous at best, is ultimately sundered. As fore-shadowed by the 'rent veil', the wedding, a ritual designed to transform selfhood, achieves its opposite. After Bertha's existence is revealed, Jane is assaulted by Rochester's physical threats to her person and witnesses his violent excess in both his lugubrious confessions and his brutish imbroglio with his 'lunatic' wife. 'Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man—you forget that' (344, chapter 27). The abortive wedding rends the boundary between the discrete personalities of Rochester's two brides and tosses them into the double-voiced vortex of a shared insanity.

Hence the interior allegory of the 'rent veil' plays itself out within the plot proper. Within the next two chapters Jane as she flees Thornfield on foot with no plan or destination, transits from fragile integrity to physic break; she is 'rent', emotionally flooded, physically disregulated and struggling to locate reasoned decision within the primitive cauldron of Herman's 'fight and flight' (Herman 35). In mimetic sympathy with its heroine, Chapter 27 is 'broken'—'rent in half', not by a straight line but a border of asterisks, part scalloped edge, part tatters, as the veil of denials and evasions disintegrates and with it the threads of a coherent self. Jane is 'transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room in Gateshead'. Thus the veiled imprint of the red-room, like a palimpsest shines through the surface, not to enlighten but to frame, the present trauma. Its exposure ruptures the membranes—'the veils'—between dreaming and waking, perception and knowing, imagination and memory, past and present: 'The light that long ago had struck me into syncope [arouses the figure of the mother who broke forth] as never moon broke forth from cloud' (346, chapter 27). In the trance-like aphasia of aural hallucination the mother of so many ambiguous meanings 'whispers in [Jane's] ear' coaxing her toward mental and physical extremity. She is 'weak-limbed', suicidal and crawling on hands and knees.¹⁸ She has not reenacted the traumas of Gateshead and Lowood; they have reinvented themselves in the present. But this is not how Jane interprets herself. Either Jane. However, the authorial and narratively embedded Jane are merged here, and the former's fastidious interrogations of her superstitious tendencies stilled. Finally the narrative persona arises sphinxlike from the text to exhort her reader to keep her distance from the tale: 'Gentle

¹⁸ Many scholars, Gubar, Gilbert and Rich included, read Brontë's explicit parallelism with her description of Bertha "It groveled, seemingly on all four fours: it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal" (p.370) this as Jane's dropping into the instinctual but repressed feminine embodied in Bertha, an ontological state of being anathema to the gender mores of the time. Shuttleworth historicist reading sees Jane's lapse from 'moral management' toward madness as her brief alliance with the female excesses of Bertha who is "plagued by the generic functions of her female body" (Shuttleworth 166), which, she argues, to the contemporary medical mind predisposed women to madness (166). The reading in this paper, however, suggests the erasure of the boundaries of the subjective body, the rupture of human form, so that human nature is merged into a montage of other creatures and natures: the birds, bees, bilberries and lizards: the moor, sunshine, rocks and dew (Brontë 113, chapter 28).

reader may you never feel what I then felt!' (348, chapter 27). ¹⁹Ere another chapter has passed this most recent, more excitable emanation of the 'author' appears to lose her bearings, at least when it comes to her announced project to make sense of her own story.

Reader it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this say I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation blent with the physical suffering form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on...Let me condense now. I am sick of the subject. (Brontë 355, chapter 28)

Retelling, for the moment anyway, has become its own trauma.

Yet most readers, gentle or otherwise, are not drawn *Jane Eyre* to be traumatized, but fed. Jane, for many, embodies the proactive agent who triumphs over the paralysis over unbearable pain.

Adrienne Rich writes:

Like Thackeray's daughter, I read *Jane Eyre* in childhood, carried away as "by a whirlwind." Returning to Charlotte Brontë's most famous novel, as I did over and over in adolescence, in my twenties, thirties, now in my forties, I have never lost the sense that it contains, through and through beyond the force of the creator's imagination, some nourishment I needed then and still need today. (Rich 89).

For as every *Jane Eyre* aficionado knows by heart, our heroine does not succumb to 'the friendly numbness of death' but spies a light 'shining dim, but constant' (Brontë 357, chapter 28). Defying her own fatalism, the archetypal 'mother' of *her own* inner experience, reclaims the integrity of the 'infant who has tumbled from her lap' and muscles forward to frame a happy ending where, in comedic fashion, the aesthetic and thematic threads tie up. Here again Jane's recovery of coherent selfhood is achieved while sharing her story with both her reader *and* with witnesses from within the novel itself. These interior retellings are one of the novel's most consistent tropes and precipitate many key tonal shifts, from

¹⁹ A consideration of this paragraph is relevant in terms of clinical trauma theory: the authorial "I" in distancing from her narrative self, risks as much a repudiation of her plight as empathy with it. The identification of the "I" with the internalized critic, and with the abuser himself, is the ultimate 'victimization' that may precede either suicide and/or severe psychic crisis.

telling her side of the Gateshead debacle to Miss Temple²⁰ (and then to Helen) to the Rivers without whose intervention Jane would never have been reunited with Rochester.²¹

From this vantage, Brontë's novel conforms almost perfectly with Herman's therapeutic prescription: the narrative act of memoir transforms the dysfunction of traumatic memory and restores it to its normal state. "[Normal memory]" claims Pierre Janet, "like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially it is the action of telling a story" (quod. in Herman 37). The therapeutic act of sharing one's story with a community of listeners, mimics the interplay between the writer and her readers. By this logic, the interrogative spaces generated by Brontë's conceit of the fictionalized autobiography are less lacunae for deconstruction than invitations to empathy and catharsis.

Or should we read more dispassionately, as Virginia Woolf would prefer and as the shrewd, anti-pathetic figure of St. Rivers does? ²² In the rush of enthusiasm for imparting her history to the Rivers, Jane lets slip to St. John's by "an involuntary half-start" that Elliot is an '*alias*' (italicized in the text) (374, chapter 29). Storytelling can betray the teller, even if couched in literary device, and possibly because of them. The end of the novel has been problematized and reparsed many times for its ambiguities and ambivalences, for its invocation of maiming and eclipse beneath its professed happy ending.^{viii} However, this is not the only part of the story that questions its own premise.

Confiding past pain is the petri dish in which the intimacy between Rochester and Jane is born. Revisiting the incident of the 'rent veil', Jane's agitation is provoked less by the threat of physical violence than by the violence of meanings dangled, suggested and withheld. In the course of her febrile exposition, Jane pauses to correlate the past with the present—'for the second, time in my life—only the second...(I lost consciousness)' (311,

²⁰ Had Jane not recounted her own version of Gateshead to Miss Temple she would have remained ostracized and considered a 'liar'. Her superior story-telling skills trumped Mr. Brocklehurst's advantage in terms of status.

²¹ Reading functions as container and traumatic indictor. Jane's borrowing of cousin John's, Bewick's *History of British Birds* enables her to manage and reorganized her roiling emotional life. After the double trauma of his attack and the red-room she can no longer negotiate the same text.

²² In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf calls Brontë to task for the "buried suffering smouldering beneath her passion, a rancour which contracts those books, splendid as they are, with a spasm of pain" (Woolf 74).

chapter 25). In the act of retelling, Jane glimpses the depth of field of her own psychic interior and that brief insight grounds and galvanizes her. She reasserts her grasp on both reality and reason only to be undermined by her confidante. 'I determined that to none but you would I impart this vision. Now, sir, tell me who and what that woman was!' (311). Rochester summarily disarms his so-called beloved informed, specifically, by his prior knowledge of her vulnerabilities and of the past that provoked them. In essence, he turns the story back on the teller.²³

Now, Janet, I'll explain to you all about it. It was half dream, half reality: a woman did, I doubt not, enter your room; and that woman was—must have been—Grace Poole. You call her a strange being yourself...in a state between sleeping and waking, you noticed her entrance and her actions; but feverish, almost delirious as you were, you ascribed to her a goblin appearance." (312, chapter 25)

Rochester's interpretation demonstrates canny insight into the workings of posttraumatic memory²⁴ including its cognitive dissonance and its predilection for privileging convenient lies over inconvenient truths. He has Herman's 'doublethink' down, and he manipulates it to serve his own ends. Herman herself is sensitive to the injury inherent in the healing relationship, especially where an imbalance of power allows the healer's 'interpretation' to create one more layer of trauma.²⁵

The telling of Cousin John's assault also contains curious inconsistencies. The author's recall of the event is abbreviated and condensed.

I felt a drop or two of blood from my neck trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don't know very well what I did with my hands but he called me "Rat! Rat!" (43, chapter 1)

²³ It can be argued that the clarity Jane acquires from retelling her sojourn in Gateshead empowers her to return and confront her aunt on her deathbed. In keeping with much of modern clinical therapy, she can speak truth without the obligation of forgiveness.

²⁴ More research is called for to establish the terms and etiology of Brontë's thinking here, given her exposure to contemporary notions of trauma and its impacts on the brain and body. See reference to Jill Matus in conclusion.

²⁵ Herman does emphasize "It is the therapist's responsibility to use the power that has been conferred upon her only to foster the recovery of the patient, resisting all temptations to abuse" (Herman 135).

The syntax here is redolent of Kristeva's semiotic sensations. Yet the young Jane, with her child's sense of injustice, 'Unjust!—Unjust!' said my reason '²⁶ (12, chapter 2), is quick to make sense of them. In conversation with Mr. Lloyd she makes a thorough inventory of her injuries ending with: 'John Reed shut me down and my aunt shut me in the red room'. This is a simple truth that the mature narrative characterizes as 'meager' and embellishes with backstory of Jane's life with the Reeds, as though to beg the reader's forbearance for her child self's bad behavior.²⁷ The overall effect is to background cousin John and obscure, if not mitigate, his responsibility for Jane's suffering; all told there is more attention to Jane's retaliation than to her cousin's provocation.²⁸ Does retelling risk altering or even compromising memory in the guise of advocating for the teller?

The point here is not to deconstruct or challenge the power of retelling: it is to situate it *within* the hologram of complex posttraumatic stress, rather than as its post hoc solution. The brain imaging techniques of the past decade, studies that Herman herself is actively and currently engaged in^{ix}, are further illuminating the Gordian knot, part chemistry, part neural pathways, that comprise experience lost and found, how memory is laid down and how it is retrieved. What does this reading bring to *Jane Eyre*? It brings new dimension to the novel's tussle between suffering and resilience, agency and injury.

Yet this exploratory essay is supremely vulnerable to push back from historicists. In her inventory of contemporary trauma theory compiled in the chapter 'Historicizing Trauma' in *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* Jill Matus handily summarizes the psychological assumptions of this paper (Matus 25—26) in terms of clinical practitioners and literary theorists as well as their decriers (placing Cathy Caruth flush with Ruth Leys). Her quarrel with contemporary trauma theory rests, as does Sally Shuttleworth's, in the location agency, which psychoanalytic and trauma theorists ascribe to the unconscious.

²⁶ Again undercut by the editorializing narrator, " ...forced by my agonizing stimulus into precocious though transitory power"(Brontë 14, chapter 3)

²⁷ Here Brontë as the creator of a fiction, as opposed to the older narrator as the imparter of autobiography, does appear to punish her protagonist for excesses of honesty and temper by tossing her from the frying pan of Gateshead to the fire of Lowood. However, this is requires more of the kind of historicist analysis detailed in Shuttleworth.

²⁸ Moreover, for the rest of the novel violence is held at arm's length from both narrators. It is the territory of Bertha and Rochester, and Jane flees rather than risking an encounter with Rochester's threatened violence. As a feature of plot structure it is curious in terms of avoiding the content of the novel's precipitating event.

The Victorian vision of the unconscious, she asserts, 'is part of a vision of government that suggests at best an enabling vision of labor and at worst a consciousness that is merely epiphenomenal of a material system doing its work automatically' (Matus 24). Matus continues:

Questions of agency and their relationship to unconscious mental functions need to be closely scrutinized in any attempt to examine the Victorian antecedents of trauma theory. They take place in a larger context in which the newly forming discipline of psychology wrestled with questions about the relations of mind and body. Historicizing the contemporary impasse between neurobiological and psychoanalytic explanations for trauma allows us to apprehend the similar yet distinctive stakes in between automatic action of the mind and willed agency. (Matus 24)

Judith Herman's work²⁹, however, attempts to circumvent the impasse between neurobiological and psychoanalytic explanations, between physiological and psychological responses to trauma, which makes it a potentially rich addition to the conversation between contemporary and Victorian etiologies of trauma. In addition, her theory facilitates correspondences, and sometimes transference between public and private, social and domestic spheres. It promises to create conversation if not build bridges between two entrenched perspectives. Brontë's classic, with or without either psychoanalytic or historicist interventions, will like its auto-fictive heroine endure in the interstices between writer and reader, in the reverberations between personal memory and the written word. It will always change my mind.

²⁹ As does Julia Kristeva in her references to clinical practice in "The Life and Death of Speech."

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ In his essay 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud' Jacques Lacan complicates Sausurre's S/s linguistic heuristic (the signifier what it represents (the signified). The whimsically provocative diagram of the words 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' over pictures of identical doors replaces the more elementary word 'tree' over the image of a tree. The doors are identical, but the words complicate their significance. The signifier can divide or qualify the meaning of the signified (1131—34). Lacan continues to elaborate how the metonymic threads of the signifier can change and even reverse the signified. The passage in the red room where Jane encounters the ghost of Uncle Reed is a textbook example. Jane locates her own reflection in the mirror locating meaning in her interior 'room', the image in the mirror then shifts to the memory of a kindly Uncle Reed and thence bounces to a reflection of moonlight gleaming on the wall, which transforms 'the interior' into the frenzy of demonic possession. Uncle Reed's 'meanings' shift from the internalized positive male to the demonic one.

ⁱⁱ In her essay, The Life and Death of Speech Julia Kristeva links preconscious experience, in particular the traumatic separation from the mother in early infancy, (which she substitutes for the psychic (Gordian) knots of Freud's Oedipus complex) to pre-verbal imprints, 'se-miotics', which function as physical sensation not sign. The profound alienation of 'being cast off and set aside' by the mother generate one of Kristeva's richest heuristics (if oxymoronic!), abjection. In Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection. The foreground Jane's of psycho-physical reactions to the red room exemplify archetypal 'abjection':

When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (Kristeva 2)

Jane is cast off by the Reeds as she was from her family of origin, the red suffusion of the background reactivates the trauma of a birth that came fast on an orphaning enacts a semi-otic experience. However overhearing Bessie and Abbott conversing about the circumstances of her orphaning transfers a disorganized semiotic experience into a coherent speech act. Of course, the fundamental force and focus of the abject in the novel is madness mashed in with female sexuality and, as this paper argues, with violence which cannot be beheld or confronted.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dismissive as the narrator is of her child self's dependence on the 'faded graven image' of her doll, Jane's interactions with it resemble Melanie Klein's use of play and symbolic objects within play to rearrange and soothe the wounds associated with primal trauma. In the play scenario with her doll Jane reenacts and remakes the missing mother:

'I doated on this little toy; half-fancing it alive and capable of sensation. I could not sleep unless it was folded in my nightgown: and when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy, believing it be happy likewise' (31, chapter 4).

^{iv} Rich highlights John Reed's physical insult as the provocative event of the novel and that the blame is shifted to Jane. However her themes are carefully delineated: firstly Jane's recouping of the nurturing she missed as a result of the early loss of her biological mother; secondly, her getting the measure of romantic love and thirdly in an echo of Shuttleworth's exposition of the contemporary emphasis on 'moral management', Rich details Jane's intersection with Bertha in terms of Jane's struggle to preserve her own sanity and autonomy.

^v I deliberately alluded to the 'mad woman' of Gilbert and Gubars' title in my novel, *Cologne* because I wished to invoke their trope of 'secret self' excised from the social persona that lurks ever-present within the 'attic' of the soul. I felt this to be true of all the female characters in my novel, most particularly Caroline and her mother Helen. Helen was unable to claim the trauma/'madness' of her World War 11 experiences and as a result this visceral suffering is passed down whole cloth to her children as hallucinations and sensory intrusion on their lives (and eventually the sexual abuse they suffer at the hands of their father).

^{vi} Possibly the boldest and most far-fetched assertion in this paper is the claim of structural correspondence between Sally Shuttleworth's historicist interpretation of Jane and Herman's paradigm of complex posttraumatic stress disorder.

Shuttleworth writes in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*:

Jane Eyre is a heroine of individualism who exposes the contradictions of individualist ideology. She attempts to found a sense of personal agency and power on a concept of selfhood which lacking all unity is merely the shifting relationships of internal conflicts. At the very time when individualist theories of social and economic interaction held sway...[contemporary ideology] started to stress internal divisions, and the lack of a unified center of self. (Shuttleworth, 176)

Shuttleworth's paradigm is one of dynamic and rapidly shifting social energies and a model of self that attempts to gather these energies behind the façade of a disciplined actor, only to be broken by the explosive energies within. The paradigms read like the gathering and breaking of selfhood that occurs within Herman's dynamic model of posttraumatic stress.

^{vii} Rick Rylance and Sally Shuttleworth both attest to Brontë's fascination with the medical science of phrenology whereby characteristics, specifically powers of the mind, are expressed in the topography of the face. Shuttleworth argues for many assertions about her characters being made via specific descriptions of their facial structure and features in 'Jane Eyre: lurid hieroglyphics'.

^{viii} Against the grain of the feminist stereotype, Adrienne Rich interprets the marriage between Jane and Rochester in positively as a marriage ‘radically understood for its period, in no sense merely a solution or a goal. It is not a patriarchal marriage that stunts and diminishes the woman; but a *continuation* of this woman’s creation of herself’ (Rich 106). In this regard it echoes the thesis of this essay in its accent on Jane’s development, and thus her recovery from biographical trauma, being a recursive process.

^{ix} New work by Herman and Bessel van der Kolk is remaking psychologists’ understanding of the structure and mechanical apparatus of the brain particularly in the ways memories are laid down and retrieved. It is not only challenging the body/mind dichotomy but also the oscillating and circuitous way memory operates in time and space.