

The Power of a Good Book

Books as a Motif for Power in *Jane Eyre* (1847)

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Abstract

Books and reading are a central motif within the narrative of *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and contributes in many ways to the depiction of characterisation, world-building, and the progression of the narrative. In particular, there are correlations between the depiction of books and reading and the depiction of power and power dynamics in *Jane Eyre*. Previous research into books and reading practices in *Jane Eyre* have focused on the allusive properties of the literary references mentioned in the narrative, but none have addressed the multitudinous depiction of books as both material and symbolic objects. This thesis therefore addresses the use and depiction of books and reading in *Jane Eyre* in relation to the motifs of owning, reading, and using books in relation to depictions of power and power dynamics. The purpose of this is to elucidate the way that Charlotte Brontë depicts complex aspects of the characterisation, world-building, and narrative of *Jane Eyre* through the depiction of books and reading. In order to conduct this study, the thesis uses a thematic close-reading method which focuses particularly on uses of books in Victorian literature as defined by the researcher Leah Price, and additionally analyses stylistic features of the prose through close-reading. The thesis found that the materiality of books in *Jane Eyre* contributes to the depiction of economical power, that the symbolic role of books as objects contributes to the characterisation of the characters, and that the depiction of ways books and knowledge gained from books can be used exemplifies the function of book-ownership as cultural capital in *Jane Eyre*. The conclusion reached from this was that there indeed is a correlation between the depiction of books and reading and the depiction of power and power dynamics in *Jane Eyre* and that this contributes in a complex way to the depth and nuance of the characterisation, world-building, and narrative of *Jane Eyre*.

Keywords: *Jane Eyre*, reading practices, cultural capital, materiality, power dynamics, class dynamics, books, book objects

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Introduction

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is a book that is rife with intertextuality, literary allusions, and literary references.¹ It is also a book filled with reading, and with books. While ample research has been dedicated to the books that Jane and her fellow characters read – as well as to the unpicking of the rich tapestry of intertextuality that is interwoven throughout the narrative of *Jane Eyre* – less so has been dedicated to the act of reading and handling books within the narrative of *Jane Eyre*. Books appear at many instances throughout the narrative both as objects of reading, decorative objects in book cases, projectiles, gifts, conversation starters, etc., and are central to Jane's worldly and spiritual education. As such, it is a point of interest to attempt to illuminate the many ways in which books are used throughout the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, both as objects and as symbols. *Jane Eyre* is also a narrative that deals with themes of power and associated dynamics between characters which are concerned with who possesses power and how it is gained. In *Myths of Power. A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (1975), Terry Eagleton describes how “the primary terms on which Charlotte Brontë's fiction handles relationships are those of dominance and submission. The novels dramatise a society in which almost all human relationships are power-struggles; and because ‘equality’ comes to be defined as an equality of power, it is an inevitably complicated affair”.² Eagleton discusses this in relation to Jane's independence from Rochester and her kinsmen, but the statement holds for all dynamics in *Jane Eyre*. In this thesis, I propose that one of the ways in which power dynamics are communicated, represented, and symbolised in *Jane Eyre* is through books, specifically in regards to who owns them, who has access to them, who reads them, and what reading does with the characters in terms of how it empowers them in different ways.

Books play a very particular and multi-faceted role in *Jane Eyre*. In the article “Reading Books And Looking At Pictures In The Novels Of Charlotte Brontë” (2007), Alison Hoddinott establishes that the way that all of the Brontë sisters depict books and reading in their novels is a significant stylistic feature which Charlotte Brontë in particular uses in order to locate her

¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Deborah Lutz, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016 (1847).

² Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power. A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Anniversary Edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005 (1975), p. 30.

characters “morally and temperamentally by reference to their taste in literature and art”.³ Hoddinott writes that Brontë “developed a subtle, and, indeed, innovatory technique of giving depth and subtlety to her fiction by the use of such references”, and that this is particularly evident in *Jane Eyre*.⁴ The technique Hoddinott describes involves associating a given character with a work of literature which exists outside of the novel – that is, in reality – thus giving complexity to the characterisation of said character by implying through context whether the sentiments of the given work agrees with the character’s worldview. This technique has been identified and described by many researchers within *Jane Eyre*-studies (e.g. Helena Habibi, Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, Jessica Richard, Anne Hiebert Alton, and others), but none so clearly as by Hoddinott. Hoddinott explains an interesting case of literary references which act allusively, but focuses exclusively on these allusions. Furthermore, Hoddinott focuses on Charlotte and Anne Brontë for her study but not Emily as, by comparison, “Emily [Brontë] is unlike her sisters in that *Wuthering Heights* does not refer by name to other works of literature. Reading, books and education play a large part in her novel, but we remain ignorant of the titles of the books in Edgar Linton’s library or of the book from which the second Catherine teaches Hareton to read”.⁵ When Hoddinott discusses the way John Reed denies Jane access to books, however, she mentions how this scene resembles “Hindley Earnshaw’s deliberate degradation of Heathcliff by robbing him of education” in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and thus comes up against a problem which the article does not address: though Emily Brontë does not refer explicitly to existing works, the way that books and access to books are depicted in her novel are significant to the narrative and the power dynamics between the characters.⁶ By forgoing focus on Emily Brontë’s use of books in her narratives, Hoddinott hence also forgoes noting that Charlotte Brontë uses the same technique of using the motif of books as significant objects that Emily Brontë uses in addition to references to real books in *Jane Eyre*. This thesis will therefore expand on previous research on the role of books and reading in *Jane Eyre* by focusing not only on those named works of literature, but also on books as objects within the narrative and the ways in which they are depicted and used by characters within the narrative.

³ Alison Hoddinott, “Reading Books and Looking at Pictures in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë”, *Brontë Studies*, 2007:1, p. 1.

⁴ Hoddinott, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The way that books function as a signifier of power in *Jane Eyre* will, in this thesis, be explored particularly in terms of how they represent symbolic power and economic buying power, as this is indicative of overarching access to buying power (which largely defined the social hierarchies of Victorian Britain), and ways in which representations of buying power also function symbolically. In his article “Never mind the price, what about the cost?” (2001), Simon Eliot produces a statistical examination of book prices in nineteenth century Britain, and compares these prices to the average salaries of different British social classes of the time. Thus, he describes the relative cost of the books in a way that shows the economical weight and significance of purchasing a book to a large portion of the British population of the time, which by extension elucidates the social, emotional, and cultural significance of purchase of and access to books. He posits this as a significant fact to keep in mind in the interpretation of the role of books in nineteenth century British literature, as this literature by its very nature reflects the contemporary attitudes towards books and access to books in a way that may not be instinctively understood with as much nuance by the modern reader. He suggests that e.g. St. John’s gift of *Marmion* to Jane in the Morton School-portion of *Jane Eyre* represents a far more expensive and significant gift than the modern reader might comprehend, meaning that a layer of significance of Jane’s act of accepting the gift may be lost. Eliot’s article is the initial source of inspiration for this thesis, which therefore will consider the nineteenth century British attitudes towards books and reading as material objects and as a cultural praxis, in an attempt to unveil the dimensions of meaning in the narrative that might remain hidden with a modern perspective on books. Eliot also discusses the role of economic resources as a source of power, and therefore this thesis will consider the economic and symbolic dimensions of power that are reflected in the owning of books in *Jane Eyre*.

Naturally, the significance of books is not only defined by the price, but also by the cultural value which it is considered to have. Books are a particular category of object which have certain cultural connotations of value because they represent knowledge, education, intellectuality, and high culture. This type of value is defined by Pierre Bourdieu as *cultural capital*, which refers to cultural prestige which can be wielded or leveraged as a form of capital. In Donald Broady’s description of Bourdieu’s theory, cultural capital includes such things as “degrees from reputable educational institutions, familiarity with classical music or literature,” and “the ability to express oneself in a cultivated manner in speech or text”, which are considered to be valuable as skills or

resources by “many groups” (or, especially, the “dominating class”) within a society.⁷ Books hence serve as an example of objects through which cultural capital can be acquired as reading of books both can foster “familiarity with classical [...] literature” and “the ability to express oneself in a cultivated manner”.⁸ This notion of cultural capital is highly applicable to the depiction of books in *Jane Eyre* as bookishness and the trait of being well-read continuously is depicted and discussed as desirable and venerable traits, and reading continuously is depicted as a valuable expenditure of time. The depiction of books in *Jane Eyre* will hence be discussed both in terms of their economic value as objects and in terms of their symbolic value as resources of cultural capital, which can lend the reader of books power as cultural capital is a form of power which can be wielded socially.

The primary material of this thesis will be the novel *Jane Eyre* exclusively. British nineteenth century literature is a literature that is particularly rich in the motif of books and reading, but few of them are as rich in it as *Jane Eyre* is, and thus the scope of this thesis only allows for the investigation of one such nineteenth century work. A similar study may be possible for other nineteenth-century works of literature, but the basis for this thesis stems specifically from ideas and theories which pertain to *Jane Eyre* in particular, and hence this novel requires the thesis’s full focus. *Jane Eyre* is a thoroughly studied work already, but while most modern studies pertain to feminist or postcolonial readings, and a smaller number pertains to studies of class as well as studies of books and intertexts, none that this thesis has found pertain to drawing a connection between the depiction of class with the depiction of material objects, much less books in particular, as symbols or signifiers of class and power dynamics. This thesis therefore aims to introduce a new perspective on how dynamics of power are represented in *Jane Eyre* by conducting a close-reading of the text with specific reference to the way that books and the things that are done with books are depicted.

This thesis will be structured as follows. Following this introduction, the purpose and research questions will be presented, after which a brief background of the plot of *Jane Eyre*, *Jane Eyre*’s condition as a bildungsroman, and the Victorian ethos of self-improvement will be discussed. Thereafter, some previous research on *Jane Eyre* and the depiction of books and class

⁷ Donald Broady, *Sociologi och epistemologi. Om Pierre Bourdieus författarskap och den historiska epistemologin*, Stockholm: HLS Förlag, 1990, p. 171. My translation.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

in *Jane Eyre* will be discussed.⁹ After this, the theory and method will be presented, after which the analysis follows. The analysis portion of this thesis will be structured in three sections: ownership of books, analysed through the depiction of books as material objects, with a focus on the locations in which books are found and who has access to them; reading of books, analysed through the depiction of books as literature, with a specific focus on how books are read and what readers gain from reading; and usage of books, analysed based on how reading functions as capital, with a focus on how access to reading books is demonstrated and wielded as a tool of rhetoric and knowledge. This will be followed by a discussion of the intersection of these three points of focus (owning, reading, and using books) and the way that they relate to each other and reflect the role of reading in cultural discourse and as a narrative device.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an overview of the ways that books and reading are depicted in *Jane Eyre* in relation to themes of power and power dynamics with a focus on the motifs of owning, reading, and using books. In so doing, the thesis aims to uncover a dimension of the text which concerns the way that power is reflected through the depiction of books and reading in a way that both reflects Victorian cultural power dynamics and adds nuance to the narrative, characterisation, and relationship dynamics of *Jane Eyre*. That is to say, the thesis will investigate the significance of the way that books and reading function within the world of *Jane Eyre* and the way that this plays a part in the narrative, characters, and symbolism of *Jane Eyre*, as well as the way that these aspects relate to depictions of class and social hierarchies.

Research questions

- How is ownership of and access to books depicted and in what ways does the depiction of access to books contribute to the depiction of power dynamics between characters in *Jane Eyre* (1847)?
- How are Victorian reading practices depicted and how does this reflect and contribute to the social dynamics of the characters in *Jane Eyre* (1847)?

⁹ Only *some* previous research on *Jane Eyre* will be discussed as the amount of research that exists is beyond the scope of relevance for this thesis.

- How is reading used as a tool of social and intellectual empowerment by characters and how does this contribute to the depiction of class dynamics in *Jane Eyre* (1847)?

Background

Jane Eyre, full title *Jane Eyre. An Autobiography* is a novel written by Charlotte Brontë and published in 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell. The narrative follows the young Jane Eyre, who is introduced to the reader at age ten when she lives with her aunt, Mrs. Reed (who is her late uncle's wife), and her three cousins John, Eliza, and Georgiana Reed. The novel was originally published in three volumes, and is considered by most researchers to be divided into five stages based on the locations in which Jane spends her time. Firstly, there is Gateshead, where she lives until she is ten years old and is sent away to Lowood, which is a religious Charity School for children whose parents cannot keep them. Secondly, after having spent eight years at Lowood, including two as a teacher, Jane advertises for a position as a governess and receives an offer to work at Thornfield, which is the third stage of the narrative. While at Thornfield, she meets Mr. Rochester, his ward Adele, the housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax, and some other fellow servants as well as some guests of Mr. Rochester. During her stay, Jane falls in love with and is proposed to by Mr. Rochester, but when it is revealed that he is married and keeping his mentally ill wife Bertha Mason locked in a room on the third floor of Thornfield, Jane flees because she refuses to become his mistress. After some days of wandering and starvation, she reaches her fourth destination, Moor House, also known as Marsh End, where she meets the siblings St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers and their servant Hannah. She befriends the sisters and finds work as a school teacher with St. John's help, and it is soon revealed that the Rivers siblings are also her cousins, but from her father's side of the family. Concurrently with this revelation, it is revealed that their joint uncle has passed away and left his fortune to Jane, making her a rich and independent woman. She shares the inheritance evenly between herself and her three new cousins and intends to live with them in happiness and comfort, but soon St. John proposes in the hope that she will go to India as a missionary with him. Still in love with Rochester, Jane refuses and goes to find Rochester, who is not at Thornfield, but rather is at the narrative's fifth destination: Ferndean. Ferndean is a secluded house that Rochester owns which he has retired to with only two servants as he has been blinded and crippled by a fire at Thornfield which Bertha set and perished in. Now free of his obligations to his wife, Rochester proposes once more and Jane accepts. The narrative finishes with an

epilogue set ten years later, at which point Jane has been happily married for a decade and has borne Rochester a son.

Jane Eyre is generally considered to be either a romance or a bildungsroman, and either way is always considered gothic. This thesis will treat *Jane Eyre* primarily as a bildungsroman, in accordance with research such as that of Sandra M. Gilbert in “Plain Jane’s Progress” (1977), who writes that *Jane Eyre* is “a distinctively female Bildungsroman in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood toward an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome”.¹⁰ Similarly, Deidre d’Albertis writes in “Beyond The Brontë Myth: Jane Eyre, Hannah Cullwick and Subjectivity in Servitude” (2014) that “[t]he integrity of Jane’s posture as narrator, in fact, depends upon her ability to craft a female Bildungsroman validated by domestic ideology”.¹¹ Hence, researchers within *Jane Eyre*-studies seem to agree that if *Jane Eyre* is a bildungsroman, it is a specifically female one, which is concerned with ideology related to being a woman in Victorian society. Marianne Thormählen in *The Brontës and Education* (2007) largely disagrees with the idea of calling the Brontë sisters’ novels bildungsromane overall, though she notes that *Jane Eyre* in particular is generally referred to as such. Thormählen rather writes that “[s]elf-education projects in the works of the Brontës do not stop at well-adjusted adulthood, nor are they limited to successful socialisation in this world”, but instead, “[t]he end towards which storylines tend is not an adult in harmony with society, but an adult in harmony with herself as part of the Creation, including its spiritual and imaginative-creative aspects”.¹² I argue that the accuracy of this statement does not preclude *Jane Eyre* in particular from being regarded as a bildungsroman, as the narrative largely focuses on Jane’s personal growth and development, but Thormählen’s point is relevant to consider in light of the role of books and reading in the narrative. Thormählen addresses “self-education projects” as a given feature of Brontë-novels, and further discusses the project of self-improvement that was common at the time and permeates *Jane Eyre* in *The Brontës and Education*. It is this sort of self-improvement and education project that this thesis will investigate in *Jane Eyre* in relation to the role of reading, pertaining both to Jane herself and to other characters who do the same.

¹⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert, “Plain Jane’s Progress”, *Signs*, 1977:4, p. 781.

¹¹ Deidre d’Albertis, “Beyond *The Brontë Myth*: Jane Eyre, Hannah Cullwick and Subjectivity in Servitude”, *Brontë Studies*, 2014:4, p. 270.

¹² Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 4.

Thormählen writes on “self-improvement” as a central theme of the Brontës’ literature. She writes that “[o]ne of the most enduring reasons for the appeal of the Brontë fiction is its portrayal of searching spirits facing hardships and overcoming them. The life-projects of the people concerned are pursuits of self-education, full of intellectual and moral endeavour, undertaken in recognition of the free individual’s responsibility for the outcome”.¹³ It was, in particular, the idea of the individual’s responsibility for the outcome of one’s life which drove the self-improvement project of the Victorian era, and which features so heavily in *Jane Eyre*. The idea of self-improvement was prevalent particularly in the homes of middle-class families “of independent means” as they were expected to not simply rest in leisure but to “cultivate their minds and pursue other other character improving activities”, the foremost of which was study, “a pursuit that entailed the active understanding and committing to memory of large portions of knowledge”.¹⁴ “This knowledge”, Thormählen writes, “should be so coherent and so well digested that it formed personality-enhancing insights”, thus contributing to improvement of the self.¹⁵ Thormählen notes, in particular, that when the Brontë sisters write of self-improvement through reading, they distinguish “between ‘reading’ and ‘study’” in which study is “geared towards stocking and exercising the intellect” while “reading develops the emotions, the aesthetic sensibility and the moral sense”.¹⁶ This conceptualisation of reading and study, i.e. uses of books, will be systematically categorised and studied in this thesis in terms of the way they contribute to characterisation and narrative. As Sally Shuttleworth puts it in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (2009), “Jane’s history [...] seems to endorse popular ideologies of self-improvement: by acquiring self-control she is able to move into a position of social power”, which identifies that the ideology of self-improvement is depicted in *Jane Eyre* not only in terms of characterisation and morality, but also as a plot-driving character goal, which will be addressed throughout this thesis.¹⁷

¹³ Thormählen, p. 214.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁷ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 181.

Previous Research

Jane Eyre is one of the most researched novels of the nineteenth century, which makes it an impossibility to account for all previous research of the book or its author. In order to give a brief account of the relevant previous research that has pertinence to this thesis I will therefore present a number of articles and books which deal specifically with the depiction of books in *Jane Eyre*, as well as with topics such as materiality in *Jane Eyre*, class relations in *Jane Eyre*, cultural discourse in *Jane Eyre*, depictions of Victorian reading practices, and the Brontë family's relationship to education, religion, and similar topics and cultural attitudes related to reading. Additionally, I will briefly present some of the most decisive or well-known voices within *Jane Eyre*-studies throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the editors of the critical editions of *Jane Eyre* of the past few decades.

Firstly, a mention should be made of Corinna Norrick's article "'Reader, I Married Him': 19th Century Reading Practices, Reading, and Readers in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" (2011).¹⁸ In her short article, Norrick establishes reading and reading habits as a motif in *Jane Eyre*, and summarises the most central and well-known instances of reading in *Jane Eyre*. She thus provides an overview of the topic upon which this thesis expands, and lays the groundwork for further exploration of the topic of reading as a motif. Secondly, Alison Hoddinott's article "Reading Books and Looking at Pictures in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë" (2007) explores and defines the use of references to books that exist in reality as a motif for the morality and temperament of the characters that the books are related to. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis will expand on the depiction of books and reading as stylistic features which reflect cultural attitudes and sensibilities upon the characters they are associated with, but with a more general focus on all books and reading. Thirdly, the article "Books in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë" (1996) by Anne Hiebert Alton identifies which books Jane reads and in what way, that is, for what purpose, she reads them.¹⁹ Hiebert Alton uses a contextualising perspective which tracks Jane's behaviour according to which literature she may or may not have read, implying that she is affected by what she reads, which is a useful framework for interpreting the ways that characters in *Jane Eyre* gain

¹⁸ Corinna Norrick, "'Reader, I Married Him': 19th Century Reading Practices, Reading, and Readers in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*", *The International Journal of the Book*, 2011:1, pp. 67-75.

¹⁹ Anne Hiebert Alton, "Books in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë", *Brontë Society Transactions*, 1996:7, pp. 265-274.

power through knowledge from reading. Thus, Hiebert Alton will be used to contribute to the interpretation of the use of books as sources of power to readers of books in this thesis.

One of the foremost inspirations for this thesis is Simon Eliot's article "'Never Mind the Value, What About the Price?'; Or, How Much Did *Marmion* Cost St. John Rivers?'" (2001).²⁰ Eliot provides a background for the price of books in relation to the wages of the population in nineteenth century Britain as well as an examination of the circumstances required to allow for reading in a time before gaslight was readily used. The questions he asks about what the potential significance of *Marmion* as a gift from St. John to Jane would be in light of these significant book costs is a valuable point of entry for further exploration of the narrative significance of the materiality of books. Eliot's article is based to an extent on John Sutherland's chapter on *Jane Eyre* in his book *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy? More Puzzles in Classic Fiction*, (1997), in which Sutherland suggests that the significance of *Marmion* as a gift depends on when the novel is set, which is a widely debated topic, as the first and second edition of *Marmion* had significantly different prices which affects how materially valuable of a gift *Marmion* would be for St. John to give to Jane.²¹ Regardless of the timing, Eliot concludes that the book would be very valuable.

More extensive research into Victorian reading practices and the ways that they are depicted in Victorian literature, including in *Jane Eyre*, has been conducted by Leah Price in her book *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (2012).²² *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* is a book-historical overview of the ways that different types of books were used during the Victorian period, how their value differed depending on the bindings, the social and cultural significance they had both in real life and in fiction, and so on. In relation to *Jane Eyre*, Price discusses the image of the reading orphan, i.e. Jane, for whom reading is both a solace and an indication of genre, as it is only in this type of novel that "books are the refuge of the powerless".²³ In this thesis, Price's text will be used to contextualise Victorian reading habits and depictions more generally as part of the theoretical framework of this thesis, and will also be used as an addition of nuance to the interpretation of young Jane's reading habits.

²⁰ Simon Eliot, "'Never Mind the Value, What about the Price?'; Or, How Much Did *Marmion* Cost St. John Rivers?," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 2001:2, p. 160–197.

²¹ John Sutherland, *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy? More Puzzles in Classic Fiction*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

²² Leah Price, *How To Do Things With Books in Victorian Britain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Extensive research into the lives of the Brontë sisters with specific focus on their relationships to religion and education has been done by Marianne Thormählen in her books *The Brontës and Religion* (1999) and *The Brontës and Education* (2007).²⁴ Thormählen focuses on illuminating the cultural attitudes of Victorian Britain and the nuanced ways in which the Brontës related to them. Her aim is not literary analysis, but is rather to provide a background from which further analysis can stem, which positions it as an ideal source of information for this thesis. In particular, Thormählen focuses on the unique relationship each sister had to religion and education respectively, including the way that each sister would have related to the contemporary ideal of self-improvement through general and religious studies. Additionally, Thormählen is the editor of the anthology *Brontës in Context* (2012), which includes biographical and cultural context for not only the Brontë sisters Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, but also for their brother Branwell and their father Patrick.²⁵ This anthology is particularly relevant for the chapters “Literary influences on the Brontës” by Sarah J. Lodge and “Current trends in Brontë criticism and scholarship” by Alexandra Lewis. Overall, Thormählen’s works within Brontë studies will serve as one of the primary sources of cultural context for nineteenth century Britain used in this thesis.

Previous research on the theme of materiality in *Jane Eyre* has been done by Elaine Freedgood in her book *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006).²⁶ Freedgood addresses the way that material objects that are extensively described and depicted in Victorian literature is more meaningful than is detectable to the modern reader as common knowledge of the origin and cultural significance of objects in Victorian society is not immediately apparent to the modern reader. In reference to *Jane Eyre*, Freedgood discusses the mahogany furniture in *Jane Eyre*, especially the furniture with which Jane furnishes Morton House after having inherited her uncle John Eyre. Freedgood reveals that the origin, history and availability of mahogany furniture is connected to the Caribbean, Madeira, colonialism thereof, and questions of class, which illuminates a symbolic level of meaning of these objects that is not easily accessible to the modern reader. Thus, Freedgood demonstrates the relevance of investigating Victorian

²⁴ Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999; Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Only *The Brontës and Education* (2007) is cited in the text of this thesis; notes referring to Thormählen refer to this work.

²⁵ Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës in Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

²⁶ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things. Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

cultural attitudes and knowledge for comprehension of hidden dimensions of the text of *Jane Eyre*, something which this thesis also seeks to do.

Some very central works to depictions of power and class in *Jane Eyre* are Terry Eagleton's book *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (1975), Raymond Williams's book *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1984), the article "Jane Eyre Class-ified" (1982) by Jina Politi, and the article "What Did 'Jane Eyre' Do? Ideology, Agency, Class and the Novel" (2005) by Chris R. Vanden Bossche.²⁷ Eagleton addresses the dynamics of domination and submission in relation to Jane's independence from Rochester and St. John, Williams discusses the radicality of the narratives of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Politi discusses the class narrative of *Jane Eyre* and how Jane, in the end, acquiesces to class hierarchy, and Vanden Bossche addresses how Jane "rebels against social exclusion yet ultimately does not seek to overturn the existing social order".²⁸ Eagleton's conceptualisation of power dynamics and Politi and Vanden Bossche's conceptualisations of Jane's class journey will be particularly relevant to the analysis of Jane's narrative journey and the relationship between books and power within it.

Another central text on the importance of investigating contemporary cultural discourses of the Brontës is Heather Glen's book *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (2004).²⁹ Glen suggests that Brontë's novels are far more anchored in contemporary cultural discourses than have previously been considered, indicating a nuanced and intentional awareness of the way that her texts reflect and interact with discourses of the time. Glen indicates that this is a sign of a higher level of aesthetic sophistication than Brontë has previously been considered with, including an accompanying awareness of the subtleties of language and different types of language use. The above notions will be relevant throughout this thesis as the depiction of book and reading will be treated as engagement with several types of Victorian cultural discourse, and some sections of character dialogue will be treated as highly intentional in their language use to convey deeper meanings of cultural significance.

²⁷ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1984 (1970); Jina Politi, "Jane Eyre Class-ified", *New Casebooks. Jane Eyre*, ed. Heather Glen, London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1997 (1982).

²⁸ Chris R. Vanden Bossche, "What Did 'Jane Eyre' Do? Ideology, Agency, Class and the Novel", *Narrative*, 2005:1, p. 46-47.

²⁹ Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Jane Eyre has been studied almost since its conception, and while it is not possible to account for all of these studies, there are a few that should be noted for the way they have shaped modern *Jane Eyre*-discourse. The first notable text is *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), which is a biography of Charlotte Brontë written by the famous author Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell's biography lay the foundation for the first biographical interpretations of Brontë's works, and has been considered in many texts on Brontë since. Another author who has written on Brontë and *Jane Eyre* is Virginia Woolf, whose commentary on Brontë's overly passionate style in Jane's "Women are supposed to be very calm generally..." monologue from *A Room of One's Own* (1929) turns up in many texts on the novel.³⁰

Jane Eyre was also a common topic of study within feminist theory in the literary studies of the 1970's. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers, from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (1978) was a centrally important text of the time which discussed the history of feminine and female writing, both in its conception and reception.³¹ Showalter addresses *Jane Eyre* as one of her primary examples, with a focus on the psychological development of Jane's character through the use of various literary devices. The next year, one of the most seminal feminist texts on *Jane Eyre* was published. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar is an extensive feminist psychoanalytic text which posits that the theme of confinement was common to women writers of nineteenth century Britain as this was a reflection of their material and spiritual reality, of which *Jane Eyre* and *Bertha Mason* were reflective, among others.³² In the chapter "Plain Jane's Progress", Gilbert addresses Jane's journey and the way that *Bertha* functions as an alter ego for Jane, which has shaped both *Jane Eyre*-studies and adaptations ever since.

Some other notable voices within *Jane Eyre* studies are the various editors of the critical editions of *Jane Eyre*. This thesis has used the notes on the text and additional introductory and analytical essays of the Penguin Clothbound Classics edition (2008; ed. Stevie Davies), the fourth Norton Critical edition (2016; ed. Deborah Lutz), and the Oxford World's Classics edition (2019;

³⁰ Brontë, p. 101.

³¹ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Writers from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*, Revised and Expanded Edition, London: Virago Press, 2009 (1977), p. 93.

³² Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, Second Edition, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000 (1979).

ed. Margaret Smith and Juliette Atkinson) as a contextualising starting point for the analysis. In addition to these critical editions, many of the editors have edited other texts by the Brontës, but Margaret Smith and Sally Shuttleworth have also written further on Charlotte Brontë. Margaret Smith is the editor of *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* (2004), which composed Brontë's letters with previously unseen attention to detail, and Sally Shuttleworth is the author of *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (2004). The context provided to the understanding of the text of *Jane Eyre* by these scholars have contributed to the interpretation of the text by many, including this thesis.

Theory

The theory section of this thesis will break down the way that books are defined as material objects and as symbols of self-improvement through reading, as well as the way that books function as cultural symbols, which corresponds to the depiction of owning, reading, and using books in *Jane Eyre*. As the reader will notice, much of the secondary literature discussed in this section will be recognisable from the Previous Research section of this thesis, including the works of Terry Eagleton, Simon Eliot, and Leah Price. This is as the thesis draws on the theoretical basis of these works in order to formulate the theoretical basis for this thesis. The analyses of *Jane Eyre* in these works, which were mentioned in the Previous Research, are not the focus in the Theory section as the theories they use will be applied in this thesis but with a different angle than the original texts used. Thus, some of these texts will be used both in terms of their theoretical framework and referred to in terms of their analysis of *Jane Eyre*, but not in conjunction. This thesis will apply the theories at hand in new ways with a new purpose in order to illuminate new dimensions of meaning in the text. In addition to these three theorists, the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, as explained by Donald Broady, will be used in order to analyse the function of books and reading as resources of cultural capital.

The overarching focus of the way that books and reading are depicted in *Jane Eyre* will, as mentioned, be the way that these depictions relate to the depiction of power. The thematisation of power and power dynamics will function as the overarching feature to which owning, reading, and using books is continuously related. The theme of power and power dynamics in *Jane Eyre* will in this thesis be conceptualised based on Terry Eagleton's conceptualisations in the book *Myths of Power. A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (2005). As mentioned in the introduction, Eagleton writes

on how the terms on which Brontë depicts relationships are “those of dominance and submission”, implying that Brontë primarily depicts relationships in terms of the power dynamic which exists between the characters, i.e. “all human relationships are power-struggles”.³³ The struggle for power between characters in *Jane Eyre* is fought on multiple levels, both in terms of economical power/social position, in terms of intellectual power, and in terms of personal independence as a form of power which allows for freedom through equality. These three examples of terms on which struggles for power are conducted are exemplified by owning, reading, and using books, in which owning denotes economical power/social position, reading denotes intellectual power, and using books and reading can be done to gain independence by affecting one’s own mindset and relationships to others. The last point is especially relevant in regards to Eagleton’s analysis, which pertains to independence, as “‘equality’ comes to be defined as an equality of power”, which applies to all of the above forms of power.³⁴ This thesis posits that in *Jane Eyre*, these forms of power are represented, symbolised, actualised, and signified through the presence of books in the narrative, as the owning, reading, and using of books in the novel contribute to the formation of each of these forms of power, both materially, intellectually, and symbolically. The thesis will therefore analyse power in terms based on Eagleton’s notions of how Brontë depicts relationships.

This thesis operates under the assumption that books carry a certain symbolic or cultural value that denotes certain characteristics in the owners and readers thereof. This is a notion that is relevant in modern society as well as in Victorian society, meaning that it is a necessary dimension of meaning to consider when analysing the symbolic and narrative role of books and reading in *Jane Eyre*. Books are also material objects, which means that they have a material value that matters in regards to who owns books and who reads books. The way that the price of books affects reading is vital to any cultural understanding of the role of books. As Simon Eliot puts it, “price is an absolutely critical subject. In any money economy, price determines how a book is sold, where it is sold, in what condition it is sold, to whom it is sold, and in what quantities”, which by extension also determines who reads, when they read, and what they read. The way that this is reflected in literature contributes to the way that contemporary culture is depicted, even unintentionally, and in particular contributes to depicting relations of class and other social hierarchies. Price hence constitutes the first and most significant determinant of the value of books as material objects as it

³³ Eagleton, p. 30.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

is determined by the actual material costs of producing the book, as well as by the demand to purchase the book and by additional cultural attitudes that may contribute to the possibility of inflated book prices. Therefore, the owning of books denotes a particular economic and social position, as it demonstrates that the fictional character who owns many books can afford to own many books. This contributes to both world-building and characterisation as it both depicts the book-owners class, and introduces the motif of access to books. The character who owns books can lend or refuse to lend books, meaning that they control the access that other characters who cannot afford to own books have to books. This aspect of the depiction of books relates to the focus placed on the materiality of books as they do not only represent knowledge and education symbolically, but also represent the characters' material access to knowledge and education. Therefore, this thesis will investigate the role of books as material objects and the associated power dynamics that arise from this, and the ways in which this contributes to the characterisation of the characters and the world-building of *Jane Eyre*.

In addition to discussing the role of the depiction of books as material objects, this thesis will discuss the function of reading (or not reading, but handling books) as an act and as a symbol in *Jane Eyre*, which will elucidate the role of books as symbols of knowledge, education, learning, and self-development, all of which contribute to self-improvement. Both the way that books are read and handled contribute to the way they are depicted as symbolic objects in literature. Leah Price notes, in her book *How to do Things With Books in Victorian Britain* (2012), that within Victorian narratives, poor treatment of books is synonymous with poor treatment of children, that vanity in choice of book bindings is synonymous with vanity in choice of wife, and that “domestic tyrants” such as John Reed “[make] books a proxy for readers under their control”.³⁵ Price focuses on three different uses of books, which are “*reading* (doing something with the words), *handling* (doing something with the object), and *circulating* (doing something to, or with, other persons by means of the book – whether cementing or severing relationships, whether by giving and receiving books, or by withholding and rejecting them)”.³⁶ All three of these categories of uses of books occur in *Jane Eyre* (as Price establishes herself — her book contains a chapter on *Jane Eyre*). These ways of using books will be analysed more extensively in relation to *Jane Eyre* than they are in Price's chapter, which focuses on the ways in which Jane's relationship with reading changes

³⁵ Price, p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5. My italics.

throughout the novel, by extending it to include all characters who read at one point or another.³⁷ This thesis posits that depiction of different types of reading practices contributes to individual characterisation and the way that characters gain or do not gain power through reading. This is particularly based on the notion that Thormählen discusses in *The Brontës and Education* of how, in the Brontës' depictions of uses of books, study and reading are depicted as two different things, wherein study is "geared towards stocking and exercising the intellect" while "reading develops the emotions, the aesthetic sensibility and the moral sense".³⁸ Both options constitute reading, but represent two different types of reading which lend themselves to different types of self-development.

In order to represent the difference between studying (as in exercising the intellect), reading (as in developing sensibilities), and leisurely reading for escapism or amusement (which Thormählen does not mention but which Price includes in her study), this thesis will introduce the additional category of *cognising* into Price's system of categories. *Cognising*, in this case, refers to cognitive extensions of reading which denote that the text that has been read has been synthesised into ideas, that is, the text has been studied in order to exercise the intellect or read in order to develop the sensibilities, which excludes reading for leisure. *Cognising*, as I define the term, is narratively represented by actions such as thinking, talking, and behaving in certain ways that can be traced to the reading of the characters in the novel, which denote expressions of studying and reading. These actions denote reflection over what has been read, which I posit is pertinent to discuss in particular as the presence of this reflection over literature by characters shows a level of nuance to the way Brontë depicts her characters as complex persons heretofore undiscussed by *Jane Eyre*-research. There are some similarities between *reading* and *cognising* as

³⁷ As mentioned in the background section of this thesis, Victorian reading practices differed to some extent from modern reading practices and involved different sorts of reading communities. In particular, female reading communities grew during this period, which has been extensively studied in general, and with specific reference to *Jane Eyre* in "Female Reading Communities In *Jane Eyre*" (2005) by Cheryl A. Wilson as well as to some extent in Corinna Norrick's article "'Reader, I Married Him': 19th Century Reading Practices, Reading, and Readers in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" (2011). In light of the extensive previous research on female reading communities and *Jane Eyre*, this will not be the main focus of the section on the depiction of reading practices in *Jane Eyre* in this thesis. This thesis will rather focus more broadly on the depiction of different types of reading practices and how they relate to individual characterisation and to cultural discourses around reading practices. Hence, female reading communities will be briefly considered as they are one of the more notable types of reading practices of the period, but will not be the central focus of the reading practices section.

³⁸ Thormählen, p. 141.

reading refers to “doing something with the words”, but I define *cognising* as a separate term as it involves doing something particular with the words that produces new meaning.

Additionally, the thesis will introduce the fifth category of *owning* (permanently possessing a book by legal rights), as the thesis discusses the ways in which books are depicted as a part of the environment of the story in e.g. bookshelves. I posit that *owning* denotes something about the character who owns the book and the character who observes ownership of the book. *Owning* differs from *handling* and *circulating* as it is a comparatively static action; *handling* implies that something is being done with the book, such as observing, throwing, pretending to read, etc., and *circulating* implies a changing of hands, a social act which affects another character. *Owning*, on the other hand, is for the book to belong to a character who does not necessarily handle or circulate it. Hence, five types of uses of books will be investigated in the thesis in order to give a multidimensional overview of the role of books as symbols and motifs in *Jane Eyre*. They will be addressed in a different order than I have just presented them, as it is pertinent to my argument to discuss them in a different order, but it would not be possible to present the two new categories without defining Price’s three original ones. Hence, the five categories will be discussed in the order *owning*, *circulating*, *reading*, *handling*, and *cognising*.

Though it could be assumed that the idea of *cognising* relates to the depiction of reading, this thesis will address the concept of cognising primarily in terms of how it constitutes usage of books in a way that relates to cultural capital. That is to say, it pertains to the way that characters in *Jane Eyre* make use of the things they have read by thinking and talking about them, which creates a form of power as possession of knowledge and a tendency to ‘exercise the intellect’. This is as the possession of knowledge, ideas, and education constitutes cultural capital. This thesis discusses values, meanings, and connotations of the ownership and usage of books as if they were a class of object unto themselves due to the specific regard they are afforded within western culture. This is due to the fact that books are commonly afforded considerations as objects of cultural capital, in Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of the term, within western culture. Cultural capital in Bourdieu’s sense is an extension of symbolic capital, which is “that which is recognised by social groups as having value”, i.e. a symbolic resource such as a good reputation within a given field or group which gains capital (that is, value which can be leveraged for gain such as social

gain) within the specific group that the resource is valued in.³⁹ Cultural capital, by extension, is specific types of symbolic capital that is anchored in general cultural values, e.g. a valuing of “familiarity with classical music or literature”.⁴⁰ The idea of familiarity with classical music or literature having cultural capital is based in French culture, but was similarly true for Victorian culture, which valued knowledge of music and painting in women, among other things. Familiarity with classical literature that is expressed by characters within *Jane Eyre* will therefore be considered as an expression of possessing cultural capital (and thereby leveraging a form of power which is gained through (often) costly educations or ventures into book acquisition), which enriches the complexity of the character that is given this trait.

Thus, this thesis will conduct a multi-faceted analysis which considers the depiction of books and reading as metonyms of power through the perspective of five categories of usage of books (i.e. owning, circulating, reading, handling, and cognising) in relation to the cultural context of the early nineteenth century.

Method

The method used in the analysis section of this thesis will be a thematic close-reading which focuses on the theme of power as facilitated by books as a motif. The close-reading will draw on historical contextualisation in order to supplement the modern cultural understanding of book-culture and dynamics of power that a modern reader otherwise might be subject to. The use of close-reading is traditional for analysis of *Jane Eyre* and is generally the most common method used as it is a method well suited to handling the thematic and linguistic complexities of *Jane Eyre*. It should be noted that the method entails a culturally contextual reading, but not necessarily a biographical reading. Biographical readings of *Jane Eyre* are a common feature of *Jane Eyre*-studies as the novel is titled *Jane Eyre. An Autobiography* in full, and as many of the events and characters featured in the narrative resemble events and people from Charlotte Brontë’s life. As such, new historical analyses of the literature that the Brontë sisters had access to at Haworth Parsonage abound. As this previous research into the Brontës’ reading list is so well-established, however, it is not necessary nor relevant to include an analysis thereof in this thesis as this thesis

³⁹ Broady, p. 171. My translation.

⁴⁰ Broady, p. 171. My translation.

focuses on the use of books and reading as motifs that contribute to related themes – i.e. as a literary device – and is not an analysis of the allusions and intertextuality thereof. Furthermore, in the interest of limiting the scope of the thesis, this is not a reception historical thesis. Further reception focused studies on the way that Brontë’s contemporary readers interpreted the materiality of books, reading, and dynamics of power in *Jane Eyre* certainly would be of interest, however, as they may reveal further dimensions of meaning than this thesis will discover. This will not be the focus of the thesis at hand, however.

As established in the theory section of this thesis, the three central approaches to *Jane Eyre* that will be used in the analysis section are 1) Eagleton’s definition of the relationship of domination and submission between characters in *Jane Eyre* which signify power and power dynamics through the study of 2) the three motifs of owning, reading, and using, which will be analysed through the lens of 3) a focus on five different uses of books (i.e. owning, circulating, reading, handling, and cognising). In this, the modes of *owning* and *circulating* both pertain to the overall motif of owning, the modes of *reading* and *handling* pertain to the overall motif of reading, and the mode of *cognising* pertains to using books, as in wielding knowledge and abilities gained from books. The analysis will be structured according to the three motifs of owning, reading, and using books by conducting a close reading of passages in which ways of owning and circulating (under the subtitle “Books as material objects”), reading and handling (under the subtitle “Books as literature”), and using access to books through demonstrating cognising of books (under the subtitle “Reading as capital”) are depicted and will in this way investigate the relationship between the depiction of books and reading with the depiction of power and power dynamics. In order to study the thematic uses of the named motifs, the thesis will conduct the thematic close-reading based on the use of literary devices in *Jane Eyre*, which function to communicate multiple different types of meaning. The analysis will discuss several literary devices, such as narrative voice, narrative symbols, literary spatiality, character dynamics, dialogue, monologue, etc. Karen Chase warns us in the article “*Jane Eyre’s* Interior Design” (1984) not to let an apparent consistent parallel between symbols (interior design in Chase’s case) and meaning (psychological internal life) “tempt us toward any rigorous symbology”, such as suggesting (in Chase’s case) that a specific place symbolises a specific thing.⁴¹ This means that in this thesis, one and the same

⁴¹ Karen Chase, “*Jane Eyre’s* Interior Design”, *New Casebooks. Jane Eyre*, ed. Heather Glen, London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1997 (1984), p. 65.

passage or symbol may be interpreted in several different ways from different perspectives, and will therefore be considerate of the multitudinous nature of *Jane Eyre's* literariness. The conclusions reached thereby will lastly be summarised and discussed more explicitly in the discussion section of the thesis.

Analysis

In order to analyse the three motifs of owning, reading, and using books, the analysis section of this thesis will be divided into three sections. Firstly, owning and circulating of books will be discussed in a section focused on owning, which discusses where books are found within the literary space of *Jane Eyre* and how they are accessed by different characters within the narrative with a focus on the depiction of bookshelves, and on circulating actions such as borrowing and gifting. Secondly, reading and handling of books will be discussed in a section which focuses on who reads or handles books and for what purpose they do so, and because reading and cognising are pragmatically inseparable, as cognising is a function of reading, this section will also begin to address cognising as a way of developing internal power. Thirdly, cognising of books will be discussed in a last section, which will focus on ways of using reading such as thinking about content that has been read and reflection of past reading through quoting texts in dialogue.

Books as material objects (owning)

Throughout the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, books appear in all manner of places among all manner of people. They are found in breakfast-rooms, libraries, parlours, school rooms, and in the hands of servants and soothsayers. They are handled, read, borrowed, and gifted by numerous persons throughout the story, but in order for the books to be able to be handled or circulated, they must first come into the hands of people who can do the handling and circulation; the books must first be owned. In order for the reader to be able to discern that a book is owned by any particular character, this must be announced either explicitly or implicitly within the story, thus actualising the role of ownership by declaring that said character has the legal right to handle, read, and circulate the book as they see fit. The explicit announcement of ownership is easily definable; it is a mere question of a possessive pronoun, e.g. '*her* book', while the implicit announcement of ownership depends on the staticity of books. Books that are described in a particular location, such

as in a bookshelf, a library, or in the private parlour of a great house, are implied to belong to the owner of that house, such as how the library of Thornfield belongs to Rochester, implying that all books within that library belong to him. Hence, the locations in which books are found are also significant for the interpretation of ownership of books as a literary symbol. In the article “*Jane Eyre’s Interior Design*”, Karen Chase writes that “few novels are as spatially articulate as *Jane Eyre*”, which is to say that literary spatiality is both consistent and consistently used throughout the novel to communicate tone, atmosphere, Jane’s psychological state of mind, and relationships between characters.⁴² Therefore, it is relevant to read the presence of books in a house in conjunction with the interior design that it is associated with, i.e. the book-shelves and -cases in which they are kept. This section of the analysis will therefore first describe and discuss the locations in which books are found in *Jane Eyre*, and what this says about the owners of the books, and then go on to describe how ownership of books relates to the circulating of books as books cannot be circulated until they have left the ownership of the original purveyor of books, and thus will investigate the implications that ownership and circulation of books have for characterisation and depiction of power-dynamics in *Jane Eyre*.

The locations of books

Most of the locations which are part of *Jane Eyre* are mansions, halls, and great houses, such as Gateshead, Thornfield, and Moor House. Within these places, libraries often occur, but even when they do not, bookshelves often do. Gateshead enjoys a great bookshelf in the breakfast-room, Thornfield a library which contains a number of shelves locked behind glass doors, and the parlour of Moor House contains a bookshelf from which the Rivers siblings and Jane read ardently. It is a natural assumption that any book that belongs on these bookshelves also belongs to the owners of the houses, i.e. Mrs Reed, Mr Rochester, and the Rivers siblings, and this is never challenged within the text. Additionally, Victorian interior decorating was governed by clear rules, as prescribed by descriptions such as that of Robert Err in *The Gentleman's House. Or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace* (1865), in which he conducts a “systematic exposition of those details of arrangement which make up the plan of a ‘Gentleman's House’”.⁴³

⁴² Chase, p. 59.

⁴³ Robert Err, *The Gentleman's House. Or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (1865), p. 2.

Therefore, emphasis will be placed not on the location of the bookshelves, but on the description thereof. Karen Chase writes that within the houses of *Jane Eyre*, the “rooms come to have a distinct personality” and that “the elaborate spatial design is not so much a way to arouse sensation as to organise it”.⁴⁴ Chase focuses on the general atmosphere of rooms and spaces, but I posit that this approach to literary spatiality may be extended to furniture as well, specifically in terms of how the descriptions of the furniture – in this case bookcases and -shelves – serve a symbolic purpose in the same way as themes of confinement and exposure (which Chase discusses) are symbolised by rooms and spaces. Similarly, Leah Price writes of the depiction of books in Victorian literature that there is “no surer predictor for the plot: a character who sells his father-in-law’s library can’t be trusted not to buy a mistress; a character who wants his books bound in leather will marry the blonde; a character who manhandles books will abuse children”, meaning that treatment of books is often used as foreshadowing of later events or as a metonym for morality, which Alison Hoddinott also suggests Brontë does.⁴⁵ In combination, Chase, Price, and Hoddinott’s theories of the symbolic role of books and spatiality means that bookcases and other locations in which books are found serve an additional symbolic purpose, which this analysis will discuss forthwith as the bookcases serve as a framework for the depiction of books and as a focalisation for the materiality of books.

The way that books as objects are used to depict character and foreshadowing in *Jane Eyre* is most clearly shown in an excerpt from the novel which does not concern bookshelves, but rather concerns the books which Rochester allows his guests access to when the company of gentlefolks headed by Blanche Ingram visit Thornfield. On one such occasion in the drawing rooms after dinner, the guest Mr. Frederick Lynn can be seen to be showing “the engravings of a splendid volume” to Blanche’s sister Mary Ingram.⁴⁶ Based on multiple later passages in which characters are seen to pick up books to read in leisure that have been lying on the side tables in the salon, it can be assumed that the book belongs to Thornfield and to Rochester, and has been presented to the guests as a source of amusement. Thus, Rochester provides his guests with books which signify the appearance that he wants to give off to his peers during this fortnight-long party: the facade of all being right at Thornfield, signified by the splendour of an engraved (work which takes extra

⁴⁴ Chase, p. 59-60.

⁴⁵ Price, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Brontë, p. 159.

effort and is extra expensive) volume. He is communicating his wealth, which is a consistent pattern throughout the episode as he attempts to lure Blanche Ingram into attempting to marry him only to prove her fairweather-tendencies by later causing her to hear the rumour that his “fortune is not a third of what was supposed”.⁴⁷ The surface-level image that Rochester presents in the presence of guests suggest him to be a vain person, one who “will marry the blonde” (or the queenly Blanche, in this case), but this is a mere facade, as the reader knows.⁴⁸ The reader is, at this point in the novel, after all also aware of the fact that there are mysteries and secrets in the house, which also are signified by the bookcase in the library.

The three bookcases that are depicted in *Jane Eyre* are located at Gateshead, Thornfield, and Moor House, but the most significant of these in terms of interpretation is the bookcase at Thornfield as this one differs from the other bookcases. The library, later to become Rochester’s office once he starts living at Thornfield long-term, has stood unused in Rochester’s absence, but with the arrival of Adele and her new governess Jane, the room has been transformed into a schoolroom. In this room, Jane finds that “[m]ost of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one bookcase left open containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travels, a few romances, &c”.⁴⁹ The fact that the books are in bookcases is significant here as these bookcases have glass doors behind which most of the books are *locked*, much like the door to the third-storey room in which Bertha Mason is kept. Rochester’s most private self and secrets are hidden from Jane and from his guests by denying anyone who enters the library access to studying the books within the locked bookcase on anything more than surface-level. Thus, Rochester’s facade is maintained by only allowing access to the “elementary works” in the unlocked section of the bookcase. Even the locked bookcase has glass doors, however, meaning that an observant person who looks closely, such as Jane, is permitted some extent of transparency of Rochester’s person, which Jane experiences during the evenings she and Rochester spend together in which he makes no effort to control his moods. Thus, books as objects and the depiction of their materiality and location acts as a signifier for personality and facades within *Jane Eyre*.

⁴⁷ Brontë, p. 229.

⁴⁸ Price, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Through this reading, the depiction of the bookcase in the breakfast-room at Gateshead becomes another point of interest. The bookshelf in the breakfast-room at Gateshead is described on three occasions in *Jane Eyre*. We first come upon it on the first page of chapter I, when we find Jane reading in the window-nook. Having been apostrophised from her aunt's and cousins' presence for her lack of a "childlike disposition", Jane has been removed from the drawing room that houses her relatives and instead sought refuge in the adjoining breakfast-room, which "contained a bookcase".⁵⁰ This bookcase is not at first described, but is implied to be of some value and import to Jane, as the description of her relationship to Bewick's *History of British Birds* and the comfort with which she seats herself in the window-nook implies a habitual tendency to withdraw to the breakfast-room, implying that this is a regular source of escapism and comfort for her. When Jane returns to Gateshead to witness her aunt's death, the bookcase and room are briefly described: "the inanimate objects [within the breakfast-room] had not changed: but the living things had altered past recognition" and Jane can "distinguish the two volumes of 'Bewick's British Birds' occupying their old place on the third shelf, and 'Gulliver's Travels' and 'Arabian Nights' ranged just above".⁵¹ Though ten years have passed since Jane last stood in the breakfast-room, its interior remains identical to how she left it. The fact that each of the books that Jane remembers fondly from her childhood remain in each precise spot where she last saw them, seems to imply that they have not been moved since; Jane was the only reader in the house. Hence, books within the Reed household serve a far more static purpose than at Thornfield, where they are frequently moved by Jane and the company of guests. Rather, the books at Gateshead function more as decorative objects which denote the wealth required to acquire such a collection of books. Furthermore, the unchanged nature of the bookshelf denotes the unchanged personalities within the household. Though Eliza and Georgiana Reed "had altered past recognition" when Jane reunites with them, they have done so in appearance only. Eliza maintains the rigid character which led her to systematically extort the house servants for coins to secret away as her own savings as a child in the form of religious fervour while Georgiana's strengths and passions still relate to her beauty and the benefits this gains her. Similarly, John Reed never ceased to be greedy and dismissive of the feelings of his mother and Mrs. Reed has called Jane to her side on her deathbed in order to do right by her in terms of the letter from Uncle Eyre that she kept secret, but even

⁵⁰ Brontë, p. 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

so holds a grudge against Jane even ten years later for not having been a more amenable child. Even on her deathbed, when Jane, who has grown and changed, offers reconciliation in the form of a kiss to her cheek, Mrs. Reed turns away from the potential to change.⁵² Hence, the unchangedness of the bookshelf denotes the unchangedness of the characters who would peruse it.

The last significant mention of a source of books, a bookcase owned by someone, is the bookcase in the parlour of Moor House, belonging to the Rivers. The Rivers siblings are voracious readers (much like their mother, who was “a great reader, and studied a deal”) who spend their time together reading and translating literature, and then talking about what they have read and translated.⁵³ As opposed to the case with previous bookshelves that Jane has come across, she is free to borrow books from this one, which she does eagerly as she joins her long-lost cousins’ favourite pastime. Much like Rochester’s bookcase, this bookshelf is actually “a cupboard with glass doors” which “contained some books and an ancient set of china” and is located in the parlour, which is “plainly furnished; yet comfortable, because clean and neat”.⁵⁴ The fact that the books share space with a set of china is significant because this implies that in spite of the family’s passion for reading, their cupboard of books is not *filled* with books. It rather calls forward a dual image of domesticity and sparsity. In the Rivers household, to read (i.e. to use their books), is as regular and vital a task as any domestic task or other accomplishment that the siblings may work on learning.⁵⁵ Diana and Mary Rivers work daily at their studies of translation and the reading of literature, a stark contrast to any other woman Jane has met since Helen Burns. In Moor House, reading seems to be both a valued task and the domain of women as well as men, which is particularly denoted by the association with a tea set, which calls forth images of tea parties and domestic associations – the domain of women during the period. Furthermore, the parlour is “sparsely furnished”, the set of china is “ancient”, and “there was no superfluous ornament in the room”, but what there is looks “well worn and well saved”.⁵⁶ The description is the first indication that the reader is given that though the inhabitants of Moor House are well-read and well-mannered

⁵² Brontë, p. 216.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 306.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 308.

⁵⁵ “Accomplishment” here refers to “the accomplishments”, which were the skills that women of rank were expected to learn during the Victorian period in order to prepare them for wifehood. The accomplishments included music, embroidery, drawing, languages, and some conversational skills.

⁵⁶ Brontë, p. 308.

gentlefolk, they are on the brink of ruin economically. Hence, it follows that though the Rivers have an avid and active passion for reading, they do not own many books because they cannot afford many books. As opposed to the case at Gateshead and Thornfield, the books at Moor House are not only static objects, but are in fact read frequently. The Rivers siblings' ownership of books is thus used to establish their class position and the fact that their wealth is meagre, which provides a contrast to both the Reeds and Rochester, both of whom own plenty of books which are not seen to be used. The contrast is therefore dual: the Reeds and Rochester own many books but do not visibly read them, whereas the Rivers own few books and visibly read them often. Lastly, in similarity to Rochester's bookcase, the Rivers' bookcase has doors made of glass, which symbolise that there are things about the Rivers which remain hidden from Jane, such as the reason for their economic ruin and the fact that they are actually her cousins. The bookcase is not locked, however, because none of these notions are actively kept secret from Jane, but rather do not come under scrutiny or come up in conversation until Jane's own secret (her name) is revealed to St. John. This signification of the Rivers' bookcase as an expression of the Rivers' characters and secrets is actualised in contrast to the bookcase at Thornfield and is created by the specific similarity of both bookcases having glass doors, but having different contents and differing levels of accessibility to Jane.

In short, the depiction of bookcases function as metonyms for characterisation and moral character in which books function as symbols of the spiritual interior, which can be hidden, revealed, or revealed to be unchanged based on their placements and accessibility in the bookcase. *Handling* of books as Price discusses it pertains primarily to the way that characters actively handle books, hence *owning* books denotes passive handling of books, the act of having handled books in the past, which, much like handling, denotes character traits and foreshadowing. *Owning* books also denotes a particular power to allow or deny access to the books owned, denoted by the ways that the books are presented and described in the bookcases, which will be discussed further in the following section of the analysis.

The withholding of access to books

When Leah Price defines *circulating* as a thing which can be done with books in novels, she defines it as “doing something to, or with, other persons by means of the book—whether cementing or severing relationships, whether by giving and receiving books or by withholding and rejecting

them”.⁵⁷ Circulation of books in *Jane Eyre* is mainly concerned with withholding and permitting access to books as a consistent theme throughout the novel, as well as one occasion of giving and receiving when St. John gives Jane *Marmion*. Withholding and permitting access to books is the form of circulation of books that is most concerned with power as it by its very nature introduces a power dynamic between the character who determines access and the character who is granted access. In *Myths of Power*, Terry Eagleton describes how “the novels dramatise a society in which almost all human relationships are power-struggles” and that hence, “‘equality’ comes to be defined as an equality of power”.⁵⁸ Eagleton discusses this in relation to Jane’s independence in relation to Rochester and her kinsmen, but the statement holds for all dynamics in *Jane Eyre*. Simon Eliot establishes that

price is an absolutely critical subject. In any money economy, price determines how a book is sold, where it is sold, in what condition it is sold, to whom it is sold, and in what quantities. It determines if and how a book gets to a reader, as well as the conditions in which that book is read and absorbed⁵⁹

which by extension means that the owning of books denotes access to economic capital that denotes social class and position in Victorian Britain and thus in *Jane Eyre*. This thesis thus treats access to books as a form of power, in which ownership of books denotes a higher grade of power than access through borrowing, meaning that given that relationships in Brontë’s works are defined by equality of power, ownership and circulation of books may be treated as a metonym for power-dynamics within the novel, which is actualised by withholding and permitting access to books. Therefore, dynamics concerned with borrowing and gifting books within *Jane Eyre* will be analysed forthwith as they function as signifiers of power dynamics between characters.

Though the bookcases of Gateshead matter much to Jane in terms of what she can acquire from it for the purpose of escapism, they seem to matter to her cousin John Reed more in terms of the material value of their contents. When Jane is discovered reading in the window-nook, John chastises her for “rummag[ing] [*his*] book-shelves” and intends to teach her a lesson over it.⁶⁰ He specifies to Jane that “[y]ou have no business taking our books” because “you are a dependent,

⁵⁷ Price, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Eagleton, p. 30.

⁵⁹ Eliot, p. 160-161.

⁶⁰ Brontë, p. 12. My italics.

mamma says; you have no money”.⁶¹ As Helena Habibi describes it in the article “‘The volume was flung, it hit me’: Coarseness, Bird Imagery and Thomas Bewick’s *A History of British Birds* in *Jane Eyre*” (2018), “John uses [the book] as a means of exercising patriarchal ownership and dominance” over Jane, and thus the book becomes “the bully’s brutal instrument to punish Jane’s imaginings beyond the stultifying effects of authoritarian cruelty” rather than the source of comfort and escapism it has been for Jane.⁶² John recognises, because he has been taught to recognise such, that books have value, but that their value to him lies in the fact that he owns them, “or will do in a few years”, and thus to him the only way of handling them is as an instrument of punishment, as a tool of power.⁶³

John uses books as a way to actualise the power dynamic between himself and his destitute cousin, by firstly denying Jane access to the books, and secondly by using Bewick’s *History of British Birds* as a projectile which he throws at Jane in order to punish her for daring to make use of what he, in his mind, already owns. In the preceding exchange between the two, when Jane demands “What do you want?” and John in turn demands “Say ‘what do you want, Master Reed’”, the “social relation of domination/subordination is signified [...] through the impositions applied by the master-class upon speech” according to Jina Politi in the article “*Jane Eyre* Class-ified” (1982), emphasising that John’s actions in this scene are intended to be an expression of his power.⁶⁴ The social power-dynamic between Jane and John is thus introduced, which is underscored by John’s use of Bewick’s *History of British Birds* as a projectile. He asserts his power over Jane socially, physically and economically as he demonstrates his ownership over the book and mastership over Jane in a rapid chain of events; Jane does not have the right to read the book but John has the right to mistreat it because it belongs to him, much like John has the right to mistreat Jane because she is a dependent. John objects to Jane reading because he objects to the idea that she should access his own privileges (“You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent”), though he elects to not make use of those privileges himself.⁶⁵ This scene between Jane and John acts as the inciting incident from which the rest of the narrative grows, making it

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶² Helena Habibi, “‘The volume was flung, it hit me’: Coarseness, Bird Imagery and Thomas Bewick’s *A History of British Birds* in *Jane Eyre*”, *Brontë Studies*, 2019:1, p. 58.

⁶³ Brontë, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Politi, p. 81.

⁶⁵ Brontë, p. 12.

particularly noteworthy that Jane's social position as a dependent and an outsider from the family – a position which will haunt her in every place she resides until she receives her Uncle Eyre's inheritance – is established in this scene as it means that the entirety of the narrative hinges on this power dynamic, which is first actualised by Jane's access to books being withheld.

The relationship between bookshelves and access to books is further explored at Thornfield in the library-come-schoolroom in which Jane teaches Adele. As mentioned, it is a given that the books belong to Rochester, but the limitations placed on which privileged person has access to the books is significant. As mentioned, most of the bookcases in the Thornfield library are locked, and as opposed to the case in the Reeds' breakfast-room, access to the books is not only limited by lock and key, but that which is not available is showcased by the use of the glass doors of the bookcase. Similarly to the case of the Reeds, the books behind the locked glass doors thus become decorative, static objects, which see no use unless the master of the house grants it by unlocking the case. Momentarily diverging from the idea of the locked bookcase as a signifier of Rochester's secrets, this comes off as pragmatically odd in the case of the Thornfield library, as Rochester is a great reader (denoted by the frequency with which he quotes literature, which will be covered in the section "Wielding rhetoric") who is neither frugal nor jealously protective over his belongings (as opposed to John Reed). Though symbolically, the locked bookcase stands for Rochester's secret-keeping, pragmatically there is no implication that Rochester's tastes in literature are esoteric or scandalous enough to warrant secrecy. Therefore, I posit that the depiction of the bookcases in the Thornfield library are also significant as cultural commentary as well as an aspect of Rochester's characterisation.

The narrator, an older version of Jane who looks back on her life in an autobiographical format, explains the locked bookcase to the reader with the words "I suppose he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal", expressed with both the benefit of hindsight, age, and an intimate knowledge of Rochester's mind (which she has gained after years as his wife as per the epilogue).⁶⁶ The phrasing of "I suppose he had considered" implies that Rochester's supposed assumption is incorrect, and that narrator-Jane looks back on the books she then had access to as unsatisfactory to her needs, which in due course raises questions about why Rochester considered a collection of "elementary works" to be all a governess – which is

⁶⁶ Brontë, p. 95.

emphasised by the phrasing “the governess would require” as opposed to “I would require”, as would be the standard of the narrator’s patterns – would require. A presumably intelligent and educated woman, a governess is, as Terry Eagleton describes it “an ‘upper’ servant, and so (unlike, supposedly, other servants) furnished with an imaginative awareness and cultivated sensibility which are her stock-in-trade as a teacher”.⁶⁷ This does not entirely correspond to the contemporary view of governesses, however, and thus a potential explanation for this lies in the actual views on and treatment of governesses during the nineteenth century. Victorian governesses lived difficult lives compared to their socialite counterparts; they were wage-earning middle class women who were obliged to seek a position as a governess as their families could not afford to “support [them] in leisure” at a time during which middle-class femininity was defined by “domesticity and non-participation in the public labour market”.⁶⁸ The difficulty of governesses’ lives as an outsider of the family unit while playing the role of mother and educator to the children of the family has been duly recorded in the form of the Victorian governess novel.⁶⁹ Though *Jane Eyre* is more of a gothic novel than a governess novel, it can be said that the life of a governess is thematized within it, continuing the narrative thread of exclusion introduced in the first chapter. This historical context provides a possible interpretation for the reason that 1) Rochester’s bookcases are mostly locked to Jane and 2) Jane the narrator comments upon this fact, which is that having not yet met Jane, Rochester made assumptions about Jane’s intelligence and character based on contemporary cultural attitudes towards governesses prior to meeting her, and thus Brontë makes a commentary on how lowly the intelligence of governesses is (mistakenly) regarded. The fact that Rochester only intentionally lends Jane elementary works of literature is never further commented upon in *Jane Eyre*, however, and thus may be read as an innocuous detail or as exclusively symbolic, but as the dissonance between young Jane’s experience and narrator-Jane’s commentary draws attention to the fact that the books available to Jane have elementary content, the passage may also be read as a statement on the dispersal of literature and on the presumed level of education and intelligence of governesses in Victorian Britain. The in-between state of the bookcase – partially

⁶⁷ Eagleton, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros, *The Victorian Governess Novel*, Lund: Lund University Press, Diss: Lund, 2001 (1999), p. 13.

⁶⁹ Wadsö Lecaros, p. 193-194. Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros defines the genre in the dissertation *The Victorian Governess Novel* (2001), which includes Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *Jane Eyre* itself. The way that governesses were disregarded by their employers is explored extensively in *Agnes Grey* and even, to a lesser extent, in *Jane Eyre* in chapter XVII, in which Blanche Ingram and her mother discuss how much they abhor governesses.

locked but giving access to some books – is therefore also representative for the in-between state of Jane’s position as a governess; she is both part of the household but not part of the family and one of the servants while, like Mrs. Fairfax, having a station above the other servants. Thus, Jane has some access to books within the house, but not complete access, much like she has no complete access to any social group or class context at Thornfield. Thus, the withholding of books from Jane’s access that is implicit in the locking of some of Rochester’s bookcases maintains the power dynamic that is introduced by John Reed, by which Jane is denied full access to the books within the house where she resides due to the fact that she is an outsider from the family of the household and considered to be a relative lesser.

Jane’s relationship to the bookcases of Gateshead and Thornfield both pertain to borrowing of books by implicit permission (which is more or less given or withdrawn). These are not the only examples of circulating books within the narrative, however, as there are two other particularly significant examples thereof. Firstly, there is the more clear-cut case of the books lent to Jane by the Rivers’ while she is staying with them. She “is granted unlimited access” to their shelves as she joins Diana and Mary Rivers’ female reading community of two.⁷⁰ Thus, she enters a reading community in which she comes as close to being an equal of her reading peers as she has ever been. When Jane the narrator tells us that “[she] liked to read what [Diana and Mary] liked to read”, it is implied that she has found companions who are her equals, both in taste, intelligence, and reverence for reading.⁷¹ Diana and Mary are “both more accomplished and better read” than Jane, but “with eagerness [she] followed the path of knowledge they had trodden before [her]”, meaning that as opposed to the case at Thornfield, where she was limited to “elementary works”, at Moor House she is intellectually challenged and stimulated in a way that precludes narrator-Jane, who recognises the differing levels of complexity of literature she has had access to so far.⁷² Jane’s inclusion in this reading community is thus a stark contrast to anything the reader has witnessed of Jane’s life since she left Lowood (at which teachers occasionally lent her books as reward for her studiousness, but even then she was a student and a junior teacher rather than a peer). In conjunction with the limitations placed on her access to books at Gateshead and Thornfield, Jane’s reading at Moor House demarcates her incipient entry into a family unit – rising from an outsider

⁷⁰ Norrick, p. 72.

⁷¹ Brontë, p. 312.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

whose access to the books and intellectual privileges of the household is limited to a position of inclusion and privilege – which is confirmed when she learns that the Rivers siblings are her cousins.

Leading up to the revelation of the Rivers' relation to Jane, one of the most significant examples of circulation of books within *Jane Eyre* occurs: Jane receives a book as a gift. When St. John visits Jane at the school cottage where she works in order to gift her the copy of *Marmion* which brings her such delight, he also discovers a drawing which Jane has reflexively signed with her true name (rather than the pseudonym of “Jane Elliott” which she gave in order to avoid being traced by Rochester when she arrived at Moor House), which is the decisive moment which reveals to St. John that Jane is his long-lost cousin. Hence, the gifting of the book, the first book Jane would own for herself, heralds the imminent reception of a large inheritance and a place of belonging among her paternal cousins the Rivers. The life of exclusion (as a dependent, governess, and charity case) thus ceases in the same moment she receives a book to own herself, confirming and concluding the correlative symbolism of withholding and permitting access to books as a means to exert class-based power over Jane. She enters the upper-class financially and socially by her revealed association with the fine old family of the Rivers, thus exonerating her from her need to rely on others for the financial means to access books.

Concurrently, however, another power dynamic begins to emerge in this scene – that between St. John and Jane. In the scene where Jane's parentage is confirmed to St. John and vice versa (chapter XXXIII), Jane reveals herself to be “a hard woman”, and a pragmatic one, which is what leads St. John to settle on the idea that she would be the perfect missionary wife, a thought which St. John was already considering in light of Jane's industriousness as a school teacher. Simon Eliot comments on the gift of *Marmion* with a detailed consideration of the price of books at the time when *Jane Eyre* is set and concludes that regardless of which option for when the novel is set holds true, “[t]he gift of the book represented a significant expenditure and value to both parties, and thus would not have been undertaken lightly” either as a purchase by St. John or as a received gift by Jane.⁷³ Eliot suggests that the book represents an expenditure that would communicate something significant to the recipient even in modern terms, meaning that at a time when formal courtship still more or less reigned, this gift would be read as highly significant by a

⁷³ Eliot, p. 197.

reader in 1847. The circulation of books is hence thematised as a form of capital on its own, but additionally, gifts and the act of gifting is thematised further more generally in the novel. When Jane and Rochester are formally introduced, Adele, in her childlike innocence, questions Rochester on whether he might have brought a present for Jane from his trips. “[D]id you expect a present, Miss Eyre? Are you fond of presents?” Rochester demands in reply to this, to which Jane responds that “a present has many faces to it, has it not? and [sic] one should consider all before pronouncing and opinion as to its nature”.⁷⁴ The first mention of the topic of gifts in the novel thus establishes that a gift is not something to be received blithely and without expectation, implying that it can be used as a tool of power or manipulation when the gifter comes to collect on their expectation. This theme remains consistent throughout the novel, and especially resurfaces in Rochester’s tale of his paid mistress Céline Varens and in Jane’s refusal to accept his engagement gifts in fear of becoming the next Céline. Thus, it follows based on both the thematisation of access to books and the thematisation of gifts, that St. John begins to exert power over Jane after the gifting of *Marmion* as he prepares her for the missionary work in India that he imagines for her. Now owning a book, and owning her portion of the Eyre inheritance, however – having the buying power to acquire more books than St. John’s gift in symbolic terms – Jane is able to free herself from St. John’s influence. Thus, the circulation of books within *Jane Eyre* acts as a thematic proxy for the circulation of power in which the ownership of books denotes a dominant position in any given power dynamic.

Books as literature (reading)

Aside from symbolising power dynamics through circulation, the use of books is a meaningful symbol for denoting character in *Jane Eyre*. Alison Hoddinott, as mentioned, writes in the article “Reading Books And Looking At Pictures In The Novels Of Charlotte Brontë” (2007) that “[Brontë’s] characters are frequently placed morally and temperamentally by reference to their taste in literature and art”, meaning that their reading habits contribute to the depiction of their moral character. Characters who fail to read or fail to read correctly often fail in intelligence, kindness, or ability to grow, whereas characters who read correctly see success in their endeavours and a spiritual ascension. The success that characters gain through reading correctly denotes a

⁷⁴ Brontë, p. 111.

different type of power than the ownership of books, which denotes economical power. Reading correctly rather denotes a growth of spiritual power and a growth of knowledge which can be used as power. Or, rather, it becomes *empowering* to gain knowledge as this lends itself to allowing characters a better understanding of the world they live in, which position them to better adapt to the difficulties they face in life. This is at the very least the case for the characters of *Jane Eyre*, who do not only read but who also take away lessons from their reading which help them understand themselves and the world. This is a prevalent aspect of the way that characters in *Jane Eyre* read, which is fruitfully framed through the lens of nineteenth century attitudes towards reading. In *The Brontës and Education* (2007), Marianne Thormählen explains the ethos of self-improvement, by which the self was supposed to be improved through “cultivation of the mind”, which was “a religious duty, partly because a trained intellect is serviceable in the work of the world, partly because it helps a person form sound habits and partly because it enables the owner better to perceive the glory of God and his Creation”.⁷⁵ This attitude towards reading was particularly prevalent in the Brontës’ lives according to Thormählen, based on their own religiosity, social position, and general cultural context. Reading in *Jane Eyre* can hence be read as a judgement of morality and temperament in relation to the way it contributes to the spiritual improvement of the person who reads.

Books as vehicles of morality and temperament

Morality and temperament is denoted both by handling and reading books in *Jane Eyre*, though reading is the more significant of the two as reading enacts an action which operationalises the purpose of the book. When the book is read, its content and the way that the reading character relates to it comes into view and becomes significant, communicating notions about the character who reads and the way that they relate to their world through the way they relate to their reading. Leah Price’s definition of reading is “doing something with the words”, which is essentially to interpret or absorb them.⁷⁶ In this way, the depiction of different kinds of reading signifies the ways in which characters do or do not engage themselves in the project of self-improvement, which contributes to positioning them morally as the project of self-improvement was considered a moral issue in Victorian Britain. Hence, the difference between reading for leisure, escapism, education

⁷⁵ Thormählen, p. 25.

⁷⁶ Price, p. 5.

and spiritual betterment tells us much about the characters and what kind of power they have, as well as to what extent this is amassed through reading.

The first, and perhaps most fascinatingly obvious example of a character in *Jane Eyre* who reads for self-improvement is Eliza Reed. Previously, I have discussed how the Reeds stubbornly remain unchanged in character, which is denoted by the staticity of their bookshelf, which remains true for all three Reed siblings. John shows a disregard for the idea that books could have value beyond their material value to him in his mishandling of Bewick's *History of British Birds*, which, as Leah Price points out, shows a "refusal to treat books as a protected category", and thus rejects the idea of improvement of the self through reading, which foreshadows his untimely demise once his gambling debts have accumulated past what he can survive as the specific circumstances of how his gambling debts were accrued signify that he never grew out of his greed and selfishness.⁷⁷ Georgiana, similarly, relied as a child on the power of her "beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls" which "seemed to give delight to all who looked at her" in order to "purchase indemnity for every fault", meaning that she had no need to improve her mind.⁷⁸ When we meet Georgiana again as an adult at Gateshead, she can be seen to have "fallen asleep on the sofa over the perusal of a novel", the operating word being "perusal", which does not guarantee that Georgiana was reading, but rather perhaps flicking through the novel superficially, implying that the superficiality of her likeability as a child remains to this day.⁷⁹ Eliza also remains unchanged in the sense that she was always trying to improve her situation. As a child, this meant 'selling' produce to the cooks in the house (who were under orders to go along with her scheme) in order to accrue independent capital (coins though it might have been), and as an adult, this means pursuing social independence through reading. When Jane reunites with her cousins at Gateshead, Eliza has "something ascetic in her look", which is accompanied by clothes whose "plainness" is "extreme" as well as a "nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix".⁸⁰ In place of her childhood prudence, Eliza has become religious, not necessarily due to spiritual religious devotion, but because it suits her character. During the days Jane spends with the Reed sisters, Jane observes that "Eliza would sit half the day sewing, reading, or writing, and scarcely utter a word to [Jane] or her sister" and it

⁷⁷ Price, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Brontë, p. 16.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 205.

later emerges that Eliza “evidently [has] no time to talk” at any time because she has carefully “divided her time into regular portions; and each hour had its allotted task”.⁸¹ In this carefully noted down description of Eliza’s habits, the idea of self-improvement which “helps a person form sound habits” emerges. The fact that this is connected to reading is denoted not only by the mention of Eliza dutifully reading as a part of her daily schedule, but also by the specific book she reads. Aside from ordinary reading, Jane also observes that Eliza three times a day studies a “Common Prayerbook”, and upon being questioned on the great appeal of this volume, Eliza responds that the great attraction of it is “the Rubric”, which is a set of rules for religious services.⁸² This focus on the rubric implies a focus on structure, rules, and scheduling, which are closely related to the idea of sound habits, implying that Eliza draws her ideas regarding having habits from the common prayerbook and presumably also from similar literature, as this seems to be her preference to read.

Forming “sound habits” as a way of self-improvement is related to power in terms of the personal power and control that comes with independence in the case of Eliza Reed, which is revealed one day during Jane’s stay at Gateshead, as Eliza has a sudden outburst directed at her sister Georgiana. Amongst various insults towards Georgiana’s character and nature, Eliza demands “[h]ave you no sense to devise a system which will make you independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own?” and goes on to instruct her on how precisely to divide her day, leaving “no stray unemployed” minutes but to rather keep her schedule with “rigid regularity”.⁸³ In this way, Eliza claims, “you are indebted to no one” for helping you to make the time pass and “have lived, in short, as an independent being ought to do”.⁸⁴ This speech reflects both the purpose of forming “sound habits” and the power that Eliza experiences through forming such habits; to rely on no one else by spending her time e.g. reading (one of the examples she gives) gives you independence from human effort and influence, which allows for a total control over the self. Eliza as an example is taken to a near comical extreme in terms of this independence – in stark contrast to her sister, who lives the precise opposite way and thus emphasises Eliza’s asceticism all the more – but within *Jane Eyre*, an adherence to religious and social rules of this sort, is consistently thematised. As Anne Hiebert Alton writes in the article “Books in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë”

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 211.

⁸² Brontë, p. 211.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 212.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

(2013), Jane follows a similar pattern of adhering to strictures taken from books on female etiquette. She uses the story of *Pamela* (1740), which has been retold to her by Bessie, as “a kind of moral yardstick for proper behaviour when she deals with Rochester” and similarly rejects Rochester’s gifts during their engagement in accordance with conduct books such as *The New Female Instructor* (1834), which Hiebert Alton suggests that Jane could have possibly read during her schooling.⁸⁵ Jane’s dedication to strictures is what guides her through the most pivotal section of the narrative, when she leaves Thornfield and Rochester after having convinced herself to do so with the help of her belief in those strictures: “I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be”.⁸⁶ Hence, Jane retains the power to vouchsafe her own well-being and soul through the habits and principles she lives according to, many of which she presumably learned through reading at Lowood. Much like Eliza uses her sound habits to avoid relying on other people for social stimulus, Jane relies on her reading to guide her through her relationship with Rochester and to avoid becoming a kept or fallen woman, thus maintaining her spiritual independence through maintaining her virtue with the help of examples of conduct she has read about.

One of the most famous examples of reading in *Jane Eyre* is that of Helen Burns and her reading of *Rasselas*. Cheryl A. Wilson writes that Helen serves as Jane’s “first reading community”, Leah Price considers Helen to be a true reader as she is an “absorbed reader” who can barely be distracted from her reading even by company, and Corinna Norrick considers Jane’s first encounter with Helen “as touching as it is relevant”.⁸⁷ Jessica Richard notes, however, that though the scene is often discussed, “few critics of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) have made much of the book that Helen Burns is reading when Jane first meets her at Lowood”.⁸⁸ Aside from Richard, only Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* and Juliette Atkinson (editor to the 2019 edition of *Jane Eyre*) seem to have taken notice of what Helen reads, which is

⁸⁵ Hiebert Alton, p. 267-268.

⁸⁶ Brontë, p. 284.

⁸⁷ Cheryl A. Wilson, “Female Reading Communities in *Jane Eyre*”, *Brontë Studies*, 2005:2, p. 131; Price, p. 81; Norrick, p. 71.

⁸⁸ Jessica Richard, “‘I Am Equally Weary of Confinement’: Women Writers and ‘Rasselas’ from Dinarbas to Jane Eyre”, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 2003:2, p. 335.

relevant to note in this thesis with reference to how Richard, Gilbert, Gubar, and Atkinson discuss Helen's reading. Discussing Gilbert and Gubar, Richard writes "if this [Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of Helen's relationship to *Rasselas*] is indeed how Helen reads *Rasselas*, she participates in a well-developed tradition of women who have read *Rasselas*".⁸⁹ The point of note in this excerpt is the phrasing of "Helen reads". Richard (and Gilbert and Gubar) implies that Helen reads *Rasselas* in a particular way, that is, she interprets it in a particular way as she reads, meaning that she learns from what she reads. Atkinson identifies that the speeches Helen makes about her "creed" are inspired by "one of Johnson's characters, the Princess Nekayah, [...] [who] determines that 'To me [...] the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity'".⁹⁰ Helen explains to Jane how her "creed" "makes Eternity a rest—a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss" to her, evoking the idea of looking to eternity (i.e. death, in Helen's case) as something which one can choose to find comfort in, similarly to the Princess Nekayah.⁹¹ Thus, Helen appears to have learned from *Rasselas* and synthesised these ideas into her world view. This notion is supported by the text of *Jane Eyre*, not only in relation to *Rasselas*, but in relation to other texts Helen has read, specifically the Bible. When Jane and Helen discourse on how cruelty and punishment should be received, Helen instructs Jane on how it is "far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil."⁹² Helen thus demonstrates the doctrine she holds in relation to punishment and cites the Bible as inspiration for her belief, though not as an instructor. That is, Helen does not claim that her belief is precisely outlined in the Bible, but rather that she has drawn conclusions based on the Bible. Furthermore, these are ideas which Jane, who has read the Bible, is baffled by as she cannot "comprehend this doctrine of endurance", implying that Helen's beliefs are not religious text, but rather are her own "doctrine", which she has formed through reading. As she reads, she learns.

The idea of learning by reading is emphasised in the text by the discussion between Jane and Helen in which Jane explains that she feels she "must resist those who punish [her] unjustly" (an idea which seems to be drawn from her own musings on Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, which

⁸⁹ Richard, p. 335.

⁹⁰ Juliette Atkinson, "Notes on the Text", *Jane Eyre*, ed. Juliette Atkinson and Margaret Smith, Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2019 (1847), p. 468.

⁹¹ Brontë, p 55.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

this thesis will discuss under the subtitle “Books as sources of knowledge”), which Helen claims is the “doctrine” of “[h]eathens and savage tribes”.⁹³ The discussion of opposing “doctrines” implies and emphasises that Jane and Helen follow different teachings, but as neither of them have been taught their doctrines, it is clear that they have taught themselves by drawing inspiration from their reading. Like Eliza, they draw inspiration according to which they structure their (moral) lives. Forming creeds, doctrines, and understanding of the world through reading is thematised in *Jane Eyre* both in the depiction of Helen’s wisdom and beliefs, and in the way Jane reflects on her own reading and the way her own doctrines differ from Helen’s. Jane understands that Helen’s worldview differs from her own as she recognises that “Helen Burns [considers] things by a light invisible to [Jane’s] eyes”, that is, she possesses a framework for interpretation that Jane does not have.⁹⁴ Helen, in particular, explains how she holds “another creed; which no one ever taught [her]” which allows her to “clearly distinguish between the criminal and his crime” and “so sincerely forgive the first while [she] abhor[s] the last”.⁹⁵ Hence, through her reading, Helen is able to draw conclusions which better enable her “to perceive the glory of God and his Creation”; Helen’s reading functions as an form of self-improvement both because she learns and grows, and because it makes her more forgiving and more likely to forgive, which denotes spiritual ascension within a Christian frame of godliness.

A contrast to Helen and Eliza, and more than anything to Jane, is posed by the grand lady Blanche Ingram, who visits Thornfield alongside a company of guests and poses as a rival in love to Jane. Like her fellow guests, Blanche spends most of her days in the drawing-room attempting to amuse herself by various means, as was custom for such a party. On two occasions, Jane observes her taking a book to amuse herself, but her reading seems to differ from that of the other reading women in the narrative. On the first occasion, when Rochester supposedly has business in town (but indeed is preparing to surprise the guests by dressing as a soothsayer), Blanche rejects the offered company of all her peers with “supercilious taciturnity” and “having fetched a novel from the library” flings herself “listlessly on a sofa” in order to “beguile, by the spell of fiction, the tedious hours of absence”.⁹⁶ In other words, the option of reading is far from Blanche’s first

⁹³ Ibid., p. 54.

⁹⁴ Brontë, p. 53.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

choice of entertainment (in which the first is the presence of Rochester, the second is murmuring over “some sentimental airs and tunes on the piano), as it ranks only above the company of the elder Mrs. Dent and Mrs. Eshton (who are implied to be unamusing).⁹⁷ Blanche’s attitude towards the task also appears lacklustre in conjunction with the dramatic petulance of Jane’s description of the way she chooses her seat, i.e. “listlessly” “throwing herself”, which becomes associated with a lack of focus and propriety in comparison to Jane and her “Lowood constraint” which “still clings to [her] somewhat; controlling [her] features, muffling [her] voice, and restricting [her] limbs” according to Rochester.⁹⁸ The comparison to Jane is actualised prior to this passage, as Jane has been bidden to sit in the drawing-room with the guests each evening by Rochester so that she is part of the company. Upon her first such evening, in which she sneaks into the drawing-room early so that she can choose a seat out of the centre of the room, Jane “retire[s] to a window-seat, and, taking a book from a table near, endeavour[s] to read”.⁹⁹ Thus, when Blanche is first seen to attempt to amuse herself with a book, it is with a prior association of reading in the drawing-room with Jane.

Blanche’s comparison with Jane and the depiction of her less nuanced reading habits, is continually emphasised after having seen Rochester as the soothsayer, when she returns to the drawing-room and takes a book, “lean[s] back in her chair” and declines further conversation, but despite this does not turn the page for the coming half hour, implying her distraction from the book. Rather than reading, she uses the book as a shield or a mask behind which to hide, as to avoid questions about her soothsaid future. This, according to Leah Price, is rather a form of *handling* (“doing something with the object”) than *reading* (“doing something with the words”), meaning that it cannot productively bring about power through self-improvement. Interestingly, Jane is acting similarly when she herself takes a book in the drawing-room; as soon as the guests enter, her focus drifts to describing them and the way they act, reducing her book to a shield behind which she hides in order to discourage approach, much like Blanche does later. In this way Jane and Blanche are thus similar, but the difference between them emerges in the way they use reading. As Corinna Norrick writes, “[t]o underline her antipathy for Blanche, Jane tells us about Blanche’s reading habits” and the way that “Blanche uses books and the state of being well-read as a status

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

⁹⁸ Brontë, p. 127.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

symbol” but “merely repeats ‘sounding phrases’ from books but has no qualified opinion of her own”.¹⁰⁰ This means that firstly, Blanche does not read critically in a way that fosters self-improvement, and secondly, this implicit comparison between Jane and Blanche’s reading habits mirrors the comparatively more explicit comparison between Jane and Blanche’s fitness as a wife and companion to Rochester. Blanche’s interest in Rochester is superficial, which is denoted by her comments on his appearance and how she loses interest in him once she believes that he is not as wealthy as she had been told, and Rochester’s interest in Blanche is accordingly superficial as his descriptions of her only pertain to her beauty, and her character is seen to offend him when she e.g. orates on the uselessness of governesses. Jane, by comparison is depicted as Rochester’s ideal companion, both explicitly according to Rochester (his “best earthly companion”) and implicitly by how she is able to temper and tease him throughout their engagement, as well as in how she can match his literary vernacular with literary references of her own when they converse.¹⁰¹ Hence Rochester is uninterested in Blanche beyond superficiality, while his interest in Jane is both in her person and character as her references to literature are substantiated by an understanding of the text and therefore meaningful. Hence, Jane gains the power to charm Rochester symbolically and (to some extent) pragmatically through the way her reading differs from Blanche’s, whose power to do the same is superficial and therefore meaningless. The power afforded by reading books is therefore also depicted in terms of an ability to use and have a qualified opinion on that which one reads, which lends itself to displaying a strength of character in interaction with others.

Books as sources of knowledge

The idea of reading as a form of self-improvement that strengthens the spirit is a theme which permeates *Jane Eyre*. The novel is famous for the intertextuality and literary allusions (Stevie Davies calls it a “book of books”) that permeate the text, but not all of these references and intertextualities are presented exclusively as if they were conjured by the implied author.¹⁰² Brontë has also placed these intertexts in the mouths of her characters and, most of all, in the descriptions given by Jane the narrator, with such intentionality that the references almost seem to belong to the characters themselves. As previously mentioned, the novel contains two versions of Jane; the

¹⁰⁰ Norrick, p. 73.

¹⁰¹ Brontë, p. 228.

¹⁰² Stevie Davies, “Introduction”, Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, London: Penguin Classics, 2008, p. xxiv.

version who is narrating and the version who is being narrated. Jane looks back on her youth from the position of a woman who is ten years Rochester's wife, and describes her past in both her own more mature words, and in the words that she supposes she was thinking at the time that the events occurred. It thus becomes significant to note to whom the words, and especially the literary references, belong, as this determines the difference in character and maturity between Jane the narrator and Jane the narratee, as well as between other characters that discourse on the same themes. This is particularly interesting to note in reference to literary allusions, which occur both in dialogue (implying that they belong to Jane the narratee or other characters that speak) and in monologue (implying that they belong either to Jane the narrator or to Jane the narratee depending on how they are framed). One such literary allusion, which recurs throughout the narrative at pivotal moments, is the allusion to Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, which is established in the text when Jane curses John Reed as a "murderer" and "slave-driver" like "the Roman Emperors".¹⁰³ The role that this book plays for Jane as a character will recur time upon time throughout the narrative in a way that implies that the lessons she drew from it contribute to the framework through which she views the world, much like the Bible and *Rasselas* did for Helen Burns.

Jane Eyre's reading habits are discussed by all who discuss books in *Jane Eyre*. Leah Price considers her an immature reader, while Alison Hoddinott notes that "Jane's reading and the way in which her preferences indicate her adventurous and independent sense of self are thoroughly documented" in reference to her reading of Goldsmith's *History of Rome*.¹⁰⁴ The fact that Jane has read this book is introduced in chapter I, during the scene in which John Reed throws Bewick's *British Birds* at her. The moment after she has been struck with the book, she finds that "the terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded".¹⁰⁵ Then, Jane abandons her reservations and exclaims at John, decrying him as a "[w]icked and cruel boy" who is like a murderer, slave-driver, and Roman emperor.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Jane expresses a comparison between John and all sorts of evil 'masters', indicating that the ten-year-old Jane has drawn conclusions about John based on information that she has gotten from somewhere. This is explained by Jane the narrator immediately after in the monologue, in which she explicates that at ten years old, she had "read

¹⁰³ Brontë, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Hoddinott, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Brontë, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Goldsmith's 'History of Rome', and had formed [her] opinion of Nero, Caligula &c. Also [she] had drawn parallels in silence, which [she] never thought thus to have declared aloud".¹⁰⁷ Thus, the older Jane declares that her ten-year-old self did not only read about Roman history, but synthesised the knowledge she gained from it. As Hiebert Alton puts it, "Goldsmith's *History of Rome* gives her a frame of reference for John Reed's character", and from this she begins to construct a framework through which she can understand her own life.¹⁰⁸ She is oppressed and beaten by John Reed, who she is forced to call "master", and thus sees herself in the Roman slaves.¹⁰⁹ As Julia Sun-Joo Lee puts it in the article "The (Slave) Narrative of 'Jane Eyre'" (2008), literacy thus serves a "critical role in giving Jane a voice"; she is able to contextualise her experience, or "articulate her condition", through her reading.¹¹⁰ Thus, because of her reading, Jane formulates personal knowledge and understanding which empowers her to "comprehend her own condition and resist", meaning that her limited access to books imbues her with an intellectual form of power.

The imagining of Jane as a slave is not limited to this one initial scene, but rather becomes a repeated motif, which Jane turns to in pivotal moments. The comparison recurs a few pages after the first one, when she is carried off to the red-room, and she explains that "[she] was conscious that a moment's mutiny had already rendered [her] liable to strange penalties, and, like any other rebel slave, [she] felt resolved, in [her] desperation, to go to all lengths" and when she is in the red-room, "the mood of the revolted slave" is still with her.¹¹¹ The experience of the red-room and the revolt against the Reeds that both precede and follow it, is the first true event in the plot of *Jane Eyre*. It is from this revolt, which drives Mrs Reed to send Jane to Lowood, that all other events of the plot stem, as none of them could have occurred if not for Jane's first rebellion. The comparison recurs at Lowood, when Jane and Rochester are engaged, when Jane leaves Thornfield, and when Jane refuses St. John's offer of marriage. It particularly recurs at moments when Jane must make big decisions which affect the outcome of the rest of her life, recalling the sense of the fundamental change that occurred in Jane's life when she first revolted against the Reeds. When Jane is at Lowood and is punished by Brocklehurst for imagined slights of lying, and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Hiebert Alton, p. 268.

¹⁰⁹ Brontë, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Julia Sun-Joo Lee, "The (Slave) Narrative of 'Jane Eyre'", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2008:2, p. 318.

¹¹¹ Brontë, p. 13.

Helen Burns makes eye contact with her as she passes by, Jane feels the moment “as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit”, which precedes Jane taking on Helen’s traits of endurance and piousness during her tenure at Lowood, and thus denoting a change in her character which will follow her through the narrative.¹¹² Likewise, when Jane runs away from Thornfield, she thinks of the alternative, which is to be Rochester’s mistress, as of being a “slave in a fool’s paradise”, denoting how she made the great decision of leaving Rochester in part due to the sensibilities she has formed around what slavery and independence mean. Instead, she later gains independence by acquiring a position as a school teacher, and, as Sandra Gilbert puts it, it then seems that Jane’s independent life is “one toward which the whole novel seems to have tended”.¹¹³ Lastly, when Jane thinks of going with St. John to be a missionary in India, she thinks of it in the terms that if she does so “as his sister”, “[she] should still have [her] unblighted self to turn to: [her] natural *unenslaved* feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness”, meaning that St. John would then not own the right to determine her moods and feelings by virtue of being her husband, as Jane feels he would due to his unique influence over her feelings.¹¹⁴ When St. John thus rejects the idea of travelling together as brother and sister, Jane rejects his offer to go to India altogether because to do so would be to lose her freedom and her life. The idea of Jane as a “runaway slave” thus becomes a governing tenet for Jane’s journey throughout the narrative as she exists in a constant state of struggle to create and retain independence and selfhood. Hence, the lessons she takes away from Goldsmith’s *History of Rome* at ten years old informs her worldview and her character arc for the rest of the narrative. The knowledge Jane has of the concept of slavery thus stems from her reading of *History of Rome*, meaning that the entire narrative of Jane as a slave is initially actualised by her reading. Because the framework that she forms with the help of *History of Rome* is what informs the most important and pivotal decisions she takes in the journey towards independence, the importance of reading books for the purpose of self-improvement is hence thematised as one of Jane’s most important strengths and the source of her power of conviction.

The first time that the motif of slavery recurs once Jane is an adult is, however, not initiated by Jane. It rather comes up when Rochester is telling Jane the story of his former mistresses in

¹¹² Ibid., p. 63.

¹¹³ Gilbert, p. 799.

¹¹⁴ Brontë, p. 363. My italics.

Europe, Céline Varens in particular. Rochester explains how he acted as a financial patron for his mistresses, but that he came to be disgusted with this after the fact because he grew to feel that “[h]iring a mistress is the next worse [sic] thing to buying a slave”.¹¹⁵ Thus, Rochester’s sense of what ‘slavery’ means as a metaphor, which differs from Jane’s, is introduced. This idea recurs when Jane is engaged to Rochester, at which point she is in danger of losing herself and her independence in the face of Rochester’s will. When Rochester attempts to rain expensive gifts over her, Jane reads his expression as that of a sultan who “in a blissful and fond moment” might “bestow on a slave his gold and gems”, foreshadowing the danger she faces of becoming once more metaphorically enslaved (something she freed herself from with her revolt against the Reeds) should she accept his gifts.¹¹⁶ Jane thus works to reassert her independence by insisting that she will not accept any gifts and will instead continue working as a governess until they are married; she will retain her independence until she “can’t help it”.¹¹⁷ Rochester confirms the danger she had been in when he attempts to order her to “give up [her] governessing slavery at once”, underscoring the difference between how Jane and Rochester view the metaphor of slavery. Jane, as has become clear, views metaphorical slavery as being a dependent whose moods must please her master lest his benevolence be withdrawn, and views freedom as economical independence. Thus she is glad to do hard work such as “governessing slavery”, because it allows her to earn wages and therefore maintain independence by feeling that she *does* do something “for her keep”, whereas Rochester holds the notion that “[m]ost things free-born will submit to anything for a salary”.¹¹⁸ The emphasis on “free-born” draws a connection between the statement and the idea of slavery, implying that a salary does not at all denote freedom, but rather dependence and inferiority.¹¹⁹ This notion of Rochester’s is further underscored when he later claims that “[h]iring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading”, clearly declaring that should Jane have become his mistress, she would eventually have taken on the traits of a slave in his eyes.¹²⁰ Similarly, Jane views the position she would have lived in then as a form of slavery, as she would then have become a

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 279.

¹¹⁶ Brontë, p. 241.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 242.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 243, 14, 123.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 279.

dependent once more, which is emphasised by the conclusions Jane draws as she realises that had she gone along with Rochester's proposal of mistresshood, she would have been a "slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles—fevered with delusive bliss one hour—suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next".¹²¹ A clear difference between Rochester and Jane's understanding of slavery thus emerges, forming both nuance in the thematisation of slavery, and in the psychological realism of the characters. This contributes to depicting Jane and Rochester as two different people with two different frames of reference, which implies that they have different sources of knowledge. Thus, the difference between Rochester and Jane's understanding of slavery also underscores the importance of Jane's reading, as this is what has formed the frame of reference through which she understands the idea, which is the same understanding that allows her to retain emotional and economical independence from Rochester.

The recurring motif of slavery has been studied by a small number of researchers, including Julia Sun-Joo Lee and Sue Thomas. Their focus lies in the historical contextualisation of the theme of slavery, however, rather than the role it plays in the depiction of Jane's character as she contextualises her own life according to the narrative of a runaway slave. In terms of historical contextualisation of the theme of slavery in *Jane Eyre*, both Sun-Joo Lee and Thomas argue that the imagining of Jane as a "rebel slave" is inspired by semi-contemporary historical events relating to slavery.¹²² Sun-Joo Lee argues that the thematisation of slavery is inspired by the African-American slave trade and is contextualised in relation to the recent abolishment of British slavery in 1846, whereas Thomas approaches the depiction of slavery in relation to historical events surrounding slavery in the West Indies, which the Brontë children could have read about in *Blackwood's Magazine*.¹²³ These contextualisations provide background for how and why Brontë might have been inspired to thematise Jane's struggle for independence in terms of the terminology of slave narratives, but within the text of *Jane Eyre*, the theme is, as mentioned, actualised by the reference to Goldsmith's *History of Rome*. Additionally, Sun Joo-Lee suggests that Brontë drew her literary inspiration from Frederick Douglass's slave narrative, while in the text, Jane draws inspiration from Goldsmith's *History of Rome*. Regardless of which text is the true progenitor of the idea of imagining Jane as a rebel slave, the point remains that the idea is formulated and

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 321.

¹²² Brontë, p. 13.

¹²³ Sun-Joo Lee, 317; Sue Thomas, "Christianity and the State of Slavery in 'Jane Eyre'", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2007:1, 61.

executed after having been actualised by reading. On a metatextual level, Jane the narrator formulates her depiction of her youth with Goldsmith's *History of Rome* as an intertext in the same way that Brontë formulates the slave narrative with Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) as an intertext. This becomes particularly clear in descriptions such as "*it was as if* a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit", which clarifies the role of Jane the narrator in that the description of young Jane's feelings seems to stem from her older self's perspective.¹²⁴ References such as these hence actualise the role of the narrator in a way that clarifies the role of reading in gaining knowledge with which to contextualise reality.

Thus, the actualisation of a literary understanding of slavery as a framework of meaning is actualised by the presence of books, and though there is a clear difference between the writing decisions made by Charlotte Brontë as an author and the narrator that she creates through her writing, the way that Brontë defines Jane the narrator in contrast to Jane the narratee with the help of commentary that adheres to said framework contributes to the way that *Jane Eyre* is read as a highly psychologically realistic main character. In her construction of Jane the narrator, Brontë constructs an author whose words are treated as if they were written by an original person to comment upon another person. This, in turn, emphasises and underlines the extent to which Jane appears to be in charge of her own narrative. As mentioned, the theme of slavery recurs in pivotal moments of *Jane Eyre*, which all seem to pertain to Jane's need for independence. When she frees herself from the oppression of her cousin, from caring about her aunt's opinion of her, from the risk of being kept as a mistress by Rochester or as a wife by St. John, Jane takes actions that drive her towards independence which are contextualised by both the narrator and narratee, and which drive her spiritually towards independence. The power of Jane's spirit and her drive towards independence is hence actualised and signified by her reading and the way she refers back to her reading for guidance continuously, which ultimately also underlines the way that reading is valued within the narrative. In particular, the notion that this reading functions as a form of self-improvement for Jane becomes clear, as the independence she achieves with the help of the knowledge she gains from reading allows her more clarity of mind, and allows her to work as an active member of society, as she finds succour in independence through work, which aligns with

¹²⁴ Brontë, p. 63. My italics.

the idea of how “a trained intellect is serviceable in the work of the world”. Thus, Jane’s reading, what she does with the words as she synthesises them into her worldview, function as self-improvement, and thus ensures that the narrative is permeated with the idea of the value of self-improvement through reading.

Reading as capital (using)

In *Jane Eyre*, books are not only depicted and read, but reading is depicted after the fact. This is done in the way that characters discuss reading, both as an act, and in the form of a character implying that they are well-read through their use of citations and quotations from literature that they are familiar with. This section is not concerned with how reading in the moment is denoted, but rather with how past reading is expressed. More specifically, this section is concerned with the ways that characters in *Jane Eyre* think about and use things they have read, that is, how they *cognise* about their reading. Hence, this section discusses the outcome of having had access to books, and ways in which this access leads to wielding power over others. The outcome of having had access to books and having read them is best discussed as a form of power in terms of how it provides the speaker with cultural capital. In a culture in which reading is valued as a source of education and self-improvement, as has been discussed throughout this thesis, reading denotes both high class status, as access to books can be afforded, and a great intellect, when books can be interpreted. In *Jane Eyre*, the positive outcome of reading is communicated specifically in terms of 1) “the ability to express oneself in a cultivated manner”, which characters in *Jane Eyre* do by quoting classical texts such as the works of William Shakespeare and the Bible, and 2) “familiarity with classical [...] literature”, which in *Jane Eyre* is communicated partially through quoting, and partially through discussing whether a character is well-read in plain terms.¹²⁵ Both of these expressions of having read literature are represented in ways which denote the social power that the characters that possess cultural capital have over the characters who do not, in particular through their abilities to be convincing both rhetorically and through leveraging class positions. The ability to wield the cultural capital of being well-read is thus actualised by not only having spent time reading, but having spent time understanding the things that are read, which is to say, *cognising*, and therefore the depiction of cultural capital in *Jane Eyre* will be discussed in terms

¹²⁵ Broady, p. 171. My translation.

of the depiction of cognising and how cognising lends itself to being leveraged as a form of social power.

Wielding rhetoric

As mentioned, *Jane Eyre* is filled with references to other pieces of literature. Philip C. Rule notes in the article “The Function of Allusion in *Jane Eyre*” that in marked contrast to Brontë’s other works, which contain fewer references, “*Jane Eyre* is filled with allusions and citations: thirty-seven from the Bible, eleven from Shakespeare, and references to or citations from more than twenty writers ranging from Vergil to Sir Walter Scott”.¹²⁶ Most of these allusions and citations occur in the monologue/description parts of the prose, and are thus presented primarily through Jane the Narrator as a medium, but a number of them also occur in dialogue. In particular, nearly all of the Shakespeare-references and a large number of the quotes from the Bible occur in dialogue, voiced by Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers. Previous studies have investigated a few of these quotes in isolation, particularly for their allusive properties, but none have addressed the references in terms of how they are used as rhetoric by Rochester and St. John, as well as, to a certain extent, by Jane herself, Helen Burns, and Mr. Brocklehurst. Brontë assigns these references to different characters systematically, where all Shakespeare quotes in dialogue are said by Rochester whereas St. John only cites from the Bible, Mr. Brocklehurst cites his own texts, and Jane and Helen Burns allude to various sources including the Bible. Svante Nordin writes that citations can be used for many purposes, including to “support a statement by referring to a source”, to “invoke an authority”, as “embellishment or demonstration of the speaker’s knowledge of and familiarity with classical literature”, or as a way of connecting to a culture, educational tradition, group, direction of opinion, party, or belief system.¹²⁷ Embellishment and demonstration of knowledge in particular is a way that citation functions as cultural capital, but in terms of wielding reading and knowledge as the characters of *Jane Eyre* do, all of the above points count towards wielding reading as rhetoric. The idea that Rochester and St. John use rhetoric in order to convince Jane to follow their wishes is established by Susan V. Scoff in the article “Echoes of Aristotle: Rochester's Rhetorical Ploys in *Jane Eyre*” (2002), which centres around the idea that

¹²⁶ Philip C. Rule, “The Function of Allusion in ‘Jane Eyre’”, *Modern Language Studies*, 1985:4, p. 165.

¹²⁷ Svante Nordin, “Förlåt jag blott citerar”. *Om citatets historia*, Nora: Bokförlaget Nya Doxa, 2001, p. 15. My translation.

Rochester and St. John use, but fail to completely adhere to, Aristotelian rhetoric. This provides a basis for how to view the way that Rochester and St. John use language in order to attempt to wield power over Jane. No previous research has considered the role of citations and allusions in these attempts to convince Jane of marriage, which this thesis will now do. This thesis considers rhetoric to be any device of speech which functions with the purpose of convincing the listener of something, either consciously or unconsciously, and thus treats all quotations in dialogue in *Jane Eyre* as a use of rhetoric as all of them, in their own way, invoke an authority in order to convince the listener of something, regardless of if that something is that the listener should do a particular thing, or that the speaker possesses a particular trait. In the sense that citing read texts functions as rhetorical devices, this thesis will treat the Bible as a text which can be cited from in order to invoke authority and demonstrate the reading character's familiarity with relevant texts, as it is in this way it functions as a rhetorical device within *Jane Eyre*.

Svante Nordin notes that in the English literary tradition, one of the most commonly cited writers is William Shakespeare, which is a tradition that Brontë participates in and seems to actively depict in her representation of Rochester.¹²⁸ As mentioned, Philip C. Rule identifies eleven allusions to Shakespeare in *Jane Eyre*, but meanwhile, Stevie Davies notes sixteen allusions to Shakespeare in her notes on the text to the 2016 Penguin Classics edition of *Jane Eyre*. Out of the allusions Davies notes, six Shakespeare-quotes occur in the monologue in *Jane Eyre*, while ten are cited in dialogue by Rochester, thus specifically locating Shakespeare-citations in Rochester's character. He uses them when speaking to Jane, often with no apparent deeper meaning than as embellishment to his speech; Davies notes that quotes such as "Off, ye lendings!" from *King Lear*, which Rochester exclaims while removing his disguise as a soothsayer, are "melodramatic and somewhat absurd".¹²⁹ On other occasions, however, Rochester's references seem to function as complex allusions to his actual life and his great secret; his wife Bertha. The line "[a]nd was that the head and front of his offending?", which Rochester says to Jane in regards to Mr. Brocklehurst in their first 'interview', is a reference to Shakespeare's *Othello*, specifically the lines "true, I have married her: / The very head and front of my offending" which refers to Othello's marriage to Desdemona.¹³⁰ In the context of Rochester's marriage to Bertha, this line takes on deeper meaning

¹²⁸ Nordin, p. 43.

¹²⁹ Brontë, p. 183; Stevie Davies, "Notes on the Text", *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies, London: Penguin Classics, 2008 (1847), p. 557.

¹³⁰ Brontë, p. 113. The citation is identified by Deborah Lutz in the notes on the text.

and seems to apply better to Rochester's own situation, as the origin of all his problems is his marriage to Bertha; as Davies puts it, "[t]he allusion is prescient of Mr. Rochester's own offence".¹³¹ Viewing Rochester as a psychologically complex character, the presence of this line creates a sense that this particular quote may have been bouncing around in Rochester's head as he recognises himself in it. The majority of Rochester's Shakespeare-references refer either to *Othello* or to *Macbeth*, and in context all seem to refer to Bertha. Paul Edmondson, who writes on the way that the Brontës used Shakespeare in their works, writes that "[o]n the whole, the Brontës never seem to think through Shakespeare in any of their writing [...] rather, Shakespeare is made present as an implied influence throughout their work, and at odd intervals", but that in *Shirley*, however, "Charlotte presents a heroine who does think through Shakespeare".¹³² It is unclear exactly when Edmondson means when he writes "think through", but as he describes how Shirley attempts to use *Coriolanus* as a tool with which to teach Robert kindness to his workers, one might suggest that it refers to using Shakespeare's texts as a frame of reference through which to learn and think. In the same way, Rochester seems to use Shakespeare, and especially *Othello* and *Macbeth* as a framework through which he can think about his marriage to Bertha and speak of it in disguised terms as none of his companion's (Jane and Mrs. Fairfax) recognise the references. Hence, I argue that Edmondson's statement also applies to *Jane Eyre*.

Aside from the references described by Edmondson, a way that allusions to specifically Shakespeare and the Bible are discussed both in English literature in general and in *Jane Eyre* in particular is as a form of *bricolage*. Bricolage is a literary device which Keith A. Jenkins defines in the article "*Bricolage, Brontë Style: Atypical Typology in Jane Eyre*" based on Lévi-Strauss's definition as "a putting together of bits and pieces out of whatever comes to hand", which is to say that it is a way of creating a narrative by combining allusions to existing stories to form a new story.¹³³ It is a technique that Brontë herself uses in *Jane Eyre* as she uses references to the Bible as allusions which form a bricolage according to Jenkins. Other researchers have not used the term bricolage to refer to this technique, but researchers like Philip C. Rule similarly identifies the systematic way that Brontë uses allusions to the Bible and Shakespeare's plays like those to couples such as "Adam and Eve, Samson and Delilah, and Lear and Cordelia" which together

¹³¹ Davies, p. 548.

¹³² Edmondson, p. 184, 189.

¹³³ Keith A. Jenkins, "*Bricolage, Brontë Style: Atypical Typology in Jane Eyre*", *Brontë Studies*, 2012:4, p. 307-308.

“form a pattern or motif of male/female pairings”.¹³⁴ Jenkins discusses Brontë’s bricolage in terms of how she uses allusions to the Bible in order to discourse on biblical gender dynamics and to change them into a dynamic of equality, and Rule similarly discusses these allusions in terms of their depiction of the “fundamental nature of the relationship between man and woman”, many references of which are located in Rochester’s speech, in particular the reference to Adam and Eve.¹³⁵ When these allusions are situated in Rochester’s speech however, they seem to be displaced from the narrative bricolage and become a bricolage which Brontë creates in Rochester’s speech as he winds tales around Jane with implications of their inevitable fate as lovers and helpmeets. Brontë thus both uses bricolage as a technique in the overarching narrative of *Jane Eyre*, and presents Rochester as a particularly skilled reader and rhetorician who is capable of similarly building a bricolage in his speeches. Rochester uses bricolage to attempt to tell his own story, which is that of a man who has made a mistake, a marriage which is “the very head and front of [his] offending” and who thence has been cursed by his destiny, which he denotes with a comparison between destiny and the “hags” of Macbeth, and most significantly draws parallels between himself and Jane to Adam and Eve.¹³⁶ Davies notes, in her notes on the text, that during the proposal scene in chapter XXIII, in the passage

“[...] Are you anything akin to me, do you think, Jane?”

I could risk no sort of answer by this time: my heart was still.

“Because,” he said, “I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous Channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I’ve a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you,—you’d forget me”¹³⁷

Rochester compares himself and Jane to Adam and Eve as he wonders if they are “akin”, which in biblical terms refers to Adam being “akin” to Eve as in “being her source”, and specifies that the connection between them is lodged under his ribs, alluding to the way that Eve is made from

¹³⁴ Rule, p. 165.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

¹³⁶ Brontë, p. 113, 130,

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

Adam's rib.¹³⁸ The allusion to Adam and Eve, in particular, is rhetorically significant as this is a frame of reference which Jane relates to. There is no sign that she has read any Shakespeare at this point in her life (the Shakespeare-references in the monologue rather appear to belong to Jane the narrator, who has had more time to read), but she is well-versed in the Bible, meaning that Rochester is effectively evoking an authority that Jane follows in calling on religious ideas of platonic marriage. The notion that he is using these biblical allusions rhetorically in order to convince Jane to marry him appears particularly potent when considering the fact that he is already married, and therefore it is impossible for him, by Victorian standards, to enter a perfect union; the argument is based on lies and is therefore entirely rhetorical. Rochester attempts to write his own ending to the bricolage story he builds, but the ending he plans is an impossibility and therefore imaginary. Regardless, Rochester displays cognising over his reading as he effectively uses that reading as a rhetorical device and a framing device through which he contextualises his life.

Though Nordin notes that Shakespeare-quotes are some of the most common within the English literary tradition, he does note this in conjunction with the notion that Biblical citations are a category unto themselves in their commonality.¹³⁹ Much has been written on Brontë's biblical allusions and the way she uses them to build her narrative, but less so seems to be written on the way that the Bible is quoted by characters as rhetorical devices. Two examples aside from Rochester of men who wield Biblical rhetoric against Jane are Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers. The two have starkly different styles of rhetoric and genuinity, but, as John Hagan puts it in "Enemies of Freedom in *Jane Eyre*" (1971), "[t]hough Brocklehurst erred by being insufficiently religious, whereas St. John errs by being exclusively religious, both threaten Jane's freedom by their pride, rigidity, ambition, and lack of human warmth".¹⁴⁰ While Jane feels oppressed by both Brocklehurst and St. John, and in fact draws parallels between herself and a slave in the expression of her feeling of oppression in regards to both of them, she reacts differently to each man's oppression. Both men express their religiosity through quotation from or allusion to the Bible, but they do so in such different ways and with such different purposes that they affect Jane differently with differing levels of efficiency. With Brocklehurst, the feeling of oppression

¹³⁸ Davies, p. 562.

¹³⁹ Nordin, p. 43.

¹⁴⁰ John Hagan, "Enemies of Freedom in 'Jane Eyre'", *Criticism*, 1971:4, p. 372.

he puts her through when he makes her stand on a stool throughout a full school day feeds Jane's anger, which is the selfsame anger she expresses to Helen and Miss Temple later when she describes how Brocklehurst came to believe her to be a liar due to Mrs. Reed's influence. Jane is falsely punished for a crime she has not committed, and thus she is angered by Mr. Brocklehurst, but is not cowed by him. She is rather strengthened in her anger, and her oppression by Brocklehurst gains her Miss Temple's favour. Similarly, Brocklehurst's quotations of the Bible, and "books of his own inditing" seem to ring false when he speaks. Brocklehurst is generally recognised as a hypocrite by critics of *Jane Eyre* such as Sandra Gilbert in "Plain Jane's Progress" (1979), as he preaches punishing the body to save the soul for the pupils of Lowood while his own wife and daughters are "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs".¹⁴¹ Additionally, when he quotes the Bible, he misquotes and misrepresents the quotes in order to suit his purposes. When he instructs Miss Temple to never give the girls any extra food even if their meals are inedible, he quotes "if ye suffer hunger or thirst for my sake, happy are ye", which is a misquote of "[b]lessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled".¹⁴² Sara L. Pearson writes that Brontë's "biblically literate audience would have been able to discern the unorthodox ways in which she incorporated biblical texts into her novel" to produce narrative, humour, and multitudinous levels of meaning, by which extension it would have been clear to a contemporary reader that Brontë intentionally misuses Biblical quotations in the dialogue of Mr. Brocklehurst in order to emphasise his hypocrisy and the falseness of his religiosity.¹⁴³ It is in this way that Brocklehurst is "insufficiently religious", as Hagan puts it.¹⁴⁴ Thus, Brontë places misquotes in Brocklehurst's dialogue in order to depict his failed attempts at rhetoric, and hence emphasises his failure to be a good christian or an intelligent man.

According to Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (2003), knowledge of the Bible is vital to any reading of *Jane Eyre* as "[w]ithout it, the resonances and nuances deriving from the biblical context cannot be savoured, ironies may be missed, emotional depth reduced, and the nature of characters like St. John Rivers not fully

¹⁴¹ Brontë, p. 61.

¹⁴² Brontë, p. 59. Deborah Lutz's notes on the text.

¹⁴³ Sara L. Pearson, "'The Coming Man': Revelations of Male Character in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*", 2012:4, 299.

¹⁴⁴ Hagan, p. 372.

understood”.¹⁴⁵ St. John is a highly religious man who lives ascetically in the sense that he deprives himself of all pleasures, such as the prospect of marrying Rosamond Oliver – whom he is infatuated with and who returns his feelings – and finding pleasure in nature, which is “not to him that treasury of delight it was to his sisters”.¹⁴⁶ In his dialogue, he continually refers to his religiosity, both in quotations and in more general references, as these notions thoroughly govern his life. Thus, St. John has the capacity to rhetorise in a way that resonates with Jane, which affects her far more strongly than Brocklehurst’s rhetoric did. In “Christianity and the State of Slavery in *Jane Eyre*” (2007), Sue Thomas describes how while Jane is at Moor House and helping St. John prepare for his missionary work, “she feels that his ‘influence’ takes away her ‘liberty of mind’. Jane’s sense of the boundaries between self and other at stake [sic] in a marriage to St. John – which would mean becoming ‘part’ of him, his vocation, and his ‘will’”.¹⁴⁷ This effect is achieved through a combination of biblical citations and references with the influence of St. John’s personality on Jane. His sermons are described in detail, not as Brocklehurst’s are, with focus on the hypocrisy of the verses chosen, but in terms of the emotional effects it produces in Jane and the rhetorical effects of his delivery. St. John is rather described as “pure-lived, conscientious, zealous”, and genuine in his conveyances, which focus on themes of doom, in stark contrast to Brocklehurst’s ingenuity. In contrast to Brocklehurst’s hypocrisy, when St. John attempts to convince Jane to take on the work as a teacher at Morton School, he eulogises “I hold that the more arid and unreclaimed the soil where the Christian labourer’s task of tillage is appointed him—the scantier the meed his toil brings—the higher the honour. His, under such circumstances, is the destiny of the pioneer; and the first pioneers of the Gospel were the Apostles—their captain was Jesus, the Redeemer, Himself.”¹⁴⁸ St. John follows these tenets of living as he deprives himself of pleasure as often as possible, to the extent where he would rather take Jane, a woman he oppresses and does not love, as his wife with him to India because she would be a good worker, rather than Rosamond, who he loves. In his continued attempts to convince Jane to marry him, St. John cites the Bible casually and reads it aloud with intention, and very nearly succeeds in convincing Jane

¹⁴⁵ Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ Brontë, p. 314.

¹⁴⁷ Sue Thomas, “Christianity and the State of Slavery in ‘Jane Eyre’”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2007:1, p. 71.

¹⁴⁸ Brontë, p. 316.

to marry him, underlining textually how he is both truly well-versed in Biblical texts and capable of quoting them effectively. Thus, it becomes clear that St. John possesses a power to influence and control the people around him through the use of Biblical allusions and rhetoric, which is a skill that he has developed through cognisant reading. Mr. Brocklehurst, on the other hand, possesses no such power as he is unable to quote the Bible appropriately. In other words, St. John engages in cognising when reading the Bible, which allows him to cite it with intent, while Mr. Brocklehurst simply reads it. Hence, Brocklehurst cannot tame Jane by quoting scripture because he is incapable of accurately wielding the rhetorical power of Biblical allusions in a way that convinces the listener. St. John, however, wields Biblical rhetoric with a concerning accuracy, with which he effectively wields the power of rhetoric over Jane.

Wielding knowledge

So far, the ways that Jane is oppressed by her environment and the people in it by withholding access to books has been discussed, but it must also be noted that Jane does have occasional access to books, not to mention an education at Lowood, where she stayed for eight years. As Deirdre d'Albertis puts it, "Jane Eyre [...] is not as singular as she might at first appear, being the beneficiary of class privilege".¹⁴⁹ As has previously been discussed, Jane inhabits a class position outside of either the upper class or the servant class. Eagleton establishes that as a governess, she is both a "servant, trapped within a rigid social function which demands industriousness, subservience and self-sacrifice" and an "'upper' servant, and so (unlike, supposedly, other servants) furnished with an imaginative awareness and cultivated sensibility which are her stock-in-trade as a teacher".¹⁵⁰ d'Albertis also addresses this as she declares that "[c]onfusion surrounds Jane's role from the outset. Is she a servant or not?", referring to how Jane is declared "less than a servant" by Miss Abbot as a child at Gateshead.¹⁵¹ When Jane is visited by her old nurse Bessie at Lowood shortly before leaving for Thornfield, however, Bessie declares that her "father's kinsfolk [...] are as much gentry as the Reeds are" and that Jane "look[s] like a lady, and it is as much as ever [Bessie] expected of [her]".¹⁵² The in-betweenness of Jane's life is a recurring theme

¹⁴⁹ d'Albertis, p. 268.

¹⁵⁰ Eagleton, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ d'Albertis, p. 269; Brontë, p. 14.

¹⁵² Brontë, p. 85.

throughout the narrative as, as discussed, she does not find a sense or place of belonging until she receives her Uncle Eyre's inheritance. This concurrently means that Jane's class belonging and access to power is depicted in contradictory terms as she is largely oppressed by her 'betters', but also wields power over those who she considers to be lower than herself, either in terms of class or in terms of intelligence, such as Mrs. Fairfax, Adele, Bessie, and the Rivers' servant Hannah. Chris Vanden Bossche poignantly summarises this as he notes that *Jane Eyre's* "heroine rebels against social exclusion yet ultimately does not seek to overturn the existing social order".¹⁵³ Marianne Thormählen similarly notes that Brontë's fiction "contain[s] inconsistent views, conflicting class values and anxious, inconclusive probings", which is the framework through which Jane's wielding of power will be considered, particularly as Jane's personality seems to change when she speaks to or of people 'lower' than herself, which draws attention to these scenes.¹⁵⁴ The way that Jane wields this power is primarily located in the way she wields her intellect against the people she looks down upon, which is frequently conveyed through reference to the reading and education she has had access to, meaning that Jane wields power by wielding her cultural capital and her ability to cognise over her reading.

Studies of *Jane Eyre* which discuss class discuss Jane's class, and especially so in relation to the Reeds, to Rochester, and to the Rivers. These discussions are often contextualised by the statement "you are less than a servant for you do nothing for your keep", said to Jane by Miss Abbot in chapter II, as this line emphasises Jane's state as "between classes".¹⁵⁵ The topic of class in *Jane Eyre* has not, however, been discussed in terms of Jane's specific relationship with the servants in her life, either as their superior or as their colleague. Jina Politi has, however, discussed the overarching narrative of Jane's class journey in "*Jane Eyre* Class-ified" (1982) with the proposition that "the narrative together with the girl-child [Jane] will grow from revolted marginality to quiescent socialisation, reblending the contradictions which it originally exposed".¹⁵⁶ By this, Politi refers to the way that Jane, who revolts against both her "master" John Reed and against the idea of being "less than a servant", comes to reintegrate herself into a class hierarchy, which she accepts readily as she reclaims the position of "gentry" that her "father's

¹⁵³ Vanden Bossche, p. 46-47.

¹⁵⁴ Thormählen, p. 26.

¹⁵⁵ Brontë, p. 14; Politi, p. 79.

¹⁵⁶ Politi, p. 78.

kinsfolk” had.¹⁵⁷ This narrative of a class journey can be traced through the way Jane relates to servants and others she considers herself superior to in terms of how reading and intellect is depicted and discussed in relation to Jane’s relationship with these characters.

Jane’s social position is highly ambiguous at Gateshead and Lowood, as has been established previously in this thesis. At Thornfield, however, Jane holds the true position of a servant in the household, as she is a governess, even if a governess is considered an “upper servant”.¹⁵⁸ When in this position, Jane is uncomfortable at the idea of being condescended to by Mrs. Fairfax by being shown friendship, as she believes that Thornfield belongs to Mrs. Fairfax, who thus would be her superior. When Mrs. Fairfax reveals that she is simply the housekeeper, however, Jane is immediately relieved as she can view Mrs. Fairfax as something closer to a social equal and feels that her “position is all the freer”. Mrs. Fairfax seems to share this notion as she comments how now that Jane is here, she shall be “very gay indeed”, as her only other company have been Leah, John and John’s wife, who are “very decent people, but [...] only servants, and one cannot converse with them on terms of equality”, and Adele and her nurse Sophie, neither of whom speak English. The social position of the governess as above other servants that Eagleton notes is thus actively depicted in this scene as Mrs. Fairfax considers Jane to be more of an equal to herself than the other servants. Mrs. Fairfax’s company soon grows insufficient in its ability to stimulate Jane socially and intellectually, however, as though she “turned out to be what she appeared, a placid-tempered, kind-natured woman, of competent education and average intelligence”, Jane soon begins to desire “more of practical experience than [she] possessed; more of intercourse with [her] kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within [her] reach”. Though Mrs. Fairfax is moderately educated, she is not of Jane’s “kind” intellectually or breeding-wise (though Mrs. Fairfax is a relation of Rochester’s, it’s through her late husband and not her own blood), not as Rochester, who is “akin” to her, will appear to be, as Jane’s understimulation ceases when Rochester arrives. This depiction of Mrs. Fairfax’s intellect as lacking in comparison to Jane’s is continually emphasised by Rochester’s presence and the way that Jane seems to always be able to interpret his speech whereas Mrs. Fairfax cannot. Even before Rochester appears in the narrative, Mrs. Fairfax describes how she believes that Rochester is clever, but how she has “never had much conversation with him” as he is peculiar in the way he

¹⁵⁷ Brontë, p. 14, 68.

¹⁵⁸ Eagleton, p. 16.

speaks, and she thus never understands him. Even in the way she expresses this sentiment, her lack of understanding is emphasised as she says “it is not easy to describe—nothing striking, but you feel it when he speaks to you; you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don’t thoroughly understand him, in short—at least, I don’t”, making clear that she can no more describe what she doesn’t understand about Rochester than she can understand him.

Edward Rochester uses quotations and allusions frequently in speech. He uses them to embellish his language frequently, which Nordin establishes is one way of using quotations, as well as in order to invoke authority and support his statements by reference. When Rochester uses citations and allusions as embellishments, he often seems to do so for his own entertainment or in order to appear inscrutable, appearing absurd by quoting texts which the listeners are unfamiliar with. In writing him like this, Brontë demonstrates how well-read he is in comparison to Jane and Mrs. Fairfax. Rochester seems to amuse himself by expressing absurdisms in order to baffle his listeners, as he does when he accuses Jane of being one of the “men in green” (i.e. fairies or elves) earlier in the same scene, which baffles Mrs. Fairfax who sits listening but who, upon hearing this talk, “had dropped her knitting, and, with raised eyebrows, seemed wondering what sort of talk this was”.¹⁵⁹ The confusion Mrs. Fairfax experiences is especially emphasised by the fact that Jane responds in kind to Rochester’s statement, and claims that “[t]he men in green forsook England a hundred years ago”, which is a fantastical imagining that she developed when she read Gulliver’s Travels as a child.¹⁶⁰ Because Jane and Rochester seem to understand each other as a result of the cognising they have done in regards to reading books (in Jane’s case) excludes Mrs. Fairfax from the conversation as she does not have a similar framework of the fantastical imaginings developed through reading or other opportunities for leisurely fantastical imaginings. This is emphasised a few lines later, when she remarks “[t]hat was very false economy” in response to Jane’s description of Mr. Brocklehurst’s economising with bad needles and thread, as Jane the narrator describes that Mrs. Fairfax “now again caught the drift of the dialogue” when the dialogue refocuses on material concerns which she has a frame of reference for.¹⁶¹ Thus, even the references to folklore Rochester makes intentionally pass by Mrs. Fairfax’s comprehension, which excludes her from

¹⁵⁹ Brontë, p. 112.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 113.

understanding him and illustrates the basis of Mrs. Fairfax's description of Rochester as peculiar and hard to understand. As Jane understands and is able to respond to Rochester's peculiar absurdisms, however, she is established as his equal in terms of intellect by comparison to Mrs. Fairfax. Concurrently, Jane is established to be above Mrs. Fairfax in the same way that Rochester is by association between their similar intellectualities. Jane is hence removed from her social equality with Mrs. Fairfax, reiterating her position "between classes" as being socially above even a housekeeper, who is the highest ranked servant of a Victorian household, which concurrently marks Jane's first step towards "quiescent socialisation".¹⁶²

Alongside the depiction of Mrs. Fairfax's intelligence and interest, Jane the narrator often also discusses Adele's intelligence. By Jane's account, Adele's intelligence is average and uninteresting, and her primary interests lie in her "toilette". The clearest occasion on which Adele's interests are depicted in dialogue, i.e. as she is viewed even in Jane the narratee's perspective, is on the occasion when Jane and Adele have been called to sit in the drawing room with the company of guests at Thornfield. In the very same scene which was commented upon previously when Jane "takes a book" to sit and read, Adele approaches her and asks if she might take a flower from one of the tables in order to complete her "toilette" (outfit). Jane responds that "You think too much of your 'toilette', Adele", but allows her the flower.¹⁶³ In this passage, Adele's interests as compared to Jane's are emphasised as while Adele thinks of her appearance, Jane is attempting to read in a window-nook, just as she was depicted doing when she was Adele's age, emphasising Adele's comparative vanity. Furthermore, when Jane describes her pupil in the monologue in relation to how she lacks stimulation at Thornfield in a previous scene, she describes her as follows:

My pupil was a lively child, who had been spoilt and indulged, and therefore was sometimes wayward; but as she was committed entirely to my care, and no injudicious interference from any quarter ever thwarted my plans for her improvement, she soon forgot her little freaks, and became obedient and teachable. She had no great talents, no marked traits of character, *no peculiar development of feeling or taste which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood.*¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Politi, p. 63.

¹⁶³ Brontë, p. 154.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 99. My italics.

In this passage, Adele is implicitly compared to the young Jane, who is depicted as having many nuanced feelings and unusual tastes in literature, such as Bewick's *British Birds* and Goldsmith's *History of Rome*. Adele is not depicted as thoroughly as Jane was, however, but is simply described by Jane the narrator, and in this description she repeatedly appears as average and lacking any special intelligence, as opposed to Jane.

That Mrs. Fairfax and Adele's intellects are mostly described in the monologue by Jane the narrator is a notable aspect of the depiction of their respective intelligence. By comparison, Jane, Rochester, and St. John's intelligence is duly depicted by Brontë through dialogue, indicating that this is experienced by Jane the narratee, and more memorably so than any interaction with Mrs. Fairfax and Adele. In literary terms, this is a natural outcome of Rochester and St. John having a more central function in the plot and in their relationships to Jane, meaning that it is more pertinent to depict their discoursing in dialogue explicitly. When reading *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography by Jane the narrator, however – that is, when reading Jane the narrator as a character whose characterisation is depicted concurrently with Jane the narratee's – there is a sense that the depiction of Mrs. Fairfax and Adele is moderated by distance and reflection. The passage in which Jane explains how Mrs. Fairfax and Adele are insufficient as stimulating company directly precedes the infamous monologue on how “women are supposed to be very calm generally”, in which Jane describes how women are oppressed by the notion that they should only work on learning the accomplishments rather than having a “field for their efforts” as “their brothers do”.¹⁶⁵ This passage has been specifically addressed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1928) as jarring, and as “awkward” in its placement, denoting how Brontë, according to Woolf, “write[s] of herself when she should write of her characters”.¹⁶⁶ If the monologues of *Jane Eyre* are interpreted as expressions of Jane the narrator's character, however, this passage is not as awkward as Woolf suggests, but rather depicts the reflections of Jane the narrator as she looks back on her life. This, by extension, means that the way Brontë uses Jane the narrator to describe Mrs. Fairfax and Adele actually is reflective of Jane's reflections over Mrs. Fairfax and Adele's intelligence and positions from her position as Rochester's wife, at which point she has undergone a “tidying, a consolidating of class positions” towards which Politi suggests the entire narrative moves.¹⁶⁷ In

¹⁶⁵ Brontë, p. 101.

¹⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, London: Penguin Books, 1928, p. 80-81.

¹⁶⁷ Politi, p. 81.

this way, Jane the narratee's relationship to her social equals is depicted through the foreshadowing light of Jane the narrator's descriptions and reflections. In this way, she also depicts how merely reading or having read books is not sufficient for acquiring cultural capital as a useful tool of power, as both Mrs. Fairfax and Adele are moderately educated but do not live up to Jane's standards. Rather, a sense is created that the two lack an inherent ability to use their reading constructively by cognising the meaning of the contents of their reading. The emphasis on how Mrs. Fairfax and Adele are not of Jane's "kind" implies that there is another "kind" of person who is capable of stimulating Jane by having an "expanded mind", which is a phrase that Jane uses to describe Rochester in the dialogue in which she declares her feelings for him in chapter XXIII, as well as when she describes her own mind as she searches for interest and stimulation before Rochester's arrival at Thornfield. Hence, it seems that Mrs. Fairfax and Adele have, by comparison, closed or unexpanded minds, which cannot compare to Jane's. Though Blanche Ingram similarly seems to struggle to use her reading as more than "sounding phrases", as was discussed under "Books as vehicles of morality and temperament", she is taken seriously as romantic competition by Jane because her beauty and other accomplishments, not to mention class, gives her advantages over Jane aside from her intelligence. Mrs. Fairfax and Adele do not have these other advantages, and so are disregarded.

A more explicit example of Jane using her own reading as cultural capital, and furthermore, implicitly considering her reading to be cultural capital, is in her interactions with Hannah, the servant of the Rivers. With Hannah, Jane refers explicitly to her reading and education in dialogue, revealing that her estimation of her own knowledge and skills in synthesising that knowledge have grown, and that she feels clearly that she is above Hannah in station. When Jane and Hannah speak for the first time after Jane has recovered from her flight across the Moors, Hannah asks Jane whether she has ever gone "a-begging" before and Jane answers "quietly, but still not without a certain marked firmness". This firmness notes Jane's indignance over the accusation, which she tempers with the knowledge that she had indeed "appeared as a beggar" before Hannah. The indignance that emerges in this moment is, however, the first time Jane has set a boundary against anyone's opinion of her since Gateshead. Jane's ire rises in a parallel to how she raged against Miss Abbot, but now in defence of her position rather than in revolt against the concept of John Reed being her master; she has taken one step further towards becoming Jane the narrator. It begins to seem like the answer to d'Albertis's question of "is Jane a servant or not?" might be no. This

episode also leads into her taking a position as a school teacher, after which she's never a servant again. In terms of the narrative of bildungsroman, which *Jane Eyre* is according to a number of researchers including Sandra Gilbert, Kristi Sexton, and Deidre d'Albertis, Jane is bound to return to her original state but grown. Symbolically, as Jane joins the Rivers family, her "father's kinsfolk" who are "gentry", she returns to where she started out before she was orphaned as an infant. This confirms Politi's notion that this is the ending towards which the narrative was heading the entire time. There is a deterministic sense that Jane was born to be a great reader, as the Rivers siblings' mother, Jane's biological aunt, "was a great reader" according to Hannah, implying that her familial bonds predict Jane's class position and "expanded mind" which has both interest in and capacity for reading and using reading through cognising it. Brontë's implications of determinist psychology is a recurring motif throughout *Jane Eyre*, as phrenology is often referred to as a way in which Jane determines the character (i.e. personality, morality, and temperament) of the other characters in the narrative by judging the shape of the forehead.¹⁶⁸ This has been noted by several researchers such as Sally Shuttleworth, W. M. Senseman, and Ian Jack, as well as the editors of different editions of *Jane Eyre*. Senseman notes that "phrenological analysis conditions the attitude of one character towards another" and that "Brontë created such physiognomical analyses in the first place for the purpose of giving her readers an accurate insight into the potentialities of various characters".¹⁶⁹ The aspect of "potentialities" in particular implies that people have inherent traits which predispose them to certain skills or inclinations, such as having a great mind for reading in Jane's case. Hence, the similarities that Hannah draws between the Rivers and their mother being great readers in the same conversation that it is established that Jane is a great reader foreshadows the relation between Jane and the River siblings. d'Albertis also writes that in *Jane Eyre*, "self-creation is made possible only by forces well beyond the control of the narrator/protagonist", which could be assumed to be referring primarily to economical conditions and events, but the notion is equally present in the way that the ability to read actively and cognise is presented as an inherent skill rather than a learned one, which seems to be received through genetic predisposition.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Phrenology is a pseudo-science which was popular during the Victorian era.

¹⁶⁹ W. M. Senseman, "Charlotte Brontë's Use of Physiognomy and Phrenology", *Brontë Society Transactions*, 1954:1, p. 287-289.

¹⁷⁰ d'Albertis, p. 270.

More concretely, in this scene it becomes clear that Hannah values reading highly as a skill which denotes cultural capital and virtue. She asks Jane if she is “book-learned”, to which Jane replies “[y]es, very”, which gives a pointed impression as she emphasises that she’s more than a *little* “book-learned”, but instead is *very* learned.¹⁷¹ When Jane then reveals that she went to a boarding school for eight years, Hannah “open[s] her eyes wide” in surprise, and after this seems to treat Jane with a greater veneration than previously.¹⁷² When Jane asks to help her pick the gooseberries that she is set to make into a pie, Hannah insists on getting her a towel to lay over her dress so that she will not “mucky it”, denoting that her attitude towards Jane, which previously was critical as she believed Jane to be uneducated, has changed, and that she now views Jane more in the way that she views the Rivers sisters.¹⁷³ Thus, she immediately takes on a more submissive role, and in accordance, Jane takes on a more dominant role than she has ever been seen to have in the narrative up to that point. She questions Hannah adamantly about the house and its inhabitants in a way she dared not do with Mrs. Fairfax when she came to Thornfield, as she then believed that Mrs. Fairfax was of a higher class than herself. The style of questioning that Jane uses is reminiscent of Rochester and the way that he questioned Jane about her person and past when they first met, implying that Jane has taken over the role of master for the purpose of this conversation with Hannah. This is especially emphasised by the way that Jane admonishes Hannah for having thought poorly of her for having no money, after which she orders Hannah to shake her hand and accept her forgiveness with the phrase “[t]hat will do—I forgive you now. Shake hands”.¹⁷⁴ The act of hand-shaking, which has appeared at no other time in the narrative than when Rochester orders or requests for Jane to shake his hand, especially recalls the ghost of Rochester which haunts Jane’s every step now that she has left him. Thus, Jane the narratee begins to truly take on the role of the person she will be once she is Jane the narrator, that is, Mrs. Rochester. Importantly, the entire interaction between Jane and Hannah is determined by their shared estimation of the value of reading as cultural capital; because Jane is well-read, Hannah recognises her as of a class above her own, as she (presumably) is not herself well-read. Thus, Jane continuously wields the cultural capital of her well-readness and her ability to recognise her reading

¹⁷¹ Brontë, p. 305.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁷⁴ Brontë, p. 306.

as a tool with which she can determine her social and class position compared to the people around her as, it is implied, her inherent intelligence seems to be connected to her inherited class.

Final observations

Summary

To summarise, this thesis has discussed the role of books and reading as sources of different forms of power in *Jane Eyre*. The primary ways of gaining power in relation to books and reading have been addressed firstly in regards to owning books as material objects, secondly in terms of how books represent literature and reading, and thirdly in terms of how using reading by referencing that one is well-read functions as cultural capital in *Jane Eyre*. Books as material objects has been discussed in terms of the way that ownership of books denotes economical privilege, which is one form of power, and in terms of how ownership of books denotes the ability to withhold or grant access to books, which is another form of power related to the circulation of books. Books as literature has been discussed in terms of how they function both as a way to denote character traits such as morality and temperament through the way the characters are depicted as engaging in projects of self-improvement or not and the ways that characters who read gain intellectual power through this self-improvement, and as a resource for knowledge which can be used as a framework through which to interpret the world, which endows the one who reads with spiritual strength and power to resist oppression. Reading as capital was addressed firstly in terms of how wielding rhetoric through citing or alluding to texts which have been read functions as a way to wield power both in terms of demonstrating cultural capital and in terms of strengthening the said rhetoric through evoking higher authorities, and secondly in terms of how wielding knowledge, which is to say actively using knowledge which has been gained in order to understand the world, functions as power in *Jane Eyre* as those who do not have equivalent abilities to use knowledge are depicted as lesser. As part of this series of discussions, ideas of characterisation based on what characters read, such as Helen and Eliza's reading, how characters read, such as Blanche Ingram or Jane's reading, and how characters talk about reading, such as Rochester, Brocklehurst, St. John, and Jane's talking about reading, have been put forward. Concurrently, the thesis has discussed the way that Jane's self-improvement project is depicted through both the growth and development of Jane the narratee and the way she speaks and thinks and through the way that Jane the narrator

describes the things she sees and thinks, which denotes a character development through which Jane gains power of social, mental, and economical independence while simultaneously beginning to look down more on her peers who do not have the same way of using their intellects as she does.

Discussion

This thesis has worked with a theoretical framework based on three motifs, *owning*, *reading*, and *using*, which have functioned as a framework through which to discuss the five categories of ways that books are used in Victorian literature, three of which Leah Price defines (*reading*, *handling*, and *circulating*), with the addition of the two categories *owning* and *cognising*, which I have added. An argument could be made that owning is an aspect of handling or circulating, as both of these categories are concerned with doing things with books other than reading them, which is a category in which owning is included, but as has been demonstrated in this thesis, owning is defined by specific circumstances which is a precondition for the possibility of circulating or handling, and additionally represents cultural and economic capital in a way that handling and circulating does not fully do. Circulating, in particular, is dependent on owning, which makes owning a separate category of interest. Similarly, cognising is an aspect of reading, but as has been shown, cognising is concerned with the depiction of past reading in text, i.e. how reading is expressed or expresses itself as a part of characterisation and functions as a framework which is present in the narrative in a way that depicts psychological complexity in the fictional characters.

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the ways in which books and reading are depicted in relation to power in *Jane Eyre*. Throughout the analysis, the idea that power, either cultural power such as economic and cultural capital or personal power such as mental strength or spiritual independence, is a function of access to books has emerged. An inherent trait of power is that it is created by dynamics of dominance and submission, which is the selfsame dynamic which Eagleton suggests governs all relationships in *Jane Eyre*. It is therefore interesting to note the way in which power is depicted in relation to books and reading, as these partake in forming a multitude of axes of power in the dynamics between the characters in *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, the conclusions around the depiction of power which have emerged through the analysis of the use of books and reading throughout *Jane Eyre* contribute to building a deeper understanding of the power dynamics within *Jane Eyre*, which both recreate and challenge power dynamics from real life. In Eagleton's terminology, this means that the ideology which *Jane Eyre* mirrors is an idea based in knowledge

as power based on contemporary ideas of self-improvement, the historical reality mirrored is the aspect of the material value of books and the rhetorical value of reading as cultural capital, and the literary form used to achieve this is based on the depiction of books and reading and the various ways in which these are represented in ways that contribute to power dynamics.

A particularly interesting aspect of the power dynamics in *Jane Eyre* that has emerged through the analysis in this thesis is the duality of the journey Jane goes through in the narrative of *Jane Eyre*. On the one hand, she gains power through knowledge, which helps her contextualise the oppression she goes through and to thus resist said oppression. On the other hand, she gains cultural and intellectual capital through her reading, which she continuously wields as a power which determines her superiority over other servants. Thus, the narrative simultaneously depicts ideology which today is considered feminist in regards to the way Jane gains independence, and ideology which reflects a “tidying, a consolidating of class positions” as a positive direction for the narrative to head in, in spite of the fact that this condemns certain classes to be inferior to others, which contradicts the ideas presented in Jane’s narrative of independence. Thus, the results of this thesis contribute to a complicating and a nuancing of the ways in which the depiction of power dynamics and ideology are discussed as regards *Jane Eyre*.

As this has been a thematic close-reading, the various conclusions reached about the role of books and reading in the narrative are interpretative and cannot definitively be said to be Brontë’s intention nor her contemporary readers’ interpretation. This is, however, an issue with all thematic close-readings, and in light of this, it would be a point of interest to conduct further studies into associated topics, i.e. the relation between books, reading, and power in *Jane Eyre* with a greater focus on a biographical, new historicist, or reception history-focused perspective. In the original conceptualisation of this thesis, a reception historical focus on how the use of books, e.g. St. John’s gifting of *Marmion* to Jane that Simon Eliot addresses, would have been interpreted by Brontë’s contemporary readers was included. The thematic close-reading method that I chose in order to best investigate the five categories of uses of books meant that the reception historical focuses was excluded due to limitations of time and scope of the text in favour of a more cohesively thematic analysis. The thematic analysis that resulted could, however, be used as a basis for further studies into the reception history and historical context of Brontë’s publishing context in order to investigate how certain cultural aspects of the text would have been interpreted by Brontë’s contemporaries with a more guided focus.

In the section “Wielding rhetoric”, the concept of wielding citations and allusions as a form of rhetoric by characters in dialogue was introduced. I suggested that this use of citation and allusion is particularly interesting when viewed as references to literature which are specifically and intentionally expressed by characters in dialogue as in terms of story and characterisation, this means that Brontë is depicting said characters as being well-read and capable of using the knowledge gained from that reading. This is an interesting and complex way to depict the intelligence of characters which could be further researched in order to better understand the way Brontë uses literary references in order to develop characterisation, as well as to depict cultural praxes as regards the ways in which reading was valued in terms of self-improvement and cultural capital during the Victorian era. Additionally, it would be of interest to develop and deepen the analyses of Rochester and St. John’s use of references, particularly the way that Brontë depicts Rochester as psychologically complex in the way that he nearly tells his own story through bricolage, with a clearer focus on the importance of each reference, as such a focus was not possible in this thesis due to time and length constraints.

This thesis introduced the concept of reading Jane as the main character in two different lights: as the narrator and as a character being narrated. The notion that there is a difference between Jane the narratee and Jane the narrator has been acknowledged by Dorrit Cohn in “Discordant Narration” (2000), but Cohn suggests that *Jane Eyre* is not a discordant narrative as when opinions expressed by the narrator on the events of the narrative “appear to coordinate or harmonize with the story that contains them—as in the case of *Jane Eyre*, for example—there is no inducement for understanding the narrator as a discordant voice”.¹⁷⁵ I suggest that the difference between Jane the narrator and Jane the narratee could be fruitfully studied further, particularly in terms of the development of Jane’s class position towards “quiescent socialisation”, as Jina Politi addresses it, as the narrative is shaped by the fictionally autobiographical form of the text. Based on the analysis of the differentiation between Jane the narrator and Jane the narratee that this thesis has presented, it can be argued that Brontë’s use of the narrative voice is far more complex than has previously been acknowledged, and would be a point of interest for further *Jane Eyre*-studies.

¹⁷⁵ Dorrit Cohn, “Discordant Narration”, *Style*, 2000:2, p. 308.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to provide an overview of the ways that books and reading are depicted in *Jane Eyre* in relation to themes of power and power dynamics with a focus on the motifs of owning, reading, and using books. In order to fulfil this purpose, the thesis has considered a variety of ways in which books and reading are depicted and concluded that this depiction has strong correlations to the depiction of power and power dynamics within the narrative. The most central conclusion is that Brontë depicts access to books and ability to read books critically, in accordance with the self-improvement ideal of her period, as a way to access different forms of power, such as economical, cultural, mental, and spiritual power, answering the question of how ownership of and access to books are depicted in relation to power in *Jane Eyre*. Further investigation of the implication of this notion has led to the conclusion that reading practices related to self-improvement are depicted in *Jane Eyre* as something which characters engage in in order to gain knowledge and insight. This contributes to a depiction of these characters as moral and of a good temperament, while characters who are depicted as negligent of reading or of the value of books are simultaneously and by correlation depicted as amoral and of a poor temperament, answering the question of how Victorian reading practices reflect social dynamics in *Jane Eyre*. Lastly, in regards to the way that access to reading is wielded as a tool of social and intellectual empowerment, characters who read or have read in *Jane Eyre* and have synthesised the knowledge gained from it, wield power over other characters both as a tool of rhetoric, which is actualised by citing or alluding to literature, and as a form of cultural capital which denotes their social position. In this way, class is depicted in *Jane Eyre* as having a correlative relationship to reading as access to reading is gained only by those of a higher social class. Significantly, class is depicted not only as a state of owning wealth, but is also represented as something which is inheritable and therefore inherent as Jane, who during periods in her story holds lower social positions than the one she was born to, always has access to power through reading as she thinks critically about her past reading in a self-improving way. To conclude, the depiction of books and reading represent a complex representation of power dynamics in *Jane Eyre* which are partially reflective of reality and partially discourse on the nature of power and intellectuality.

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