as Charlotte did in publishing and altering some of Emily's Gondal poems, or to respond to criticism that impugned her sisters' characters? Surely any such document from a forthright Brontë sister would bear traces of its writer's reservations and impatience with the sisters it also lovingly memorialized. We should, of course, be wary of taking Charlotte's words as etched on stone tablets, but let us not exaggerate their effects on the reception of the younger sisters she sought to protect.

Notes

1 Barker is often reasonably critical of the other Brontës while sympathizing with them all, including Charlotte. But her frequent disparagement of Charlotte begins to seem tendentious and unreasonable. Another example surrounding Branwell's death: she hears jealousy in Charlotte's writing that "my poor Father naturally thought more of his only Son than of his daughters . . . he cried out for his loss like David for that of Absolom" (qtd. in Barker 671). Surely, however, Charlotte is expressing sympathy here rather than jealousy.

2 On the back of *Branwell Brontë's Barber's Tale* is a publisher's blurb claiming that the novel is one that "all Brontë lovers must read—if they want to know the truth." However, directly beneath that are accolades from imagined reviewers. One is attributed to the *Bradford Observer* from 1867; a second, attesting to the novel's "excellent description of the shave," is credited to Bennett's Barbers on Bolton Road, an actual barber shop in Bradford. The novel's marketing of itself as a repository of the truth is thus presented playfully.

3 Lew Girdler, in arguing explicitly against Charlotte's characterization of Emily, observes that "many Brontë scholars have done little more than restate or quote" the "Biographical Notice" (385–86) and cites some of the biographers of the first half of the century. But this was in 1956.

4 For example, she quarrels with Gaskell's suggestion that grief over Branwell's misdeeds killed Emily and Anne (xi).

Works Cited

Armstrong, Nancy. "Emily's Ghost: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Fiction, Folklore, and Photography." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 25, no. 3, Spring 1992, pp. 245–67.

Barker, Juliet. *The Brontës: Wild Genius on the Moors: The Story of a Literary Family.* Pegasus Books, 2010.

Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell." *Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey*, by Emily and Anne Brontë Smith, Elder, 1850, pp. vii–xvi.

———. "Editor's Preface to the New Edition of *Wuthering Heights*." *Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey*, by Emily and Anne Brontë, Smith, Elder, 1850, pp. xvii–xxiv.

Dunkle, Clare B. "Brontë Myths." *ClareDunkle.com*, 2009.

Eagleton, Terry. *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1975.

Firth, Chris. *Branwell Brontë's Barber's Tale: Who Wrote* Wuthering Heights? Caedmon Story Tellers, 2004.

Girdler, Lew. "*Wuthering Heights* and Shakespeare." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 4, Aug. 1956, pp. 385–92.

Langland, Elizabeth. *Anne Brontë: The Other One*. Macmillan, 1989.

Leavis, Q.D. "A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*." *Lectures in America*, by F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, Chatto and Windus, 1969, pp. 84–152.

Miller, Lucasta. *The Brontë Myth*. Knopf, 2004.

Moore, George. *Conversations in Ebury Street*. Boni and Liveright, 1924.

Moser, Thomas. "What Is the Matter with Emily Jane? Conflicting Impulses in *Wuthering Heights*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 17, no. 1, June 1962, pp. 1–19.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, Autumn 1985, pp. 243–61.

Stoneman, Patsy. "Sex, Crimes and Secrets: Invention and Imbroglio in Recent Brontë Biographical Fiction." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4, Nov. 2014, pp. 341–52.

Swinburne, Algernon Charles. "Emily Brontë." *Miscellanies*, Chatto and Windus, 1886, pp. 260–70.

———. *A Note on Charlotte Brontë*. Chatto and Windus, 1877.

Thormählen, Marianne. Introduction. *The Brontës in Context*, edited by Thormählen, Cambridge UP, 2012.

Tully, James. *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë: The Secrets of a Mysterious Family.* Carroll and Graf, 1999.

Ward, Mary Augusta. Introduction. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, by Anne Brontë, 1848, Thornfield ed., Harper Brothers, 1900, pp. ix–xix.

Winnifrith, Tom. *A New Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Macmillan, 1988.

~

"Charlotte Brontë and Disability Studies"

TALIA SCHAFFER

JANE EYRE (1847) famously offers the rags-to-riches tale of someone who is "poor, obscure, plain, and little" (Brontë 253) but nonetheless manages a meaningful life and a marriage to the man she passionately loves. In its insistence that such a powerless woman can triumph, the novel became a founding myth of Victorian culture, a kind of female version of another iconic mid-century book, Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859). Jane pronounces, "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (317). This is the kind of independent, empowered character Nancy Armstrong describes when, in this special issue, she revisits her argument in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.

Yet recently scholars have begun to tease out another aspect of *Jane Eyre*, one that seems diametrically opposed to this story of rampant autonomy: a history of mutual dependency. Interestingly, Charlotte Brontë has become a central figure in disability studies, partly because of the Brontës' consumptive deaths, partly because of the range and variety of impairments she depicts, and partly because of the way she imagines the social uses of caregiving.

Jane Eyre is a novel in which a truly remarkable number of characters experience disabling conditions: chronic illness, debilitating trauma, mental disability, nervous impairments, and blindness. Children suffer typhoid and consumption; an aunt has a stroke; a caretaker is alcoholic. Jane's life story is intimately connected with caregiving. From its famous opening paragraphs, concerned with "nipped fingers and toes" and a humbling consciousness of "physical inferiority" (7), to its ending lines prophesying St. John Rivers's imminent

death (452), this is a novel in which people suffer and in which a significant measure of the moral virtue of a person is how well she or he works to alleviate that suffering. Indeed, the greatest love Jane knows is intimately intermingled with nursing; to care for Rochester, in both senses, is the climax of her story.

Mr. Rochester, who has lost his sight and his right hand in a fire, is one of the two most visibly disabled characters, paralleled only by his wife Bertha (an equivalence nicely recognized by the title of a recent study, *The Madwoman and the Blindman*). Bertha's original disorder seems to consist mainly of being bad-tempered, "intemperate and unchaste" (306), qualities that her husband shares but that are pathologized only for her.[1] Whether Bertha is originally sane or not, after years of imprisonment, her mental state has significantly deteriorated. She appears incapable of rational or verbal expression by the time Jane encounters her. Although she is depicted as animalistic, the signs of her dehumanization—her unkempt hair, her plain straight gown, her discoloured face—are really signs of her neglect. Grace Poole clearly does not care for her charge's cleanliness or grooming needs.

Jane herself suffers from both mental and physical complaints. In the first few pages, John Reed attacks her. "The cut bled, the pain was sharp" (11), and it is this pain that drives her to fight back, putting the story in motion. Her imprisonment in the red room creates lifelong "fearful pangs of mental suffering" (20). As a teenager, Jane is stunted from her years of malnourishment at Lowood and later collapses at Moor House after nearly starving to death. Julia Miele Rodas has argued that she is autistic. After all, she was "like nobody" at Gateshead, "an uncongenial alien" whom they could not love (Brontë 15–16). While this may be an anachronistic diagnosis of a fictional character, it also opens up the possibility of reading *Jane Eyre* as an inspirational early account of what it feels like to live on the spectrum.

Jane Eyre is also notable because of the extent to which it interrogates the best ways of caring for its impaired characters. The philosophy of "ethics of care" argues that we are not autonomous monads but interdependent beings, engaged in continual care relations. These are particularly visible in nurse-patient, teacher-student, or parent-child dyads. But care can go badly; the carer can be depleted, or the cared-for can be abused. Virginia Held explains that "the caregiver may be trying to form a relation or must imagine a relation. Relations between persons can be criticized when they become dominating, exploitative, mistrustful, or hostile" (36–37). Victorian novels are ideal case studies of care, since they show intimate, ongoing domestic nursing. Often this results in tender, affectionate relations, forming the sentimental climax of the story—but Victorian novels also offer searing revelations of the ways in which care can go horribly awry, fundamentally wounding everyone involved.

Jane Eyre pits loving voluntary caregiving against indifferent paid service. The "hireling" (437) is depicted as hasty and neglectful: the apothecary treating Jane after the red room incident, the busy doctor at Lowood during the typhoid epidemic, the hired nurse at Mrs. Reed's deathbed, and, of

course, Grace Poole, Bertha's caretaker. But Jane compensates for their failures, as she crawls into bed with the dying Helen Burns, sits with Mrs. Reed after her stroke, and pities Bertha. When Jane in turn becomes the cared-for, it is the Rivers siblings who nurse her, the homeless wanderer who has collapsed on their doorstep. Jane also receives care from Miss Temple and Mrs. Fairfax, small acts of daily kindness that sustain her.

Jane Eyre thus promulgates a vision of affectionate family or friends offering tender care to those they love, with paid service work visible only as an occasional, unsatisfactory alternative. Miriam Bailin clarifies: "As long as it was not for hire, nursing was repeatedly invoked to verify in a way no other activity apparently could the genuineness of one's affections, the essential goodness of one's character" (11). Jane is a good person because she loves to give care. Moreover, it is because she is enmeshed in relations of loving care throughout the novel that Jane can learn to become Rochester's aide, or, as Jane describes the role, "your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper . . . your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you" (435). Such care may include provoking and teasing along with alleviating suffering; care is what names a living, complicated relation between people, an ongoing imaginative projection into the life of the other, a kind of love.

D. Christopher Gabbard has argued that the Rivers family teaches Jane what real care looks like. For the novel's original readers, Rochester's treatment of Bertha would have seemed both old-fashioned and cruel, for the Quakers led reforms of the treatment of mental illness in the 1840s, ushering in newly humane treatments.[2] But even before meeting the Rivers family, Jane has a clear ethics of care that foregrounds compassion and respect. Jane tells Rochester that he is vindictive and "cruel—[Bertha] cannot help being mad" (301). She sets a better example by standing "so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon," in Rochester's words (294). When Jane is considering St. John's proposal to become a missionary schoolteacher, she cries, "I am not fit for it: I have no vocation" (402). Given her strong urge to alleviate others' suffering throughout her life, perhaps her true vocation is, in fact, nursing. Her marriage thus gives her both love and a career, intertwined in one relationship. For her, marriage is a perfect care relation: "He loved me so truly, that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes" (451).

Although *Jane Eyre* offers this eloquently ideal expression of care relations, it is not the only way Brontë depicted disability and nursing in her career. Disability plays a significant part in all Brontë's fiction, in which depression, lethargy, illness, and wounding are utterly normative, and nursing relations offer kind compensation that can flower into marital love. *Shirley* (1849) features Caroline Helstone's illness and Robert Moore's wound; they can marry only through their slow recognition of their mutual need in their

recovery, and Caroline and Mrs. Pryor learn to love each other through nursing. *The Professor* (1857) is a story of suffering people trying to survive others' domination. Paul Marchbanks has argued that Brontë's experience of nursing became fundamental to her fiction. After all, Brontë's childhood was shaped by the deaths of her mother and two elder sisters, while her adulthood was formed by the experience of nursing three siblings who all died within one dreadful year, not to mention caring for her elderly father, aunt, and servant (see remarks on Brontë's biography by John Maynard, Deborah Denenholz Morse, and Beth Newman in this issue).

Villette (1853), however, offers the most interesting counterpoint to *Jane Eyre*, for it offers a devastatingly revised version of caring. In the bleak world of *Villette*, domestic caregiving has disintegrated. Hired nursing is now the norm. The only voluntary familial care occurs when Mrs. Bretton nurtures Lucy after the latter's illness—and, as tender and restorative and delightful as this nurturing is, it is quite clear that it is an exception in Lucy's life, an anomalous survival in a world in which care is commodified. Significantly, Lucy's love interest through most of the novel is Dr. John, someone who is paid to care for others and whose amiability is available for hire and consequently cannot be trusted as authentic. In *Villette*, Brontë foresaw a modern condition of institutional service work and explored the way that paid care can create emotional dissidence and profound psychological damage.

As a paid caregiver, Lucy has two kinds of experiences that are differently problematic. When Lucy cares for the elderly invalid Miss Marchmont, she loses herself in nursing, her body and mind becoming intermeshed with those of her cared-for. But when Lucy moves to Labassecour, she must learn to be a caregiver of a different sort, a teacher for an unruly class of sixty bold teenagers. Instead of submerging her own identity, she goes to the other extreme, performing a falsely meek, shadowy self while sealing away her private fiery reality. But she has to perform her surface self constantly because her employer keeps her under unremitting surveillance. She experiences what Arlie Russell Hochschild calls "emotional labor," performing emotions for commercial uses. Because such labour commodifies "a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality," workers can become "estranged or alienated from" their core self, an apt description of Lucy's psychological distress (7). In one-on-one caregiving, and in service work in front of a crowd, Lucy loses her sense of self. She is paid for caring even if she does not really care at all, and sustaining that sort of pretence proves toxic.

In Brontë's fiction, disability is an omnipresent condition of life, like poverty or hunger, and the need to give care can be restorative or corrosive, produce tender mutual love or destroy one's psychological authenticity. Brontë gives us a set of fictional worlds in which disability is so much the norm that it need not be announced as such, and it is the very matter-of-fact, understated nature of her works' depiction of disability that makes them so radical for modern readers. In her fiction, disabled bodies are not, to use a modern

disability-studies term, extraordinary bodies. They are the most ordinary of all, and it is their very ordinariness, their neediness, that promotes love. As Jane Eyre says to Rochester, "It is a pity to see [your stump]; and a pity to see your eyes—and the scar of fire on your forehead: and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this, and making too much of you" (436).

Notes

1 Certainly when the notoriously violent-tempered Rochester explains only a few pages later that he himself has tried "dissipation" and hired "the company of mistresses" (331), it is not grounds for any diagnosis; European men are allowed passion, drink, and desire without being considered insane. Rochester may assume Bertha is prone to insanity because her tropical origins and possible interracial history debar her from his idea of white Victorian womanhood. The Victorians did, however, have a category called "moral insanity," for behaviour that violated ethical and social norms, and Bertha may qualify under that definition.

2 See Gabbard.

Works Cited

Bailin, Miriam. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. Cambridge UP, 1994.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Edited by Margaret Smith, Oxford UP, 2000.

———. *Villette*. Penguin, 1985.

Gabbard, D. Christopher. "From Custodial Care to Caring Labor: The Discourse of Who Cares in *Jane Eyre*." *The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jane Eyre, Discourse, Disability*, edited by David Bolt, Julia Miele Rodas, and Elizabeth J. Donaldson, Ohio State UP, 2012, pp. 91–110.

Held, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. 2nd ed., U of California P, 2003.

Marchbanks, Paul. "A Costly Morality: Dependency Care and Mental Difference in the Novels of the Brontë Sisters." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 4, no.1, 2010, pp. 55–72.

Rodas, Julia Miele. "'On the Spectrum': Rereading Contact and Affect in *Jane Eyre*." *The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jane Eyre, Discourse, Disability*, edited by David Bolt, Rodas, and Elizabeth J. Donaldson, Ohio State UP, 2012, pp. 51–70.

~

Pens, Pencils, and Realism

ELSIE MICHIE

> Keep reality distinctly before you, and paint it as accurately as you can.
>
> —GEORGE HENRY LEWES, "Recent Novels"

IT HAS been notoriously difficult for critics to give Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) the kind of attention that has been paid to both *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853). Negative reviews have dogged the novel since it first appeared,