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Charlotte Bronte and William Wordsworth. Ideals of the Romantic in Jane Eyre

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Carla Priscila Roman

carlaroman7667@gmail.com

Artículo de Reflexión / State University of New York at Albany / Estados Unidos

Bachelor of Arts in English and Communicator with degree Cum Laude from the State University of New York at Albany.

Abstract: This paper works to prove that Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* was heavily influence by the work and points of interest of William Wordsworth. William Wordsworth was one of the leaders of the Romantic Era and Romantic Literature. Bronte's novel then, if influenced heavily by William Wordsworth and Romantic ideals should then be approached through a different lens. To this day *Jane Eyre* is still marked as a Victorian novel but I would argue that this novel is in fact an attempt to turn back to the Romantic Era in literature. It is important to investigate the connections with Bronte's writing with that of the Romantic Era because it can mark a new way to approach Bronte's writing style, technique, and choices in writing. It can also open up the conversation of the novel as Romantic rather than as a marker of the Victorian.

Keywords: Romantic Literature, Victorian Novel, Jane Eyre

Resumen: Este artículo trabaja en demostrar que la novela de Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, estaba fuertemente influencia

por el trabajo y puntos de interés de William Wordsworth. William Wordsworth fue uno de los líderes de la época romántica y literatura romántica. La novela de Bronte luego, si es fuertemente influenciado por William Wordsworth y los ideales románticos, entonces debe ser abordado desde una perspectiva diferente. Hasta éste trabajo, *Jane Eyre* todavía está marcada como una novela victoriana, pero se podría afirmar que esta novela es en realidad un intento de dar marcha atrás a la época romántica en la literatura. Así, es importante investigar las conexiones con la escritura de Bronte con la de la época romántica, ya que puede marcar una nueva manera de acercarse a la escritura de estilo, la técnica y opciones en la escritura de Bronte. También puede abrir la conversación de la novela como romántica, más que como un product de la época Victoriana.

Palabras claves: Literatura Romántica, Novela Victoriana, Jane Eyre.

Introduction

The Victorian Era for English literature is marked as starting around 1837 (in conjunction with the reign of Queen Victoria). Charlotte Bronte is remembered as one of the strongest female writers during the Victorian time for her novel *Jane Eyre*, which to this day is still being adapted into mainstream cinema. But what if *Jane Eyre* one of the more popular Victorian novels of all time isn't of the Victorian literature genre at all?

Victorian literature's typical characteristics include characters in search/need of social advancement, written during the time period of Queen Victoria's reign, included notions of industrialization (that was happening during Victoria's reign), and had issues with

class. Yet, while Charlotte Bronte did write *Jane Eyre* during the reign of Queen Victoria which has been the reason for why *Jane Eyre* is classified as a Victorian novel, I would argue that the novel is Bronte's attempt to turn the novel (typically also associated with Victorian) back to Romantic tendencies and theme.

The Romantic Period for literature is associated with starting in the 18th century and is seen as a philosophical movement attempting to step away from neoclassicism. Romanticism is heavily marked with an emphasis on the use of imagination, emotions, a sense of sensibility, and a deep-rooted search for external nature (connection with). All of these simple but prominent marks in Romantic Literature are all found in the novel *Jane Eyre*.

In this essay I would argue that Charlotte Bronte uses the influence and writing tendencies of the Poet Laureate during the time she was writing, William Wordsworth, who was one of the most influential writers during the Romantic Period, to write *Jane Eyre*, which can more be read as an ode to the Romantic genre than a turn to the Victorian.

Charlotte Bronte and William Wordsworth: Ideals of the Romantic in *Jane Eyre*

In the year 1789 the French Revolution began and caused a new dawn that would give headway to the age of romanticism. William Wordsworth, who was in France during the early part of the revolution, was quoted exclaiming, "bliss was it in that dawn to be alive!" (Broadview, 3). The French Revolution, would, for most poets at the time (Wordsworth in particular) spark a new era concerned with keeping the spirit¹ of the French Revolution alive. It is interesting that the 'spirit' of the French Revolution is what was of most interest to the emerging writers of the time. It calls into question, what was meant by the 'spirit'? In "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age", M.H. Abrams explains that Wordsworth, according to William Hazlitt, was "a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age...this spirit was one of revolutionary change" (p. 45). It is important to acknowledge that although Wordsworth, alongside many other poets during the French Revolution were influenced by the political upheaval and idealized freedom of the collective enterprise that represented the French Revolution, it affected these poets in a very individualistic manner (Broadview 16).

The 'spirit' of the French Revolution, or the revolutionary change that was the spirit of the French Revolution, caused a desire for the "individual freedom: the freeing of the individual mind...subjective experience and the... response to and the experience of reality" (Broadview 17). So the French Revolution caused a desire for poets such as Wordsworth to explore the 'spirit' (revolutionary change) of the individual in relation to (at least for Wordsworth) the powers of both internal and external forces such as nature and imagination. The French Revolution (although a collective enterprise for freedom) sparked in the Romantic period, a desire for the exploration of the revolutionary spirit of the individual.

1 On page 3 of *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, the editors claim "What these poets hoped for however, was a continuation of the *spirit* of the French Revolution (3). No definition is given to the notion of 'spirit', which is why M.H. Abrams who addresses the 'spirit' of the age proves useful in this context.

It is easy to see how this interest in the individual person and mind is explored in the poems of William Wordsworth. But it is important to acknowledge that not only was the individual mind of great interest, but also the relationship between the natural external world and the imagination of the individual mind/the self, and how it could be expressed, became of great interest to Wordsworth. Wordsworth, as is explored by Paul de Man in "Time and History in Wordsworth", became concerned with the self in relation to nature, as well as an interest in "the language of the imagination" (de Man 93). De Man argues "in Wordsworth, ...language is linked with...imagination...the...imagination is privileged in terms of truth...truth about...self...and since the self never exists in isolation, but...in relation to entities...an authentic understanding of the self means...a description of the entities toward which it relates"(93). This notion is interesting because it not only encompasses how Wordsworth was exploring the self in relation to the exterior world, but it also leaves room to suggest that perhaps Wordsworth wasn't just interested with the exterior nature and how the individual related to it, but also exterior society and how the individual was related and affected by it.

The notion just mentioned above, then allows for room to explore how Wordsworth, through some of his poetry like "The Thorn" from *Lyrical Ballads*, or through some characters like the blind beggar from *The Prelude*, was interested in how the individual self related and was affected by the exterior world in terms of community and society. But, in poems such as "The Thorn" the central protagonist of the poem becomes a figure that was not related to the exterior social world, but rather aside it. In Book Seven of *The Prelude* part of the central climax of the narrator was his encounter with the blind beggar. "The Thorn" and book seven of *The Prelude* become concerned with what has been termed in relation to Wordsworth's characters the outcast figure². This outcast figure is the focal point of the poem, and how others project it's (the outcasts) self becomes the imagined self of the figure termed the outcast. The narrator in consequence is only a self through how it does or doesn't relate and identify with the outcast figure. For Wordsworth then, while

2 Heewon Kang introduces the notion of the outcast figure in his essay "Encounters with the Outcast: The Ethical Relation of Wordsworth and Lacan". Through Lacan's study of the gaze and the Mirror Stage, Kang leaves clear that when discussing Wordsworth's outcast "the way in which the community explains and defines them serves as the point of departure"(13) only because according to Lacan how other's perceive a figure is how the figure will in turn perceive him/herself, inconsequently believing himself /herself the outcast.

he was interested in how the individual self related to the external, the external could be broadened to not just nature but how community/external society relates to the individual and vice-versa. Wordsworth, through the theme of "The Thorn" and in book seven of *The Prelude*, can explore how the narrator/individual self can relate not only to the external natural world, but also the outcast figure of the external world, which at times is meant to be a rupture in meaning³. In return his poems begin to explore the dimensions of how the individual self is imagined and redefined through the external society/community. Heewon Kang in "Encounters with the Outcast: The Ethical Relation in Wordsworth and Lacan" describes it better "it is this double focus on subjectivity and community that we find in the profound, mysterious, and early unintelligible encounters embodied in Wordsworth's poetry—often between a speaker and some outcast other"(7) .

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth leaves clear that part of his desire as poet was "to choose incidents and situations from common life and... describe them...and, at the same time...throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way"(Broadview 122). It is clear that Wordsworth was very much interested with the workings of the imagination and how the imagination worked for the self in relation to nature. In "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" De Man reiterates that "the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature, such was the fundamental ambiguity that that characterizes the poetics of romanticism"(2). So the imagination and nature were two of the more popular topics explored by the romantic poets, in particular Wordsworth. By the time Wordsworth got to finish the 1799 version of *The Prelude*, many critics concluded, "Wordsworth reaffirms... the revolutionary potential of the imagination. *The Prelude* is a great, long lesson showing 'how the mind of man becomes/A thousand times more beautiful than the earth/ On which he dwells" (Broadview 111). This is seen in particular in book six of *The Prelude* "Crossing the Alps". What is important to remember is that the imagination was mediated through nature for Wordsworth, which according to Hartman in "Via Naturaliter Negativa" was part of his failure⁴. Somehow it began with

³ Kang goes on to argue that part of the function of the "outcast figure" is to also show a "void in signification" and language as related to Lacan's psychoanalytic ethics(iii).

⁴ Hartman explains in "Via Naturaliter Negativa," "there are many who feel that Wordsworth could have been as great a poet as Milton but for this return to nature , this shrinking from visionary

nature (the imaginative spirit/transcendence) but because Wordsworth always returned to nature (the external) we never get that full transcendence of the imaginative spirit. Yet, although it's through nature, Wordsworth does explore and exemplify the powers of the imagination of the individual in relation to nature and the external reality. After all, it is the imagination and idealization that arises from the individual that becomes the spirit that moves the narrator's growth in *The Prelude*.

The reason I have spent time discussing some specific aspects of what is considered the main points of exploration in Wordsworth's writing, is because those same points of exploration can be seen in the work of Charlotte Bronte. Charlotte's Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* has always been a point of intrigue for scholars because of its complex structure and content. Many would argue that because of its date of publication (1847) it is a Victorian genre, concerned with the same tropes and ideas as other Victorian writers of her time. Yet, it is difficult to categorize Bronte's novel solely as a Victorian seeing as how the novel presents, through its heroine Jane, an insistence on ideals of the self, rooted at the heart of romanticism.

While this paper does not mean to debunk the notion of *Jane Eyre* 's genre, it will attempt to problematize it. Throughout the novel, there are particular aspects of *Jane Eyre* that parallel themes found in the works of the one of the major poets of the romantic period; William Wordsworth. The similar explorations of the self, the outcast figure in relation to the self, and the imagination are all found in the work of Wordsworth and in *Jane Eyre*. In the novel *Jane Eyre* we find a narrator as inclined to explore, and as susceptible, to the power of the imagination as the narrator of *The Prelude* was. Throughout *Jane Eyre* we are also presented with an interesting exploration of the self in relation to not only nature, but also the self in relation to the external community. This then leads to the exploration of the outcast figure in *Jane Eyre* that we find throughout the poetry of Wordsworth as well. I would argue that due to these themes found in *Jane Eyre* that were also present in the work of William Wordsworth, we are presented with a novel that although Victorian, is

subjects. Is Wordsworth afraid of his own imagination?"(39). This notion is interesting because not only does it show how Wordsworth was concerned with the imagination but how he used imagination to return to nature, which was seen as a failure on his end. Wordsworth, because he returned to nature (the external) he avoids truly transcending to that visionary subject. Perhaps Bronte's Jane is following suit with Wordsworth's ideals on the imagination, or perhaps Bronte stays away from where others have seen Wordsworth fail in.

clearly exploring some of the ideals found at the heart of romanticism. This argument is important in so far as it questions the way *Jane Eyre* has been approached both historically and by literary scholars.

In so far as studies on Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in relation to Wordsworth go, there are few. Jennifer Gribble's essay "Jane Eyre's Imagination" is perhaps the closest work I've found that touches upon my ideas. Gribble argues that, "Charlotte Bronte's romanticism is of a more exploratory...kind...that in *Jane Eyre*, she is attempting...to examine the workings of the creative imagination"(280). Gribble goes on to argue how the use of the imagination creates a blurring "between the narrator and the heroine"(280). Gribble also explores how the use of the imagination in the novel is explored through the contact of the mind with nature (281). Gribble discusses how Jane is in fact a character very much inclined to the power of the imagination and the imagination through nature. "The minds relationship with the natural world offers the most immediate illustration of the power and limitations of the imagination"(Gribble 293). Gribble includes the scene in the red-room and leaves clear that she believes Bronte is not writing a romantic, but rather that Bronte is tying in what is the imagination into the 19th century (282). Gribble does mention Wordsworth only in the sense that she believes that Bronte, "strives like Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* to reconcile 'the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of...the modifying colors of the imagination'"(281).

Ruth D. Johnston's essay "Dis-Membrance of Things Past: Re-Vision of Wordsworthian Retrospection in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*" did directly connect Bronte's *Jane Eyre* with the work of Wordsworth, but not in the same manner that I intend to do so. Johnston leaves clear that "in this essay I will...focus on the revision of Wordsworthian narrative paradigms in *Jane Eyre*"(73). Johnston was concerned with shifting "critical attention from thematic concerns...to the meaning making process (represented on the level of narration as a particular structure of retrospection"(73). Johnston makes sophisticated arguments centered on temporality in relation to romantic and realism. Johnston goes on to argue, "in romantic narrative...temporal separation between experience and knowledge is a fundamental theme...which...explains why autobiography is its basic narrative mode"(74). Johnston focuses on how Bronte truly transforms the Wordsworthian paradigms and narrative autobiographical conventions, which then

allows Bronte to "call into question the continuity of time that ultimately ensures the reconciliation of different vantage points in Romantic narrative"(75)⁵. Overall, what Johnston works claim is that, "Bronte's novels...revise Wordsworth's narrative procedures in the interest of exposing the operation of this complex temporality and its corollary"(78).

Both the articles mentioned resembled aspects of what I believe to be at the heart of *Jane Eyre*. Ruth D. Johnston's essay is similar to my own notions of *Jane Eyre* simply because Johnston does see a connection between the novel and William Wordsworth. Johnston though, centers Bronte's connection to Wordsworth through the use of narrative paradigms (the autobiographical form). While this similarity is true⁶, because it has been studied, my paper will set aside the similarities in form and narrative that can be found in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Wordsworth's writing. Gribble's essay on the other hand, since it centers on Bronte's exploration of the imagination in *Jane Eyre* through aspects of the self and nature, does correlate with my intended argument. What Gribble does not do is tie in how the imagination's function in relation to nature and self that is being explored in *Jane Eyre* parallels the same concerns found throughout the poetry of William Wordsworth. Gribble is insistent on keeping *Jane Eyre* in the confines of the 19th century novel. Gribble then, attempts to argue that Bronte modernizes the functions of the imagination for the 19th century Victorian novel⁷. I argue that the exploration of the imagination in *Jane Eyre* is not an attempt to bring it into the Victorian, but rather that the use of the imagination is Bronte's turn to the Romantic and away from the Victorian. Neither of these essays nor any others that I read analyzed the outcast figure in relation to *Jane Eyre* and William Wordsworth.⁸

5 Johnston believes that because Bronte transforms Wordsworthian narrative "the significance of temporality in Bronte's novels does not reside in its replacement of perception as an organizing principle, but in its subversion of the very idea of such a principle"(75).

6 The structure of Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* is structured as Jane's autobiography and some would argue it is Bronte's autobiography. The autobiographical structure is seen in the poem "There was a Boy" according to De Man in "Time and History in Wordsworth" and *The Prelude* is also considered an autobiography. Both writers seem to use the same autobiographical structures.

7 Gribble claims "Charlotte Bronte is not writing a form of romance but attempting to register the claims of the imagination within the conventions of the 19th century novel"(282).

8 As I have mentioned Heewon Kang does talk about the outcast figure in the poetry of William Wordsworth, but I have yet to find work that studies how both writers (Bronte and Wordsworth) are concerned with the outcast figure.

I began my paper with the exploration of the influence of the French Revolution on the Romantic Period for a specific reason. The French Revolution is a big part of what influenced the Romantic Period's exploration of the individual mind and was a big influence on William Wordsworth as well. But by the time that the French Revolution ended in 1799, Charlotte Bronte had not even been born. So why include it? I include the French Revolution because it leads into the discussion of the romantic poets desire to keep the 'spirit' aroused by the revolution alive. The first generation Romantic writers (Wordsworth included) were stirred by what is termed "revolutionary fervor"(Broadview 3) and the 'spirit of the age'. This same spirit was what was seen in *Jane Eyre* when the novel was first released.

According to Sara Lodge in *Charlotte Bronte Jane Eyre: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Lodge states in her chapter "Victorian Responses" that, "to some commentators Jane Eyre's anger about her upbringing and determination to improve her lot smacked of the same rebellious political spirit that had brought about the French revolution"(6). This response to the novel when it first came out, was interesting to read because it identifies Jane as having that same 'spirit' which was prevalent during the French Revolution and among the writers at the time. This critique on the novel presents *Jane Eyre* as the embodiment of the feelings aroused at the start of the French revolution, which is interesting because the novel came out in 1847, years after the French revolution had ended. Yet, some critics couldn't help but place the heroine Jane and the novel as representing the same attitude and tone as those rallied by the French revolution. This comment and critique is key because it exemplifies that even at the time that *Jane Eyre* came out, there was something about it that was perceived by critics as not being of the current age/spirit/or fashion but rather of a past spirit and ideology.

Many other critics of the time when *Jane Eyre* was released argued that the novel was particularly different in a variety of ways from other popular novels of the time. Lodge includes a critique by A.W. Fonblanque in the *Examiner* that stated, "it is anything but a fashionable novel. It has not a Lord Fanny for its hero, not a Duchess for its pattern of nobility. The scene of action is never in Belgrave or Grosvenor Square...it was unlike the novels of...Charles Dickens"(8). This is an example of how outside the novel was from current trends, how critics didn't even see a similarity to the

Victorian tendencies, and how some saw no similarities to the greatest Victorian writer; Charles Dickens.

What critics (George Henry Lewes in this case) did note about *Jane Eyre*, was that it's writing was "by no means a fine style, it has... 'the written speech of an individual, not the artificial language made up from all sorts of books'...of connecting external appearances with internal effects"(9). This comment on *Jane Eyre* was interesting because it began paralleling some of the ideals Wordsworth expressed when he wrote his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*⁹. These critiques on the novel and the connections the novel was forming with romantic tendencies began to stir a sense that the novel was deviating from the Victorian. Instead, *Jane Eyre* was becoming a novel concerned with themes such as that of "nature" (Lodge 7) and a novel that "explores regular events taken from real life"(16).

Charlotte Bronte's correspondence with some of the critics of *Jane Eyre* are important because they highlight her interest in keeping true to tendencies (such as the importance of imagination) also significant to the poets/writers during the Romantic Period. In a letter to G.H Lewes, 6 November 1847 in response to his review of *Jane Eyre*, Bronte writes "when I first began to write, so impressed was I with the truth of the principles you advocate that I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides"(Nov. 1847). But then in that same letter, Bronte leaves clear that although Lewes had warned her against straying from the real (truth) and experienced, that "imagination is a strong, restless faculty which claims to be heard and exercised...are we to be quite deaf to he cry...when she shews us bright pictures are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them?—And when she...speaks rapidly...in our ear are we not to write her diction?"(Nov. 1847)¹⁰. Here Bronte clearly believes that the imagination has its own power over the self. Bronte in reference to her writing believes that the imagination has to be heard and written, even if it strays from "the ground of experience" (Nov. 1847) that Lewes advocates. This is crucial because it demonstrates how aware Bronte was of the importance of the imagination and its power in relation to her work. Bronte begins to express the imagination.

9 Wordsworth writes in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* "I proposed to myself...to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them...in a selection of language really used by men" (Broadview 122).

10 It is interesting that Bronte describes the imagination in such a way, as we see in her novel *Jane Eyre*, Jane herself draws bright pictures reproduced from her imagination.

As its own power capable of transcending beyond the self¹¹, but she also realizes the dangers of melodrama¹² that could come with straying from what Lewes termed "real".

In Charlotte Brontë's correspondence we can also find thrilling evidence that express her deep knowledge and appreciation of William Wordsworth, and also of the influence of his work in her writing. It becomes crucial to make this connection because through this we can begin to prove that Charlotte Brontë was not only well read in the works of William Wordsworth but also deeply interested in the study of his subject matter. In a letter to Thomas De Quincey on June 16th 1847, due to the fact that the poems the Brontë sisters published did not sell, Brontë writes "we have decided on distributing as presents a few copies of what we cannot sell—we offer you one in acknowledgement of the pleasure...we have long derived from your works"(June.1847). In the footnotes following Brontë's letter to De Quincey, the editor of *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë 1829-1847* Margaret Smith, notes that, "De Quincey was one of several authors to whom CB and her sisters send copies of their poems. Her letters to Tennyson and J.G. Lockhart were substantially the same...those to Wordsworth...have not been located"(530).

Although the letter to Wordsworth has not been found it is plausible to believe that Brontë would have sent him copies, since at the time William Wordsworth was the poet laureate of England. Smith also makes note that "according to *Shorter*¹³ a copy was also sent to Wordsworth(1770-1850).

His poems were loved by CB, who wrote of his 'deep, serene and sober mind' and often quoted his work"(531). This information is fascinating since it demonstrates the fact that Brontë was in fact well read and knowledgeable of the works of Wordsworth. It is also interesting because it demonstrates that Brontë was referencing and using his work in her own work. Smith goes on to write in the footnotes "Wordsworth

11 "More broadly a belief took root among...(the great romantic poets in particular) that the aesthetic and imaginative truths of poetry were possessed of a transcendence status"(Broadview 19). This point is interesting because it demonstrates the connection between how Romantics viewed the imagination and how similar it is to how Brontë viewed the power of the imagination.

12 According to Smith's footnotes relating to Brontë's letter to G.H. Lewes, 6 November 1847, Lewes claimed that "the deep, significant reality of *JE* brought its defects into stronger relief. 'There was indeed too much melodrama and improbability'"(560).

13 Smith is making reference to Clement K. Shorter who released *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle*, which was also a collection of correspondence of Charlotte Brontë and her relations.

had been the poet laureate since Southey's death in 1843, and he had carefully revised his work for the Moxon edn. Of 1845 on which CB had probably hoped to model the Bells' *Poems*"(531). This footnote is interesting since it states that Charlotte Brontë was hoping to model both her sisters and her poems around Wordsworth's own work. This begins to show the deep interest, pleasure, and influence that Wordsworth had on the work of Charlotte Brontë at the time¹⁴. Some of Charlotte Brontë's letters go as far as making direct references to William Wordsworth's poems, which demonstrates furthermore her knowledge and familiarity with his writing¹⁵.

Through Brontë's letters we also learn what Brontë was heavily learned (or read) in. Brontë writes to W.S. Williams, 28 October 1847 in response to Mr. Thackeray's comments on *Jane Eyre*, "the plot of *Jane Eyre* may be a hackneyed one; Mr. Thackeray remarks that it is familiar to him; but having read comparatively few novels...I thought it original"(Oct. 1847). This choice of phrasing from Brontë herself, is interesting. It seems as though Brontë was saying she had read few novels throughout her life.

So it leaves you wondering, what it is that Brontë was heavily reading? Due to the fact that Brontë was a devoted admirer of Wordsworth, and that she was writing poetry and sending copies of her poetry to Tennyson, J.G. Lockhart, and Ebenezer Elliot¹⁶, we can infer that Brontë was more familiar with poetry than she was on the novel, as she states herself¹⁷.

Through Charlotte Brontë's correspondence and the criticism she received when *Jane Eyre* was first

14 The letter that the footnote is referencing was dated June 1847, and four months later *Jane Eyre* was published. This is interesting because if in June 1847, Brontë was expressing a heavy influence by the works of William Wordsworth in her poetry, it is plausible that as she wrote *Jane Eyre* that year she was also heavily influenced by his work in her novel.

15 In Brontë's letter to Hartley Coleridge 10 December 1840, Brontë makes a direct reference to "that inward eye'...which is said to be "the bliss of solitude". This is a direct reference to Wordsworth's poem "I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud". In Brontë's letter to W.S. Williams 25 February 1848, Brontë made notable use of Wordsworth's sonnet 'Great men have been among us'(Smith 531).

16 Smith's footnotes in relation to Brontë's letter to Thomas De Quincy, 16 June 1847 states that Brontë sent copies of both her sisters and her poetry to all writers mentioned above as a present in acknowledgement to the pleasure they gained from their work. It is interesting that all writers mentioned above were poets and essayists, none novelists.

17 The fact that Brontë admits that she has read few novels is curious because it suggest that perhaps Brontë was more concerned with the work of poetry and other forms of writing, making the claim that she was reading and inspired by the poetry of the poet Laureate of her time seem more plausible.

released we can begin to see how *Jane Eyre* could have definitely been influenced by not only the tendencies of the romantic period, but in specific the tendencies and subject matter of William Wordsworth. Through a close study of specific scenes in *Jane Eyre* and in select poems by William Wordsworth, we will be able to see how through the exploration of the power of the imagination, and in the study of the outcast figure in relation to the self and vice-versa, how similar Bronte's novels resembles some of the themes explored in the work of Wordsworth.

From the onset of the novel we can begin to see how Bronte deals with the theme of the outcast figure in a similar manner as does Wordsworth in "The Thorn". In the first page of the novel we already see how Jane becomes the outcast figure in relation to her external community. "Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying, 'she regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie and could discover...that I was...to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition...she really must exclude me'"(5; ch.1). So from the start we begin to see how the external community and external society begins to label the central figure. Young Jane only knows herself through what her aunt says about her, and from what she gathers she is obviously unlike her aunt or cousins, since she is excluded. But like in Wordsworth's poem "The Thorn", we only gather that the characters(Martha in Wordsworth and Jane in *Jane Eyre*) are outcast figures (or beside the norm) because of others characterization of them. The affect of how those around Jane define her, and how it leads to the representation of the outcast figure, will come more into play when we get to the scene in the red room.

Before we get to the scene in the red room it is important to take a look at "The Thorn" by William Wordsworth. In this poem the main character is Martha Ray. According to what the community tells the narrator of the poem, Martha was abandoned by her love Stephen Hill who married someone else. Martha then was also pregnant and once her love abandoned her "she to the mountaintop would go,/ and there was often seen"(135-136). The community also insists that "what became of this poor child/there's none that ever knew:/And if a child was born or no"(156-158). In this poem we get an interesting study on what Kang terms the outcast figure. The narrator of the poem only projects what the community has told him (that her love left her, she mourns on the mountain-top and that she could have killed her child) onto Martha as

he speaks about her. The positioning of Martha in the poem, also allows for a certain interpretation of the outcast, since Martha is always by "this aged thorn,/ this pond and beauteous hill of moss"(56-58) on a mountaintop.

The poem becomes interesting in the study of the outcast because we see how the narrator, who we find out was also an outsider "when to this country first I came"(183) become part of the community because of Martha (who takes up the current outcast position). Martha remains the outcast figure, although she clearly was part of the community ¹⁸ before the narrator was. Martha remains the outcast figure because the community simply can't explain her actions. Kang explains, "Martha...can...embody what resist the symbolic order without standing as an exception...they embody some structural lack within the symbolic order. As a...point of resistance irreducible to meaning... it is this strangeness that leads...the community to becomes seized by anxiety"(14-15). Basically, Kang argues that although Martha is technically part of the community, because she doesn't follow the symbolic order, the community has to (to remove the anxiety from the community) interpret Martha as the outcast figure. Wordsworth poem "The Thorn" demonstrates how the outcast figure is constructed and why. The outcast figure comes to be out of a rupture in what the external world/community perceives as the symbolic order or something definable. When the external community can no longer verbalize or define the figure (in this case Martha) she becomes the outcast figure. Martha then perceives and is perceived as the outcast figure. The narrator in return either attempts to identify with the figure that is considered outside the symbolic order or attempts to give language to the figure that has been constructed as the outcast figure/someone un-definable or unrepresentable by the external community.

Jane herself becomes the outcast simply because her aunt, cousins, and housemaids perceive something about Jane that is simply irreducible to meaning. Mrs. Reed (Jane's aunt) explains that Jane at the age of nine does not represent the "child-like disposition"(5; ch.1). When Jane asks what she has done to be outside of the community of her aunt and cousins, Mrs. Reed cannot explain it and averts the question. Ms. Abbott refers to Jane as "an underhand little thing"(10; ch.1). So in just

18 In "The Thorn" when the narrator first arrives to the country, the community explains that Martha had a fiancé and was to be married—Martha was part of the symbolic order of the community before her fiancé left her.

the first few pages we get an exploration of how Jane is marked as the outcast figure by others, but there is not real justification. Her aunt cannot explain what Jane has done to be set apart from everyone except that her nature is not of a sweet-child. Mrs. Abbott leaves clear that Jane is simply deceitful but with no true justifications. But perhaps Jane is different than those around her at Gateshead. Jane herself expresses a consciousness of her "physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed" (5; ch.1). But then again, perhaps Jane's own notion of self-inferiority has been constructed because of how others have defined and caused her to feel.

The red room is perhaps the best scene to explain how Charlotte Bronte explores the notion of the outcast figure found in "The Thorn". Remember that in *Jane Eyre* our narrator is an older Jane retelling her childhood as truthfully as she can in the same way that the narrator in "The Thorn" attempts to narrate what has happened to Martha. In the red room, Jane happens by a mirror and has to see her reflection. "I had to cross before the looking glass;...all looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow...the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking...glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit;...like one of those tiny phantoms... Bessie's...stories represented"(11 ch.1). Jane as a child describes herself as what seems to be an outcast figure. Jane becomes a 'tiny phantom' and the narrator (elder Jane) only retells the reflection the younger Jane saw. Those around young Jane have identified and treated her as the outcast, so it can be argued that what Jane sees as a child is the reflection of what her current community has deemed her to be.¹⁹

According to Kang, the narrator of "The Thorn" "wants to preserve and even transmit Martha's traumatic status as a void or rupture...he tries to capture something of her enigmatic unrepresentability and transmit it in language"(24). Perhaps the narrator of *Jane Eyre* (older Jane) also is attempting to transmit young Jane's traumatic experience and current unrepresentability through the way that young Jane sees herself in the glass. Jane sees a reflection of a being that is outside of the symbolic order, Jane does not see the child

that she is but rather a spirit-like being. The narrator attempts to describe, through Jane's reflection, Jane's current traumatic status in the red room through her reflections mysterious unrepresentability. Young Jane can only turn to Bessie's stories as an explanation and representation for what she has seen in the reflection. But the narrator seems to be exploring (by retelling this past moment and trying to capture and express young Jane's reflection) what Kang refers to as "a...discourse that transmits anxiety or the real or the moment of 'resistance to meaning'"(24).

Kang argues Wordsworth was engaging in this new type of discourse as well. "Wordsworth as a 'man speaking to man' is engaged in a new kind of speaking that transmits anxiety or the real...just as the narrator transmits the truth about Martha"(24). Wordsworth by creating the outcast figure of Martha in "The Thorn", sets up a poem where the narrator is attempting to recreate Martha's enigmatic self, and trying to represent what seems to be the outcast or the unrepresentable, through language. Bronte, also seems to be attempting to put in language and to represent the traumatic experience Jane suffered in the red room through the enigmatic figure that Jane perceives in her reflection. Both writers (Bronte in the red room and Wordsworth in "The Thorn"), attempt to express through language a traumatic moment for the individual where there seems to be a rupture in the individual mind and self that resist meaning. Jane's treatment by her external community, and how the community perceives of Martha, also demonstrates both writers (Bronte and Wordsworth) interest in how the external can affect/represent the individual. Because Jane was deemed and defined by the external as an outcast or other, Jane sees in her reflection an outcast figure. Jane herself is also internally shaken up in the red room, which would explain why she sees such a fleeting spirit-like reflection. The thorn, the isolated mountaintop, the moss around the thorn, and the fact that Martha sits by the thorn, are all external representations of how Martha is internally still in woe over her lovers betrayal in "The Thorn".

As Jane grows older and she goes to work at Thornfield we find another instance where there is the same interest with the outcast figure for Bronte and Wordsworth. At Thornfield, Jane no longer seems to be that child that couldn't please, that "toad" as Ms. Abbott described, or the figure that everyone had to avoid (as it became in Gateshead). Instead, Jane gets along well at Thornfield and no longer represents

19 Young Jane herself (it could be argued) sees the strange outcast being that others have projected her as, but the narrator older Jane could be exploring something different by turning back to this moment where there seems to be a rupture in meaning of Jane's reflected self. Also note that throughout the novel the "past Jane" changes in how she views herself in accordance to how others cast her (when she's with Rochester Jane even admits she looks more handsome).

the outcast figure that she did at Gateshead. When Rochester arrives at Thornfield, he is the only one to cast Jane as from "another world"(107 ch.13). But it is by no means meant to be as though positioning Jane as an outcast. Rather Rochester correlates her to fairytales and fairies. "I marveled where you had got that sort of face...I thought unaccountably of fairytales...were you waiting for your people...for the men in green...did I break through one of your rings"(107 ch.13). In his first formal meeting with Jane, while it could be taken as a moment where Jane is being casted as an outcast/ of another world, Rochester is actually in a sense flattering Jane. Rochester views Jane as a fairylike creature, a creature out of a fairytale. It isn't until Jane comes into contact with the outcast figure at Thornfield hall that Jane herself recognizes the outcast figure in her own self once again.

The day of Jane's wedding with Rochester, their wedding is stopped because Briggs exposes the fact that Rochester is married to a Bertha Mason a creole from Spanish Town, Jamaica (255 ch.26). From the start, Bertha already resembles this outcast figure as she is not from England, but a creole from Jamaica. Once Rochester confesses, he describes Bertha as "a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to...seek sympathy with something at least human"(257 ch.26). Rochester views Bertha as the outcast being that is not even human in his eyes. Before Jane sees Bertha, she already possesses the notion that Bertha represents an outcast figure/being. When Jane does see Bertha, Jane describes "the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet...the maniac bellowed. I recognized well that purple face—those bloated features"(259 ch.26). It is clear that Bertha represents another outcast figure. Bertha's character cannot be fully defined through human characteristics and without people seeing her personally, and like Jane was treated at Gateshead, Bertha remains isolated and casted aside from the community of those around her. But yet, Jane somehow connects with Bertha.

In Book Seven of *The Prelude* we get another outcast figure in the work of Wordsworth. The narrator of book seven is reflecting on how he has walked through crowded streets of which, "the face of everyone/ that passes by me is a mystery"(597-598). To the narrator all the people passing by him as he reflects were a mystery or nothing to his eyes. But when the narrator saw the blind beggar an actual connection or recognition happened. "Twas my chance/abruptly to be smitten with the view/of a Blind beggar"(610-612).

The narrator here no longer is in a sense reflecting on a vast array of things (the mysterious faces, thoughts of what, when, how) but rather the rhythm and flow of the narration slows down as the narrator comes into sight with the blind beggar. The narrator then notices "upon his chest/wearing a written paper, to explain/the story of the man, and who he was/my mind did at this spectacle turn round/.../and it seemed/ to me that in this label was a type,/or emblem, of the utmost that we know,/both of ourselves and of the universe"(613-620). This is where the connection between how the narrator perceives himself through the external outcast figure of society is seen. The narrator clearly holds some type of connection with the blind beggar as the beggar is not another face that the narrator passes by. Instead, the narrator is stopped by the sight of the beggar and through what is written on the beggar's chest, identifies something (an emblem) that everyone (including him) can relate and know. The narrators halt at the sight of the blind beggar and the poems slowness in this scene works to show the importance of the interaction between the two characters. At first the narrator was reflecting internally on the fact that all he had passed by externally around him was a mystery or unknown. It is only in the encounter with the blind beggar that we get a sense of an anchored connection between the narrator and the external world.

When Jane sees and discovers Bertha Mason, Jane's only instinct (although she loves Rochester) is that she has to leave Thornfield. I argue that Jane saw what could become of her through the outcast figure of Bertha Mason. Jane on a certain level identified herself and her future if she stayed at Thornfield with the outcast figure of Bertha. This led Jane to realize that she had to leave Thornfield, because if she didn't, like Bertha, she would once again become an outcast. If Jane stayed at Thornfield, it would have been as Rochester's mistress. This would have caused her to become the outcast figure at Thornfield and to society since she would be committing a moral sin that all would look down on. Jane, through her identification with Bertha, realized that if she stayed at Thornfield she too would become an outcast, or "a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage; a vivid, restless, resolute captive"(122 ch.15), which Rochester at one point perceived her as.²⁰

20 I find it interesting that Rochester defines Jane or Jane's look as that of a caged, captive bird because it parallels how Bertha's look must be, since she is actually the caged and captive creature. Although its clear that Rochester does not see Jane as the outcast being that Bertha is there are times when Rochester describes Jane and it parallels with Bertha's character/status.

Both in book seven of *The Prelude* and in Jane's scene with Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, we get an exploration of how the individual identified and related with what was deemed as the outcast figure. According to Kang, through Wordsworth's book seven of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth explores, "the subject's identification with the void within symbolic order"(95). The outcast figure will in a sense always represent the subject set aside (or not acting) through a symbolic order. We saw this in "The Thorn" through Martha's actions and with the blind beggar (since he is a beggar) he is also acting outside of the symbolic order. Jane as a child was seen as the outcast because of her strong fits of passion against Mrs. Reed and her cousin John. Jane was also an orphan or a beggar in the house of Mrs. Reed further putting her aside from those around her. Yet, as we saw in book seven of *The Prelude* and with Jane's reaction to Bertha, both subjects (Jane and the narrator in book seven) identified with the outcast figure or the "void within symbolic order"(95). It is interesting to see how both writers (Bronte and Wordsworth) in this instance also explored in their writing moments where their narrator/main character's individual self identified with what was deemed as the un-definable or the unrepresentable (or the outcast figure).

Charlotte Bronte's exploration of the ideals and themes in the works of William Wordsworth did not simply end at the outcast figure. Throughout *Jane Eyre* we also see how Charlotte Bronte uses and expresses the power of the imagination through Jane in the same way that William Wordsworth explores the power of imagination throughout his poems.

Perhaps the most important scene in *Jane Eyre* that places the novel in parallel with the work of William Wordsworth, occurs when Rochester views Jane's paintings. Rochester asks Jane about her paintings, "where did you get your copies?"(109 ch.13). Jane answers "out of my head"(109 ch.13). Then as Rochester once again observed the paintings, Jane addresses her reader and states, "I will tell you, reader, what they are: and first, I must promise that they are nothing wonderful. The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind. As I saw them with the spiritual eye...but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived"(110 ch.13). In this moment *Jane Eyre* is clearly talking about the imagination. What Jane perceived in her mind (with the "spiritual eye") was so incredible, yet once she tried to replicate what her imagination created, her body fell short. Jane's own

hands fell short of truly portraying in her paintings what the imagination had created in her mind. This scene is intriguing because what becomes the topic and issue is the power of the imagination, and how one's mode of expression and the external nature will never be able to represent what the imagination conceives. Through this scene we see an exploration of the power of the imagination.

The power of the imagination is also an acknowledged and major topic in Wordsworth's book six of *The Prelude* "Crossing the Alps". The narrator and his friend are on a journey to cross the Alps. Both (in particular the narrator) have already imagined what crossing the Alps would look like, and as they wander lost along the mountain, the narrator realizes that perhaps they have already crossed the Alps. "To our inquiries, in their sense and substance,/translated by the feeling which we had,/ended in this; that we had crossed the Alps"(522-524). The narrator and his comrade have just realized that without them even noticing they had crossed the Alps. "Imagination! lifting up itself/before the eye and progress of my song/like an unfathered vapor; here that Power/in all the might of its endowments, came/athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,/.../and now recovering, to my Soul I say/ 'I recognize thy glory'"(525-532). This is where the narrator of the poem realizes that the imagination and what they imagined the crossing of the Alps would be, surpassed what was actually before them. The imagination and the imagined images of the Alps proved to be more powerful and greater than the external actual images of the Alps before them. This part of book six of *The Prelude* represents how the imagination and the power of the imagination on the mind cannot be surpassed by the external representation of what the imagination has conceived.

Charlotte Bronte also creates other scenes where the power of the imagination and Jane's susceptibility to the imagination are portrayed. While at Thornfield Hall Jane begins to reflect, "my sole relief was to walk...the third story...in the...solitude of the spot and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever vision rose before it—and certainly there were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved...and to open my inward ear...to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created...with all the incident...that I desired and had not in my actual existence"(96 ch.12). Here we begin to see how Jane recognizes the imagination and enjoys being in its presence or consumed by it. Jane is presented here as a character very much interested in

listening, searching, and waiting for the moment when the imagination takes over the mind and transcends the mind to a story or place that she did not have in her actual life. Jane here begins to see the imagination as a transcendent power capable of moving beyond the self and away from the external and internal—only for a moment²¹. This scene and representation of the imagination through Jane reflects romantic ideals and the romantic poetry of William Wordsworth.

Charlotte Bronte's representation of imagination through Jane's character in the quote discussed above is seen in the third stanza of Wordsworth's poem "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud"²².

"For oft when on my couch I lie/in vacant or in pensive mood,/they flash upon that inward eye/which is the bliss of solitude,/and then my heart with pleasure fills,/and dances with the daffodils"(13-18). Wordsworth's representation of how inspiration comes before the narrator, allows his heart to fill, and how then imagination passes before the 'inward eye', is all expressed in Jane's quote discussed above. In the quote discussed above, Jane's solitude and pensive mood allows for imagination to come before her eyes and fill her heart to take her to a tale that departs from her own reality. In Wordsworth's poem we see the same notion of the narrator being in a calm, pensive mood, and in solitude when the imagination comes before his eyes and fills his heart. Then the imagination transcends the narrator to the "dancing daffodils/along the lake, beneath the trees,/ten thousand dancing in the breeze"(4-6). In this case, Bronte like Wordsworth, explored the power of the imagination to transcend the self through Jane's character. This notion can even be extended to how Bronte brings Jane and Rochester back together in the end of her novel.

Towards the end of *Jane Eyre*, Jane was presented with a marriage proposal from St. John, which she kept refusing. Then on the day that she had somewhat given St. John a yes²³, Jane perceives something. "They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, while the flesh

21 I don't believe Bronte meant to use the imagination in terms of a mode of escape from reality but rather like Wordsworth "to chose incidents...from common life and...to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way"(Broadview 122)

22 The connection to this specific stanza in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" was easy to make because Bronte herself seems to be a fan of "the inward eye" mentioned in this stanza as she has used this phrase from Wordsworth's poem in her letters as well.

23 Jane says, "were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now—come afterwards what would"(369 ch.35).

quivered on my bones. 'What have you heard? What do you see?' asked St. John. I saw nothing; but I heard a voice somewhere cry—'Jane! Jane!...and it was the voice of...that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain"(369 ch.35). In this scene Jane has imagined with 'her inward ear'²⁴ the calls of her name. It is this vulnerability to the power of the imagination to take over the self that allows Jane to believe what she hears. Jane has been crafted as a character sensible to the powers of the imagination, external nature, and self, which is why Jane states as to the occurrence, "down superstition!...'this is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature" (369-370 ch.36). Jane herself recognizes the faculties that are working amongst her. Early on throughout the novel we become aware that Jane is as much connected to the imagination as she is with nature (think back to how her internal emotions are expressed through weather)²⁵. This allows Jane to believe that what she hears is her senses and nature telling her something. Jane then leaves for Thornfield and reconnects with Rochester. In the end she ends up living among nature with Rochester as his wife, right hand, and as his 'visionary eye' since he has been blinded.

It seems that even *Jane Eyre's* ending brings into questions themes of the romantic period. Jane's imagination and her own self in relation to external nature allows her to perceive her love's pain and incident. Jane's inward eye (imagination) becomes her blind husband's inward eye "I was then his vision... he saw nature...he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river...of the landscape before us"(397 ch.38). Both beings (Jane and Rochester) then become part of Bronte's exploration of the power of the imagination, as well as the self in relation to external nature and the outcast figure²⁶.

24 Jane has already made reference to the power of her ear to hear the imagination on page 96 "to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously". It's interesting then that Jane hears her name being called, because it serves to suggest it was her imagination opening her inward ear to hear Rochester, since it seems that Jane feels as though through her ear she can hear the imagination's tale.

25 Throughout the novel we also see how Jane's interiority is expressed through external forces such as nature. One example is the morning after Rochester and Jane have declared their love and Jane obviously awakens happy. "I was not surprised...that a brilliant June had succeeded the tempest of the night; and to feel through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I am so happy"(226 ch.24).

26 Since Rochester becomes blind and disabled, it can be argued that like the "blind beggar" Rochester becomes the outcast. Since Rochester cannot participate in the community and because of his blindness and missing hand, he is no longer perceived as part of the social order, but rather a social void—an outcast figure. The

Their residence (Jane and Rochester's) also becomes interesting because Ferndeau itself is isolated and reclusive. Ferndeau resides deep in the woods and becomes itself positioned outside of the urban or community²⁷. I would argue this ending in *Jane Eyre* further marks the end of the novel as a clear turn away from the industrial, which marks the Victorian Genre and a return to the external nature part of what marks the Romantic Genre.

It was interesting to track Charlotte Brontë's interest and subject matter throughout her novel because there was so much connection with William Wordsworth's interest and subject matter. Both Brontë and Wordsworth are complex writers that can be analyzed through various lens. But it was intriguing to investigate how *Jane Eyre* explored similar themes as those found in the poems of William Wordsworth. What is true for both writers is their interest with the faculties of the imagination. Charlotte Brontë explores the power and limits of the imagination through her heroine Jane Eyre, and Wordsworth himself was deeply fascinated with the mind and the imagination's power in relation to the natural world. Both Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* and William Wordsworth explored the ways the mental world of the individual and the natural world could potentially blur through the notions of the imagination/mind. This similarity, along with a tendency to portray the outcast figure throughout their writing is another point of interest in Wordsworth that Brontë takes up in her novel.

Although Charlotte Brontë was born into another literary period it is fascinating to see how her novel does potentially turn back to explore some of the concerns found in the works of William Wordsworth. Some of the issues and points of query found in both Charlotte Brontë's novel and in the writings of William Wordsworth begin to raise questions as to Brontë's own literary curiosity and intrigues. While Charlotte Brontë has been recognized as pertaining to the Victorian canon, it is important to attempt to recognize in her work the correlations between some of her themes and interest with those of the romantic period's writers. This will, as a result, lead to a new understanding and approach to Charlotte Brontë's work and begin to question the

blind figure of Rochester begins to echo the blind beggar/man of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* book seven.

²⁷ Although a stretch, but perhaps the fact that both Jane and Rochester return to nature (living in the woods) show the turn away from the Victorian, which was all about urbanizing. Jane and Rochester become the outcast figures of society, and the reason that they are both now outcast is because they both now see the world and are living through romantic aesthetics.

literary period with which her work has currently been analyzed under.

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