

NINETEENTH CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

ISSUE 15.2 (SUMMER 2019)

“Resolute, Wild, Free”: Women’s Leisure and Avian Ecologies in *Jane Eyre*

By Robyn Miller, Auburn University

<1>Present within the women’s domain of the parlor as both darling pets and objects to be collected, birds unsurprisingly migrated from the domestic sphere into Victorian women’s literature. Indeed, their presence within the latter served the ideological work of making domestic arrangements seem natural, often drawing upon natural history and socially accepted leisure activities to reinforce an idealized domesticity. Though many nineteenth-century texts widely use birds as a representation of domesticity, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is an especially rich site for examining avian ecologies in women’s leisure due to its innumerable references to Thomas Bewick’s *A History of British Birds* (1831), a natural history text. The connection between *Jane Eyre* and Bewick’s *A History of British Birds* has been widely discussed by past scholarship, though often with a focus on this intersection between natural history and fiction as symbolic. The bird imagery is primarily interpreted as a glimpse into Jane’s desire for freedom, Bertha Mason’s wildness, or Rochester’s raptor-like, controlling nature. (1) While such scholarship is important, there has not yet been any analysis that explores how the inclusion of *A History of British Birds* speaks to natural history’s role within the rituals of nineteenth-century leisure and how natural history’s adaptation into leisure impacted biodiversity. When read with an ecocritical eye, *Jane Eyre*—and its abundant references to Thomas Bewick—provides insight into how the availability of natural history texts within the Victorian household reinforced both birds’ and women’s place within the domestic sphere, often at the cost of avian biodiversity.

<2>Jane Eyre’s leisured bird watching, reading, and painting reveals how her practices transform birds into a species that matters—to the leisured collector or artist. Like Bewick in *A History of British Birds*, Jane situates birds as the focus of her precious leisure time, which represents the little freedom she has to choose what to view or paint. This role of the bird and its alliance with Jane’s “free time,” however, obscures the ecological impact of such a narrative and the exploitation of avian species by practices like art or collection, which increase with the cultural visibility of the species. In fact, through her leisured gaze, Jane portrays birds like herself: resistant to domestic influence despite her containment within various households. Bewick’s birds were not “resolute” and “free,” as Jane suggests, but stuffed specimens taken in disastrous numbers (Brontë 284). Reading Jane’s leisurely productions and representation of the importance, wildness, or freedom of birds alongside the impact of such narratives on bird populations themselves in the Victorian period reveals that the former narrative conceals the latter. The ecological impact of the leisured woman then may be actively concealed by Victorian

narratives like *Jane Eyre*, which play a complex role in understandings of avian biodiversity, natural history, and its intersection with domestic and leisured ideologies.

<3>Birds appear in the first pages of *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane is delighted by the prospect of not going on a walk outdoors and instead curling up with Thomas Bewick's *A History of British Birds* in a window-seat during her newfound free time. Jane relishes herself as being "shrined in double retirement," enclosed both by a heavy curtain within the window seat and the walls around her (Brontë 9). Though doubly encaged by domestic comforts, Bewick's text provides young Jane with access to distant lands, "bleak shores," and "death-white realms" (10). Reading the natural history text beguiles Jane with tantalizing images of far-flung wilderness, but their foreignness and inhospitable climate reaffirms Jane's decision to stay indoors, providing her access to foreign lands while reinforcing her chosen "double retirement" (9). The visions of fantastic distant lands are filtered not just by Bewick's depiction but also her "undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings" (11). The power of Bewick's volumes lies not only in the access they provide to the natural world but a potential for growth. In the shelves of young Jane's mind, Bewick provides leisured entertainment as interesting as "'Pamela,' and 'Henry, Earl of Moreland'" but with the promise of deepened knowledge obtainable through the maturation of her imperfect feelings (11). Even from its opening passages, *Jane Eyre* reinforces natural history, such as that provided by Bewick's volumes, as a deserving part of women's leisurely reading, providing imaginative escapes into the natural world beyond the comfort of domesticity and allowing for growth and maturation.

<4>The book's material presence within the text also speaks to Brontë's own nostalgia. (2) Bewick's influence was noteworthy enough that, at the age of sixteen, Brontë wrote an elegiac poem "Lines on the Celebrated Bewick." This poem, like *Jane Eyre*, invokes the book as a physical object and invites others to read along, inviting readers to turn the pages with the speaker and to consume its contents as they might a magazine. Brontë's references to the "many winged inhabits of the air. . .as those that now the skies and waters sweep" echoes Bewick's cataloguing of species, which were divided into volumes based on birds visible on land and water (Alexander 15-16). Though such categorization was prominent within the practice of natural history, Brontë's instructions to turn the page and careful reflection of Bewick's organization emphasize the text as a material object intended for visual consumption, suggesting that the depiction of the birds within might be consumed in a similar fashion.

<5>*A History of British Birds* appears as a household presence on many occasions, first cradled in the lap of a young Jane, then as a weapon in the hands of John Reed, and lastly envisioned as a presence on Gateshead's shelves—a cornerstone of her memories of home—when Jane returns as an adult. The ubiquitous, material presence of the book represents the similarly widespread presence of the ideas and ideologies ensconced within, suggesting that Bewick's volumes are not just an enriching read for young Jane but a crucial part of the domestic milieu. Referencing it alongside other real-world texts enriches the intended realism of *Jane Eyre* as an "autobiography" edited by Currer Bell, relying on readers' familiarity with Bewick's writing as a common household object. From these references to the physical volumes of *A History of British Birds*, *Jane Eyre* illustrates the natural history tome's worthiness as a leisurely pursuit in

addition to reaffirming its widespread presence within the nineteenth-century household, suggesting that the text satisfied the domesticating work of acceptable leisure rituals and served as a core part of Jane's—and, perhaps, a multitude of other young women's—youth.

<6>Jane's use of Bewick's language reflects the domestic ideologies perpetuated in his descriptions and provides an opportunity for Jane to rework the meaning of both birds and the natural order using her knowledge of natural history. Based on her childhood encounters with *A History of British Birds*, Jane notably identifies with songbirds and refers to them as a demonstration of her learnedness or interacts with them as a form of leisure. The first bird likened to Jane is a robin for whom Jane leaves out bread crumbs at Gateshead Hall. Jane's fascination with the robin represents her disinterest in participating in the social affairs of Gateshead, where a carriage has just arrived. The robin provides both a "spectacle" and a "livelier attraction" to Jane in her spare time than participation within the domestic sphere (Brontë 30). The robin's chirping for food however—and Jane's willingness to leave morsels on the sill for the bird—is lifted from Bewick's classification of the bird. Bewick's robin "approaches the house, taps at the window with his bill, as if to entreat an asylum" (Bewick 157). The robin's entreaty in Bewick's depiction represents the bird choosing the "asylum" offered by the enclosure of the house and, by extension, domestication. Jane's offering of food also reinforces this domesticating exchange; just as the robin is represented as choosing the cage through the echoing of Bewick's language, so too is Jane a participant in the attribution of domestic ideals to the robin, even if her fascination with the bird is meant to illustrate her desire to be freed of such affairs. To leave breadcrumbs out is the first step in taming a bird, increasing its dependence on the household and foreshadowing its eventual domestication.

<7>Despite personifying robins as beggars, Bewick also praises the bird for its domestic habits and refers to the familiarity of the bird within the British imagination. According to Bewick, the robin's "well-known familiarity has attracted the attention and secured the protection of man in all ages," which suggests that the robin has not only adapted to request help from humanity, but that "man," specifically, has taken the robin under his protection in kind. This protection is inspired by the robin's proximity to domestic spaces. Bewick expresses great admiration for the robin's nesting habits, in which "it prepares for the accommodation of its future family" (Bewick 155-156). This degree of self-sacrifice also reflects the expected role of the women in domesticity, who is expected to exert similar effort in her own "nest-making" through her practices of reading, crafting, and house management. Of Bewick's entries, his depiction of the robin, its dedication to family and desire to be indoors, and its animated dependence on their charity, is among his most personified entries. This personification enables Bewick to represent the robin as a domestic ideal, suggesting that even a wholly wild animal may be drawn to the allure of domesticity and enact some model behaviors.

<8>Bewick's entries for the other birds referred to in *Jane Eyre* follow similar patterns of personification and idealization, and these meanings are carried by Jane's identification with such species even as she desires to upend traditional domesticity. Jane refers to her "turtle-dove sensibility" in her behavior with Rochester prior to their wedding date; Rochester refers to Jane as "skylark," "dove," and "linnet" in turn (Brontë 246, 315, 317, 447). Of the lark, Bewick

praises the bird's artful singing while noting that their ground-dwelling and nesting habits expose "them to the depredations of the smaller kinds of voracious animals" (Bewick 194). This yet again alludes to the lark's need for asylum and even protection by representing them as vulnerable. The doves prove to be "willing attendants on man, and depend on his bounty, seldom leaving the dwellings provided for them," and they are "emblematic of peace and innocence. . . [and] faithful to their mates" (314-315). Once again, Bewick's personification is two-fold: the loyalty of doves when provided "dwellings" to inhabit increases their desirability as creatures to be collected; as birds emblematic of purity and faithfulness, Bewick's language connects their willingness to "choose" their domestic cage to traits idealized within women housekeepers. The linnet is described in similar terms. Its song is "lively and sweetly varied," and "its manners are gentle, and its disposition docile" (255). Of most interest with the linnet is its adaptive nature. In captivity, the linnet "adopts the song of other birds" in its cage, and "has been taught to pronounce words with great distinctness" (255). The novelty of mimicry increases their commodified value as pets. Descriptions of the linnet's gentle and docile disposition speak to its status as a wild bird easily translated to family pet rather than contribute to any scientific knowledge of linnet's behavior in the wild.

<9>Reinforcing the beauty of songbird's "music," therefore, in some ways speaks to the delights they might provide while captive. Each of these species in Bewick's classifications are praised for their docility, sweetness of song, and, at times, their dependence on humans, susceptibility to predation, and adaptive nature to coping with captivity. Like the figure of the robin, this imbues *passerines*, or the order of songbirds, with domestic traits typically reserved for the Angel of the House, figuring them as easily domesticated and, once in captivity, a domesticating influence through their practices of song, nest-building, and language mimicry. These activities resemble some of the socially acceptable, disciplinary activities deemed appropriate for ladies with time of their hands—the practice of music, studying other languages, or decorating the house with handicraft or art. Jane also acknowledges the centrality of these practices to domesticity, noting how accounts of "school discipline" contained a curriculum for accomplished young ladies of "beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by them executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, of purses they could net, of French books they could translate" (Brontë 25). Such practices, of course, have since been liberated by scholarship as a compromised means of escape from domestic ideologies and potential site for female subjectivity, but their idealized presence within Bewick's depiction of birds—and Jane's catalog of ladies' accomplishments—performs the ideological work of making such practices within the domestic cage of the home seem natural. The birds' easy adjustment to the home reinforces leisurely pursuits as a sanitizing, moralizing practice. In such state, Rochester's choice of birds in describing Jane—and their close association with Victorian domestic ideals—underscores the commodified value and domestic ideologies embedded within Bewick's personification of birds. It also reveals the cultural assumption that wild birds and women alike may "choose" enclosure by cage or house, as exhibited by Bewick's portrayal of the window-tapping behavior and dove's faithfulness to their caretakers.

<10>In echoing Bewick's language to conceptualize her heroine, Brontë adopts his systematic natural history and does so notably at the expense of the birds. Modern understanding has

complicated Bewick's personification of *passerines* and their quaint, idealized behaviors. For example, the robin's window-tapping behavior praised by Bewick is, in fact, the bird's confused reaction to encountering its own reflection on glass—an artificial construct. This encounter between bird and man-made object does not affirm the adaptiveness of *passerines* to human houses but refutes it; the bird's collision with an artificial reflection of itself, both literally in the glass and figuratively in its presumed motivation for tapping, prefigures a more violent impact between bird and glass through window-strikes. Only recently have ornithologists attempted to trace the impact of window-strikes on *passerine* populations, but it is estimated to be "greater than any other human-associated source of avian mortality" (Klem 407). Modern estimates place bird-strike fatalities in the billions, and identify, specifically, "clear and reflective windows" as the cause, necessitating the appropriate "marking" of windows to prevent these needless casualties (406). The very technology which aided the Victorian observation of and fascination with birds—and the barrier which Jane must wrest open to offer breadcrumbs to the robin—proves to be one mechanism through which songbird populations are invariably affected by humanity. At stake not only with the presentation of window-tapping but also the correlation of birds with women is erasure. The belief that window-tapping and food begging represented the desire of wild birds to occupy domestic spaces (thereby increasing their desirability as pets) conceals the harmful impact of windows on passerine populations, overlooking what is now known to be the most significant factor impacting songbirds in populated areas. This erasure is enabled by affixing idealized domesticity to songbirds and presenting these traits as part of a gendered natural order, as represented in both *Jane Eyre* and Bewick's *A History of British Birds*.

<11>The personification of birds contributed to their popularity as collectible specimens, both for natural history and for women's use within the home. Prior to Bewick's publication of *A History of British Birds*, he was invited to Barnard Castle to examine specimens for his woodcut art. He wrote to a friend "commenting on the enormity of the task and his dissatisfaction with the badly stuffed specimens" (Holmes). The enormity of the task suggests that there were a great many specimens to sort through, and their poor preservation rendered them largely useless for Bewick's art. Abandoning this collection, *A History of British Birds* was, instead, drawn from his "own experience or from fresh specimens sent to him by his many friends and admirers" (Holmes). Many specimens were drawn from living counterparts, as the Corncrake, "which was taken from a bird that ran about his own room" and later converted to a "specimen which is still to be seen in [Newcastle]" (Dobson 97). Drawing from prepared specimens, in part, explains some of the personifications; though careful in the depiction of detailed feathers, physiology, and other physical traits, the process of preparing a specimen is fraught with subjectivity. It may result in poorly preserved skins, as Bewick discovered in Barnard Castle, or the specimen may be arranged in a way to represent a bird's "excellent attitude" in a simulacrum rather than a faithful reproduction to nature. The fine line between living pet, like the Corncrake, to specimen delineates how the collection of specimens, both living and dead, resulted in their "death" within their ecologies. On one hand, this isolation of the specimen from its habitat ensures that what is presented as "natural order" is not always truly representative, enabling the manipulation of their categorization and the perpetuation of gendered ideologies as factual. On the other hand, the presentation of such birds in natural

history texts like Bewick's (and the increased awareness of avian species through natural history's translation into fictional texts like *Jane Eyre*) increased the commodified desire for and consumption of birds. Even Jane is not immune to this desire for birds, as demonstrated by her conceptual collection of bird species with which she identifies and, as adult Jane demonstrates, her attempts to "capture" birds in her art as a personal symbol.

<12>The birds' descriptions, for Jane, Brontë, or even Bewick's readers more broadly, were not the only point of fascination that made the volumes an acceptable part of women's leisure. Like young Jane's reverence of *A History of British Birds* as a book "stored with pictures," Brontë's own reverence for Bewick stemmed from his vignettes or end-pieces, which often had little to do with the bird depictions and text copy on the adjoining page (Brontë 9). Brontë describes Bewick's depictions of "common Nature that we see/ In England's sunny fields, her hills and vales, / On the wild bosom of her storm-dark sea" (Alexander 9-11). "Common" suggests that such scenes bear a certain universality, as though they are accessible to a large group and, perhaps, are part and parcel of the book's widespread appeal. Of course, the images depict an abstract nature; though readers may expect to find similar scenes outdoors, the vignettes represent Bewick's conceptualization of local and foreign landscapes. Such imagery inspires Brontë's "childhood's days [to] return again in thought, / . . . [and] wander in the land of love and light" (33-34). In these stanzas, Brontë's core focus is on how these small vignettes represent Bewick's Britain as the "land of love and light." The stanzas contextualize the book's birds within their native environment and, by extension, the natural world's role within English culture. Bewick's vignettes depicted alongside wild birds are often human-centric, day-in-the-life images that position the birds as existing within and alongside the human world. A man drives a plow following Bewick's entry on the Lark; pastoral scenes of men on horseback, snow-covered lodges, or a housewife hanging up laundry follow still other entries on common buntings and tit mice (Bewick 197, 192, 237). Vignettes set close to the home reinforce gendered roles, illustrating women busy with household chores or men laboring or traveling. Part of these images' allure was their availability to be consumed from the comforts of home, allowing the reader to experience an idealized and sanitized representation of nature without the associated work of stepping outside to observe it. To read Bewick's natural history—and to observe the birds alongside the human-centric vignettes—was to accept Bewick's interpretation of not only natural order but also cultural practices. Perusing the vignettes reinforced the ideological work of English culture and proved tantalizing to both Jane and Brontë during their leisure time.

<13>The vignette that perhaps best represents Bewick's interpretation of natural order features a painstakingly detailed fingerprint over what appears to be an image of a farmhouse and horse.



Figure 1. Bewick, Thomas. *A History of British Birds*, 2 vols. Longman, 1832, pp. 181. *Open Library*, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofbritish00bewi/ref=ol#page/n6/mode/2up>.

The fingerprint's positioning is almost haphazard in appearance, off-center of what otherwise appears to be a complete scene. As it is a woodcut print, however, Bewick designed the placement and carefully illustrated whirls with intent, obscuring the natural world of the illustration with the fingerprint while leaving the home untouched. It is unknown whether the fingerprint is Bewick's own, but its implications remain consistent regardless of the ownership: just as manmade structures affect the natural landscape, so too does the act of observing both native landscapes and the wildlife therein leave a proverbial "print" on the environment. Implicit within the thumbprint and in the idyllic illustrations of humanity and nature coexisting is the concept of influence. Bewick's envisioned "fingerprint" on nature was one of utopian co-existence, where people not only live alongside nature but refine and improve it. To leave a "fingerprint," however, is to leave a trace, to alter, to impact. Bewick's etching represents a growing awareness of human impact on the landscape even as it attempts to reinforce humanity's dominion over the wilderness within a natural order that prevails over both wild heath and domestic hearth. Bewick shows humanity's "fingerprint" and ever-expanding reach into the natural world in a way that nevertheless prefigures the Anthropocene, reflexively predicting an irrevocable impact on nature and the birds juxtaposed with the vignettes even as it proliferated the ideological work of a natural order.

<14>Natural history texts alone could not have engendered such obsession with birds; leisure—especially the imitative arts that constituted a portion of women's leisure—culturally engrained the ideological work found within Bewick's volumes or *Jane Eyre's* adaptation of natural history. When Rochester interrogates Jane about her accomplishments as a lady, Jane describes to the reader the three watercolor paintings in which Rochester takes a particular interest. This artwork features a cormorant holding a woman's bracelet in its beak on the mast of a submerged ship, a woman's shape rising out of a pastoral landscape, and a frozen king in a barren landscape, illuminated only by the glittering northern lights (Brontë 115). Each in turn

features a natural scene—a rolling sea, verdant hills, icy and distant glaciers—disrupted by human bodies rising from the landscape. This proves to be a literalization of Bewick’s fingerprint, but also serves to balance Jane’s seeming domesticity with more far-flung wilds, quietly demonstrating nature’s dominion over humanity rather than promoting the idea of a utopian balance between the two. The cormorant perched atop a sunken ship and the icy king’s despair speak to mankind’s ruin and isolation within unforgiving environments; only the second illustration of the woman rising from the grassy hill, with eyes that “shone dark and wild,” speaks to any kind of balanced union between humanity and nature—one that is female, markedly undomesticated, and disruptive to the pastoral elements (115). Domesticity, at least within these paintings, is markedly not naturalized.

<15>The cormorant cements these illustrations as both an imitation of and response to Bewick’s own vignettes. At the age of twelve, Charlotte Brontë completed a similar drawing in pencil, showing a cormorant presiding over a tumultuous, storm-tossed ocean. (3) This pencil drawing of Brontë’s is intended to be a direct copy of the vignette preceding the cormorant in *A History of British Birds* (Bewick 396). Emphasized in Brontë’s recreation of the illustration is the distant wild landscapes occupied by the cormorant. Bewick suggests that the cormorant is unfamiliar with humanity to a flaw, often known “to sit and receive repeated shots, without offering to remove out of the danger” or to be “easily taken by throwing nets over them or by putting a noose around their necks” (401). This description is echoed by Jane’s assertion that “no net ensnares [her]” when Rochester likens her to a struggling bird (228). The cormorants’ susceptibility to entrapment stems not from their ability to be domesticated but by their frequent occupation of places distant from the presence of people. Bewick notes that they “assemble in flocks on the summits and inaccessible parts of rocks which overhang or are surrounded by the sea” (399). Here is a species, both in the vignette and text, that resists Bewick’s “fingerprint” through choice of habitat and behavior alone, and so Brontë’s fascination with the cormorant—a bird well separated from Bewick’s personified song birds—marks a diversion from the ideologies preserved elsewhere in *A History of British Birds*.

<16>Jane’s version of the vignette pointedly makes some alterations to the source material that both disrupts Bewick’s ideology of domesticity while reinstating the idea of Bewick’s fingerprint as ecological impact. (4) Jane’s cormorant is perched not on the rocky cliffs where Bewick observes these birds making their nests but on the mast of a ship. The cormorant is alone, unlike Brontë or Bewick’s illustrations with their impressionist strokes indicating distant bird wings in the sky. In its beak, a “bracelet” had been washed or torn from the “fair arm” of a “drowned corpse” (Brontë 115). Jane expresses the great pains that she had taken to encrust the bracelet in brightly hued gems, suggesting that the corpse below was a woman wealthy enough to own such luxuries. As a woman’s bauble, the richness of jewelry is out of place in the beak of a bird Bewick describes as “wild” and capable of raising “havoc” (400). The cormorant’s appetite for material goods, however, more closely follows Bewick’s personification of the bird, which appears as a “wary circumspect plunderer, the unrelenting tyrant, and the greedy insatiate glutton” (402). The cormorant, in Bewick’s estimation, possesses none of the desirable traits exhibited by other species nor the suitability for containment within a cage of household, but the cormorant’s theft of the round bracelet recalls the barbaric means of domestication

nevertheless employed on the boisterous species: “A ring, placed round the neck, hinders the bird from swallowing; its natural appetite joins with the will of its master, and it instantly dives at the word of command” (Bewick 401). In Jane’s version of the vignette, the cormorant’s natural habitat had been supplanted by manmade perching, and the bird has wrested the means of its own domestication from a woman, disrupting the natural order both through its coveting of material goods and by its usurpation of women’s dominance over the domestic realm. (5) The changes made to Bewick’s source material represent Jane’s efforts at reclaiming her own bird imagery. However, in depicting the cormorant as seizing the means of domestication—be that net or ring—Jane’s adaptation of natural history allows her to represent her freedom even as the natural landscapes in her art experience an ecological crisis.

<17>Though *Jane Eyre* exists as a pre-Darwinian text, the representation of the cormorant as a species disruptive and free from a domesticating natural order nevertheless carries with it the threat of extinction, just as its covetousness of the bracelet echoes the commodification of bird’s bodies. Jane’s choice of the cormorant’s environment—surrounded by the bodies and objects of people rather than rocky outcroppings—speak to the shrinking boundaries of avian ecosystems and the encroachment of human impact, even if they are intended to upend man’s dominion over nature and secure her own freedom of expression. Such ecosystems are further diminished by the cormorant’s intrusion into domestic spaces, represented by the theft of the bracelet and by Jane’s reproduction of the elusive species in her leisurely work. Ironically representing the harrowing demise of domesticity via a culturally-accepted pastime, Jane also depicts a growing ecological crisis concealed within and posed by women’s leisure.

<18>At the time of *Jane Eyre*’s publication, the growing awareness of avian species, indeed, was spurring their popularity in household pursuits and collection alike. Though considered to be non-game animals, nineteenth-century naturalists such as Alfred Newton acknowledged the “threats to nesting population” of seafoal and proved central in their preservation (Cowles 710). Even the eggs were desirable to collectors, and Bewick describes the heroics of those fowlers who steal the eggs of “the various kinds of water fowl” in great detail, depicting how they must scale down cliffsides, suspended by a rope, to seize their prize from the nests and judiciously preserve their bounty (Bewick 411). Within the Victorian household, ladies were also engaging in the consumption of birds; even the “harmless” reproduction of avian illustrations, like that which Jane engages in, was reliant on natural history texts that required greater numbers of specimens. Taxidermy and the inclusion of feathers in textile crafts proved other sites where the intersection of natural history and leisure translated birds into material practices. Talia Schaffer remarks that the practice of imitation and the inclusion of natural materials “show the need to dominate nature, processing it into mere decoration” and transforming the Victorian parlor into “a symbolic and practical switchpoint, transforming the natural into the cultural” (Schaffer 31). Indeed, Jane’s portraits identify such a cultural moment, portraying natural landscapes as cultural commentary on domestic ideologies. The intended meaning of such work represents the extent to which natural history—and the imitation of natural history within the home—allowed for another site where the natural might be transformed into the cultural.

<19>Tracing the connection between *Jane Eyre* and *A History of British Birds* reveals how the intersection of natural history, fiction, and women's leisure impacts avian biodiversity through the perpetuation (or reworking) of domestic ideologies. In representing Jane as a variety of songbirds, Brontë, perhaps unwittingly, likens her heroine to species Bewick identifies as easily tamed into domestic pets on account of their idealized traits, and these particular species are perceived as adapting readily to replacement of their natural habitats with man-made structures. The endowment of domesticized birds with idealized traits reflects the categorization of women into discursive identities as stultifying as the human-like behaviors bestowed on birds by Bewick. Most importantly, reading for the birds themselves reveals the way that personified behaviors do not represent their adaptability to domesticity but, rather, their vulnerability to it. The robin tapping on the window is not seeing man's protection but confronting its own reflection. The bird and window exchange gestures to the inception of window-strikes as a major detriment to passerine populations in urban spaces. The nineteenth century—and the inception of glass culture through industrialization—must then be viewed as the inception of one of mankind's largest negative impacts on native avifauna. The representation of diverse avian species in *Jane Eyre* occurs in the midst of leisurely practices that would negatively impact biodiversity, ranging from offering birds human food to domesticating foreign avian species as pets or even imitating natural history through taxidermy and painting. As a pre-Darwinian text, *Jane Eyre* does not overtly acknowledge the potential of extinction, but allowing the birds to speak for themselves reveals the ways that systematic natural history constructed domestic ideologies which decreased biodiversity. The birds of *Jane Eyre* are not "resolute" or "free," but, rather, on the brink of an ecological crisis.

Notes

(1) See also: Wallace, Emily Roberson. "Caged Eagles, Songsters, and Carrion-Seekers: Birds in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2016, pp. 249-60.; Stedman, Jane. "Charlotte Brontë and Bewick's "British Birds." *Brontë Society Transactions*, vol.15, no.1, 1966, pp 36-40.; Anderson, Kathleen, and Heather Lawrence. "'No Net Ensnares Me': Bird Imagery and the Dynamics of Dominance and Submission in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2015, pp. 240-251.

(2) This seminal text of natural history "transported [Brontë] back to her childhood," and it played a crucial role in the Brontë sibling's education, having been introduced to the household "when Charlotte was twelve years old" (Wallace 251).

(3) This drawing is currently part of the Brontë Parsonage Museum and digitally displayed by the British Library. To view the drawing, see Charlotte Brontë. "Copy from Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*." British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/copy-from-thomas-bewicks-history-of-british-birds-by-charlotte-bronte>.

(4) Jane Stedman argues that Bewick's illustrations appear "implicitly or explicitly" through Jane's descriptions of the illustrations within the book, suggesting that more than Jane's drawings draw from Bewick's visuals. For more information on Bewick's influence on *Jane Eyre*

and Brontë, see Jane W. Stedman, "Charlotte Brontë and Bewick's 'British Birds.'" *Brontë Society Transactions*, vol.15, no.1, 1966, pp 36-40.

(5) Susan Taylor suggests that the image represents two facets of Jane: both the fair, domesticated woman (represented by the corpse) and the desirous, hungering woman (represented by the cormorant). "Image and Text in *Jane Eyre's* Avian Vignettes and Bewick's *History of British Birds*." *The Victorian Newsletter*, no. 101, 2002, pp. 5-12.

Works Cited

Alexander, Christine, and Margaret Smith. *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Anderson, Kathleen, and Heather Lawrence. "'No Net Ensnares Me': Bird Imagery and the Dynamics of Dominance and Submission in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2015, pp. 240-251

Bewick, Thomas. *A History of British Birds*, Vol. I and Vol. II. Longman, 1832. *Open Library*, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofbritish00bewi?ref=ol#page/n6/mode/2up>.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Deborah Lutz, 4th edn, Norton, 2016.

Brontë, Charlotte. "Copy from Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*." British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/copy-from-thomas-bewicks-history-of-british-birds-by-charlotte-bronte>.

Cowles, Henry M. "A Victorian Extinction: Alfred Newton and the Evolution of Animal Protection." *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2012, pp. 695-714.

Dobson, Austin. *Thomas Bewick and His Pupils*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1899.

Klem, Daniel, and Peter G. Saenger. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Select Visual Signals to Prevent Bird-Window Collisions." *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*, vol. 125, no. 2, 2013, pp. 406-411.

Holmes, June. "Thomas Bewick (1753-1828): A Biographical Overview." *The Bewick Society*, 2016, <http://www.bewicksociety.org/Life%20and%20Work.html>.

Stedman, Jane. "Charlotte Brontë and Bewick's 'British Birds.'" *Brontë Society Transactions*, vol.15, no.1, 1966, pp 36-40.

Taylor, Susan B. "Image and Text in *Jane Eyre's* Avian Vignettes and Bewick's *History of British Birds*." *The Victorian Newsletter*, no. 101, 2002, pp. 5-12.

Wallace, Emily Roberson. "Caged Eagles, Songsters, and Carrion-Seekers: Birds in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2016, pp. 249-60.