

Several recent writers upon *Jane Eyre* have commented briefly upon the book which Jane is reading in chapter 1, withdrawn into her secret world behind the window drapes in the hostile household of Mrs Reed of Gateshead. The book is Thomas Bewick's *British Birds*. To an account of it Charlotte Brontë devotes a full page, first to its words in a blend of paraphrase and quotation, and then to seven of its vignettes.

Q. D. Leavis, introducing the Penguin edition of *Jane Eyre*, 1966, notes that the 'detailed descriptions of some of Bewick's text and woodcuts' provide the child 'with images of storm, shipwreck and disaster, Arctic desolation and Alpine heights, death and mysterious evil.' (p 14). David Lodge, in a chapter in *Language of Fiction*, 1966, suggests that Charlotte Brontë finds in the four elements and in the weather of their landscape what may be called 'objective correlatives' for 'the interior landscape of Jane's emotions'; he notes that we meet these elemental phenomena first in the opening scene with Bewick.

In addition to these, there are passing comments here and there, but, to my knowledge, there is only one piece devoted solely to the topic, a short article by Jane W. Stedman in the *Brontë Society Transactions*, 1966 (vol xv, no 1, pp 36-40).

While it has always been obvious that much of the imagery in *Jane Eyre* has a visual basis in art, it has not perhaps been appreciated how much of this derives from the words and pictures of Bewick's *Birds*. These establish a scaffolding which is to support Charlotte Brontë's exploration of the psychology of the sub-conscious.

This is not the place for the full investigation which the topic invites, but some necessary preliminaries may be dealt with. Two questions need to be decided: which are the pictures which Jane is looking at, and where are they?: and, to what extent could Charlotte Brontë expect her references to have, for her readers of 1847, any specific visual content? How well known, that is, was *British Birds* when *Jane Eyre* was published?

To take the second question first. Bewick's work was very well known indeed in the mid-nineteenth century. An extract from the *British Quarterly Review* for 1845, which devotes twenty pages to his work on the occasion of a reprint, shows the esteem in which he was then held.

'The name of Thomas Bewick is a "household word"; and his works are to be found in every region where the language of England is spoken, or her literature cultivated. There are few works which have been so universally diffused as those of Bewick, and it would not be