

Victorian England and Her Women

Women in Victorian England were believed to be inferior to men; they “were subjected to their [men’s] authority in many ways” (Fletcher 108) and their legal status was similar to that of children. Their fathers, husbands or other male relatives were their legal representatives and it was men who were in charge of women’s property for almost all the nineteenth century. Women were not allowed to vote and were not legal guardians of their children. A Victorian woman “would be stoical, motherly, submissive and chaste” (Paxman 228); “[I]nnocence and inexperience and a cultivated fragility were the characteristic attributes of the Victorian girl” (Klein 264). The division of sexes was clear; men and women knew that their roles were different and accepted that they were, “even within marriage, obliged [them] to lead separate and unequal lives until they died” (Paxman 212). The man was the breadwinner; the woman was confined to domesticity. As domestic beings, most women were denied education because it was considered unnecessary. Women were not found in professions or skilled trade; if they worked, they worked in jobs where no higher education was required. At home they were expected to be amiable companions and not partners with whom men would discuss business or politics.

The main role of every woman was the role of a mother and a home-maker, which were roles believed to be congenital to women. “It was the wife who made the home, who cared for her children within it, who brought her husband back to it when work was done, who provided the hot dinners and created the atmosphere of comfort and protection” (Calder 27). Women were automatically expected to become ideal wives and mothers and were brought up to be charming angels who were “ideally, both decorative and useful” (Calder 9) and whose main target in life was finding a suitable husband.

“Man for the field and woman for the hearth: / Man for the sword and for the needle she: / Man with the head and woman with the heart” (Tennyson in *The Princess*).

About Charlotte Brontë: Charlotte Brontë, born in 1816, grew up in the small mill town of Haworth on the edge of the rugged moors of West Yorkshire, in northeastern England. The setting was isolated and made lonelier by the fact that Charlotte’s mother had died when Charlotte was five. Charlotte, her four sisters—Maria, Elizabeth, Emily, and Anne—and their brother, Branwell, turned to each other for companionship. Charlotte Brontë’s father was a Cambridge educated clergyman. Because the family was not well off, the Brontë girls were

sent to a boarding school where they could prepare for their future employment as governesses. At the school, discipline was harsh, the food inadequate, and living conditions unhealthy. Students often became ill. Maria and Elizabeth Brontë both contracted consumption (today called tuberculosis) at the school and died at home in 1825. After this tragedy, Mr. Brontë himself educated the children at Haworth.

Throughout their childhood and into adulthood, the close-knit Brontë children entertained themselves by creating fanciful stories. Inspired by a set of twelve wooden soldiers their father brought home, they invented imaginary worlds that were a blend of myth, history, current events, and society-page stories from newspapers and magazines. Gradually Charlotte came to focus on romantic passion and themes of temptation and betrayal in these melodramatic tales. This story-writing provided an essential outlet for Charlotte's creativity, an outlet she would painfully miss once she began her "wretched bondage" as a governess. After unsuccessful attempts at living away from Haworth as students or teachers, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne decided to launch a school for girls in their hometown. To help them prepare for this venture, their aunt paid for them to go to a school in Belgium to study foreign languages. There, Charlotte fell deeply in love with her French teacher, a man with whom she had no hope of a future. Heartsick, she returned home. When the sisters' school failed to attract pupils, all three turned in earnest to their long cherished literary ambitions. Under male pseudonyms they published a joint collection of poems. Soon afterward, each sister completed a first novel. Emily's *Wuthering Heights* was published, as was Anne's novel. But Charlotte's *Professor*, a story loosely based on her experiences in Belgium, was rejected. Charlotte's second novel was an immediate success. *Jane Eyre*, the compelling story of a self-reliant young governess, was published in 1847. Alternately referred to by critics as "a book after our own heart" and an "anti-Christian composition," *Jane Eyre* signified the triumph of Charlotte's desire to bring forth a creation entirely her own.

Brontë's enjoyment of her fame was short-lived. Her brother Branwell, an unsuccessful artist who had become an alcoholic, died in 1848. Then, within a year, both of her sisters died of consumption. Charlotte continued to live at Haworth in order to care for her elderly father. She also continued to write. Finally, a year before her death, she married a family friend. She confided to Ellen Nussey, "What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order."

Introduction:

The publication of *Jane Eyre* on 16th October 1847 was a milestone in the history of the English novel. An instant popular success, it was reviewed in countless magazines and journals, and everywhere praised for its exceptional originality and riveting power.

This is not only a work of great promise; it is one of absolute performance. It is one of the most powerful domestic romances which have been published for years. It has little or nothing of the old conventional stamp upon it; none of the jaded, exhausted attributes of a worn-out vein of imagination... but is full of youthful vigour, of freshness and originality... It is a book to make the pulses gallop and the heart beat, and to fill the eyes with tears. (Anonymous reviewer in the *Atlas*, 23rd October 1847)

Jane Eyre's success owed a lot to its timing:

“Brontë’s first novel made its appearance in the somewhat dismal interval between, on the one hand, Jane Austen and Scott, and, on the other, the most eventful period in the novel’s history,” wrote the critic Miriam Allott. Yet more than 150 years later, it still powerfully affects its readers with all the charge of a new-minted work. “Read by thousands who have no idea of its period, who devour it unaware of difficulties, unconscious of any need for adaptation to unfamiliar manners or conventions, *Jane Eyre* makes its appeal first and last to ‘the unchanging human heart’.” (Kathleen Tillotson)

It is easy to forget, now, how shocking the novel was to its mid-19th century readers. Virtually every early reviewer felt obliged either to condemn or defend its impropriety. The most savage reviews denounced the “coarseness” of language, the “unfeminine” laxity of moral tone, and the “dereliction of decorum” which made its hero cruel, brutal, yet attractively interesting, while permitting its plain, poor, single heroine to live under same roof as the man she loved. What caused most outrage, perhaps, was the demonstrable rebellious anger in the heroine’s “unregenerate and undisciplined spirit”, her being a passionate law unto herself. “Never was there a better hater. Every page burns with moral Jacobinism,” wrote an early critic. As the poet Matthew Arnold was to say of Brontë’s “disagreeable” final novel, *Villette*, “the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage.” Though the view of the novel as “anti-Christian” was extreme, many readers criticised its melodrama, improbability and unnatural artifice. For most, though (then as now), these flaws

are not only entirely explicable in view of the writer's youth but are amply compensated for by Brontë's intellectual seriousness, moral integrity and depth of feeling.

Reality – deep, significant reality – is the great characteristic of the book. It is an autobiography, – not, perhaps, in the naked facts and circumstances, but in the actual suffering and experience... It is soul speaking to soul; it is an utterance from the depths of a struggling, suffering, much-enduring spirit. (George Henry Lewes, December 1847)

Later, the British critic and novelist, Virginia Woolf wrote:

The writer has us by the hand, forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees, never leaves us for a moment or allows us to forget her. At the end we are steeped through and through with the genius, the vehemence, the indignation of Charlotte Brontë.

—Virginia Woolf, British novelist

For all its compelling love interest, it is worth recalling that *Jane Eyre* was regarded even by the Romantic sensibility of late 19th-century poet Algernon Charles Swinburne as a work of “genius” first and foremost because of its realism: The gift of which I would speak is that of a power to make us feel in every nerve, at every step forward... thus and not otherwise... it was and must have been with the human figures set before us in their action and their suffering; that thus and not otherwise they absolutely must and would have felt, thought and spoke

.....*Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* is a romance novel with elements of the Gothic novel and the bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel). Smith, Elder and Company published it in 1847 under Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym, Currer Bell. *Jane Eyre* is a Victorian novel that will enable students to authentically appreciate a woman's quest for love and search for identity. First published in 1847, the book became a bestseller and established a platform for feminist writing in the nineteenth century. The novel would be appropriate for any curriculum thematically based on topics of heroism, dreams, women's studies, or social standing. It would also be an important unit of study for a course in British literature. Though written during the Victorian Age, *Jane Eyre* exemplifies many of the qualities of Romantic literature.

The presence of supernatural elements, emotional connections, individual journeys, and idealistic attitudes make the Romantic elements easy to spot in this piece of Victorian literature. Dreary settings and a brooding male protagonist also establish the foundations on which many Gothic novels were set. Much of Jane Eyre is autobiographical. Mirroring the heroine she created, Charlotte Brontë lost her mother at an early age, spent part of her youth in a boarding school, and worked as a governess. Like her protagonist, Brontë was unmarried and considered plain in appearance. In developing Jane, Brontë created the quintessential underdog, a character to which students will relate with ease.

While Jane Eyre is shorter than the typical Victorian novel, it is a challenging literary work for high school readers as they are transported to the Victorian Age through rich narrative and vocabulary. Readers will relate to the book's universal themes including: suffering through social class prejudice, exhibiting loyalty to those we love, longing for family, appreciating gender issues, and surviving a difficult childhood.

.....A Gothic novel focuses on dark, mysterious, terrifying events. The story unfolds at one or more spooky sites, such as a dimly lit castle, an old mansion on a hilltop, a misty cemetery, a forlorn countryside, or the laboratory of a scientist conducting frightful experiments. In some Gothic novels, characters imagine that they see ghosts and monsters. In others, the ghosts and monsters are real. The weather in a Gothic novel is often dreary or foul: There may be high winds that rattle windowpanes, electrical storms with lightning strikes, and gray skies that brood over landscapes. The Gothic novel derives its name from the Gothic architectural style popular in Europe between the Twelfth and Sixteenth centuries. Gothic structures—such as cathedrals—featured cavernous interiors with deep shadows, stone walls that echoed the footsteps of worshippers, gargoyles looming on exterior ledges, and soaring spires suggestive of a supernatural presence.

.....A bildungsroman is a novel that centers on the period in which a young person grows up. This type of novel was pioneered by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) in his novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*). *Bildungsroman* is a German word meaning novel (*roman*) of educational development (*bildungs*). It is also referred to as an apprenticeship novel.

Setting

.....The action takes place in the rural areas of central England in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Characters

Protagonist: Jane Eyre

Antagonist: Adversity

Jane Eyre: Strong-willed, plain-looking daughter of a poor clergyman. Both of her parents die while she is still an infant. A cruel aunt rears her to age ten as an unwanted and inferior member of the family, then sends her to a charity school, Lowood Orphan Asylum. Jane spends six years there as a student and two years as a teacher before accepting a position, at age eighteen, as the governess of the ward of Edward Rochester at his estate, Thornfield Hall. Jane is intelligent, well educated (thanks in part to her love of books), industrious, loyal, compassionate, and morally upright, with an independent spirit.

Edward Fairfax Rochester: Gruff, sometimes moody employer of Jane Eyre. He falls in love with Jane, who is about half his age, and gains her assent to marry him even though he already has a wife—an insane woman whom he keeps in the attic of Thornfield Hall.

Mrs. Sarah Reed: Cruel aunt who rears Jane Eyre. Her husband made her promise to do so before he died.

John Reed: Late husband of Sarah Reed and brother of Jane's mother. He is entombed in the chancel of Gateshead Church.

Young John Reed: Son of John and Sarah Reed. He constantly bedevils Jane, reminding her that she is a lowly orphan who does not deserve to live in the Reed home. He is a cruel and mischievous boy, Jane says, who "twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory."

Eliza, Georgiana Reed: Daughters of John and Sarah Reed. Like their brother, they make Jane miserable for Jane, who says, "Eliza and Georgiana, evidently acting according to orders, spoke to me as little as possible."

Rowland Rochester: Edward Rochester's brother.

Old Mr. Rochester: Edward Rochester's father.

Mr. Miles: Headmaster at the school young John Reed attends. When Mrs. Reed keeps John out of school for several weeks because of his "delicate health," Mr. Miles says that John's problem is that he receives too many cakes and sweetmeats from home.

Bessie: Nurse in the employ of Mrs. Reed. She treats Jane humanely.

Abbot: Maid in the employ of Mrs. Reed. She sides with Mrs. Reed against Jane.

Robert Leaven: Coachman whom Bessie marries.

Bobby and Jane Leaven: Children of Robert Leaven and Bessie.

Mr. Lloyd: Apothecary who attends Jane at Gateshead Hall after she blacks out.

Mr. Carter: Surgeon who treats Rochester after the latter falls from a horse and suffers a sprain. He also

treats the wounds Richard Mason suffered when his insane sister attacked him.

Mr. Brocklehurst: Minister and headmaster at Lowood Orphan Asylum who embezzles money from the school.

Mrs. Brocklehurst: Wife of Mr. Brocklehurst.

Misses Brocklehurst: Sixteen- and seventeen-year-old daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Brocklehurst.

Helen Burns, Mary Wilson: Good friends of Jane at Lowood.

Julia Severn: Student scolded by Brocklehurst for daring to wear her hair in curls. (She has naturally curly hair.)

Maria Temple: Kindly superintendent and teacher at Lowood Orphan Asylum. She becomes a good friend of Jane.

Miss Scatcherd: History and grammar teacher at Lowood. She treats the students cruelly. She is especially hard on Helen Burns, whom she whips.

Miss Smith: Lowood teacher who helps students make their clothes.

Madame Pierrot: Lowood's French teacher from Lisle, France.

Miss Miller: An under-teacher at Lowood who greets Jane after she arrives there from Gateshead Hall.

Miss Gryce: Welsh teacher who shares a room with Jane after the latter becomes a teacher at Lowood.

Mr. Bates: Surgeon who treats Helen Burns when she becomes ill.

Nurse: Woman who assists Bates and informs Jane that Helen Burns is about to die.

Mrs. Alice Fairfax: Kindly elderly woman who manages Thornfield Hall and keeps house there. Rochester's mother was a second cousin of Mrs. Fairfax's late husband.

Adèle Varens: French girl of about ten who has been at Thornfield Hall for six months before Jane arrives to become her governess. She is the ward of Rochester. Although the story focuses little attention on her character development, she is a pivotal presence in the novel in that her education and care are the reasons that Jane Eyre goes to Thornfield Hall.

Sophie: Adèle's French nurse.

Céline Varens: Adèle's mother and a French opera dancer. Rochester had an affair with her after his wife went insane.

Madame Frederic: Woman with whom Adèle Varens lives for a short time before being adopted by Rochester and taken to Thornfield Hall.

Mr. Wood: Clergyman who is to marry Jane and Rochester.

Bertha Antoinetta Mason: Rochester's Jamaican Creole wife, who is confined to the attic at Thornfield Hall

after going insane.

Richard Mason: Brother of Bertha Mason. He reveals that Rochester is already married.

Jonas Mason: Jamaican merchant and father of Bertha and Richard Mason.

Grace Poole: Servant who watches over Bertha Mason.

Briggs: Richard Mason's lawyer.

John: Servant at Thornfield Hall and later at Ferndean Manor.

Mary: John's wife, who is Rochester's cook.

Leah: Housemaid at Thornfield Hall.

Blanche Ingram: Beautiful young woman who is a guest at Thornfield Hall. Jane mistakenly believes Rochester plans to marry her.

Mary Ingram: Sister of Blanche and a guest at Thornfield Hall.

Dowager Lady Ingram: Mother of Blanche and Mary. She is a guest at Thornfield Hall.

Mr. Eshton: Magistrate, friend of Rochester, and a guest at Thornfield Hall.

Mrs. Eshton: Wife of Mr. Eshton and a guest at Thornfield Hall.

Amy and Louisa Eshton: Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Eshton and guests at Thornfield Hall..

Sir George Lynn: Millcote politician and a guest at Thornfield Hall.

Lady Lynn: Wife of Sir George and a guest at Thornfield Hall.

Henry and Frederick Lynn: Children of Sir George and guests at Thornfield Hall.

Colonel and Mrs. Dent: Guests at Thornfield Hall.

Sam: Footman who brings coal for the guests at Thornfield Hall and informs them of the presence of a fortunetelling gipsy (Rochester in disguise).

Giacinta: Italian woman with whom Rochester had an affair while traveling in Europe.

Clara: German woman with whom Rochester had an affair while traveling in Europe.

Farmer: Man who gives Jane bread on her journey through the moors.

Shopwoman: Woman who sells bread cakes in a village Jane comes upon during her journey through the moors. She answers questions Jane asks about employment.

Woman at a Village House: Woman who answers questions Jane asks about employment in a village. Jane comes upon during her journey through the moors.

Woman at a Parsonage: Woman who answers Jane's questions at a parsonage at which Jane seeks a clergyman to help her find employment.

Girl at Cottage: Girl who gives Jane porridge after the latter spends the night in woods.

Mother of Girl: Mother of the girl at the cottage.

St. John (pronounced *SIN jin*) Rivers: Minister who, with his sisters, takes Jane in after she wanders on the moors.

Diana and Mary Rivers: Sisters of St. John who become good friends of Jane.

Hannah: Servant in the Rivers household.

Alice Wood: Jane's assistant at the school founded by St. John Rivers.

John Eyre: Uncle of Jane, St. John Rivers, and his two sisters. He bequeaths twenty thousand pounds to Jane, which she shares with the Rivers family.

Rosamond Oliver: Young woman in love with St. John Rivers.

Mr. Oliver: Father of Rosamond and wealthy owner of a needle factory.

Mr. Granby: Well-connected man whom Rosamond Oliver marries.

Sir Frederic Granby: Father of Mr. Granby.

Host of Rochester Arms: Keeper of the inn at which Jane stays when she returns to Thornfield Hall and finds it in ruins after the fire. He informs her of what happened to Rochester.

Damer de Rochester: Ancestor entombed in the church where Jane and Rochester go to be married before Richard Mason reveals that Rochester is already married. Damer de Rochester was killed in the Battle of Marston Moor (July 2, 1644) during the English Civil War.

Elizabeth: Wife of Damer de Rochester.

Coachmen

Animals: Pilot, Rochester's dog; Mesrour, Rochester's black horse; Carlo, Rosamond Oliver's dog.

Plot Summary

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.....Jane Eyre's parents died before she was old enough to form memories of them. Her father had been an impoverished clergyman whom her mother married over the objections of family members who said the clergyman was beneath her. After the marriage, Jane's mother was disinherited. She was not to receive a single shilling.

.....One year into the marriage, Jane's father caught typhus while ministering to the poor, and her mother caught the disease from him. Both died within months. Jane's uncle, John Reed—the brother of her mother—adopted Jane, but he died not long after he brought the infant to his home, Gateshead Hall.

.....Jane has recorded the events of her life, and here is her story, beginning when she is ten years old and under the supervision of Mr. Reed's widow, Sarah.

.....Mrs. Reed and her children—John, Eliza, and Georgiana—treat Jane cruelly. In fact, John, a stout

fourteen-year-old, terrorizes Jane, who recalls that "he bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh in my bones shrank when he came near."

.....One day, in a room adjoining the drawing room, Jane takes *Bewick's History of British Birds* from a bookcase and begins reading it on a window seat. Moments later, John appears, commands her to stand before him, and tells her that "you have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense."

.....Then he brains her with the book. Jane falls and cuts her head on the door. A spunky child, she accuses him of acting like the Roman emperors, whom she had read about in Goldsmith's *History of Rome*. He grabs her hair and further bullies her. After Eliza and Georgiana summon Mrs. Reed, she assumes Jane caused the ruckus and orders the nurse, Bessie, and a maid, Abbot, to lock Jane in the "red room," the scene of Mr. Reed's death and wake nine years before. Since that time, "a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion."

.....While Jane broods, day passes into night. Wind howls and rain beats at a window. If Mr. Reed were alive, she thinks, he would treat her kindly. Before he died, he made Mrs. Reed promise to rear Jane as her own child. In the darkness, Jane sees a light on the wall. Frightened that it is an otherworldly presence, she runs to the door and screams. When Bessie and Abbot come, Jane tells them she saw a light, a sign perhaps that a ghost was about to appear. Abbot accuses her of lying. Mrs. Reed arrives and pushes Jane back into the room and locks the door. Bessie, who has always treated Jane humanely, is powerless to rescue her in the face of Mrs. Reed's tyranny.

.....Sometime later, Jane awakens in her own bed with Bessie and Mr. Lloyd, an apothecary, tending her. She has no memory of how she got there. But when overhearing Bessie and Mrs. Reed talking in a nearby room, she learns that she had suffered a "fit" and spoken of something dressed in white that had passed her, followed by "a great black dog." She had also spoken of "a light in the churchyard" over a grave.

.....The apothecary returns the following day to check on her condition. When he questions her about what made her ill, she tells him about the cruel treatment she receives at Gateshead Hall. Mr. Lloyd, a kindly man, asks her whether she would like to go away to school. She says she would indeed, and Mr. Lloyd speaks with Mrs. Reed, who (eager to get rid of Jane) arranges an interview at her home with the headmaster-treasurer of Lowood Orphan Asylum, Mr. Brocklehurst, who is also a clergyman. His mother, Naomi Brocklehurst, founded the institution, located fifty miles away, near Lowton.

.....In presenting Jane for enrollment at Lowood, Mrs. Reed advises Brocklehurst to "keep a strict eye on

her, and, above all, to guard against her worst fault, deceit." In response, Brocklehurst tells Jane that "all liars shall have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone." Mrs. Reed also tells Brocklehurst that she wishes Jane to spend all her vacations at Lowood. After Brocklehurst leaves, Jane tells Mrs. Reed: "I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed [Mrs. Reed's late husband]; and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I."

.....Lowood is bleak building with mullioned windows and sparse furnishings. On her first morning there, Jane and the other students are served burnt porridge. The girls sample it before realizing how horrible it tastes, then eat no more. In geography class, the superintendent, Miss Maria Temple, surprises the girls when she tells them that she has ordered bread and cheese for them.

.....Such generosity is uncommon at Lowood, Jane learns in the ensuing weeks and months. To be sure, the benefactors of the school provide adequate funds for the children, but Brocklehurst scrimps on food and clothing for the children and pockets the savings.

.....Of course, Lowood is an improvement over Gateshead Hall, but there is still cruelty with which to reckon. For example, when Brocklehurst visits Jane's classroom one day, he singles her out as a liar and makes her stand on a stool in front of the class to expose her to scorn. He also ridicules a student named Julia Severn for daring to wear her hair in curls. (Her hair is naturally curly.) On another occasion, a teacher of history and grammar, Miss Scatcherd, whips Jane's best friend, Helen Burns. She also sentences Helen "to a dinner of bread and water . . . because she had blotted an exercise in copying it out." When Jane advises Helen to resist Miss Scatcherd's treatment, Helen tells her that "it is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil." Sometime later, Helen dies of consumption.

.....However, Jane endures during her six years as a Lowood student, thanks in part to the kindnesses of Miss Temple, who clears Jane of the charge of lying after writing to Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary in whom Jane confided at Gateshead Hall. To Jane, Miss Temple is "a mother, governess . . . and companion." Miss Temple eventually marries and leaves Lowood. Meanwhile, benefactors make improvements to Lowood and reduce the authority of Brocklehurst.

.....Jane learns that her old nurse at Gateshead, Bessie, has married a coachman, Robert Leaven, and bears two children, Bobby and a girl she has named Jane. She also learns that a Mr. Eyre—the brother of Jane's father—had visited Gateshead looking for Jane. Told she was at a school fifty miles away, he left on business in a foreign land, Madeira.

.....Jane stays on two more years as a teacher at Lowood, then—yearning for a new life—advertises for a teaching job in a private home. She receives and accepts an offer from Alice Fairfax, a housekeeper, on behalf of her employer, Edward Rochester, the master of Thornfield Hall, about six miles from the town of Millcote. Upon her arrival there in autumn, Jane is pleased to discover that Miss Fairfax, an elderly woman, is kindly and genial. She informs Jane that she is to serve as the governess for Adèle Varens, a French girl of about ten who has been at Thornfield Hall for six months as the ward of Mr. Rochester. With Adèle is a nurse, Sophie. Fortunately, Jane had learned French at Lowood from another teacher, Madame Pierrot, and is able to speak with Adèle and Sophie in French, although the girl is learning English.

.....After her mother died, Adèle had lived a short time with a “Madame Frederic” before Rochester invited her to live at Thornfield. For school lessons, Jane and Adèle use the library—equipped with books, a piano, a painting easel, and two globes.

.....Mrs. Fairfax takes Jane on a tour of the mansion that includes a trip to the roof to view the lands that the Rochester family has owned for generations. As they descend from the attic, Jane hears a laugh and asks whether Mrs. Fairfax heard it. The latter tells Jane that it probably came from Grace Poole, a servant who sometimes sews in a room on the third floor.

.....Three months pass before Jane meets Rochester. While she is taking a walk, he falls from a horse as he rides by and suffers a sprain. At his side is his dog, Pilot. Unaware of who he is, Jane stops to help him to his horse. Jane recalls that “he had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow He was past youth, but had not reached middle-age; perhaps he might be thirty-five.”

.....When a surgeon, Mr. Carter, attends him at Thornfield Hall, Jane discovers his identity. The two of them get along well, although he can be gruff and moody.

.....One afternoon, while Adèle plays on the grounds and Rochester walks with Jane, he tells her that Adèle’s mother, Céline Varens, was a French opera dancer whom he established in a hotel, showered with gifts, and carried on a grand passion. But one day, he observed her with a young man in an officer’s uniform—a roué he had run across before and whom he despised—and overheard Céline ridiculing Rochester’s “deformities.” He then broke off with her and, the next morning, wounded the young man in a duel. Later, Céline abandoned Adèle and absconded to Italy with a singer or a musician. Rochester then adopted Adèle even though he was almost certain that she was not his child.

.....That evening, after going to bed, Jane hears diabolical laughter outside her room. When she investigates, she sees smoke coming from Rochester’s room and rushes inside. Flames are consuming the curtains around his bed while he appears to be in deep sleep. A candlestick lies on the floor. When Jane attempts to rouse him but fails, she concludes that the smoke had put him in a stupor. Grabbing a filled ewer from his wash basin,

she throws the water on the fire and on Rochester, then retrieves a pitcher of water from her own room and manages to extinguish the fire and awaken Rochester. She tells him about the laugh she heard, and they both agree it came from Grace Poole. As Jane is about to leave the room, he stops her and tells her that she saved his life—"snatched me from a horrible and excruciating death." He takes her hand and tells her he is deeply indebted to her. However, he says, she must tell no one about the incident and is not to worry about Grace Poole.

.....In time, he grows quite fond of his savior—and she of him.

.....After going away, Rochester returns about three weeks later with a group of friends, including a beautiful woman named Blanche Ingram. They are all to be lodged and entertained at Thornfield Hall. The house is full, the maids and cooks are busy, and there is much cheer and revelry over the next several days as the guests occupy themselves with various entertainments. Jane assumes Rochester plans to marry Miss Ingram "for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure."

.....One day, a new guest—Richard Mason, from Spanish Town, Jamaica—arrives while Rochester is away from Thornfield Hall. He says he knows Rochester and then joins the other guests as they socialize.

.....After Rochester returns, he appears in the guise of an old gipsy, wearing a red cloak and a black hat, and tells fortunes in a voice that fools listeners. Later, when he is in the library alone with Jane, he begins speaking in his normal voice, which Jane recognizes. After he removes his disguise, Jane mentions the presence of the new guest, Mason. Rochester goes pale and asks Jane for wine. After she fetches him a glass of it, Rochester recovers himself and tells Jane to go back out with the guests and whisper to Mason "that Mr. Rochester has come and wishes to see him." Jane does so, escorts Mason to the library, then leaves.

.....After everyone retires that evening, "a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound" is heard throughout the mansion. The cry rouses all the guests, who come forth terrified or confused. Rochester calms them, saying, "A servant has had a nightmare; that is all. She's an excitable, nervous person: she construed her dream into an apparition, or something of that sort, no doubt; and has taken a fit with fright."

.....Then he tells Jane to fetch a sponge and salts. After she obtains them, he takes her to a room on the third floor. There, Mason sits in a chair suffering from wounds to an arm and shoulder. Jane tends him while Rochester goes out for a doctor. Hours later, around dawn, he returns with Mr. Carter, the same surgeon who treated Rochester for his sprain. When Carter tends Mason's wounds, their conversation indicates that a woman with a knife attacked Mason. When Rochester wrested the weapon from her, she bit Mason.

....."She sucked the blood," Mason says. "She said she'd drain my heart."

.....Jane continues to assist while Mason undergoes treatment. After the surgeon pronounces him well

enough to travel, a coach comes for him at about 5:30 a.m. Rochester sees him off. Before leaving, Mason tells Rochester, "Let her be taken care of; let her be treated as tenderly as may be."

....."Yet would to God there was an end of all this!" Rochester says.

.....Believing Grace Poole attacked Mason, Jane asks Rochester whether she will be dismissed. Rochester says no and tells her not to worry about the servant. Nor should she concern herself about Mason, he says. However, Rochester acknowledges that he is vulnerable to someone, but he cannot disclose the details.

.....Meanwhile, Jane's aunt, Mrs. Reed, sends her coachman, Robert Leaven (the husband of Bessie) for Jane. He tells her Mrs. Reed has suffered a stroke and is near death after learning that her son, John—Jane's bully at Gateshead Hall—apparently killed himself at his residence in London after consorting with bad companions, running himself into debt, and running afoul of the law. When Jane arrives, she talks briefly with Bessie and Mrs. Reed's daughters, Eliza and Georgiana, before seeing Mrs. Reed, whose mind is in a confused state. She talks to Jane as if Jane were another person, noting that "I had a dislike to her mother always; for she was my husband's only

sister, and a great favourite with him: he opposed the family's disowning her when she made her low marriage; and when news came of her death, he wept like a simpleton."

.....Mrs. Reed falls into a stupor and more than ten days pass before Jane can speak to her again. In the interim, Jane paints and talks with the two sisters, with whom she gets along well enough. When Jane finally talks with Mrs. Reed, who continues to decline, the woman gives her a letter from John Eyre, In it, Eyre, unmarried and childless, asks for Jane's address so that he may write to her and invite her to live in Madeira with him as his adopted child and heir. When Jane asks why Mrs. Reed did not inform her previously about the letter, she says that "I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity."

.....Mrs. Reed dies and is buried, Georgiana moves to London, and Eliza leaves for France to study Roman Catholicism and become a nun. Jane, after spending more than a month at Gateshead, returns to Thornfield Hall.

.....There, she receives a wonderful surprise: Rochester asks her to marry him. She accepts the proposal, of course. However, when they are at the altar about to be united, a London solicitor, Briggs, announces that Rochester is already married. Briggs reads the details about the marriage from a document, signed by Richard Mason. It says that Rochester had married Bertha Antoinetta Mason, daughter of Jonas Mason, in Spanish Town, Jamaica, fifteen years before the present date. Richard Mason, her brother, then steps forward to disclose that Rochester's wife is living at Thornfield Hall. (It was she who attacked him and tore open his shoulder with her teeth.) Rochester acknowledges the marriage but says that his wife is insane and must be

confined to the attic of Thornfield Hall under the care of Grace Poole. He then escorts his listeners to the attic to show them his wife. In her narrative, Jane describes the woman: "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face."

.....Before leaving, Mason's solicitor, Briggs, tells Jane that Richard Mason had planned to return to Jamaica but stopped over in Madeira to recover from the wounds his sister inflicted. In Madeira, Briggs says, Mason met John Eyre, who spoke of a letter he had received from Jane in which she disclosed plans to marry Rochester. Mason, of course, informed Eyre that Rochester was already married. Because John Eyre had fallen ill, he was unable to travel to England to alert Jane of Rochester's previous marriage. But Mason, sufficiently recovered from his injuries, was able to act on John Eyre's behalf and, after arriving, contacted Briggs on Eyre's recommendation. Together, they went to the church to stop the wedding.

.....After Mason and Briggs leave Thornfield Hall, Rochester has a long talk with Jane. He begs her forgiveness, and she gives it. Then he explains in detail the circumstances surrounding his marriage.

.....His father, a greedy man, learned that an old acquaintance of his, a West Indies planter and merchant named Jonas Mason, planned to give his daughter, Bertha, an extraordinary gift: thirty thousand pounds. Rochester's father then sent his son to Jamaica to court her, telling him that she was a rare beauty but withholding information about her expected fortune. She was, in fact, beautiful—tall, dark, and statuesque, the daughter of Jonas's Creole wife.

....."Her family wished to secure me because I was of good race," Rochester says. "So did she." Rochester thought he loved her. He never met her mother, for he was given the impression that she was dead. However, she was alive—in an insane asylum. Rochester's father and brother, Rowland, were aware of the history of insanity in the Mason family but kept it a secret. It was the thirty thousand pounds that interested them. In short, Rochester married her. After four years, she began to go mad. Meanwhile, Rochester's father and brother had died, and he inherited their money and became rich. Doctors declared his wife insane.

.....In time, he wanted to escape from her terrifying presence, so he returned to Europe with Bertha, hired Grace Poole to care for her at Thornfield Hall, and went off to foreign lands and wandered for ten years—sojourning in St. Petersburg, Paris, Rome, Naples, and Florence. He kept company with many ladies: English, French, Italian, German. After his affair with Celene Varens, he had two more—with an Italian named Giacinta and a German named Clara. However, no woman has ever meant so much to him, he says, as Jane.

.....Although Jane sympathizes with him, she refuses to remain at Thornfield Hall. She cannot endure being

around a man she loves but cannot marry.

.....It is now summer. Early one morning, she leaves on the first coach out of the area. However, it drops her two days later at a place called Whitcross because she lacks enough fare to continue. After she gets out and the coachman drives off, she discovers that she left a parcel containing belongings on the coach. At that moment, she realizes she is destitute and has no place to go.

.....After wandering through the countryside, she comes upon a village, but no one offers to help her. At dark, desperately hungry, she asks a farmer for food and he gives her a thick slice of bread. Eventually, she knocks at the door of a house late at night, but the servant, Hannah, refuses to admit her. When she is on the brink of collapsing, a man arrives at the house and takes her in. He is a minister, named St. John Rivers. In the house, besides Hannah, are two sisters of Rivers, Diana and Mary. It is the family home, although St. John Rivers lives at Morton, nearby, where he maintains a parish. Jane identifies herself by a false surname—Elliott.

.....After several days in bed, Jane regains her strength and the minister promises to help her find suitable employment. In the meantime, she remains with the family, enjoying the company of Diana and Mary. In turn, they much cherish her company, for all three young ladies have many of the same interests.

.....After a month, the two sisters begin preparing to leave for positions they hold as governesses in southern England, and St. John offers Jane a position teaching impoverished girls at a school he is founding. He has already established such a school for boys. Her salary would be thirty pounds a year. A cottage attached to the school would be her home. Jane readily accepts the post.

.....Meanwhile, St. John receives visits from an attractive young woman, Rosamond Oliver, the daughter of the wealthy operator of a needle factory. It becomes obvious to Jane that Rosamond loves the minister, and he acknowledges his attraction for her. However, he does not return her attentions, believing that if he married her the marriage would not last. Besides, he says, he plans one day to become a missionary in the Far East. To be the wife of such a man would not suit her.

.....One day, St. John receives a letter notifying him and his sisters that their uncle has died. He bequeathed a fortune of twenty thousand pounds to another relation but only thirty guineas to the Rivers family.

Sometime later, Rivers learns through a lawyer that his late uncle was also the uncle of a young lady named Jane Eyre. Rivers' observation of "Jane Elliott" since meeting her, as well as her background and other information, suggests to him that she is Miss Eyre and the heiress to John Eyre's fortune. Jane admits her identity. She is the cousin of St. John, Diana, and Mary. What is more, she declares that she will share her inheritance with St. John and his sisters. St. John then asks her to become his wife and work at his side as a missionary in India. But, much as she admires St. John, she cannot marry him, for she does not love him.

.....It is Rochester that she loves and, upon thinking of him again, she returns to Thornfield Hall to find out what has happened to him since they departed. Upon her arrival there, she learns that there has been a fire that reduced the mansion to ashes. During the fire, Rochester attempted to save his wife when she was on the roof screaming for help. But it was no use. Bertha Mason Rochester ended up dead on the pavement. Rochester lost an eye and a hand in the rescue effort, and an injury to his other eye eventually drew a veil of darkness over it. He then took up residence at Ferndean Manor (about thirty miles away) with two servants, sent Adèle to a school, and gave Mrs. Fairfax a generous annuity before she left to live with friends. Jane reunites with him at Ferndean Manor and they eventually marry. Within two years, the veil of darkness lifts from the injured eye, and he can see the world again—and Jane and the son she bore.

Narration

.....Jane Eyre tells her story in first-person point of view as she looks back on her life after her marriage to Edward Rochester. She begins the narrative when she is a ten-year-old orphan being reared by a cruel aunt.

Plot Structure

Charlotte Brontë structures the thirty-eight chapter novel according to stages in Jane Eyre's life. These stages center on Jane as a

1. Maltreated child in the home of Mrs. Sarah Reed.
2. Child and adolescent student at Lowood Orphan Asylum.
3. Teenage governess and teacher at Thornfield Hall, where she falls in love with her employer, Edward Rochester.
4. Wanderer through the moors after leaving Thornfield Hall. Tired, lacking food, she becomes deathly ill.
5. Sojourner at the home of St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers, where Jane recovers.
6. Fulfilled young woman at Ferndean Manor after reuniting with and marrying Rochester.

Climax

.....The climax of a novel or another literary work can be defined as (1) a major turning point in the story or as (2) the final and most exciting event in a series of events. The climax of *Jane Eyre* occurs, according to the first definition, when Richard Mason and his solicitor reveal at the wedding ceremony that Edward Rochester is already married. According to the second definition, the climax occurs when Rochester, temporarily blinded by the fire, realizes that Jane Eyre has returned to him. Here is the dialogue:

....."Great God!—what delusion has come over me? What sweet madness has seized me?"

....."No delusion—no madness: your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy."

....."And where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh! I cannot see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever—whoever you are—be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!"

.....He groped; I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.

....."Her very fingers!" he cried; "her small, slight fingers! If so there must be more of her."

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Main Theme: Struggling Against Adversity

.....Throughout the novel, Jane Eyre struggles against forces that use her cruelly. After fate robs her of her mother and father, it places her in the home of an abusive aunt whose children bully Jane and remind her that she ranks as a lowly orphan without entitlement to the privileges they enjoy. At Lowood school, she struggles against ridicule, cold, loneliness, and the maltreatment of fellow students by school authorities. She recalls in Chapter 7 that

My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age; and not the golden age either; it comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks. The fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than the physical hardships of my lot. . . . Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold: we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes and melted there: our ungloved hands became numbed and covered with chilblains. . . . Then the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid. From this deficiency of nourishment resulted an abuse, which pressed hardly on the younger pupils: whenever the famished great girls had an opportunity, they would coax or menace the little ones out of their portion. Many a time I have shared between two claimants the precious morsel of brown bread distributed at tea-time; and after relinquishing to a third half the contents of my mug of coffee, I have swallowed the remainder with an accompaniment of secret tears, forced from me by the exigency of hunger.

.....At Thornfield Hall, Jane struggles to fathom eerie and mysterious happenings and to win the love of the man at the center of them, Edward Rochester. As to the latter struggle, Jane herself sometimes becomes the enemy. In a kind of soliloquy in Chapter 26, she berates herself for daring to think that Rochester would marry her:

You," I said, "a favourite with Mr. Rochester? You, gifted with the power of pleasing him? You, of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me. And you have derived pleasure from occasional

tokens of preference—equivocal tokens shown by a gentleman of family and a man of the world to a dependent and a novice. How dared you? Poor stupid dupe!—Could not even self-interest make you wiser? You repeated to yourself this morning the brief scene of last night?—Cover your face and be ashamed! He said something in praise of your eyes, did he? Blind puppy! Open their bleared lids and look on your own accursed senselessness!

.....But after Rochester does ask her to marry him, a perverse turn of events prevents the marriage, desolating Jane. After leaving Thornfield Hall, she struggles for her very survival while wandering aimlessly in the countryside, then struggles to regain her health in the home of a kindly family that takes her in. After she marries Rochester, her struggle continues when she helps him cope with the blindness inflicted upon him by the fire at Thornfield Hall. Fortunately, it is a happy struggle: "Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done." When sight returns to one of his eyes, Jane embarks upon a new experience in her life, normalcy.

Other Themes

Love

Jane Eyre focuses on several kinds of love: romantic (Jane and Rochester's love for each other), sisterly (Jane's love for Helen Burns and other students at Lowood, for Maria Temple, and for the Rivers family), compassionate (the love of Jane, Maria Temple, and others for the downtrodden), and familial (the love of Diane, Mary, and St. John Rivers for one another).

Lack of Love and False Love

Lack of love causes Jane's miserable childhood at Gateshead Hall, as well as the ridicule and deprivation she and other children suffer at Lowood Orphan Asylum. False love is in part responsible for Edward Rochester's disastrous marriage to Bertha Mason. What he thought was love for her was instead infatuation. St. John Rivers loves Rosamond Oliver but instead proposes to Jane Eyre, whom he does not truly love, because he believes she would make a good partner for him in the missionary field.

Deception

Jane Eyre's tormentors at Gateshead Hall label her a liar when she is in fact truthful. After Mrs. Reed tells Mr. Brocklehurst to monitor Jane for deceit, he forces her to stand on a stool in front of her classmates as punishment for lying ways. The kindly superintendent of the school, Maria Temple, later exonerates Jane; it was Mrs. Reed and others who were deceitful. Mr. Brocklehurst deceives the benefactors of the school about the use of their money—he keeps a portion of it for himself. The family of Rochester's first wife, as well as his

own father and brother, deceive him about her background—in particular, her family's history of insanity—before he marries her. Rochester himself deceives Jane about the strange occurrences at Thornfield Hall—in particular, the unearthly laughter she hears and the role of Grace Poole. In addition, he allows Jane to believe that he is single and eligible for marriage when in fact he is already married. Jane deceives the Rivers family about her identity, claiming her surname is "Elliott."

Women's Rights

Jane Eyre speaks up for herself not only as a human being deserving just treatment but also as a woman deserving the same. In this regard, an important moment in the novel occurs in Chapter 12 when Jane observes that

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

In asserting herself, however, Jane never attempts to exceed the boundaries of moral propriety. For example, after it becomes known that Edward Rochester's first wife is alive, she refuses to accept his invitation to live with him in an adulterous arrangement.

Selfishness

Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster at Lowood Orphan Asylum, pockets part of the money provided by benefactors of the school for proper food and clothing for the students. Rochester's father and brother promote his marriage to Bertha Mason because of her family's offered dowry of thirty thousand pounds.

Self-Reliance

Jane ably fends for herself against the cruelty and injustice inflicted upon her. As an avid reader, she also educates herself. Moreover, upon graduating from Lowood Orphan Asylum, she takes control of her destiny, choosing to teach at Lowood and then to strike out on her own as a teacher and governess. When Rochester asks her to live with him after acknowledging that he is married to an insane woman, Jane's sense of dignity and propriety makes her refuse to do so even though she loves him. When St. John Rivers proposes to her, she refuses to marry him. She then returns to Rochester after his first wife dies and freely marries him, well knowing that a sightless man will test her mettle.

Paranormal Phenomena

From time to time in the novel, Jane Eyre sees or hears what she thinks could be manifestations from the beyond or encounters situations that suggest the presence of a ghost. For example, when Mrs. Reed confines her to the red room at Gateshead Hall (Chapter 2), Jane begins to remember "what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr. Reed's spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode—whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed—and rise before me in this chamber." After she sees a strange light she thinks that the "swift darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort." Years later at Thornfield Hall, Jane asks Mrs. Fairfax whether servants sleep in certain rooms on the third floor (Chapter 11). Mrs. Fairfax tells her, "No; they occupy a range of smaller apartments to the back; no one ever sleeps here: one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt." Jane also hears unearthly laughter at Thornfield Hall.

Foreshadowing

.....The fire in Edward Rochester's room (Chapter 15) foreshadows the fire that burns down Thornfield Hall and kills Rochester's insane wife, Bertha. After extinguishing the fire in Rochester's chamber, Jane tells her master that she saw a candle on the floor upon entering the room and concludes that Grace Poole set the fire. However, when Jane sees Grace Poole the next day (Chapter 16), the latter betrays no sign of guilt as she talks with Jane. Also, Rochester keeps Grace on rather than firing her. Thus, the reader has reason to suspect that another presence in the house was the cause of the fire. Whatever the case, the fire alerts the reader that danger lurks in the house. This danger could manifest itself again—and does. After Thornfield Hall burns to the ground, the host at the Rochester Arms tells her that Rochester's insane wife, Bertha, set the fire:

She had a woman to take care of her called Mrs. Poole—an able woman in her line, and very trustworthy, but for one fault—a fault common to a deal of them nurses and matrons—she kept a private bottle of gin by her, and now and then took a drop over-much. It is excusable, for she had a hard life of it: but still it was dangerous; for when Mrs. Poole was fast asleep after the gin and water, the mad lady, who was as cunning as a witch, would take the keys out of her pocket, let herself out of her chamber, and go roaming about the house, doing any wild mischief that came into her head. They say she had nearly burnt her husband in his

bed once: but I don't know about that. However, on this night, she set fire first to the hangings of the room next her own, and then she got down to a lower storey, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's . . . and she kindled the bed there. . . .

Brontë's Descriptions

.....Brontë writes descriptions with syntactical grace and striking imagery, as in the following passage:

A splendid Midsummer shone over England: skies so pure, suns so radiant as were then seen in long succession, seldom favour even singly, our wave-girt land. It was as if a band of Italian days had come from the South, like a flock of glorious passenger birds, and lighted to rest them on the cliffs of Albion. The hay was all got in; the fields round Thornfield were green and shorn; the roads white and baked; the trees were in their dark prime; hedge and wood, full-leaved and deeply tinted, contrasted well with the sunny hue of the cleared meadows between.

.....The first sentence of this passage rings with alliteration: *splendid,*

Midsummer, skies, so, suns, so, seen succession, seldom, singly. The second sentence presents a simile in which Italian days become birds. The first clause of the third sentence departs from the airy lyricism of the first two sentences: "The hay was all got in—a welcome relief." The passage finishes with a description of hues and shades and other characteristics of the scene Jane Eyre sees.

.....Here is another example of a descriptive passage, in which Jane tells of the Rivers sisters and their home:

I liked to read what they liked to read: what they enjoyed, delighted me; what they approved, I revered. They loved their sequestered home. I, too, in the grey, small, antique structure, with its low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls, its avenue of aged firs—all grown aslant under the stress of mountain winds; its garden, dark with yew and holly—and where no flowers but of the hardiest species would bloom—found a charm both potent and permanent. They clung to the purple moors behind and around their dwelling—to the hollow vale into which the pebbly bridle-path leading from their gate descended, and which wound between fern-banks first, and then amongst a few of the wildest little pasture-fields that ever bordered a wilderness of heath, or gave sustenance to a flock of grey moorland sheep, with their little mossy-faced lambs:—they clung to this scene, I say, with a perfect enthusiasm of attachment.

.....To maintain intimacy with the reader, the narrator sometimes addresses him or her directly, as in this sentence: "Why have I alluded to this man? I have alluded to him, Reader, because I think I see in him an intellect profounder and more unique than his

contemporaries have yet recognised. She also sometimes addresses herself, a technique that enables her to

reveal an objective, unbiased voice within her that lends credibility to her self-evaluations: "Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.' "

.....To help maintain suspense or provide transition, the narrator frequently introduces unexplained occurrences, such as the strange light on the wall in Gateshead Hall, the unearthly laughter at Thornfield Hall, and the "voices" that guide her.

Allusions

Charlotte Brontë includes many [allusions](#) in her narration. Following are examples:

Chapter 8: "We feasted that evening as on **nectar** and **ambrosia**; and not the least delight of the entertainment was the smile of gratification with which our hostess regarded us, as we satisfied our famished appetites on the delicate fare she liberally supplied." In Greek mythology, nectar was the drink of the gods, and ambrosia their food. Both conferred immortality on the consumer. *Nectar* and *ambrosia* became synonyms for any delicious drink (nectar) and any delicious food (ambrosia).

Chapter 8: "That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the **Barmecide** supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread

and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings." A *Barmecide* is an imaginary or pretended banquet. Barmecide was the name of a prince in *The Arabian Nights* who served a beggar a "feast" consisting of empty dishes.

Chapter 16: "Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way a **plain, unvarnished tale**, showing how I had rejected the real, and rabidly devoured the ideal . . ." *Plain, unvarnished tale* recalls a line written by Shakespeare in *Othello*: "I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver" (1. 3. 104). Othello is defending himself against accusations that he abducted Desdemona, the daughter of a Venetian senator, saying he will tell the whole truth (*round unvarnish'd tale*).

Chapter 19: "The library looked tranquil enough as I entered it, and the **Sibyl**—if Sibyl she were—was seated snugly enough in an easy-chair at the chimney-corner." In ancient Greek literature and mythology, a sibyl was a very old woman who prophesied or told fortunes; sibyl was a title, not a name. In the sentence above from *Jane Eyre*, the narrator is referring to Rochester disguised as a gipsy fortuneteller.

Chapter 25: "I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of **Beulah**; and now and then a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne." *Beulah* is a reference to a land of peace

and contentment in *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan (1628-1688).

Chapter 27: "In the servants' hall two coachmen and three gentlemen's gentlemen stood or sat round the fire; the **abigails**, I suppose, were upstairs with their mistresses; the new servants, that had been hired from Millcote, were bustling about everywhere. Abigail is the name of a maid in *The Scornful Lady*, a play by Francis Beaumont (1585-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625). The word *abigail* (with a lower-case *a*) was later used as a synonym for maid.