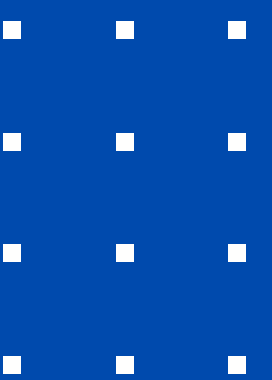
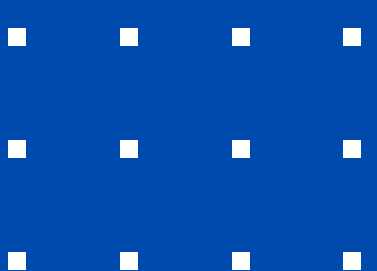


'JANE EYRE'

EASY ENGLISH:
COMPREHENSIVE
STUDY GUIDE



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PLOT SUMMARY

"Jane Eyre" unfolds as a tale of resilience in the face of adversity, tracing the protagonist's journey from a grim childhood to a fulfilled adulthood. Orphaned and unloved, young Jane suffers emotional neglect and abuse at the hands of her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and her bullying cousin, John. Her only solace during these bleak times comes from the kind-hearted servant, Bessie, and the sympathetic apothecary, Mr. Lloyd, who ultimately recommends her schooling away from the Reed household.

Jane's arrival at Lowood Institution brings about new challenges. The headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, embodies cruelty and hypocrisy, preaching austerity while misusing the school's funds for his own luxurious living. At Lowood, Jane forges a significant friendship with another pupil, Helen Burns, whose stoic acceptance of the school's harshness both inspires and frustrates Jane. A typhus outbreak exposes the squalid conditions at Lowood, leading to the necessary reforms that greatly improve Jane's life, allowing her to remain at Lowood for eight more years as both a student and then a teacher.

Craving new horizons, Jane embarks on a life-changing role as a governess at Thornfield Hall, where she meets the lively ward Adèle and the house's enigmatic master, Mr. Rochester. Their relationship develops subtly, with Jane saving Rochester from a mysterious fire, an event that foreshadows deeper secrets within Thornfield. Jane grapples with her growing affection for Rochester, even as she believes him to favor the beautiful, if shallow, Blanche Ingram. However, in an unexpected twist, Rochester proposes to Jane, not Blanche, and Jane accepts, her happiness overshadowed by a sense of disbelief.

Their wedding is abruptly halted by the intrusion of a man claiming that Rochester is already married. This man, Mr. Mason, reveals the existence of Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife, who is both alive and insane. Rochester presents Bertha to the assembled crowd, validating Mason's claims and describing the deceptive circumstances that led to his unfortunate union in Jamaica. Devastated by this revelation and knowing their union to be morally impossible, Jane flees Thornfield without a word.

Jane endures hardship and hunger, wandering destitute until the Rivers siblings—Mary, Diana, and St. John—take her in. As their bonds of friendship strengthen, a stunning twist of fate reveals that the siblings are actually Jane's cousins, and she is heir to her late Uncle John Eyre's substantial fortune. Embracing her newfound family, Jane divides the inheritance equally among them.



St. John Rivers, the stern clergyman, proposes to Jane, asking her to accompany him to India as his missionary wife. Jane consents to the journey but declines marriage, her heart still entwined with Rochester's. Nearing a decision to yield to St. John's repeated requests, she experiences a preternatural moment, hearing Rochester's distant voice calling her name. Compelled by this sign, Jane hastens back to Thornfield, only to find it ruined by fire, set by Bertha Mason who died in the flames. Rochester, now impaired by blindness and maimed trying to save others, has retreated to Ferndean Manor with his servants John and Mary.

In the quietude of Ferndean, Jane and Rochester rekindle their relationship and proceed to marry. Jane's final reflections offer readers a glimpse into their decade of married bliss, marked by equal respect and a restored Rochester, who regains partial sight to witness the birth of their first child.

"Jane Eyre," often hailed as an early feminist text, delves deep into the psyche of its heroine, grappling with themes of love, freedom, and the quest for identity against a backdrop of strict Victorian social hierarchies and gender roles. Jane Eyre's bildungsroman captures her moral and spiritual growth, highlighting her unwavering integrity and search for a life where she can be loved as an equal, bespeaking Brontë's own critique of the society of her time.



SETTING

Gateshead Hall

Gateshead Hall, as depicted in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre," forms the backdrop for the beginning of Jane's life story and sets the stage for the exploration of many of the novel's themes, such as social hierarchy, familial alienation, and the struggle for self-determination.

Jane's description of Gateshead provides a palpable sense of the coldness and sterility within its walls: "**She had a turn for traffic and a marked propensity for saving; shown not only in the vending of eggs and chickens but also in driving hard bargains with the gardener about flower-roots, seeds, and slips of plants...**". This focus on transactional relationships, with Eliza Wheelwright bartering with the gardener, illustrates the mercenary atmosphere pervasive in Gateshead Hall and mirrors the lack of warmth and affection that characterises Jane's existence there.

The Hall and its inhabitants serve as an emblem of the rigid Victorian social structure and the sense of exclusion and otherness that Jane experiences. Gateshead, where Jane resides as a dependent, an outsider in her own family, becomes a microcosm of the greater societal constraints of the time. Despite the opulence of the house, Jane's position is akin to that of a servant—her presence is tolerated but not cherished. Her cousins, not yet called to Mrs. Reed, contrast her isolation and lack of belonging: "**Bessie was gone down to breakfast; my cousins had not yet been summoned to their mama...**" From this, the reader learns that social status dictates relationships within Gateshead Hall, rather than familial bonds, and sets the groundwork for Jane's future encounters with the world at large.

Furthermore, Gateshead Hall's penurious and severe environment, exemplified by its strict mistress and austere routines, contrasts with the childhood homes of Romantic ideals—places supposed to provide comfort, growth, and nurturing. Instead, Gateshead becomes a symbol of exile and hardship, fueling Jane's desire for independence and fulfillment beyond its confining pressures.

Gateshead's role in Jane's early life reveals Brontë's critical eye on the family dynamics and social customs of the era, showing how these institutions may hinder the emotional and psychological development of individuals. These early experiences at Gateshead mold Jane into a person who passionately desires freedom, self-respect, and the right to



determine her own life, themes that deeply permeate the entire novel. Thus, Gateshead Hall is not just a mere setting—it is a symbolic landscape that reflects and intensifies the development of characters and themes within "Jane Eyre."

Lowood School

Lowood School in "Jane Eyre" functions as a microcosm of Victorian society and serves as an important setting that reflects the novel's themes of suffering, morality, and resilience. The school is where Jane's character is significantly molded and represents the broader societal expectations and treatment of women and the poor.

The stark conditions at Lowood are vividly depicted through the description of the school's unhealthy location and insufficient provisions for the students: **"The unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children's food; the brackish fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils' wretched clothing and accommodations—all these things were discovered..."**. These details not only create a setting of deprivation and adversity but also symbolise the oppressive structures of the era that valued austerity and humility, especially for those in lower social classes.

The harsh environment of Lowood is the backdrop against which Jane's moral education unfolds. It is also the setting where Mr. Brocklehurst exercises his cruel brand of piety, aiming to instill "humility" in his pupils by keeping them in poverty: **"Humility is a Christian grace and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood; I therefore direct that especial care shall be bestowed on its cultivation amongst them"**. This intention is evident in the deliberate humbling of the students, echoed in the words of Brocklehurst's daughter, who remarks how the girls appear like "poor people's children" due to their plainness and the contrast with her own privileged upbringing.

Despite its grimness, Lowood is also where Jane forms her most significant early relationships, particularly with Helen Burns and Miss Temple. These bonds amidst adversity highlight the themes of friendship, and resilience and the development of Jane's character away from the cold isolation of Gateshead. Helen Burns, especially, serves as a spiritual and moral guide for young Jane, teaching her about endurance and forgiveness under suffering.

Lowood's transformation, prompted by a typhus epidemic that draws public attention to the inhumane conditions, symbolises Victorian England's gradual awakening to social reform. The eventual improvements in the management, facilities, and



welfare of the students are representative of broader changes in attitudes towards welfare and education: **"Several wealthy and benevolent individuals in the county subscribed largely for the erection of a more convenient building in a better situation..."**. This shift from neglect to nurturing and its impact on Jane marks her journey from a victim of circumstance to an individual with the agency to shape her own destiny.

In summary, Lowood School shapes the development of Jane's character through its embodiment of deprivation and the emphasis on moral rectitude. The improvement of the school represents the potential transformation of the oppressive landscapes that Jane navigates—a theme that continues to echo throughout her life and her quest for freedom, understanding, and a place to belong.

Thornfield Hall

Thornfield Hall is a key setting in "Jane Eyre," and its description opens a window into the novel's underlying themes, including mystery, secrecy, and the search for love and freedom. As Jane's main residence throughout much of the novel, the grandeur and hidden decay of Thornfield mirror her own psychological metamorphosis and the contradictions within Mr. Rochester's character.

Describing Thornfield, Jane notes, **"[It is] a gentleman's manor-house, not a nobleman's seat: battlements round the top gave it a picturesque look. Its grey front stood out well from the background of a rookery..."**. The estate's size and battlements suggest protection and strength, yet its greyness and association with a rookery—a place filled with birds often considered as omens—imply an underlying gloom. The **"mighty old thorn trees"** on the property, **"broad as oaks,"** further suggest the mansion's namesake and symbolise the thorny paths to uncovering Rochester's secrets and Jane's self-discovery.

Thornfield's ambience changes with Rochester's presence: **"Thornfield Hall was a changed place... it had a master: for my part I liked it better"**. Jane perceives a stark contrast between the once silent and inert Thornfield and its new, lively atmosphere, which symbolises the transformative experience of finding companionship and potential love. This transition from stillness and monotony reflects Jane's growing attachment to the place and especially to Rochester, marking a shift in her life's narrative—from solitude toward belonging and affection.



However, the life and movement present at Thornfield also coincide with increased tension and suspense, reflecting the dualities within Rochester and manifesting in the strange laughter and eerie events Jane encounters. These mysterious happenings foreshadow the revelation of Bertha Mason's existence, which lies at the heart of Thornfield's secrets. Consequently, the fire that ultimately consumes Thornfield becomes symbolic of both destruction and rebirth—the collapse of the old boundaries of Jane's world and the emergence of new opportunities for her as an independent and wealthy woman.

Thornfield Hall, thus, stands as more than a mere house—it is a vessel for the narrative tension between concealment and revelation, reflecting the development of characters and themes within the text. Its setting is crucial to Jane's development, offering both confinement and the chance for liberation. It is at Thornfield that Jane finds and fights for her sense of self, only to be driven away by Rochester's deceit, and it is only after Thornfield's destruction that the two can reunite on more equal terms.

Ferndean

The setting of the manor house, Ferndean, appears in the latter part of "Jane Eyre," and serves as a potent symbol of isolation, rebirth, and the deepening connection between Jane and Rochester. This secluded dwelling is described through Jane's perspective as she arrives: **"Even when within a very short distance of the manor-house you could see nothing of it so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it. Iron gates between granite pillars showed me where to enter, and passing through them I found myself at once in the twilight of close-ranked trees"**. The obscured view of Ferndean amidst dense woods and the melancholic environment echoes the introspective and reclusive nature of Rochester's life following the destruction of Thornfield Hall.

The gloominess and seclusion of the setting reflect the state of Rochester, who has become physically and emotionally scarred by the events that transpired at Thornfield. The cold and penetrating rain coupled with the twilight atmosphere as Jane approaches symbolises the threshold of change for Jane and Rochester, transitioning from their past trials to a renewal of their relationship. The remote and nearly uninhabited manor house contrasts sharply with the previously bustling and secretive atmosphere of Thornfield, suggesting a removal from societal constraints and superficial judgments — a place of genuine emotional engagement and intimacy.

Ferndean, a dwelling that remains **"uninhabited and unfurnished, with the exception of some two or three rooms fitted up for the**



accommodation of the squire when he went there in the season to shoot," further symbolises the stripping away of former grandeur and pretense. This minimal furnishing aligns with Jane's values of authenticity and simplicity, and her reunion with Rochester in such a modest abode represents a haven where their relationship can flourish without the veneer of wealth or status.

The manor house as a setting also marks the culmination of Jane's personal growth and independence. Here, she returns to Rochester not out of desperation or as an act of rescue, but from a position of strength and agency – she has inherited her own fortune, found her family, and solidified her identity. Jane's arrival at Ferndean signifies a pivot point where she and Rochester can finally engage on equal footing, and where their future is one of mutual reliance and emotional openness, unobstructed by the social strictures or hidden madness that previously threatened their union.

In the context of "Jane Eyre," Ferndean manor house not only encapsulates the transformation and ultimate redemption of Rochester but also stands as a symbol of the true and unpretentious love that Jane has yearned for and found. It is within the setting of this secluded manor that the novel's themes of love, self-discovery, and liberation from past burdens find their ultimate resolution.



CHARACTER

Jane Eyre

The character of Jane Eyre is a profound study in the equilibrium between personal integrity and passionate nature. From the outset of the narrative, it is evident that Jane possesses an innate awareness of her value and dignity. She is a being grounded in principles and a sense of justice, harboring a deep trust in the divine, complemented by her vivacious temperament. Throughout her life's arc within the novel, Jane's moral fiber is tested, compelling her to navigate the turbulent confluence of her inner aspects to achieve a harmonious existence.

Shaped by early childhood orphanhood, Jane is familiar with the sting of isolation, an affliction intensified by the maltreatment she receives from her Aunt Reed and her cousins, exacerbating her sense of alienation. Jane yearns for belonging, seeking kinship or **"kindred spirits,"** a yearning militated by her simultaneous need for independence and liberty. To illustrate the complexity of her character, she ruminates, **"I wondered what you thought of me or if you ever thought of me and resolved to find this out"**, evidencing her desire for connection in juxtaposition with a quest for self-understanding and assertiveness.

Jane's odyssey to freedom is as much a spiritual and emotional one as it is a physical pursuit. Initially, Mr. Rochester's entreaty introduces the possibility of emancipating Jane's affections, yet she discerns that this liberation may enslave her dignity, should she become his mistress, a compromise of self-respect over sentiment. Contrasting Rochester's fiery passion, St. John Rivers extends an alternative freedom through principled action and missionary work in India, a prospect that, while noble, could imprison Jane's true sentiments under a veil of stoicism.

An insight into Jane's psyche during one of her most trying moments can be gleaned from her inner turmoil as she grapples with her sense of duty towards Rochester against her convictions: **"A hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals... I shook I feared—but I resolved"**. It's this unyielding stance on morality and self-worth that marks her character as uncommonly virtuous and resilient amidst the vicissitudes of life.

Charlotte Brontë crafts Jane Eyre as an intricate reflection of her own existential struggles, armed with revolutionary stances on religion, class, and gender for her time. Jane's nuanced



character is Brontë's canvas for debating these poignant themes and remains a beacon of complexity and fidelity to one's principles in the face of formidable challenges.

Edward Rochester

Edward Rochester, the Byronic master of Thornfield Hall, emerges as a complex and multifaceted figure within the pages of "Jane Eyre." Despite a gruff exterior and a lack of classical handsomeness, Rochester captures Jane's affection, drawing her in with his deep sense of kinship and the first offering of genuine, enduring love and the prospect of a true home—concepts that have eluded Jane for much of her life.

Rochester's character is an amalgamation of worldly experience and internal conflict. While positioned above Jane in both social and economic stature, prevailing Victorian notions of male dominance are subverted by Jane's presence, for she matches him in intellect and eventually surpasses him in moral fortitude. This is evidenced when Rochester attempts to rationalise his deceptive intent to marry Jane, despite his preexisting marriage: **"I was wrong to attempt to deceive you; but I feared a stubbornness that exists in your character."**

Rochester's remorse over the recklessness of his youth, characterised by promiscuity and indicates a recognition of his own shortcomings. Nevertheless, these transgressions have done little to strengthen his resolve when compared to Jane's incorruptible virtue. Indeed, Jane's ethical clarity steers her away from a life that could compromise her dignity for facilitating her a dormant passion.

As events unfold, Rochester's fortunes—and with them, his patriarchal power—dwindle, while Jane's ascend. Jane inherits a substantial fortune, finding herself no longer shackled by poverty. This newfound financial and familial stability empowers her to act on her own terms. Furthermore, the tragic fire at Thornfield not only eradicates Rochester's estate but diminishes his physical capacity, leaving him blind and maimed. Rochester, in his weakened state, remarks, **"My strength is quite failing me,"** showcasing a reversal in the power dynamics between him and Jane.

By the culmination of their tale, Jane asserts: **"I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine... we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result."** However, their relationship seems to have shifted in Jane's favor, with Rochester's impairments making him more reliant on her, thereby granting Jane a definitive, if implicit, ascendancy within the marriage.



Edward Rochester stands as a testament to the imperfections of humanity, entwined with the redemptive possibilities through love and mutual respect—a rich depiction of Victorian social constructs, personal redemption, and the intricate dance of power within intimate relationships.

St. John Rivers

St. John Rivers serves as a narrative counterbalance to Edward Rochester, highlighting an alternative path that life could offer Jane Eyre. In stark contrast to Rochester's fiery passion, St. John is characterised by his austerity and ambition, his nature depicted through imagery of rock, ice, and snow, aligning with his ascetic and zealous disposition.

Whereas a union with Rochester represents a submersion into the fervor of romantic love, marrying St. John would signal a suppression of passion in favor of piety and principle. St. John is the epitome of a missionary zealot, presenting to Jane an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the broader world as his helpmate in India, transcending the traditional role relegated to a Victorian housewife. Yet this prospect is marred by the absence of true affection, whereby Jane's spiritual needs might only be met by her inward retreat, execution of duties, and communion with the divine, encapsulated in St. John's own words, **"and only mind earthly things"**, implying a life of solitude cushioned by spiritual pursuit.

At the crux of her reflection on St. John's marriage proposal is Jane's epiphany that autonomy, ironically, is deeply entwined with the freedom to engage in mutual emotional dependency. Independence, as proffered by St. John, would come at the expense of love and the warmth of human connection. Jane's internal deliberations unravel this paradox as she measures the possibility of a passionless but principled existence against her intrinsic yearnings for love and partnership.

Ultimately, St. John's unwavering devotion to his missionary work, his stoic demeanor, and relative disinterest in the pleasures and connections of earthly life illuminate the potential emptiness of a life without shared love. He represents the ethos of self-denial and service that runs counter to Jane's passionate nature, and he embodies a resonant religious fervor that both draws and repels her. St. John's departure to India and subsequent work are encapsulated in the final evaluation of his character: **"A more resolute indefatigable pioneer never wrought amidst rocks and dangers. Firm, faithful, and devoted [...]"**, which deeply contrasts with the journey of love and mutual fulfillment that Jane ultimately embraces with Rochester.



Helen Burns

Helen Burns, Jane's compatriot at Lowood School, serves as both a poignant foil to Mr. Brocklehurst's harsh evangelicalism and a mirror of Jane's own search for belonging. Her embodiment of a gentle Christian doctrine highlights patience, tolerance, and acceptance, standing in stark contrast to Brocklehurst's punitive use of religion as a tool of control and subjugation. Helen's serene adherence to her faith and her ability to turn the other cheek to Lowood's repressive regimes emphasise her inner strength and spiritual maturity, all the while underpinning her philosophy with quiet fortitude: **"I live in calm looking to the end."**

While both are orphans longing for a place to call home, Helen's pursuit diverges significantly from Jane's, as she finds solace in the belief of a celestial dwelling beyond earthly confines. Her acceptance of Lowood's harsh realities is rooted in the conviction that divine justice will prevail, a position that seemingly contrasts with Jane's determination for earthly happiness and love. However, Jane's critique of Helen's stoic endurance reflects a divergence in their coping strategies—where Helen finds refuge in resignation and the prospect of heavenly recompense, Jane actively seeks to shape a worthy existence in the present.

Despite her resilience, Helen's path is one of self-effacement rather than self-assertion. It is her meek and ascetic nature that accentuates Jane's more headstrong and assertive character. Helen's submission to the rigorous conditions of Lowood and her pacifist response to injustice underscore a doctrine of humility and the relinquishment of worldly concerns in favor of spiritual riches.

Helen's tranquil acceptance of suffering, her conviction in a greater universal balance, and her anticipation of eternal joy offer a serene backdrop to Jane's more turbulent search for home and belonging. Helen's character arc culminates in her untimely death from consumption, a somber yet fitting testament to her gentle spirit and undying faith. Through Helen, Brontë explores the complexities of piety, the virtues of forbearance, and the influence that such a steadfast character can have on someone as inquisitive and passionate as Jane.

Mrs. Reed

Mrs. Reed, as presented in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre," is a complex character embodying the strict and often harsh Victorian attitudes towards class and upbringing. She is described as a **"stout woman"** of about **"six or seven and thirty,"**



characterised by a **"robust frame, square-shouldered and strong-limbed,"** with physical features such as a **"low brow,"** **"large and prominent chin,"** which contribute to a sense of her imposing presence. Mrs. Reed's interactions with the protagonist, Jane, are colored by a mixture of stern discipline and cold aloofness. This mixture is evident when she—in response to young Jane's audacious statement—spirits Jane away with a flurry of energy, threatening in an "emphatic voice" not to allow Jane to **"rise from that place or utter one syllable during the remainder of the day,"** showcasing her strictness and control.

The authoritarian nature of Mrs. Reed often leans towards the turbulent and violent, as seen when she swiftly **"rallied her spirits"** and physically disciplined Jane by shaking and boxing her ears, which she did **"most soundly,"** before leaving **"without a word"**. These actions reflect not just an adherence to the disciplinary norms of the time but also a personal hostility and inability to empathise with or love Jane. It is hinted that Mrs. Reed viewed fulfilling her promise to keep Jane as a duty, **"as well as her nature would permit,"** suggesting a deep-seated resentment borne out of obligation to her late husband rather than genuine affection or concern for the child.

Mrs. Reed's disposition is not without complexity; on rare occasions, her stern mien falters, revealing glimpses of vulnerability. An example of this occurs when Jane confronts her with the rhetorical question of what her deceased Uncle Reed would think, causing Mrs. Reed's **"usually cold composed grey eye"** to become **"troubled with a look like fear"**. Despite these moments, she retains a certain inflexibility of character, with her attitudes remaining "unchanged and unchangeable" towards Jane, whom she never seems to warm to, even as Jane extends an olive branch of civility or appeals to kindred relations.

Finally, Mrs. Reed's actions can be abrupt and dismissive, as when she murmurs **"I will indeed send her to school soon"** and then leaves the room **"abruptly,"** displaying a typical reaction to dispense with an uncomfortable situation and further highlighting the emotional chasm between her and Jane. Overall, Mrs. Reed embodies the antithesis of the nurturing maternal figure; instead, she serves as a representation of unyielding authority, a product of her era's values and her circumstances, making her a pivotal figure in Jane's early life, shaping many of the protagonist's formative experiences and perceptions of love, family, and authority.

Bertha Mason

Bertha Mason, often referred to as the **"madwoman in the attic,"** is a haunting figure in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre." She is Mr. Rochester's first wife, hidden away in the secluded upper rooms



of Thornfield Hall. Bertha, of Creole heritage from the West Indies, is portrayed through Rochester's account as having inherited madness, as he remarks, "**Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations!**" This assertion casts her as a victim of hereditary insanity, underscoring Rochester's belief that her mental state was beyond her control and inherent in her lineage.

Rochester's depiction of Bertha serves to perpetuate the stereotype of the "**other**"—the exotically foreign figure whose alluring differences can simultaneously entice and threaten. He describes the early years of his marriage in terms of disillusionment: the discovery of Bertha's unruly temperament contrasted starkly with his own nature. Despite his initial attraction to her beauty and wealth, he ultimately found her too dissimilar, her behavior unbearable and menacing. This narrative, nonetheless, is tainted by Rochester's own subjective views and may not accurately reflect Bertha's actual character or the depth of her psychological distress.

Her animalistic representation by Jane, who, upon first sight, observes Bertha moving on all-fours, works to dehumanise her. Bertha's resultant actions—such as setting Rochester's bed on fire, tearing Jane's wedding veil, and violently confronting her brother—all signify her rebellion against the circumstances of her life. These acts of destruction symbolise the destruction of her personhood, agency, and marital relationship with Rochester. Her ultimate decision to set Thornfield ablaze and leap to her death epitomises her resistance and serves as a grim assertion of her agency.

Even though Bertha's voice is notably absent from the novel, her presence exerts a significant influence. Bertha's tragic figure emphasises the themes of entrapment, autonomy, and oppression. Her actions, though often attributed to madness, arguably reflect the behaviors of a person pushed to the brink by isolation and disenfranchisement. Bertha Mason's story remains a shadowy reflection of the period's fears and misconceptions surrounding mental illness, race, and female autonomy. Her narrative challenges the readers to question the reliability of Rochester's account and consider the broader implications of her confinement and treatment in the context of Victorian society.



T H E M E S

The tension between love and autonomy

The tension between love and autonomy is a central theme in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre." The novel explores how personal freedom is compromised or enhanced by emotional bonds, particularly in the relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester. Jane's upbringing at Gateshead and Lowood School shapes her understanding of autonomy, where her lack of family bonds provides her with a certain freedom but also imprints upon her a deep sense of independence. As Jane matures, she continues to assert her self-reliance, affirming, **"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will"**. This declaration marks a crucial turning point in Jane's assertion of self, defying the traditional notion that marriage binds a woman to her husband. This line is pivotal as it encapsulates Jane's struggle to maintain her selfhood in the face of overpowering emotions. For Jane, genuine love cannot exist without the preservation of her inner liberty.

When Rochester attempts to shower Jane with jewels and fine garments in the wake of the proposal, she resists vigorously, telling him, **"the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation"**. Jane is acutely aware of the power dynamics at play and fears that succumbing to such luxuries would mean losing her identity and sense of self-worth and becoming another of Rochester's possessions. This reaction underscores the novel's feminist undertones, where Brontë advocates for equality and respect in a relationship regardless of gender and social status.

Later, Jane grapples with love's power to endanger her autonomy when she learns of Rochester's existing marriage. Although her heart yearns to stay with him, her autonomy demands she uphold her moral and ethical standards. To do otherwise would be **"to commit myself to an existence of agony,"** which confirms that while Jane deeply loves Rochester, she refuses to surrender her principles or her autonomy for him. This reflects Jane's formidable character and moral conviction even when faced with profound emotional turmoil.

After leaving Thornfield, Jane's ensuing experiences, including her inheritance and her finding of new family connections, further augment her desire for both love and autonomy. Her eventual return to Rochester on equal footing, after he has been humbled and she has come into her own means, culminates the theme. Their union is on terms of mutual respect and regard for each other's freedom, as symbolised by the union that does not restrict but instead supports each individual's autonomy.



Love and autonomy in "Jane Eyre" are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are harmonised in a delicate balance. Brontë's protagonist illustrates that self-actualisation and emotional connectedness can coexist. Jane's journey towards a love that neither diminishes her autonomy nor renders her subservient ultimately delivers a powerful message on the integrity of the self within the Victorian context and beyond. Brontë's nuanced portrayal of this theme allows the reader to delve into the complexities of love, freedom, and selfhood during a time when women's independence was often circumscribed by societal expectations.

Religion

In "Jane Eyre," Charlotte Brontë offers a profound examination of the theme of religion, showcasing distinct perspectives through her characters and employing religious discussions as a means to explore broader questions surrounding faith, morality, and the human condition. The narrative delves into various religious approaches and their ramifications for the characters' lives and decisions.

St. John Rivers embodies the stringent, duty-driven aspect of Christianity. Describing himself, he states, "**I am not a pagan but a Christian philosopher—a follower of the sect of Jesus. As His disciple I adopt His pure His merciful His benignant doctrines**". His commitment to his faith is unwavering and uncompromising, an approach that suits his ascetic lifestyle and missionary zeal but also portrays a certain rigidity in terms of personal relations and joy. St. John's religion is one of self-denial and adherence to a strict moral code, a path that he believes will lead to spiritual salvation and divine purpose, which he embraces entirely.

However, Jane's own religious views diverge from St. John's. While she is a believer, her understanding is that religion should complement, not solely define, one's life. She reflects, "**So much has religion done for me; turning the original materials to the best account; pruning and training nature,**" yet acknowledges the permanence of human nature, implying that spiritual beliefs cannot wholly erase innate qualities or desires until earthly existence is transcended. Brontë uses Jane's moderate religious stance to critique the extremes that St. John represents, accentuating the theme of balance in the application of religious precepts to one's life.

The theme advances further when Jane is nearly convinced to marry St. John, despite her lack of romantic love for him, purely out of a sense of religious duty. She states, "**Religion called—Angels beckoned—God commanded—life rolled together like a scroll—death's gates opening showed eternity beyond: it**



seemed that for safety and bliss there all here might be sacrificed in a second". This moment illustrates how religion can dramatically intervene in life choices, encouraging the surrender of earthly happiness for heavenly rewards; such outcomes are measured against internal struggles and the core self.

In amalgamating these perspectives, Brontë presents a nuanced view of Christianity in Victorian England, acknowledging its potential for guiding individuals toward selflessness and devotion but also highlighting its capacity to suppress personal fulfillment and happiness when interpreted with a lack of flexibility. Throughout "Jane Eyre," religion acts as both a foundation for moral conduct and a point of contention when its doctrines clash with personal desires and autonomy, weaving a complex dialogue about faith's role in shaping identity and life paths in the nineteenth century. Jane's spiritual journey is not just about finding God but also about understanding how her faith fits into the broader spectrum of her desires, aspirations, and quest for self-realisation. Brontë's exploration of the theme of religion showcases the search for a middle ground, where an individual's spiritual and earthly fulfillment can coexist without negating each other.

Social hierarchy of Victorian England

In "Jane Eyre," Charlotte Brontë weaves a critical commentary on the rigid social hierarchy of Victorian England, with particular focus on the ambiguous social position of governesses. Governesses, including Jane, often possessed the refined manners, sophistication, and education typical of the aristocracy, as they were expected to impart not only academic knowledge but also the cultural poise of the upper classes. However, despite their cultivation, governesses were ultimately employees—a status that afforded them little respect and power within the household. While residing at Thornfield, Jane is caught in this paradox of being akin to the aristocracy in all but social status and wealth. She is proverbially caught between two worlds—she is neither a servant nor a lady by birth.

Jane is acutely aware of the social barriers that divide her and Mr. Rochester. She respects him as **"a gentleman, a landed proprietor—nothing more,"** recognising her place in the social order and the distance it creates between them. Jane's sentiments on social class are encapsulated when she reflects on poverty, associating it with degradation and expressing reluctance to **"belong to poor people,"** fearing the loss of social status more than the absence of kindness. Her aversion to poverty and its associated social stigma is further emphasised when she contemplates how **"poor people had the means of being kind"** and expresses a preference for education over the **"liberty at the price of caste"**.



This critique of class attitudes is woven throughout the narrative, peaking in moments where Jane confronts the imbalances of power directly. In a poignant speech to Rochester, Jane asserts, **"Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you—and full as much heart!"** This confrontation addresses the core of the novel's critique on social class disparities, challenging the notion that wealth and status are the arbiters of a person's value or capacity for feeling.

Brontë does not shy away from acknowledging the material realities of her era. Despite the heated dialogue on class and the challenges to its rigid structure represented by Jane's character, she only achieves social mobility through an inheritance, rather than through any reform of the social systems that initially suppress her. In the end, Jane's marriage to Rochester occurs only after she has attained financial independence, highlighting a predetermination that equates economic status with personal worth and autonomy within the class structure of the time.

Through "Jane Eyre," Brontë artfully navigates the complexities of social class, urging her readers to consider the inherent worth of each individual beyond their societal rank. However, the resolution of the novel with Jane's inheritance somewhat upholds the traditional societal values that measure worthiness through wealth, subtly affirming the social order even as it critiques its constraints. Brontë's exploration of class is both a challenge to its limitations and a concession to its prevailing influence in Victorian England.

The struggle for equality in a patriarchal society

In Charlotte Brontë's novel "Jane Eyre," the protagonist's struggle for equality in a patriarchal society is a central theme. The novel charts a narrative path through which Jane confronts oppressive structures that seek to subordinate women to men. This confrontation occurs through her interactions with three central male figures: Mr. Brocklehurst, Edward Rochester, and St. John Rivers, each representing different facets of patriarchal control.

Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster of Lowood School, embodies the tyrannical control of institutionalised sexism. His treatment of the girls at Lowood reflects a view that women should be humble, plain, and unadorned, an ethos he enforces with a cruel rigidity. In contrast, Rochester's domination is more personal and nuanced. He initially positions Jane as a subordinate by nature of his wealth, status, and gender. However, Jane is unwilling to fully submit to Rochester's authority, as illustrated by her



assertion that, **"I have as much soul as you—and full as much heart!"** This declaration signals her refusal to be diminished simply because of her gender or social class.

St. John Rivers presents a third challenge to Jane's autonomy, representing a spiritual and moral authority that attempts to coerce Jane into a marriage of convenience, thereby stifling her emotional needs and desires. St. John's emotionally detached proposal and his expectation that Jane forgo love for duty underscore the persistent societal expectation that women should be self-effacing and sacrificial, valuing the desires of men over their own.

Jane's quest for independence and self-knowledge is a journey of escaping from under Mr. Brocklehurst's authoritative shadow, rejecting St. John's cold utilitarianism, and coming to Rochester only on terms of equality. This journey is not just a personal one; it is emblematic of the struggle for gender equality during the time of Brontë's writing. The novel's climax occurs when Jane can approach Rochester as an equal, both emotionally and financially, establishing her independence in the context of a relationship built on mutual respect, rather than dependency.

Furthermore, Rochester's blindness at the end of the novel symbolically shifts the power dynamic, making him dependent on Jane and upending traditional gender roles. Jane's assertion of her right to love and be loved, while maintaining her autonomy, becomes a significant statement on the capabilities and rights of women.

"Jane Eyre" presents a radical feminist philosophy for its time, challenging conventional views of gender relations and presenting a vision for a more equal society. Jane Eyre serves as a proto-feminist icon, exemplifying that dignity, equality, and personal freedom are not solely the domain of men, but the inherent right of all individuals, regardless of gender. Through Jane's trials and ultimate triumph, Brontë articulates a feminist message that remains resonant and powerful even in contemporary discourse.

Home and belonging

"Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë touches on the profound theme of home and belonging, an element intricately woven throughout the narrative. Jane's quest for a place to call home—a place where she feels both a sense of belonging and the ability to contribute meaningfully—is a cornerstone of her journey and development.



From the outset of the novel, Jane is keenly aware of her outsider status in the Reed's household, where she describes herself as "**a discord**" at Gateshead, acknowledging a fundamental disharmony with the family residing there and a lack of usefulness, given that she cannot "**add to the happiness of the household**". This sense of disconnection is further compounded by the absence of reciprocal affection—Jane has no one to love at Gateshead, nor is she loved in return.

Jane's experience at Lowood School offers a temporary sense of community and belonging, enhanced greatly by her bond with Miss Temple. However, once Miss Temple leaves, Jane feels that Lowood loses its home-like quality, as it was Miss Temple who made Lowood "**homey**" for Jane. Thus, her role and her sense of belonging at Lowood are not enough to anchor her there in the absence of love. In this way, Brontë reveals that Jane's concept of 'home' hinges not only on her utility but also on her emotional connections.

Jane's time at Thornfield is where her ideas of home are most deeply explored. It is with Rochester that she finds a profound emotional connection which prompts her to declare that he is her "**only home.**" Nevertheless, her departure from Thornfield after the revelation of Bertha Mason's existence is indicative of her complex relationship with the concept of 'home.' Her choice to leave demonstrates that her sense of belonging cannot be reconciled with a living situation that renders her "**morally useless**" and complicit in Rochester's deception.

Jane's eventual return to Thornfield is significant as it represents the culmination of her search for a place where she belongs and can be useful. Her usefulness is now more pronounced, as Rochester's blindness makes him dependent on Jane. This mutual dependence, combined with Jane's newfound wealth and a stronger sense of self, enables her to finally feel at home with Rochester, embodying both belonging and purpose. Notably, Jane's articulation of finding "**a home**" reflects a modest and functional setting—a "**cottage,**" a small room symbolising simplicity mixed with contentment and sufficiency, which is brought about by the kindness of her newfound family and friends.

Jane's journey illustrates that 'home' is not merely a physical space but a profound feeling of kinship and contribution. For Jane, 'home' is more a state of being than a place to live; it is where she finds love, respect, and the ability to serve those around her. Brontë's narrative conveys that 'home' and 'belonging' are discovered in relationships imbued with mutual respect, love, and the ability to contribute in a meaningful way—a sanctuary where one is able both to give and receive affection. The theme of home and belonging in "Jane Eyre" thus



explores not just the individual's need for a physical shelter but also an emotional and moral haven where one's presence is valued and impactful.



SYMBOLS

Gothic imagery

In Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre," gothic imagery is employed to embody Jane's internal anxieties and uncertainties. The first brush with the supernatural, the **"terrifying red-room,"** symbolises the rejection and lack of belonging that has overshadowed her from childhood. This room haunted not by a ghost, but by the unfulfilled promise of a caring home offered by Uncle Reed, vividly encapsulates Jane's desperate quest for love and acceptance within the strict confines of her social world.

Moments of gothic representation are interspersed throughout the novel to mirror Jane's internal turmoil. The split chestnut tree, struck by lightning on the night that Rochester proposes to Jane, stands as a powerful omen; it reflects the forbidden nature of their love—a kind of premonition or warning that casts a shadow over their union, foretelling that their future happiness is threatened and uncertain.

Bertha Mason, Rochester's secret wife, acts as a gothic and psychological counterpart to Jane—an embodiment of the **"violent passions and anger"** that Jane suppresses. The connection between Jane and Bertha serves as a continuous source of anxiety for Jane, who fears that, like Bertha, she too could be overwhelmed by her emotions and become a victim to circumstances.

Furthermore, the looming presence of Bertha personifies Jane's apprehensions regarding her relationship with Rochester. Before Jane is even aware of Bertha's existence, she harbors a fear that Rochester may grow bored of her and that a governess marrying her master would disrupt the established Victorian social order. Bertha, thus, metaphorically expresses Jane's dread over their impending marriage and symbolises the ambiguity and instability of her own social standing.

Brontë artfully uses gothic elements not merely to invoke fear but to explore the deeper psychological conflicts within Jane regarding her place in a rigidly stratified world. These motifs of the supernatural and the unknown convey the precariousness of Jane's situation—her ongoing struggle for self-identity, belonging, and love amid a society that often appears hostile and indifferent to her very existence.



Bertha Mason

Bertha Mason, in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre," serves as a potent symbol deeply intertwined with central themes of the novel. She is more than a mere character; she represents the societal, psychological, and emotional constraints that the protagonist, Jane, wrestles with throughout her journey.

Bertha is often depicted as the physical manifestation of Jane's suppressed rage and passion. Mr. Rochester's description of his wife, "**Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations...**", emphasises her as an inherited and unavoidable madness. This reflection of ancestry, coupled with the madness, becomes a symbol of the inescapable burdens that society imposes on individuals—burdens that Jane herself feels in the form of social constraints and expectations.

Moreover, Bertha's existence acts as a literal barrier to Jane's and Rochester's union, yet symbolically, she illustrates the inner turmoil that Jane experiences. Bertha's madness and her confinement mirror the societal limitations on women's freedom and expression during the Victorian era. Through Bertha, Brontë questions the position women are placed in when they deviate from social norms—represented by Thornfield's attic, which becomes a dark space of confinement for what society cannot accept or wishes to control.

The episodes involving Bertha also serve to symbolise the 'other' within—parts of Jane's personality that are restrained, such as her own anger and vitality, which she must keep in check to navigate the social world as a woman. Bertha's existence is a dark counterpart to Jane's modesty, a personification of the primal instincts that Jane strives to balance with her sense of propriety and morality.

In a broader sense, Bertha Mason symbolises the Victorian fear of the 'other'—the exotic, the colonial subject, and the non-conformist. Her Creole background and the repeated mentions of her madness could be seen as reflecting Victorian England's anxieties about the empire and its 'savage' parts. Bertha could be read as the embodiment of the colonial fears and fantasies of the time—the fiery Creole woman contrasted against the calm and reasonable English Jane.

Ultimately, Bertha's tragic end—leaping to her death from the burning Thornfield Hall—is symbolic of the destructive potential of repressed passions and the liberation from the social shackles that bind women. It paves the way for Jane to find a balanced life, where she can experience love and passion without forsaking her autonomy or being consumed by them.



Bertha Mason, as a symbol, allows Brontë to explore and critique the various forms of captivity inflicted upon women—whether through marriage, by social expectations, or via literal confinement. Her presence in the story illuminates the oppressive structures of the time and provides a stark contrast to Jane's pursuit of a free and honest life. Thus, Bertha Mason's character becomes a complex symbol through which Brontë communicates deeper meanings about love, freedom, and the constraints of society.

The Red Room

The Red-Room in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" is an evocative symbol that encapsulates many of the novel's themes, such as imprisonment, fear, and the search for liberty and self-knowledge. This room at Gateshead, where young Jane is locked as a punishment by her aunt Mrs. Reed, marks Jane's earliest confrontation with isolation and the social and familial rejection that she must grapple with.

Confinement in the Red-Room becomes a catalyst for Jane's understanding of her disempowerment and the beginning of her quest for self-reliance and freedom. The room's stark and terrifying nature is described by Jane as a place of **"strange fears"** where the **"light that long ago had struck me into syncope"** transforms her sense of reality, heightening her perception of the walls and ceiling, and creating a nightmarish vision from which she longs to escape. The redness itself can be interpreted as symbolic of anger and passion, emotions Jane must suppress in order to survive in her oppressive environment.

Furthermore, the Red-Room is associated with the death of Jane's benevolent uncle, Mr. Reed, and serves as a reminder of the security and familial love that she has been denied. As such, it is both a literal and metaphorical prison for Jane, evoking her status as an outsider within the Reed family and foreshadowing her lifelong struggle against the constraints and oppressions imposed by society.

It is evident that the experience inside the Red-Room is etched deeply in Jane's psyche. As an adult, her recollections of the room highlight its continued psychological resonance; during a moment of uncertainty, she dreams of the room, reliving the dread and anticipating a **"word of doom"**. This invocation of the Red-Room underscores the pervasive influence of past traumas on Jane's understanding of herself and the world around her.

Though the Red-Room is most prominent at the novel's beginning, its symbolic weight echoes throughout Jane's subsequent experiences. Each place she inhabits—Lowood



Institution, Thornfield Hall, Moor House, and ultimately Ferndean—reflects in some way her experiences in the Red-Room, reinforcing the dichotomies of freedom versus oppression, belonging versus alienation, and love versus rejection that are at the heart of Jane's narrative.

Through the symbol of the Red-Room, Brontë vividly illustrates the psychological cellar where a young girl's sense of worth and identity is challenged. This symbol allows Brontë to create a deep meaning in "Jane Eyre" by connecting emotional, physical, and psychological spaces, thereby advancing the novel's exploration of a woman's enduring struggle for self-definition and autonomy in a restrictive world.

The chestnut tree

The symbolism of the chestnut tree at Thornfield, which is struck by lightning and split down the center shortly after Jane agrees to marry Mr. Rochester, provides a poignant illustration of the impending challenges to their union. The tree stands as a metaphor for the relationship between Jane and Rochester—a relationship that, while deeply rooted and strong, is to be catastrophically divided. The **"trunk split down the centre"** and yet, **"The cloven halves were not broken from each other for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below,"** symbolising the enduring connection between the pair despite the rupturing forces that will soon separate them.

The split chestnut tree is described as **"a ruin but an entire ruin,"** articulating a duality that mirrors Jane's forthcoming plight. Following the tumultuous revelation of Rochester's existing marriage to Bertha Mason, like the chestnut tree, Jane and Rochester's relationship retains its fundamental roots—love, respect, and mutual understanding—but the **"community of vitality"** that would allow them to be together in the full sense is irreparably damaged. The image of the tree, **"black and riven,"** paints an ominous picture, foreshadowing the difficulties and separation that lie ahead for Jane and Rochester.

Furthermore, the violent act of nature that splits the tree suggests forces beyond human control influencing the course of their relationship—metaphorical of the societal and personal constraints that impact Jane's life. It also signifies the destruction of a once harmonious and flourishing entity, akin to the disruption of the seemingly idyllic future Jane envisioned with Rochester.

The tree's state, with **"great boughs on each side dead,"** presages the consequences of Rochester's concealment of Bertha: the possibility that either or both may fall under the



strain of what has transpired. Here, Brontë intensifies the novel's exploration of integrity, trust, and the resilience of human bonds under duress.

In essence, the split chestnut tree serves as a visual emblem of division and foreboding, but also a symbol of the underlying strength and continuity of the bond between Jane and Rochester. Through this symbol, Brontë communicates a deeper layer of meaning regarding the complexities of love, the threat of external calamities, and the enduring power of foundational commitments even in the face of apparent ruin.

Fire and Ice

The motifs of fire and ice in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" are symbolic representations of the novel's central characters, as well as Jane's internal struggles and the contrasts in her external world. These elemental symbols are artfully employed to create layers of meaning throughout the narrative.

Fire, associated with passion, warmth, and destructive potential, frequently relates to the character of Mr. Rochester and the intense, sometimes uncontrollable emotions he inspires in Jane. Instances of fire in the novel often coincide with Jane's deepest feelings and highlights, such as when Bertha Mason sets fire to Rochester's bed, which serves as a symbol of the burning passion and potential danger that Rochester represents in Jane's life. Fire is the unrestrained force that, without proper bounds, can become destructive, as shown in the climactic conflagration that ultimately destroys Thornfield and Bertha, symbolising both the end of an era and the opportunity for rebirth.

Conversely, ice and cold are symbolically linked to restraint, reason, and desolation. Jane's childhood musings on **"the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone and those forlorn regions of dreary space—that reservoir of frost and snow where firm fields of ice the accumulation of centuries of winters..."** define her feelings of abandonment and the suppression of her desires. The coldness also represents the emotional distance and severity of characters like St. John Rivers, whose austere manner and stark proposal to Jane symbolise the chilling effect of emotional denial in the name of duty and reason.

The interplay of these elemental symbols can be seen in the juxtaposition of Jane's relationships with Rochester and St. John Rivers. Where Jane finds fire with Rochester—a warmth that threatens to consume her—she finds ice with St. John—a freezing detachment that threatens to nullify her passion.



Brontë's use of fire and ice also reflects the broader societal constraints of Victorian England and the personal struggles inherent in Jane's search for a balance between passion and reason, desire and duty. Jane's challenge is not to let herself be consumed by fire or immobilised by ice but to find a way to integrate these opposing forces harmoniously into her life.

The symbolic use of fire and ice throughout "Jane Eyre" allows Brontë to underscore the novel's emotional tenor and thematic complexity. By harnessing these symbols, Brontë imbues the narrative with a depth that underscores both the fervent and subdued aspects of the human spirit, and the environment in which Jane must navigate her journey to self-fulfillment.

Eyes

In "Jane Eyre," Charlotte Brontë uses eyes as pervasive and powerful symbols to convey a wide array of emotions, intentions, and judgments, which becomes central to understanding the characters. Eyes in the novel often function as windows to the soul, revealing truth, and indicating emotional and moral depths.

The gaze plays a crucial role in the narrative, showcasing various character traits and dynamics. For instance, Jane describes Mr. Rochester's eyes as **"large, brilliant, and black,"** which, per Victorian beliefs, were often associated with a fiery and passionate temperament. Conversely, St. John's **"large and blue"** eyes reflect his cold, impassive, and stoic nature. This juxtaposition between fiery black eyes and cold blue eyes corresponds to the themes of passion versus restraint and serves to highlight the emotional and intellectual contrasts between these pivotal characters.

Jane herself is often the subject of scrutiny, and her eyes become a symbol of her ability to see and be seen accurately. In one memorable instance, she describes her eyes as **"favourable,"** which could denote her capacity for understanding and the desire to connect with others on a deeper level. Yet, there's an acknowledgment that her eyes **"will not suffer further scrutiny,"** which implies her need for privacy and autonomy, revealing her inner conflicts between openness and self-preservation.

Moreover, the motif of sight and blindness takes on a literal and symbolic meaning towards the novel's climax. Rochester's figurative blindness—his inability to see the consequences of his actions and his moral blindness to the implications of his bigamy—is ultimately made literal through the loss of his eyesight in the Thornfield fire. This serves as both a punishment



and a transformation, compelling him to atone for past transgressions and to see the world and himself with new clarity through his inner vision rather than his physical sight.

Brontë's use of eyes transcends mere description and becomes a complex symbol of power, understanding, and connection. They are the means by which characters judge one another and themselves, the means through which intimacy is gained or refused, and underlie the theme that truth and perception are fundamental to human relationships.

Through the symbol of eyes, Brontë weaves a nuanced narrative of character and theme development—eyes are the organs of physical and spiritual perception that guide the reader to a deeper comprehension of the characters' inner lives. In "Jane Eyre," eyes are not only for seeing the world but for revealing the multifaceted nature of human emotion and morality.

Food

In "Jane Eyre," Charlotte Brontë uses food as a symbol to reflect characters' socio-economic positions, their emotional states, and the prevailing moral judgements of the society they live in. Food, or the lack thereof, often parallels Jane's journey from deprivation to abundance, scarcity to choice, manifesting her inner growth and shifts in her social status.

Early in the narrative, the denial of food establishes an initial connection between physical hunger and emotional neglect that Jane experiences at Gateshead and Lowood. Food, in this context, also symbolises the broader hunger for love, acceptance, and a better life. For example, during Jane's time at Gateshead, Bessie brings her a tart on a **"brightly painted china plate,"** but at that point, Jane is unable to eat it, reflecting her disconnection and lack of belonging: **"Vain favour! coming like most other favours long deferred and often wished for too late!"** The tart, once desired, has lost its allure, just as the illusions of kindness and inclusion have faded in Jane's perception.

Moreover, food represents a stark class difference. Jane's desperate plea for food from a peasant girl, who was about to throw away cold porridge to pigs, highlights her lowly status and extreme destitution: **"The girl emptied the stiffened mould into my hand, and I devoured it ravenously"**. This act portrays her momentary fall from her class and illustrates her vulnerability and dependency, which she is fiercely determined to overcome.

Notably, St. John Rivers brings an elevated moral perspective to the discourse surrounding food by suggesting substituting the pleasure derived from food with that of high moral and spiritual



sustenance: **"We need but to seek another nourishment for the mind as strong as the forbidden food it longed to taste—and perhaps purer"**. His approach to food reflects his asceticism and the ideal of self-denial for spiritual purity and duty.

As Jane rises in personal wealth and social standing through her inheritance, her relationship with food transforms from survival to sustenance and communal sharing, reflecting her newfound independence and material security. The offerings of tea and bread in Moor House contrast with the privation of her youth, indicating her evolution to a woman who can provide for herself and, by extension, to others.

Brontë uses food symbolically in "Jane Eyre" to explore complex themes such as social inequality, the deep human need for belonging and affection, and the emphasis on spiritual over material sustenance in a class-stratified and morally prescriptive society. Food in the novel often transcends its literal meaning, serving instead as a nuanced symbol aligned closely to the protagonist's emotional experiences and life trajectory.

Portraits and pictures

Portraits and pictures within "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë hold symbolic significance, acting as reflections of self-perception, societal values, and interpersonal dynamics. The paintings not only showcase the characters' inner thoughts and conflicts, but they also reveal societal roles and contradictions.

A key moment involving portraiture is when Jane sketches portraits of herself and Blanche Ingram as a method of self-examination and reflection on her own status in relation to Mr. Rochester's potential bride. Jane paints Blanche as an **"accomplished lady of rank,"** with **"Grecian neck and bust,"** **"round and dazzling arm... delicate hand,"** and adorned with **"diamond ring and gold bracelet,"** elements signifying Blanche's beauty, richness, and social standing. Meanwhile, Jane's self-portrait is modest, which juxtaposes her perceived plainness and lack of material wealth with Blanche's grandeur. She muses, **"Mr. Rochester might probably win that noble lady's love if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?"** Jane's dual portrait session underlines the contrast between her own social insecurity and the regal qualities of Blanche.

The portrait of Blanche serves as a foil to Jane's self-image, highlighting Victorian societal expectations of beauty, wealth, and class for a desirable marriage. On the other hand, Jane's unpretentious self-portrait, devoid of luxurious attire and jewels, signifies her internal conflict between desiring Mr. Rochester's



affection while acknowledging the social barriers that may preclude it.

The motifs of portraits and pictures also underscore the theme of appearance versus reality. The idealised depiction of Blanche contrasts sharply with Jane's portrayal, which is truer to her self-perception—a perception fraught with humility and the internalisation of low social standing. The act of drawing and comparing the two portraits exemplifies Jane's struggle to assert her self-worth in a society where external beauty and wealth command respect.

Portraits in "Jane Eyre" symbolise the characters' identity and social roles, providing a window into the core personal and societal challenges Jane faces throughout the novel. As silent observers, the portraits reflect the nuances of self-awareness and social expectations, allowing Brontë to create a compelling discourse on the rigid Victorian social hierarchy and the quest for individual recognition beyond mere appearance.