UNIT 12: CHARLOTTE BRONTË: *JANE EYRE*

UNIT STRUCTURE:

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- read *Jane Eyre* as an outstanding fictional work produced in the Victorian age
- discuss the novel in relation to the dominant issues and ideas prevalent during the Victorian times
- relate the text to the facts of the author's life as well as to some aspects of the age in which the author lived.
- examine the dominant issues of gender and a female author's treatment of the same
- discuss how *Jane Eyre* employs a particular narrative style and draws on different genres of fictional writing

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* which has been regarded as one of the classic texts of Victorian literature. Of the four novels written by Charlotte Brontë, namely, *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, *Jane Eyre* stands out as the most powerful

fictional works of the author and when it first appeared it was praised by critics for its freshness and vigour. The novel is autobiographical in the sense that we find close resemblance between some of the facts of the life of the protagonist and that of the author. We also find how the world of the writer's personal life is, in some ways, related to the world of the novel. As you go on reading the unit, you will soon discover that it is indeed a powerful narrative with a series of discoveries, which are surprising, shocking and horrible at times, and, of course, can, in the words of one of the earliest reviewers, "make the pulses gallop and the heart beat, and feel the eyes with tears."

12.3 THE STORY OF THE NOVEL

Jane Eyre was published in London in 1847 by Smith, Elder & Co. under the pseudonym Cureer Bell. Charlotte Brontë completed writing the novel by august, 1847. By then, her first novel *The Professor* failed to gain literary success. She accepted the criticism of the novel by W. S. Williams, reader for the firm of Smith & Elder, of the "want of varied interest in the tale", and offered the same firm her second novel with the conviction that the novel would avoid the weakness of the first one. The author considered the suggestion of the publisher regarding the title of the work, and finalised it as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. It was printed and published by 19th October 1847. A second edition, containing some corrections made by Brontë and a preface dedicating the novel to Thackeray, was published in 1848. Her communications with the publisher of the novel provide useful information as to the literary taste of the time and how the writer negotiated the issue. As Charlotte Brontë writes:

"Perhaps, too, the first part of *Jane Eyre* may suit the public taste better than you anticipate, for it is true and truth has a severe charm of its own. Had I told all the truth, I might indeed have made it far more exquisitely painful– but I deemed it advisable to soften and retrench many particulars lest the narrative should rather displease than attract."

Jane Eyre, a ten year old orphan, has a miserable life at Gateshead Hall, oppressed and tormented by Mrs. Reed and her

children. Jane's father and mother had died when she was a baby. Mr. Reed took the responsibility of bringing her up. He had been the brother of Jane's mother. On his deathbed he directed Mrs Reed to look after the girl and treat her as her own child. After the death of Mr. Reed, Mrs. Reed considered Jane a nuisance, and oppressed and tormented the little girl. Thus, Jane spent her years of neglect, abuse and physical and mental torture at Gateshead. One day Jane's cousin knocked her down and when she retaliated, Mrs. Reed punished her by sending her to Red Room-a gloomy chamber where Mr. Reed had died, and which therefore was rumoured to be haunted. It was a horrible experience for the ten year old girl, who lost her consciousness as she stayed in the room. She was freed later but she devolved dangerous illness. However, she regained normalcy slowly with the care of the sympathetic family apothecary Mr. Llyold and the loving ways of Bessie, the sharp-tonged nurse at Gateshead Hall.

Mrs Reed continued to despise Jane and felt that she could no longer take charge of the girl. She made arrangement for sending Jane to Lowood School. She consulted the proprietor of Lowood School, Mr. Brocklehurst for getting the little girl vigorously trained in the institution. One morning Jane left Gateshead Hall and rode 50 miles by stage to Lowood. Jane studied diligently at Lowood and was liked by her superiors. During her stay at Lowood, an epidemic of fever broke out, causing many deaths. Sickness and semi-starvation prevailed in Lowood. Mr. Brocklehurst strictly ensured this condition of starvation among its inmates, prescribing it as a condition for Christian way of life. The investigation of the epidemic finally helped in improving the atmosphere. After Jane completed her study at Lowood she was retained as a teacher. However, she grew weary of her life at Lowood, and advertised for a position as governess. Finally, she was engaged by Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield near Millcote. Jane had one pupil to teach at Thornfield– Adele Varens-a ward of Mr. Edward Rochester. In contrast to life at Gateshead Hall and Lowood School, she was pleased with the quiet country life, the beautiful old house and her own comfortable room.

When Jane entered the house as governess Mr. Rochester, her master, was not there. From Mrs. Fairfax She came to know that the master seldom came to Thornfield and travelled much. For the first time, she met Mr. Rochester while she was out walking, went to his aid after he fell off his horse. Her employer was a sober and moody man. He confided to her that the girl Adele was the daughter of a French dancer, who not just deceived him but also deserted her daughter. One night Jane was alarmed by a strange noise and found that Mr. Rochester's room was open and his bed was set ablaze. When she attempted to arouse all the inhabitants in the house, Mr. Rochester commanded her to keep quiet about the whole affair. The mystery did not unfold at that time, but she learned that Thornfield had a strange tenant who laughed like a maniac; she believed it to be Grace Poole, seamstress employed by Mr. Rochester.

Mr. Rochester had the habit of attending parties. One day he informed the people of Thornfield that he was soon bringing a party of guests home. Miss Ingram, the daughter of Lady Ingram, was the centre of attraction in the party. Mr Rochester was known to have paid court to Miss Ingram. During the party the guests treated Jane with disdain, which, they thought, her humble position deserved. In the mean time, Jane fell in love with Mr. Rochester, but she saw that he was only interested in Miss Ingram. One evening, when Mr. Rochester was away, the guests played charades. Here a gypsy fortune teller appeared to read the palm of the lady guests. When it was Jane's turn to see the fortune teller, she was reluctant, yet somewhat inwardly excited as to the fortune teller's predictions with regard to her link with Mr. Rochester. To her utter dismay, her relation with the gypsy turned out to be much revealing. The fortuneteller exactly articulated her feeling and it was discovered afterwards that the fortuneteller was Mr. Rochester himself.

A stranger named Mason arrived at Thornfield to see Mr. Rochester on business. That night the person was mysteriously wounded supposedly by the inhabitant of the third floor– Grace Poole. It was another mystery to Jane.

One day, news came from Gateshead that Mrs. Reed was on her deathbed and that she was willing to see Jane. Jane returned to Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed handed a letter to Jane saying that her uncle John Eyre had asked her to send Jane to him for adoption. But, Mrs. Reeds then sent him false information that Jane had died at Lowood. Now on her death bed, Mrs. Reeds was haunted by a sense of guilt that she kept from Jane that information which would have led to her adoption by Mr. Eyre and inheritance. After the death of Mrs. Reed, Jane came back to Thornfield which, to her, was like her own home. One night in the garden, Jane was embraced by Mr. Rochester, and he proposes to marry her. Jane was first hesitant, given the fact that Mr Rochester's romantic link with Miss Ingram was very much in the air. Mr. Rochester then revealed that he had forsaken Miss Ingram after having a test on her love for him in order to find out how much she cared for him and not for his wealth. Rochester told Ingram that he was to be destitute soon. On hearing this, she chose to avoid and Rochester came to know that her real interest was in his money. Finally, Jane accepted the proposal. They planned for a quiet ceremony at the village church. She wrote to her uncle in Madeira about Mrs. Reed's deception and about her prospective marriage with Mr. Rochester.

Before wedding, Jane had another harrowing and mysterious experience. She saw a repulsive looking woman in her room ripping her wedding veil to shred. Mr. Rochester tried to convince her that the whole thing was nothing but a figment of imagination whereas next morning she found the torn veil in her room. Anyway, at the church during the pronouncement of the vows, a stranger declares that there was an impediment to the marriage. He presented a document, which stated that Mr. Rochester had married Bertha Mason, Mr. Mason's sister in Spanish town, Jamaica fifteen years ago. Mr. Rochester admitted the fact and he conducted the party to the third storey chamber, where they found Grace Poole, the attendant, and Bertha Mason, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester. It was this mad wife who injured her own brother Mr. Mason, set ablaze Mr Rochester's bed and tore apart Jane's wedding veil.

Fearing that she might have to live as Rochester's mistress, and not his wife, Jane decides to leave Thornfield despite much exhortation by Mr. Rochester to the contrary. Two days later she found herself utterly desolate on the moors of a north Midland shire. She did not have a penny, slept in the open field, starving and actually had to begg for food. Finally, she got shelter in the house of St. John Rivers and befriended his sisters Mary and Dian, who nursed her back to health. In the new household, she assumed the name of Jane Elliot and refused to divulge anything about her past, except her link with Lowood School. Eventually Mr. Rivers found her a place as mistress in a girl's school. It was through Mr. Rivers that much to her surprise, she came to know about the death of her uncle at Madeira, leaving for Jane an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds to her. She learned that St. John and his sisters are in fact her own cousins. Jane was utterly happy and jubilant at such a pleasant discovery of her relations. She promptly offers to divide the inheritance with her cousins.

During this time, St. John was about to go to India as a missionary; he offered her a proposal of marriage. He plainly admits that he does not love her; he admires her for her qualities and thought her to be a deserving companion for his prospective missionary works. Jane refused the proposal. She was indebted to his kindness, but she could not become his wife. Initially though Jane agreed to go to India, she however, rejected the marriage proposal because she could not forget her first love Rochester. So, she returned to Thornfield. The whole mansion was now in ruins. From the neighbours she learned that one stormy night, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester set the whole mansion on fire, as a result of which she died. Mr. Rochester was trying to rescue her from the roof, but his hand had been badly injured and also lost his eyesight. Now he lives at Ferndean, a lovely farm some miles away from Thornfield. Jane went to the farm, and saw from a distance how the blind Rochester was trying to walk. Jane told him about St. Joan and how his marriage proposal was rejected by her. Jane and Rochester then got married; after two years Jane regained his eyesight and could see their first child.



LET US KNOW

You should note that the form of the novel *Jane Eyre* is that of Bildungsroman which is basically a story of a child's growth and maturity into adulthood. Jane, the protagonist, is a thinking and sensitive woman who is individualistic without being morally insensitive. The novel also offers social criticism and, among other things, it deeply grapples with important moral issues. The moral aspect of the novel is intimately related to the portrayal of a protagonist who is contemplative, keenly observant and, many a time, unyielding with respect to the pressures of external circumstances. Besides, Gothic fiction, which enjoyed vogue and popularity right from the Romantic period well into the mid-Victorian times, also has a considerable impact on *Jane Eyre*. The legacy of the Gothic fiction can be felt in the novel's creation of a solitary, brooding atmosphere, and the air of fearsome mystery, as well as in some crucial incidents in the story.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who is Jane Eyre?

Q 2: Mention the names of the male characters in the novel.

12.4 MAJOR THEMES

In the previous section, you must have gained some general information regarding the probable themes and issues raised in the novel *Jane Eyre.* Ever since its first appearance, Jane Eyre has been a popular novel, highly commended by its earliest reviewers. Its popularity could be attributed to the portrayal of the character of Jane but the other aspects of the novel, notably the themes, must also be taken into account.

Country Life and the Seasons:

The novel opens with the mention of cold winter wind and rain,

which disrupt the evening walk of the Gateshead people that day. Winter brings coldness, despair and glooms. The narrator says in chapter 1:

"I studied the aspects of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast."

Description of the seasons and the landscape also occurs when it comes to having casual outing. Going for long evening walks forms part of Jane's routine at Gateshead Hall, but no such outing is allowed in Lowood, except going to Church on Sundays. Attending the Church was an important aspect of the country life. Despite the new religious skepticism promoted by the scientific discoveries, the Church still played an important role in Victorian society. However, to Jane, church going, especially in winter Sundays, was a kind of torture. "We set out cold, we arrived at church colder; during the morning service we became almost paralysed."

The seasons, thus, provide an apt décor for human drama to take place; the changing seasons corresponds to the changing situations and shifting moods of the protagonist. When Jane is cleared of the false charge against her at Lowood, and she got inner strength to improve herself academically, there is the beautiful description of the 'onset of summer'. In the same vein, the description of nature is equally picturesque in Jane's first encounter with Mr. Rochester: "something of daylight still lingered and the moon was waxing bright; I could see him plainly. Later, it is the 'splendid summer' and a beautiful natural settingwith 'sweet briar and southernwood, jasmine, pink and rose' that provide a background for Jane's romantic engagement with Mr. Rochester.

Confrontation of the Social Classes:

The novel's first confrontation, which is between Jane and the Reeds, can be seen as confrontation of two different social classes. Mrs Reeds obviously belongs to higher stratum, and Jane represents the poor class. Mrs. Reed's aversion of Jane is not just rooted in the girl's unyielding and observing, unsubmissive nature. It has a history, in the

act of transgression of social decorum befitting a class. Her husband's sister had a low marriage, of which Jane is the outcome. Towards the end of her life, Mrs. Reed called for Jane, and while finding her near her bed, she still retains her old class prejudice: "Mrs. Reed took her hand away, and turning her face toward me, she remarked that the night was warm." There is no trace of repentance, except of the fact of her deliberate misinformation to Jane's uncle; but, rather there is the renewed expression of her former class prejudice:

"…Are you Jane Eyre?"

"I am Jane Eyre."

"I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands- and so much annoyance she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition…''

The most vivid confrontation of class can be seen in the Gateshead Hall episode. Jane is repressed and tortured physically and emotionally, and what is sought from her is that she understands the limits of her ways in accordance with her class. This lesson of class norms Mr. Brocklehurst tried to imbibe in Jane not as a common sense, but in a huge theological framework, as he presents contrasting version of heaven and hell as the only options lying before Jane.

Another important issue associated with class is property and inheritance. The novel shows Jane the protagonist's passage through different material atmospheres, which are also different stages of her intellectual, moral and emotional development. She starts as a poor girl, and could at best expect to become a governess; but towards the end, sudden endowment of inheritance from her uncle of Madeira at once raises her social status. Therefore, in terms of class status she is finally at par with Mr. Rochester. It is therefore interesting to see how the novel, among other things, also unwittingly maintains equilibrium with respect to class when there is the question of two people's emotional bonding.

Redemption and Forgiveness:

The first encounter between Jane and Mr. Rochester is significant, because it symbolically enacts another important theme of the novel: an

individual's moral and ethical 'fall' and the need of rescue through redemption and forgiveness. Mr. Rochester falls off his horse when Jane was out walking and she offers him helping hand. Mr. Rochester is not a righteous person; he is vulnerable to temptations and adventurous in a perverse way particularly in relation to women. First, it was Bertha whose dark sensuality appealed to him. Then there was the French dancer Celine Varens by whom he had a daughter. Then he approaches Miss Ingram, daughter of Lady Ingram. Mr. Rochester himself was aware of his transgressions, and he sought to atone for them; an instance of his atonement is the bringing up of Adele. The theme of sin and redemption as related to Rochester's conduct is present in the novel. Rochester asked Jane to be his mistress but Jane's pure love for him showed him the path of redemption, which came much later after his going through a huge punishment. Thornfield Hall was burnt; he was crippled and blind. This enormous loss was a necessary aftermath of his earlier misdeeds, as well as a prelude to the marital bliss as he and Jane were re-united at the end of the novel.

Domination and Dissidence:

Jane Eyre is about domination, repression, imprisonment or loss of freedom and at the same time, it is also a tale of opposition, dissidence, or search for identity and freedom. Through different stages of the protagonist's passage into an independent womanhood, the narrative offers different images and instances of domination, subjugation and imprisonment. To Jane, Gateshead Hall becomes a sort of prison so that when there is the talk of sending her to Lowood, Jane is anxious to shift to that place, as it would at least relieve her of the compulsion of having to endure oppression and humiliation at Gateshead Hall. However, it is soon noticed that Lowood School offers another kind of imprisonment.

Jane is a great rebel throughout the novel, though the nature of her dissidence markedly changed in later life. At Gateshead, when John Reed, her cousin, knocked her down on the floor and injured her, she fought back rather than withdrawing from the confrontation and this led

to her imprisonment in the red room. The novel offers a telling account of Jane's suffering inside the gothic chamber. This literal imprisonment of Jane can be related, from a much later moment in the narrative, to the long-term imprisonment of Bertha Mason in the attic at Thornfield Hall.

Language can also be a vehicle of dissidence. There is a passage in the Gateshead Hall episode where Jane speaks to her aunt with utmost freedom and courage, revealing Mrs. Reed's torturous ways and giving vent to her own emotion: ''I will never call you aunt again as long as I live …if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty." It was such a powerful discourse that it compels Mrs. Reed to soften her tongue, as she said: "Is there anything you wish for, Jane? I assure you, I desire to be your friend."

The most vivid and significant image of imprisonment and dissidence can be seen in Bertha Mason's case. Mr. Rochester marries Bertha, brings her home and discovering that she is mad; he imprisons her in the attic, under the care of Grace Poole. Bertha tries to come out whenever Grace Poole is drunk, and attempts to kill her husband. Finally, she puts the entire mansion at Thornfield into flames and kills herself.

Search for Home and Family:

At Gateshead, we have Jane as a child of ten who has lost her parents and thus, a family and a home. Gateshead Hall is not her home in its proper sense, because no offer of truly humane and emotionally intimate bonding was extended to her. In another way, in case of Mr. Rochester too, the terms—home and family—lost all its positive import. In the final moments of the novel, however, we have him finding a true home and making a true family after marrying Jane.

If loss of home and family has a tragic aspect, it also moulds Jane's nature in a positive way. She has nothing to fall back upon; she was compelled to struggle with circumstances and situations and to make significant decisions of life; and thus she establishes herself as an independent and self-reliant individual. When Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall, she is uncertain as to the nature of its air, and was a little

apprehensive. But after a disturbing phase spent at Thornfield and revelations about Mr. Rochester's wife, she leaves the place, becomes destitute, and is literally reduced to begging until she is accommodated in the Moor House by St. John. St John's sisters Maria and Diana had a sisterly relation with her. Jane comes of a poor family; yet she has much less craving for riches than for a real home and relations. Her uncle of Madeira bestows upon her an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds. However, she resolves to divide equally the money with her cousins. Rather than the matter of inheritance, it is the 'discovery' of her cousins that truly delighted her.

When somebody is in need of the shelter of home and comforting presence of a family, any human intervention to such a quest is seen as an ethical blunder. Mrs. Reed in her last days could not bear the pangs of conscience because she supplied to Jane's uncle misinformation about Jane when he had offered to adopt the girl. Jane's uncle's initial offer of adoption is significant; it could have meant for her home and family– a possibility, which Mrs. Reed averted.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Mention some of the important themes of the novel.

Q 4: Mention what Charlotte Brontë wrote in her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* regarding morality and religion.

Q 5: What role does Seasons play in the novel?

Q 6: What thematic purpose does the confrontation between Jane and Mr. Reeds serve in the narrative of the novel *Jane Eyre*?

12.5 CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S ART OF CHARACTERISATION

Charlotte Brontë's strength as a novelist lies more on her creative imagination, a vitality that every page of the novel 'burns and breathes with', to borrow from David Cecil than on characterisation. Her major

characters such as Jane Eyre, Lucie Snowe, Caroline Holstone, Shirley Keeder are all fully drawn and elaborately furnished but the secondary characters are mostly seen through the narrow prison of the heroine's temperament and therefore, they exist, in so far as they relate to her. Another weakness of her characterisation is that she is rather ineffective in the portrayal of the male characters. They are conceived as rather too feminine or too full of masculine vanity. However, she is particularly successful in portraying the character of Jane Eyre who has few parallels in English fiction in terms of possessing a dynamic personality.

Some of the important characters of the novel are discussed with more detail in the following sections.

Jane Eyre:

Jane Eyre, the principal character of the novel, is one of the most talked about characters in Victorian fiction. In fact, the story of the novel is inseparable from her own story and, therefore, the novel charts her own growth from being a child, a young girl, to a mature woman. However, she has been shown as dependent on others— first on Mrs. Reed, then on Mr. Brocklehurst, then on Mr. Rochester and St. John. This dependence, though circumstantial, helps her to move on. As a poor little orphan, she was materially bound to Gateshead Hall. In fact, from Gateshead Hall through Thornfield Hall, she was in some way or the other made to feel that she is at the mercy of others. Initially this 'other' was Mrs. Reed, then Mr. Brocklehurst, and then Mr. Rochester. After Mrs. Reed's punishment of Jane at red room, it was Brocklehurst who offers to hone her personality as a passive, receptive and suffering individual by offering contrasting the images of heaven and hell as Jane's only alternative. At Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst's dismissive ways and pronouncements of inhuman and harsh norms find a certain Christian vocabulary. When, for instance, he inquired about twice serving a lunch against the norms of the institution, Miss Temple confessed to it, and he retorted: "you are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying." The awareness of being dependent is

something that Mr. Rochester too gives Jane from time to time.But right from her childhood Jane had a bit of mental independence or self respect. Her little act of rebelliousness against her cousin after he hit her is a manifestation of her self esteem. When Mrs. Reed commands her children not to mix up with Jane who, to her, is 'not worthy of notice', her reply was straightforward: 'they are not fit to associate with me.'

The Lowood School episode is significant if we look at the moral and intellectual development of Jane. After a terribly secluded life at Gateshead Hall, it was at Lowood that she comes to terms with some good people, like Helen Burns and Miss Temple. Helen Burns was a senior student at Lowood. She was disgracefully flogged and was sent to stand in the middle of a room full of people by a teacher named Miss Scatcherd. She was an embodiment of endurance and restraint. She talks to Jane about the New Testament lesson to love one's enemy and this lesson of Christian forgiveness Jane imbibed later in her life, as, in Mrs. Reed's final days she accompanies her aunt. However, the latter fails to do away with her earlier class prejudice against Jane. In fact, it was her closeness with Helen Burns and Miss Temple that it prepared the ground for Jane to enter a wider realm of experience and it gave her a sense of her worth.

At Thornfield Hall, independence of mind and self-reliance was essential to Jane as, among other things, she is to make a crucial choice: whether she would stay with Mr. Rochester or leave him after she learns about his past life. He implores her to stay with him with a heart full of repentance and with utmost sincerity. Of course, she decides to leave, implying a troublesome aftermath for Mr. Rochester and an uncertain future for herself. What is important however is how Mr. Rochester is made dependent on Jane's verdict. In the Moor House episode, she consents to accompany St. John to India on missionary work, but she is also unambiguous in articulating her refusal of his proposal for marriage. This very act of refusal once again establishes her integrated and independent selfhood.

Many critics feel that the character of Jane Eyre is a self portrait of Charlotte Brontë although the author herself is has denied it. One critic

Laura Hinkley, finds a parallel in Jane's love for a married man and Charlotte's love for M. Heger. Jane's love is passionate but she would put her feelings aside to live a life of struggle. On the whole, despite the affinities between Jane and her creator, what is important to remember is that in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë has presented a complete person and a woman of moral superiority.

Mr. Rochester:

Mr. Rochester is a complex character. His actions and ways actually pave the way for a number of interpretations. As the owner of Thornfield house, he entrusts upon Jane the task of teaching Adele, daughter of a French opera dancer Celine Varens. As affirmed by the child's mother, Edele was his own daughter. But he did not give the small child his love as father. Rather, he seeks to discharge his duties impassionately. It was the bitterness arising from Celine Varens' breach of trust with him that lends him this coldness towards Adele.

Mr. Rochester appears to enjoy travelling abroad, and as Jane has been informed by Mrs. Fairfax, he is seldom seen at Thornfield Hall. He loves to enjoy party and the company of woman. He is somewhat sadistic with respect to his ways to Jane. He is aware of how Jane loves him still he talks to her about his prospective marriage with Miss Ingram. He is well aware of how Jane is attuned to his home; yet he commands her to leave Thornfield Hall, something that aggrieved her. He reminds her that she is a dependent being, and that once Miss Ingram becomes his wife she should shift elsewhere. What is more, he even commands her to go to Ireland and find a new situation at a specified household. Though afterwards he confesses that he sought to arouse Jealousy in the mind of Jane, his ways nevertheless has caused her emotional disturbance.

Mr. Rochester has some qualities that can be called anti-heroic. He is dark and ugly looking, his rough appearance and impulsive action make him singularly unsuitable for Jane's acceptance. Charlotte Brontë's account of Rochester's character is seen in her letter to her publisher: *"Mr. Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is*

neither selfish nor self indulgent; he is ill educated, misguided; errors, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live, but being radically better than most men, he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it…"

Bertha Mason:

Bertha is the mad wife of Mr. Rochester. He had married her in Jamaica, West Indies, fifteen years back, when he was quit a young man. According to him, however, it was a plotting designed by his brother and his father to get thirty thousand pounds, something of which he was completely unaware. Initially, Bertha's sensual beauty fascinated him, but after marriage he discovered that she was mad. As revealed by him to Jane, Bertha's mother was mad too. She was brought back to Thornfield Hall, and imprisoned in the third story attic. Grace Poole was engaged to keep a constant vigil on Bertha.

Bertha tried to come out of her chamber when Grace Poole was unaware, and once she set ablaze the bed of Mr. Rochester, and attempted murder of her brother Mr. Mason. Further, she tore the wedding veil of Jane. It indicates two things: Bertha has a certain murderous hatred against the male, and she senses Jane as her rival. It is significant that she is rather heard and sensed than seen. It is evident that it was not out of love but lust that propelled Mr. Rochester to marry Bertha. Paradoxically, however, Mr. Rochester's prime accusation against her was her coarseness; she is "at once intemperate and unchaste". On the other hand, he locks her up in a room and goes forth on a life of sexual adventure.

Bertha Mason, in many ways, stands as antithesis to Jane. Her sinister revenge motive stands opposite to Jane's composure and self-restraint. She is physically strong, violently willful, demonic– qualities which are not acceptable in a Victorian wife. Many feminist critics, however, see Bertha as Jane's alter ego, an embodiment of her repressed anger.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How would you like to judge the character of Mr. Rochester?

Q 8: Do you think Bertha is an antithesis to Jane?

12.6 CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S NARRATIVE STYLE

As has been indicated by the full title of the novel, it is a first person narrative. It is told from the viewpoint of the protagonist, Jane Eyre. Technically, in a narrative where the character presents his/her own story, we have to set apart the narrator and the character for the purpose of analysis. We shall have to discuss the relation between Jane the narrator and Jane the character in the world of the events narrated. An important fact about the narrative style of *Jane Eyre* is that the Narrator is aware that what he/she narrates is a written narrative. There are instances where the narrator directly addresses the reader with the word "reader" as the narrator declares at the end of the book: "reader, I married him." Because the novel is technically autobiographical, self-presence is an important criterion to assess the reliability of the narrative. The realism of the novel basically hinges on the 'presence' of Jane in a situation. This self-presence enables the narrator to describe things, even gives her the power to record, observe, assess and criticise the 'other', be it event, people or situation. Again, it also enables the narrator for self-presentation.

One interesting fallout of this first person viewpoint is that sometimes there is a rupture between Jane's self-presentation and her received image in other people's mind. For instance, Rochester describes his own impression of Jane when she comes to Thornfield: "I find you full of strange contrasts, your grab and manners were restricted by rule; your air was often diffident, and altogether that of one refined by nature, but absolutely unused to society, and a good deal afraid of making herself disadvantageously conspicuous by some solecism or blunder; yet when addressed, you lifted a keen, a daring, and a glowing eye to

your interlocutor's face; there was penetration and power in each glance you gave." He claims that Jane may be stern and repressed, but we cannot figure it out from Jane's self-presentation. Some crucial narrative information are not part of Jane's felt life; it has been supplied by other agency. There are occasions where Jane receives other's stories. It is Mr. Rochester who informs her facts of Adele's parentage, the deception of Celine Varens to him, and more importantly, the story of his past. And in all this, Mr. Rochester presents himself more as a victim than as a victimiser. Mr. Rochester narrates how he was fooled by his father into marrying a 'mad' woman for monetary gain. The way Mr. Rochester presents his story also carries an implicit justification for his act of imprisonment of his own wife. Bertha does not have a point of view, neither an intelligible voice which can only be heard from a distance.

Another aspect of the novel's narrative strategy is its retrospective nature. It is told from a much later point of time. Towards the end, the narrator says 'I have now been married ten years.' It is only at this point that the perspective of the narrative is defined as the voice of thirty-year-old Jane. In some points distance is perceived between Jane the narrator and Jane the character in the world of the events, as in chapter 2, the narrator contemplates on the turmoil in the mind of the young Jane: "what a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection! Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance was the mental battle fought!" However, there is also no obligation to maintain a narrative distance throughout the novel; there is in fact a flexible play with narrative distance, and you will see that it is necessary in the creation of an atmosphere of mystery and gothic horror in Thornfield Hall. This creation of the atmosphere of horror would not have been possible when the reader perceived a gap between the experienced narrator and the ignorant character. With regard to the mysterious events in Thornfield Hall, the reader is given as little narrative information as Jane herself knows. It leads to revelation: revelation to Jane as much as to the reader.

The abundant use of symbolism, imagery, and the supernatural elements adds to the stylistic mastery of Charlotte Brontë as a writer. If you read the text you will find that occasionally the narrative rises above the commonplace and receives an extra infusion of poetic flavour. The

splitting of the great chestnut after Rochester's false marriage proposal is clearly symbolic of a portent. Most interestingly, this is followed by the nightmarish visit of Bertha Rochester to Jane's bedroom two nights before the actual marriage, the tearing of the wedding veil that is planned from the upcoming ceremony that will certainly betray both the real wife and the girl falsely betrothed. It is extraordinary that the climax of the story hinges on the telepathic appeal Jane receives from Rochester just at a time when she was ready to submit to St. John.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What according to you is the important aspect of the narrative style used in the novel *Jane Eyre*?

Q 10: Why is it that the narrative strategy used in the novel is retrospective in nature?



12.8 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you have learnt that this unit has dealt with Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* which has been regarded as one of the classic texts of Victorian literature. Of the four novels written by Charlotte Brontë, namely, *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, *Jane Eyre* stands out as the most powerful fictional works of the author, and when it first appeared, it was praised by critics for its freshness and vigour. The novel is autobiographical. Moreover, from this unit, you must have also learnt that *Jane Eyre* is an outstanding fictional work produced in the Victorian age, and it makes lot of resemblance to the facts of the author's life as well as to some aspects of contemporary life such as issues of gender and the female author's treatment of it.



12.9 FURTHER READING

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12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Jane Eyre is a ten year old orphan living at Gateshead Hall… …she is oppressed and tormented by Mrs Reed and her children… …she spends her years of neglect, abuse and physical

and mental torture at Gateshead… …she finds herself confined toa gloomy chamber where Mr Reed had died for no serious reason at all… …she loses her consciousness; with the care of the sympathetic family Mr. Llyold she gets well soon.

Ans to Q No 2: Mr Reed… …Mr. Llyold… …Mr. Brocklehurst… …Mr. Rochester… …Mr. Rivers… …St. John etc.

Ans to Q No 3: Country Life and the Seasons… …Confrontation of the Social Classes… …Redemption and Forgiveness… …Domination and Dissidence… …Search for Home and Family

Ans to Q No 4: "Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion…There is a difference; and it is a good, and not a bad action, to mark broadly and clearly the line of separation between them."

Ans to Q No 5: The seasons provide an apt décor for human drama to take place in the novel… …the changing seasons corresponds to the changing situations and shifting moods of the protagonist as well as the characters.

Ans to Q No 6: It represents the confrontation of two different social classes… …Mrs. Reed's aversion of Jane is not just rooted in the girl's unsubmissive nature; it has a long history… …it has been seen by Reeds as the act of transgression of his social decorum… …this high class attitude of Reed towards Jane continues till the end of the novel.

Ans to Q No 7: Mr. Rochester is a complex character… …he is the owner of Thornfield house and he entrusts upon Jane the task of teaching Adele… …Mr. Rochester appears to enjoy travelling abroad… …Mr. Rochester is dark and ugly looking, his rough appearance and impulsive action make him singularly unsuitable for Jane's acceptance.

Ans to Q No 8: Yes… … Bertha Mason, in many ways, stands as antithesis to Jane. Her sinister revenge motive stands opposite to Jane's composure and self-restraint. She is physically strong, violently willful, demonic– qualities which are not acceptable in a Victorian wife. Many feminist critics, however, see Bertha as Jane's alter ego, an embodiment of her repressed anger.

Ans to Q No 9: The narrator is aware that what he/she narrates is a written narrative… …there are instances where the narrator directly addresses the reader with the word "reader" as at the end of the book: "reader, I married him."… …self-presence is an important criterion to assess the reliability of the narrative because it is autobiographical.

Ans to Q No 10: It is told from a much later point of time. Towards the end, the narrator says 'I have now been married ten years.' It is only at this point that the perspective of the narrative is defined as the voice of thirty-year-old Jane.



12.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Give a detailed sketch of the complex nature of relationships that helps in the development of the plot of the novel *Jane Eyre*.

Q 2: Trace the relationship between Jane and Rochester from the beginning to the finish.

Q 3: To what extent does Jane's life at Thornfield help her to grow as an individual? Explain with reference to the incidents in Thornfield.

Q 4: 'Self determination is the chief virtue in Jane's character'. Elaborate this statement.

Q 5: Why do you think Charlotte Brontë makes Rochester almost blind for some time and then allows him to recover some of his sight later?

Q 6: Compare the characters of Rochester and John Rivers in their dealing with the women in the novel including Jane Eyre.

Q 7: 'Jane Eyre is a declaration of feminine independence.' Discuss.

Q 8: Do you think that the *Jane Eyre* is an autobiographical fiction Charlotte Brontë had written?

Q 9: How does the loss of home and family make Jane a stronger character?

Q 10: In what way, do you feel, can the novel *Jane Eyre* be called a Buildugsroman? Explain.

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