

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

CHARLOTTE BRONTË  
JANE EYRE



THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

---

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

*Jane Eyre*

---

*Edited with an Introduction by*

MARGARET SMITH

Oxford New York Toronto Melbourne  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1980

*Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP*

OXFORD LONDON GLASGOW

NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

KUALA LUMPUR SINGAPORE JAKARTA HONG KONG TOKYO

DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI

NAIROBI DAR ES SALAAM CAPE TOWN

*Introduction, Notes, Bibliography, and Chronology*

© Oxford University Press 1975

First published by Oxford University Press 1975

First issued as a *World's Classics* paperback

and as an *Oxford Classics* hardback 1980

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

The paperback edition is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

Brontë, Charlotte

*Jane Eyre*. – (*The world's classics*).

1. Title 11. Smith, Margaret, b.1931

823.8 PR4167 J5 79-41333

ISBN 0-19-251017-7

ISBN 0-19-281513-X Pbk

Printed in Great Britain by  
Hazell Watson & Viney Limited  
Aylesbury, Bucks

## INTRODUCTION

*Jane Eyre* was published in October 1847: '... such a strange book! imagine a novel with a little swarthy governess for heroine, and a middle-aged ruffian for hero.'<sup>1</sup> Its success with the general reading public was immediate, and critics seized upon its 'reality',<sup>2</sup> 'sound and original' thoughts,<sup>3</sup> and 'freshness' of style.<sup>4</sup> Thackeray was 'exceedingly moved & pleased' by it: 'It interested me so much that I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day in reading it at the busiest period, with the printers I know waiting for copy.'<sup>5</sup> True, there were one or two 'carping' criticisms. The *Christian Remembrancer* for April 1848,<sup>6</sup> while admitting that *Jane Eyre* showed signs of genius, found its morality 'questionable'; and in December of the same year the *Quarterly Review* roundly condemned it for 'coarseness of language and laxity of tone', finding that it combined 'genuine power with . . . horrid taste' and that the author had committed the highest moral offence of 'making an unworthy character interesting'. But the general opinion was summed up by the favourable critic in the *Dublin Review* for March 1850; evidently made somewhat cautious by moral objections of the *Quarterly* type, he writes of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* 'Undoubtedly we would give neither of these books to very young people'; but he nevertheless claims that Currer Bell has 'originated a new style of novel writing' and that his novels contained 'as much of thought and imagination as . . . at least half-a-dozen average works of far greater pretension.'

The history of the composition and publication of *Jane Eyre*

<sup>1</sup> Sharpe's *London Magazine*, June 1855, pp. 339-40.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Lewes in *Fraser's Magazine*, Dec. 1847, p. 691.

<sup>3</sup> *The Examiner*, 27 November 1847.

<sup>4</sup> G. H. Lewes in *Westminster Review*, Jan. 1848, p. 581.

<sup>5</sup> *The Letters and Private Papers of W. M. Thackeray*, ed. G. N. Ray (1945), ii. 318-9.

<sup>6</sup> C. Brontë commented on this review in a letter dated 3 March 1848 (*LL*. ii. 195). Either the number came out early or the letter is wrongly dated. (For abbreviations in these notes see below, p. 465.)

can be briefly summarized. Charlotte Brontë offered her first novel, *The Professor*, to a series of publishers for over a year—from April 1846<sup>1</sup> to July 1847—but without success. In August 1846 she had taken her father to Manchester for an operation for cataract; on the day he was to have his operation, *The Professor* was returned to her with a 'curt note' of rejection. Within the next few weeks she began to write *Jane Eyre*; and once back at Haworth she wrote—sometimes with intensity, as with the Thornfield chapters, completed in three weeks; sometimes, as Mrs. Gaskell reported, 'weeks or even months elapsed before she felt she had anything to add to that portion of her story which was already written.'<sup>2</sup>

Early in August 1847 *The Professor* received its seventh rejection, this time from Smith, Elder, but in a courteously expressed letter which 'added, that a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention.'<sup>3</sup> Charlotte completed her fair copy of *Jane Eyre* on 19 August, and sent it to Smith, Elder on the 24th. Received with enthusiasm by the firm's reader, W. Smith Williams, and by the head of the firm, George Smith, it was printed and published by 19 October, as 'An Autobiography. Edited by Currer Bell'. A second edition, containing some corrections by Charlotte and a preface dedicating it to Thackeray, appeared in January 1848. She made further slight revisions for the third edition (April 1848), and explained in a brief note that 'Currer Bell' was the author of *Jane Eyre* only. (T. C. Newby had published *Wuthering Heights* by 'Ellis Bell' (Emily Brontë) and *Agnes Grey* by 'Acton Bell' (Anne Brontë) in December 1847, and there was very general confusion, fostered by Newby's misleading advertisements, concerning the identity, separate or otherwise, of the Bells.) In 1850 Charlotte Brontë somewhat reluctantly consented to the publication of a cheap edition of *Jane Eyre*, but there is no evidence that she herself provided any corrections for it. That her publishers were right to proceed with its production is clear from the continuing sales recorded in their ledgers. A 'fifth edition' of 3000 copies was printed after Charlotte's death in 1855, and in 1857 a 'new edition' of no less than 25,000 was printed and sold within half a year, following the

<sup>1</sup> See her letter to Aylott and Jones, 6 April 1846 (Bonnell Collection, Haworth).

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, ii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> C. Brontë, *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell*.

publication of Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, with a further 10,000 in 1858.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Gaskell's work had given readers some understanding of Charlotte's life, and of its strange union of narrow outward circumstances with an intense private world of imagination and feeling. In such a world two elements assumed unusual importance: the companionship of her own family, and the experience of literature. Miss Fannie Ratchford, in *The Brontës' Web of Childhood* (1941), showed how the Brontë children developed their childish play with wooden soldiers into the sagas of Angria and Gondal. Their reading of current newspapers and periodicals, such as *Blackwood's Magazine*, was partly responsible for the journalistic form of their early writings; their father's keen interest in contemporary politics, and enthusiasm for the Duke of Wellington, influenced the content. The characters in their stories were adventurers, colonists, statesmen, and in private life, heroes of passionate intrigues; their earlier escapades, magically assisted by genii in the manner of the Arabian Nights, gave place to romantic tales of love and war, inspired by the children's reading of Byron and Scott.

Charlotte's contributions early show an adaptation of both form and content to lively studies of personality: one thinks of her satirical portrait of her brother Branwell, and her attempts to portray complex characters whose public lives conflict with their private affections—as in *Northangerland* and *Zamorna*. *Zamorna*, moody, passionate, exulting, and desponding by turns, adored by his wife, regarded with slavish devotion by his mistress Mina Laury, is Charlotte's Byronic hero; and Miss Ratchford has shown how *Jane Eyre's* master, Rochester, is in the direct line of succession from him,<sup>2</sup> though Charlotte is at pains to prove that Rochester's Byronism is external and reformable. The heroines of Charlotte's juvenilia—Mary Percy, Zenobia Ellington, Mina Laury, and the rest—have a more complex derivation. They may take external attributes from the writings of Scott or Byron; their beauty is often of the statuesque or pictorial type admired by Charlotte in the various illustrated 'Keepsakes' or 'Friendship's

<sup>1</sup> Printing figures before 1853 are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Ratchford probably over-estimates the significance of the Angrian sources for *Jane Eyre* as a whole, but her analysis of Rochester's lineage is convincing.



Offerings' of the day:<sup>1</sup> but their emotional life, in the writings of her later adolescence, is (portrayed) with what seems already a personal intensity. She writes of the Duchess of Zamorna as if she were real: 'I hope she's alive still, partly because I can't abide to think how hopelessly and cheerlessly she must have died, . . .'<sup>2</sup> It is this ability to identify with her heroines which forms a link between the juvenilia and the mature novels; but, as her 'Farewell to Angria'<sup>3</sup> shows, Charlotte deliberately turned away from their amoral world, where emotion was supreme. Her later work is in varying degrees an exploration of the relation between passion and morality.

Both the nature of Charlotte's reading, and the use made of it in the mature novels, reflect this central concern. The frequency of her references to the *Bible*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and the poetry of Milton, shows her to be thoroughly familiar with them. Some of her Biblical quotations are very freely adapted, sometimes with satirical intention; but they can give resonance and poignancy, as in the expression of Jane's despair at the end of Volume II: 'in truth, "the waters came into my soul; . . . the floods overflowed me"'; or they can hallow what might otherwise seem merely a strange coincidence: 'I kept these things, then, and pondered them in my heart.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the figure of Samson gives a kind of archetypal enlargement to our conception of Rochester. Here Charlotte almost certainly had Milton's drama in mind as well as the Bible story: Rochester speaks of his 'sun at noon' darkened in eclipse,<sup>5</sup> recalling some of Samson's most moving lines.<sup>6</sup>

Charlotte also knew Shakespeare's plays well; those which most readily came to mind when she wrote *Jane Eyre* were *Macbeth* and *Othello*. The former seems especially significant. There are several direct quotations from it, for example the ominous

<sup>1</sup> On the influence of the 'Annuals', see Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë* (1967), ch. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Roe Head Journal (1836, Bonnell Collection, Haworth).

<sup>3</sup> Undated prose fragment beginning 'I have now written a great many books' Bonnell Collection, Haworth and *B.S.T.* (1924, pp. 229-30).

<sup>4</sup> p. 453.

<sup>5</sup> p. 220.

R. B. Martin comments illuminatingly on the evocative suggestion of the Samson story, and relates it to the religious pattern of the novel. See his *Accents of Persuasion* (1966), pp. 99-100.

recollection of its opening scenes as Jane and Rochester go to the church. Even more specific is Rochester's allusion to his 'destiny' as he 'glares' at the battlements of Thornfield: 'She stood there, by that beech-trunk—a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth on the heath of Forres.'<sup>1</sup> Later, Jane's nightmarish dreams of Thornfield as a dreary ruin, and of a clinging child which almost strangles her, lead up to the scene in which the madwoman, dressed in a long white garment and bearing a candle, enters Jane's room in the 'dark and gusty' night. One of the recurring images indicating the flaw in Rochester's attitude to Jane during his courtship is that of garments which make the wearer ill at ease: 'I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady's robe';<sup>2</sup> the image is of course a dominant one in *Macbeth*.

Like her sisters, Charlotte was familiar with and responsive to the poetry of the Romantics. Their characteristic enthusiasm, their concern with the human heart and with what Charlotte called the 'stormy sisterhood' of the passions, are qualities she appreciated in novels as well as poems.<sup>3</sup> 'Byron excited her; Scott she loved', Charlotte wrote of Frances Henri in *The Professor*; but Frances is made to study most closely the 'deep, serene, and sober mind' of Wordsworth,<sup>4</sup> and it is with Wordsworth that Charlotte has the closest affinity—in their insistence that feeling 'gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling';<sup>5</sup> in their preference for the 'language of truth' to the 'jargon of Conventionality'; in their condemnation of the empty display of society; and in their appreciation of 'resolution and independence' as the sustaining qualities of the individual. Charlotte's response to nature is expressed in the terms of romantic poetry: the 'strange ground-sunshine' of the primrose plants at Lowood is seen in 'sweet days of liberty';<sup>6</sup> and of the 'wilderness of heath' round Moor-House she writes, 'I felt the consecration of its loneliness'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> She criticized Jane Austen's work because she considered it lacked these qualities. See her letter to W. S. Williams, 12 April 1850 (LL, iii. 99).

<sup>4</sup> *The Professor* ch. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>6</sup> pp. 76, 78.

<sup>7</sup> p. 354.



Charlotte was emphatic in her rejection of previous novels as models for her own work: 'Were I obliged to copy any former novelist, even the greatest, even Scott, in anything, I would not write.'<sup>1</sup> Certainly, where unconscious borrowing can be demonstrated, the originality of her adaptation is more significant than the actual debt. Her conscious reaction to Richardson's novels is equivocal: 'Avoid Richardsonian multiplication' in the matter of friends, she notes in her scheme for a magazine tale;<sup>2</sup> and though the echoes of *Sir Charles Grandison* in *The Professor* and of *Pamela* in *Jane Eyre* are unquestionable,<sup>3</sup> it is the differences which are more revealing. Jane, unlike Pamela, convinces us that she has a mind as well as a heart, and that the disparity in rank between herself and Rochester is ultimately irrelevant to their real relationship. Charlotte dismissed most French novels as 'clever wicked sophistical and immoral',<sup>4</sup> but we know that she admired some of George Sand's work—in particular *Consuelo*.<sup>5</sup> Charlotte would appreciate the heroine's integrity, independence, and devotion to her irascible, brilliant master, and it may be that the presentation of such a relationship in literary form helped Charlotte to objectify her own experiences and translate them into her novels. But there is no hint in *Consuelo* of the fusion of master and lover, with the complications of feeling produced by this.

The novels which most profoundly affected Charlotte Brontë were undoubtedly those of her own sisters. Of *Wuthering Heights* she wrote, 'It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath', and she described her first reaction to it: 'If the auditor of her [Emily's] work, when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation.'<sup>6</sup> The experience, however disturbing, may well have been a liberating

<sup>1</sup> Letter to W. S. Williams, Sept. 1848 (*LL*, ii. 255).

<sup>2</sup> MS in Bonnell Collection, Haworth.

<sup>3</sup> See Janet Spens, 'Charlotte Brontë' in *Essays and Studies* (1929), xiv. 56-7.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Ellen Nussey, 20 August 1840 (*LL*, i. 215).

<sup>5</sup> Letter to G. H. Lewes, 12 Jan. 1848 (*LL*, ii. 180).

<sup>6</sup> Charlotte's *Preface* to the Smith, Elder edition of *Wuthering Heights* (1850).

one for Charlotte as a writer, and may help to account for the difference between *The Professor*—careful, civilized, subdued—and *Jane Eyre*, so much less conventional in its woman's declaration of love, in its dark, 'sardonic' hero (though Rochester is 'grim', rather than 'savage' like Heathcliff) and in its freer use of nature as symbol and as a significant part of the characters' experience.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Charlotte's response to literature, and her own experiments in narrative art, interacting and influencing each other, are vital parts of the development which culminated in the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847. To understand why it was produced at that particular time one must recall certain events in her outward life. The vicarious excitement of her secret world of Angria had given place to a real involvement of emotion and sensibility in her relationship to her 'master', M. Heger. The complex frustrations and tensions of the two years following her return from Brussels, during which she was forced to realize that she could not compel a response to the highly charged feeling of her letters to M. Heger; that she could not release her pent-up urge to action by starting a school at the parsonage, nor leave her father to (take up a post) elsewhere; that she could no longer share her poems and stories with Branwell, now disgraced and ill: these varied pressures impelled her to fuse together her real emotion and her private world of imagination. Helped by the discovery of Emily's poems, they forced expression into the open, first in the *Poems* of 1846, then in *The Professor*, where Charlotte took over a very early theme (that of the two brothers) from the juvenilia, and grafted on to it an adaptation of her experiences in Brussels—modified, of course, and avoiding a direct portrait of M. Heger. It is significant that the master-figure in *The Professor* is the autobiographical 'I'—an uneasy yoking together of Charlotte's own personality with both real and desired characteristics of M. Heger.

*The Professor* was intended to be a 'plain tale' of a man who had to 'work his way through life': it was set partly in a grimy manufacturing town, partly in various Belgian schools; its heroine was a poor schoolteacher. As Charlotte told G. H. Lewes in a letter of 6 November 1847, publishers had found it deficient in 'startling incident' and 'thrilling excitement'. She determined

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of Charlotte's debt to her sisters' novels, see Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the 1840s*, (1954), pp. 288–90.

therefore to give her second novel a more vivid interest. *Jane Eyre* certainly has no lack of 'startling incident', (but Charlotte's maturity as a writer is evident in her placing of such episodes within an entirely credible and fully-realized autobiographical framework.) The Jane who rescues the hero from his burning bed, who is immured with a madwoman's victim in the 'Mysterious Chamber', and whose wedding is so dramatically interrupted is no passive, unreal beautiful and colourlessly virtuous Radcliffean Julia or Emilia. From the beginning Jane is established as a complex, vividly reacting participant in the events she describes. The Red Room episode evokes our sympathy for the harshly treated child, yet emotion is tempered by the sober assessment of the adult narrator—'I was a discord in Gateshead-Hall';<sup>1</sup> and how well, too, the chill of reaction is described when Jane has won her victory over Aunt Reed. Again, the more melodramatic, 'Gothic' incidents of the novel are prepared for, in a sense, by the whisperings of the servants at Gateshead, and by the faculty of enlarging imagination in the sensitive child. The 'death-white realms' of Bewick, the fiend, the wreck in cold and ghastly moonlight, the 'quite solitary churchyard', all form part of Jane's consciousness; and because they impinge in an understandable way on the mind of a child we accept them as tokens of a possibly sinister range of experience shadowing the reality of Jane's world.

The pattern of interacting reality and imagination is developed throughout the novel. In the earlier Angrian tales, character and events are dominated by fantasy; in later ones such as *The Ashworths* fantasy characters are incongruously translated into an English setting. *The Professor* seeks to explore that 'cooler region' of reality 'where the dawn breaks grey and sober'; and though imagination is used as a touchstone of character, and is thematically contrasted with 'reality', it is present sporadically rather than in the total structure of the novel. But imagination in *Jane Eyre* is neither self-indulgent, nor, ultimately, repressed: it is a part of Jane's nature and her response to experience. Because of it she suffers so intensely in the Red Room; through the bond of imaginative sympathy with Helen Burns the child Jane begins to comprehend doctrines of endurance and religious faith previously alien to her. Rochester recognizes the quality of Jane's imagination, contrasting it with the sordid and petty nature of his mistresses.

<sup>1</sup> p. 15.

It is evident in her strange paintings, and in her ominous dreams; but it is also, more importantly, the means by which she apprehends Rochester's character—she does not fear its 'volcanic' nature—'I longed only to dare—to divine it.'<sup>1</sup> When Jane is separated from him, her love expresses itself in 'dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal'.<sup>2</sup> It is when she is in a state of heightened imagination—'The dim room was full of visions'<sup>3</sup>—that she hears Rochester's voice calling her at the climax and turning-point of her exile from him.

For Jane the 'golden age of modern literature' was that which produced Scott's *Marmion* (1808). Charlotte Brontë's 'cherishing' of imagination is one of the qualities showing her kinship to the Romantic movement in poetry. (Equally close in spirit is her insistence on liberty of mind and feeling, liberty to develop oneself to the full. The crucial scenes in *Jane Eyre* turn on the nature of this freedom.) 'I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you'<sup>4</sup> she says when she believes Rochester will marry Blanche Ingram. The fulfilling happiness of her own marriage to him is expressed in terms of freedom: 'To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company.'<sup>5</sup> The theme is reflected in a series of images contrasting slavery, bondage, or imprisonment with rebellion, escape, or the bursting of bonds. Images of slavery not unnaturally occur to Jane at Gateshead and Lowood—but they also define her uneasiness during Rochester's courtship: his smiles are such as a sultan might bestow on a slave.<sup>6</sup> *Marmion*—how strange a gift from St. John Rivers!—tells of the nun who broke her vows for love and was doomed to be enclosed 'Alive, within the tomb'. Miss Tompkins has shown how this typically 'Gothic' pre-occupation with living burial is transmuted by Charlotte Brontë into images and motifs of spiritual and imaginative significance, especially in *Villette*.<sup>7</sup> In *Jane Eyre* St. John cannot bear to live 'buried in morass, pent in with mountain'; and Jane's 'iron

<sup>1</sup> p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> p. 371.

<sup>3</sup> p. 424.

<sup>4</sup> p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> p. 456.

<sup>6</sup> Compare the images used in describing Mr. Reuter in *The Professor*, ch. 20.

<sup>7</sup> In *Modern Language Review*, xxii, 195-7.

shroud' contracts around her. Related images of captivity become increasingly insistent during the development of Jane's relationship to St. John—she is in thrall to him; he has sealed her fetters; she is in a rayless dungeon, a victim imprisoned and tortured, until finally she is released by Rochester's call. The image of her release is characteristically Biblical: 'The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison: it had opened the doors of the soul's cell, and loosed its bands . . .'<sup>1</sup> One of the most intense of Charlotte's metaphors combines the idea of imprisonment with that of flame. Married to St. John, Jane would be forced to keep the fire of her nature 'continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital.'<sup>2</sup> It is a kind of imagery which Charlotte used increasingly, especially to express Lucy's frustrations in *Villette*.

Contrasting metaphors of fire and ice recur in *Jane Eyre*, contributing to its emotional impact, and influencing our attitude to Jane, whose character is akin to the elements of fire, brightness, warmth, purity. Characters with whom she is in sympathy share these qualities to some extent; Rochester indeed must go through an ordeal by fire to attain union with Jane. Occasionally one feels Charlotte is using the clichés appropriate to a hero of melodrama: we hear too often of Rochester's 'flaming and flashing' eyes. But elsewhere the metaphor can be both restrained and revealing—as in the description of the blind Rochester: 'His countenance reminded one of a lamp quenched, waiting to be relit'.<sup>3</sup>

Images of ice and coldness, associated with desolation and barren rocky landscapes or sea-scapes, contrast with the fiery element in Jane. In the opening chapter the 'death-white realms' of extreme cold described in Bewick, and his vignettes of desolate coasts and moonlit wrecks link with Jane's isolation and desolation; in her early days at Lowood physical coldness combines with her sense of spiritual exclusion. The Bewick pictures are recalled in Jane's own paintings, shown to Rochester. This recurrence gives the images of frost, ice, the frozen shroud and snow, 'waste, wild and white as pine-forests in wintry

<sup>1</sup> p. 426.

<sup>2</sup> p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> p. 444.

Norway',<sup>1</sup> describing Jane's state of mind after the interrupted wedding, an accumulated significance. In addition, each is the death-blow of the flourishing and fertile—midsummer, June, apples, roses—which formed the sensuous, Eden-like background to Rochester's proposal.

St. John Rivers is conceived almost entirely in terms of cold, hard substances—ice, rock, a cold, cumbrous column. It is his coldly patient demandingness which so tortures Jane—'You are killing me now' she says<sup>2</sup>—and forces her into a reaction which recalls her violent longing for friendship at Lowood: 'If others don't love me, I would rather die than live.'<sup>3</sup> This trial by emotion makes the St. John episodes truly balance the Rochester courtship. The objective contrast between the two men is again reinforced by imagery and association: Jane, reunited with Rochester, takes him out into refreshed green fields and describes him as a growing 'green and vigorous' tree, surrounded by fertile plants.

The peculiar tension of Charlotte Brontë's writing, especially in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, arises partly from the interplay between these romantic, emotive images and the moral and intellectual intention which they serve. *Jane Eyre* is a moral pilgrimage—primarily for its heroine, but also for Rochester.<sup>4</sup> It deals ultimately with their relationship to God, and its story is about the individual soul's testing, proving, and response. As Mrs. Tillotson says in her *Novels of the 1840s*, 'Part of the novel's inclusiveness and unity comes from Jane's spiritual growth.'<sup>5</sup> Jane, the little untaught girl, rebellious and self-assertive, learns from Helen and Miss Temple the hard lessons of tolerance and patient endurance of suffering. Her return to Gateshead, with her changed attitude to Mrs. Reed and her daughters, shows how far she had developed these human virtues. But the most searching test of integrity has still to come. During Rochester's courtship Jane admits 'He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those

<sup>1</sup> p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> p. 417.

<sup>3</sup> p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> On the simplification in the moral pattern, see Barbara Hardy, *Jane Eyre* (1964), pp. 28–9.

<sup>5</sup> *Novels of the 1840s*, p. 308.



days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol'.<sup>1</sup> So, after the abortive wedding, 'conscience and passion' struggle for mastery, and the victory of conscience is a declaration of spiritual responsibility: 'I care for myself . . . I will keep the law given by God . . .'.<sup>2</sup> The last testing, in the St. John Rivers episode, is the most subtle. Previously false religion had taken forms which Jane found it natural and easy to reject—the pompous, harsh dogmatism of Brocklehurst, or the narrow formalism of Eliza Reed. But in St. John's faith she sees a religion which is neither absurd nor selfish; she recognizes in him a self-control similar to that which she herself has achieved. His influence over her comes in the guise of a call to serve God; yet her release from it is seen as a victory of the spirit over the body, and after Rochester's call she prays, seeming 'to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet'.<sup>3</sup> We know less of Rochester's experiences: but for him as for Jane, separation from each other and eventual reunion are seen in terms of spiritual suffering and renewal: 'I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death'; 'I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconciliation to my Maker';<sup>4</sup> his call to Jane is part of his anguished prayer to God; and he sees her return as God's mercy to him. In *The Accents of Persuasion* R. B. Martin analyses the moral pattern of *Jane Eyre* as a progression towards maturity and self-knowledge; and rightly, I think, he sees these qualities also as part of the final right relationship with God and man towards which the novel moves.

Yet if *Jane Eyre* is basically serious, it makes some of its points through comedy: as in the figure of Mr. Brocklehurst, suffering from shock at the sight of curled hair, and pointing 'to the awful object, his hand shaking as he did so'.<sup>5</sup> His exhortations have a black satire about them, the more deadly because it is so close to the reality of certain brands of nineteenth-century evangelical piety, not least Carus Wilson's. On a different level there is often a hint of comedy in the descriptions of Adèle (herself a touchstone for evaluation of the various adults): such as her sigh of 'ineffable

<sup>1</sup> p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> p. 321.

<sup>3</sup> p. 425.

<sup>4</sup> p. 452.

<sup>5</sup> p. 64.

satisfaction' in her rose-adorned sash. The absurdity of the house-party is certainly intended, and helps to point the contrast between Jane's values and those of 'society'; but one must admit that Charlotte lacks sureness of touch here. On the other hand the treatment of Rochester's courtship succeeds partly because of its contrast of tones: we are left in no doubt of Rochester's physical passion for Jane, but Charlotte shows how far she has travelled from the 'burning clime' of Angria by the deft, dry comedy of the teasing Jane uses to keep Rochester from the 'gulf of sentiment'.

This ease of movement between apparently widely varying moods is a mark of Charlotte Brontë's firm control of her material, and of the presence of clearly defined underlying values. Ease and maturity are also evident in her manipulation of character. Details of appearance,<sup>1</sup> mannerisms, style of speech, associated images, relationship patterns, and explicit cross-references are used to evaluate characters, to bring out their similarities and contrasts, and to illuminate the main themes of the novel. Thus our attitude to Blanche Ingram is influenced by brief comments comparing her with Mrs. Reed, and later, with Bertha Mason; similarly, Rosamund is linked with Adèle. There are also significantly repeated family patterns: the Reeds and the Ingrams, by their callous treatment of the outsider—Jane, who as orphan, and later, governess, suffers their contempt—contrast with the Rivers' family, who accept and sympathize with her. Sometimes, it is true, the patterning is obtrusively schematic. Georgiana and Eliza Reed are both condemned, the one for 'Feeling without judgment', the other for 'judgment untempered by feeling':<sup>2</sup> a crude reductive summary of the more subtly worked out contrasts of the main plot embodied in the Rochester/St. John antithesis.

It is easy to find fault with the plot of *Jane Eyre*. The author herself disarms criticism by acknowledging how foolish the mere outline of its events sounds,<sup>3</sup> though when she wrote it she 'thought it original'.<sup>4</sup> Although the basic plot is a simple one of

<sup>1</sup> On the significance of these, see Ian Jack, 'Physiognomy, Phrenology and characterization in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë', *B.S.T.* 1970, 377-91.

<sup>2</sup> p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> She admits 'faults of plan and construction. I wonder if the analyses of other fictions read as absurdly as that of "*Jane Eyre*" always does.' Letter to W. S. Williams, 13 December 1847 (*LL*, ii. 161).

<sup>4</sup> Letter to W. S. Williams, 28 October 1847 (*LL*, ii. 150).

the Cinderella type, directing sympathy to its oppressed heroine and tending strongly towards the conventional happy ending, it contains an extremely powerful downward swing, the nadir of which is not the outward event, the interrupted wedding, but the inner conflict culminating in Jane's decision to leave Rochester. In the Whitcross chapter physical destitution is both symbol and accompaniment of Jane's spiritual desolation. The upward trend towards discovery of fortune and cousinship is in itself gradually and tactfully presented; and though the fortune may be a hackneyed device, it is in part the outward accompaniment of Jane's own toughly acquired self-sufficiency.

The episodes involving the madwoman were criticized for unnatural exaggeration: Charlotte insisted they were 'but too natural',<sup>1</sup> though she thought she had erred in making horror, not pity, predominant. With *Northanger Abbey* in mind, one may see as absurd or immature the midnight visitations or the melodrama of the final battlement scene: but one may still acknowledge Charlotte's narrative skill in manipulating such material.<sup>2</sup> The death of Bertha Rochester, described in the rough, unpretentious words of the innkeeper, is kept on the level of personal tragedy. Jane has already seen the burnt-out shell of Thornfield; the host's blundering narrative makes us realize to the full Jane's painful anxiety. Charlotte probably recalled the ravaged, half-burnt Tully-Veolan in *Waverley*, and certainly must have read of Ulrica's leap to death from the burning battlements of Torquilstone in *Ivanhoe*: but the differences in technique and emotional relevance are instructive. In *Ivanhoe* Scott unashamedly exploits the horrific and picturesque: 'Her long dishevelled grey hair flew back from her uncovered head; the inebriating delight of gratified vengeance contended in her eyes with the fire of insanity; and she brandished the distaff which she held in her hand, as if she had been one of the Fatal Sisters . . .'.<sup>3</sup> In *Jane Eyre* the death of the madwoman, though crucially relevant to Jane, is secondary both

<sup>1</sup> Letter to W. S. Williams, 4 January 1848 (LL, ii. 173).

<sup>2</sup> See R. B. Heilman's comments on her 'radical revision of the Gothic mode' in 'Charlotte Brontë's "New" Gothic', in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, ed. R. Rathburn and M. Steinmann (1958), pp. 118-32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivanhoe*, ch. 32.