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Jane Eyre

CHARLOTTE BRONTË



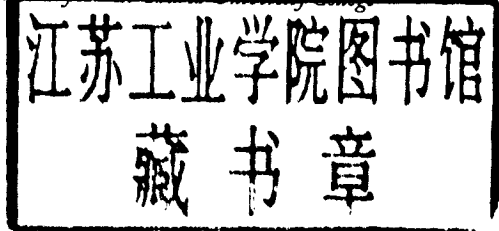
COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

JANE EYRE

◆
Charlotte Brontë

Introduction and Notes by
DR SALLY MINOGUE

Cambridge Classics Library



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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JANE EYRE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

General Adviser

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INTRODUCTION

'Conventionality is not morality':¹ so Charlotte Brontë proudly defended *Jane Eyre* against the 'timorous or carping few' (p. xxvii) who had not shared in its general acclaim. The words could be Jane's own, hot in self-defence after she has suffered a wrong. We think of her 'Unjust! – unjust!' (p. 10) when she has been locked in the red room in punishment for fighting back, while John Reed escapes blame in spite of having struck the first blow with – how appropriate – a book. A deep sense of injustice is indeed the imaginative spring of this great novel, and it was apparently still ready to well up in its author when she felt that *Jane Eyre*, her first published novel, was misunderstood. In fact it was a sensational success, both popular and critical, immediately following its publication in October 1847; and second and third editions were speedily prepared (January and April, 1848) – satisfyingly material evidence for its author of her achievement.

1 Author's Preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, p. xxvii

But popularity does not guarantee understanding. In her eponymous heroine, Brontë had sought to create a deeply unconventional character who was nonetheless a deeply moral being. The paradoxes created were too much for some Victorian readers. While the *Christian Remembrancer* deplored its 'coarseness' and warned that 'every page burns with moral Jacobinism',² Queen Victoria herself would describe it as 'a really wonderful book . . . [with] such fine religious feeling.'³ In truth the novel was large enough to embrace these apparently opposing views: as Brontë's publisher, George Smith, pointed out, 'Even those who regard it as coarse must admit its strange fascination'⁴ – one that has indeed persisted to the present day.

For some contemporary critics that popular fascination made *Jane Eyre* downright dangerous. In December 1848, the *Quarterly Review* took stock and launched a damaging attack on the novel and its author. If Brontë had willingly, even wilfully, set up the terms of her individualistic morality, the *Quarterly's* reviewer, Elizabeth Rigby (later Lady Eastlake), was more than ready to knock them down. Her remark that if the author were indeed a woman, she must have 'long forfeited the society of her own sex' (McNees, p. 53) was nasty enough. But this blow below the belt originated in a deeper moral and political anxiety, expressed in her judgement of the novel as

pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment – there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which we find no authority either in God's word or in God's providence . . . the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre* (McNees, p. 51).

Here the gloves are off, and one part at least of Victorian society is defending *its* morality, based firmly on 'God's appointment' (the same which in 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' was at this very time

2 *Christian Remembrancer*, 15 April 1848, in McNees, pp. 17–18; for full details of this and other references turn to the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction.

3 Diary entry, 23 November 1880, quoted in Myer, p. 107; she had first read it with Albert in 1858, staying up late into the night because it 'proved so interesting.' (Diary entry, 2 August 1858, quoted in Allott, p. 140)

4 Quoted in Allott, p. 142

placing 'The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate').⁵ Clearly Brontë had scored a palpable hit, though at the end of 1848, a year in which both Branwell and Emily had died and Anne had fallen mortally ill, personal sorrows had eclipsed her interest in literary fame: 'For ourselves', she replied to the concerned enquiry of her publisher's reader, W. S. Williams, 'we are almost indifferent to censure. I read the "Quarterly" without a pang -'.⁶ Before this temporary domestic retreat, Brontë's correspondence with Williams had frequently featured open-minded discussion of contemporary political issues, including Chartism.⁷ Rigby's review is alert to the larger historical circumstances - revolution in Europe and unrest at home - in which *Jane Eyre* was written, produced and received; for all its conservatism, it usefully reminds us of the political dimension of a novel more recently seen as foregrounding the personal, the bourgeois and the domestic.⁸

Jane's Progress

So what *unconventional* morality is Charlotte Brontë exploring in the novel? In what way, if any, does its concern for personal injustice engage with larger structures of inequality? And what does all this have to do with the overwhelmingly romantic love story at the heart of the novel? Robert B. Heilman has perceptively noted that 'a tendency to work through the conventions of fictional art was a strong element in [Brontë's] make-up. This is true of all her novels, but it is no more true than her counter-tendency to modify, most interestingly, those conventions.'⁹ In *Jane Eyre* an extraordinary heroine is firmly placed within the framework of Victorian fiction, but the moral challenges she encounters (and issues) in her progress allow Brontë to explore new ways of looking at the relationship of the self to the world. As she does so she must also find narrative solutions which themselves inevitably challenge the conventions of her chosen genre. The novel is at its best when moral and narrative inventiveness elide; at times however, in Brontë's very attempt to push out the moral boundaries, she is forced back on to standard,

5 Cecil Frances Humphreys (Mrs Alexander)'s *Hymns for Little Children*, 1848; it was published after *Jane Eyre* but before Rigby's review.

6 Letter, 4 February 1849, in Wise and Symington, p. 307

7 See the letters of 25 February, 28 February, 11 March, 29 March, all 1848, on affairs in France and their relationship to England; and especially 20 April 1848, on Chartism (Wise and Symington, pp. 188-203)

8 See Eagleton, Lodge, Moglen

9 Heilman, in Allott, p. 195

even hackneyed, devices of the nineteenth-century novel to extricate her heroine from a cul-de-sac. (For example, when Jane's moral stance places her at what seems an irretrievable distance from Rochester, Brontë has to find a means to re-unite them.) The resulting inconsistencies and contradictions, as well as the innovative brilliancies, are part of the nature of this much-loved novel. Many critical readings of *Jane Eyre* have made the mistake of artificially resolving, or simply ignoring, these difficulties, fixing on an interpretative path to lead us safely through the novel. But, just as Jane can, retrospectively, see various possible selves at key moments of her past life (and as Brontë draws on various fictional genres, forms and languages – sometimes at odds with each other – to reflect those different selves), so as readers we need rather to keep an open sensibility, ready to respond to the shifts of both consciousness and narrative which make up Jane's erratic progress.

So, for example, the journeying nature of the novel has been frequently remarked: Jane moves from place to place as the narrative progresses, each marking a new structural departure.¹⁰ Gateshead is the font of her development and her point of entry into life; Lowood is the site both of decay and growth; at Thornfield, we are waiting for the hero and heroine to snare themselves on briars; conversely, when Jane heads for her reunion with Rochester at the dolorous Ferndean, green shoots of cheerfulness will keep breaking through. But this is, I think, an over-schematic way to see the novel. It implies that at each stage of her journey Jane Eyre matures, as in a classic *bildungsroman*,¹¹ moving inexorably through personal development towards happiness in the closure of marriage. Yet Jane sees herself as 'cut adrift from every connection' (p. 81), 'a wanderer on the face of the earth' (p. 200) – more akin then to Thomas Hardy's characters who later cross and recross the English landscape almost at random. True, Brontë alludes frequently to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Jane's isolation and her spiritual vicissitudes echo those of Christian. But in so far as this is a model, Brontë uses it to place her heroine in contradistinction to Bunyan's hero: Jane's struggle forward is individual rather than symbolic, and rather than reinforcing moral axioms it leads to their revision or even reversal.¹²

10 See especially Leavis; also Gilbert and Gubar, Martin, Maynard, Moglen, Shannon

11 Recent criticism has seen it more specifically as a female *bildungsroman*, see e.g. Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter, though see Rich for a counter-view.

12 See Myer for a thoughtful overview of the debate about whether or not *Jane Eyre* is a Christian novel

Similarly, Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic and post-colonialist readings of *Jane Eyre* construct singular, unified views of the novel, and while these are often individually illuminating, they tend to smooth out its interesting bumps.¹³ Brontë herself certainly sets up various models – developmental, allegorical, psychological, symbolic – but she constantly ironises these systems, undercutting them with Jane's idiosyncratic form of progress.

This is not to be a regular autobiography

If there is a pattern in the novel, it is, I shall argue, one of revisitation and reinterpretation. In its first four editions *Jane Eyre* was subtitled *An Autobiography* (with the added conceit, in the first edition only, of 'Currer Bell' credited as editor, not author). However, as Jane – herself, of course, a fictional character – says, 'this is not to be a regular autobiography' (p. 71); the benefit of retrospect allows her to highlight particular events and passages of feeling, for she knows, as the reader does not, what is significant. Brontë creates that significance narratively by frequently anti-realist means: the veils of Gothic, the terrors of melodrama, and coincidences that would presuppose divine intervention – if authorial intervention were not already present. But these are always underpinned by the foundations of realism. G. H. Lewes was the earliest critic to recognise that 'the grand secret of [*Jane Eyre's*] success . . . was its reality. From out the depths of a sorrowing experience, here was a voice speaking to the experience of thousands' (McNees, p. 466).

Generation after generation of readers, even as they know that they are reading a fiction, have thought of that voice as real; they – we – seem to be reading at the very moment of feeling, event, narrative explosion. Indeed quite frequently the narrative *is* in the present tense, and the past becomes the present.¹⁴ We feel the excitement and intimacy of a life being discovered to us, and this is not just a matter of the standard first person narrative, or the prolific use of the 'dear reader' device. These place us in an intimate relationship to the heroine. What is revolutionary is Brontë's exploration of the dynamic between the Jane who looks back on her past life from a position of safety, and the various selves she revisits and reconstructs. The

13 See Eagleton for a Marxist reading, Gilbert and Gubar for a feminist account, Maynard, Moglen for variations on a psychoanalytic theme, and Meyer (in Glen, pp. 92–129) for a post-colonial reading

14 See Shannon for an account of the structural dimensions of the use of the present tense

tension between lived and relived experience is thus both tangible and shifting, as both are mediated through the selective recollection of the writing process. We see a life as it unfolds for the subject who is ignorant of what is to come, and in parallel we see the incumbent of that life unfolding it again to herself.

Crucial to our sense of involvement is the fact that we see the origins of the mature Jane in the ten-year-old child who occupies the first nine chapters of the novel. Here the adult Jane identifies so completely with her earlier self that even second-time readers have the sense that the child is telling her own story – the first extended example of such a narration in English fiction. Brontë could have milked the pathos of the orphan's plight (Dickens would have); instead she introduces us to a difficult child and renders her very rebelliousness sympathetic. She also makes Jane interesting, because she thinks, and indeed acts, in ways we would not expect of a child, especially perhaps of that era. The retrospective gaze of the narration rests long, and longingly, on this young Jane: according to her adult voice, 'to the first ten years of my life I have given almost as many chapters' (p. 71), but in fact all of those chapters are devoted to just *one* year of Jane's life, her tenth. In psychoanalytic depth this year is quarried for its meaning, and the adult's focus on the past child-self yields up brief moments of understanding and forgiveness:

What a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! . . . I could not answer the ceaseless inward question – *why* I thus suffered; now, at the distance of – I will not say how many years, I see it clearly.

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; . . . [I was] a heterogeneous thing . . . a useless thing (p. 10).

This interpolating adult counter-commentary, markedly rational, perceptive and generous, complements the child's hot bitterness, but never undermines or denies it.

I resisted all the way

This childhood section, and so the whole novel, begins in a deceptively quiet fashion – 'There was no possibility of taking a walk that day' (p. 3) – announcing the centrality of the life of the mind in the novel, with Jane's mental wanderings through the pages of Bewick. Of all the books Brontë might have chosen to suggest the hunger of Jane's imagination, a *History of British Birds* does not at first strike us as the most illuminating. But Bewick's etchings (which as real readers we can still share with the fictional Jane) are the clue here: mono-

chrome, darkly suggestive, yet fine, they echo Jane's imagination: 'the words . . . connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes [the etchings], and gave significance . . . to the rock standing up alone . . . to the broken boat . . . to the cold and ghastly moon' (p. 4). *History of British Birds*? This is the romantic history of Jane's spirit. British birds seasonally inhabit a whole other geography, which itself quickly becomes a novel landscape of the mind for the comfortless child, holed up in her window-seat like an explorer in a tent. Just outside – for her, inside – are the 'death-white realms' (p. 4) of the Arctic zone, but rather than confirming spiritual despair, they answer to that despair in her and make of it, through the power of imagination, a positive. Thus Jane is able to say, truthfully, 'with Bewick on my knee, I was then happy; happy at least in my way' (p. 5). 'In my way' is the only way she will be happy, stretching the mind to those unknown possibilities that lie within the most ordinary things (birds; window seats; books). It is precisely this sense of her own mental power that disturbs and threatens the familial and social conventions within which she lives, for, mute as her resentment largely is, it speaks on her face.

Of course this precocious and difficult child gets her comeuppance for such hubris; John Reed strikes her with the very book she has been lost in, and she cuts her head as she falls. We scarcely need his words – 'You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant' (p. 6) – to remind us of the structures of power poised against Jane. But the imaginative power of books is greater, since it can be endlessly reproduced; Jane has Bewick, and all it signifies beyond itself, already in her head, and John Reed can't reclaim that, though he may take back the actual book. Thus empowered, she can easily withstand a bit of bloodletting.

The red room is a different matter. While it is intended to quell her insubordination, rather it fosters it by fixing her sense of injustice at this dramatic moment of consciousness – but not without damaging her first. Thus, classically formative, it marks her for life and provides a template against which all subsequent events are measured, recurring in Jane's consciousness at moments of crisis, and similarly reverberating through the whole of the novel. Even on first reading we somehow sense that this will be the case, since these six pages are written at a pitch of intensity answering to the extremity of Jane's feelings, and to the peculiarly heightened quality of childhood experience. Chapter 2, which is wholly given over to this incident, begins: 'I resisted all the way: a new thing for me' (p. 7); this is to set a habit of mind, as she later tells Helen Burns, 'I must resist those who punish

me unjustly" (p. 48). Thrust into the red room, her inner thoughts and feelings conspire to build on the daily, the domestic, the matter-of-fact, to produce terror. This is the downside of the imagination, and under its relentless gaze, returned to her through the 'great looking-glass' (p. 9), Jane sees herself. The expanded mind of the first chapter is answered here by 'the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom' (p. 9). She reminds herself of 'one of the tiny phantoms' (p. 9) of Bessie's stories, and soon she contemplates making herself such a phantom, imagining 'never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die' (p. 10).

To today's reader the anorexic connotations here are striking, particularly the uncontrollable alterations in scale which afflict Jane. The bed, the 'piled up mattress and pillows' (p. 9), the wardrobe all seem huge, while she is tiny and lacking bodily substance; yet at the same time she fears that the power of her thoughts is great enough to call up her uncle's ghost. Is the 'streak of light' (p. 10) which hovers over her natural or supernatural? That is a question prompted by several further unexplained phenomena in the novel, which tease the reader, and finally leave ambiguous Jane's adult view of the relationship between the known world and the unknown. But at the age of ten, and in her state of agitation, it is entirely realistic that she should have thought the light which appears in the red room 'a herald of some coming vision from another world' (p. 12). Indeed Brontë uses a language suggestive of the supernatural cleverly to reinforce the *natural* in this scene; everything in it is produced from Jane's mental power working on the actuality of her environment and combining with her knowledge (that her uncle died in the room, for example) to create a crisis of dread. But the epiphenomena of her state ('My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears which I deemed the rushing of wings', (p. 12) are carefully noted in the same consciousness that has helped to create them. The drama can end only when 'unconsciousness closed the scene' (p. 13).

When Jane comes round in her nursery bed, reality still assumes an alien shape, and her relation to the world is for a time altered. The surest sign of her depression is that even her precious books fail to move her: 'all was eerie and dreary' (p. 15). But the loss of appetite, for food, for the beauty of the plate on which the food is served, for life itself, is blessedly temporary. The incident which might have felled a lesser spirit leads instead to the possibility of change (as well as an actual change in Jane's self-understanding as she hears the story of her parenthood from the servants' gossip), and her resilience returns. 'I gathered enough of hope to suffice as a motive for wishing to get

well' (p. 20). It is Jane's ability to recover equilibrium and perspective which is her strength; as a good athlete's pulse returns quickly to normal after vigorous exercise, so her mental and emotional faculties, which have here been overstretched, soon steady themselves. All that internal exercise behind the curtain of the window-seat has stood her in good stead; by Chapter 5 Jane's childhood exuberance allows her to bid a cheery '“Goodbye to Gateshead!”' (p. 33).

Resurgam

The re-awakening from the red room incident proves the first of several new dawns for Jane, either actual or metaphorical, often paralleled by a structure of reversal. Thus the distress of the red room awakening actually leads to a positive; conversely some later hopeful dawns bring unexpected disappointment. Jane's meeting with Helen Burns is to bring a similarly paradoxical awakening. Helen, in her shining capacity for love and forgiveness, almost knocks Jane off her own personal path of righteousness. Rather than the punitive and exclusive Christianity of the Reverend Brocklehurst, Helen offers her own wonderfully generous 'creed' (p. 49) which extends salvation to all human souls.¹⁵ For Jane this is, in its own way, a temptation; its corollary is a desire for the death hastening towards Helen. But just as Jane flirted only briefly with self-starvation, now she proves miraculously resistant to Helen's consumption: prescient was her vow to 'keep in good health, and not die' (p. 26) – and though that was in order to avoid hellfire, here it is also proof against the lure of salvation. Even as Helen proclaims her certainty that they will meet again after death in 'the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty universal Parent', Jane mentally questions '“Where is that region? Does it exist?”' (p. 70).

Nonetheless, from Helen she draws the healing power of love, warm and fleshly as much as it is spiritual; and she learns to give love, too, instinctively seeking out the dying Helen's bed: 'I *must* see Helen, – I must embrace her before she died, – I must give her one last kiss' (p. 68). These imperatives (intensified by the italic) are characteristic in the early part of the narrative, and their recurrence later in the more restrained adult self signals an insistence which we recognise as ungainsayable. Here, however, finally it is Helen's wraith-like body, recalling the phantoms of the red room, that embraces and consoles the living and thrusts her back into life.

15 The *Guardian* reviewer, 1 December 1847, was particularly alarmed by the endorsement of this creed, 'even though it be in a novel' (McNees, p. 10).

Thereafter Jane reclaims Helen's epitaph, Resurgam – I will rise again – for worldly existence (and in doing so she appropriates the resurrectional imagery of a male Christ for the actuality of her female existence).

Jane's next significant awakening comes eight years, but only two chapters, later in her new room, and her new position, at Thornfield, where her youthful strength of spirit, and the power of life itself offer regeneration: 'My faculties, roused by the change of scene, the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir' (p. 84). Yet the same faculties that enable her to spring up when she has been knocked down also lead her to desire more – much more. Standing on 'the leads', the highest point of the house, she looks out over the surrounding countryside:

. . . then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen – . . . then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach (pp. 94–5).

The scene carries echoes both of Christ's temptation and of the Miltonic Satan's overview of Paradise. Certainly it is hubristic, and as such it is exciting, particularly for the woman reader. But Jane has now learnt to extrapolate from her personal plight to that of others. This passage is followed by an eloquent, a defining expression of human impotence and its equivalent desire:

It is in vain to say that human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth (p. 95).

We see where the *Quarterly's* alarm stems from! Only after identifying life's injustice, and justifying human rebelliousness, in these general terms does she go on to specify it in peculiarly female terms: 'Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer' (p. 95).

This last part of the passage is in didactic mode; there is a sense of an impassioned address to the reader, with Brontë's voice overriding her heroine's. As it continues it becomes an almost direct appeal to the male reader, berating him for expecting women 'to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags' (p. 95). But what makes this statement of female frustration so powerful is that the author has recognised its continuity with aspects of the male condition. The bathos inherent in the structure of this long passage, which begins with overpassing the limit and ends with puddings, stockings and embroidery, embodies the under-fulfilment of much female existence, but also, crucially, of much human existence.

Conflagration

Without these stirring passages of thought we might read *Jane Eyre* purely as a great romantic love story, one which has launched a thousand Mills and Boon novels. As if answering Jane's mental call, as in the future she will do, Rochester rides into the novel in a parodic version of the knight in shining armour. Indeed Brontë ironises his entry by gently mocking her heroine's romanticism. Out under the rising moon (which acts structurally almost as her familiar), when Jane hears an approaching horse her mind goes back to Bessie's tales (as it did in the red room), and she expects the Gytrash – indeed temporarily Rochester's huge rushing dog seems such a monster. But he is soon domesticated to a snuffling, tail-wagging creature, a 'Pilot' leading Jane to his master – who is himself brought down to size by his collapse on the ice, a neat way of bringing him to Jane's level, indeed dependent on her, from the very outset. (The democracy of their first meeting also resonates with her earlier reflections on those who lack power.) This tendency to use bathos to undercut fantasy is a characteristic feature of the narrative, and it allows Brontë to indulge the reader's pleasure in romance, the Gothic, the supernatural, but within a realist frame. Often, as here, one sort of romance is rejected, but replaced by another, more human, sort. For this first meeting between Rochester and Jane is fateful, and it immediately enters her imagination to be revived and expanded there: 'The new face . . . was like a new picture introduced to the gallery of memory . . . it was masculine . . . it was dark, strong, and stern' (p. 101). So the Byronic hero is freed of previous ironies; and however much Brontë insists that he is ugly, what hangs round him always is the romance of that moonlight meeting, rather than its bathos. Whatever else, this *is* a great love story.

Central to that is the sexual attraction generated between these two unlikely lovers. Jane's sexual awareness possibly began very early: the change from the docile nine-year-old to the uncontrollable ten-year-old may signal the onset of puberty. As her sexuality must break out, so must she, and social and sexual nonconformity are only more deeply fused by the attempt, via the red room, to modify and moderate them. At that very first 'awakening', she shuns the anorexic pull to remain a child, restores the appetite which will allow her to grow, and finds the voice (Bessie remarks "you've got quite a new way of talking", p. 32) to express her rebellious spirit. Now, in Rochester, she has an object for her desire, and again sexual and social nonconformity are linked. The remarkable equality of the relationship, signalled in that first meeting, is articulated by Jane herself, again finding a new voice: "I don't think, sir, you have the right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have" (p. 117). It is an unusual voice from a governess, and Rochester respects it: "I mentally shake hands with you" (p. 118).

The deep feeling between them is developed largely through this mental exchange, which is manna to Jane: "So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength" (p. 128). Of course, the consummation of their passion would, logically, fill those empty spaces even more satisfactorily; but its necessary deferral (in a Victorian novel) only produces greater sexual tension, heightened by the suspense created by the Gothic plot. Bertha Mason may set the conflagration in Rochester's bed, and Jane may put it out, but in the aftermath passion is set alight in what is close to a bedroom seduction scene. Jane is now truly 'awake' (p. 133).

Damping Down

The sleepless, joyful night which follows (Chapter 15, p. 133) closes Volume One, in the original three-volume publication of the novel. But though Volume Two (Chapter 16) begins on the same note of excitement and sense of possibility as earlier new dawns, hope is raised only to be dashed, as Jane discovers almost accidentally from Mrs Fairfax that Rochester has departed for a week's stay in the company of Blanche Ingram. The emotional momentum of the novel is peremptorily checked, leaving the reader as well as the heroine to reconsider and regroup – a feature that will recur. But as the plot moves backward, Jane herself makes headway: "When once more

alone, I reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavoured to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense' (p. 140). Imagination has again become double-edged: the 'boundless and trackless waste', recalling Bewick, suggests endless possibility, but also endless emptiness; and the struggle she has to control it is reflected in the masochism of her method. She draws a portrait of herself, and another of Blanche, labelling the first 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor and plain', and the second 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank' (pp. 140-1). Contemplating these portraits and their disparities, she puts herself firmly in her place.

Yet this, we know by now, is not her way; 'place' doesn't come into her relationship with Rochester. Ironically, incidents which arise from the one impediment to their happiness, and Rochester's deepest secret, now bring them even further together. The pretended obstacle, Blanche, with which Rochester cruelly teases Jane, is herself somewhat cruelly used by him, as a decoy. This is an interesting point in the novel. The reader knows by now that Rochester wants Jane, and the fractures and diversions of the narrative line act in counterpoint to the momentum of their desire for each other – and of the reader's desire for its fruition. The demands of the Victorian three-volume construction also exert an influence here. With a large part of the novel still to develop, Volume Two ends (Chapter 26) not with marriage but its disruption, not with a fair future but with a disastrous past; and the Gothic phantom that has haunted the novel, hidden in the recesses of the third storey, is here revealed in full flesh and blood: 'that purple face, – those bloated features' (p. 259). Rochester's bitter comparison of Jane with Bertha, 'this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon' (p. 259) is like a horrid parody of Jane's self-comparison with Blanche. What should have been Jane's happiest day, and with it the novel's central section, closes as it had opened with Jane yet again reflecting on the loss of her hopes.

Yet there is a poetic justice in this, as Jane's own ethic of equality should allow her to recognise, and as Brontë narratively recognises in the deferral of Jane's personal happiness. For in a sense the real subject of this central section of the novel is not Jane but the hidden Bertha (who is, remember, fully known to the adult Jane narrating these events). Immediately after her eloquent reflection on human impotence, out on 'the leads', Jane had heard the uncanny laugh, 'the same low, slow ha! ha! which, when first heard, had thrilled me'