



**SHARED  
EXPERIENCE**

# Jane Eyre

Adapted by Polly Teale  
from the novel by Charlotte Brontë

Education Pack by Gillian King



# Jane Eyre

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Photo: Mike Kwasniak

## The Pack

This pack is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing a performance of *Jane Eyre*. I've included background material, such as the history and culture of the time, and also information specifically on our production; which includes interviews with the Creative Team.

Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of the whole production, I hope that it introduces some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. Scattered through the pack are questions and exercises that I hope will be useful to provoke discussion and practical work of your own.

**Gillian King**

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## Company Credo

At the heart of our work is the Power and Excitement of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience – a *Shared Experience*. We are committed to creating a theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

**Nancy Meckler and Polly Teale, Joint Artistic Directors**



# Jane Eyre

## Expressionism



Photo top left: *Brontë* by Robert Day  
Photo top right: *Madame Bovary* by Robert Day  
Photo bottom left: *A Passage to India* by John Haynes

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place **feels** like than what it realistically **looks** like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage is grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house felt like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism, and is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.



# Jane Eyre

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## The Novel

*“It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility; 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 beside political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth.”* Jane Eyre



Charlotte Brontë

*Jane Eyre*, first published in 1847, is a classic, one of the most popular novels in English literature. It is the story of an orphan who grows up in strict Victorian society and becomes a governess, working for a man with whom she gradually falls in love. However, when Rochester decides to marry Jane, it is revealed that he has a secret: a former wife - Bertha - who is shut up in the attic because she is mad. Jane leaves to follow a different life. Bertha escapes from the attic and burns Thornfield to the ground. Bertha dies in the fire and Rochester is maimed. Jane Eyre returns to Rochester and they marry.

However, this simple summary belies the subversive nature of the book; although the novel recalls traditional love stories and archetypes it also makes radical departures and negotiates difficult questions: women's status, the treatment of madness or 'unacceptable behaviour', repressive Victorian morality and its effect on the individual. The heroine herself expresses intense frustration about the world in which she lives. Foreseeing that the world would be particularly censorious if it knew the novel had been written by a woman, Charlotte Brontë wrote under the pseudonym of 'Currer Bell'. This, however, did not stop the critical assault.

*“Ten years ago...our lovers were humble and devoted...and the only true love worth having was that chivalrous true love which consecrated all womankind...when suddenly...Jane Eyre stole upon the scene and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed.”*

Mrs. Oliphant, 1855

Other critics described its; **'masculine hardness, coarseness, and freedom of expression'** and condemned Rochester for possessing **'the profanity, brutality, and slang of the misanthropic profligate'**. The entire novel was described as having **'a total ignorance of habits of society, a great coarseness of taste, and a heathenish doctrine of religion'**.



# Jane Eyre

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## On adapting *Jane Eyre* by Polly Teale



Monica Dolan as Jane Eyre

Returning to *Jane Eyre* fifteen years after I read it as a teenager I found, not the horror story I remembered, but a psychological drama of the most powerful kind. Everything and everyone in the story is seen, larger than life, through the magnifying glass of Jane's psyche.

Why though, I asked myself, did she invent a madwoman locked in an attic to torment her heroine? Why is Jane Eyre, a supremely rational young woman, haunted by a vengeful she-devil? Why do these two women exist in the same story? I had forgotten that the novel began with another image of incarceration: another female locked away for breaking the rules of allowed behaviour. Jane Eyre is shut up in the Red Room when, for the first time in her young life, she allows her temper to erupt, losing control of herself in an attack of rage. Jane is told that God will strike her dead "in the midst of one of her tantrums": She is so terrified she loses consciousness. The message is clear. For a Victorian woman to express her passionate nature is to invite the severest of punishment. Jane must keep her fiery spirit locked away if she is to survive.

Could it be that Jane and the madwoman are not in fact opposites. That like all the most frightening ghosts Bertha Mason exists not in the real world but in Jane's imagination!

I have come to see the novel as a quest, a passionate enquiry. How is it possible for Jane as a woman to be true to herself in the world in which she lives?

Each of the women in the novel suggests a possible role: from the excessive artificiality of Blanche Ingram, to the silent stoicism of Helen Burns, we see the range of choices available.

Jane, like Charlotte Brontë, is 'poor, obscure and plain' and yet hidden inside is a 'secret self, the huge imagination glimpsed in Jane's visionary paintings of foreign lands. Although Brontë spent most of her life in a remote Yorkshire village, she had a great longing to overpass the horizon of her restricted existence. It is significant that Bertha is a foreigner. She comes from the land of Brontë's imagination, from a land of hot rain and hurricanes. She is both dangerous and exciting. She is passionate and sexual. She is angry and violent. She is the embodiment of everything that Jane, a Victorian woman, must never be. She is perhaps everything that Charlotte Brontë feared in herself and longed to express.

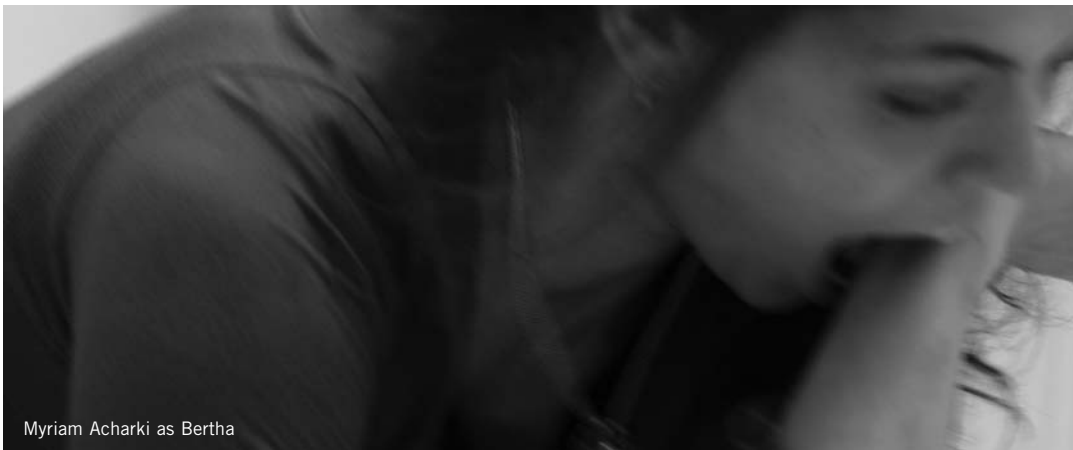
**September 1997**

# Jane Eyre

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## Jane and Bertha

Consciously or unconsciously, Charlotte Brontë exploits the idea of psychological doubles in the novel. The characters of Jane and Bertha (the madwoman) express respectively, the socially acceptable self, and the untamed, uncensored self. At Thornfield, Jane seems to have an acute awareness of the mad woman in the attic; she is frightened by the locked door, but also drawn to it. A relationship between them is implied by the strong presence of Bertha when Jane is alone, by the many parallels drawn between them, and by Bertha's behaviour when Jane is repressing intense feelings of emotion about Rochester.



Myriam Acharki as Bertha

Compare the following extracts from the novel and our adaptation.

### 1 The novel:

When Jane Eyre is sent up to the Red Room and locked in as a punishment for attacking John Reed, she experiences a 'mental battle'.

*'Unjust! – unjust!' said my Reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power and resolve equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die.... 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, I could not answer the ceaseless inward question why I thus suffered...I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity.... With all my might I endeavoured to stifle it - I endeavoured to be firm'* Jane Eyre

### 2 The adaptation:

BERTHA Unjust. Unjust.

JANE Why can I never please? Why is it useless to try and win anyone's favour?

BERTHA He is cruel and wicked. He should be punished, not me. He drowned a kitten in the stream. He set the dogs at the sheep. He snaps the heads off the flowers in the hothouse and laughs.

JANE I dare commit no fault. I strive to fulfil every duty and I am called naughty and sullen and sneaking and....

BERTHA Unjust. Unjust.

JANE I will run away. I will not eat or drink. I will let myself die.

BERTHA If Mr Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly.

JANE Ssh. Ssh. Ssh.

SHE TRIES TO STIFLE BERTHA.

BERTHA I have read that dead men can come back. They come back to punish the living who have failed to do their bidding as Mrs Reed has. She promised him to look after me and treat me as her own. He will come back and torment her.

7 JANE Shut up. Shut up.



# Jane Eyre

## Questions

- How does the adaptation dramatise Jane's inner struggle?
- What feelings does Jane stifle in stifling Bertha?
- Consider this statement below with reference to Jane and Bertha, how true do you feel this is?

*'Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other. If they must contend, let it be at least a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life...It is the old game of hammer and anvil: between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an 'individual.'*

Jung: *Conscious, Unconscious and Individuation*



Myriam Acharki as Bertha and Sarah Ball as Grace Poole





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## An Interview with Monica Dolan (Jane Eyre) and Myriam Acharki (Bertha)

### **How important is research to you both as actors?**

Monica: It's very important to read the book. Research generally informs the decisions that you make as an actor. To be really inventive and yet truthful you have to know the world that Jane lived in. When I understand how her life was and what options were available to her, I am able to make better choices as to how to portray her.

Myriam: I read *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. I also read a biography of Josephine Bonaparte who had been born a Creole before moving to France to be with Napoleon... I also read *Indiana* by Georges Sand, and the journal of the wife of an English Ambassador who went to Jamaica at the end of the eighteenth century. Both of those books feature Creole women and customs.

### **Myriam, what work have you done to create Bertha's accent?**

I've worked with our voice coach and listened to tapes a lot – I only have to speak in the first half. In the second half I create more animalistic sounds so I've been listening to coyotes and hyena sounds.

### **Monica, what are Jane's best and worst qualities as a person?**

I enjoy playing her humanity and passion, and I also like playing a character that isn't always likeable. Her worst quality is that she is unable to accept herself, and the best is her empathy for others, especially more vulnerable people. She's very tolerant and I love her imagination!

### **What are the main challenges facing you as we start rehearsals?**

Monica: The interpretation of this piece that Jane and Bertha are two halves of the same woman. It's what makes this play really interesting. But it's very physical working with someone so closely and the challenge is to keep every moment specific.

Myriam: Yes it can be very exhausting – but you do build up your stamina!

Monica: With Shared Experience's way of working you have to be prepared to be emotionally vulnerable from day one. It's a lot different from working with other companies. But it's very supportive and all the actors jump in and don't hold back.

Another challenge I have is not to think further ahead than the scene I'm playing. I'm on stage for two and a half hours without a break so I need to concentrate on each moment.



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## A Woman Divided

In the Victorian era, public and private worlds were segregated. The world of business, commerce and industry became a male domain while women were contained within the home.

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth;  
Man for the sword and for the needle she;  
Man with the head and woman with the heart;  
Man to command and woman to obey;  
All else confusion.*

*The Princess*, 1847; Alfred Lord Tennyson, the most widely read Victorian Poet

Middle-class women were expected to cultivate their sense of domesticity and passiveness as a symbol of the fact that they did not need to work. Images of women focus on their paleness, their susceptibility to frailty and their huge crinolines, all of which imply their inability to take an active part in the world. A woman's role was defined by the sense of moral safety she could provide to those around her.

*"A woman may make a man's home delightful, and may thus increase his motives for virtuous exertion. She may refine and tranquilise his mind - may turn away his anger, or allay his grief...it is the woman, not the man, to make the sacrifice, especially in indifferent matters. She must in a certain degree, be plastic herself, if she would mould others, and this is one reason why very good women are sometimes very uninfluential."* Mrs John Sandford, *Woman in her Social and Domestic Character*, 1837

### Woman: Angel or She-devil?

Hand in hand with the idolised image of good women as angels and guardians of the soul, lay a fear of any manifestations of their sexuality or passion. In fact, women's sexual arousal was often seen in terms of disease. The alter ego of the angel was the she-devil, the whore, the female monster who was both terrible *and* tempting and therefore dangerous. The worst fear was that the passionate 'devil' would exist *within* the angel.

*"If men could see us as we really are; they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women; they do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman is almost always a fiend"* *Shirley*: Charlotte Brontë

Both Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë are passionate and imaginative women who find themselves in a constrictive world. They feel compromised by the disparity between how they are expected to act and how they genuinely feel. There is a strong sense that they are in a constant state of conflict with themselves and their identity.

*"I wish you did not think me a woman... You will - I know - keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex... Come what will - I cannot when I write think of what is elegant and charming in femininity - it is not on those terms or with such ideas I ever took pen in hand."* Letter to George Lewes from Charlotte Brontë, Nov 1849

*JANE: Oh, Lord, forgive me. I know that women are supposed to be calm. I know that women are supposed to be satisfied with tranquility but it is not so. Women feel just as men feel. They must not confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings and playing the piano."* Scene 10



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## Questions

- In your opinion do these attitudes towards women still exist?  
How do they manifest themselves?
- Consider the tabloid newspapers and magazines. How are women and female celebrities portrayed if they don't conform to society's rules?  
How are men judged?

## Exercise

- In groups, look through the play, what type of language is used to describe  
A) Jane and B) Bertha?
- How does the production illustrate their differences?  
Or their similarities?
- In groups create a back-story for Bertha Mason. Find the passage in the book where Rochester describes their meeting. Re-tell the story from Bertha's point of view, trying to imagine the same story from a completely different perspective.

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## ROCHESTER



James Clyde as Rochester

### An Interview with James Clyde

#### What is it like returning to a role after eight and a half years?

It's a challenge to regain that familiarity. I've never been away from a part this long before. So after all that time I come back as an altered person. I feel much more comfortable with the age that I am now, which I think suits the role better.

#### What research do you do prior to rehearsals?

It's different in every case. For *Jane Eyre* the novel is the touchstone. It's such a complete psychological study, it reveals the internal landscape of Rochester, and for example Rochester's return to Thornfield, the natural landscape echoes his internal state.

#### What do you consider to Rochester's vices and virtues?

I enjoy his self-loathing, his animalistic impulses and that he says exactly what he feels and damn the consequences. He is a sensitive man but he has constructed a very hard shell around himself. He is described in the novel as a hard ball of Indian rubber but with a tiny sentient being in the middle!

#### What is the most challenging part of rehearsals for you?

The challenge with Shared Experience is to translate the emotional discoveries you make in rehearsal onto the stage. The extreme scenes in the play are always hard work but I find the main challenge with Rochester is putting right the alchemy of several conflicting emotions. The tangle of emotions are to name a few: self-hatred, pride, anger, lust, compassion. It's a real collision course of emotions.

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Monica Dolan as Jane Eyre and James Clyde as Rochester

## When Rochester met Jane...

The first description we have in the adaptation is a very physical one, sound penetrating the mist:

*The kicking feet grow louder and louder and take on the rhythm of a galloping horse. We hear the sound of hooves on a rocky road magnified in the imagination. We see behind her ROCHESTER on a horse, galloping towards us through the mist. His dog, PILOT runs ahead. Suddenly the horse rears up slipping on the ice. ROCHESTER falls in front of JANE. The dog PILOT snarls violently at JANE.*

In the novel, Jane's descriptions of Rochester change. Her first impression is of a man with a

*'dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow....He was past youth but had not reached middle age; perhaps he might be 35...'*

At her first formal meeting with Rochester she says:

*"I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows: his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair; I recognized his decisive nose more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils denoting, I thought cholera; his grim mouth, chin and jaw – yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake. His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonised in squareness with his physiognomy;- I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term – broad chested and thin flanked, though neither tall nor graceful."*

At the end of the novel she says:

*"And was Mr. Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, reader; gratitude and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire. Yet I had not forgotten his faults; indeed I could not, for he brought them frequently before me. He was proud, sardonic, harsh to inferiority of every description: in my secret soul I knew that his great kindness to me was balanced by unjust severity to many others. He was moody, too, unaccountably so. I more than once, when sent for to read to him, found him sitting in his library alone, with his head bent on his folded arms; and when he looked up, a morose, almost a malignant scowl blackened his features."*

## Questions

- As a play can't rely on written descriptions, how does the actor playing Rochester capture both his darkness and his beauty?
- What theatrical devices have been used to reveal Jane's changing feelings towards Rochester?

# Jane Eyre

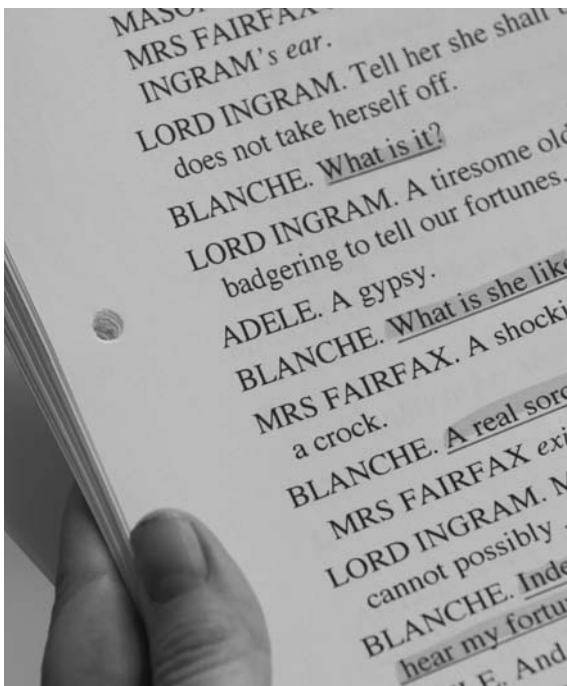
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## The Novel

One night at Thornfield, Jane cannot sleep for thinking of Rochester. It is the first time we sense her attraction to her master. As she tries to sleep, Bertha escapes and sets fire to Rochester's bed.

*"I could not sleep for thinking of his look when he paused in the avenue, and how his destiny had risen up before him, and dared him to be happy at Thornfield... I hardly know whether I had slept or not after this musing. At any rate, I started awake on hearing a vague murmur. Which sounded, I thought, just above me....I tried to sleep again...Just then it seemed my chamber-door was touched; as if fingers had swept the panels in groping a way along the dark galley outside....I began to feel the return of slumber. But a dream had scarcely approached my ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow-freezing incident enough... I withdrew the bolt and opened the door with a trembling hand...and became aware of a strong smell of burning."*

Jane Eyre



## The Adaptation

JANE LIES DOWN TO SLEEP BUT BEGINS TO HEAVE AND MURMUR. SHE IS HAVING A SEXUAL DREAM. BERTHA STEALS ACROSS THE ATTIC CARRYING THE CANDLE. THE KEYS TO THE DOOR ARE IN GRACE'S POCKET. SHE MUST STEAL THEM WITHOUT WAKING HER. GRACE'S OCCASIONAL MOVEMENTS ARE CONNECTED WITH JANE'S AND THE MURMURINGS OF HER DREAM.

JANE I want...I want to.....let me...

THESE WORDS ARE SCARCELY AUDIBLE BUT SUGGEST A CONFLICT HAPPENING IN THE DREAM. BERTHA, AFTER SEVERAL ATTEMPTS FINALLY TEASES THE KEYS FROM GRACE'S POCKET. SHE RUNS TO THE DOOR. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE LOCKS OPENING. IT IS AS IF JANE IS RELEASED. SHE MURMURS WITH PLEASURE. GRACE IS WOKEN BY THE NOISE. AS BERTHA DISAPPEARS THROUGH THE DOOR SHE STARTS AFTER HER. BERTHA CARRIES THE FLAME ALOFT. SHE ENTERS ROCHESTER'S CHAMBER. SHE STRADDLES HIS SLEEPING BODY, BEARING DOWN ON HIM IN AN EXPRESSION OF LUST AND RAGE. JANE'S MOVEMENTS ECHO BERTHA'S. GRACE FINALLY CATCHES UP WITH BERTHA AND LAYS HOLD OF HER. SHE WRESTLES HER BACKWARDS AND DROPS THE CANDLE. JANE AWAKES WITH A START. BERTHA IS FORCED BACK UP THE STAIRS. JANE COMES OUT INTO THE PASSAGEWAY. SHE SEES THE DROPPED CANDLE AND THEN SMELLS FIRE. SHE RUNS TO ROCHESTER'S ROOM BEATING BACK THE SMOKE AND COVERING HER MOUTH. SHE GRABS A PITCHER OF WATER AND THROWS IT OVER ROCHESTER DRENCHING HIM. HE WAKES CONFUSED.

## Questions

- How has Polly's adaptation emphasised the stirrings of Jane's desire?
- What is the significance of the fire and the water in this extract?



# Jane Eyre

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## CLASS AND STATUS

The years 1840 - 1860 were a particularly confused period in the Victorian age. Whilst there was confident expansion of the British Empire, rapid growth of Industrialisation and the emergence of a middle-class, such developments brought about a strong feeling of nervousness. An increasingly large urban population needed to be kept under control: in 1842 there had been riots and strikes in the industrial areas of northern Britain. It was an age where social behaviour and morality were driven by conservative ideals. There was preoccupation with categorising and labelling both to try to understand the world, and to contain and suppress what could not be understood.

The Victorians were a status-laden society; the major class divisions were pursued particularly by the newly emerged middle-class who wanted to distance themselves from the working masses and to project their own specific identity. The middle-class tried to prove itself by insisting on a firm sense of morality based upon the family unit and by a keen rejection of people who tried to rise above their position. Jane Eyre's social position is a particularly sensitive one; she is an orphan, adopted by a middle-class family. Although she is allowed to play with Mrs Reed's children, it is with certain limitations and she is expected to be subservient to them. When she protests against any injustice she is reminded of her dependency and punished for trying to rise above her station.

*"Jane Eyre, you have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense."*

John Reed in *Jane Eyre*

Following the industrial revolution, the new middle-classes were created, and with them came a great surge of wealth to the country. Suburbs began to grow, ideal for the factory owner for example who no longer wanted to 'live above the shop'. It was also the start of gentility. Before the industrial revolution, women could earn money as secretaries, book-keepers, shop-keepers, hairdressers, midwives and pharmacists, but the change in society decreed that it was not 'genteel' for women to work. The only option as a woman if you needed to earn money was in a factory, as a servant or a governess, that is if you wanted a legal profession.

Although a governess had to have the education and manners of a "lady," she was treated as a servant. However, the other servants did not accept her either because she was far better educated than them, and shared a level of

intimacy with the master's children. The life of a governess was a life of isolation. Even so, it was almost the only option for an unmarried middle-class woman who needed to earn her own living.

Governesses often lived within the family home but their status was ambiguous. When Jane Eyre arrives at Thornfield she is lonely, but although the servants:

*"are very decent people... one can't converse with them on terms of equality; one must keep them at a due distance, for fear of losing one's authority."* Jane Eyre

Charlotte Brontë worked as a governess and in 1839 wrote to her sister Emily describing her experiences:

*"The children are constantly with me and more riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs never grew...I used to think I should like to be in the stir of grand folks' society but I have had enough of it – it is dreary work to look on and listen. I see more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil...If she steals a moment for herself she is a nuisance."*

In another letter she discusses the advertisements that were placed for 'governesses':

*"What they really want is a maid-of-all-work, and they have the audacity to insult the educated portion of the female community by advertising for a 'governess'. Let things be called by their right names; and henceforth, let the words, 'WANTED A DOMESTIC DRUDGE!' be placed at the top of all similar advertisements."*

The awkwardness of being well-educated but with low status is something which Jane Eyre is painfully aware of, and it is one of the major negotiations between her and Rochester,

JANE I was thinking, sir, that very few masters would trouble themselves to enquire whether or not their paid subordinates were piqued and hurt by their orders.

ROCHESTER Paid subordinates! What! You are my paid subordinate, are you? Oh yes, I had forgotten the salary! Well then, on that mercenary ground, will you agree to let me hector a little?

JANE No, sir, not on that ground; but on the ground that you did forget it, and that you care whether or not a dependent is comfortable in his dependency, I agree heartily.

# Jane Eyre

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## MADNESS AND MORALITY



Monica Dolan as Jane Eyre

Today we no longer use the term 'Madness', but instead use 'mental illness'. Much medical and psychological study and improved general public teaching and awareness has done much to reduce the stigma and shame previously attached to mental illness. Today we place the illness firmly in the arena of health and not in the arena of social conditioning – or morality.

### Definitions of Mental illness on the Web:

- The term that refers collectively to all mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.
- A state of being in which an individual has difficulty in handling situations and feelings of an everyday nature. In certain instances, conditions are characterized by impairment of intellectual functions, the experience of shallow and unstable emotions, and difficulty in adapting to one's environment.

But in the Victorian Age, with its strict boundaries of behaviour, madness (as it was then termed) and morality became very confused. A person expressing rage or rebellion could be described equally as mad or evil. Such behaviour was contained by moral or physical restraint.

*Much Madness is divinest Sense  
To a discerning Eye  
Much sense - the starkest Madness  
'Tis the Majority  
In this, as All, prevail  
Assent - and you are sane  
Demur - and you're straightaway dangerous  
And handled with a Chain*

Emily Dickinson (1830-86)

Madness appears throughout Jane Eyre. Two characters (Bertha Mason and John Reed) go mad and commit suicide, while the main characters, Jane and Mr. Rochester, both have their moments of madness. Although Bertha is described in the novel as the antithesis of Jane, we know that Jane also feels rage and longing.

*"This is my wife" says he. "Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know – such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And this is what I wished to have, this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon. Look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask- this form with that bulk; then judge me, priest of the gospel and man of the law, and remember, with that judgment ye judge and ye shall be judged. Off with you now. I must shut up my prize." Jane Eyre*

The early nineteenth century saw a transition in medicine from religion to science. Men began taking over the medical profession, removing the power from female healers and wise-women. Women were not officially prevented from becoming doctors, but in order to practice, a doctor needed a university certificate. Women were barred from attending universities!





# Jane Eyre

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Women began to lose any control they had over their physical and mental health. Women were seen to be intellectually feeble and only able to be housewives – mother-wives, and only then under supervision from men. Men were aligned with aspirations, learning, management, direction and science. In contrast, women were aligned with nature, superstition (evilness and the Devil) and childbirth. It was the female body that had the potential for deviancy, and thus madness became synonymous with femininity.

The female reproductive system (menstruation, menopause and pregnancy) had always been feared by men. It was felt that these feminine ‘disorders’ could change the temperament and mind of a woman and thus draw her away from her role as domestic angel.

It was also thought that mental illness was located in the female sexual reproductive parts or processes. Amputation of reproductive organs, including the clitoris and the cervix became common, because it was incorrectly thought that female madness would be removed with the body part. Unsurprisingly many women suffered greatly and often died from these operations.

*“The emotion of fear is the first and often the only one by which (patients) can be governed. By working on it one removes their thoughts from the phantasms occupying them and brings them back to reality, even if this entails inflicting pain and suffering.”* *Mind-Forg’d Manacles* by Roy Porter

Often woman who had been traumatized by an event such as a rape or assault were removed to mental asylums, thus removing the threat of the madness spreading to other woman.

*‘The shadow is the personal unconscious; it is all those uncivilised desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and our ideal personality, all that we are ashamed of, all that we do not want to know about ourselves. It follows that the narrower and more restrictive the society in which we live the larger will be our shadow.....it has remained much the same since infancy, when our actions were purely impulsive. The collected aspect of the shadow is expressed as a devil, a witch, or something similar.’* Frieda Fordham, *Introduction to Jung’s Psychology*

## Exercise

## Questions

If Bertha and Jane are two opposites of womanhood, how is this reflected in the production? Musically? Scenically? By the actors?

Charlotte Brontë wrote to her friend:

"Throughout my early youth.... I felt myself incapable of feeling and acting as most people felt and acted ;....unintentionally, I showed everything that passed in my heart and sometimes storms were passing through it. In vain I tried to imitate....the serene and even temper of my companions..."

"I could not restrain the ebb and flow of blood in my arteries and that ebb and flow always showed itself in my face and in my hard and unattractive features. I wept in secret."

- In groups create a short scene that illustrates the idea that women had to ‘lose’ or ‘hide’ a part of themselves in order to escape being labeled as ‘mad’.
- How would your ideas for the scene change if you were given two dates in which to stage the scene; 1846 and 2006?



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## SCENE STUDY

Read through the following scene and then consider the questions and exercises.

THE CLOCK STRIKES TWELVE.

JANE        You may go. Lessons will continue this afternoon. Tell Cook I'm not hungry.

ADELE LEAVES. JANE PICKS UP ADELE'S SAMPLER AND TRIES TO UNPICK THE STITCHES. SHE PULLS IMPATIENTLY AT THE TANGLED THREAD MAKING IT WORSE. WE HEAR BERTHA'S FOOTSTEPS PACING TO AND FRO IN A DISTANT ROOM. IT IS THE TREAD OF A CAGED ANIMAL. THIS RESTLESSNESS REGISTERS IN JANE'S BODY MAKING IT HARD TO STAY STILL. SHE TRIES TO USE THE EMBROIDERY TO CONTROL HER AGITATION BUT IT INCREASES AS IF SOME FORCE WERE COMING THROUGH HER. FINALLY SHE THROWS THE SAMPLER DOWN AND GETS UP.

JANE        Oh, Lord, forgive me. I know that women are supposed to be calm. I know that women should be satisfied with tranquillity but it is not so. Women feel just as men feel. They suffer from stagnation. They must not confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings and playing the piano. They must exercise their powers. They must have action. And they will make it if they cannot find it.

THE PACING FEET GROW LOUDER AND LOUDER AND TAKE ON THE RHYTHM OF A GALLOPING HORSE. JANE CLOSES HER EYES. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF HOOVES ON A ROCKY ROAD MAGNIFIED IN THE IMAGINATION. WE SEE BEHIND HER ROCHESTER ON A HORSE, GALLOPING TOWARDS US THROUGH FALLING SNOW. HIS DOG, PILOT, RUNS AHEAD. SUDDENLY THE HORSE REARS UP SLIPPING ON THE ICE. ROCHESTER FALLS IN FRONT OF JANE. SHE OPENS HER EYES.

JANE        Are you injured, sir?

## Questions

- Why has Polly Teale chosen to give Jane the action of unpicking the sampler? What does it tell us about her inner state?
- How does Bertha physically express this state?
- What is the impact of Rochester literally crashing into the scene and falling at Jane's feet?

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## Exercise



- Choose a section of the novel that you enjoyed. Read it in a group, how would you dramatise it?
- How would you portray on stage any inner emotions or feelings?
- In pairs, consider the conflicting energies that can exist within one person. For example a child has been told that she can't eat the sweets before dinner but she wants to. Her conflicting energies are of desire and obedience. A is desire, B is obedience.
  - Make one person A, the other B.
  - Face each other and begin mirroring small movements. No sound or words.
  - Now add their 'wants'. A desperately wants the bag of sweets that is situated at the other end of the room. B wants them too but is too scared to try to get them.
  - Allow the mirroring movements to express these wants. You can change the leader at any time. Keep the mirroring small, exact and detailed.
- The mirror now dissolves and A and B can move without copying each other, allowing their individual wants to establish themselves.
- They must remain within a foot of each other and/or touching in some way. Remember to keep the movements precise and detailed.
- A's desire for the sweets is very strong and she must convince B that they should get them and eat them.
- B's fear of the consequences of eating the sweets far out-weighs her desire for them so she must stop A.
- Although the two parts have different wants they are inextricably linked so that one action or energy in one half always provokes a reaction in the other. It is like a primal game of call and response.
- Who will win the struggle?

# Jane Eyre

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## THE FIRE

Fire plays an important role in *Jane Eyre*. The novel teems with the ambivalent presence of candles and fires; they symbolise both passion and danger, hell and desire, warmth and destruction:

*“At the beginning, Jane is locked up in the Red Room, as though her fiery temperament is something that needs to be contained. Mr. Brocklehurst uses the image of Hell as a fiery lake of burning sulphur to frighten Jane. At Thornfield, just when Jane is beginning to feel attracted to Rochester, Bertha escapes and sets fire to Rochester’s bed. The fire becomes a symbolic expression of that flame inside Jane, who immediately rushes out with a pitcher of water and throws it over Rochester as though to extinguish this desire. The climate becomes hotter and hotter at Thornfield as though the heat reflects Jane’s and Rochester’s feelings for each other. And then, finally, there is the fire at the end. This act of burning down the house is a massive act of self-assertion, of protest. It’s like tearing apart an enclosed space so that it can never be locked up again. The final image of Bertha in the embers is a cathartic one. There is a transformation. She’s free again, released from that place, no longer a raging spirit.”* Polly Teale

The fire at Thornfield is an intense moment of emotional, psychological and physical release. Polly Teale fuses the idea of fire as a physical reality and a symbolic expression of Jane and Bertha’s rage.

## Questions

- What do you think of the fire in the production? How is it used? How is it created?
- How would you create a natural element such as a fire or a storm on stage?
- Why doesn’t Bertha escape from Thornfield when she gets the chance?



# Jane Eyre

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## An Interview with the Composer, Peter Salem



### **This is a revival from an earlier production of Jane Eyre, what changes will you make and why?**

I won't really know the answer to this until we get further into rehearsals, as any changes I make will most likely be in response to changes in the script/staging. Inevitably there will be some cues which I come back to which I will want to alter or improve and because of cast changes I'm sure the Bertha song/dance section will need looking at.

### **What instruments are you using and why?**

As in the original (and because the same actor/musician will be working on this production) I shall be using a cello, the sound of which is picked up by a microphone and altered electronically (reverb/echo is added; the pitch is altered so it sounds much higher or lower than is played; layers of sound are built up on top of each other etc). The cello was chosen as an instrument which could represent and express Jane's inner emotions, which she frequently has to suppress. So the choice was more emotional than geographical though it is good at expressing a bleak coldness (high harmonics) and tropical warmth - I use sounds other than the cello to depict the richer warmer world from which Bertha has come and to which Jane's imagination drifts.

### **What is your favourite scene?**

There are many, but the return of Jane to Rochester's house is of course very powerful.

### **Any major challenges for you?**

The challenges are mostly technical, as the computer-controlled electronics which alter the sound of the cello are complex.

### **What are the main differences between working with Shared Experience and other theatre companies?**

The difference between Shared Experience and other companies is the physical content, coming away from the text to express something purely physically or counterpointing sections of text with physical work. This is always particularly interesting from the point of view of sound as these are heightened non-naturalistic moments which can use sound very effectively.

## Questions

- **When in your opinion was the most effective use of music, sound or song in the production? Why?**



# Jane Eyre

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## The Landscape of the Play

### An Interview with Associate Set Designer, Angela Simpson

#### Can you describe the set to us?

Yes, it's a skeletal version of a grand house after a fire. Thornfield after the fire. It's charred and dilapidated. There are the remains of a big sweeping staircase in the middle of the stage coming from the attic room, where Bertha is locked up. We may have a wooden eagle carved on to the banister at the foot of the stairs – a small pocket of grandeur that the fire missed. The stairs sweep round in a circular fashion which came out of the idea of hurricanes (as described in the opening passage of the play).

We've used an almost photographic-looking sky cloth of clouds and sky. This helps, when lit, to create different moods and to help us define indoor and outdoor scenes.

We've also got a few chairs and benches, but for example we won't bring on a huge table when there is a dinner scene, the actors will sit on chairs with just a knife and fork. And all the furniture can be used to create other things, carriages for example.

Costume-wise, Jane will be very monochrome in colour: greys, blacks and dark blues, whereas Bertha will be the only real colour - flame reds and so on.

#### What was the biggest challenge in terms of design?

Neil Warmington originally designed the set, my job has been to honour that design and also marry the subtle changes that developed over the course of two previous production runs.

#### What's your favourite image?

The sky. It is eternally atmospheric and emotional and it can be lit in an intimate or expansive way. It's very versatile.

#### How did you become a designer?

I started working backstage, helping out at a local theatre when I was at school initially. As a teenager I also worked with Chicken Shed Theatre Company. After that I did a degree in Fine Art and then I began to specialise in theatre – my work at Chicken Shed having inspired me - and so I studied Theatre Design at the Motley Theatre Design College in London.

## Questions

- Jane travels to five different places in the novel: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End and Ferndean. In the production there are many different locations portrayed such as a snowy winter night, a grand drawing room, a classroom, an attic and so on. How does the play conjure up these different places?



# Jane Eyre

## What Do I Want?

Each character in the production has a 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. Also there is an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective.

Throughout rehearsals, Polly (the Director) and the actors discuss what each character's objective and obstacle might be. The actors discussed the ideas below in the very first week of rehearsals. These are never carved in stone as through the rehearsals ideas grow and change. I have included as many of the characters as possible.



### Character: Jane Eyre (Monica Dolan)

**Super Objective:** To be respected for myself.

**Obstacles:** Female, poor, unconnected (orphan), plain-looking and therefore less chance of marriage and that she is disliked from an early age, which manifests in a huge fear of rejection.

**Favourite Line:** *'I have as much soul as you and full as much heart. And if God had given me beauty and wealth I should make it as hard for you to leave me as at it is for me to leave you.'*



### Character: Rochester (James Clyde)

**Super Objective:** To find a soul-mate.

**Obstacles:** Self-loathing.

**Favourite Line:** *'Jane will you hear reason? Because if you won't, I'll try violence'.* From the novel

### Character: Bertha (Myriam Acharki)

**Super Objective:** To be free to express herself.

**Obstacles:** Conventions.

**Favourite Line:** *'The tropical clime of the West Indies has been described as a paradise on earth.'*





# Jane Eyre

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## John Lightbody plays **Character: St John Rivers**



**Super Objective:** To be exceptional.

**Obstacle:** The fear that he is ordinary/unexceptional.

**Favourite Line:** *'I fancied myself as an author, an orator, an artist, anything but a Priest in a country parish. Then after a season of darkness the light came into my life.'*

## **Character: Mr Brocklehurst**

**Super Objective:** To achieve power and control – especially over women.

**Obstacle:** Fear of being found out as little pervert!

**Favourite Line:** *'We are here to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves in shamefacedness and sobriety.'*

## **Character: Lord Ingram**

**Super Objective:** To see his daughter well married.

**Obstacle:** His daughter's behaviour.

**Favourite Line:** *'What a poppet – beautifully sung.'*

## Sarah Ball plays **Character: Bessie**



**Super Objective:** To do the right thing.

**Obstacle:** Her dependency.

**Favourite Line:** *'You should try to be useful and pleasant'*

## **Character: Blanche Ingram**

**Super Objective:** To have power.

**Obstacle:** Her gender

**Favourite Line:** *'I shall go first.'*

## **Character: Diana Rivers**

**Super Objective:** To expand her mind.

**Obstacle:** Being restricted by her gender and position in society.

**Favourite Line:** *'You must be hungry'*

## **Character: Mrs Reed**

**Super Objective:** to protect her family.

**Obstacle:** My fear.

**Favourite Line:** *'My last hour is wracked by recollection of a deed which, but for you, I would never have been tempted to commit.'*





# Jane Eyre



## Character: Mrs Fairfax (Joan Blackham)

**Super Objective:** To care for.

**Obstacle:** Her sense of order and propriety

**Favourite Line:** *'I told him I thought you would decline and he told me to tell you it was his particular wish and if you resist further to say he would come and fetch you.'*

## Octavia Walters plays

### Character: Adele

**Super Objective:** To be loved by everyone, especially Rochester

**Obstacle:** Fear of rejection

**Favourite Line:** *'I do exactly like Maman n'est -ce pas?'* (She feels that if she is like her mother then Rochester will love her.)

### Character: Helen Burns

**Super Objective:** To be accepted into the world of God

**Obstacle:** Being alive!

**Favourite Line:** *'You think too much of the love of human beings'*



## Questions

Choose one character, what do you feel their Super Objective is for:

- a) The whole play; and
- b) a particular scene

## Exercise

Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a 'want', for example: to punish • to want forgiveness • to enthuse • to freeze • to protect • to blame

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person and in the room, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!

One person 'speaks' by moving their chair in relation to the other person, then the second actor 'answers' by moving his/her chair.

They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner. Their objective is to win their case and to change/dissuade the other actor of theirs.



# Jane Eyre

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## A Biography of Charlotte Brontë

- 1816** Charlotte Brontë born in Thornton, near Bradford, West Yorkshire, the third daughter of Revd Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell. Two elder sisters – Maria and Elizabeth; two younger sisters – Emily and Anne; and a younger brother – Branwell.
- 1820** The Brontë family moves to the moorland parish of Haworth, West Yorkshire.
- 1821** Her mother dies of cancer. The children are left with their strict father, who is most fond of Branwell.
- 1834** All the girls except Anne enter the grim Clergy Daughter's School in Cowan Bridge, Lancashire. The following year, Maria is sent home from school with TB and dies 3 months later. In May, Elizabeth is sent home with TB and dies in June. Revd Brontë immediately removes Charlotte and Emily from the school.
- 1831** Charlotte enters Roe Head School.
- 1832-5** Charlotte spends a miserable time as a teacher at Roe Head School; she does not enjoy teaching and writes the Roe Head Journal as an escape. This is later used for the setting of Lowood in *Jane Eyre*. She finally leaves and teaches her sisters at home. During this period she writes *The Angrian Sagas*, co-authored by Branwell.
- 1838-9** Branwell starts taking opium. On her own, Charlotte begins to invent a new heroine for herself, "the volcanic interior of an apparently subdued governess" (Gordon p. 344)
- 1839** Charlotte refuses two suitors. Instead she spends a miserable time as the governess for the Sidgwick's of Stonegappe near Skipton.
- 1840** Charlotte writes *Ashworth*, her first attempt at a novel. She gives it to Hartley Coleridge to read and he is just critical.
- 1841** Charlotte tries to revise *Ashworth* while a governess for the Whites of Upperwood. She is longing to study abroad.
- 1842** She goes with Emily to the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels; her teacher, M. Heger, recognises her talent. Her aunt dies and Charlotte has to return to Haworth.
- 1843** Charlotte returns to Pensionnat Heger to study further. She falls in love with Heger but he withdraws. Feeling lonely and depressed, she still manages to put her poems in order.
- 1844-5** Back in Haworth. Charlotte feels bored and stagnant but writes passionate letters to Heger as an outlet for her passion.
- 1845** Branwell is dismissed in disgrace from his tutor's post at Thorp Green, where Anne has also been teaching. Anne returns with some of her novel, *Agnes Grey*, written. Charlotte discovers Emily's secret "Gondal poems" and devises a plan for joint publication of their poems. The three sisters resume their creative sharing after many years; they often write late at night, pacing up and down the drawing room to work themselves into a creative passion. They decide to invent pseudonyms for themselves – Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell – presuming that the world will be shocked if they are discovered as women authors.
- 1846** The publication of poems by Currer Ellis, and Acton Bell. Charlotte completes her novel *The Professor*, which is rejected six times, and starts work on *Jane Eyre*.
- 1847** *Jane Eyre* is published by Smith Elder with instant success. However, Charlotte is distressed by the savage critics of Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, published in the same year.
- 1848** Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is published. To quash rumours that the Bell brothers are one person, Charlotte and Anne go to London to reveal their identities to their publisher. However, they insist on further cover while they are there, as the "Misses Brown". In September, Branwell suddenly dies. Emily catches TB and dies. Anne also falls ill with TB.
- 1849** Anne dies. Charlotte completes *Shirley*. It is a triumphant success.
- 1850** Charlotte meets Mrs Gaskell at Windermere and they immediately strike up a close friendship. She also spends a lot of time with the publisher George Smith, it is a close but ambiguous relationship.
- 1851** Charlotte begins *Villette* based on her relationship with Heger. She stays with George Smith and his family until the visit becomes stressful due to complications with the relationship and she returns home, ill and depressed. Arthur Bell Nicholls, the local curate proposes but she refuses him.
- 1853** *Villette* is published. George Smith becomes engaged to another woman. Shortly afterwards Charlotte relents to Nichols.
- 1854** One month after Smith's wedding Charlotte marries Nicholls despite continued doubts as to the possible happiness they could shared. They tour Ireland for their honeymoon.
- 1855** Charlotte feels increasingly happy and settled. She becomes pregnant. She catches typhoid, possibly from a servant, and dies six weeks later after last letters express gratitude to her husband for loving her. Her will leaves everything to him.



# Jane Eyre

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## WRITING A REVIEW

### **GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A REVIEW:**

- Say what you saw
- Say what you think
- Reflect on your responses
- Write freely from the heart
- Don't worry about given theories
- Create your own theories
- Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
- Question that moment
- Find out what it says to you
- Say why it spoke to you

### **CONSIDER**

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
- The set, the costumes, the style of the production

### **THE OBJECTS**

- The chairs
- The benches
- The veil
- The candle

**THE THEMES**  
**THE CHARACTERS**  
**THE STORY**  
**THE ENDING...**

(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)

Send your review to:

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