



[Jane Eyre](#), by Charlotte Brontë

In A Nutshell

Charlotte Brontë published *Jane Eyre*, a three-volume novel, in 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell. The novel tells the story of a young woman who, orphaned as a child, must become first a teacher and then a governess to survive. In her first post as a governess, Jane Eyre develops a romantic fondness for her employer, the craggy, rough-mannered Mr. Rochester, but she also discovers that his country estate holds mysterious and frightening secrets.

Like Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, *Jane Eyre* is a classic Victorian *bildungsroman*, or "novel of development." *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* are also both famous for using autobiographical material from the author's life in a fictional context. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, Brontë draws on her own experiences of teaching and nursing the terminally ill, of watching her sister Maria sicken and die, and of falling in love with her supervisor while at a school in Brussels.

The most successful of the various novels by the three Brontë sisters (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne), *Jane Eyre* was an instant bestseller and has been continually in print since its first publication. Charlotte Brontë's willingness to engage, not only the titillating tropes of Gothic fiction and the difficulties facing unmarried middle-class women, but also the problems of empire and colony in 19th century England, has created a hybrid text that remains relevant and interesting for 21st century readers. Readers can focus on anything from the details of

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interpersonal relationships and romances to the fear and suspense of the Gothic genre or the problems of nationalism.

Viewing audiences have also embraced the story; *Jane Eyre* has been adapted for film and television more than two dozen times over the last century, from a 1910 silent version to the 2009 film currently in production, and has also been transformed into a musical, a ballet, and an opera.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 How would this novel be different if it was titled *The Governess*? If it was titled *Redemption*? If it was titled (to steal from Gilbert and Gubar) *The Madwoman in the Attic*? (See "Brain Snacks" for a discussion of Gilbert and Gubar.)
- 2 What would happen to the story if Jane were beautiful instead of plain? Would it matter?
- 3 If Jane and Rochester are "akin," then what is their "kind"? What do they actually share, and what made them similar in the first place?

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