

Jane Eyre

A novel by

*Charlotte Brontë**

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*originally published in 1847 with the title *Jane Eyre, An Autobiography* under the pen name “Currer Bell”

Charlotte Bronte



- Born in Thorton, Yorkshire in 1816 in a family of six children
- Became an governess for various families in Yorksire in 1839
- Some of Charlotte's inspirations were Sir Walter Scott, William Wordsworth, and Lord George Gordon Byron
- She became a teacher and later a governess.
- Most of Charlotte's work was published under a pseudonym "Currer Bell"

Jane Eyre & The Gothic Novel

The story of *Jane Eyre* relies heavily on key Gothic conventions.

- The Haunted Castle – Thornfield as an mysterious and threatening atmosphere

“...the staircase window was high and latticed; both it and the long gallery into which the bedroom doors opened looked as if they belonged to a church rather than a house. A very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude...” Chapter 11

- Lies, Madness, and Secrets – The laughs that Jane hears throughout Thornfield hints at a terrible secret lurking in the mysterious attic...
- The Hero – Mr. Rochester as a Byronic Hero.
- The Supernatural – *Jane Eyre* is full of unexplained occurrences, such as the turning point in the novel rest upon an unexplained event...

Themes in Jane Eyre

- Love vs. Independence - Jane's desire for love, and also to be valued, and of belonging

"...to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest..." Chapter 8

- Religion – Jane's struggle between moral duty and earthly pleasures
 - Three figures of religious importance in the novel : Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers

Illness in Jane Eyre

- Specifically Jane becomes ill at two points in the novel:
 - After the incident in the red room
 - After Jane runs away from Thornfield
- What do these instances have in common?
 - Jane is cast out as a result of male injustice
 - The illness she experiences is one of “nerves”
 - These bouts of illness are stimulated by “passion”



OED Definition of Hysteria:

“A functional disturbance of the nervous system...[which is] usually attended with emotional disturbances and enfeeblement or perversion of the moral and intellectual faculties.”

Masculinity and Femininity in Jane Eyre

Jane is the ultimate androgynous Victorian character.

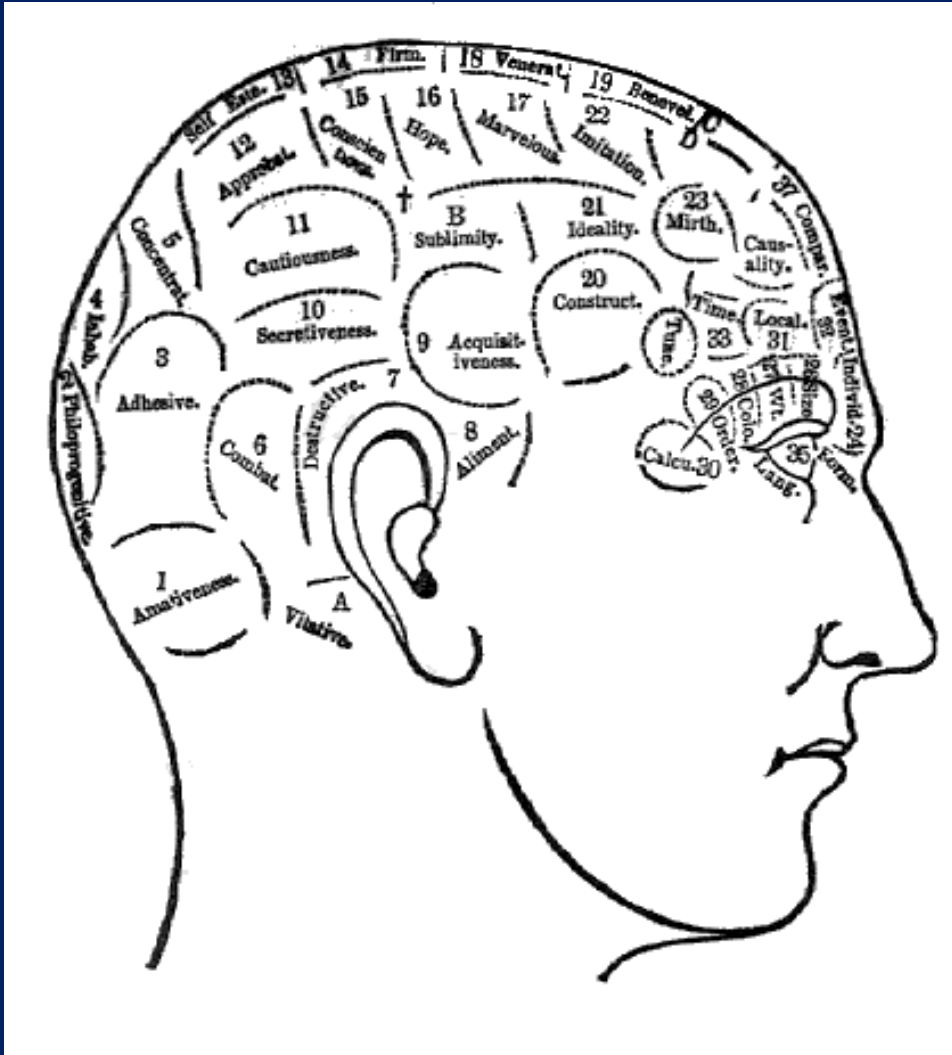
Masculine

- Outspoken nature
- Works for a living (being a governess is a state of class/ gender limbo)
 - Ill-tempered
 - Rebellious

Feminine

- Governess=maternalesque
 - Rochester's moral compass
- Her fate is at the mercy of men.
- Experiences bouts of hysteria

Jane Eyre and Phrenology / Physiognomy



- OED definition of Phrenology:
“The theory that the mental powers or characteristics of an individual consist of separate faculties, each of which has its location in an organ found in a definite region of the surface of the brain, the size or development of which is commensurate with the development of the particular faculty”

What's in a Name??

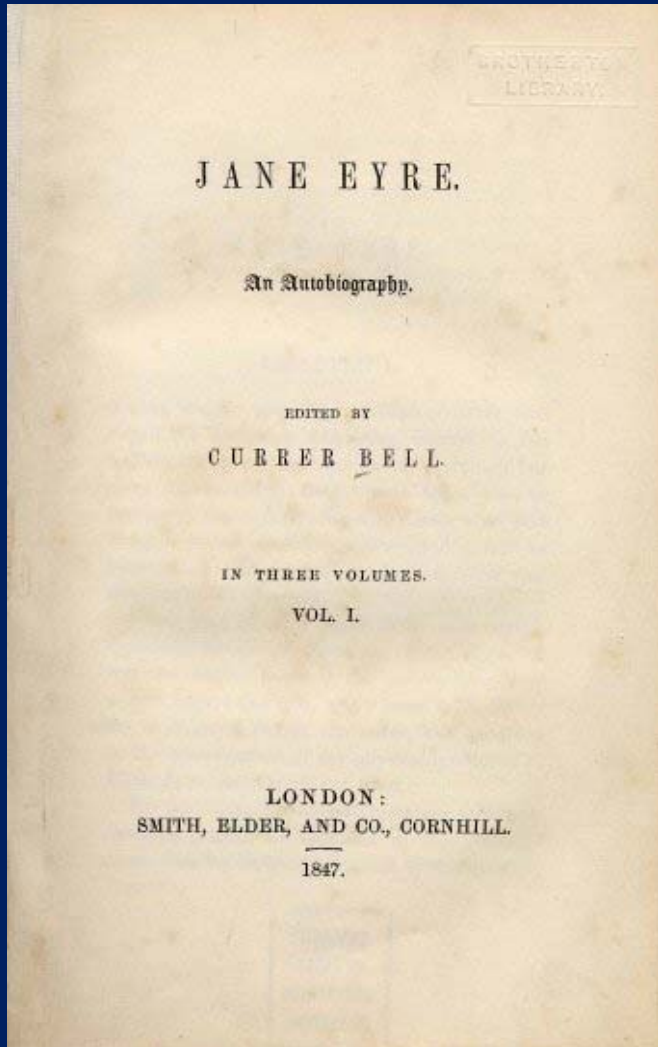
- Charlotte Bronte wrote *Jane Eyre* under the pseudonym: Currer Bell.
- As did her two other sisters Emily and Anne, under the names of Ellis and Acton Bell.
- The “Bells” were of constant speculation as to what their true sex was and whether they were actually three persons or one.



WHY did they do this??

- They did not want to expose themselves to the prejudice that woman writers were often given by critics.

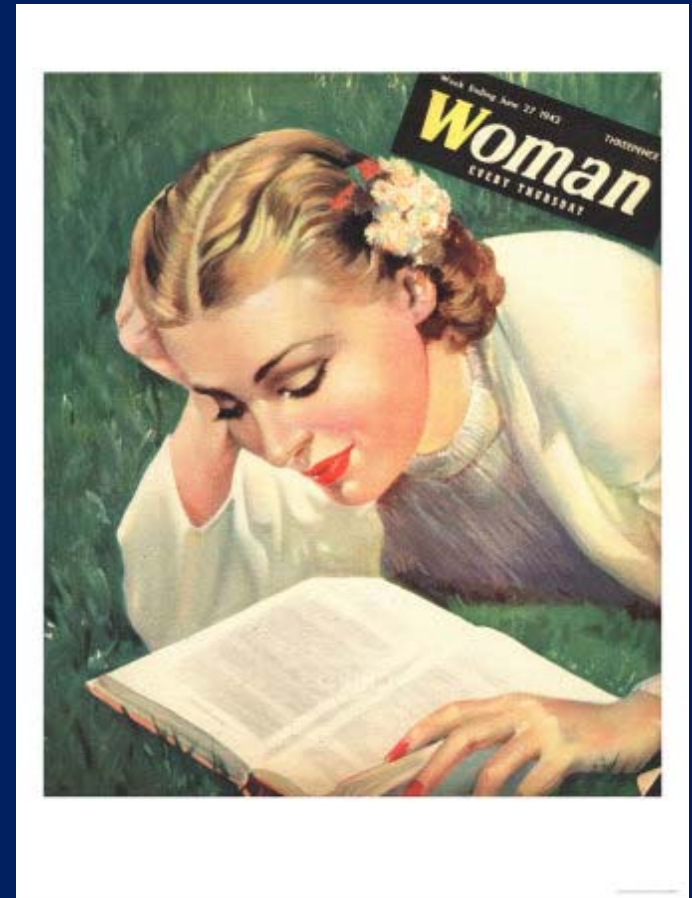
Initial response to Jane Eyre



- Because Charlotte chose to publish her novel under a pseudonym, there was much speculation about the sex of the author.
- When it was published in 1847, it became a best seller. Even the queen praised it.
- Overall, the response to *Jane Eyre* was positive and most reviews were favorable.
- However, when Charlotte revealed her true identity, the reviews became much more negative.

Why did people like *Jane Eyre*?

- People who liked the novel thought it was raw, fresh, youthful and nothing like it had ever been produced before.
- Suggested that part of its appeal comes from its fulfilling common fantasies and wishes.
- Readers were fascinated with its gothic setting and plot.
- Charlotte bravely contradicted the views of women in society in *Jane Eyre* – it speaks volumes for the oppressed woman.
- The *Atlas* review praised the novel...
- *This is not merely a work of great promise; it is one of absolute performance. It is one of the most powerful domestic romances which have been published for many years...*



Why did it receive harsh criticism?

- *Jane Eyre* was thought to be anti-Christian and unfeminine – no way a woman could have written it.
- *Jane Eyre* was published during a time of “*fear and social unrest*” in England, known as Chartism.
- At the time it was considered a radical book that deposed authority, violated human code, and fostered rebellion and Chartism in the homes of society (Victorian Web)
- Eliza Rigby of the *Quarterly Review* gave some of the harshest criticism ...

Jane Eyre is throughout the personification of the unregenerate and undisciplined spirit....

Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre is preeminently an anti-Christian composition

