

Jane Eyre

Author
Charlotte Brontë

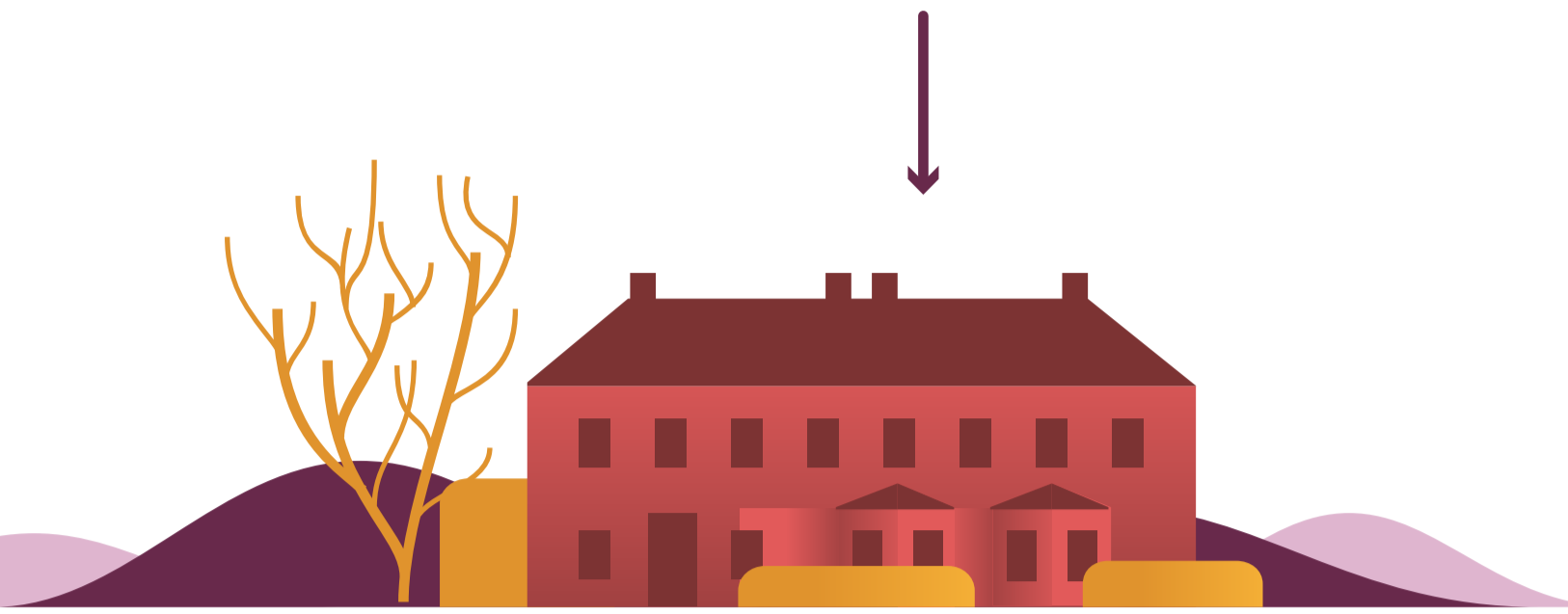
Year Published
1847

Original Language
English



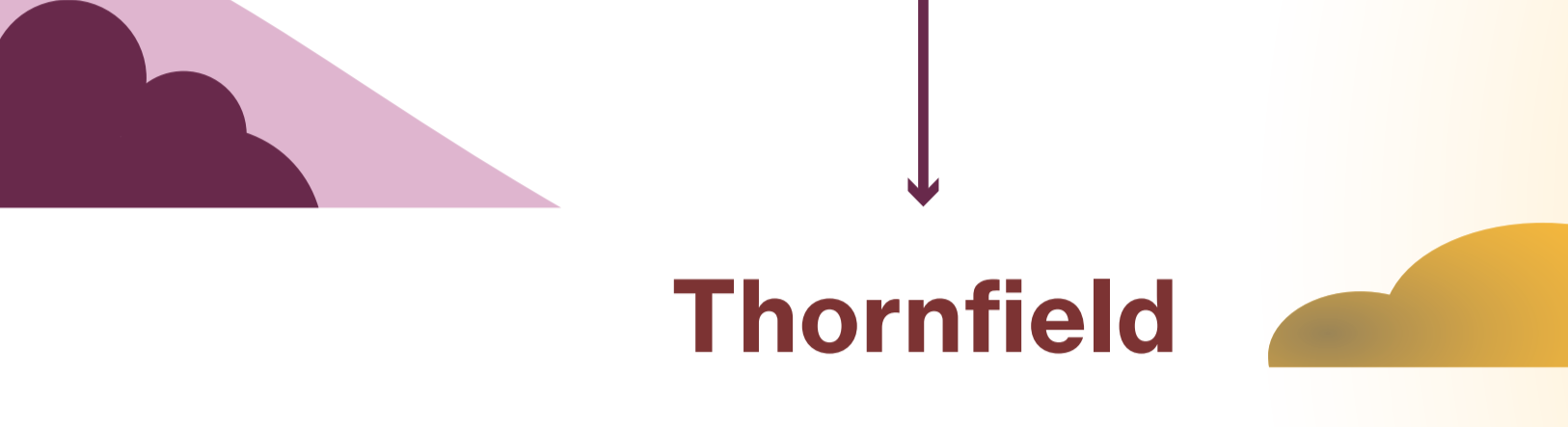
Gateshead

Orphaned and tormented by her aunt and cousins, Jane finds solace in reading.



Lowood

Through cruelty and sickness, Jane blossoms intellectually with friends and teachers.



Thornfield

Arriving as a governess, Jane is drawn to Thornfield's master, Mr. Rochester. She agrees to marry him, but on their wedding day it is revealed that his first wife, Bertha, is still alive.

OVERVIEW

Jane's Journey

Though often labeled a romance, *Jane Eyre* is also a coming-of-age story, memorable for its groundbreaking reveal of a woman's inner life. We follow Jane as she matures from a young orphan to a teacher and then a governess; from there, we watch as she journeys away from Thornfield and back in her quest to unravel her feelings for the impulsive, fiery Mr. Rochester.



Ferndean

Jane returns to Rochester to find him blinded from a fire set by Bertha, and they marry.



Marsh End

Jane is taken in by St. John Rivers and his sisters, but finds she cannot marry the cold, ascetic St. John.



In turmoil Jane flees from Rochester, who wants her to remain as his mistress.

Themes



Passion

Jane is plain, but full of intellectual, moral, and physical passion. Bertha also represents passion, intensified by the imprisonment that leaves her unable to express it.



Gender and Class

Jane's actions and choices were controversial to many readers, who saw her rebelliousness and romantic choices as ignoring barriers of gender and class.



Religion and Self-Control

Jane sees different examples of piety in Helen and St. John, and draws on her own moral code to avoid temptation and make choices she feels are right.

Author



CHARLOTTE BRONTË 1816–55

Much of Jane's story came from Charlotte Brontë's own early years. Along with her sisters Emily and Anne, Charlotte endured a horrifying boarding school, worked as a teacher and governess, and refused proposals from several suitors. *Jane Eyre* was immediately successful, in great part since the richness of its author's interior life is reflected in the title character.

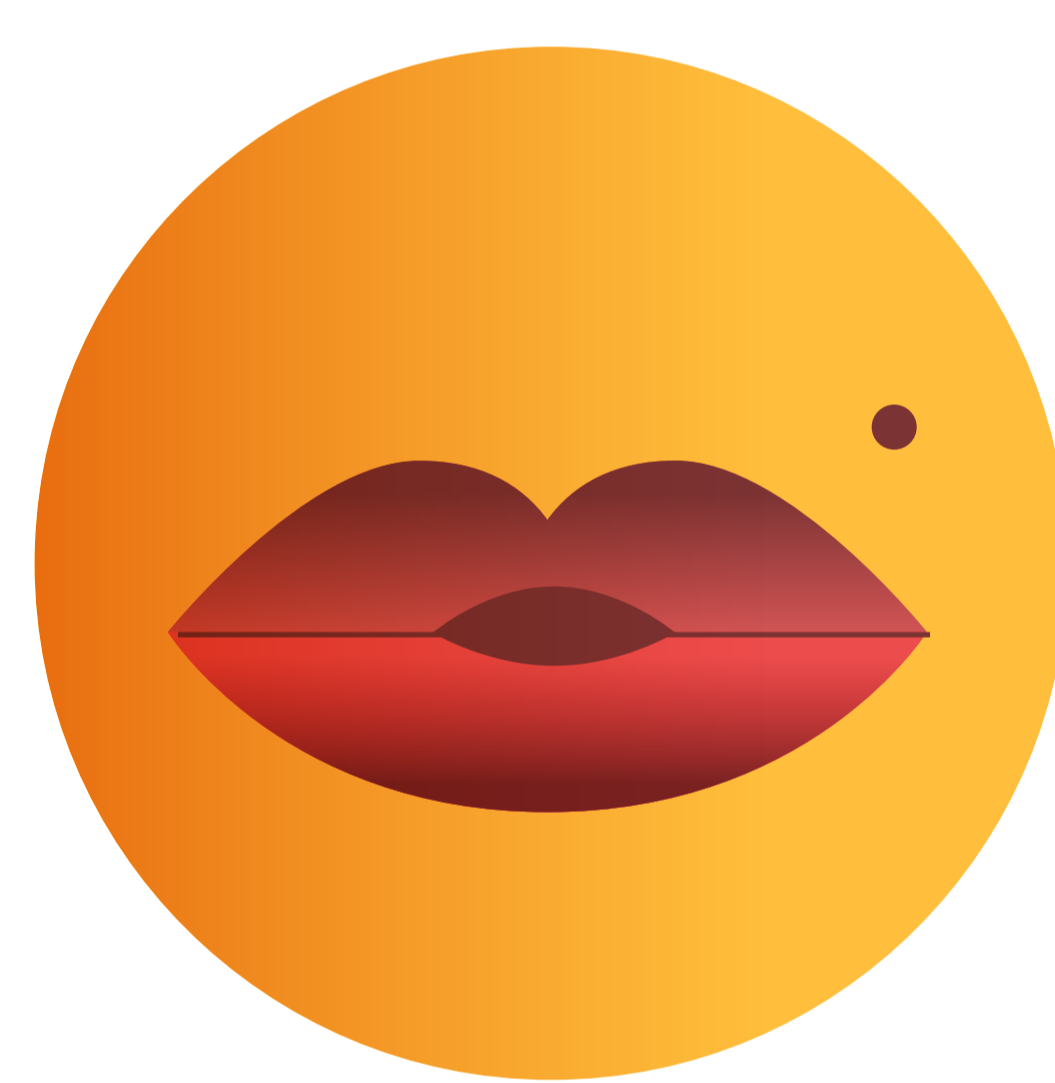
Critical Lenses

The novel has been viewed through a variety of critical perspectives:



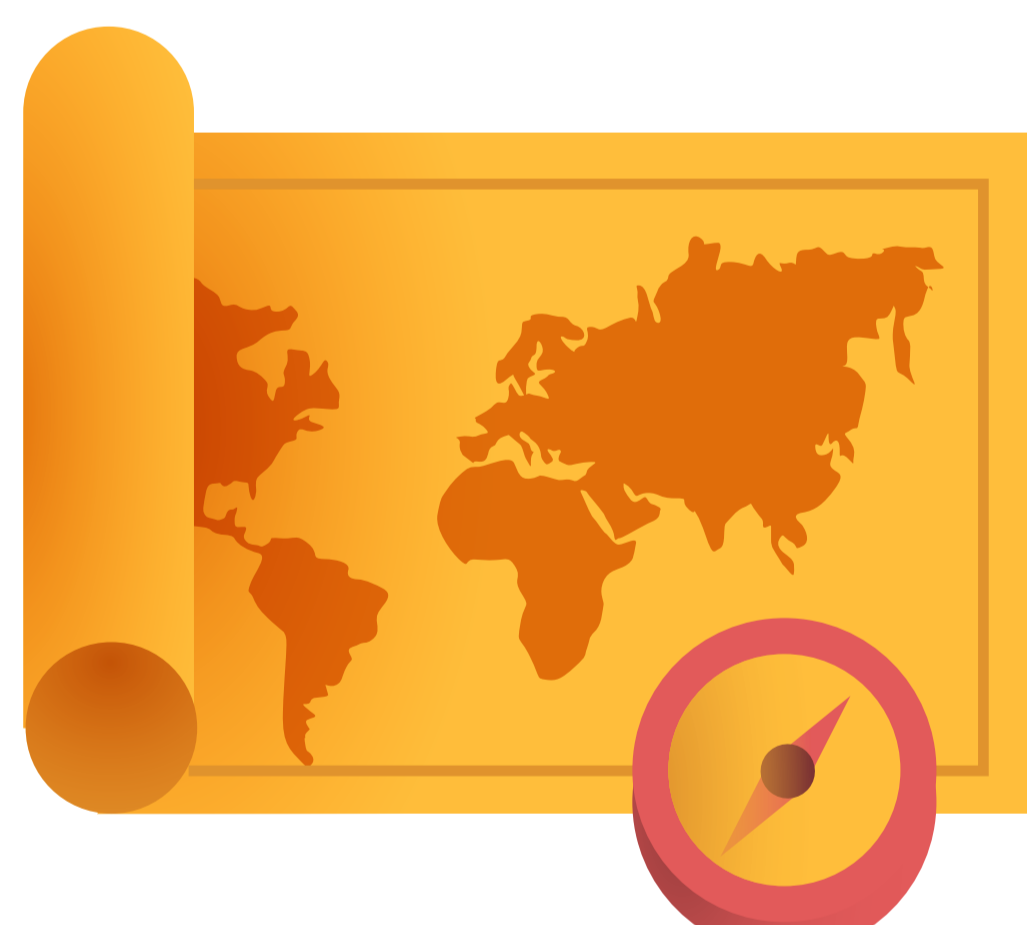
Marxist

Treats books as "products" of their era, and believes literature ultimately reflects class struggle. A Marxist reading of *Jane Eyre* focuses on how class shapes Jane's relationship with Rochester and others.



Feminist

Explores how ideas of womanhood are represented in literature. Feminist critics focus on characters like Jane, Bertha, and Adele, analyzing the ways in which they undermine or propagate stereotypes of female characters.



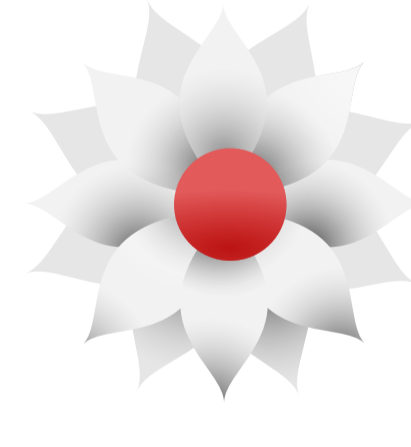
Postcolonial

Draws our attention to how colonial and anti-colonial messages are represented in literature. *Jane Eyre* shows how Western values are often perceived as "natural" and non-Western ones "savage," especially looking at Rochester's treatment of Bertha.

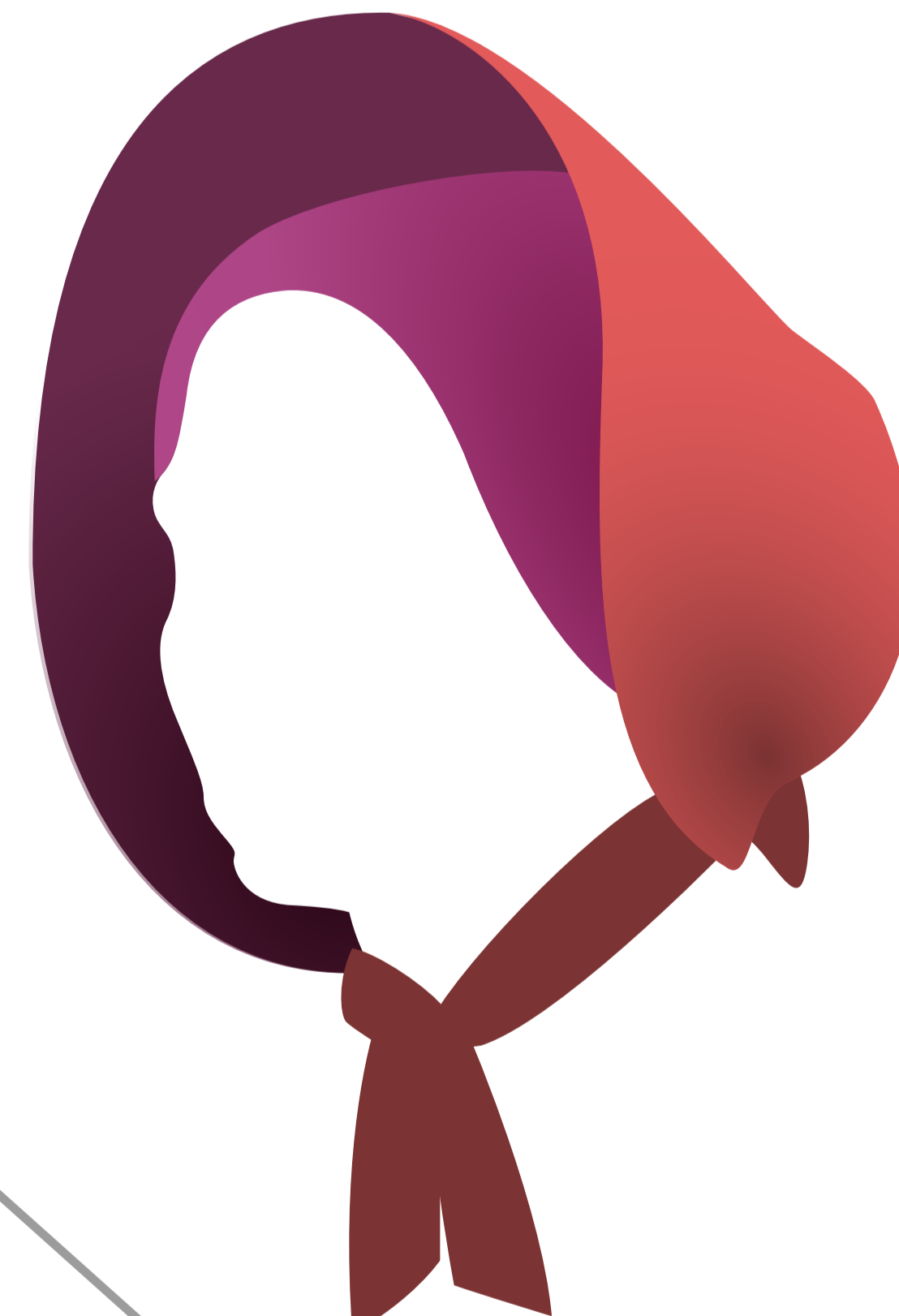
Main Characters



Mrs. Reed
Aunt
Cruel, petty, unforgiving



Helen Burns
Childhood friend
Innocent, spiritual, kind



Jane Eyre
Heroine
Independent, strong, spirited



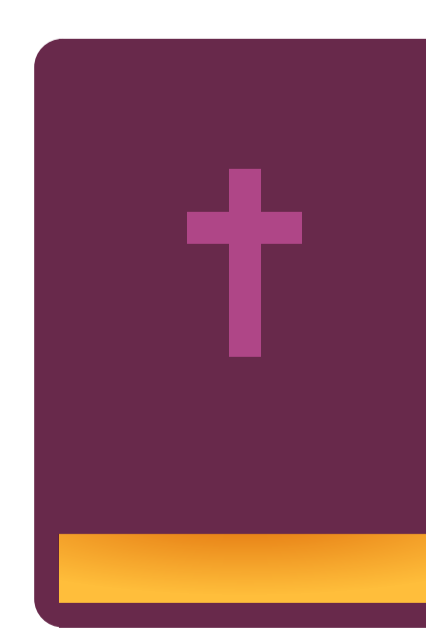
Mr. Rochester
Love interest
Impulsive, fiery, brooding



Bertha Mason
Wife
Beautiful, repressed, plagued by madness



Adèle Varens
Foster daughter
Playful, foreign, materialistic



St. John Rivers
Rochester's foil
Restrained, pious, cold

Symbols



Fire

Symbolizes passion; appears in the story when Bertha attempts (and eventually succeeds) in burning Thornfield



The Madwoman

The madwoman in the attic, a coarse characterization of Bertha, has become a symbol of scandal and secret

Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!

Jane, Chapter 23