Selected Topics in English Literature

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الرموز المستخدمة

 **فيديو للمشاهدة.**

 نص للقراءة والدراسة.

 **رابط خارجي.**

 **أسئلة للتفكير والتقييم الذاتي.**

 **أنشطة ومهام.**

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ENTERING JANE AUSTEN'S WORLD

Lesson 1

Jane Austen is one of the world's most widely recognized authors. To understand Austen means knowing when she wrote—her place in history and literary history. It also means knowing the difference, then and now, between books that were called novels and romances. Finally, it means being able to confidently tackle her writings, sentence by sentence and chapter by chapter, not just novel by novel.

Austen's Historical Context

- This lesson begins with Jane Austen's historical context. Austen was born in 1775, just one year before the start of the American Revolution. She died in 1817, age 41. She began writing seriously in her teens in the 1790s, and she began to publish her novels in the 1810s.

- This period of years was a cataclysmic time politically. It was an era of revolutions—not only the American Revolution but also the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and what some have called the longest revolution: the revolution for women's rights.

- Austen is said to fall in two different literary periods. Some say Austen belongs to the 18th century. Her fiction's sensibilities have been called Augustan. That label linked 18th-century literary qualities with the Roman emperor Augustus. Calling 18th-century literature Augustan signaled its appreciation for the classical past. Austen's fiction was said to belong in that group of authors because she, too, exhibited a typically 18th-century classical appreciation for order, style, and satire.

- But the Augustan 18th century was said to have been supplanted in literary history by a new era, called the Romantic period. That period is usually said to begin in 1789—with the storming of the Bastille prison and the French Revolution—and to last until 1832. That was the year of the passage of the First Reform Act in Britain, which extended voting rights to a larger number of males.

- Chronologically, Austen belongs in a category with the literary Romantics. Yet for many years, she was seen as out of place in English Romanticism. That's because half a century ago, the Romantics were said to be made up of male poets. Austen's female-centered prose didn't fit the rubric.

- But today, the term *Romantic* is used far more capaciously. Most critics now see Austen's writings as sharing many of Romanticism's thematic and literary concerns, including a focus on the emotions and on the individual and the natural world. Austen also shares elements of the Romantic period's political shifts, characterized by a move toward greater liberty, equality, and fraternity. As a result, both the 18th century and the Romantic period now claim Austen for their own.

- Other historical labels have come into play as well. Some have described Austen as a Regency author. The Regency was a short period of nine years when the future King George IV was ruling as prince regent, and it coincides almost perfectly with the publication of Austen's novels. Austen, then, was a Regency author, as well as an 18th-century and a Romantic one.

- Some call Austen a Victorian novelist. That, however, is a chronologically inaccurate claim. Austen died in 1817. Queen Victoria was crowned in 1837 and reigned until 1901. That period—1837 to 1901—is the Victorian era.

Novels and Romances

- Despite English literature's long history of prose writing, there haven't always been novels. A tradition of English-language novels began to emerge in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Novels were by no means the most prevalent prose works. For example, there were roughly three times as many histories of England published across the 18th century as there were novels. It's estimated that 10,000 histories of England were published, compared to 3,000 novels.

- In the 18th century, not all prose fiction was automatically considered a novel. Some works of fiction were labeled romances or even histories. Today, one might hear people say that Austen was writing romances or that she was the first writer of romance fiction. Such claims aren't just misleading; they're wrong, at least in terms of what that word *romance* meant then.

- Throughout her career, Austen distanced herself from the prose subgenre that her contemporaries called romance. Each of the books she published during her lifetime was labeled with the subtitle *A Novel*. One example is *Sense and Sensibility: A Novel*. She was making a clear distinction of type.

- In her day, the word *romance* meant not just a story of love and manners. It also signified a kind of fiction that was fanciful and improbable. A romance work was usually set in the distant past, in a supposedly exotic location, or both. Good fought against evil, riches were lost and restored, and family members were dramatically torn apart.

- Identities were changed, hidden, and revealed. In the end, the good were rewarded, and evil was vanquished. Long-lost family members were reunited. Romances with these features had been popular for more than a century by the time Austen was born.

- Austen threw her lot in with earlier mid-18th-century writers who built up a new kind of fiction, which was called the novel. It used present-day settings and more probable characters and actions. The novel was even declared to be a new species of writing.

Austen's Predecessors

- Austen was following in the footsteps of two famous novelists, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. Richardson published his famous novels *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* as morality tales set in the present. Austen liked *Sir Charles Grandison* so much that she adapted its story for performance on the stage.

- Richardson's *Pamela* was a powerful influence on Austen, too. That novel was said to be made up of the actual letters of a servant girl, writing home to her family, reporting her master's nefarious attempts to seduce her.

- Pamela repeatedly refuses her master's sexual advances and proves her virtue. In the end, the master marries his virtuous servant, and the book was a bestseller in the 1740s. But Richardson's author-rival, Fielding, was actively writing in the 1740s, too. He set out to satirize Richardson's *Pamela*. One of Fielding's books was a spoof titled *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela*.

- Richardson and Fielding emerged as two of the most acclaimed fiction writers of the mid-18th century, 25 years before Austen

was born. Richardson left behind a legacy of probable, moralizing stories set in the present. Fielding created comic, racy sendups of moralizing formulas, full of imperfect human motivations, opportunism, and foibles. Austen would have read the works of both authors.

- Austen's family claimed she was influenced by Richardson rather than Fielding. But one doesn't have to read too far into her novels to see debts to both authors. Her stories are everyday and probable ones, like Richardson's. But her heroines aren't as faultless as his so often are. Austen shows us their faults, often through humor and satire, as Fielding did.

Austen's Style

- Austen changed the heroine. She showed her in a quest for growth and gave her psychological depth. She made her admirable but flawed. She let readers see how the heroine thought differently from those around her, especially the previous generation. Austen's heroines all eventually rebel or refuse to conform to social expectations.

- Today, labels like "romance novels" and "chick lit" are used to try to cordon off authors and readers by gender. They're used to demean fiction that's said to be not by or for men. But chick lit is a category that Austen wouldn't have recognized. She didn't understand herself to be writing only or even principally for women. Austen came from a family of novel readers. She takes pains to show male characters reading and loving novels, too.

- Austen's stories were both like and unlike the other novels of her day. Most focused on young heroes and heroines and the obstacles they faced in their families and in the wider world. But Austen was doing some things that were different, too.

- A recent critic, Ben Blatt, performed quantitative studies of Austen alongside other classic authors. He discovered that she's the "one writer" among notable greats who "never wrote a book" that used the pronoun *he* more often than *she*. Blatt's study gives numerical weight to the long-held feeling that her books, taken together, are up to something different in terms of how stories are told and whose stories are told. But that's different from saying who these stories are for.

- Austen's novels range well beyond romantic love. They may all end in marriage, but they grapple

with family conflict, economics, ethics, and morality as well as the ways that people are connected to each other and treat each other. Each novel combines these themes with irony, humor, and social criticism. Sometimes Austen's work manages to pack all of these things into a single, brilliant sentence.

- Classical Greek drama was said to be divided into tragedies and comedies. Tragedies centered on godlike heroes whose circumstances and character flaws transformed their life circumstances from good to bad. These plays ended with their disastrous deaths. Comedies, by contrast, centered on regular people whose circumstances went from bad to good. These plays ended in happy marriages.

- Austen's prose draws on classical dramatic elements, putting them in a new key. When we say that Austen was writing comic novels, we don't mean that every page of her prose is humor-filled or designed to provoke laughter. We mean she created fictional stories of everyday people. She was working within the comic genre, fulfilling readers' expectations, at least in the marital endings she created.

- In addition to being described as comic, Austen's books are sometimes called novels of manners. This label, too, is often misunderstood. A novel of manners doesn't necessarily teach the reader good manners. Rather, novels of manners investigate how people behave toward each other. They focus on customs, values, and traditions in social settings.

- Sometimes they're described as "small" novels, although that seems literally and figuratively belittling. Despite the fact that Austen's novels are painted on a fictional canvas she once described as "3 or 4 families in a country village," they've reached millions of readers over two centuries. That's the opposite of small.

- Her success came down to her both following and flouting literary tradition. When Austen started writing fiction in the 1790s, she was emulating but also rebelling against earlier works of fiction. She read widely and respected literary traditions. But she was also a playful, irreverent innovator. She pioneered new methods for combining point of view, characterization, morality, humor, and social criticism.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY: SISTERS UNITED

Lesson 2

Sense and Sensibility is arguably Austen's second-most recognized novel, after *Pride and Prejudice*. As comic novels with happy endings, they may share literary DNA, but they're not mirror images. All of the themes that readers of Austen's fiction expect to find are here: family conflicts, money problems, and thwarted courtships. But *Sense and Sensibility* is different in its minute examination of two captivating sisters and its deployment of a darker tone alongside its comedy.

Background on the Novel

- In the context of the book's title, the terms *sense* and *sensibility* are often misunderstood by readers. Some mistakenly think these terms are synonyms. Some mistakenly think they are opposites. Neither is the case.
- Then, as now, the word *sense* meant "reason," "rationality," and "wisdom." It signaled good sense or common sense. But in Austen's day, the word *sensibility* was different. It meant "sensitivity" or "emotional receptivity." Throughout the novel, Austen couples the word *sense* with ideas of goodness, honor, and duty. But the word *sensibility* is yoked to more complicated adjectives in the novel, like *potent*, *strong*, and *affectionate*.
- In Austen's novel, the word *sense* is most often associated with the older of the two heroines, Elinor Dashwood, described as a young woman who "possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment."
- The word *sensibility* is most often associated with the middle sister, Marianne Dashwood. It's said that her abilities were equal to Elinor's—that they were equally sensible and clever. However, Marianne is called "generous, amiable, interesting" and "everything but prudent."

A First for Austen

Sense and Sensibility, published in 1811, was Austen's first novel to see print. For that reason alone, it deserves a prominent place as a breakthrough moment in her career.

Plot Summary

- These differences have led some readers to see the novel in formulaic terms. Elinor equals sense. Marianne equals sensibility. In that reading, sense is said to provide patient, rational Elinor with her happy ending with the hero Edward Ferrars. Her challenge in the novel was to exercise her rationality and patience, especially after she learns that Edward, although he's shown an interest in her, is secretly engaged to another woman. Elinor learns of this engagement from that other woman herself—Lucy Steele.

- Despite being silently heartbroken, Elinor behaves coolly and with honor. She keeps Lucy's secret, despite her deep disappointment. At the end of the novel, the unworthy Lucy breaks her engagement to the worthy Edward. Edward and Elinor are free to marry.

- It's then and only then that Elinor's feelings for Edward are outwardly expressed. Elinor is famously so emotionally overwhelmed that she runs out of the room. She closes the door and "burst into tears of joy." This shows that Elinor feels very strongly. She just prefers, throughout the novel, not to display her deepest feelings openly to others.

- Her sister Marianne is very different. She believes that feelings must be expressed. She wears her heart on her sleeve as a principle and point of pride. She falls in love with the seemingly perfect Mr. Willoughby, a man who literally sweeps her off her feet. However, Willoughby is not all he seems.

- The problem is that Marianne is convinced people fall in love just once in their lives. It's an odd belief on her part because her mother was a second wife. But, as a true romantic with extreme sensibility, Marianne doesn't approve of what she calls "second attachments." She believes only in undying first loves.

- By the end of the novel, Marianne discovers that she has been too quick to offer Willoughby her heart. He turns out to be ruled by impulse, desire, and greed. He's not at all what Marianne's powers of sensibility and his displays of sensibility had first led her to believe he was.

- But Marianne finds a second love in Colonel Brandon, an older man in his late 30s who's also endured heartbreak. Marianne and Colonel Brandon are both each other's second loves.

This is important. The narrator tells us that Marianne, instead of "falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion" with Willoughby, learns that she might find happiness by submitting to new attachments, entering into new duties, and becoming the patronness of a village, as Colonel Brandon's wife.

Different Readings of the Novel

- Given these relationships and the ways in which they evolve, some have said that in this novel, sense is shown to be good, and sensibility is revealed as bad. This is a very tempting interpretation because it's compact and easily grasped. However, it is a limited way to understand a complicated novel.

- The novel suggests that one can be ruled too entirely by sense or too entirely by sensibility. One needs to moderate each. We can see this early in the novel, when Marianne sarcastically offers a mock-critique of herself to Elinor, after she perceives herself criticized. Marianne mockingly says, "I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful—had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes, this reproach would have been spared."

- Interestingly, by the end of the novel, Marianne and the reader both realize that she has indeed been too open and sincere, too much at ease, too happy, and too frank. But she doesn't come to the conclusion that she ought to have been entirely reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful. She discovers a middle ground.

- The novel shows that sense and sensibility both have limits as modes of expression. Each Dashwood sister comes to appreciate the value and the limitations of her preferred trait. But it takes experience and growth for them to come to those similar and separate realizations.

- At the beginning, these temperamental differences are presented as a good-natured battle of personalities. We can see this competition at work in a conversation Elinor and Marianne have while walking on a gorgeous fall afternoon. Marianne makes poetic statements about how moved she is, thinking about the leaves falling off the trees at their former home.

- Elinor responds with a deadpan line: "It is not every one who has your passion for dead leaves." It's a funny joke, but it's also a serious criticism: Just how much sympathy do dead leaves deserve? Elinor's wisecrack implies that Marianne might consider directing her passionate concern and sympathy elsewhere than on falling leaves.

- But Marianne's reply implies that Elinor's lack of understanding and sensitivity is the greater problem. Marianne tells her sister, "No; my feelings are not often shared, not often understood. But sometimes they are." According to Marianne, Elinor is just like other insensitive people who don't grasp the value of nature and the life cycle.

The Novel in Context

- The conversation about leaves is asking us to take a side: sense or sensibility. However, as critics have noted, Austen's novel's title features the two words linked, even yoked, by the conjunction *and*. It's not a story of good versus bad. This is important because most of the novels of Austen's day were exactly that—stories of good versus bad.

- We can see that in their very titles. *Sense and Sensibility* was published alongside novels with titles such as *Riches and Poverty*, *Love and Madness*, and *Virtue and Vice*. Each is typical in having one clear positive and one negative word. These novels advertise themselves as black-and-white morality tales. The titles preview their contents: Achieve the desirable and avoid the danger.

- *Sense and Sensibility* is unusual in offering two terms that both have positive value, especially when joined and held in the right proportions.

Complexity and Triangles

- The novel's subtle treatment of life's gray-area complexities goes beyond its title to the novel's opening line. *Sense and Sensibility* begins: "The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex."

- The verb *settled* is crucial because it's placed in a way that's unsettling. The line reads "had long been settled." We're clued in that we're about to encounter something that had been true and is about to change. In the first chapter, we learn that some of those Sussex Dashwoods are being forced to resettle. The novel revolves around settling, shuffling, and resettling money, houses, and relationships.

- The first characters to be unsettled are four Dashwood women: Mrs. Dashwood, a second wife, and her three daughters: Elinor, Marianne, and the youngest daughter, Margaret. These four women are about to be turned out of their home at Norland Park because of two successive male deaths. Their great uncle, the owner of Norland Park, dies first. Then their father inherits the estate but dies just a year later.

- Upon his death, Mr. Dashwood's son by his late first wife, a young man named John Dashwood, inherits the estate. His son is set to inherit after him. This means the Dashwood women have no legal claim to the Norland estate. They will need to move.

- Half brother John Dashwood could have been generous with them. In fact, he promised he would be. But we're clued into this promise being an empty one by the narrator's description of John's character. It's subtle and damning. He's described as "not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted and rather selfish is to be ill-disposed." This is a brilliant and very Austenian line. The deadpan first statement is completely undercut by the clause that follows.

- Many of the narrator's sentences operate with this kind of dry-witted irony. This line is funny and revealing. It's also a piece of deep social criticism: Outsiders may suppose that a wealthy man like John Dashwood is respectable. He's competent and looks the part. But he has neither sense nor sensibility. And his wife, Fanny Ferrars Dashwood, is even worse. After setting up this family conflict, the story develops similar, further ones.

Tangled Webs

- *Sense and Sensibility* contains many sets of interconnected siblings. The family webs get very tangled. For instance, the brothers Edward and Robert Ferrars are at odds. Edward, the hero, is the more admirable of the two.

- Older brother Robert is described as a coxcomb—a vain man. He ends up marrying his brother Edward's former fiancée, Lucy Steele. This frees up Edward to marry the woman he really loves, Elinor Dashwood. But Robert seems to marry Lucy, at least in part, from the mistaken belief that he's showing off his power to his family.

- The Ferrars brothers' unfriendly relationship mirrors that of two other brothers: Colonel Brandon and his late brother. Austen isn't suggesting that sibling relationships are naturally strengthening or that they always work out well. She shows that siblings can be quite destructive, too.

- The sisters Lucy and Anne Steele are a complicated sister pair. They're in league with each other but also destructive of each other's happiness. Lucy is constantly frustrated by her older sister Anne's vulgarity and stupidity. And it's Anne's inability to keep a secret that pushes Lucy's life into a crisis.

- Anne reveals Lucy's secret engagement to Edward Ferrars's family because she's foolish enough to think it will do her sister good. Instead, it brings the engagement to a crisis and results in Edward being disinherited.

- Anne and Lucy Steele's sisterly relationship can be compared and contrasted to Elinor and Marianne's. Sensible Elinor keeps Lucy's secret. But Lucy's own sister Anne cannot.

- And, of course, in the end, Elinor does become Lucy's sister—that is, her sister-in-law. The two women marry the two Ferrars brothers, Edward and Robert, once Lucy transfers her affections from disinherited Edward to newly independently wealthy Robert.

- Additionally, in this novel, sibling pairs and romantic couples repeatedly find themselves in opposition and in challenging relationship triangles. The novel is full of twos that become threes.

Background on Marriages: Family Involvement

- In Austen's era, marriages were rarely arranged, at least in the strictest sense of the word *arrangement*. Families rarely chose specific spouses for their children. However, few marriages then were entirely free of family arrangement, for multiple reasons.

- One reason was the importance of doing one's duty by the family. Because marriage was seen as a tool for linking prosperous families and consolidating present and future land and wealth, its negotiations and outcomes usually involved the family as a whole, and even people beyond it.

- By tradition, fathers were asked by would-be grooms for permission to marry their daughters. That wasn't just patriarchal politeness. Both sets of parents were likely to be needed to sign off on any plan for marriage, especially if money were to change hands, as it certainly would have for families of means.

- Unless a young man were financially independent, he would have sought permission to marry from his own parents, too. If he didn't, he might jeopardize their financial support. A young man who was of age—that is, over 21—could conceivably choose to marry first and ask his family for forgiveness later. But this was taking a significant risk.

- It's for this reason that we see admirable characters in Austen's novels seeking parental permission in the courtship process. Those characters who flout the process and don't do their duty to consult their elders face difficulties and harm. For example, take Lydia Bennet's eloping in *Pride and Prejudice* and Colonel Brandon's ward Eliza running away in *Sense and Sensibility*.

- There are exceptions, though. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney seems likely to have secretly courted Catherine Morland by letter, against his father's wishes, toward the end of the novel. But even this rebel couple doesn't try to resume their official courtship or to marry without parental approval.

- When parents tried to steer their children toward a prospective spouse with a certain level of status or wealth, it wasn't just to control their lives. It was with the recognition that others in the family might be affected by that marriage.

- A financially advantageous marriage might protect an entire family from discomfort, financial ruin, or imprisonment for debt. If one son or daughter married into a wealthy family, it might produce advantages that would flow out to many. For example, take *Mansfield Park*'s Sir Thomas Bertram. He ends up helping many members of his wife's extended family, in ways large and small.
- In *Emma*, when the orphaned Jane Fairfax marries Frank Churchill, she escapes a life of insecurity and drudgery as a governess. Jane hasn't chosen Frank out of greed. But unlike Emma Woodhouse, Jane stands to gain everything from such an advantageous marriage—fortune, employment, and consequence. So, too, do her surviving family members.

Ideals in Flux

- A complicating factor was that ideals of marriage in relation to family duty were then in flux. In the 1790s, debating societies held public arguments to consider which was the greater evil: marrying for love without money or marrying for money without love. This was a culture that couldn't decide which scenario was worse. The clear message was that it was nice if you had both love and money, but if you had to do without one or the other, you might make do without love.
- Literature may have paved the way for gradual real-life changes. Austen's fiction took a liberal or reformist perspective toward traditional marriage in the middling classes and above. Her novels promote small changes by placing the emotional and intellectual desires of the individual, especially women, above the financial and status-oriented needs of the family.
- Although Austen doesn't recommend doing away with the institution of marriage, her novels expose the built-in unfairness for women in matters of courtship and matrimony. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's conversations about marriage with her practical friend Charlotte Lucas get at the heart of the conflict.
- Charlotte believes that "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" and that "it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life." Elizabeth disagrees and at first even believes that Charlotte must be joking.

- But Charlotte shows herself willing to accept the very suitor that Elizabeth vehemently rejects: Mr. Collins. Charlotte recognizes that Mr. Collins's company is irksome. But we're told that, for Charlotte, "marriage had always been her object" as "the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune." For Charlotte, security is the reason for marriage. For Elizabeth, happiness is.

- Elizabeth refuses to do what many readers then would have seen as her duty: marry to secure her family's financial future. It helps very much that Elizabeth had her father's approval for her refusing Mr. Collins. She didn't have to go against both of her parents' wishes—just her mother's. Her father, too, supports individual female happiness over family comfort, at least in Elizabeth's case.

Laws and Institutions

- Next, this lesson turns to take a look into the era's laws and practices. When a couple became engaged, that was considered a man's binding promise to a woman and her family. Should a man back out of an engagement, then he could be sued by her family for breach of promise of marriage.

- Fiction like Austen's may have been ahead of real life in its depictions of possibilities in marriage. Austen's fiction suggests that individual choice and romantic happiness ought to win out over economics and family pressures. However, in each of her novels, the money conveniently falls into place for couples who are brought together by love. Any family recriminations conveniently fall away, too.

- The idea behind a breach of promise of marriage suit was that a man who had jilted a woman had damaged not just the woman's but the family's and father's financial prospects. Her chances of finding another husband were lessened by the suitor's rejection.

- Knowing this context might add a little wrinkle to Edward Ferrars's keeping his engagement to Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*. His ending the engagement might have resulted in her family bringing a breach of promise of marriage suit against him.

- Such lawsuits were no doubt far more rare than actual broken engagements. Lawsuits were expensive, and a reputation-conscious family might prefer to sweep a broken engagement under the rug.

- Even for the more mundane things like marriage settlements, which we might think of as proto–prenuptial agreements, lawyers were regularly involved. The family of the bride offered, or negotiated, a sum of money that she would bring into the marriage, called a dower, dowry, or bride price.

- Lawyers might help draw up contracts stipulating matters like widow's jointures and pin money. Widow's jointures were separate financial settlements for wives, which were to be paid should their husbands die first.

- Pin money was a wife's annual spending allowance. It was a small amount set aside so that it would be under her control to spend as she'd like after the marriage. Pin money had to be declared in the marriage contract because otherwise, the wife's property became, by law, the property of her husband.

- Married women could not own separate property in Britain until late in the 19th century. Single women and widows could own property, but married women could not. All of the bride's previous property became her husband's. So, too, did anything that came to her during the marriage, even her own earnings, as unusual as those would have been for a middle-class woman or above.

- The expectation was that a wife did not need to work outside the home or perhaps beyond the family business. A privileged wife's "employment" was supposed to be managing her husband's household and any servants they might have, raising their children, and doing works of charity, including ministering to the community's poor.

Legal Strictures and Workarounds

- No matter which class a person came from, 18th-century marriage brought with it a set of legal strictures. Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, also known as the Marriage Act of 1753, tried to curb the practice of clandestine and irregular marriages. Its rationale was ostensibly to protect wealthy young women. The act sought to do away with fortune-hunting men manipulating, or even kidnapping, young heiresses in order to marry them for their money.

- After 1753, these runaway marriages became illegal. The act also stipulated that all marriages needed to be announced publicly through so-called banns. Banns, too, were seen as protecting wealthy families and vulnerable girls from predatory men.

- Banns were oral statements of an engagement, read aloud in the church service in the parish in the weeks before the intended wedding. The clergyman would ask if anyone in the parish knew a reason why the couple should not marry.

- Thanks to Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, English marriages were supposed to be performed during the day, by a regular clergyman, in a church or chapel, and then recorded in parish registers. Most importantly, the act required parental permission to marry for anyone under age 21. It gave families far more control over young couples.

- There were legal ways around Lord Harwicke's rules. One way was used by the extremely wealthy—marriage by special license, which gave couples the right to marry as they chose, without banns. Another way to get around the law was for a couple from England to elope to Scotland and get married according to its comparatively looser laws.

- Divorce was made possible by King Henry VIII, under his 1534 establishment of the Church of England, which he formed, in part, because the Catholic Church didn't allow him to divorce. Thereafter, powerful, wealthy Englishmen could bring suit to divorce their wives, if they could prove a cause, such as adultery. But wives couldn't divorce husbands for that reason. The double standard was cruel.

- It was possible for a wife to sue for divorce if she could prove adultery and physical cruelty. This, too, was very rare. A separation was more feasible. A wife was unlikely to have the independent financial means to sue for divorce or the power to win one.

Background on the French Revolution

- To understand Austen's attitudes toward rank, class, and wealth, it's important to grasp the outlines of the French Revolution and its calls for fraternity, liberty, and equality. It's also crucial to grasp the Terror of the 1790s, in which mass guillotining became a part of public life.

- During Austen's young adulthood, Britain watched the events happening in France closely. Many wondered if French revolutionary ideals and fervor would cross the channel that separates the two countries and, if so, whether violence would follow. The British government eventually enacted restrictions on its own population as it prepared for a possible invasion that never came to its own shores.

- The French Revolution is often seen as beginning on July 14, 1789, when a group of activists stormed the Bastille prison, releasing a small number of prisoners but, more importantly, seeking the ammunition held there. But complete histories of the French Revolution usually begin far earlier than this date in order to describe decades of political conflict and accumulating war debt that led to the revolution.

- The French monarch, King Louis XVI, was jockeying for power with his country's nobility, the bourgeoisie (the middle class), and the petit bourgeoisie—those in the professions and trades as well as skilled artisans.

- The French population was under a system called the ancien régime. It was divided into three estates. The First Estate was the clergy. The Second Estate was the nobility. The Third Estate was made up of commoners. The king wasn't seen as part of any estate.

Austen's Times

Austen, born in 1775, was just an infant when Great Britain went to war with the American colonies. Then, as she came of age, Britain was pulled into war with a transformed France. When Austen died in 1817, it was just two years after Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo and exile to St. Helena. Austen lived in a country that was at war across almost all of her 41 years.

- The First and Second Estates bore little of the tax burden, which was increasingly viewed as unfair by the Third Estate. Its commoners made up of the majority of the population.

Matters Escalate

- The situation became explosive when taxes on things such as salt came to be more widely viewed as unfairly applied, especially to the poor. The average worker was already spending half of his daily earnings to buy bread, but prices shot up higher after grain crops failed in 1788–1789.

- Even among those with wealth and power, suspicion was growing among the factions. It was rumored that King Louis XVI was raising an army to overthrow the National Assembly, as it sought to extend its own powers.

- As the year 1789 unfolded, powerful orators from various factions were encouraging people to organize against the crown, the army, and the state. New municipal governments and municipal militias were forming. It was politically very unstable, as these new groups were looking for grain and weapons.

"Let Them Eat Cake"

Queen Marie Antionette probably never said that line that's attributed to her, "Let them eat cake," when she learned about the difficulties of the people getting bread to eat. But it was widely believed that neither the crown nor the government cared that its people were going hungry.

- Newly formed groups raided an arsenal and took its muskets. A search for arms and ammunition is said to have led them to the stores at the Bastille, an old Parisian fortress that had long served as a prison, although it actually held very few prisoners at the time. When the Bastille fell, on July 14, 1789, it was celebrated as a milestone moment for the powers assembling against the monarchy and the First and Second Estates.

- The young Jane Austen began writing around this time, producing short works of fiction, drama, and history. Her comic play *The Visit*, probably written in the year 1789, contains content that points to a young author who was familiar with conversations about generations, traditions, nepotism, shortages, sharing, tyranny, and liberty.

The Old Order Falls

- By late 1789, there was a sense in France that the ancien régime had fallen. The notion that the king ruled by divine right—by God's will—had been weakened. New ideas about the rights of man were taking hold. There were calls advocating for greater social, moral, and economic equality, especially among the commoners, the Third Estate.

- The National Assembly drew up a declaration of rights, thanks to the leadership of the Marquis de Lafayette, known even then as a hero of the American War of Independence. But when the assembly sought to dismantle the feudal system, the First and Second Estates, the tithes of the clergy, and the rights of the nobility, the king refused to approve it.

- Eventually, angry crowds, demonstrating about a lack of food and the price of food, marched to King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette's lavish palace at Versailles, southwest of Paris. The crowd forcibly removed the royal couple to the Tuileries Palace in Paris in October 1789.

- Powerful individuals and newly formed groups began to jockey for power and authority. Monarchists, including most of the nobility and the clergy, clashed with moderates and revolutionaries. Some moderates, like those in the Jacobin Club, began to affiliate with revolutionaries. The working classes—described as sansculottes, because the men wore long pants rather than those cut off at the knee—were newly politically energized.

- Britain was watching all of this unfold as the news arrived from abroad. Some observed the events with enthusiasm and some with fear. Just where the Austen family would have sided at this confusing time is difficult to pin down. What's clear is that King Louis XVI was by no means a family favorite.

- In February 1789, Jane Austen's brothers published in their periodical, *The Loiterer*, a fictional news update from several months in the future, the month of May, in Paris. In it, King Louis XVI writes what's humorously labeled a "most gracious reply to the humble petition of his Parliament." He's given this line of fictional dialogue: "I am determined to make you, and all France, know that I will be master—for I hate to be a tyrant by halves." According to some members of the Austen family, the king of France was fully tyrannical.

The Early 1790s

- The situation in France was unstable. Power was up for grabs in every social class, and it wasn't a good time to play the tyrant. The king, queen, and their children tried to flee the country, disguised as servants, in what is known as the Flight to Varennes, on June 20, 1791. The king's plan was to reconsolidate his power in his wife's native Austria.
- His attempt to flee the country failed. He was returned to Paris by the national guard. A crowd gathered. When it wouldn't disperse, the guardsmen were ordered to fire. Fifty demonstrators were killed. These deaths further split loyalties.
- As the king's power and popularity weakened, other leaders emerged. These included Maximilien Robespierre, of a political party called the Mountain, and Jean-Paul Marat, the idol of the sansculottes.
- In August of 1792, the king and queen were imprisoned. In September 1792, the National Convention declared France to be a republic and abolished the monarchy. Louis XVI was brought to trial, with proof that he'd tried to conspire with other countries against the revolution and to reestablish tyranny.
- Despite a number of split votes, Louis XVI was sentenced to death and executed by decapitation on January 21, 1793, using a guillotine. Nine months later, Marie Antoinette was tried, convicted of treason, and also guillotined, on October 16, 1793.

The Reign of Terror

- In 1793 and 1794, France endured a period sometimes called the Reign of Terror. Newly empowered rulers sought to find and punish anyone who had allegedly supported the old regime. Committees and tribunals formed and considered charges against those who were branded as enemies of the new state.

Mary Wollstonecraft

A revolutionary English writer who may have influenced Austen was Mary Wollstonecraft. She notably wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in 1790 and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. She was a powerful advocate for educational and social equality, especially for women.

- There was a sense in France that everything had been reset. The new revolutionary calendar restarted from year one. It renamed the months of the year according to the seasons.

- New festivals were put in place to de-Christianize the country, as the Catholic Church, too, was viewed as tyrannical. Yet the system was not atheist. In the place of the Catholic God, the new order declared the Cult of the Supreme Being.

- The use of the guillotine became almost commonplace during the Reign of Terror. In the end, at least 17,000 people were tried and executed. Not everyone got a trial, whether fair or not. It's estimated that as many as 40,000 people were put to death.

- One source concludes that only 15 percent of that number were clergy and nobility. The rest were from the bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeoisie, the laborers, and the peasants—the classes that had initially banded together to seek political and social change. Robespierre himself, responsible for overseeing so many of the executions, was executed in 1794.

- By the end of the Reign of Terror in France, Jane Austen—still living with her parents in Steventon, England—was in her late teens. She had already written three volumes worth of work—her juvenilia.

- Unfortunately, no letters by Austen survive from these years. The first surviving correspondence from her hand dates to 1796. One of the things it describes is her brother Henry's service in the Oxfordshire militia. Militias were a part-time national guard, charged with securing the country in case of invasion by the French. They were also charged with putting down any civilian unrest, as British radicals were prohibited from rousing the masses to anti-government action.

War against France

- Across the decade of the 1790s, France was not only embroiled in struggles among its own people but was also at war with much of Europe. The feared French invasion of England never came, though.

- Later in the decade, a young French military commander named Napoleon emerged. He succeeded in leading the French to overpower Italy. He moved forces into central Europe, Turkey, and, for a time, Egypt.

- Under his leadership, France left revolutionary ideals of a republic behind for a dictatorship. Napoleon, a successful general, came to power and stayed there for 15 years. Eventually, the British had the greatest success in fighting him and the French forces back. Even without an invasion, British families lost fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers to its wars against France.

Eliza and the Count

- Jane Austen's first cousin Eliza had married a Frenchman in 1781. He was a count, the Comte de Feuillide. The count and his wife traveled back and forth from England to France over the course of the next decade, separately and together. Eliza sometimes stayed with the Austens at Steventon, and she became close to the sisters Jane and Cassandra. Jane even dedicated one of the most important works of her juvenilia, "Love and Freindship," to her worldly cousin Eliza.

- Over the next several years, Eliza and her husband the count tried to navigate the cataclysmic changes in his home country. The count was in England when he learned that his property in France would be forfeited to the nation unless he returned. He left his wife and their son behind in England and traveled home. It was an unfortunate decision.

- A surviving letter from Eliza describes what she's learned about the conditions her husband witnessed. She tells her English correspondents that the horrifying reports they receive about France are not exaggerated. The count had wanted to return to England, but he found it was impossible to get away. He was tried and executed by guillotine in 1794. His death tells us that Austen would have understood perfectly well that revolutions and wars could devastate families.

Tragedy in Austen's Fiction

- Austen puts tragedy and war deaths into her fiction, too. In her novel *Emma*, the orphan Jane Fairfax is said to have lost her father in wartime. That father, Lieutenant Fairfax, was serving in an infantry regiment when he died in action abroad. Every reader would have understood that Lieutenant Fairfax was a casualty of the war in a battle with French forces. In the novel, Jane Fairfax's mother is said to have died after her husband, of consumption and grief.

Lesson 5

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: THE BEST ENGLISH NOVEL?

Some of the breakthrough techniques that Jane Austen developed in *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813, are so deftly handled that they may seem effortless—even invisible. The advance that had greatest value for subsequent novelists was an entirely new way of merging two perspectives that, until then, seemed like opposites: the overview of an omniscient narrator and the consciousness of an individual character.

Austen's novels culminate the 18th-century English tradition, and although the Romantic movement was in full flower at the time, they show hardly any influence from it.

THE NARRATOR AND THE PROTAGONIST

- *Tom Jones* has an omniscient narrator with a very Olympian perspective. He's in the foreground much of the time, chatting and commenting and joking, and his stance toward all of his characters is consistently ironic.

Austen's values are conservative, and her novels ratify the status quo. But they also show very powerfully the emotional price of learning to live with the status quo. *Pride and Prejudice* brings to life the challenge for an intelligent and exceptionally perceptive person to create a life of authenticity.


Jane Austen

- In *Clarissa* and the *Liaisons*, we had psychological interiority, but with the drawback for Richardson of losing authorial control of his story. Laclos turned that into an advantage by exploiting our frustration at not being guided, but that wasn't a solution that other novelists could rely on regularly.

- Austen's solution turned out to be enormously fruitful. ***Pride and Prejudice* does have an omniscient narrator, and one who is witty and ironic, but it also has a central consciousness: Elizabeth Bennet.** We are taken inside Elizabeth's head much more than any other character's. And that feels convincing because Elizabeth and the narrator have so much in common—similar keen intelligence, similar ironic wit.

- Take the famous first sentence of the novel:

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

- In a BBC version of this novel, those words are spoken by Elizabeth herself—and well they might be. Her perspective on the society she lives in is very much that of the narrator.

- **To make this work—this doubling of narrator and character—Austen invented a technique that has been imitated ever since.** Or if she wasn't its only inventor, it certainly doesn't appear in English fiction before her novels.

- This is what has become known as **free indirect discourse**. It's a way of folding a character's thoughts into the narrator's presentation.

- Here's a simple example from chapter 4. A "single man in possession of a good fortune" has just rented an estate close to the village of Longbourn, where the Bennet family lives. His name is Bingley, and he has taken an immediate interest in Elizabeth's older sister Jane. Jane is lovely in a conventional way, and very sweet and kind, but no match for Elizabeth in what their father approvingly calls "quickness."

- However, living with Bingley are his friend Fitzwilliam Darcy and Bingley's snobbish sisters. They are immediately alarmed at the possibility that he might marry down, into an ordinary middle-class family.

- After the Bennets pay them a visit, Jane says cheerfully, "I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in [Miss Bingley]." Elizabeth is too tactful to comment on that, but here is what the narrator goes on to say:

> Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced; … and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, … she was very little disposed to approve them. They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited.

- Those are the narrator's words, but they are Elizabeth's thoughts.

- **It's important to stress how effectively this technique works—unobtrusive as it is, and should be.**

- **What this dual perspective makes possible is to encourage us to sympathize deeply with Elizabeth**—plenty of readers fall in love with her—**but also to see her assumptions and misjudgments in a larger perspective**. She will come to understand those herself, of course, and feel humiliated about it. We will sympathize with that very humiliation, because we know and understand how it happened.

PSYCHOLOGY AND EMOTION

- In its original form, drafted around 1796, this novel was called *First Impressions*. Austen was 21 at the time, almost the same age as Elizabeth Bennet. No one knows how much of that early version survived in *Pride and Prejudice*, but the revised title crystallizes **the theme of psychological blindness, even in highly intelligent and sensitive people.**

- Bingley's friend Darcy is proud, but what Elizabeth mistakes for arrogance is really shyness—and also a loathing of social hypocrisy that she herself shares.

- Likewise, her prejudice against him is founded on too little real knowledge, as well as on lies told by an attractive young man named Wickham, who claims that Darcy treated him very badly in the past.

- In an obvious sense, ***Pride and Prejudice*** **is a Cinderella story.** In due course, **Elizabeth unexpectedly receives a proposal of marriage from Darcy**, who is an aristocrat and fabulously wealthy. **But unlike Cinderella, she will turn him down!**

- **Yes, they will get married in the end**, and every reader must want that to happen. **But it will only be possible when they ruefully admit to themselves the depths of their own misjudgment of the other person.** They have to open up inwardly as well as outwardly.

- For this reason, Charlotte Brontë's often-quoted put-down of Austen's novels is terribly unjust. She described them as "a carefully fenced, high-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers." More crushingly, Brontë added that Austen knows nothing about "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through."

- It's true that Austen's characters don't express themselves in emotional rhetoric, but that doesn't mean that they're not emotional. And it's true that they accept the limitations of social decorum, but that only makes them more interesting, because their deepest feelings have to be masked from other people most of the time.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

- **Another theme—that of socioeconomics—is so fundamental to the story that it likewise keeps this from being a simple wish-fulfilling Cinderella fantasy.**

- Just as in *Clarissa,* **economic circumstances have everything to do with a young woman's prospects in life.** But in that novel, the Harlowe family was extremely rich. The problem was that they were determined to marry off their daughter to someone as rich as themselves in order to make the family's wealth even greater.

- In *Pride and Prejudice,* we are given very exact figures on people's incomes, and we know that the Bennets have 2,000 pounds a year. That's a very considerable amount in a small town; it makes them the leading family there.

- A typical clergyman—such as Austen's own father, who had died by the time she was writing—might expect 150 pounds a year. Mr. Bennet's inherited income means that he has never had to hold a job; he lives comfortably as a well-off gentleman of leisure.

- But there's a catch. By a legal provision known as an entail, a bequest could specify into the indefinite future which types of descendants would be permitted to inherit. It was common, as has happened in this case, to limit inheritance to males.

- The Bennets have five daughters, but no sons. As Mr. Bennet mentions at the end of the novel, he always expected to have a son and therefore never gave much thought to providing for his daughters. Now it's clearly time to think about it, but he has grown accustomed to passivity, evading difficulties by withdrawing into his library.

- **There were no well-paying careers for women in those days.** Governesses were treated like household servants and trades like seamstress work were poorly paid, too. **One respectable way a woman could make money was by writing novels—as Austen herself was doing.** And of course, there remained the possibility of a financially advantageous marriage with "a single man in possession of a good fortune."

- Gossip in the village of Longbourn soon establishes that Bingley has an annual income of 5,000 pounds, which puts him very much in the upper crust. Darcy has twice that much.

- Before Elizabeth shockingly turns down Darcy's marriage proposal, she had already turned down a proposal from a clergyman named Collins, who showed up to introduce himself as the male heir to the family fortune. Marrying Collins would certainly make financial sense for Elizabeth, but he is a pompous fool, and she refuses to consider it. That makes two men who can't believe she would turn them down.

The members of the Bennet family are an ill-assorted group, but in the way real families often are—not in the melodramatic contrasts of saintly Clarissa, malicious Arabella, bullying James, and so on.

- Elizabeth is the outlier among her sisters, and the only one her father can really communicate with. Yet she loves her family and accepts, as most people do, that we must get along with people we might never have chosen to be with.

- The oldest sister, Jane, is appealing and lovable, just not very interesting. Elizabeth always feels close to her.

- There are two interchangeable airheaded flirts, Lydia and Kitty, whom their mother favors but who will cause big problems later on.

- The youngest sister, Mary, overcompensates by intellectual pretentiousness. She is constantly uttering sententious pearls of wisdom. In fact, nobody—even once—responds to anything Mary says in the novel.

FALLING IN LOVE

- **The heart of *Pride and Prejudice*, of course, is the way Elizabeth and Darcy come to understand that they belong together.** And as with every great novel, rereading it is an even deeper pleasure than reading it the first time. That's when you see all the subtle stages of the relationship developing and the gradually changing awareness of the characters themselves.

- **Conversations in Austen's novels are full of hints and things unsaid. Coming right out and saying what you mean is felt as risky.** It's only shallow characters like Mrs. Bennet who babble and blurt. And the intelligent characters are particularly skilled at veiling their meaning with indirections.

- When Elizabeth and Darcy are still just beginning to know each other, Elizabeth walks three miles in the mud to see her ill sister Jane. Bingley

and his sisters greet her, and Darcy is there, too, and the narrator gives us a glimpse into his mind:

> Mr. Darcy said very little …. [He] was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone.

- Darcy is far from indifferent, even though he doesn't say anything. He is genuinely concerned that Elizabeth may have overtired herself. And more importantly, he's admiring her glow. Austen's language is always discreet, but the point is that Elizabeth is looking very sexy. So we realize that Darcy is attracted to her, while she doesn't perceive it at all.

- Soon afterward, the two of them have a conversation, in which he admits that he's not quick to forgive offenses against himself:

> My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever.

- Elizabeth exclaims, "That is a failing indeed! Implacable resentment is a shade in a character." When she adds that he evidently has a tendency to hate everybody, he replies "with a smile" that her defect "is willfully to misunderstand them."

- **Many times in the story, we're told that Darcy smiles at Elizabeth, but thanks to her prejudice against him, she never picks up on that.**

- When Elizabeth and Darcy finally make their heartfelt avowals to each other, it happens at his estate. Elizabeth has been taking a trip with her aunt and uncle, and as was common at the time, they had asked to see the great mansion while its owner was away.

- His old housekeeper speaks so warmly of his generosity and kindness that Elizabeth is startled into a new perspective on his character. And when she happens to see a portrait of Darcy, their earlier conversation comes back to her with new force:

> She beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her.

- **As in *Tom Jones*, this novel is all about reevaluation, seeing apparent evidence in a different light.** But there, the evidence was more external, managed entirely by the narrator. Here, it emerges within the characters themselves.

- And then Darcy unexpectedly shows up, and soon they make their crucial avowals. Strikingly, we don't get to hear the words. It's characteristic of Austen to withdraw discreetly at these moments.

- Why don't we get to hear how Darcy expressed himself? We can only guess about that. It might be that Austen doubted her own ability to represent passion convincingly. It might be that even if the characters are passionate in their souls, they would go on speaking in formal language, which wouldn't do justice to what is happening to them.

- **It's a Cinderella story in a superficial way, but how much deeper than that!** It wasn't love at first sight, but very early on, there was a spark between Elizabeth and Darcy. When she later asks him when he first realized he was falling in love, he answers, "I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun."

- **They didn't really know each other for a long time. That had to develop gradually.** Neither of them revealed their true feelings at first, though they never expressed false feelings. And it's clear that they won't have the kind of simple, shared compatibility that Jane and Bingley will. **They'll be complementary, and they'll always have to keep negotiating their relationship, because that's what real people do.**

Lesson 6

EMMA: BETTER THAN THE BEST ENGLISH NOVEL?

As was previously done with Fielding, this lecture will consider a second novel by the same author that builds on techniques developed in the first but extends them in new ways. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* are both masterpieces, but in *Emma*, published three years later, Jane Austen set herself up for a more formidable challenge and surmounted it magnificently. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* takes place in a tiny world, geographically and socially. It's a little town called Highbury, in which everybody knows everybody else. That's the very opposite of the epic scope of Fielding's novels, but it resembles the worlds that most people actually live in—not on desert islands, or imprisoned in whorehouses, or rambling through the countryside for months on end.

Virginia Woolf made a memorable observation in her book *A Room of One's Own*:

> Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write.

A BILDUNGSROMAN

- Austen once commented that *Pride and Prejudice* was maybe "too light, and bright, and sparkling." **In *Emma*, she created a different kind of heroine, who, as she said with some irony, "no one but myself will much like."**

- Here is the first sentence of *Emma*, the threshold we're invited to cross when we open the book.

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

- Emma has everything going for her, but that telltale word *seemed* in "seemed to unite the best blessings" tells us that the narrator knows more than Emma does.

- **This novel is a highly accomplished example of the bildungsroman.** It's the story of the character's education—not just in the ways of the world, but in self-knowledge.

- Elizabeth Bennet was handsome and clever, but not rich. **Emma is the only child of a wealthy widowed gentleman who dotes on her and who does indeed let her have her way.** She has been growing up as a spoiled princess.

- In her rather claustrophobic little world, Emma always wishes that more would be happening. And to make up for the tedium of life in Highbury, she is what the narrator calls an "imaginist."

- She fancies herself a shrewd matchmaker, and she keeps playing games with other people's lives, imagining relationships that don't actually exist and trying to make them happen herself.

- **In her own case, she believes she will never get married, or even want to.** Her fortune is spectacular, 30,000 pounds, and her father gives her complete

authority over their estate, which is known as Hartfield. **Marriage would mean no longer always getting her way.**

- During the course of the story, Emma will gain important insight in two ways:
    - Getting her way is self-indulgent and often leads to treating other people as pawns, rather than trying to know them for who they really are.
    - She needs to learn that she has limitations of character that marriage with the right person could help her overcome.
- **So this novel, too, will have a marriage plot—but just as in *Pride and Prejudice*, it has to be the right kind of marriage, and once again, the heroine needs to learn a lot about herself before she'll be ready for it.**

THE SUBPLOT OF FRANK AND JANE

- Emma's relationship with a young man named Frank Churchill is interesting. Frank had been adopted into the family of his late mother since they had no male heir of their own—remarkably, the same thing happened to one of Jane Austen's own brothers. Frank is now visiting Highbury to stay with his real father.
- Someone suddenly showing up from outside in Highbury, especially a dashingly attractive one like Frank, is like a thrilling meteorite shaking up this static little world.
- **Frank cheerfully flirts with Emma, and other people are sure their interest in each other is deep. But really, both of them are just playing games.**
- Emma's game is to see if she can turn Frank on, with no intention of letting it go very far. Frank's game is kept a mystery by the narrator until late in the story. There are a number of clues along the way that hint at the truth, much in the same way that Fielding drops clues. But although Emma is highly intelligent, she's too absorbed in her game to pick up on the clues.

- What we eventually learn is that Frank has been having a passionate love affair all along with a young woman named Jane Fairfax, though they have to keep it secret because Jane has no money or social standing and Frank's adoptive family might disown him if they found out.

- The reason Frank is in Highbury is not to see his father; it's because Jane is staying with relatives there, so it's a chance to be near her, if not with her. And since their relationship has to be kept secret, Frank pretending he's interested in Emma provides ideal cover.

- **At some point, every reader is bound to suspect that it's really Jane, not Emma, that Frank is interested in. And on rereading, the clues are right there from the start.** But Emma is enjoying his playful attentions too much to realize how insincere they are.

THE NARRATOR AND THE GUIDE

- During the course of the story, we are often shown the worst in Emma. She is self-centered and self-satisfied. As the narrator told us right at the start, she's inclined to think too well of herself. And because the sleepy little town offers so little to stimulate her, she counteracts boredom by stirring up complications in other people's lives.

- No wonder Austen thought this was a heroine that people would not like very much! It is in this way that she set herself a big challenge.

- The way Austen conquered the challenge was to employ, still more subtly, the technique she invented in *Pride and Prejudice.* **This narrator is more judgmental—more detached from the heroine—than the narrator in the earlier novel was.**

- But even so, as with Elizabeth Bennet, **we are taken inside Emma's consciousness much more often than that of any other character.** We also get to understand, from inside, that Emma is a fundamentally good person.

- **Emma also has a valuable guide within the story.** The owner of a neighboring estate, George Knightley, frequently helps her acknowledge

where she has gone wrong, and she's chagrined and repentant when he does. Knightley is 16 years older than Emma; he has known her all her life and is deeply fond of her. So it's out of affection that he reproves her.

FLIRTATION, LOVE, AND MARRIAGE

- Though determined not to have a serious relationship herself, Emma enjoys flirting with various men. Emma tells her protégée, a naive schoolgirl named Harriet Smith:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry.

- **Emma says she would only consider marriage if she were to fall truly in love,** and it's clearly appropriate for her to feel that way.

Austen never married but is known to have turned down proposals.

- As a wealthy unmarried woman, Emma has a kind of independence that no married woman in that culture could expect. But **the price for Emma's independence is heavy.** For one thing, she shows little self-knowledge when she declares to Harriet:

> I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall.

- The game of harmless flirtation is all very well for the time being—Emma is not yet 21—but it's a failure of self-knowledge to imagine that it's not in her "nature" to ever be in love. And of course, there is no acknowledgment of sexual desire, which is never explicitly addressed in Austen's novels but is certainly felt to be powerful, as it was between Elizabeth and Darcy.

In the village culture in which Austen spent her own life, tact was obligatory and boring people had to be humored. From this perspective, Austen's novels give her an outlet—even a safety valve—for the self-repression that must never be violated in her own life.

- It must strike most readers that instead of taking up with the docile, spaniel-like Harriet, Emma should have made friends

with Jane, who is genuinely her equal. George Knightley tells her as much. But Emma is accustomed to always being treated as superior, and she can't bring herself to get close to Jane.

The only way Jane—to whom Jane Austen gave her own name—is not Emma's equal is in economic circumstances. She is an orphan who has no choice but to provide for herself in a competitive world.

- It's of course because of her hidden relationship with Frank Churchill that Jane has to behave in a reserved and distant way. Knightley begins to guess the truth about that long before Emma does. Emma is too busy imagining that Frank must be in love with bland little Harriet—a preposterous idea—or else with herself.

THE LESSONS OF LOVE

- Throughout the novel, Frank has enjoyed dropping meaningful remarks in Jane's presence that only she will understand. Whenever he is flirting with Emma in some social situation, he throws out comments that are really intended as messages to Jane.

- And not kind messages, either. Feeling his power, Frank is practically tormenting Jane, knowing she has no choice but to keep quiet and take it. He has a mean streak, if not a sadistic one. But it has been a passionate affair—maybe they have even slept together, though Austen would never tell us that. And we know from the story of Lydia and Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* how distrustful Austen is of passionate love.

- Jane might well repent ever having lost her heart to this willful man. But love him she does, and since his haughty stepmother, who would have prevented the match, has just died, we understand at the end of the story that they will indeed get married.

- As for Emma, she is getting a better understanding, at last, of her own heart. **By now we are realizing that Knightley isn't just fond of her. Now that she has grown into a woman, he is truly in love with her.** And what made him realize that, with great psychological truth, is that he was deeply jealous when he thought Emma was in love with Frank.

- Exactly the same thing happens to Emma herself. Knightley is kind enough to dance with Harriet at a ball. And the impressionable Harriet is now sure that Knightley is in love with her.

- Modestly, Harriet confesses to Emma that she believes Knightley feels the same way about her. Emma's instantaneous reaction is to reject such a possibility—and she asks herself why.

> It darted through her with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

- That's an age-old metaphor—Cupid's arrow!

- It's clear that **Austen regards this as the ideal outcome.** Knightley is representative, as Fielding's Squire Allworthy was, of the old country house ideal: managing his estate wisely and doing good for all his neighbors.

- Yet the ending may seem surprisingly low key. **Knightley and Emma will complement each other well,** with his judiciousness and her quick wit, **but it does promise to be a comfortable marriage, rather than a stimulating one.**

- Mr. Woodhouse, predictably, does his best to keep it from happening. Why should Emma get married at all when she is so happy with him?

- So Emma warns Knightley straight out that she could never leave Hartfield during her father's lifetime. And amazingly enough, Knightley commits himself to leaving his much-loved estate to move into Hartfield. Woodhouse accepts this plan, for the rather absurd reason that thieves have broken into his chicken house and he wants another man on hand to protect him.

- **This ending may seem like a real diminuendo, if not an actual downer.** For the accomplished, active, intelligent Knightley to spend his days being told "an egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome" seems a rather grim prospect. **But Austen likely saw it as fundamentally positive.** It's a sign of his generosity of spirit that he's willing to make this sacrifice for the woman he loves—and of Emma's generosity, that she will continue to honor her loyalty to her father.

Lesson 7
Austen and the Comedic Tradition

Scope: This lecture is the first of two on Jane Austen, the most beloved of all English novelists. In this lecture, we will focus on the sociological dimensions of Austen's work, noting her responses to larger historical forces and commenting on her use of comedic endings. Although Austen's work is often described as timeless, it is actually rooted in a specific time and place. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen comments on the phenomenon of social mobility. In addition, Austen wonders how traditional elites can be protected from their own worst impulses, and in arranging her comedic endings, she uses marriage as a metaphor for political and social regeneration. The happy couple at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* serves as an example of how wealth and privilege can be combined with a sense of duty and humility. Although earlier writers had tried to create similar effects, none of them had managed the task as skillfully as Austen. As a result, her novels would become classic expressions of the emerging comedic tradition in English fiction.

Outline

I. This lecture is the first of two on Jane Austen (1775–1817), the most beloved of all English novelists.

- **A.** In this lecture, we will focus on the sociological dimensions of Austen's work, noting her responses to larger historical forces and concluding with some ideas about her use of comedic endings.
- **B.** In the next lecture, we will turn our attention to the psychological dimensions of Austen's fiction, exploring her treatment of what later writers would call the "inner life."

II. Austen was born in Hampshire, the daughter of a clergyman and the sixth of seven children.

- **A.** She began her first serious writing projects when still in her 20s, producing early versions of what would later become *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Northanger Abbey*. She returned to these works in her 30s, revising them for publication.

B. She never married and probably never had a really serious romance—a painful irony, given her perceptive treatment of courtship and marriage.

III. At first, it may seem surprising to suggest that Austen is responding to historical forces, because her work is often described as timeless.

A. That description is not entirely inaccurate, given that Austen seldom mentions major historical events or contemporary controversies.

B. Compared with Scott, who lived and wrote at the same time, her settings and situations may seem trivial.

C. We will see, however, that as Austen works through her stories, she confronts many of the most pressing social issues of her day.

IV. In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Austen is preoccupied with the phenomenon of social mobility.

A. The family of Elizabeth, or Lizzy, Bennet, Austen's heroine, is a good case in point.

1. Lizzy's father is a gentleman. He lives on the family estate, which provides him with an annual income of £2,000.

2. Lizzy's mother is from a slightly lower class. Her "people" are professionals and merchants—respectable and decent but not quite on Mr. Bennet's level.

3. When we look at Lizzy's parents, we can see subtle examples of social mobility: He has married down, while she has married up.

B. There's more to the story than that, for although Mr. Bennet is indeed a gentleman, his position is in no way secure.

1. The family estate can be passed on only to male heirs—and the Bennets have had only daughters, five of them.

2. The business of the novel, as Mrs. Bennet realizes, is to get at least a few of those daughters married off to reasonably wealthy men.

C. Thus, although the novel presents us with some conspicuous examples of upward mobility—one local merchant has recently been knighted, for instance—looming in the background is the awful possibility of downward mobility.

V. Austen also responds to a number of other developments.

A. She seems to feel that the ruling and elite classes are in some danger of losing their moral authority.
  1. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the major representative of the country's ruling class is Mr. Darcy, the novel's eventual hero.
  2. Darcy does not make a good first impression. He is fabulously rich—one of the wealthiest men in the country, as a matter of fact—but also cold and distant.
  3. In the middle of the book, Darcy proposes to Lizzy—but because his proposal is not a flattering one, she wastes no time in rejecting him.
  4. Later, when Lizzy visits Darcy's estate and meets his servants, she learns that he is a generous master and landlord. His housekeeper tells an astonished Lizzy, "I have never had a cross word from him in my life, and I have known him ever since he was four years old."
  5. Eventually, Lizzy and Darcy do get together, but his cold exterior is a serious problem, especially in a period when the authority of the ruling classes is being challenged.

B. Through the story of Darcy and Lizzy, *Pride and Prejudice* dramatizes the question of how to shore up the authority of the ruling class.
  1. If England is to remain in the hands of people like Mr. Darcy, Austen seems to reason, then those people must not only accept their responsibilities to others but be seen and known to accept them as well.
  2. What Austen wants, in the end, is a society that honors the traditional political values and mythologies of English history—that is, the mythology of connectedness, shared responsibility, and mutual respect.
  3. Through the union of Darcy and Lizzy, Austen creates an image of political and social regeneration, suggesting that the couple is destined to provide leadership for the rest of the community.
  4. In addition to personal fulfillment and happiness, Darcy gains from his marriage to Lizzy a sense of humility and, perhaps, a sense of humor—valuable assets for a man in his position.

VI. Because Austen's novels end in this way, they may be the perfect embodiments of the English comedic tradition.

A. Austen concludes by placing her most sympathetic characters into secure and satisfying positions, giving them what they want as well as what they need and deserve.

B. Moreover, she creates powerful images of a society rescued from the twin threats of fragmentation and internal collapse.

C. Earlier novelists, including Richardson, Fielding, and Burney, had tried to do the same thing. But none of them had managed the task as elegantly or effectively as Austen.

1. While Richardson finds it difficult to wrap up his stories and Fielding relies on familiar plot devices, including the revelation of his hero's honorable birth, Austen concludes more naturally.

2. Her heroes and heroines appear to work things out on their own and for themselves, overcoming obstacles (some external, others internal) through dialogue and eventually reaching a position of mutual understanding.

D. In future lectures, when we think of comedic endings and the role of marriage, we should remember Austen in particular.

Essential Reading:

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*.

Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, introduction and chapter 9.

Supplementary Reading:

Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, chapter 4.

Robert M. Polhemus, *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence*, chapter 2.

Questions to Consider:

1. What accounts for the enduring popularity of Austen's fiction?

2. What has changed, not only for the main characters but also for the societies they inhabit, by the end of a novel such as *Pride and Prejudice*?

Lesson 8
Austen and the History of Consciousness

Scope: This lecture, our second on Jane Austen, will begin by acknowledging her consummate skill as a storyteller. Austen has often been praised for her use of dialogue and her handling of dramatic scenes. She is also thought to be a master of narrative construction, gifted with an impeccable sense of how to shape and structure a story. Yet her greatest achievement, and her most important contribution to the development of the novel, may be her innovative treatment of human consciousness. To see what makes Austen both special and important, we will contrast her work with that of Richardson and Fielding. As we consider passages from *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, and Austen's *Emma*, we will see that Austen gives us a vivid sense of what her heroine is thinking and feeling. Indeed, through her inventive use of what we now call *free indirect discourse*, she paves the way for generations of later writers and provides a compelling image of consciousness itself.

Outline

I. This lecture begins with questions about the literary reputation of Jane Austen.

A. Austen's first great admirers were other writers, including her most distinguished contemporary, Sir Walter Scott.

B. These writers admired Austen's masterly use of dialogue and her handling of dramatic scenes, and they were right to do so.

1. The scenes in earlier novels were often longer and more shapeless than the ones in Austen.

2. Austen's skill as a dramatist is one reason why her novels have so often been adapted for the screen, because much of the dialogue for the movies can be taken directly from the books.

C. Austen's admirers also viewed her as a master of narrative construction, gifted with an impeccable sense of how to shape and structure a story.

1. Among the earlier novelists, her only rival in this area was Henry Fielding.

2. Both Fielding and Austen share a delight in symmetry, balance, and order; yet in Austen, those effects are never distracting or intrusive.
3. When reading Austen, even though we always know that we are dealing with a work of art, the impression or effect of Realism is not spoiled.

II. Yet Austen's greatest achievement may lie in her innovative explorations of human psychology and human consciousness.

A. In *Emma* (1815), Austen is clearly concerned with the process of psychological development.

1. The opening paragraphs of *Emma* are among the most famous in all of literature, and they provide a basis for everything that happens in later chapters of the novel. Here is the first sentence:

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

2. As the next chapters play out, we see that Emma's judgment is clouded by vanity and self-delusion. Her efforts at matchmaking prove disastrous and nearly spoil her own chance at happiness.
3. By the end, those clouds have parted; Emma has seen the light and learned the truth about herself and her world. She ends the novel married to Mr. Knightley, the wealthiest and most intelligent man in her neighborhood.

B. At particular points in *Emma*, Austen also provides a vivid image of the mind in action.

1. Over the course of a single scene, Emma might wrestle with a number of different emotions.
2. As she gathers new impressions and takes in more information, she is often forced to reconsider her judgments—sometimes revising them, sometimes not.
3. The result is not a summary of her mental deliberations but an exciting dramatization of them.

III. Austen's achievements become more obvious when we contrast her work with that of earlier novelists.

A. As we consider these contrasts, we might remember that Austen was a devoted and passionate reader of novels.

1. By the time she began to do her first serious writing, the novel was already a well-established form.

2. She came from a family of voracious readers, and she was encouraged to discuss contemporary fiction with her parents and siblings.

3. Interestingly, her reading was not limited to the classics; she devoured almost everything, including works that other readers might have regarded as somewhat disreputable.

B. From Samuel Richardson, Austen learned the importance of creating a strong bond between her characters and her readers.

1. Because Richardson tells the story through letters and journals, he allows us to watch as Pamela struggles to make sense of her contradictory feelings for Mr. B.

2. Although Austen was intrigued by Richardson's work and borrowed his epistolary format for her initial experiments with fiction, she seems to have wanted to avoid the emotional volatility of his characters, viewing it as a threat to her control of the story.

C. In Fielding, she found an interesting but imperfect alternative to Richardson.

1. Fielding not only created plots of great complexity and beauty but also reconceived the role of the narrator.

2. For these reasons, unlike Richardson, he never seemed to lose control of his stories or his characters.

3. For the same reasons, however, he never really succeeded in creating a strong emotional connection between his characters and his readers.

D. In such novels as *Emma*, Austen builds on the achievements of Richardson and Fielding, developing a way to combine emotional immediacy with narrative control.

1. Austen achieves this feat by having her narrator borrow the language or vocabulary of her central characters.

2. This technique allows the narrator to remain on the scene, as a more or less reliable source of information, without crowding Emma out of the picture.

IV. Austen could not have realized it at the time, but she was setting the stage for generations of later writers.

A. The technique she developed is now called *free indirect discourse* or *free indirect speech*.

B. Her technique is the basis for later forms of interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness narration.

C. For that reason, more than any other, she remains not only beloved but admired as one of the most important figures in the development of the English novel tradition.

Essential Reading:

Jane Austen, *Emma*.

Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, chapter 9.

Supplementary Reading:

David Lodge, "Composition, Distribution, Arrangement: Form and Structure in Jane Austen's Novels," in *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*.

Kathryn Sutherland, "Jane Austen and the Invention of the Serious Modern Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What sorts of things might we expect novelists to notice or value in the work of their fellow writers?
2. In recent years, biographers and historians have begun to employ free indirect discourse or free indirect speech when describing the motives and actions of historical figures. Is there any danger in that? Should this technique be confined to works of fiction?

Lesson 9

Eliot and the Multiplot Novel

Scope: George Eliot is the pseudonym of Marian (or Mary Ann) Evans, a thinker and editor who began writing fiction at the age of 37. In this lecture, the first of two on Eliot, we will see why her career marks a turning point in the history of English fiction. Eliot's *Middlemarch* is clearly indebted to the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. Set in the period surrounding the first great Reform Bill, *Middlemarch* shows how individuals are affected by historical change. *Middlemarch* also perfects the form of the multiplot novel, combining the sweep of Dickens and Thackeray with the psychological acuity of Austen. Yet even as she works with familiar narrative forms, Eliot populates her world with new sorts of characters. Moved by deep spiritual yearnings, these characters want more than their immediate social worlds can provide. Through Eliot's depiction of such figures as Dorothea Brooke, she brings an unprecedented intellectual and moral seriousness to the English novel.

Outline

I. George Eliot is the pseudonym of Marian (or Mary Ann) Evans (1819–1880). In this lecture, we will see how she consolidates the achievements of earlier novelists.

- **A.** We will see that she is a historical novelist, clearly indebted to Sir Walter Scott.
- **B.** We will also see that she is a multiplot novelist who draws on the lessons of Dickens and Thackeray.
- **C.** Finally, we will identify her as a psychological novelist, heir to the legacy of Jane Austen.

II. We begin by reviewing the major events of Eliot's life.

- **A.** Unlike Charles Dickens or William Makepeace Thackeray, Evans was born and grew up in the country, and her experiences of rural life were the basis of her later fiction.

B. Intensely devout as a young woman, she later came to view the Gospels as "histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction" and decided that she could no longer accompany her father to church.

C. After her father's death, Evans used her inheritance to subsidize a career as a writer and editor, joining the staff of the *Westminster Review*, one of the leading journals of the day.

D. Perhaps more important to her later fiction, however, was her experience as the translator of two works of biblical scholarship, both originally published in German.

1. She translated the first, *The Life of Jesus* by David Friedrich Strauss, in 1846. The second, *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach, appeared in 1854.

2. These two works were among the first in Western history to approach Christianity as a historical phenomenon. In them, Evans found a way to affirm the teachings of Jesus without accepting the notion of his divinity.

E. Evans had a brilliant mind but did not know what kind of writing she wanted to do. Her decision to try her hand at fiction, which she reached at the age of 37, is a sign of the novel's rising status.

F. Evans's first sketches were submitted anonymously; she began using her pseudonym in 1858, when the sketches were published as a book.

1. One reason for her secrecy was the fact that she was living with a married man, George Lewes. She and Lewes thought of their own relationship as a marriage but knew that others would disagree.

2. Although Evans later acknowledged authorship of her books, she continued to write and publish as George Eliot. Critics continue to use her pseudonym when writing about her work.

III. Over the course of her literary career, Eliot enjoyed greater and greater success.

A. She first gained fame as the author of *Adam Bede* (1859). The novel establishes Eliot's great skill in developing women characters, as well as her continuing interest in religious feeling.

B. *Mill on the Floss* (1860) ends with the death of its central character, Maggie Tulliver, and thus, stands out as one of the few tragic novels of the period.

C. By the time Eliot finished *Middlemarch* (1871–1872), the novel widely regarded as her masterpiece, she stood alone among English novelists.

1. The great novelists of the early Victorian period were dead, including Dickens, Thackeray, and both Charlotte and Emily Brontë.

2. New writers, such as Thomas Hardy and Henry James, were entering the scene, but they had not yet emerged as major figures; thus, Eliot had the field all to herself, her only serious rival being Anthony Trollope.

IV. Eliot's triumph was not merely a matter of historical accident. In *Middlemarch*, her account of life in and around a small country town, she synthesized a number of earlier achievements in the novel form.

A. *Middlemarch* is indebted to historical novels, such as *Waverley* (1814). In Eliot, as in the works of Sir Walter Scott, we see how individuals are affected by larger historical forces.

B. Eliot places her fictional community on the brink of change, setting the novel in the period surrounding the Reform Bill of 1832. The characters not only debate the bill, which extended voting rights to some middle-class men, but also witness the extension of railway lines into their region.

C. Thus, we know what the characters cannot: that their way of life is about to be transformed as their small town is absorbed into a larger social network.

V. Eliot may also have perfected the form of the Victorian multiplot novel, combining the sweep of Dickens and Thackeray with the psychological depth of Jane Austen.

A. Like Dickens, she begins with several distinct groups of characters.

1. One group, reminiscent of the gentry families in Austen, lives in or around Tipton Grange. At the center of this group is Dorothea Brooke, an ardent young woman who surprises us with her decision to marry a middle-aged scholar.

2. Another group includes characters living in the town of Middlemarch, including the mayor, his son and daughter, and a young physician, Tertius Lydgate, who has recently arrived to work at a new hospital.

3. In addition to these two character clusters, Eliot introduces a third major grouping, which includes childhood sweethearts Fred Vincy and Mary Garth.

B. By the end, Eliot has connected all her characters, demonstrating what her narrator calls the "stealthy convergence of human lots."

1. The novel's three major plots, sharply distinct at the outset of the story, have merged by the end.
2. Behind this narrative design lies an important moral purpose. Eliot's aim is to move her readers out of their habitual egoism. If we understand our connections to other people, she reasons, we may become less likely to take the world "as an udder to feed our supreme selves."

VI. Eliot's psychological interests will be the subject of our next lecture. For now, it is enough to recognize her desire to populate the novel with new sorts of characters.

A. In many ways, Eliot's Dorothea resembles Austen's Emma Woodhouse: Both characters enjoy the advantages of wealth, beauty, and intelligence.

B. Emma, however, is happy to stay within the confines of her immediate social world, while Dorothea wants something more.

1. In the opening pages of the novel, Eliot likens Dorothea to St. Theresa of Avila, noting that Theresa's "passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life."
2. Dorothea's intellectual and spiritual yearnings make her something of a misfit—despite her beauty and wealth, she doesn't quite fit in.
3. Dorothea's yearnings (and her lack of self-understanding) lead to her hasty marriage to Edward Casaubon, a middle-aged scholar and minister. She hopes that it will be like marrying Pascal or Milton, but she is bitterly disappointed.
4. Fortunately, by the end of the novel, Dorothea has found something better. Freed from her first marriage by Mr. Casaubon's death, she is now able to marry for love—and does so in spite of her friends' disapproval.

C. Characters like Dorothea had never before appeared in English fiction. By placing such characters at the center of her novels, Eliot takes the form in a new direction, investing it with an unprecedented sense of moral and intellectual seriousness.

Essential Reading:

Karen Chase, *George Eliot: Middlemarch*.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*.

Supplementary Reading:

Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*.

Peter Garrett, *The Victorian Multiplot Novel: Studies in Dialogical Form*, chapter 4.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is any recent historical period comparable to the one in which *Middlemarch* is set? At what points in the 20th century were rural communities poised on the verge of great change?
2. Are characters like Dorothea—characters with intellectual and spiritual yearnings—still uncommon? Do any characters from recent books or movies share Dorothea's aspirations?

Lesson 10
Eliot and the Unfolding of Character

Scope: In this lecture, we will conclude our discussion of *Middlemarch*, exploring Eliot's approach to characterization. Eliot learned much from Jane Austen, as we can see from her handling of Tertius Lydgate. Like Austen, Eliot shows how our personalities are shaped by accident and circumstance. For Eliot, however, personalities are never fixed or finished. In her world, character is a "process and an unfolding." Eliot's most original characters may be Edward Casaubon and Nicholas Bulstrode, middle-aged men who have known great disappointment. We cannot always approve of their actions, but we are made to understand their feelings—and to wonder what it would be like to be in their shoes. After considering Eliot's portrayal of Casaubon and Bulstrode, we will see why Virginia Woolf described *Middlemarch* as "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people."

Outline

I. We ended our first lecture on George Eliot by examining her portrayal of Dorothea Brooke. In this lecture, we will continue to explore Eliot's understanding of character.

- **A.** Eliot shows how circumstances help to shape our personalities.
- **B.** For Eliot, however, personalities are never fixed or finished. As her narrator explains, character is a "process and an unfolding."

II. Eliot's views on these matters are evident in her handling of all the characters. We'll focus this lecture on three of her men:

- **A.** Dr. Tertius Lydgate, who at the beginning of the novel has only recently arrived in town.
- **B.** Edward Casaubon, a clergyman and scholar, the first husband to Eliot's heroine, Dorothea Brooke.
- **C.** Nicholas Bulstrode, a banker and community leader. Through her portrayal of Bulstrode's religious hypocrisy, Eliot raises a number of spiritual questions.

III. Eliot's approach to character first becomes evident in her portrayal of Dr. Lydgate.

A. Lydgate is another orphan, and like Dorothea, he comes from a distinguished family. Indeed, his aristocratic connections set him apart from others in his profession.

1. Here, we might note that the medical profession was not then what it is now. Though medicine had advanced beyond the days of barber-surgeons, the medical profession was still largely unregulated.

2. Eliot was especially interested in the conflict between physicians whose medical practices were based on tradition and younger doctors (such as Lydgate) who took a more scientific approach.

B. Eliot shows how chance events have shaped Lydgate's personality, explaining that his vocation is the result of an accident—his childhood discovery of an encyclopedia article on human anatomy.

C. In Eliot's handling of such details, we see her debt to Austen.

1. In the opening paragraphs of *Emma*, Austen shows how a number of factors unite in the formation of Emma's personality.

2. These factors include her beauty, intelligence, social position, and wealth. Had any of these things been different, Austen suggests, Emma's personality would have been different as well.

D. In addition to noting the impact of accidents and circumstances, Eliot traces the gradual unfolding of Lydgate's personality.

1. Eliot's narrator tells us that while studying medicine in Paris, Lydgate became involved with a French actress, proposing marriage, only to discover that she may have murdered her first husband.

2. Despite his determination to take a "strictly scientific view of women," Lydgate jumps into marriage with Rosamond Vincy, daughter of the mayor, and this marriage proves to be a terrible mistake for both of them.

3. At the end of the novel, we're told that although Lydgate later enjoyed worldly success as a physician in London, he "always regarded himself as a failure" and "died prematurely of diphtheria."

4. In Lydgate's case, we are dealing not with a single set of circumstances but with a chain of events: The affair with the actress leads to the resolution to avoid entanglements with women, which in turn, leads to the impulsive engagement and the unhappy marriage.

IV. Despite her success with Lydgate, Eliot offers something even more original in Casaubon and Bulstrode.

A. Both of these figures are middle-aged and, thus, strikingly different from the youthful protagonists of most English novels. What's more, they are conflicted and tormented men, capable of hurting others as well as themselves.

B. Casaubon hurts Dorothea, largely through suspicion and mistrust.

1. Though he appears pretentious and vain, Casaubon is deeply insecure, afraid of being exposed as a failure. Though he has for years been working on a massive scholarly project, he has refused to consult the leading authorities on his subject.
2. Through his adult life, he has managed to hide his insecurities from others, but after his marriage, further concealment becomes impossible.

C. As Casaubon takes out his frustrations on Dorothea, we are torn. Though we do not approve of his behavior, we can see that his situation is desperate. It would be terrible to be in Dorothea's situation, we feel, but perhaps even worse to be in Casaubon's.

V. After resolving Casaubon's story with his death, Eliot moves on to the more difficult case of Bulstrode.

A. Now a pillar of his church, Bulstrode is hiding dark secrets.

1. As a young man, Bulstrode inherited a fortune from his first wife, after concealing information about her estranged daughter.
2. The past is now catching up with Bulstrode, and as he confronts the threat of exposure, he is tormented. He knows that he has cheated his stepdaughter and that it is too late for him to set things right.
3. Moreover, he is not sure that he really wants to set things right. He has enjoyed many advantages because of the inheritance from his first wife, and he is not ready to give them up.

B. As Bulstrode's world collapses and he is forced to leave Middlemarch, we cannot help but feel that he is getting what he deserves. As with Casaubon, we also share his pain and wonder what it would be like to be in his situation.

1. What would it be like to spend your life with a terrible secret? How would you cope with the knowledge that you'd wronged another person? How might you justify your actions to yourself?
2. These are the questions that Eliot raises through her portrayal of Bulstrode. As we consider them, we can see why Virginia Woolf described *Middlemarch* as "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people."

Essential Reading:

Karen Chase, *Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot*, chapters 7–8.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*.

Supplementary Reading:

Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, chapter 4.

Virginia Woolf, "George Eliot," in *The Common Reader: First Series*.

Questions to Consider:

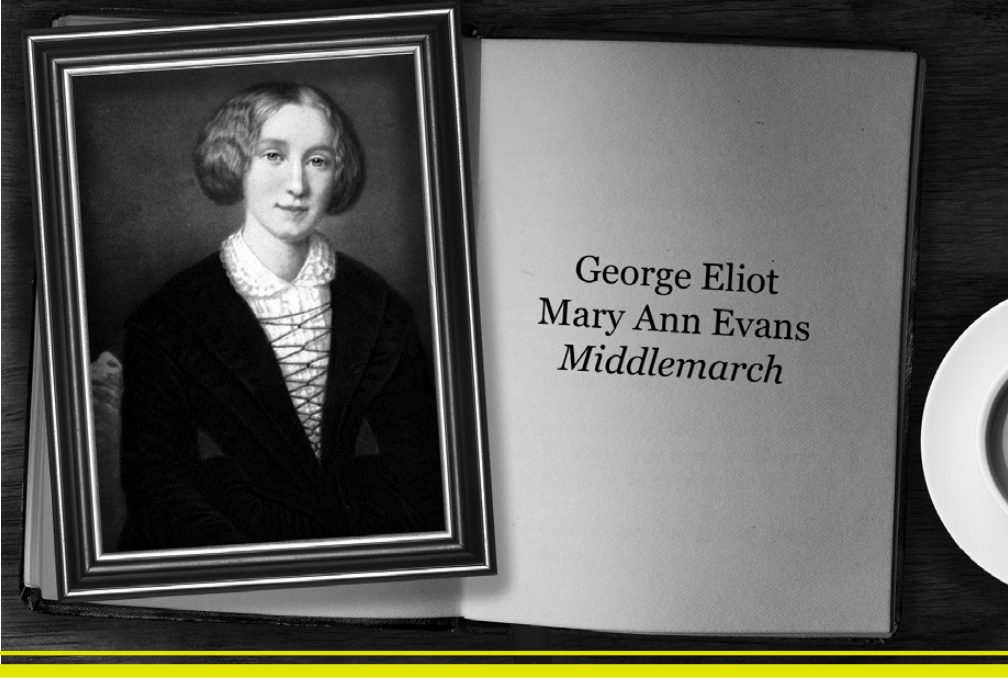
1. Does sympathy preclude or complicate moral judgment? Once we understand a person's motives, are we incapable of assessing his or her actions?
2. What makes a book seem "grown-up"? Woolf suggests that it has something to do with the acknowledgment of pain and failure. Do you agree?

Lesson 11

AN ENGLISH MASTERPIECE: *MIDDLEMARCH*

Regarded by many as the greatest novel in the English language, *Middlemarch* begins where many novels end: with people getting married. Who is going to fall in love with whom is not the key to this story. Instead, it's how people's choices—all kinds of choices, not just in love—determine what happens to them. Also, we often realize in hindsight that those were hardly choices at all. Even when people try their hardest to shape their lives, they have only the most limited scope for doing so. In the end, *Middlemarch* is a majestic tragedy, not in the classic sense of particular mistakes leading to disaster, but in the sense of a tragic condition that underlies life itself.

George Eliot was born in 1819 as Mary Anne, or Marian, Evans. She chose a male pen name for two reasons. One was to avoid the condescension that generally went along with the description *lady novelist*. The other was that after a number of disappointing attachments, she formed a lifelong alliance with an important writer named George Henry Lewes. He was separated from his wife, but since divorce was nearly impossible at the time, she had to live with him in what was regarded as a shockingly immoral relationship, even though they both thought of it as a genuine marriage. Not publishing under her real name was a way of disguising her identity.



INTERESTING ORIGINS

- *Middlemarch* owes its exceptional richness to that fact that it's really **two stories that George Eliot began to write separately** until she suddenly realized they would be even better if they were merged.

- One was to be called *Middlemarch*. It was about a young doctor, Tertius Lydgate, who arrives in the town of Middlemarch and sets up a practice. He has been trained in advanced medical ideas, and the local doctors and their patients are suspicious of him as a flashy upstart.

- The other story was called *Miss Brooke*. Dorothea Brooke is the orphaned ward of a genial but shallow country gentleman, her uncle Arthur Brooke.

- **The finished novel *Middlemarch*, in which the two stories are combined,** is set just before the passage of the great

Victorian novelists were interested in being true to the incredible complexity of life. They realized that art can't always reduce life to meaning.

Reform Bill of 1832, which opened up the franchise for the first time and was a turning point in the modernization of England. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution was beginning to bring its changes about; the establishment of the first railways also has a role to play in this novel.

- So in a real sense, ***Middlemarch* is a historical novel** set in the England of Eliot's youth, 40 years before the novel was published. *The Red and the Black* was grounded in a very specific historical moment. Middlemarch has the **dual perspective of two historical moments:** the 1830s and the 1870s.

DYSFUNCTIONAL MARRIAGES

- **Dorothea is deeply religious**—as Eliot was in her own youth—**and eager to find a way to be of use in the world. But all too clearly, society has not yet developed many ways for a woman to do that.** Dorothea concludes that her best course will be as the helpmeet of an accomplished husband.

- Very unfortunately, the man she is smitten by is Edward Casaubon: an aging, dry, pedantic clergyman who thinks of himself as a profound scholar. For years, Casaubon has been accumulating notes for a masterpiece with the ambitious title *The Key to All Mythologies*. Dorothea is thrilled to be the collaborator of this great man.

- But **not long after marrying Casaubon, she becomes bitterly disillusioned.** He is self-centered and remote. He wants her to act merely as a secretary. And it becomes clear that he has no ideas of his own. He'll just accumulate notes until the day he dies and never write the book at all.

- **Yet with extraordinary sympathy, Eliot never satirizes Casaubon.** At one point, her narrator surprisingly calls him "poor Mr. Casaubon." We are made to see that he is suffering inwardly, suspecting all too correctly that he is not a great scholar and that this life work of his is a complete waste of time. Like everybody, he is trapped in being who he is, and **the narrator genuinely pities him.**

- **But that does not mean we should like him.** He is married to a beautiful and intelligent young woman, and he is so afraid of emotion that he never

allows her to get close to him, let alone participate in his intellectual life, such as it is.

- And the narrator pities Dorothea, too. She pays a dreadful price for the illusions she had about Casaubon when she married him. **We may not get what we deserve in life, but we certainly have to pay for what we do get.**

- **That's one marriage that turns out badly. The other is Lydgate's.** He falls for a very pretty young woman, Rosamond Vincy, the daughter of a local merchant. When it's too late, they both realize how profoundly incompatible they are.

- Rosamond is narcissistic and self-indulgent, and she imagines that by marrying a doctor, she will be rich. **She is completely indifferent to Lydgate's dream of achieving scientific advances. He, in turn, falls for his image of Rosamond and is blind to what she's really like.**

THE WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS

- **The omniscient narrator regularly comments on the characters and their actions, often with profound reflections suggested by them.**

- Here is a fine example. When Lydgate and Rosamond meet each other for the first time at a party, they are both preoccupied with their own attractiveness, neither one really registering what the other person is like. Yet they will soon decide that they are "in love," and that will lead to their disastrous marriage.

- Here's what the narrator says when they first meet:

> Destiny stands by sarcastic with our dramatis personae folded in her hand.

- Eliot acknowledges that her model for this kind of commentary is Fielding. But she adds that back in his day, he had the leisure to push back his easy chair and chat with the reader. Her task, she says, is different:

> I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.

- In other words, ***Middlemarch*** **is a capacious story, with lots of characters and lots of subplots. But its purpose is to show how all of them, at a deep level, are interrelated.** It was with this in mind that Eliot had the inspiration of merging the two separate story lines she started out with.

- **The idea of a network, or web, was common among intellectuals at the time.** And Eliot's goal in *Middlemarch* is to show the complex interweaving of phenomena that needs to be grasped as a living whole. More largely, in her political thinking, there is the hope that the entire society can make slow but sure progress.

- ***Middlemarch*** **is fundamentally tragic,** and there's a famous statement of that in the novel itself. The more we come to understand the complex web, the more we see how people are trapped within it. The statement comes when Dorothea has returned from her honeymoon in Italy and bursts into helpless tears:

> That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

- **Life is tragic not just in dramatic crises, but in the steady state of suffering and loss in human life.** No one could bear to think about that all the time, which is why even the quickest of us have to be "wadded with stupidity."

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The world of *Middlemarch* is filled with the different points of view of its many characters, but the whole thing is held together—made into a unity—by the imagination and intelligence of the author.

The Victorians were great reformers, and they were committed to finding ways to make society better for everyone. Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator mentions that back in the 16th century, Saint Theresa could found a new religious order and have immense influence on other people. **Dorothea is poignantly described as "a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing."**

For Eliot, language, like everything else, is part of the complex web of social interactions—a shared medium for communication and change.

It was George Eliot's mission to raise her contemporaries' consciousness—and in particular, to see how unjust it was that a talented young woman like Dorothea could find no worthy channel for her gifts. Eliot herself, of course, had had a long struggle to get there.

While *Middlemarch* focuses on that pair of intertwined stories—Dorothea and Casaubon; Lydgate and Rosamond—it is also about an entire society at a particular historical moment. That was true of *The Red and the Black,* too, but unlike Stendhal, Eliot is deeply concerned with contemporary ideas not as abstract theories, but as ways of making sense of a world undergoing rapid change.

For the original readers of *Middlemarch*, its intellectual up-to-dateness was very apparent. A literary critic named Sidney Colvin said:

> What she writes is full of her time […] all saturated with modern ideas and poured into a language of which every word bites home with peculiar sharpness to the contemporary consciousness.

- Specifically, this refers to a philosophy (really more like a sociology) known as *positivism*. One often hears the word positivist referred to dismissively, as meaning the reduction of everything to mere facts. But what Eliot took from positivism was that **if there is no ultimate meaning in the universe—if traditional religion is an illusion—then it's all the more important for human beings to create meaning in their own interactions.** She urged her readers to open their minds, and their hearts, to what she called "the religion of humanity."

- That early critic picked up on this and expressed Eliot's thinking very well:

> [P]hilosophy which declares the human family is deluded in its higher dreams, dependent upon itself, and bound thereby to a closer if sadder brotherhood.

A (RELATIVELY) HAPPY ENDING

- As *Middlemarch* draws to a close, the many subplots work themselves out in interesting ways, including the stories of many characters other than the main ones.

- As for the principal characters, **what happens to Lydgate is both predictable and distressing. It reflects that element of tragedy in everyday life that is gradual and undramatic but bitter all the same.**

- Lydgate's idealistic dreams are shattered by two forces. One is his marriage to a selfish and materialistic wife who has no respect for his ambition to do important research. But the other is Lydgate's own sense of entitlement. Coming from a well-to-do family, he takes having plenty of money for granted. And not only does he spend more than he can afford—Rosamond helps with that, of course—he has the privileged gentleman's habit of gambling, which gets him so deeply in debt that his best course is to sell out and start over.

- Still worse, in trying to get support for an up-to-date hospital he's founding, Lydgate relies on a banker who turns out to be corrupt, and that disgrace likewise helps drag Lydgate down. He leaves Middlemarch and settles for a

life as an ordinary physician in a resort town—a far cry from the high hopes he began with.

- **Dorothea's story is different. Fortunately for her, Casaubon dies of a heart attack, and she has a sufficient inheritance to choose her own life.** What she chooses is to get married to an appealing young man named Will Ladislaw, a distant relative of Casaubon's who is regarded with suspicion in Middlemarch because of his foreign name.

- Having once thought of himself vaguely as an artist, Will accepts a job as a speechwriter for Dorothea's uncle, Mr. Brooke, who has decided to run for Parliament. Brooke is an absolute duffer and loses the election, but Will discovers that he enjoys politics and has a gift for it. By the end of the novel, he himself has been elected to Parliament, and Dorothea is at his side.

- **So this is a relatively happy ending—but only relatively. Dorothea can never be a modern Saint Theresa,** founder of a great institution. Still, as a member of Parliament's wife, **she can at least have indirect influence in the world.** Here is the last sentence of the whole novel:

> The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

- Notice that the phrase is "half owing," not owing altogether. And because people like Dorothea live hidden lives, they will be interred in unvisited tombs.

With the great Victorian writers, the many experiments and innovations of the novel form since the time of Cervantes have arrived at maturity. The 20th century, as well as the 21st, would see still further innovations and experiments, but the novels examined in this course remain foundational benchmarks—a living heritage that continues to give pleasure to everyone who loves them.

QUIZ

LECTURE 19

What does the first line of *Pride and Prejudice*—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"—tell us about the novel?

How does Austen employ free indirect discourse to create a new way of relating the narrator to the principal character?

LECTURE 20

What makes *Emma* a fine example of the bildungsroman?

What hints of feminism, if any, do we see in *Emma*?

LECTURE 21

What are some of the different ways in which Richardson, Smollett, Laclos, and Goethe use the epistolary form?

How and why did Goethe incorporate real-life experiences in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*?

LECTURE 22

In what ways should *Frankenstein* be regarded as a myth, and what are some of its implications for our culture?

How is the character of Frankenstein's monster different in Mary Shelley's book from the way it appears in movies and in popular culture?

LECTURE 23

What are the different implications of passion in *Manon Lescaut* and *The Red and the Black*?

In what ways is *The Red and the Black* embedded in its social and historical moment?

LECTURE 24

Is *Middlemarch* more overtly feminist than Austen's novels, and if so, why?

What makes *Middlemarch* a fundamentally tragic novel?

Readings

Extracts from *Sense and Sensibility*

From Chapter 1

In this extract from the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to the Dashwood women. We are given an early insight into Elinor's rationality and Marianne's sensibility. The girls' father, Mr Henry Dashwood, has died, and their half-brother John Dashwood has inherited the family estate, Norland. Although their father made John promise to look after his half-sisters, John's wife Fanny is jealous and manipulative, and has arrived at Norland almost immediately after the funeral, making the Dashwood women feel that they are no longer welcome in their own home. This extract describes the differing reactions of Elinor, Marianne and their mother Mrs Dashwood to this turn of events.

Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever; but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great.

Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in future. Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still she could struggle, she could exert herself. She could consult with her brother, could receive her sister-in-law on her arrival, and treat her with proper attention; and could strive to rouse her mother to similar exertion, and encourage her to similar forbearance.

Margaret, the other sister, was a good-humoured, well-disposed girl; but as she had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne's romance, without having much of her sense; she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life.

From Chapter 15-16

This extract describes Marianne's reaction to Willoughby's departure. Her devastation is evident, but Austen's narrative also gives the impression that Marianne is behaving in the way she thinks she ought to behave, following the example of the sentimental literature she so enjoys reading.

They saw nothing of Marianne till dinner time, when she entered the room and took her place at the table without saying a word. Her eyes were red and swollen; and it seemed as if her tears were even then restrained with difficulty. She avoided the looks of them all, could neither eat nor speak, and after some time, on her mother's silently pressing her hand with tender compassion, her small degree of fortitude was quite overcome, she burst into tears and left the room.

This violent oppression of spirits continued the whole evening. She was without any power, because she was without any desire of command over herself. The slightest mention of anything relative to Willoughby overpowered her in an instant; and though her family were most anxiously attentive to her comfort, it was impossible for them, if they spoke at all, to keep clear of every subject which her feelings connected with him.

CHAPTER 16

Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable had she been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby. She would have been ashamed to look her family in the face the next morning, had she not risen from her bed in more need of repose than when she lay down in it. But the feelings which made such composure a disgrace, left her in no danger of incurring it. She was awake the whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with a headache, was unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment; giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either. Her sensibility was potent enough!

When breakfast was over she walked out by herself, and wandered about the village of Allenham, indulging the recollection of past enjoyment and crying over the present reverse for the chief of the morning.

The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. She played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined, and sat at the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out for her, till her heart was so heavy that no farther sadness could be gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. She spent whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying; her voice often totally suspended by her tears. In books too, as well as in music, she courted the misery which a contrast between the past and present was certain of giving. She read nothing but what they had been used to read together.

Such violence of affliction indeed could not be supported for ever; it sunk within a few days into a calmer melancholy; but these employments, to which she daily recurred, her solitary walks and silent meditations, still produced occasional effusions of sorrow as lively as ever.

From Chapter 29

Marianne has seen Willoughby for the first time in many weeks, and has been publicly spurned by him. He has returned all of her letters and love tokens, and has sent with them a short note announcing his engagement to another woman. In this extract, Elinor and Marianne discuss the situation, and Marianne reveals that she and Willoughby had never been formally engaged.

"I felt myself," she added, "to be as solemnly engaged to him, as if the strictest legal covenant had bound us to each other."

"I can believe it," said Elinor; "but unfortunately he did not feel the same."

"He DID feel the same, Elinor—for weeks and weeks he felt it. I know he did. Whatever may have changed him now, (and nothing but the blackest art employed against me can have done it), I was once as dear to him as my own soul could wish. This lock of hair, which now he can so readily give up, was begged of me with the most earnest supplication. Had you seen his look, his manner, had you heard his voice at that moment! Have you forgot the last evening of our being together at Barton? The morning that we parted too! When he told me that it might be many weeks before we met again—his distress—can I ever forget his distress?"

For a moment or two she could say no more; but when this emotion had passed away, she added, in a firmer tone,

"Elinor, I have been cruelly used; but not by Willoughby."

"Dearest Marianne, who but himself? By whom can he have been instigated?"

"By all the world, rather than by his own heart. I could rather believe every creature of my acquaintance leagued together to ruin me in his opinion, than believe his nature capable of such cruelty. This woman of whom he writes—whoever she be—or any one, in short, but your own dear self, mama, and Edward, may have been so barbarous to bely me. Beyond you three, is there a creature in the world whom I would not rather suspect of evil than Willoughby, whose heart I know so well?"

Elinor would not contend, and only replied, "Whoever may have been so detestably your enemy, let them be cheated of their malignant triumph, my dear sister, by seeing how nobly the consciousness of your own innocence and good intentions supports your spirits. It is a reasonable and laudable pride which resists such malevolence."

"No, no," cried Marianne, "misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all the world. Elinor, Elinor, they who suffer little may be proud and independent as they like—may resist insult, or return mortification—but I cannot. I must feel—I must be wretched—and they are welcome to enjoy the consciousness of it that can."

"But for my mother's sake and mine—"

"I would do more than for my own. But to appear happy when I am so miserable—Oh! who can require it?"

Again they were both silent. Elinor was employed in walking thoughtfully from the fire to the window, from the window to the fire, without knowing that she received warmth from one, or discerning objects through the other; and Marianne, seated at the foot of the bed, with her head leaning against one of its

posts, again took up Willoughby's letter, and, after shuddering over every sentence, exclaimed—

"It is too much! Oh, Willoughby, Willoughby, could this be yours! Cruel, cruel—nothing can acquit you. Elinor, nothing can. Whatever he might have heard against me—ought he not to have suspended his belief? ought he not to have told me of it, to have given me the power of clearing myself? 'The lock of hair, (repeating it from the letter,) which you so obligingly bestowed on me'—That is unpardonable. Willoughby, where was your heart when you wrote those words? Oh, barbarously insolent!—Elinor, can he be justified?"

"No, Marianne, in no possible way."

"And yet this woman—who knows what her art may have been?—how long it may have been premeditated, and how deeply contrived by her!—Who is she?—Who can she be?—Whom did I ever hear him talk of as young and attractive among his female acquaintance?—Oh! no one, no one—he talked to me only of myself."

Another pause ensued; Marianne was greatly agitated, and it ended thus.

"Elinor, I must go home. I must go and comfort mama. Can not we be gone to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Marianne!"

"Yes, why should I stay here? I came only for Willoughby's sake—and now who cares for me? Who regards me?"

"It would be impossible to go to-morrow. We owe Mrs. Jennings much more than civility; and civility of the commonest kind must prevent such a hasty removal as that."

"Well then, another day or two, perhaps; but I cannot stay here long, I cannot stay to endure the questions and remarks of all these people. The Middletons and Palmers—how am I to bear their pity? The pity of such a woman as Lady Middleton! Oh, what would HE say to that!"

Elinor advised her to lie down again, and for a moment she did so; but no attitude could give her ease; and in restless pain of mind and body she moved from one posture to another, till growing more and more hysterical, her sister could with difficulty keep her on the bed at all, and for some time was fearful of being constrained to call for assistance. Some lavender drops, however, which she was at length persuaded to take, were of use; and from that time till Mrs. Jennings returned, she continued on the bed quiet and motionless.

From Chapter 37

Elinor has been aware of Edward Ferrars' long-standing engagement to another woman for several months now, but Marianne has only just learned of it. In this extract, Elinor at last confides in her sister, and declares the intensity of the emotions that she has, until now, felt compelled to conceal.

She was very far from wishing to dwell on her own feelings, or to represent herself as suffering much, any otherwise than as the self-command she had practised since her first knowledge of Edward's engagement, might suggest a hint of what was practicable to Marianne. Her narration was clear and simple; and though it could not be given without emotion, it was not accompanied by violent agitation, nor impetuous grief.—THAT belonged rather to the hearer, for Marianne listened with horror, and cried excessively. Elinor was to be the comforter of others in her own distresses, no less than in theirs; and all the comfort that could be given by assurances of her own composure of mind, and a very earnest vindication of Edward from every charge but of imprudence, was readily offered.

But Marianne for some time would give credit to neither. Edward seemed a second Willoughby; and acknowledging as Elinor did, that she HAD loved him most sincerely, could she feel less than herself! As for Lucy Steele, she considered her so totally unamiable, so absolutely incapable of attaching a sensible man, that she could not be persuaded at first to believe, and afterwards to pardon, any former affection of Edward for her. She would not even admit it to have been natural; and Elinor left her to be convinced that it was so, by that which only could convince her, a better knowledge of mankind.

Her first communication had reached no farther than to state the fact of the engagement, and the length of time it had existed.—Marianne's feelings had then broken in, and put an end to all regularity of detail; and for some time all that could be done was to soothe her distress, lessen her alarms, and combat her resentment. The first question on her side, which led to farther particulars, was,—

"How long has this been known to you, Elinor? has he written to you?"

"I have known it these four months. When Lucy first came to Barton Park last November, she told me in confidence of her engagement."

At these words, Marianne's eyes expressed the astonishment which her lips could not utter. After a pause of wonder, she exclaimed—

"Four months!—Have you known of this four months?"

Elinor confirmed it.

"What!—while attending me in all my misery, has this been on your heart?—And I have reproached you for being happy!"—

"It was not fit that you should then know how much I was the reverse!"

"Four months!"—cried Marianne again.—"So calm!—so cheerful!—how have you been supported?"—

"By feeling that I was doing my duty.—My promise to Lucy, obliged me to be secret. I owed it to her, therefore, to avoid giving any hint of the truth; and I owed it to my family and friends, not to create in them a solicitude about me, which it could not be in my power to satisfy."

Marianne seemed much struck.

"I have very often wished to undeceive yourself and my mother," added Elinor; "and once or twice I have attempted it;—but without betraying my trust, I never could have convinced you."

"Four months!—and yet you loved him!"—

"Yes. But I did not love only him;—and while the comfort of others was dear to me, I was glad to spare them from knowing how much I felt. Now, I can think and speak of it with little emotion. I would not have you suffer on my account; for I assure you I no longer suffer materially myself. I have many things to support me. I am not conscious of having provoked the disappointment by any imprudence of my own, I have borne it as much as possible without spreading it farther. I acquit Edward of essential misconduct. I wish him very happy; and I am so sure of his always doing his duty, that though now he may harbour some regret, in the end he must become so. Lucy does not want sense, and that is the foundation on which every thing good may be built.—And after all, Marianne, after all that is bewitching in the idea of a single and constant attachment, and all that can be said of one's happiness depending entirely on any particular person, it is not meant—it is not fit—it is not possible that it should be so.— Edward will marry Lucy; he will marry a woman superior in person and understanding to half her sex; and time and habit will teach him to forget that he ever thought another superior to HER."—

"If such is your way of thinking," said Marianne, "if the loss of what is most valued is so easily to be made up by something else, your resolution, your self-command, are, perhaps, a little less to be wondered at.—They are brought more within my comprehension."

"I understand you.—You do not suppose that I have ever felt much.—For four months, Marianne, I have had all this hanging on my mind, without being at liberty to speak of it to a single creature; knowing that it would make you and my mother most unhappy whenever it were explained to you, yet unable to prepare you for it in the least.— It was told me,—it was in a manner forced on me by the very person herself, whose prior engagement ruined all my prospects; and told me, as I thought, with triumph.— This person's suspicions, therefore, I have had to oppose, by endeavouring to appear indifferent where I have been most deeply interested;—and it has not been only once;—I have had her hopes and exultation to listen to again and again.— I have known myself to be divided from Edward for ever, without hearing one circumstance that could make me less desire the connection.—Nothing has proved him unworthy; nor has anything declared him indifferent to me.— I have had to contend against the unkindness of his sister, and the insolence of his mother; and have suffered the punishment of an attachment, without enjoying its advantages.— And all this has been going on at a time, when, as you know too well, it has not been my only unhappiness.— If you can think me capable of ever feeling—surely you may suppose that I have suffered NOW. The composure of mind with which I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the consolation that I have been willing to admit, have been the effect of constant and painful exertion;—they did not spring up of themselves;—they did not occur to relieve my spirits at first.— No, Marianne.—THEN, if I had not been bound to silence, perhaps nothing could have kept me entirely—not even what I owed to my dearest friends—from openly shewing that I was VERY unhappy."—

Lesson 12

Novelists of the 1840s—The Brontës

Scope: Appearing in 1847, the same year as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* take the English novel in new directions. The Brontës' works are often passionate and angry, echoing the revolutionary sentiments of the 1840s. The Brontës also challenge the limitations of earlier love stories, endowing their fiction with the intensity of Romantic poetry and modeling their male characters on the heroes of Lord Byron. Yet if the Brontës have much in common, they are also sharply distinct. Where Charlotte is fundamentally conservative, creating secure social positions for such characters as Jane Eyre, Emily is truly daring. In *Wuthering Heights*, she confounds the usual novelistic distinctions between love and hate, birth and death, creation and destruction, creating one of the few 19th-century English novels with the scope and shape of a tragedy.

Outline

I. Appearing in 1847, the same year as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* take the English novel in new directions.

- **A.** The Brontës' works are often passionate and angry, echoing the revolutionary sentiments of the 1840s.
- **B.** Their writing also borrows heavily from the works of the Romantic poets, and their male characters strongly resemble the heroes of Lord Byron.
- **C.** Though the sisters were devoted to each other, their works are ultimately quite distinct. In this lecture, we will focus on their differences as well as their similarities.

II. The Brontës grew up in Haworth, a small town in Yorkshire.

- **A.** There were six children in the family, two of whom died in childhood after contracting tuberculosis at school.
- **B.** Four children survived to adulthood: Charlotte, the eldest (1816–1855); Branwell, the only brother (1817–1848); Emily (1818–1848); and Anne (1820–1849).

C. The children lost their mother at an early age, and they became exceptionally close, reading and writing stories for one another and exploring the moors together.

III. From childhood, the Brontës dreamed of literary fame but also feared the consequences of public exposure.

A. Their first publication was a collection of poems. They chose to publish under ambiguous pseudonyms—Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell—hoping to divert attention from themselves.

B. In 1847, when Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* became a literary sensation, readers and reviewers were eager to know the author's true identity.

C. The Brontës soon revealed their identities to their publisher, though Charlotte insisted that she be "forever known" to the public as "Currer Bell."

D. Even more reclusive than Charlotte, Emily had few friends outside her immediate family. Of the sisters, she was the one most attached to the pseudonyms.

1. Emily died a year or so after publishing *Wuthering Heights*. Branwell had preceded her in death, and Anne would follow her soon—all dying within a span of just nine months.

2. Charlotte continued to write, publishing two more novels before her own death in 1855.

IV. As one might expect, Charlotte and Emily share many concerns.

A. Their novels respond to the social upheavals of the day, echoing the revolutionary sentiments of the late 1840s.

1. *Jane Eyre* not only protests against the class system but also insists on the equality of men and women.

2. Heathcliff, the central figure of *Wuthering Heights*, rejects all social values. What matters to him is not wealth or status but his intense attachment to Catherine Earnshaw.

B. Both Charlotte and Emily challenge the limitations of earlier love stories, endowing their fiction with the intensity of Romantic poetry.

1. Their male characters are descendents of the Byronic hero, difficult and dangerous yet powerfully attractive.

2. Jane's master and future husband, Mr. Rochester, can be violent and domineering. Because he has married for money

rather than for love, he feels himself undeserving of happiness.

3. Heathcliff is even more complex. He can be cruel as well as loving, and the other characters often describe him as a monster or a ghoul.

V. Despite their many similarities, the sisters are fundamentally different from each other.

A. Although Charlotte is capable of expressing anger, she is cautious and conservative by nature.

1. At the beginning of the story, Jane Eyre is an orphan. She has no money and no home of her own—and she is keenly aware of her dependence on others.
2. As governess to the children of Mr. Rochester, Jane is in a complicated position—neither a member of the family nor really one of the servants.
3. After falling in love with Rochester, Jane discovers that he is married to another woman. Although he offers to live with her in a kind of marriage, she rejects this offer.
4. By the end of the novel, Jane and Rochester have been reunited. What's more, Jane has gained a fortune of her own—inheriting a large sum of money from her uncle.
5. Thus, Charlotte upholds the comedic conventions of the English novel: By the end of the story, her angry, outcast heroine has been promoted into the ruling class.

B. By contrast, Emily Brontë is much more daring.

1. Her vision is broader, taking in two families and two generations. The action of the novel spans a period of decades, starting in the early 1770s and ending around 1802.
2. The central action of *Wuthering Heights* is Catherine Earnshaw's decision to marry Edgar Linton instead of Heathcliff.
3. Unable to accept this decision, Heathcliff runs away. When he returns after three years, having gained a fortune of his own, he devotes his life to revenge.
4. Later, after most of his own contemporaries are gone, he continues to seek power over their children, eventually tricking Catherine's daughter into marrying his own son.

5. At the end of the novel, however, Heathcliff and Catherine seem to be reunited in death. Significantly, there is no suggestion of poetic justice in Heathcliff's death.

VI. Though both works are impressive, *Wuthering Heights* is ultimately the more distinctive of the two.

A. *Wuthering Heights* confounds the usual novelistic distinctions between love and hate, birth and death, creation and destruction.

B. Emily Brontë's major characters transcend conventional notions of good and evil, and the death of those characters is a precondition for the survival of the rest.

C. A century earlier, Richardson had produced a great tragic novel in *Clarissa*, and about a half century later, Hardy would produce tragic novels, including *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Between Richardson and Hardy, *Wuthering Heights* stands as one of the few Victorian novels with the shape and scope of a tragedy.

Essential Reading:

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*.

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*.

Supplementary Reading:

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might an author decide to use a pseudonym? Does the sex of the author still factor into our judgment of a book? Are male writers still given a latitude or freedom denied to female writers?
2. Does the figure of the Byronic hero continue to attract our attention? How often, in contemporary movies or books, do we encounter dangerous yet attractive men?

Jane Eyre

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Charlotte Brontë's father was a rural clergyman. She lost her mother when she was five years old. Brontë's two older sisters—Maria and Elizabeth—died from an illness that they likely contracted at their harsh boarding school. Though outwardly plain, Brontë had an active imaginative life, writing stories of an elaborate fantasy world called Angria. Brontë's first of four novels—*Jane Eyre*—was immediately and widely popular, and brought her into London literary circles. Her sisters Emily and Anne were also successful novelists. After losing all of her siblings to illness, Brontë married a clergyman she respected, but did not love. She died at 38 of complications during her first pregnancy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Victorian period brought sweeping changes across British society, and writers like Brontë explored its crises and progress. Abroad, the British expanded into a global empire that brought wealth from colonies. With the Industrial Revolution at home, manufacturing became Britain's economic backbone. As the middle class found lucrative opportunities, a new laboring class struggled for wages, job security, and adequate working and living conditions. *Jane Eyre* includes themes of reforms that emerged from the crisis: better political representation, working conditions, and education. Few of these reforms came immediately for women, who had limited status in Victorian society. As Jane strives for economic and personal independence, she touches on the issues of class, economics, and gender roles that affected Victorian Britain at large.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The most popular literary form in the Victorian period was the novel, and *Jane Eyre* illustrates many of its defining characteristics: social relevance, plain style, and the narrative of an individual's inner thoughts. *Jane Eyre* is indebted to earlier Gothic novels, with its mysteries, supernatural events, and picturesque scenery. But as Jane matures, her autobiography likewise takes on Victorian themes and characteristics. *Jane Eyre* is a *Bildungsroman*, or a coming-of-age story, in which the protagonist's aspirations are set against the pressures and expectations of society. Victorian novels, including *Jane Eyre*, depict social panoramas with characters representing different economic and social classes, as well as gender differences. Brontë uses Jane's marriage as a metaphor for resolving England's political issues. Victorian novels with similar styles and goals include Charles Dickens' semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story, *David Copperfield* (1849-50), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*
- **When Written:** 1847
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Victorian novel. *Jane Eyre* combines Gothic mystery, a romantic marriage plot, and a coming-of-age story.
- **Setting:** Northern England in the early 1800s.
- **Climax:** Jane telepathically hears Rochester's voice calling out to her.
- **Point of View:** First person. Jane recounts her story ten years after its ending.

EXTRA CREDIT

Bells and Brontës: The Brontës became a literary powerhouse when Charlotte, Emily, and Anne all wrote successful first novels. Each sister published under a masculine-sounding pseudonym based on their initials. Charlotte Brontë became "Currer Bell"; Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1845-46) as "Ellis Bell", and Anne Brontë published *Agnes Gray* (1847) as "Acton Bell." Women could enter the marketplace as writers and novelists, but many writers, including the Brontës and Mary Anne Evans ("George Eliot"), used male pseudonyms to keep from being dismissed as unimportant.

PLOT SUMMARY

Jane Eyre is an orphaned girl living with her aunt Mrs. Reed at Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed and her children treat Jane cruelly, and look down on her as a dependent. Punishing her for a fight with her cousin that she didn't start, Mrs. Reed locks her in a red room where Jane's uncle, Mr. Reed, had died years before. His ghostly presence terrifies Jane. Soon after, Mrs. Reed sends Jane to the Lowood Institution, a charity school run by the hypocritical Mr. Brocklehurst. Lowood has terrible conditions and a harsh work ethic, though the compassionate supervisor, Maria Temple, intervenes sometimes to give the girls a break. At Lowood, Jane makes friends with another student, Helen Burns, who helps Jane learn to endure personal injustice and believe in a benevolent God. Helen, however, is sick with consumption and dies. When a typhus epidemic decimates the school's student population, new management takes over and improves Lowood's conditions. Jane flourishes under her newly

considerate teachers, and after six years, becomes a teacher herself.

Ms. Temple marries and leaves Lowood, and the eighteen-year-old Jane advertises for a job as a private tutor. She is hired to become the governess of the young Adèle Varens. Adèle is the ward of Mr. Rochester—the older, swarthy, and commanding master of Thornfield Hall. While in residence at Thornfield, Jane frequently hears strange laughter, and one night rescues Mr. Rochester from a fire in his bedroom. On another occasion, Jane helps Mr. Rochester secretly bandage and send away a man named Mr. Mason who was slashed and bitten on the third floor of the Mansion. Rochester blames a quirky servant, Grace Poole, but Jane is skeptical.

Mr. Rochester brings a party of English aristocrats to Thornfield, including the beautiful but calculating Blanche Ingram. She aims to marry him, but Mr. Rochester turns Blanche away, as he is increasingly drawn to the plain, but clever and direct Jane. Mr. Rochester soon asks Jane to marry him. Jane, who has gradually fallen in love with Rochester, accepts. Rochester hastily prepares the wedding. But during the small ceremony, a London lawyer intervenes and declares that Mr. Rochester already has a wife—Bertha Mason from the West Indies. Her brother, Mr. Mason, appears to confirm this. Mr. Rochester reluctantly admits to it, and takes everyone to the third floor, where Bertha is revealed as a raving lunatic, looked after by Grace Poole. Rochester was tricked into the marriage and he appeals to Jane to come away with him anyway, but Jane refuses to be his mistress. After a dream that warns her to flee temptation, Jane sneaks away from Thornfield at dawn.

Penniless in a region of England she does not know, Jane experiences three bitter days of begging, sleeping outside, and nearly starving. Eventually she comes upon and is taken in at Moor House—the home of Mary, Diana, and St. John Rivers, a stern local clergyman. St. John gives Jane a position teaching in a rural school. Jane discovers that an uncle she's never met has died and left her 20,000 pounds. That uncle turns out to be related to the Rivers siblings, so Jane suddenly has cousins. In her joy at finding family, she divides her fortune equally between them.

St. John has plans to go to India as a missionary, and he proposes marriage to Jane so she'll accompany and work for him. Jane feels familial affection but no love for St. John. She says she would go as St. John's sister, but he will accept no conditions. St. John's forceful personality almost convinces Jane to sacrifice herself and marry him. But in her confused emotional state, Jane experiences a telepathic flash: she hears Rochester's voice calling to her. She immediately leaves to seek out Rochester.

Jane finds Thornfield Hall destroyed from a fire that Bertha had set in Jane's old bedroom. During the blaze, Bertha had jumped from the roof and died. Rochester saved his servants, but suffered injuries that left him blind and missing a hand. Jane meets the humbled Rochester at Ferndean, his woodland retreat, and promises always to take care of him. They marry, bring back Adèle from boarding school, and have a son. Rochester eventually regains sight in one eye.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jane Eyre — The protagonist and narrator, Jane is an orphaned girl caught between class boundaries, financial situations, and her own conflicted feelings. In her youth and again as a governess, Jane must depend on others for support. Jane feels isolated, and strives for her personal freedom and meaningful connections with others—to find the loving family she never had. Jane is intelligent, imaginative, and principled. She defies many restrictive social conventions, especially those affecting women. As the novel progresses, Jane learns to temper her passions with self-control—she controls her feelings with judgment based on self-respect and Christian humility. She must reconcile her contradictory desires to be both independent and to serve a strong-willed man. Religion helps Jane to gain a mature understanding of herself as a self-respecting individual who credits her feelings, but also defers to God.

Edward Fairfax Rochester — The wealthy master of Thornfield Hall and Jane's employer and, later, her husband. Over the course of his life, he grows from a naive young man, to a bitter playboy in Europe, to a humble yet still strong man worthy of Jane. Both share similar virtues and seek their personal redemption. Yet Rochester errs in giving more rein to his feelings than his judgment and in expecting the world to submit to his will, as when he tries to marry Jane while still concealing Bertha and his secrets. In his distress after losing his eyesight, Rochester comes to accept his need of guidance and respect for God. His final strength comes from his newfound humility.

St. John Rivers — A parson with two sisters at Moor House, and Jane's cousin. Much like Jane, St. John is a restless character, searching for a place and purpose in life. Like Mr. Rochester, St. John has a commanding personality, but the two men contrast in their range of feelings. St. John relinquishes worldly happiness for a commitment to his religious principles. His stern religious faith makes him self-denying and cold.

Bertha Mason — Rochester's insane Creole wife from Jamaica who is locked away on the third floor of Thornfield. Bertha is portrayed less as a human being than as a Gothic monster or a vampire. Because of her Creole or mixed race parentage, Bertha reveals Victorian prejudices about other ethnicities. She represents Rochester's monstrous secrets.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Adèle Varens — Jane's young pupil at Thornfield, who is Mr. Rochester's ward. As Jane reforms Adèle's "French" characteristics with an English education, she symbolically restores Mr. Rochester's morality from his previous lifestyle.

Céline Varens — Adèle's mother, Céline Varens is a flirty French singer who was also Mr. Rochester's mistress. As Rochester's mistress, Céline was essentially a hired woman, submitting to the shallow status of a dependent. She represents the opposite of what Jane wants in her relationship.

Blanche Ingram — A beautiful socialite who wants to marry Mr. Rochester. Blanche embodies the shallow and class-prejudiced woman of the old aristocracy.

Rosamond Oliver — A rich and beautiful woman who supports Jane's school at Morton. She loves St. John, but marries a wealthy man when it becomes clear that St. John's focus is on his missionary work.

Diana and Mary Rivers — Jane's cousins and St. John's sisters. Similar to Jane in intellect and personality, they show Jane heartfelt compassion that contrasts with St. John's more dutiful sense of charity.

Mrs. Fairfax — The housekeeper at Thornfield Hall.

Grace Poole — The mysterious servant at Thornfield who watches over Bertha Mason. Her name suggests religious grace, which Rochester cannot find until Bertha's suicide.

Richard Mason — The timid brother of Bertha Mason, and Rochester's former business partner in Jamaica.

John Eyre — Jane and the Rivers' uncle. A successful wine merchant who leaves Jane an inheritance of 20,000 pounds.

Uncle Reed — As Jane's maternal uncle, he adopts the orphaned Jane and makes his wife promise to care for her as their own child.

Mrs. Reed — Jane's aunt by marriage, and the matron of Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed feels threatened by Jane, who has superior qualities to her own children. Mrs. Reed represents the anxiety of a wealthy and conservative social class, which acts defensively to protect itself from independent minds like Jane's.

John Reed — Mrs. Reed's son, and a bully.

Georgiana Reed — A spoiled daughter of Mrs. Reed, and later a superficial socialite.

Eliza Reed — Mrs. Reed's third child, who is more reserved and stern than her siblings.

Bessie Lee — A house servant of Mrs. Reed, Bessie is the only person at Gateshead to treat Jane with any kindness.

Mr. Lloyd — An apothecary.

Mr. Brocklehurst — The parson and hypocritical overseer of Lowood Institution. Mr. Brocklehurst advocates a severe religious program of self-improvement—denying the body to save the soul. But unlike St. John Rivers, the pampered Mr. Brocklehurst does not practice what he preaches.

Maria Temple — The headmistress of Lowood school. Ms. Temple serves as a mother figure and a model of intellectual refinement, gentle authority, and emotional sensibility for Jane and Helen. Both girls feel a deep connection to Ms. Temple.

Helen Burns — Jane's best friend at Lowood, and a model of personal strength and even temperament for Jane. Helen is a withdrawn intellectual with an optimistic religious view of universal salvation that contrasts with St. John's beliefs.

Miss Scatcherd — A cruel teacher at Lowood school.

Miss Abbot — A servant at Gateshead.

Mr. Briggs – The lawyer who, during Jane's first wedding ceremony with Rochester, reveals that Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LOVE, FAMILY, AND INDEPENDENCE

As an orphan at Gateshead, Jane is oppressed and dependent. For Jane to discover herself, she must break out of these restrictive conditions and find love and independence. Jane must have the freedom to think and feel, and she seeks out other independent-minded people as the loving family she craves. Jane, Helen Burns, and Ms. Temple enjoy a deep mutual respect, and form emotional bonds that anticipate the actual family Jane finds in Mary and Diana Rivers. Yet Jane also has a natural instinct toward submission. When she leaves Lowood to find new experiences, she describes herself as seeking a "new servitude." In her relationship with men, she has the inclination toward making first Rochester and then St. John her "master."

Over the course of the novel, Jane strives to find a balance between service and mastery. Jane blends her freedom with her commitments to love, virtue, and self-respect. At the end, Jane is both guide and servant to Rochester. She finds and creates her own family, and their love grows out of the mutual respect of free minds.

SOCIAL CLASS AND SOCIAL RULES

Life in 19th-century Britain was governed by social class, and people typically stayed in the class into which they were born. Both as an orphan at Gateshead and as a governess at Thornfield, Jane holds a

position that is *between* classes, and interacts with people of every level, from working-class servants to aristocrats. Jane's social mobility lets Brontë create a vast social landscape in her novel in which she examines the sources and consequences of class boundaries. For instance, class differences cause many problems in the love between Jane and Rochester. Jane must break through class prejudices about her standing, and make people recognize and respect her personal qualities. Brontë tries to illustrate how personal virtues are better indicators of character than class.

Yet the novel doesn't entirely endorse breaking every social rule. Jane refuses, for instance, to become Rochester's mistress despite the fact that he was tricked into a loveless marriage. Jane recognizes that how she sees herself arises at least partly out of how society sees her, and is unwilling to make herself a powerless outcast for love.

GENDER ROLES

In 19th-century England, gender roles strongly influenced people's behavior and identities, and women endured condescending attitudes about a woman's place, intelligence, and voice. Jane has an uphill battle to become independent and recognized for her personal qualities. She faces off with a series of men who do not respect women as their equals. Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John all attempt to command or master women. Brontë uses marriage in the novel to portray the struggle for power between the sexes. Even though Bertha Mason is insane, she is a provocative symbol of how married women can be repressed and controlled. Jane fends off marriage proposals that would squash her identity, and strives for equality in her relationships. For its depiction of Jane's struggle for gender equality, *Jane Eyre* was considered a radical book in its day.

RELIGION

Religion and spirituality are key factors in how characters develop in the novel. Jane matures partly because she learns to follow Christian lessons and resist temptation. Helen Burns introduces Jane to the New Testament, which becomes a moral guidepost for Jane throughout her life. As Jane develops her relationship with God, Mr. Rochester must also reform his pride, learn to pray, and become humble. Brontë depicts different forms of religion: Helen trusts in salvation; Eliza Reed becomes a French Catholic nun; and St. John preaches a gloomy Calvinist faith. The novel attempts to steer a middle course. In Jane, Brontë sketches a virtuous faith that does not consume her individual personality. Jane is self-respecting and religious, but also exercises her freedom to love and feel.

FEELING VS. JUDGMENT

Just as *Jane Eyre* can be described as Jane's quest to balance her contradictory natural instincts toward independence and submission, it can also be described as her quest to find a balance between passionate feeling on the one had and judgment, or repression of those feelings, on the other. Through the examples of other characters in the novel, such as Eliza and Georgiana, Rochester and St. John—or Bertha, who has no control over her emotions at all—*Jane Eyre* shows that it's best to avoid either extreme. Passion makes a person silly, frivolous or even dangerous, while repression makes a person cold. Over the course of the novel, Jane learns how to create a balance between her feelings and her judgment, and to create a life of love that is also a life of serious purpose.

THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Brontë uses many themes of Gothic novels to add drama and suspense to *Jane Eyre*. But the novel isn't just a ghost story because Brontë also reveals the *reasons* behind supernatural events. For instance, Mr. Reed's ghost in the red-room is a figment of Jane's stressed-out mind, while Bertha is the "demon" in Thornfield. In *Jane Eyre*, the effects of the supernatural matter more than the causes. The supernatural allows Brontë to explore her characters' psyches, especially Jane's inner fears. The climactic supernatural moment in the novel occurs when Jane and Rochester have a telepathic connection. In the text, Jane makes it clear that the connection was not supernatural to her. Instead, she considers that moment a mysterious spiritual connection. Brontë makes their telepathy part of her conceptions of love and religion.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE RED-ROOM

The red-room symbolizes how society traps Jane by limiting her freedom due to her class, gender, and independent streak.

FIRE AND ICE

Fire is a symbol of emotion in the novel. Mr. Rochester has a fiery personality, while St. John is associated with ice and snow, symbolizing his dispassionate character. Jane draws arctic scenes in her portfolio that symbolize death. She wants the vitality that fire brings, but also

to keep it under control. On the other hand, Bertha Mason, who has no control over her feelings, is a pyromaniac. The inferno at Thornfield illustrates the danger of letting the passions run wild.

EYES

The eyes are the windows to the soul in *Jane Eyre*. Jane is especially attracted to Mr. Rochester's black and brilliant eyes, which symbolize his temper and power. After Mr. Rochester loses his eyesight in the fire, Jane *becomes* his eyes: metaphorically, Jane now holds the position of mastery. Bertha has bloodshot eyes that match her violent nature. The novel also emphasizes the mind's eye—an active imagination.

FOOD

In *Jane Eyre*, food symbolizes generosity, nourishment, and bounty, and hunger symbolizes cruelty and a lack of nourishment. Brontë uses food and hunger to reveal how people treat each other—who is charitable, and who isn't. For instance, the lack of food at Lowood reveals the school's cruelty and religious hypocrisy. Ms. Temple, on the other hand, provides food and is compassionate and generous. Food has religious significance in the novel as well—physical hunger represents a deeper spiritual craving.

PORTRAITS AND PICTURES

Through dreams and drawings, Jane visualizes her deepest feelings. Jane's portfolio contains pictures that symbolize her life. Portraits can also stand in for people's characters. Jane compares her portraits of herself and Blanche Ingram, which mirror the differences in the two women's personalities and social class. Jane's portrait of Rosamond Oliver is the closest that St. John ever gets to happiness on earth. In each case, the visual picture takes on a new reality. Brontë, making her own picture of society in *Jane Eyre*, likewise wanted to give her novel real relevance.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Jane Eyre* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mama 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.

Related Characters: John Reed (speaker), Jane Eyre

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has sought refuge from her aunt and cousins in a book, when her cousin John Reed barges in and insults her. Jane was orphaned several years earlier, and now it's only a few months since her uncle - the only member of the Reed family who was kind to her - also died, and the rest of the family feels free to share their scorn and disdain for Jane. Here John belittles Jane's presumption in taking a book to read from among the family collection, for she could not be further from being a member of the family.

Though John's words are cruel, his actions are those of a child, and he seems to be buoyed and his opinions confirmed by those of his mother. Indeed, he repeats his mother's words in calling Jane a "dependent," and in assuming that this is such a negative term. The family's official line underlines several widespread beliefs at this time: that social classes were to be kept separate for a reason, for instance, and that those who are poor or vulnerable are justifiably so, and should remain in that position.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: ... the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Locked in the red-room after her outburst against John Reed, Jane Eyre looks into the mirror and thinks about the dire straits in which she finds herself, now that her kindly uncle has died and she is a ward of a family that hates her. Here Jane looks at herself as if at a stranger - and, what's

more, as if at a ghost. In some ways, this effect of estrangement, or making the familiar strange, underlines how isolated and alone Jane feels. She cannot feel herself a part of this family, but has nowhere else to turn, no one else to love her; and as a child, she must continue to rely on others.

This passage also sets up an interest in the otherworldly that will characterize the rest of the book. Even the most realistic, bodily characters can slip into and out of a feeling of grounded reality - one that can easily feel not so real when the circumstances become strange enough.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

During an interview between Jane, Mrs. Reed, and the headmaster of the Lowood school, Mr. Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed warns Mr. Brocklehurst that Jane is a compulsive liar. Jane, almost in spite of herself, exclaims that Mrs. Reed is the real liar, and a despicable person besides. Up until this point, Jane has largely retained control of her feelings, keeping her despair and unhappiness inside (except, perhaps, for the one time she lashed out at John). Now she does not feel guilty for letting her feelings override her sense of propriety, but rather relieved and exuberant.

The rest of the book will take a more measured tone on the proper balance between feeling and judgment. Indeed, since Jane is a girl in nineteenth-century England, such shows of passion are to be considered shocking if not dangerous.Here, though, Jane is shown to be so repressed and so unhappy that a rude outburst is really her only chance to express herself, to regain some sense of her own person above and beyond the cruel way she's been treated. Her declaration of the truth about Mrs. Reed is the first time that she senses that things may not always remain as they were, and that she might be able to set her own standards for what is right, outside the confines of the Reed family.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate ... I told her all the story of my sad childhood. Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme; and mindful of Helen's warnings against the indulgence of resentment, I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Maria Temple, Helen Burns

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Jane, along with Helen Burns, has been invited into Miss Temple's office, where Jane is prompted to share her life story with her friend and their teacher. No one has ever asked her to do such a thing before, and in a way Jane's tentative narrative serves as a rehearsal for the story she is now sharing with us, a far larger audience of readers. But even as she is eager to share what has happened to her already in her short life, she is wary of offending yet another adult, or of "indulging" in resentment. Miss Temple and Helen are among the few people that have shown Jane kindness and the kind of love that usually comes from family, and she is worried that they may not believe her tale, and thus that she'll lose this cherished connection. It is by keeping track of her feelings, and being careful not to lose her temper, that Jane realizes she has the best chance of keeping these two women in her life.

❝ The refreshing meal, the brilliant fire, the presence and kindness of her beloved instructress, or, perhaps, more than all these, something in her own unique mind, had roused her powers within her ... [Helen] suddenly acquired a beauty more singular than that of Miss Temple's—a beauty neither of fine color nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Maria Temple, Helen Burns

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Helen and Ms. Temple have reacted to Jane's story with grace and goodness, and after the shame of Mr. Brocklehurst's visit, Jane begins to recover. Even the tea and cakes given to her by Miss Temple are a sign of generosity until now largely absent in Jane's life. Now, she begins to feel that this particularly female bond is actually giving her the strength to carry on - a strength that has something mystical or spiritual about it, as Jane connects it to a sense of her budding "powers."

Although Jane has long been an admirer of Miss Temple's beauty, she now starts to realize as well that there can be an even more striking beauty that comes from inner, rather than external, attractiveness. Helen is the most devout person she's ever met, and her religion seems to give her a kind of physical as well as spiritual glow. As she further develops her friendship with both Helen and with Miss Temple, Jane learns certain lessons and chooses certain role models that were simply not available to her in the Reed family's home.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: "Then," I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!"

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has graduated first in her class at school, and has decided to stay on in order to become a teacher herself. Soon, though, Miss Temple leaves for a distant land. For a long time, Jane has felt somewhat restless, trapped in an oppressive school because she is without family, poor, and female, and thus opportunities to support herself are scarce. Until now, Jane has not rebelled against these strictures: instead, she has chosen to work within them, carving out a place for herself that is tolerable mainly because of her adoration of Miss Temple. With her mentor gone, though, suddenly Jane sees no reason to continue at the school.

However, even in the midst of "gasping" for freedom, Jane is both realistic and humble enough to recognize that she cannot yearn for an entirely different lifestyle. She does pray to God, but little by little adapts her prayer so as to fit her circumstances. As she does so, nonetheless, she recognizes that because of her social position, and because of her current circumstances, there are few things she could do that would actually give her greater liberty. Finally, she accepts that she may continue to feel oppressed wherever she may goes - but she insists that even that would be preferable to staying in the same place, where she knows all too well the exact outlines of her "servitude."

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Bertha Mason

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Jane is attempting to settle into her new life at Thornfield, but as Mrs. Fairfax finishes up her tour, Jane hears something entirely unexpected in such a quiet, gloomy house: laughter. Here the supernatural quality of the scene is, paradoxically, described in careful, measured detail. Jane attempts to determine the exact qualities of the laugh, the exact properties of its pitch and location. Indeed, she is soon able to fix her judgment on the exact spot from which the sound is coming.

For now, Brontë keeps the reader, as well as Jane, in the dark regarding this mysterious element of Thornfield. Rather than showing the laugh to be a figment of Jane's imagination, this passage stresses her careful capacity of judgment, underlining the book's understanding of the supernatural and the real as not opposites but as mutually productive.

Chapter 12 Quotes

I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that 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—that 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.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Although Jane has found things to enjoy about her new life in Thornfield, and in her occupation as Adèle's tutor, she has not entirely shaken off the restlessness that encouraged her to leave her former school in the first place. Here, as Jane climbs to the highest point in the mansion, her physical steps mimic her more emotional desire to float up and away from the day-to-day duties and humdrum life to which she is condemned, largely because of her social class and gender, of course.

Jane is portrayed as eager, curious, and fascinated about the wide world around her. She is clear-headed in that she recognizes how little she knows about this world, despite feeling naturally attracted to it. Indeed, Jane is deeply frustrated by the disconnect between her desire to see more and learn more, and her understanding that such knowledge lies beyond her grasp. As her eyes survey the vast landscape before her, this vision serves as her only and partial means of truly experiencing something beyond her small reality.

It is in vain to say 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. 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 ... It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane continues to muse on the subject of her own position in society, she broadens her perspective to consider the lot of oppressed and marginalized groups in general. Jane recognizes that many other people are in worse situations than herself, but for her this fact only underlines the unfairness and despair to which an entire segment of the population is subjected. Indeed, Jane makes an analogy between those who are oppressed and rebel through political revolution, and those who struggle in more individual ways, through family and community structures that are smaller than those of a nation.

Jane also points to a paradox about the way that women's roles are defined at the time. In some ways, they are considered weak and fragile, and therefore unable to support themselves or to take on the same kinds of responsibilities or to show the same kind of independence as men. They would let their feelings overwhelm them, the argument goes. Yet at the same time, women are expected to curb outbursts of feeling - something they can only do if they use their full capacities of rational judgment. This paradox is one that Jane increasingly seeks to condemn, and that Bronte more broadly points out in this very prescient passage.

Chapter 14 Quotes

I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Over the course of the first long conversation between Jane and Rochester, Jane's feelings towards the man quickly become complicated. On the one hand, she does feel a real connection to him, and admires the fact that he is largely willing to chat with her as an equal. Here, though, Jane uses the opportunity that Rochester has given to her to stress that, for her, equality is not just something that can be parceled out here and there, as a sign of good will. If Rochester really wants to treat Jane as an equal, he will have to hear what she has to say on the subject of anything that comes up - including, here, gender relations themselves.

Jane dismisses typical assumptions made about the reasons why men should be considered superior to women. Of course Rochester has seen more of the world than she has, Jane says - she would never, as a woman, be permitted to travel around the world by herself, and even if she could, her financial circumstances would prevent her. Independence, for Jane, is thus not necessarily only a personal character attribute: it is also a function of luck and circumstance, and it has little bearing on true moral equality.

Chapter 17 Quotes

"He is not to them what he is to me," I thought: "he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;—I am sure he is—I feel akin to him—I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him ... I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered:—and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him."

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has been relegated to a corner of the room at the party, where she can observe all that is going on between Rochester and his guests. Jane feels alienated from the wealthy, privileged women at the event. But as she observes Rochester with them, she realizes that she does in fact feel a profound kinship with Rochester, so profound that she believes he belongs with her far more than with people of his own class and social strata.

Jane's affinity with Rochester is not one of rational, detached judgment, in which similarities and differences, appropriate distinctions and parallels, might be carefully considered. Instead it is something she feels emotionally. At the same time, Jane herself is careful to study and identify this blossoming feeling of love for Rochester; she doesn't get carried away by her feelings but rather respects their reality as she tries to figure out what it is that she feels, and what must be the result.

Chapter 18 Quotes

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point—this was where the nerve was touched and teased—this was where the fever was sustained and fed: *she could not charm him.*

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester, Blanche Ingram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

As a member of the servants, Jane is considered largely invisible by many of the guests to Thornfield, including Blanche Ingram, which gives her the opportunity to observe the woman and Rochester from a distance. Jane isn't certain why Rochester is going to marry Blanche. The reasons she imagines are vague and uncertain: this is too distant a reality for Jane for her be able to understand the motivations driving the upper classes. What she does know, however - and what surely is the one known factor that she can take solace in, now that she herself is in love with Rochester - is that he does not truly love Blanche, nor will he ever. Here Jane resigns herself to losing Rochester based on the social norms of upper-class marriage, but she does not resign herself to failing to win his heart.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ What crime was this that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?—what mystery, that broke out now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Bertha Mason

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has accompanied Rochester to Grace Poole's upper-floor room, where they have found Mr. Mason bleeding and writhing. While Rochester goes to fetch a doctor, Jane is left alone with Mr. Mason and with her own thoughts. This chapter had begun with a frightening scream that had echoed through the mansion, and Jane now wildly begins to wonder what might be the source of such a cry.

In a series of questions, posed far more out of anxiety and fear than out of a scientific desire to get to the bottom of the mystery, Jane becomes progressively more eloquent and descriptive, even if morbidly so. She calls the source of the scream a "mystery," "creature," and "voice," thus underlining how she has only the vaguest sense of what has taken place. The book leaves us, too, in suspense: will the novel now turn even more to the assumptions of Gothic fiction, and embrace the supernatural, or will it remain within the realm of realistic prose?

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home—my only home.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Jane is on her way back to Thornfield after remaining at her aunt's deathbed, and she happens to cross paths with Rochester, who has bought a carriage, presumably for himself and Blanche. However, Jane is relieved to be leaving the still-oppressive walls of her childhood home with the Reeds, and she admits to Rochester that she is happy to return to Thornfield. Jane's statement would have been considered quite frank, even perhaps a little shocking, to readers at the time. To permit herself to share her own opinions, especially ones of a vulnerable nature, Jane pushes aside the notions of gender and social roles that require a female servant to remain meek and quiet, not speaking unless spoken to. For Jane, though, the realization that Thornfield has, strangely, become a kind of home for her is so remarkable that she feels the need to share that development with someone she cares about.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame.

Related Characters: Edward Fairfax Rochester (speaker), Jane Eyre

Related Themes:

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

Rochester has told Jane that he is to marry Blanche, and that he has found a governess job for her in Ireland. Soon, though, it becomes clear that Rochester's motivations in telling this to Jane are different. He seems to be attempting to determine what her feelings for him are, before he shares his own. If Jane doesn't share them, he has a ready-made solution and can send her away - thus ensuring that his social superiority over her escapes unscathed. Here, though, Rochester does make tentative steps towards suggesting that he loves Jane.

Though not exactly eloquently, he tries to do justice to the feeling he has around Jane, a feeling that proves to be almost too difficult for words. In general, this sentiment is one of profound unity between two people: Rochester feels such so closely tied to Jane that it is as if a truly physical bond united them. The book accepts that such unity can exist, and indeed describes it in terms of spiritual communion, which gives Rochester and Jane a religious analogy for the love they feel for each other.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

At first, Jane is thrilled by the prospect of marrying Rochester, with whom she is so in love. But little by little, the gaps between their social stations and their assumptions about proper gender roles begin to grow clearer. Here, another problem arises: the fact that Jane so adores Rochester that he begins to take on the nature of an idol, someone to be worshipped instead of God.

As narrator, Jane is looking back on her earlier self, and in passages like this, narrator-Jane shows a disapproval and even regret towards character-Jane. According to her Christian beliefs, only God can be worshipped and idolized: idolizing anyone else, indeed, is a great sin. In addition, putting Rochester on such a pedestal will prevent Jane from embracing her own independence, a value that she has held dear for so long. This disconnect between what narrator-Jane knows to be true and what character-Jane cannot help from doing and thinking will inevitably have to be resolved.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ I faced the wreck of the chestnut-tree; it stood up black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gaped ghastly … their great boughs on each side were dead, and next winter's tempests would be sure to fell one or both to earth: as yet, however, they might be said to form one tree—a ruin, but an entire ruin.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

On the day of the wedding, Jane wanders outside and sees a chestnut tree that has been struck by lightning. Turning all her powers of observation on the tree, Jane finds it to be a powerful image, though at the same time ominous and troubling. The tree is in a vulnerable, delicate state at the moment: its many boughs are dead, but have not yet fallen to earth, though it is inevitable that they will do so. Trees struck by lightning are sometimes used in the Bible as a sign for the power and will of God. Jane, cognizant of this history, most likely is troubled by the thought that, on a day that should be joyful and carefree, there is such a frightening symbol of what may lie ahead. The "ruin" of the tree, for a reader who has finished *Jane Eyre*, also foreshadows the ruin of the place that she and Rochester call home. Although the novel ends up revealing certain supernatural-seeming elements as based in reality (though still disturbing), in other ways it continues to stress the possibility of connecting natural, supernatural, and social affairs symbolically.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Bertha Mason

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

Finally, for the first time, Jane lays eyes on the source of all the strange happenings and mysterious sounds that have seemed to haunt Thornfield. But this first sight fails to substantially clarify the situation, or help Jane understand who this person is - even though she knows intellectually that it must be Bertha Mason, Rochester's legal wife.

Bertha is described not in human but in animal terms. Indeed, it is the inability to describe her as a woman that locates the source of her insanity. Jane may have pressed at the borders of what is permitted and is not among women, especially of a particular social class, but she now witnesses someone who has thrown all those strictures out entirely. As Bertha fails to act as a proper woman, as a proper wife to her husband, the book has no way left to describe her other than by considering her non-human, making an analogy to the animal world.

Chapter 27 Quotes

"Who in the world cares for *you*? Or who will be injured by what you do?" Still indomitable was the reply—"*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 365

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has learned the truth about Rochester and his existing wife, and she realizes that she must leave Thornfield. The prospect is daunting, even terrifying: Jane does not know where she'll go or what she'll do, and of course she is still in love with Rochester despite his deceit. Here, she mounts an internal debate between the part of herself that would despair about her lack of ties to the world, and the part of herself that - rather than insisting that those ties *do* exist - embraces her isolation. Jane comes to recognize that her independence is a virtue rather than a fault. It ensures that she answers only to the laws of God, rather than to the more transient desires of other people, or even of herself.

Chapter 28 Quotes

This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned—I wrung my hands—I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation—this banishment from my kind!

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 385

Explanation and Analysis

After wandering in the wilderness, weak from exhaustion and hunger, Jane finally follows a distant light to its source: but when she arrives at the door of the home, the servant refuses to let her in, and locks her out. Although Jane has tried to remain stoic until now, this show of unkindness is the last straw. She breaks down, finally allowing her feelings to overwhelm her careful poise and judgment as she weeps and groans.

The wanderer in the wilderness is a trope - an often-repeated literary device - that can be found in both Old and New Testaments of the Bible: both Job and Jesus are sent into the wilderness at one point to battle temptation. Jane's time in the wilderness is similarly her moment of greatest struggle, when her embrace of independence no longer is characterized by an exhilarating sense of freedom but actually threatens to destroy her. As Jane, narrating, recalls her thoughts at her darkest moment, the use of repeated exclamations and dashes highlights the tone of acute despair.

Chapter 32 Quotes

St. John, no doubt, would have given the world to follow, recall, retain her, when she thus left him; but he would not give one chance of heaven, nor relinquish, for the elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), St. John Rivers, Rosamond Oliver

Related Themes:

Page Number: 424

Explanation and Analysis

Jane and St. John have begun to speak frankly about St. John's feelings for Rosamond Oliver. Jane has guessed that St. John is in love with her, and he admits that this is true. However, he cannot imagine Rosamond accompanying him far away as the wife of a missionary. St. John's faith is such that he cannot consider giving up his livelihood as missionary even on account of his love for another human being: for him this kind of love is not as significant as the love he finds in serving God. At the same time, St. John's admission reflects his assumptions about the proper role of women in marriage: Rosamond's role would be to serve him as he is serving God, and he cannot imagine any other way.

Again the surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare to speak so to a man. For me, I felt at home in this sort of discourse. I could never rest in communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, whether male or female, till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve, and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place by their heart's very hearthstone.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), St. John Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 432

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane and St. John speak of the latter's love for Rosamond, St. John grows surprised that Jane would presume to speak to him so frankly of such private matters. St. John is not used to women speaking to him in such a manner: indeed, propriety and social custom make it nearly certain that very few women will broach such private topics with a man, even one with whom they are close. While Jane has acted somewhat ashamed of her propensity for frankness and openness before, here she wholeheartedly embraces this attitude, and in addition claims that there is little she can do about it: it is just part of her nature. Jane even claims a positive ethical status for such openness, arguing that convention can often mask what is real and true, while speaking frankly honors each person much more.

Chapter 33 Quotes

I looked at the blank wall: it seemed a sky thick with ascending stars,—every one lit me to a purpose or delight. Those who had saved my life, whom, till this hour, I had loved barrenly, I could now benefit. They were under a yoke,—I could free them: they were scattered,—I could reunite them: the independence, the affluence which was mine, might be theirs too.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), St. John Rivers, Diana and Mary Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 445

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has learned that she is heir to an enormous fortune, and in addition that the Rivers are her cousins, so that she now has a larger family than she ever realized. Jane has long sought independence by choosing her own way in life and by insisting on her own rights and her own, individual life, apart from all others. Now she realizes that independence need not entail isolation. Indeed, her financial independence is wrapped up in the revelation of a true family.

As a result, Jane comes to consider independence as a value that can take place within the structure of a family, and even within the limitations and responsibilities that being part of a family entails. By helping her new cousins with her inheritance, Jane will be able to ensure that they escape the kind of "yoke" under which she herself struggled; but she also will tie their life to her own in a way that she had scarcely thought possible earlier in her life.

Chapter 37 Quotes

I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 502

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane reunites with Rochester, she exhibits a complex and nuanced, if not ambivalent, understanding of the relationship between love and independence - one that has been affected by her time at Thornfield but also by the revelation that she is now financially independent. Here, Jane calls Rochester her master, as she was accustomed to do when she served as his daughter's governess. As she vows to be his "nurse" and "housekeeper," she also seems to accede to proper gender roles and even embrace this role of subservience.

However, other ways that Jane characterizes this relationship transform her vow into one of a relationship between equals. To be Rochester's neighbor or companion is not to submit to him as a woman to a man, but rather to consider each person as mutually necessary and mutually fulfilling. Jane continues to rely on some of the assumptions of her time in terms of family and gender roles, but she also carves out a more unique, progressive place for herself and Rochester based on her own beliefs and desires.

Chapter 38 Quotes

Reader, I married him.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 517

Explanation and Analysis

The last chapter of the novel begins with this famous line. Of course, the most significant aspect of the passage is that it underlines how, after so many difficulties and one frustrated attempt, Jane and Rochester finally end up together. By making "I" the subject of the sentence, however, Jane underlines her agency in choosing to marry Rochester, and makes the act one of independence rather than of choosing to submit herself to a "master" in another way. The acknowledgement of the reader also reminds us that an older Jane has been narrating this story all along, looking back on her earlier self and using that opportunity to pass judgment and to point out her own self-development.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

Writing as her pseudonym "Currer Bell," the author thanks her public and her publishers, but attacks literary critics who expect authors to stick to stylistic and moral conventions. Instead, she explains that appearances and beliefs must be examined and the plain truth must be revealed.

Bell's comments offer an early suggestion of Jane's personality. Independent and inquiring, Jane breaks through conventions and gets to deeper truths about society.

She dedicates her novel to someone who she thinks does this brilliantly—William Thackeray, the Victorian satirist and author of *Vanity Fair*. She praises Thackeray for being a "social regenerator" who writes books to correct the warped social system.

This dedication shows one of the main objectives of Jane Eyre: to expose social problems and then "regenerate" or reform them.

CHAPTER 1

On a dreary afternoon in Gateshead Hall, the ten-year-old Jane Eyre, who has been forbidden by her Aunt from playing with her three cousins, finds a curtained window seat where she can read. Jane pages through a copy of the *History of British Birds*. Its many **pictures** inspire her to imagine mysterious stories and arctic scenes.

Jane sitting and reading by herself, not allowed to play with her cousins, establishes her odd and lonely position at Gateshead Hall. Yet her willingness to find a book to read, rather than just moping, establishes her independence.

Jane's bullying cousin John Reed barges in and insults her, calling her a penniless orphan and beggar and a servant in his house. When he knocks her down with the book, Jane fights back for the first time in her life. The two children scuffle.

Because Jane is an orphan, the wealthy Reeds treat her as a dependent—someone who relies on their support. They treat her more like a servant than a family member.

Stunned, John goes crying to Mrs. Reed: his mother and Jane's aunt. Mrs. Reed, despite Jane's protests, accuses Jane of starting the fight. As punishment, Mrs. Reed orders Jane to be locked in the **red-room**. The red-room is a lavishly furnished and rarely used bedroom where, nine years previous, Mrs. Reed's husband (Jane's uncle) had died.

Jane's punishment is ironic—at the moment Jane asserts her independence, her freedom is taken away. The Reeds are tyrants and hypocrites, refusing to recognize Jane's virtues and their own vices.

CHAPTER 2

Two servants, Bessie Lee and Miss Abbot, haul the wildly struggling Jane upstairs. Shocked at her violent outbreak, they scold her for disrespecting Mrs. Reed, her benefactress and master. They tell Jane that she depends on Mrs. Reed's generosity. Without it, she would have to go to the poor house.

Because of her uncertain status in the family and in the social hierarchy, Jane is a prisoner of Mrs. Reed's "generosity" as well as the red-room. Adopted children like Jane had few, if any, options of their own.

They lock Jane alone in the **red-room**. Jane catches sight of her gaunt reflection in the mirror and broods on the injustice of Gateshead Hall, where she is always being insulted and punished while the Reed brats enjoy every privilege. She knows that the kindly Mr. Reed would never have treated her so badly. Mr. Reed brought her to Gateshead, and it was his dying wish that Mrs. Reed raise Jane like one of her own children.

Alone with her reflection and her thoughts, Jane starts to realize what she deserves as an individual, and what was promised to her by Mr. Reed—to be treated with love and respect. Though she is powerless, she knows that she deserves better.

Jane thinks about the dead and how, when wronged, they can arise to seek revenge. Suddenly, Jane is overwhelmed with a sense of Mr. Reed's presence in the room. Convinced she sees his ghost, Jane screams in terror. The servants open the door, but Mrs. Reed refuses to believe Jane or to let her out. Locked back into the red-room again, Jane faints.

Imagined or not, the ghost sets the tone for many of the supernatural elements in the novel. Jane wants revenge, but it takes a terrifying form in Mr. Reed's spirit. Jane must learn another, more controlled way to confront injustice.

CHAPTER 3

Jane wakes up in the nursery, cared for by Bessie, and by the local apothecary, Mr. Lloyd. Bessie tells Jane that she thinks that Mrs. Reed mistreated her, nurses Jane, and even sings Jane a song, but Jane is melancholy and unreachable. Jane only feels better when she gets a book—*Gulliver's Travels*, a fanciful satire by Jonathan Swift, which she believes is a factual story of distant places.

For her own children, Mrs. Reed would have hired a real doctor rather than an apothecary. Jane takes refuge in her imagination which, as with Mr. Reed's ghost, can sometimes be too powerful and distort the truth.

As Jane recovers, Mr. Lloyd asks her about her health and her well-being. Jane confesses her unhappiness and her regrets about having no family, but says she does not want to leave and become a beggar. Even if she had family, Jane says she would not want to rejoin them if they were very poor.

Poverty has affected Jane deeply enough to challenge her desire for family. Dependents and young women on their own had it rough—they could either work for someone or hit the streets.

Mr. Lloyd asks Jane if she'd like to attend school. Jane gladly says yes. He obtains permission from Mrs. Reed, who is thrilled to get rid of her niece.

Education is necessary for an orphan girl like Jane to create a place for herself in society.

Later, Jane overhears Bessie telling Miss Abbot the story of Jane's family. Jane's father was a poor clergyman. Jane's mother, a Reed, married him against her wealthy family's wishes, and they disowned her. Just after Jane was born, Jane's father caught typhus while helping the poor, and both of Jane's parents soon died. Jane's uncle Mr. Reed adopted her. Mr. Reed also died within a year, but made his wife, Mrs. Reed, promise to raise Jane like one of their own children—John, Eliza, and Georgiana.

Jane's parents are split between the working class and the upper-class gentry (people who owned property). Jane's mother chose love and her own desires over her family's money. Jane will do the same eventually. Like her mother, Jane is determined to earn respect for herself, and for women in general.

CHAPTER 4

For two months, Jane anxiously waits for her schooling to start. She is finally interviewed by Mr. Brocklehurst—the aloof and stern headmaster of the Lowood school. He lectures Jane about religion, especially about the virtue of consistency. Mrs. Reed warns him that Jane is a liar, and Mr. Brocklehurst promises to inform her future teachers.

Another painfully ironic moment—as will become clear, Brocklehurst is hardly pious or consistent, while it is Mrs. Reed who is the liar. Once again, Mrs. Reed does harm to her niece, whom she should protect.

Jane is so hurt by Mrs. Reed's false accusation that she can't stop herself from angrily exclaiming that her aunt makes her sick and is herself a cruel and deceitful person. Mrs. Reed is dumbstruck and subdued by Jane's bold criticism. Afterwards, Jane feels a thrilling mix of victory and fear at her uncontrolled passions.

Jane's passionate nature arises. By asserting herself, she stops others from misrepresenting and taking advantage of her. But she also knows that because of her social position, her outburst is out of line. She must learn to control her passions.

The Reeds continue to shun Jane during her remaining time at Gateshead. Yet Jane makes friends with Bessie and speaks to her with a new "frank and fearless" attitude. Bessie treats her to stories and **cakes** and tells Jane she likes her better than the Reed kids.

Jane is beginning to mature because she sees through—and speaks out against—the hypocritical and cruel conventions that silence and repress her.

CHAPTER 5

Four days later, on a January morning, Jane leaves Gateshead. The carriage trip winds through a dreary landscape and lets Jane off at an uninviting, haunted-looking compound—the Lowood school.

The barren winter landscape resembles the lifeless and stern environment that Jane will find at Lowood school.

The Lowood school is a charity school for orphan girls, ranging in age, and all wearing drab rough uniforms. On her first day, Jane witnesses the strictly regimented routine. Teachers order the girls around in formation. Students share beds in long dormitories, and must eat sparse and sometimes inedible **meals**.

Brontë uses Lowood to satirize the conditions in girls' charity schools (two of her sisters died in such a school). Because it's a charity school, Mrs. Reed didn't pay anything to send Jane to school there.

The school's superintendent, Ms. Maria Temple, intervenes to provide some better **food**. Ms. Temple also teaches several subjects. Jane respects her for her kindness and knowledge.

Ms. Temple is a mother figure for Jane. She provides love and sustenance (physical and spiritual) that Mrs. Reed never did.

Jane spots a solitary girl reading. The girl is Helen Burns, an orphan herself. Jane is not used to talking to strangers, but she feels an immediate connection to Helen. Jane asks her a lot of questions about the school, the teachers, and Mr. Brocklehurst, which Helen answers carefully and with respect.

Helen is independent and intellectual like Jane. But she is much more restrained and refuses to say anything negative about the people running the school—though she could.

In the afternoon, a bitter teacher history teacher named Miss Scatcherd kicks Helen out of class and makes her stand in the middle of the school room for all to see. Jane cannot understand how Helen can bear the humiliation so quietly.

Helen's experience here parallels the Reeds' mistreatment of Jane, but Helen does not fight the injustice, as Jane passionately did. She endures it.

CHAPTER 6

On Jane's second day at the school, she wakes up shivering to a meager **breakfast**. She finds that her wash water is frozen in its pitcher.

Lowood's "discipline" is actually neglect. But the girls have no power to change anything.

In classes, Jane is overwhelmed by the lessons, but is fascinated by watching Helen Burns across the room. Even though Helen answers many difficult questions in her class, Miss Scatcherd goes out of her way to criticize and punish Helen. When she whips Helen across the neck, Jane is amazed that Helen doesn't flinch or cry.

Jane feels a connection with Helen that she never feels with anyone else. Humiliated and even physically injured, Helen is a Christ-like figure who endures unjust persecution without complaint.

Later, Jane tells Helen how she should furiously resist such unjust treatment. Helen explains to Jane her philosophy of turning the other cheek, and her belief in a beautiful afterlife that gives her hope and patience to endure suffering in this world.

Helen's religious views help her endures her suffering. Helen's optimistic faith will contrast with the stern Christianity of characters later in the book.

CHAPTER 7

Conditions at Lowood remain harsh. On weekly Sunday walks to Mr. Brocklehurst's church, the poorly-clothed girls suffer exposure to frigid weather. They are constantly cold and underfed. In sympathy, Jane gives most of her small **meals** to other starving girls.

Mr. Brocklehurst's type of religion is cold and lifeless. His "charity" is literally killing the girls he is supposed to teach and nourish. In contrast, Jane nourishes others even when she herself is underfed.

One day, Mr. Brocklehurst, who is rarely present at the school itself, visits Lowood with his rich, well-dressed relatives. In front of the school, he reemphasizes the rules of his harsh educational program to Ms. Temple, who had been bending the rules out of kindness to the girls. She fumes in silence. On seeing a girl's curly red hair, he demands that all the girls' hair be cut off for the sake of modesty.

Mr. Brocklehurst enjoys wealth and comforts while the girls suffer. He would "starve the body to save the soul," but doesn't practice what he preaches. The haircuts show how the girls are denied their feelings and individuality. Ms. Temple fumes silently because, as a female teacher, she has no real power.

Jane is terrified that Mr. Brocklehurst will remember his promise to Mrs. Reed to tell all the teachers that Jane is a liar. Jane is so nervous that she accidentally drops her chalk slate during his visit. Mr. Brocklehurst then makes her stand on a high stool in front of everyone, says that Jane is deceitful, and tells all the students and teachers to avoid her.

Jane is concerned that her new friends, Helen and Ms. Temple, will reject her because of Mrs. Reed's lies. She does not yet understand the deeper bonds of friendship and love.

Jane is devastated, but takes heart from Helen Burns, who smiles at Jane every time she passes by.

Drawing strength from Helen's approval, Jane learns to endure.

CHAPTER 8

After school is dismissed that evening, thinking that she is hated by everyone, Jane collapses into tears. Helen Burns reassures Jane that she is pitied, not hated, by her peers. Helen also promises that even if the whole world despised her, Jane would still find friendship and protecting love in her faith.

Almost above all things, Jane "cannot bear to be solitary and hated." She is searching for meaningful connections to others and to her own beliefs. Helen's faith appeals to orphans and the struggling poor.

Ms. Temple brings the two girls to her office and treats them to tea and **cake**. Jane tells Ms. Temple that she is not a liar, and relates her life story, trying hard to be moderate and humble. Ms. Temple and Helen talk of learned subjects, and Jane watches them in awe. To Jane, they seem radiant with intelligence and purity.

The three women share a sisterhood of humility, persistence, and honesty. Helen's intelligence and moral purity shine through her outward appearance. Jane hopes the same will be true for her.

Ms. Temple promises to write to Mr. Lloyd to confirm that Jane's assertion that she is not a liar. Mr. Lloyd soon writes back to exonerate Jane, and Ms. Temple announces in front of the whole school that Jane is innocent of Mr. Brocklehurst's charges.

The public clearing of Jane's reputation makes the school a friendly place again. Ms. Temple takes back some of Brocklehurst's power to shape the girls' identities.

Jane returns to her studies with new vigor and excels in French and drawing. She now prefers the impoverished Lowood to the luxuries of Gateshead.

Money isn't everything. Even at Lowood, Jane feels enriched by her friends and studies.

CHAPTER 9

Spring brings better weather, but the dampness of the school grounds results in an epidemic of typhus that infects more than half of Lowood's students. Many are sent home. Many others die. Jane, meanwhile, is encouraged to wander outside for her health, and she takes great pleasure in the lush scenery and flowers. In the midst of spring's renewal, Jane contemplates death for the first time.

The Lowood epidemic recalls Brontë's own sisters' deaths, and illustrates the plight of poor women. The contrast of spring's rebirth with death wakes Jane up to life's contradictions. Spring is a transitional time, and Jane is transitioning out of her youth.

Jane soon learns that Helen is also deathly ill. Helen suffers from consumption (tuberculosis), not typhus, and is being held in quarantine in Ms. Temple's room.

In Victorian literature, characters like Helen who are too sensitive or pure for the harsh world often died of consumption.

One night Jane sneaks to Helen's bedside. Helen assures Jane that she is not scared of dying because she will be leaving behind the suffering of the world and going to her God. They fall asleep in each other's arms. By morning, Helen is dead.

Helen's profound faith in an afterlife teaches Jane to give up on some of the petty struggles of life. The girls' bond is unbreakable, even by death.

Helen is buried in an unmarked grave. But 15 years later, someone (probably Jane) places a headstone on the grave that is carved with the word "Resurgam"—Latin for "I will rise again."

The gravestone's inscription extends the novel's comparison of Helen to Christ.

CHAPTER 10

The epidemic and deaths expose the depravity at Lowood and Mr. Brocklehurst's neglect. New management takes over and improves the school.

Mr. Brocklehurst's negligence comes back to him. He receives divine and social justice.

Eight years pass. Jane excels in her studies during that time. Driven by a wish to please her teachers, she graduates first in her class and becomes a teacher at the school herself. But when Ms. Temple marries and leaves for a distant country, Jane yearns for a change herself, to venture out into the wide world and find a "new servitude."

Marriage interferes with women's relationships, and Jane is "orphaned" again when Ms. Temple leaves. Now Jane feels isolated and restless and wants her freedom, to define herself. Yet at the same time she yearns for "servitude."

Jane posts a newspaper advertisement for her services as a tutor, and a week later is offered a job by a Mrs. Fairfax to teach a young girl at the manor of Thornfield.

Jane's ad symbolizes her entrance into independent public life, though as a poor woman she must still serve others.

Just as she's leaving Lowood, Jane gets a surprise visit from Bessie. Bessie updates Jane about the Reeds—Georgiana tried to run off with a young lord, but her jealous sister Eliza ratted her out to Mrs. Reed. John Reed is failing school, spending money wildly, and generally disappointing his mother. Bessie thinks that Jane is far more accomplished than any of the Reed children.

Through her devotion to her education, Jane has gained self-confidence, admirable skills, and a respectable social position. Mrs. Reed may have rated her children above Jane, but raised without discipline and integrity, they turned out poorly.

Bessie also notes that Jane's family (the Eyres) was poor but respected—they even owned property. In fact, seven years previous (shortly after Jane left Gateshead), Jane's uncle John, a well-to-do wine merchant, had visited Gateshead looking for her. He didn't have time to visit her at Lowood, because he was headed to the island of Madeira on business.

Jane's social position becomes a little clearer. Though poor, she is a member of the gentry. Jane's uncle is a self-made man and a solid middle-class figure. His virtues parallel Jane's.

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