



Teaching Three Great Books with Dr. Flora Armetta

Lesson 6: Jane Eyre, Part One

Outline:

Jane Eyre's Background

Charlotte Bronte

- Born in 1816, in Yorkshire, England, to a clergyman father and a mother who died when Jane was 5
- Third of 4 daughters and one son; two older sisters died when she was 9
- Attended boarding school, but returned home to teach two younger sisters - Emily and Anne - when she was 15
- Returned to her old school at age 21 to be a governess; later became a private governess to two separate families
- Learned to write and draw from a very young age; drew travel scenes, scenes from Byron's poetry, *Thomas Bewick's History of British Birds*, and John Martin's apocalyptic imagery (Charlotte intended to become a professional painter)
- For financial reasons, eventually set sights on opening a school and traveled to Brussels to complete training
- Submitted a book of poetry with sisters for publication under the names Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell.
- *Jane Eyre* was written secretly and published in 1847.
- Bronte lost the rest of her siblings within a few years and died in 1857 of pneumonia

Life of a Governess

- Lived with and taught younger children and girls of wealthy families
- Primarily taught French, history, geography, reading, writing, arithmetic, and social accomplishments for girls (see Chapter 10 of *Jane Eyre*)
- Governesses were middle-class young women; every young woman needed acquire some means of support in adulthood
- Social status was difficult to determine (above other servants but below family members; socially isolated; lost middle-class status)
- Never able to save enough money to be independent

Historical context

Realism

- Genre rose with the rise of the middle class in the 19th century, promoting hope for upward mobility



- Provides detailed descriptions of character's thoughts, feelings, surroundings, and everyday occurrences from his/her POV, which allows author to depict physical and material change and growth of the characters
- Idea of the "value of the individual" did not arise until after the Renaissance and humanism; before that, it would not be common to conceive of writing about a single person's experience
- Examples of realism include:
 - Jane speaks directly to reader throughout novel
 - Ending was not a fairy tale
 - Description of the red room in Chapter 2
 - Helen Burn's death
 - Descriptions of Jane's appearance

Gothic Horror

- Began in the late 18th century with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)
- Characterized by drama, suspense, huge moments of actions, frightening events, and horror
- Focuses on events (plot line) rather than character (people and feelings)
- May include supernatural or unexplained phenomenon
- **Examples:** vision of Bertha Mason; crack of lightning in the garden; Rochester's voice calling to her toward end of novel