

Charlotte Bronte

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Overview — the story in simple English

Jane Eyre is a poor orphan (এতিম) girl who lives with her rich, cruel aunt, Mrs Reed, at a house called Gateshead. Her cousin John bullies (উত্ত্যক্ত করা) her, and as punishment she is locked in the frightening "red-room," where she thinks she sees a ghost. After this, she is sent away to Lowood, a charity school (দাতব্য বিদ্যালয়) where the food is poor and the discipline is harsh. There her gentle friend Helen Burns dies of illness, but Jane grows up, becomes a teacher, and learns patience and self-control. As a young woman she takes a job as a governess (গৃহশিক্ষিকা) at Thornfield Hall, teaching a little French girl named Adele. She slowly falls in love with the moody (খামখেয়ালি) master of the house, Mr Rochester, and he asks her to marry him. But on the wedding day a terrible secret is revealed (প্রকাশিত): Rochester already has a mad wife, Bertha Mason, whom he keeps locked in the attic (চিলেকোঠা). Refusing to become his mistress (রক্ষিতা), Jane runs away with almost nothing and nearly starves. She is rescued by the Rivers family, learns they are her cousins, and inherits money from an uncle; the cold clergyman St John Rivers asks her to marry him and go to India as a missionary (ধর্মপ্রচারক), but she refuses because there is no love. One night she seems to hear Rochester's voice calling her name, so she returns to find Thornfield burned down, Bertha dead, and Rochester now blind (অন্ধ). Because they are finally equal, she marries him.

 **One-line meaning:** *A poor, plain woman insists on love joined with equality and dignity, and refuses to sacrifice her self-respect or her freedom for any man.*

Quick Fact	Detail
Published	1847, under the pen-name "Currer Bell"
Genre	Bildungsroman + Gothic romance + autobiographical novel
Setting	Northern England, early 19th century (five houses: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House, Ferndean)
Narration-Form	First-person retrospective narration; Jane tells her own life and speaks directly to "Reader"
Original title page	<i>Jane Eyre: An Autobiography</i> , "edited by Currer Bell"

Themes & Technique

- Love with equality and independence.** Jane wants love, but never at the price of her freedom or dignity. She rejects Rochester's offer to be his mistress and St John's offer of a loveless marriage. Only when Rochester is humbled and they meet as equals does she marry him. Love in this novel must respect the woman's whole self.
- The condition and independence of women.** The novel openly protests the narrow life allowed to women. Jane argues that women feel and think as strongly as men and need "a field for their efforts." As a governess she is trapped between servant and lady, showing how few honourable choices a poor woman had. This theme maps directly to the exam question on the condition of women.
- Gothic atmosphere and mystery.** Bronte fills Thornfield with Gothic elements (আতঙ্কজনক পরিবেশ): strange laughter at night, the madwoman locked in the attic, the ghostly red-room, a supernatural voice, and a great house destroyed

by fire. These create suspense and also express Jane's hidden fears and anger.

4. **Growth and search for identity (Bildungsroman).** The story follows Jane from an oppressed child to an independent woman through five stages of life. Each house (Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House, Ferndean) teaches her a lesson and moves her closer to belonging and selfhood.
5. **Religion and morality.** Bronte shows three false or extreme kinds of faith — Brocklehurst's cruel hypocrisy, Helen Burns's passive endurance, and St John's cold ambition — and lets Jane build her own balanced, loving faith between passion and conscience.
6. **Passion versus reason (self-control).** Jane feels deeply but governs herself. She learns from Helen not to be ruled by anger, yet unlike Helen she never crushes her own feelings completely. This balance is the moral centre of the book.
7. **Class and social inequality.** Jane's poverty and low rank shape her whole life. As a governess she is educated yet dependent, neither family nor servant, and her inheritance near the end finally gives her the security that lets her choose freely. Bronte quietly criticises a society that judges people by wealth and birth rather than by worth, and she rewards Jane only after Jane has proved her moral strength.

Narrative technique:

- **First-person retrospective narration** — the older Jane looks back and judges her younger self.
- **Direct address to the reader** — famously "Reader, I married him," which builds intimacy and trust.
- **Bildungsroman** (novel of growth and education) structure across five settings.
- **Gothic conventions** — the madwoman, mysterious sounds, the supernatural call, the burning house.
- **Autobiographical form** — the subtitle *An Autobiography* makes the story feel true and confessional.
- **Symbolism and pathetic fallacy** — fire and ice imagery, and the great chestnut tree split by lightning, mirror the characters' emotions.

Key Quotations — memorize

"There was no possibility of taking a walk that day." — opening line, Chapter 1 (sets the cold, shut-in, Gothic mood)

"Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart!" — Jane to Rochester, Chapter 23

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." — Jane, Chapter 23

"It is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are!" — Jane to Rochester, Chapter 23

"women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do" — Jane, narrating, Chapter 12

"I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself." — Jane, Chapter 27

"Jane! Jane! Jane!" — the mysterious voice Jane hears calling her, near the end (the supernatural, Gothic call that draws her back to Rochester)

"Reader, I married him." — Jane, the famous opening of the final chapter, Chapter 38

Critics' Views (safe to cite)

Critic	View	Use for
Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar (<i>The Madwoman in the Attic</i> , 1979)	Bertha Mason is Jane's "dark double" — the mad wife acts out the rage and rebellion Jane must suppress	Gothic essay; Bertha; women's anger
Elaine Showalter (<i>A Literature of Their Own</i> , 1977)	Jane Eyre belongs to a female literary tradition; Bertha embodies the trapped woman's suppressed fury	Condition of women; feminist reading
Adrienne Rich ("Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman", 1973)	The novel is Jane's journey to self-respect; she resists every temptation to lose herself in a man	Independence; refusal of St John and mistress role
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", 1985)	Bertha, the Creole outsider, is sacrificed so the English heroine can win selfhood — a colonial cost	Postcolonial angle; higher-level Bertha point
Terry Eagleton (<i>Myths of Power</i> , 1975)	Reads the Brontes through class; Jane's struggle is partly about a poor woman rising in a rigid social order	Class and social inequality
Virginia Woolf (<i>The Common Reader</i>)	Praised Bronte's power but felt her anger sometimes strained the art; the writing burns with feeling	Passion; tone; women writers

Exam Q&A Bank

Part A — Reference to Context (5 marks)

Passage 1 (Very likely):

"women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do"

These lines come from *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. They belong to Chapter 12, when Jane, now a governess at Thornfield, walks on the roof and reflects on her restless mind. **Context:** She feels quiet and grateful outwardly, but inside she longs for a wider life than a woman of her time is allowed. **Explanation:** Jane insists that women are not calm, empty creatures; they feel and think as strongly as men and deserve real work and freedom, not endless embroidery. To keep them "confined" is unjust and cruel. **Significance:** This is one of the most quoted feminist passages in Victorian fiction and states the novel's central protest about the condition of women. It prepares us for Jane's later refusals — of the mistress role and of a loveless marriage — because a woman with such a spirit will never surrender her independence. (about 150 words)

Passage 2 (Very likely):

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will."

These lines are from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, Chapter 23, in the garden at Thornfield. **Context:** Rochester has been testing Jane by pretending he will marry Blanche Ingram and send Jane away. Wounded but proud, Jane declares her feelings and her freedom before he finally proposes. **Explanation:** Jane rejects the idea that she can be trapped, owned, or caged like a bird. She may be poor and plain, but her will belongs to herself alone. She meets Rochester as an equal soul, not as a dependent. **Significance:** The line defines Jane's whole character and the book's theme of love with dignity. It also foreshadows her flight from Thornfield: rather than let love turn her into a kept woman, she will keep her independent will, exactly as she promises here. (about 150 words)

Part B — Short Notes (5 marks)

1. How did Jane save Mr Rochester's life? (🔥 Very likely — appears twice in the paper) One night, soon after Jane begins to love Rochester, she is woken by a strange, low laugh outside her room and a sound of something being dragged. Uneasy, she opens her door and smells smoke. Following it, she finds Rochester's bedroom door open and his bed curtains and covers on fire, while he lies fast asleep in the flames. Jane does not panic. She quickly fetches the water from his basin and jug and throws it over the bed, putting out the fire and waking him. Rochester is deeply grateful and strangely disturbed; he tells her to stay silent about it and goes up to the attic to investigate. The reader later learns that his mad wife, Bertha Mason, had escaped and set the fire. This episode is important because it shows Jane's calm courage, deepens the bond between her and Rochester, and secretly hints at the terrible mystery hidden in the house. (about 165 words)

2. Evaluate the character of Mr Rochester (🔥 Very likely — from the high-probability list) Edward Rochester is the moody, powerful master of Thornfield Hall and the man Jane loves. He is not handsome, and his manner is rough, proud, and often sarcastic (ব্যঙ্গাত্মক), yet he is intelligent, passionate, and honest about his feelings. He treats Jane as an equal in conversation, valuing her mind rather than her looks or rank, which is rare for a rich man of his class. But Rochester also has a serious moral fault: he hides his mad wife, Bertha, and tries to trick Jane into a false marriage, which nearly ruins her. He is a Byronic hero (রোমান্টিক, দোষযুক্ত নায়ক) — attractive but flawed, carrying a dark secret and a guilty past, and struggling between selfish desire and true feeling. By the end he is punished and purified: the fire leaves him blind and maimed, and only when he is humbled can he and Jane marry as true equals. In this way Rochester also serves the plot, forcing Jane to choose between passion and principle at the novel's turning point. Rochester therefore shows Brontë's belief that real love needs honesty, suffering, and equality. (about 175 words)

Part C — Essays (15 marks)

"Evaluate Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a gothic Novel." (🔥 Very likely)

Introduction. The Gothic novel is a form full of mystery, fear, old dark houses, madness, and the supernatural, made popular by writers such as Ann Radcliffe. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) uses many of these Gothic tools, yet it does something greater than simply frighten the reader. Brontë turns Gothic terror into a way of showing Jane's inner life — her fears, her anger, and her longing for freedom. This essay argues that *Jane Eyre* is a powerful Gothic novel, but a psychological one, in which the horror lives inside the mind as much as in the haunted house.

The red-room: early Gothic terror. The Gothic mood begins in Chapter 1 with the very first line, "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day," which shuts the child indoors in cold, grey gloom. Soon after, young Jane is locked in the red-room, a cold, silent chamber where her uncle died. She believes she sees a ghostly light and screams in terror until she faints. This scene is pure Gothic — a frightened child, a room of death, a supposed ghost — but it also stands for Jane's helplessness and imprisonment as an unloved orphan. From the start, Brontë joins outer horror to inner feeling.

Thornfield and the madwoman. The strongest Gothic centre is Thornfield Hall, a large, mysterious old house with a hidden third floor. Jane hears an eerie, low laugh in the night, a curtain is set on fire, and a visitor, Mr Mason, is savagely bitten and wounded. The secret is finally revealed as Bertha Mason, Rochester's mad wife, kept locked in the attic like an animal. Bertha is the classic Gothic figure of madness and menace. The critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*,

famously read Bertha as Jane's "dark double" — the wild, angry self that Jane must control but cannot fully escape. This makes the Gothic deeply meaningful: the monster in the attic mirrors the rage of the trapped Victorian woman.

The supernatural call. Brontë also uses the supernatural directly. After Jane has fled and St John presses her to marry him, she hears, across many miles, a voice crying "Jane! Jane! Jane!" — Rochester calling her in his despair. This mysterious, telepathic cry pulls her back to him. Whether we read it as a real supernatural event or as the deep bond of two souls, it is a Gothic device that guides the plot toward its ending and shows that love here has an almost magical power.

Fire, ruin, and Gothic justice. Finally, the burning of Thornfield is a great Gothic climax. Bertha sets the house ablaze and dies leaping from the roof; Rochester is blinded and loses a hand trying to save her. The proud mansion becomes a blackened ruin. Yet this destruction also clears away the guilty secret and punishes Rochester, so that he and Jane may unite honestly. Even Brontë's imagery is Gothic and symbolic: earlier, the great chestnut tree under which Rochester proposed is split in two by lightning, warning of the broken marriage to come.

Conclusion. *Jane Eyre* clearly earns its place as a Gothic novel: it has the haunted red-room, the mysterious old hall, the madwoman, the supernatural voice, and the fire-ruined house. But Brontë's genius is to make the Gothic serve psychology and theme. The terrors are not empty thrills; they express Jane's fear, imprisonment, and hidden anger, and they drive her moral growth. Brontë therefore raises the Gothic form into serious literature, giving us a novel that both haunts and moves the reader. (about 590 words)

"What was the condition of women as reflected in the novel 'Jane Eyre'?" (🔥 Very likely — appears twice in the paper)

Introduction. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is one of the first great English novels to protest openly about the narrow, dependent life allowed to women in the Victorian age. Through Jane's struggles as an orphan, a schoolgirl, a governess, and a woman in love, Brontë shows how few honourable choices a poor woman had, and how strongly she deserved freedom, feeling, and respect. This essay argues that the novel presents the hard condition of women with anger and clarity, while also creating a heroine who quietly fights to change it.

Women with no power or protection. As a female orphan, Jane has no money, no family love, and no rights. At Gateshead she is punished for defending herself; at Lowood she suffers cold, hunger, and public shaming under the hypocrite Brocklehurst. These early sections show how a girl without wealth or a protector was completely at the mercy of others. A poor woman's respectability was fragile, and her survival depended on obedience and good luck rather than justice.

The trapped position of the governess. The novel's sharpest picture of women's condition is the figure of the governess. As a governess, Jane is educated and refined, yet she is paid, dependent, and treated as neither a lady nor a servant. Blanche Ingram and her friends openly mock governesses in front of Jane, showing the contempt such women faced. Brontë makes Jane speak the novel's most famous protest: "women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do." Here Brontë demands for women the same wide life, work, and freedom that men enjoy.

Marriage as danger, not only reward. The novel also shows that marriage itself could threaten a woman's freedom. Rochester nearly makes Jane a bigamous "wife" and then asks her to become his mistress, which would destroy her honour and independence. St John Rivers offers the opposite trap: a cold, loveless marriage of duty that would use up her life for his ambition. Jane refuses both, insisting, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." For Jane, a marriage without love or equality is only another cage.

Bertha Mason: the silenced woman. The condition of women appears in its darkest form in Bertha Mason, the wife locked in the attic. Whatever her illness, she has been shut away, hidden, and silenced by her husband. The critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read Bertha as Jane's "dark double," the trapped woman's suppressed rage made visible, and Elaine Showalter places her within a tradition of angry, imprisoned women in female writing. Bertha is the frightening image of what can happen to a woman who has no voice and no power of her own.

Jane's answer: dignity and equality. Against all this, Jane models a better condition for women through self-respect. She earns her own living, refuses to be owned or bought, and even after inheriting money she chooses love freely rather than out of need. Adrienne Rich reads the whole novel as Jane's journey toward self-respect, resisting every temptation to lose herself

in a man. When Jane finally marries Rochester as an equal — announcing "Reader, I married him" — she does so on her own terms, as a free and independent woman.

Conclusion. *Jane Eyre* reflects the condition of Victorian women as one of dependence, limited work, social contempt, and the constant danger of losing one's self in marriage. Yet Brontë does not only complain; through Jane she insists that women have equal souls, equal feelings, and an equal right to freedom and love. That double message — clear protest joined with a proud, independent heroine — is why the novel remains a landmark in the literature of women. (about 620 words)

⚡ One-Page Revision Sheet

Item	Content
Story in 3 lines	Orphan Jane grows up unloved, then works as a governess at Thornfield and loves Mr Rochester. On the wedding day his mad wife Bertha is revealed, so Jane flees rather than be a mistress. She returns after Bertha's death and the fire to marry a humbled, blind Rochester as an equal.
2 must-quotes	"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." — "Reader, I married him."
2 backup quotes	"women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do." — "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day."
2 critics	Gilbert & Gubar (Bertha as Jane's "dark double"); Adrienne Rich / Showalter (Jane's journey to self-respect; female tradition)
Technique words	First-person retrospective narration; direct address to the reader; Bildungsroman; Gothic conventions; Byronic hero; symbolism and pathetic fallacy
Top 3 likely essays	1) Jane Eyre as a Gothic novel. 2) The condition of women in Jane Eyre. 3) Character of Mr Rochester / How Jane saved his life (short).

Exam timing tip: In a 4-hour paper, give roughly 35-40 minutes to each 15-mark essay; write a 3-sentence plan first (thesis + 4 points), then open with your thesis and drop in one quotation and one critic per essay so the examiner sees clear structure fast.