

INTERNET PROJECT

As can be seen in the text on page 29, one of the first steps towards improving the lives of the thousands of English governesses in the 19th century was schooling. Now in the 21st century one of the keys to improving the lives of millions of young women around the world is still education. To find out more about the problems faced by girls and women around the world who wish to attend school, connect to the Internet and go to www.blackcat-cideb.com or www.cideb.it. Insert the title or part of the title of the book into our search engine. Open the page for *Jane Eyre*. Click on the Internet project link. Go down the page until you find the title of this book and click on the relevant link for this project.

With your partner, present a short report on this issue.

Include some of the following information:

- ▶ the particular problems girls and women face
- ▶ which organizations are working in favour of women's education
- ▶ what these organizations are doing.



PART THREE

Mr Rochester's Past

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I didn't see Mr Rochester often. Sometimes, when he passed me, he smiled, but more often he ignored me. Then one evening he asked Adèle to come and sit with him after dinner. Mrs Fairfax and I accompanied her. When we went into the drawing room, the first thing we saw was a large box on the table. 'My present!' cried Adèle, and she ran over to open it.

'Miss Eyre, come and sit by me,' said Mr Rochester.

I brought a chair up to the fire and sat a little way from him. I noticed that his expression was softer and more contented than usual. Perhaps he had drunk a lot of wine with his dinner. He looked at the fire and I looked at him. Then suddenly he turned to me and said, 'You're looking at me, Miss Eyre. Do you think I'm handsome?'

'No, sir,' I replied.

'What a strange young woman you are! You sit there like a nun, looking down at the carpet, or looking at my face as you did just now, and, if I speak to you, the reply you give is so honest as to be almost rude!'

It was true that I had said the wrong thing, but it was also

true that most people would think he was an ugly man. 'I'm sorry, sir,' I replied. 'I didn't think before speaking. I should've said that beauty is not important, or something like that.'

'No, you shouldn't. You've started, so you should continue. What's wrong with me? I have two eyes, two arms and two legs, like any other man! What's wrong with my face? Is it the face of a fool?'

'No, sir. But it isn't a kind face.'

'Perhaps not. Once, when I was your age, I was kind enough, but I've had a hard life, and it has made me less kind. Do you think there is any chance I may become kind again?'

I thought he had certainly drunk too much wine. I sat there, not knowing what to say.

'I may not be handsome, but you aren't pretty either. And yet there's something pleasing about you as you sit there looking embarrassed. At least when you're embarrassed you look down at the floor instead of examining my face! Tell me something about yourself.'

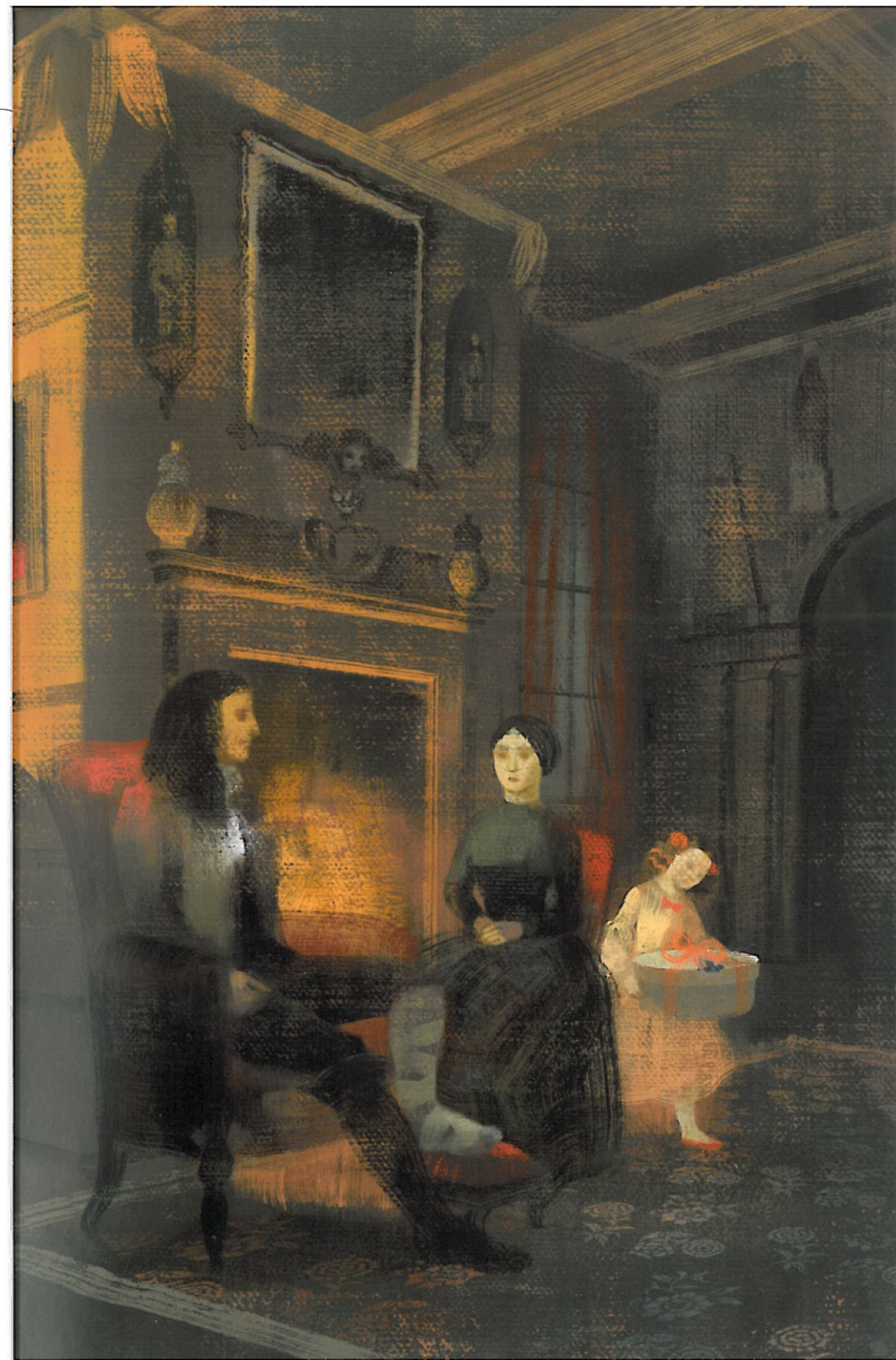
I smiled but didn't speak.

'You refuse to talk?' he asked. 'Ah! I understand. You think I was too rude. I commanded you to speak. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to treat you like an inferior. The only superiority I claim is in age and experience. So, please, tell me something about yourself to distract me from my own thoughts, which are painful.'

'I'd be happy to entertain you, sir, but I don't know what you'd like to hear. If you ask me questions, I'll gladly reply.'

'All right. Do you agree that I have the right to command you because of my greater age and experience?'

'No, sir,' I replied. 'One person isn't superior to another simply because of age and experience. It depends on how you've lived,



not just on how long you've lived. It depends what use you have made of the years.'

'Oh, dear!' said Mr Rochester. 'That's bad news for me. I haven't made good use of them at all!'

'Anyway, you forget that you have the right to command me because you pay me thirty pounds a year.'

'True! I had forgotten! Do you admit that paying you gives me the right to command you?'

'No, sir, but because you forgot and because you care whether the people who work for you are comfortable or not, I'll gladly let you command me.'

'So you don't expect me to speak politely to you?'

'I know the difference between informality and rudeness. I quite like informality, but no one born free would ever accept rudeness, not even for thirty pounds a year.'

'Nonsense! Many people would accept anything for thirty pounds a year! Speak for yourself, and don't try to generalise: you're too ignorant to speak for others. However, even if it was wrong, your answer was a good one. It was sincere and spirited. You're a very unusual young woman, Miss Eyre! But I mustn't jump to conclusions about¹ your character. You may have many faults as well as a few good points.'

'And so may you,' I thought.

He looked at me just as this thought crossed my mind, and he seemed to read the thought in my eyes. 'Yes, I know!' he said. 'I have plenty of faults too,¹ but I was treated badly, so I started living a bad life, and now I have a lot of bad memories. Little girl, how lucky you are to have nothing but pure memories!'

1. **jump to conclusions about** : judge too quickly.

'How was your memory when you were eighteen, sir?'

'It was pure then. I was your equal at eighteen. But now, because of my misfortunes, I'm not a good man. Don't misunderstand me: I've never done anything really bad; I'm just an ordinary sinner. I don't mind telling you that I'm full of remorse for my sins. Remorse is the poison of life.'

'Repentance will cure that poison, sir,' I said.

'But my life is cursed. I'm forbidden happiness, so I must find pleasure where I can.'

'It'll make things worse.'

'How can sweet fresh pleasures make things worse?'

'If they aren't permitted by God's law.'

'Perhaps we need new laws.'

'That sounds dangerous, sir.'

'I've often hated this place,' he said suddenly. 'But now I like it. Sometimes I think the spirit of the house is laughing at me and calling out to me, "Like Thornfield if you can! Like Thornfield if you dare!"'

His words frightened and confused me. What did they mean? Why didn't he like his own house?

Just then, Adèle called to us, 'Mr Rochester! Miss Eyre! Look at me!' There she stood, in the middle of the room, wearing the beautiful pink silk dress that Mr Rochester had bought for her.

'I'm glad you like it, Adèle,' said Mr Rochester, 'but it's time for bed now. Mrs Fairfax, take her to her room. Miss Eyre will come up in a minute to say goodnight.'

As soon as they were gone, he said, 'She looks just like her mother in that dress. Céline Varens was an actress. She charmed me when I was young and foolish. Then I discovered that the only thing she cared about was money. She took all my money and made a fool of me, then she laughed at me with other men.'

You've never felt jealousy, have you, Miss Eyre? No, of course not, because you've never felt love. Your soul sleeps, but one day it will wake up. You'll suffer, and you'll know what love is and what jealousy is. When I found Céline with another man, I left her. She had told me that Adèle was my daughter and I believed her, so I continued to visit the child. I don't believe it now: Adèle doesn't look anything like me, and Céline was very good at lying. A few years after I left her, she ran away to Italy with a musician, leaving Adèle in Paris. I decided to take care of the child and bring her here. Thank you for listening. Goodnight, Miss Eyre.'

That was the first of many such conversations. My master seemed to like talking to me. From that time on, he always smiled when he passed me, and he often came to speak to me. I didn't say much during these conversations, but I enjoyed listening to him. My life had been so quiet and dull, it was a pleasure to hear the adventures of a man who had travelled the world. His manner towards me was friendly and honest. I was so happy in this new life that I grew stronger and healthier than I had ever been before.

And did I still think that Mr Rochester was ugly? No, reader: not at all. I liked him so much, and I felt so grateful to him, that it gave me great pleasure to see his face. I knew he had many faults, but I thought that these were the result of his unhappy life. I began to worry that he would leave Thornfield soon. Mrs Fairfax had told me that he never stayed for more than two weeks. When he'd been there eight weeks, I thought, 'Surely he will leave soon, and what a sad change that will make in my life here!'

The text and **beyond**

1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What did Mr Rochester say Jane looked like?
- 2 Why did Mr Rochester want to be entertained by Jane's talk?
- 3 When, according to Jane, was one person superior to another person?
- 4 Why was Jane happy to let Mr Rochester tell her what to do?
- 5 Why did Mr Rochester like Jane's ideas about people accepting rudeness?
- 6 Why did Mr Rochester do bad things?
- 7 What was destroying Mr Rochester's life?
- 8 How did Mr Rochester want to solve this problem?
- 9 What did Jane think of his solution?
- 10 What was Mr Rochester's relationship with Adèle's mother?
- 11 What did Adèle's mother want from Mr Rochester?
- 12 What was Mr Rochester's relationship to Adèle?

'I should've said that beauty is not important'

If you want to give advice, or to say what you think is the right thing to do, you can use **should**:

*Charlotte, you **should** study French.*

→ *Charlotte, it would be a good thing if you studied French.*

*Jane, you **should not** ask adults questions all the time.*

→ *Jane, it is not a good thing to ask adults questions all the time.*

In the same way, if you wish to say what you think was the right thing to do in the past, you can use **should have + past participle**:

*I **should've** (should have) said that beauty is not important.*

*Mr Rochester **shouldn't** have (should not have) let her charm him.*

2 Should have/shouldn't have: duty in the past

Complete the sentences below using *should've* or *shouldn't have*, plus the past participle of one of the verbs in the box. The sentences should make sense within the context of the story. There is an example at the beginning (0).

throw give repent be gallop ~~take~~
make up with stick out his tongue

- 0 Mrs Reed says to a friend, 'I cannot stand my niece! She is terrible!' Mrs Reed's friend says, 'You ~~shouldn't have taken~~ her to live with your family.'
- 1 Mr Rochester says that he felt guilty after his father's death. Jane says to him, 'You him after you quarrelled.'
- 2 Mrs Reed says to Jane, 'You threw a book at my son, you horrible child.' Jane says to her, 'He at me.'
- 3 Bessie says, 'Poor Jane, she got sick after you locked her in the Red Room.' Mrs Reed answers, 'Well, she a book at my child.'
- 4 Jane says to Helen, 'Miss Scratcherd is terrible. It was horrible to punish you like that.' Helen says to Jane, 'I so lazy.'
- 5 A friend says to Miss Temple, 'When you taught at Lowood, the girls were always getting ill.' Miss Temple says to her friend, 'Yes, that's true. Mr Brocklehurst the girls more food and warmer clothing.'
- 6 Mr Rochester says to a friend, 'My horse slipped and fell on the road.' The friend says to Mr Rochester, 'You more slowly.'
- 7 Mr Rochester says to Jane, 'I suffered from horrible feelings of remorse for the bad things I did when I was young.' Jane says to Mr Rochester, 'You for your bad actions.'

3 Writing

Pretend you are Adèle and write a letter to an English friend. Include the following information:

- where you lived before Thornfield
- where you first met Mr Rochester
- what you think of him
- what you think of the new governess
- what you think Mr Rochester thinks of her
- why you do or don't want to learn English better

You can start like this:

Dear Sarah,

In your last letter you asked me tell you something about my new life here in England. I have lived in a big country house since I arrived in England. It is always very quiet and peaceful here. The English countryside is wonderful. But I have not always lived here. I was born in

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Your Friend
Adèle

Jane as a Feminist Heroine

When we think of the great heroines of fiction, Jane Eyre is certainly in the top ten. Like Moll Flanders, Lizzie Bennet, Emma Bovary, Dorothea Brooke, Anna Karenina and Tess Durbeyfield,¹ Jane Eyre stays in the imagination long after the reader has finished the book; yet, even among these memorable heroines, she is unique.

It is very common in literature for the heroine to meet and fall in love with a man in the following situation: she has an accident and he rescues her and restores her to her family. This is what happens in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

In *Jane Eyre* the situation is reversed: Rochester has an accident and Jane comes to his rescue. That is how they meet and the situation repeats itself in various ways later in the novel. This was a very original, dangerous and clearly feminist choice. It was original because it had hardly ever been done before. It was therefore dangerous because readers, being unfamiliar with such a situation in fiction, might find it disturbing or unconvincing. And I think we can assume it was a feminist choice because Charlotte Brontë was willing to take these risks in order to create a truly dynamic and self-sufficient heroine.

Another dangerous and original component in the characterisation of Jane is the fact that she is plain – she is not beautiful or even pretty and yet Charlotte Brontë makes her into one of the most compelling

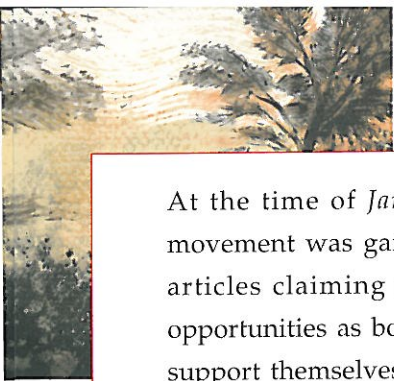
1. How many of the novels that these heroines come from do you know? The novels and their authors are listed on page 159.



The Governess (1844) by Richard Redgrave.

romantic heroines of all time. Rochester's interest in Jane is based on true sympathy, equality and respect.

Jane challenges and criticises him, but she also helps and supports him. It may therefore surprise the reader that she refers to him as her 'master'. This is a disturbing detail, especially since Victorian feminists often compared the situation of women to that of slaves. However, Brontë makes it clear that Jane calls Rochester 'master' voluntarily as an act of love and respect, not because she is forced to by her subservient position in his household.



At the time of *Jane Eyre's* publication, the Victorian feminist movement was gaining strength. Women were writing books and articles claiming that girls should have the same educational opportunities as boys and that women should be able to work and support themselves like men. The first feminist book to make such claims was *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. In it, Wollstonecraft calls for a change in the relationships between women and men and the ideal relationship she described is very like the one that Charlotte Brontë dramatised in *Jane Eyre* fifty-five years later.

FCE 1 Comprehension check

For questions 1-7, choose the best answer – A, B, C or D.

- 1 *Jane Eyre* and *Emma Bovary* are both
 - A different from most other characters in novels.
 - B like most other female characters.
 - C memorable female protagonists.
 - D feminist characters in novels.
- 2 In the past, heroines usually loved men who
 - A were intelligent and handsome.
 - B saved them from danger.
 - C they had saved from danger.
 - D came from wealthy homes.
- 3 Charlotte Brontë was a bold writer because she
 - A went against her readers' expectations.
 - B had a woman as her protagonist.
 - C wrote about unusual men.
 - D had intelligent women in her book.

- 4 Mr Rochester loved Jane despite her
 - A unexceptional looks.
 - B strong character.
 - C intelligence.
 - D kindness.
- 5 Jane called Mr Rochester 'master' because she felt
 - A as if he owned her physically.
 - B as if he owned her emotionally.
 - C a great amount of admiration for him.
 - D as if he were her teacher in life.
- 6 Which of these statements about the period when *Jane Eyre* was published is NOT true?
 - A Women were still regarded as inferior to men.
 - B Women were given the same opportunities as men.
 - C An important feminist movement was fighting for the rights of women.
 - D Some women writers tried to make people aware of the problems of women.
- 7 Mary Wollstonecraft described her ideal relationship between men and women which
 - A was different from what Victorian feminists wanted.
 - B was how *Jane Eyre* and Mr Rochester were together.
 - C was not how *Jane Eyre* and Mr Rochester were together.
 - D is not how men and women are today.