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Charlotte Brontë

Jane Eyre

The life of Charlotte Brontë

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Adapted by Christopher Hall

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Activities by Adeline Richards

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Illustrated by Anna and Elena Balusso

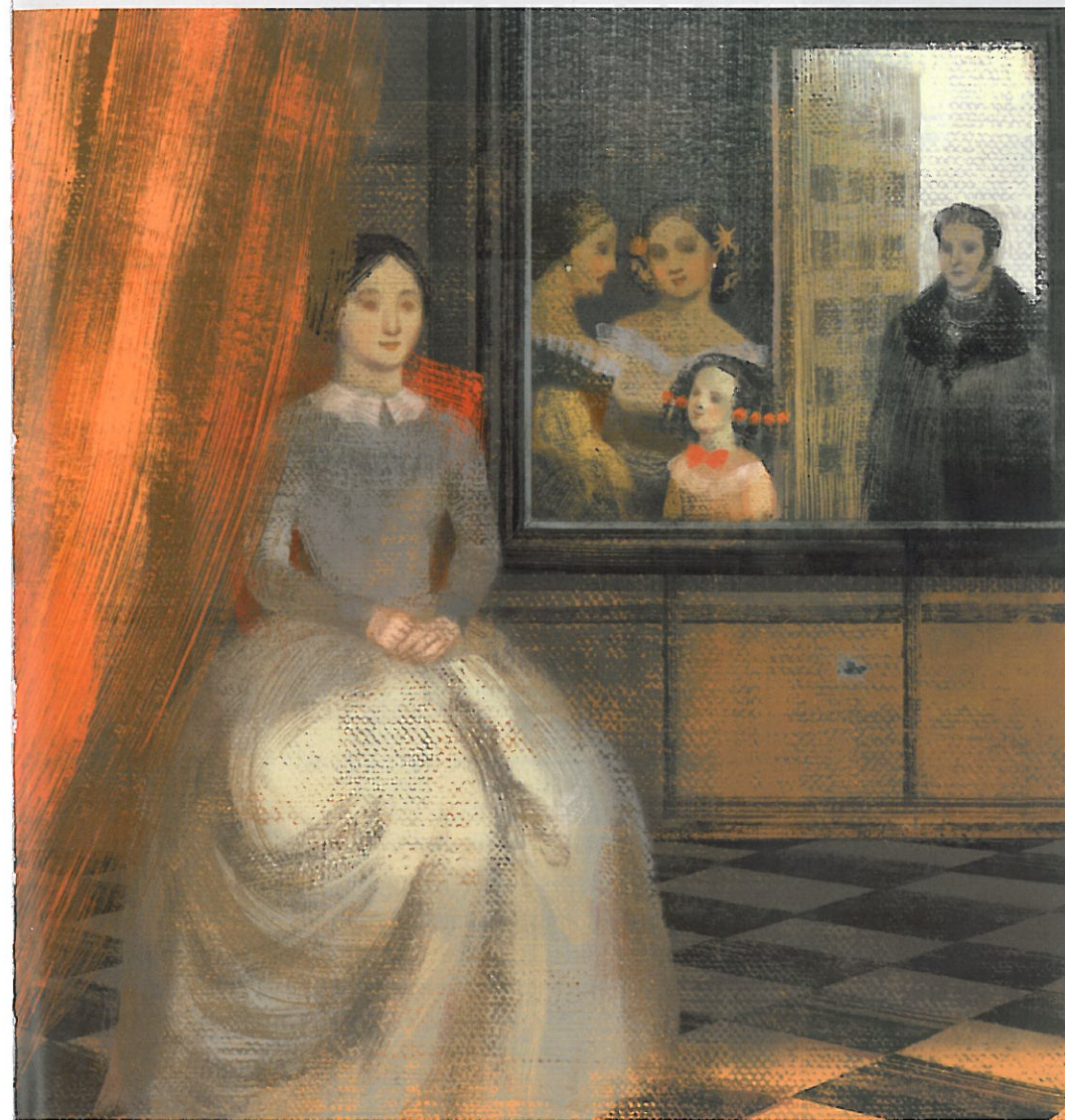
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Knihovna Jabok



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Parts 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 14 are recorded on the accompanying CD.

Parts 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13 are downloadable from our website:

www.cideb.it or www.blackcat-cideb.com.



Charlotte Brontë (1850) by George Richmond.

The Life of Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë (1816-55) was the third of Reverend Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell's six children. When Charlotte was four years old, the family moved to Haworth, a village on the bleak and windswept Yorkshire moors. In 1821, Charlotte's mother died of cancer and her aunt Elizabeth Branwell came to Haworth parsonage to take care of the children. She was a very strict cold woman with stern Calvinistic religious views, which meant that she was constantly threatening the children with hell and eternal punishment. In 1825, a servant named Tabitha Ackroyd came to live with the family and help bring up the children. Tabitha told them stories of ghosts and magic. Aunt Elizabeth's stern religion and Tabitha's stories of the supernatural both contributed to the growing imaginations of Charlotte and her younger sisters Emily and Anne,

all of whom would eventually become published poets and novelists. They had access to their father's extensive library and there they read Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Scott, Aesop's fables, *The Thousand and One Nights* and the Bible.

All the girls in the family except the youngest, Anne, attended the Cowan Bridge School for Clergymen's Daughters. Lowood, in *Jane Eyre*, is based on Cowan Bridge. There the food was inadequate and the rooms were cold. Conditions were so bad that many girls developed tuberculosis, among them Charlotte's elder sisters Maria and Elizabeth, both of whom died of the disease in 1825, when Charlotte was nine years old. After their deaths, Charlotte and Emily were withdrawn from the school and continued their education at home.

In June 1826, Mr Brontë returned from a journey with a present of twelve wooden soldiers for his son Branwell. Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne used these toy soldiers as the characters in an epic



Haworth Parsonage, the home of Patrick Brontë and his family.



The Brontë Sisters (about 1834) by their brother Patrick Branwell Brontë.
From the left: Anne, Emily and Charlotte.

drama of their own creation. The story was full of violence, magic and melodrama, and they recorded it in tiny homemade books.

Despite their obvious brilliance, none of the Brontë children did well in the world of work. The girls worked as governesses, the only employment option open to young ladies at the time; Branwell tried to become a painter, but failed. In February 1842, Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels and stayed at a boarding school run by Mr Constantin Heger and his wife. After nine months, the girls returned to Haworth, because their aunt Elizabeth was ill, but they went back to Brussels in 1843 and stayed until the following January. For most of this time, Charlotte was anxious and melancholy, and her situation was made worse by the fact that she had fallen in love with Mr Heger. When she returned to England, she wrote letters to him, but he did not reply.

For years Charlotte had been writing poetry. In 1845, when she discovered that her sister Emily also wrote poems, she suggested to Emily and Anne that they write a volume of poems together and try to get it published. Emily was reluctant, but finally agreed on condition that they publish under pseudonyms. *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* appeared in 1846. By this time, Charlotte had completed a novel entitled *The Professor* and based on her time in Brussels with Mr Heger. However, publishing houses rejected the novel and it was not published until 1857, two years after Charlotte's death. Charlotte then started work on *Jane Eyre*, which was accepted and appeared in 1847, two months before the publication of Emily's novel *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey*.

Jane Eyre was a great success. The public was very curious about the authors of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* and some reviewers thought that they might be the same person. The novels, like the poems, were published under male pseudonyms, but in July 1848, in order to stop rumours that the novels were all written by the same person, the Brontë sisters revealed their identities to the public.

Charlotte's moment of happiness about her fame and acclaim was soon lost in deep family sadness. In September 1848, Branwell died of alcoholism. Emily died of tuberculosis in December 1848 and Anne died of the same disease in May of the following year. Charlotte was now alone with her father, who was full of sorrow and going blind. She published two more novels: *Shirley* in 1849 and *Villette* in 1853. In 1854, at the age of thirty-eight, she married her father's curate, the Reverend Arthur Bell Nichols, despite her father's opposition. Charlotte died the following March, in the early stages of pregnancy.

Jane Eyre is and always has been one of the best loved novels in English literature. Its heroine and narrator is Jane, a poor, plain,

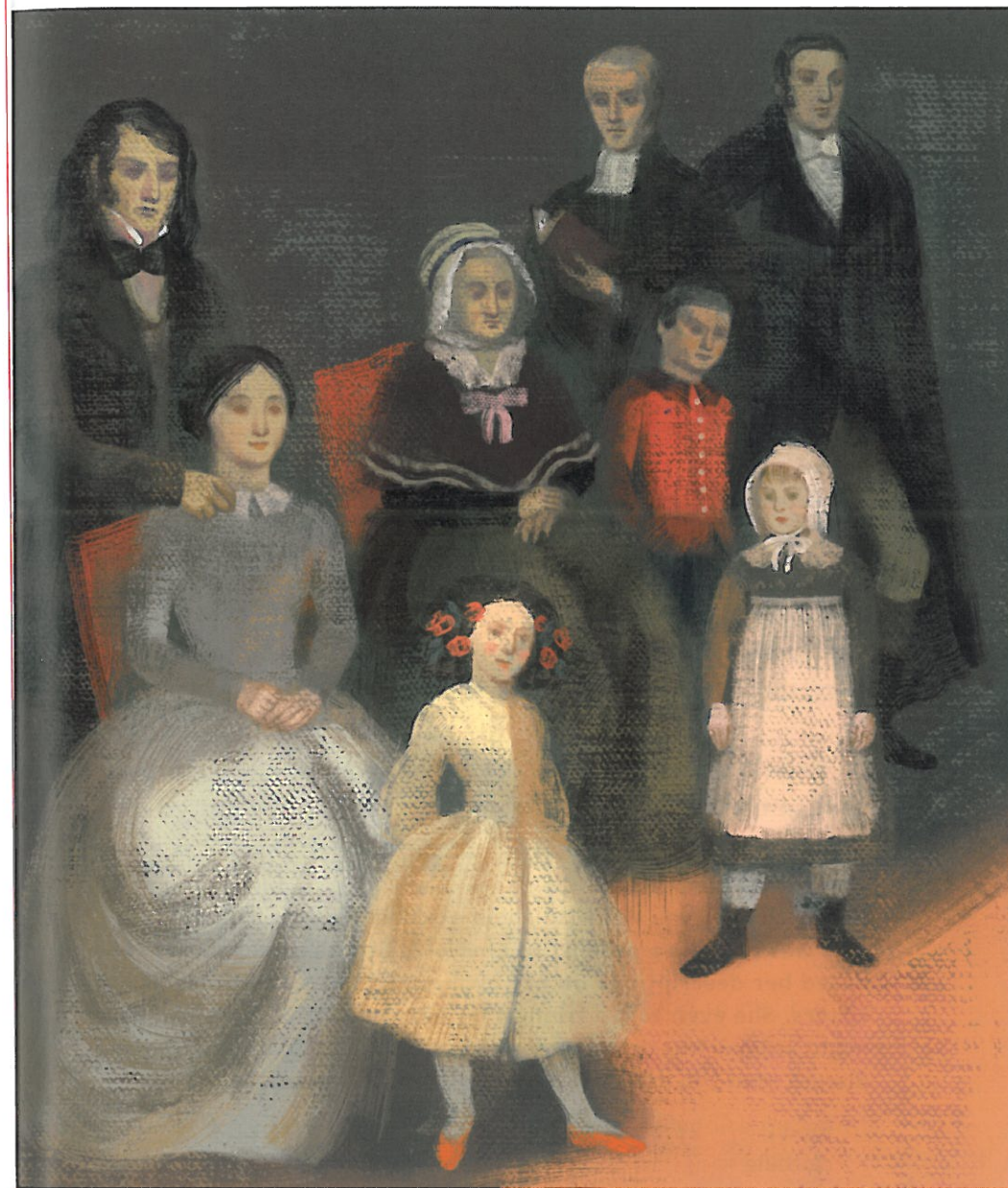
orphan girl who, at the beginning of her story, has nothing except intelligence, wit, moral seriousness, rebelliousness, an independent spirit and romantic ideals. Generations of readers have followed the story of Jane's life with eager interest. Over twenty films have been made of the story and eight television series. In 1938, the novel *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier was partially inspired by *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, which appeared in 1966, is told from the point of view of Bertha Mason and gives a completely different interpretation of events from that in the original Brontë novel. The fascination of *Jane Eyre* continues to this day: since 1997, seven novels based on its events have been published, two TV series have been produced and a musical version, an opera version, a ballet version have been staged.

1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 How many children were in Charlotte's family?
- 2 How many of them wrote famous novels?
- 3 What were the titles of these novels?
- 4 Who wrote poetry?
- 5 When was Charlotte born?
- 6 Where did she grow up?
- 7 How did Maria and Elizabeth die?
- 8 What kind of work did Charlotte do?
- 9 Who were Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell?
- 10 Was *Jane Eyre* successful when it first appeared?
- 11 How and when did Emily and Anne die?
- 12 Who did Charlotte marry?
- 13 What kind of person is the heroine of *Jane Eyre*?
- 14 Is *Jane Eyre* still a popular novel?

The Characters



From top left to right: Mr Rochester, Jane, Adèle, Mrs Fairfax, St John, Mason, John Reed, Helen Burns.