

# Charlotte Brontë

## (1816-1855)

### Biography

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816, the third daughter of Reverend Patrick Brontë and his wife Maria, while her sisters Emily and Anne were born in 1818 and 1820 respectively.

In 1826, the Brontë siblings started the creation of an imaginary world, writing poetry and stories about it. In 1831 Charlotte became a pupil at the school of Roe Head, where she returned as governess in 1835. She worked as a governess in various families in 1839, while later on she opened her own school with her sister Emily.

In 1846 the Brontë sisters self-financed the publication of their poems under the pseudonyms of Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily) and Acton (Anne) Bell, while the following year *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* by her sister Emily were published.

In 1853 Charlotte's *Villette* appeared, then in 1854 she got married but she died a few months later.

Her first novel *The Professor* was published posthumously in 1857.

### *Jane Eyre* (1847)

The novel is rich in Romantic, Gothic and Realistic elements. It can also be considered a coming-of-age novel where the heroine is followed from her childhood through to womanhood and marriage:

- **a travel story:** the character follows a straight path;
- **higher stage:** she climbs to a final successful position;
- **choices:** through dramatic choices she becomes experienced and achieves success in life.

She is a strong-willed woman, who undergoes numerous moral and concrete trials in order to achieve self-fulfilment. Jane is a governess, a familiar figure for the Victorians. The governess was middle-class, teaching children of wealthy families. She had a borderline profile, since she had to transmit traditional Victorian values, but she was an independent and respectable woman on the job market. In the novel, *Jane Eyre* represents the possibility for middle-class women to improve their social condition through true love-marriage. Yet, *Jane Eyre* explores the difficulties and perils of occupying a marginal social position that is definitely unstable, contradictory and causes anxiety.

Jane's story is in the form of a **fictional autobiography**. The eponymous heroine is neither rich nor attractive and lives her first difficult experiences at Mrs Reed's house and then at Lowood asylum. She becomes a governess at Mr Rochester's estate: here she falls in love with him and accepts to marry him. Unfortunately he hides a secret, Bertha, his mad wife in the attic, and on the day of his wedding with Jane, Bertha's brother reveals Rochester is a potential bigamist. In the last part of the novel Jane takes shelter at the Rivers' house, where Saint-John Rivers proposes to her even if not really in love: she refuses.

There is a twist in the story: she is left a legacy and discovers a kinship with the Rivers. Therefore, feeling more equal to Mr Rochester, because endowed with a family and money, she goes back to him to find out that he desperately needs her. He was in fact blinded and disabled when trying to save his wife who had set fire to the house and had died in its flames. Of course, they will now get married. *Jane Eyre* is considered a **major feminist novel** because it criticises conventional Victorian views on the role of women. Brontë stresses the difficulties of female integration into society: Jane's 'coming-of-age' in fact depends on her learning to understand the world/society through learning to understand and accept herself. In particular, Charlotte Brontë deals with such themes as equality between the sexes, woman's independence and divorce. Yet, she is not totally rebellious as the book ends with a marriage within the boundaries of the Victorian morality.