

BBC BITESIZE – JANE EYRE Episode 3

Carl: Hello, and welcome to the Bitesize English literature podcast. If you want to get all the episodes in this podcast, make sure you download the BBC Sounds app.

Jean: While you're in the BBC Sounds app, there's loads of other things you can use to help you with your revision. Full versions of some of the texts you might be studying, revision playlists and other Bitesize podcast series to help with different GCSE subjects.

In this series, we're heading to Northern England in the 19th century to explore Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. I'm Jean Menzies.

Carl: And I'm Carl Anka.

Jean: In this episode, we're taking a closer look at more of the characters within Jane Eyre. In Episode Two we shone the spotlight on Jane Eyre herself. And in this episode, we're going to find out more about Mr Rochester and St John Rivers.

Carl: We've heard a little bit about Mr Rochester already in episode two, and we know that he is the master of Thornfield Hall, where Jane works as a governess and therefore he has a large fortune.

Extract:

"Here is Miss Eyre, sir," said Mrs Fairfax, in her quiet way. He bowed, still not taking his eyes from the group of the dog and child "Let Miss Eyre be seated," said he: and there was something in the forced stiff bow, in the impatient yet formal tone, which seemed further to express, "What the deuce is it to me whether Miss Eyre be there or not? At this moment I am not disposed to accost her."

Carl: Charlotte Brontë describes him as being aloof, which is him being quite cold and unfriendly, as well as rugged, intelligent and witty, and we can certainly hear his aloofness in what we've just heard from Jane. The very first meeting when Mr Rochester falls off his horse, and their next couple of meetings solidify the idea that this man is indeed aloof, wild and outspoken. But he wants to spend time with Jane and they spend their evenings arguing and discussing topical issues. We just know she's going to fall in love with him. It's really the first time anyone's taken her seriously as an adult. And in a way it's a little bit manipulative of him.

Extract:

"Well, tonight, I excuse you. But understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing room every evening. It is my wish, don't neglect it."

Jean: So this is what Mr Rochester says to Jane about her joining him and his guests in the drawing room. But one of those guests is Blanche Ingram who openly wants to be the next

Mrs Rochester herself. And he flirts with her and even pretends he's going to marry Blanche. We know later that this is to make Jane jealous so that she'll confess her love, but at the time, it does seem like he's going to marry Blanche.

Carl: However, Mr Rochester eventually declares his love for Jane too, and says they must get married right away. But then we know what happens next - at the altar, we find out Mr Rochester is already married. And that's where we see an angry and self-pitying version of him.

Extract:

"You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human."

Jean: So that's Jane Eyre telling us what Mr Rochester said when he first takes her to see Bertha. He is not apologetic about the situation. He is just so mad that he got found out basically, and he really doesn't believe in his marriage to Bertha anymore. Like we just heard he refers to her as not even being human, which is reflective of the times and a complex attitude that we'll look at more in episode seven. Mr Rochester is desperate for Jane to stay with him, and quite selfishly pleads with her and stresses his love. But Jane can't do it.

Carl: And that's the last we hear from Mr Rochester for a while, until Jane believes that she hears him calling out to her in a dream and she heads back to find out that there's been a terrible fire. Mr Rochester has lost his sight.

Extract:

Jane, you think me I dare say, an irreligious dog. But my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent god of this earth just now. He sees not as man sees but far clearer. Judges not as man judges, but far more wisely. I did wrong.

Jean: At the end, he does seem truly to be sorry, he seems like he's learned a lot when Jane left. He loses his sight trying to save Bertha from the fire and that's the same Bertha he treated so poorly earlier and spoke of in such an awful manner.

Carl: Rochester is definitely a complex character. But in some ways this does show he has truly changed. He has his hero moment here. He put other people's safety before his and he truly repents for his past actions. He does all this without knowing that Jane is going to come back to him. So we know it's for the right reasons as well. Now I don't want to come off too lightly on him. I'm always really confused as to what his plan was. If he did marry Jane, how long did he think he'd be able to get away with Jane not realising his first wife was locked in the attic.

Jean: Especially when it becomes officially her house and she's not just an employee there. She's not going to wander around and take a look?

Carl: He didn't really think that one through. However, the true change of the character is what was needed for Jane. And throughout the book, it becomes quite obvious that Mr Rochester

truly does love Jane. He cries when he hears her voice, and he can't believe that she has come back for him.

Jean: It's fair to say he does come around in the end, and Jane herself tells us how happy her life is over the next 10 years with him. So I'm going to trust Jane's judgement on this one. And I think it's also really important that by the time she does come to him, she's an independent woman of means, because Jane needed to feel like his equal. Charlotte Bronte needed that for Jane too.

Carl: We shall move on to the next main character St John Rivers.

Extract:

"Hannah," said Mr St. John, at last, "let her sit there at present, and ask her no questions; in ten minutes more, give her the remainder of that milk and bread. Mary and Diana, let us go into the parlour and talk the matter over."

Jean: So this is Jane Eyre telling us what St John Rivers has said. When we first meet St John he's allowing Jane Eyre into his home and helping to nurse her back to health along with his sisters. He also arranges for Jane to become a teacher at the local charitable school. And it's clear from the beginning that he's a man who's very committed to his religion.

Carl: He's protective of his family and strives to do the right thing, whether it's perfectly right for him to do that or not. St John Rivers is quite a cold hearted character.

Jean: So when Jane starts managing the local school, it's here she sees that St John is completely in love with Rosamond Oliver, another lady who lives in the village, but as you just said, he's so set on doing the right thing that he doesn't consider what's right for him.

Extract:

His chest heaved once, as if his large heart weary of despotic constriction, had expanded despite the will and made a vigorous bound for the attainment of liberty. But he curbed it, I think, as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed.

Carl: that bit is Jane speaking about St. John's love for Rosamond and how he curbs that love.

Jean: Well, St John believes that God has called him to become a missionary in India, which was a British colony at this point in time. And he doesn't believe that Rosamond would make a good missionary's wife, so he refuses to act on his feelings and instead removes himself from Rosamond and becomes cold-hearted and distant.

Carl: He's extremely pious and determined to become a missionary in India which, as mentioned, was a British colony at the time. Actually, the British were forcibly introducing religion and customs. St. John eventually proposes to Jane because he believes that she will be a good missionary's wife. Love doesn't factor into it, because he's so set on being the

person he ought to be as a missionary.

Jean: And that's not for Jane. She refuses his proposal because she cannot marry without love. And that seems to confuse St. John and make him extremely cold towards her. This is what St John said to Jane:

Extract:

"God and nature intended you for missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you. You are formed for labour, not for love."

Jean: So, what you just heard there sums up this cold heartedness we keep mentioning, "You are formed for labour, not love, he says to Jane," suggesting that no one will ever love her.

Carl: It's all insulting and reductive when he says this, his belief is that women can be for one thing or the other: labour or love. Now when he says labour St John is talking about labour in the sense of work, rather than labour as in childbirth. In St John Rivers' eyes, a woman's only good for work or love. St John tries to tell Jane that she is good for labour, and love isn't something that she will receive. There's a lot of Jane being called plain that feeds into this as well. St. John believes that because Jane is so plain that makes her more suitable to be a missionary's wife.

Jean: He treats her pretty badly, but in a different way from how we heard about Mr Rochester treating her badly earlier on. Jane, in the meantime, has already felt love from Mr Rochester. So it means she knows that it exists and she needs it if she's going to get married. And she obviously knows it's not one or the other.

Carl: Yes, there's a really interesting contrast between Mr Rochester and St John Rivers. As the fiery free Mr Rochester declares his love for Jane and that's juxtaposed with the cold hearted St John Rivers who is so determined in his path that he will not stray. Not even for love.

Jean: Someone once explained juxtaposition to me as being able to see the light of the stars only because of the darkness of the space around them. When you put the two things together that are different, the contrast stands out even more when you see them together. It's really nice way of putting it and that's something we've come to expect from Charlotte Bronte. She uses beautiful imagery and symbolism around these characters, St John and Mr Rochester. Fire features a number of times in the story around the fiery and passionate Mr Rochester, whereas there is a cold and snowy imagery painted around the reserved and controlled St John Rivers, really highlighting those personality traits.

Carl: Charlotte Bronte always paints a full picture. She knows what she's doing when she's telling a story.

Jean: Thank you so much for listening to the Bitesize English literature podcast. In Episode

Four, we'll carry on looking at the characters in *Jane Eyre*. We'll focus on Helen Burns, Mrs Reed and Bertha. You can listen now on BBC Sounds.