

Charlotte Brontë:  
*Jane Eyre*

# Charlotte Brontë's life

- Charlotte had 2 sisters and a brother. They were children of an Irish clergyman. They lived in a lonely and isolated place and were educated at home.
- After working as a governess, Charlotte went to Brussels to learn French and then worked there.
- In 1854 she married, but her husband died one year later, at 39.
- She published *Jane Eyre* in 1847 and it was scandalous because it focused on the passion of a respectable woman.

# *Jane Eyre*: the plot

- Jane Eyre tells the story of an orphan girl who grows up in a hostile house: she spent her childhood with her aunt and then at a boarding school for the poor.
- She becomes a governess (like Charlotte) to a child at the home of the rich Mr. Rochester.
- She falls in love with Rochester and they are about to marry but just before the wedding she finds out that he is already married and that his crazy wife, Bertha Mason, is hidden in the attic.
- Jane doesn't want to be Rochester's lover, so she leaves him. At the end, when Berta dies after burning their house, Jane goes back to Rochester (who has become blind) and also gets an inheritance.

# The protagonist: Jane



- During the Victorian Age, the woman was seen as the angel of home.
- So Jane Eyre was a new kind of heroine: she is an INDEPENDENT and UNCONVENTIONAL woman. In fact Charlotte Bronte wrote: “conventionality is not morality”.
- Jane fights alone and improves her situation.
- This character leaves place to interpretations:
  - 1) She represents Charlotte Bronte and her desire to be loved and to go beyond the roles attributed to women at that time;
  - 2) She criticises society, that gives few opportunities to women who were educated but poor.

It is considered a BILDUNGSROMAN (there is the development of the character) because Jane learns to control **passion** and gives more importance to **reason**.

# Mr. and Mrs. Rochester



Rochester is also a particular hero: he is hard, rough and not handsome, not the typical romantic hero.

Because of this dark and mysterious appearance, he is fascinating.

He reveals to Jane his true personality: he is very sensitive and thoughtful.

Bertha is presented as mad, aggressive and dangerous for the others and for herself: in fact at the end of the story she sets fire to the house.

In the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) the writer **Jean Rhys** re-wrote Bertha's story and presents Bertha as a Creole born in the Caribbean.

# Gothic atmosphere

- Jane Eyre is not a Gothic novel in the complete sense of the word (Gothic novels were set in past lands and presented supernatural, mystery and terror elements, like **Horace Walpole's** *Castle of Otranto*), but has some elements of the Gothic novel:
  - 1) There is a mystery about Rochester's past;
  - 2) There is a ghostly atmosphere in his house;
  - 3) There is the appearance of a fortune-teller;
  - 4) There is the secret of Bertha in the attic.Also the love between Jane and Rochester can be considered a typically Gothic element.