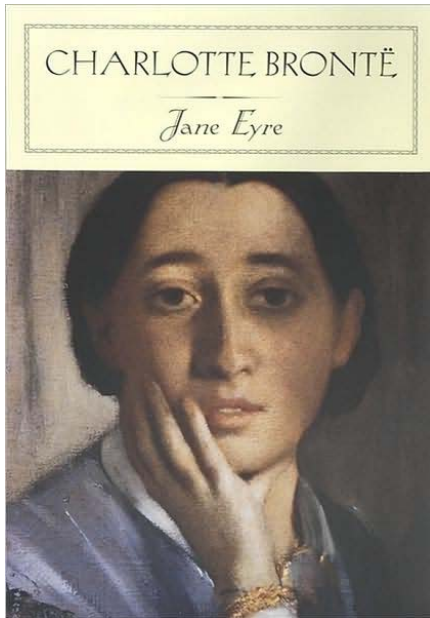


JANE EYRE

by Charlotte Brontë

First published in 1847 in England

Reviewed by Mona Hall



How about another classic? During the holidays I read aloud with my son Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. That's the blessing of not having a television: you have time to read aloud!

It's a love story with a Dickensian style happy ending. The poor orphan girl finds relatives, inherits a rich uncle and marries the man she loves. Sounds too sweet? Oh no, in Brontë's capable hands this yucky sounding plot turns out to be absolutely lovely reading. Why not make the readers feel good by giving a happy end to the story! And why not make them a little better people by describing morally uplifting characters! This sounds of course rather old fashioned and moralistic, but I think, it's very nice. Certainly it's different from the moral grimness in much of the modern fiction.

Jane Eyre was written in Victorian England. The modern readers don't take it as a feminist position statement against the woman's low status, but nevertheless it is there. In two different discussions with the main male characters Mr. Rochester and Mr. Rivers Jane feels that she is innately equal to them, not because of any status but because of her mental qualities. Due to this feeling of equality Jane is able to say what she thinks, not what she knows the men expect her to say. She can do this even though she is not a boisterous type but rather a shy girl.

Jane knows what she wants. She has a healthy ego. She is loving, giving and humble but she also knows her healthy boundaries. Mr. Rivers wants her to dedicate her life to missionary work which she refuses. She doesn't want only to live for others but recognises her need to develop her own talents, too. *Jane Eyre* is a portrait of a mentally, emotionally and above all, morally healthy person. She for example, has the capacity to forgive her guardian-foster mother Mrs. Reed all her wrong doings. Thanks to her moral qualities, Jane becomes a happy person in spite of the hardships on her path.

During the reading I realized that a story (or this particular story) can be looked at as if it were a dream. In dream interpretation you see all the characters as if they were different aspects of the dreamer. We try to balance between our feelings and thinking to find the right actions (Jane). We have burning passions (Mr. Rochester). We sometimes can get too zealous with our ideals and beliefs (Mr. Rivers). We might shun outsiders in our need to benefit our own family (Mrs. Reed). We might even have some well hidden madness (Mrs. Rochester).

Then comes the nightmarish huge fire – symbol of transformation and purification – the big mansion burns down and the configuration between the main characters is changed.

All along the story the landscape and the weather mirror the inner landscape and feelings of the main characters. There is the tall chestnut tree broken by a thunder bolt, suffering like Mr. Rochester. And how cold the weather is when Jane doesn't get the nurturing she needs!

It's a very coherent story with several good universal themes to think about. Of course, it's with good reasons certain books become classics.