

# Understanding jane eyre through berthamason



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One reason why Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, is a huge success is because of the intriguing narrator-reader dynamic. The narrator – Jane herself – develops a certain kind of intimacy with the readers throughout the autobiography. Although readers may feel as if they have a strong understanding of Jane, there are ambiguous moments in the text that leave the readers questioning the entirety of Jane's character. While it is true that readers know quite a bit about her thoughts, they know very little about her subconscious desires. Using Freud's notion of the subconscious, and Bertha Mason as the key to understanding the narrator's deepest desires, readers can develop a complete characterization of the narrator. Hence, *Jane Eyre* is often acclaimed for its intimate characterization of its pinnacle character created through numerous asides with the readers, consequently developing a seemingly sophisticated understanding of the narrator. However, it appears that readers are intimate only with Jane's conscious angelic self, and distant with her unconscious demonic half, thus begging readers to question if they can ever truly understand all aspects of the narrator. Although, if readers analyze Bertha Mason to achieve a complete understanding of Jane's character, then they can form a hypothesis as to why she marries poor Mr. Rochester at the end of the novel. The intimacy between the narrator's angelic side and the reader stems from Jane addressing the reader throughout her autobiography. In one instance, the narrator prays for the readers' happiness. After suffering hardships, she says: "Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonised as in that hour left my lips" (Brontë 370). The readers have become like friends to Jane as she recognizes

the readers as more than mere people following her story at this point in her story. She hopes that the readers do not feel what she felt that day, demonstrating her mindfulness for the readers, further developing the intimate relationship that has been building since the first time she addresses them. Subsequently, readers can see the angelic aspect of Jane's character. She portrays the qualities of the Victorian angel of the house: loving and moral. Jane is not seen full of hatred for the world and blaming others for her misfortunes and suffering. Instead, she channels her sadness into kind prayers for the readers, making readers see her as an honest and lovable character. Hence, Jane addresses the reader to develop an intimate bond between her likeable self and the reader. It would be incorrect to say that the readers have a sophisticated understanding of Jane only by analyzing her angelic persona, as there is also her demonic persona to consider. Many readers may not even consider her sinister side because the narrator purposefully does not build intimacy with readers through her antithetical persona. Hence, readers are left in the dark and are lost when trying to understand her inner thoughts during ambiguous moments in the text. If, however, readers consider analyzing Bertha Mason alongside with Jane Eyre, then they may have a more comprehensive understanding about the entirety of the narrator. Bertha can be interpreted as Jane's double because she can be seen to embody all of Jane's subconscious desires, and also render those desires into concrete actions. Thus, the ambiguous moments in the text can be explained using Bertha as the key to understanding Jane's true inner thoughts. For example, when Jane slowly wakes up from her dreams, she sees the ghost-like Bertha trying on Jane's wedding veil. She then removes it from her head and rips it into two parts,

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trampling on it afterwards (327). Bertha taking off the wedding veil and ripping it apart reflects Jane's inner thoughts. Her doubts about this sudden marriage materializes in the form of Bertha Mason. Jane is hesitant if she should marry Mr. Rochester at that point in time because deep down she knows that she has not completely matured enough in this coming-of-age story. She does not know "where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday . . . [and] where were her prospects" anymore (341). She later tells Mr. Rochester that "[she] must change too" and there "is no doubt of that" (346). Since she has not found her fully matured self yet, nor knows about her prospects in life, her subconscious manifests itself in the form of Bertha to destroy the wedding veil - thus metamorphically halting the wedding. Her leaving Thornfield further supports the claim that Jane is not yet ready to settle down and marry, but must instead continue to mature. Only when she has discovered herself, will her subconscious allow her to marry Mr. Rochester. Thus, using Bertha Mason as an outlet for Jane's subconscious thoughts, readers can better grasp the entirety of the narrator's character to decipher ambiguous moments in the text. Furthermore, Bertha can also be used to explain Jane's strange dreams, providing readers a way to interpret her subconscious desires. For instance, Jane has a nightmare about Thornfield Hall in ruins the night before her wedding. She describes it as a "dreary ruin" where nothing remained but "a shell-like wall [that is] very high and very fragile-looking" (325). Jane wakes up from her dreams after losing her balance climbing up the crumbling wall trying to look for Mr. Rochester (326). Jane does not provide any possible reasons why she has a horrible dream of Thornfield Hall in ruins, nor does she ever go back to offer an explanation. Thus, readers are proven to be not intimate enough with Jane to

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understand all aspects of her character. However, analyzing Bertha can provide a possible interpretation of her dream. During Jane's return to Thornfield, readers can see that Jane's dreams become reality. She discovers that there was a great fire that destroyed Thornfield Hall. Bertha had snuck out of her prison when Grace Poole was asleep and set ablaze the hangings of the room beside hers, and then to the room Jane used to sleep in (492). During this unfortunate night, the house burns down with "an immense quantity of valuable property destroyed [with] hardly any of the furniture [being] saved," which leaves Mr. Rochester poor (491). On the other hand, Jane is rich due to her uncle leaving her a fortune of "five thousand pounds" (501). She even offers to "build a house of [her] own close up to [Mr. Rochester's] door" so that he "may come and sit in [her] parlour when [he] want[s] company [in the] evening" (501). In addition to the destruction of Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester becomes "blind, and a cripple" as he damages both eyes and loses a hand in the house fire, leaving him dependant on those around him (494). Due to Bertha's embodiment of Jane's subconscious desires, she intentionally destroys all Mr. Rochester's property and cripples him. Her actions can be interpreted as Jane's subconscious desire to be Mr. Rochester's equal. Since the night of the fire left him poor, and her uncle left her rich, Jane is now on equal footing or higher compared with Mr. Rochester. She no longer has to rely on him paying her or supporting her through his income as she is "independent . . . [and her] own mistress" now (501). Thus, Bertha can again be seen fulfilling Jane's subconscious desires, giving readers an insight on her covert demonic persona. Only after readers use Bertha as the key to understanding the narrator's less intimate half, can they see why she chooses to marry Mr. Rochester in the end - answering the

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shocking line said by Jane: " Reader, I married him" (517). This line can be shocking to many readers because the narrator does not offer reasons as to why she marries him, especially since she is fully independent now. It could even be possible that she herself does not know exactly why she wishes to marry him. Although, after analyzing Bertha - Jane's demonic half - readers can derive a possible explanation. At the time of their first wedding, Jane has not finished maturing in this bildungsroman tale and must discover who she truly is first. Readers can see that she has discovered herself when she says to Mr. Rochester " I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out - I am come back to you" (500). She comes back to him only when she can affirm her identity. Jane also desires to be independent and an equal to Mr. Rochester, which does happen with the help of Bertha setting fire to Thornfield Hall, as it leaves him poor and dependant on those around him. After satisfying both subconscious desires, Bertha - Jane's demonic double - jumps off the roof and dies, metamorphically freeing Jane of any more sinister subconscious desires since they have been all fulfilled. Hence, the narrator forms an intimate bond with the readers through her angelic persona but avoids outwardly expressing her demonic aspect of her character. This misguides readers into thinking that they are truly intimate with the narrator. Thus, readers must do a close reading of Bertha acting as Jane's subconscious to understand why she marries Mr. Rochester, while also developing a comprehensive understanding of the narrator. Therefore, readers should consider analyzing a character's double to grasp a complete understanding of their primary character of focus.