

Loneliness and isolation in jane eyre

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Charlotte Brontë's novel "Jane Eyre", the eponymous protagonist suffers throughout the plot from loneliness and isolation, and these two themes interweave for the duration.

Jane's loneliness and isolation are repeatedly linked to her "physical inferiority", and this phrase is used by Jane to describe herself very early on in the novel. Jane is small, underdeveloped, pale and timid, which often means she finds herself helpless and different to everybody else. These differences thus lead to her isolation, as she feels she is an outcast in society, as well as feeling shy and embarrassed about her inferior appearance. In the opening scene of the novel, we learn that Jane's Master, John Reed, is a tough and prominent character, which is an immediate juxtaposition to Jane as he is not a lonely or isolated character, neither shy nor reserved.

This novel is separated into three parts, each characterised by different stages in Jane's life. These three parts are emphasised by three different place names, which are in themselves very intentional symbols of Jane's loneliness and isolation. The first of these is "Gateshead" where Jane lives with the Reed family. The imagery of a gate here symbolises enclosure and entrapment, and similarly the idea of the head suggests a form of psychological isolation due to the human brain being enclosed in one's head. Secondly, we come across "Lowood School". This glum image of lowness symbolises Jane's social isolation, as she is lower class however she has grown up with the upper class Reed family, and is at a well-respected school. This throws Jane into an incredibly ambiguous social position, which exacerbates her isolation and loneliness, as she feels again no sense of

belonging. Nature is also presented as isolating in this case, which is represented by the imagery of a wood: lonely, mysterious and often negative places to be, showing Jane's discomfort, loneliness and isolation. This idea of nature being isolative is also seen in the metaphor "impassable roads", suggesting that even nature is against Jane, and is attempting to isolate her and prevent her from developing or escaping her loneliness. Thirdly, the name of Jane's place of employment as a governess is "Thornfield". This sharp and painful imagery of a thorn emphasises her loneliness, and similarly the idea of a large open field illustrates Jane's isolation and ambiguous social position, as fields are often vast and isolated: she feels as if she is alone in a field, socially and psychologically.

Throughout the novel, there is evidence that leads one to believe that Jane herself is aware of her alienation, and this may in turn lead to her herself exacerbating her isolation, and making herself even lonelier. For example, when referring to the Reed family, Jane states that "They are not fit to associate with [her]!", showing that she too feels she is inferior to them. Similarly, Jane exclaims that she is "shrined in a double retirement" and that she is a "discord at Gateshead Hall", showing that she has accepted her isolation, and builds barriers in order to prevent those forced upon her (help from people). We also learn that Jane struggles to overcome her loneliness and isolation, as Thornfield Hall is grand and comfortable, with amiable company, yet Jane still seems distant and unhappy.

Bronte makes very effective use of pathetic fallacy, using weather terms such as "grey", "crips" and "sharp winds". The weather is constantly dreary, dangerous or cold, showing Jane's entrapment in which she cannot

escape, which is represented by the fact that the sun is never seen, showing it cannot breakthrough the blanket of bad weather, referring to the fact that Jane cannot escape her isolation and loneliness. The weather is also responsible for causing isolation in the form of death, as it brings the disease typhus with it.

Within any novel, a vital component is setting. In "Jane Eyre", the setting in its entirety represents Jane's loneliness and isolation, and also contributes to her loneliness and isolation, in cases making it worse. This is seen very early on in the novel, when we learn that instead of playing with the other children in the Reed family, Jane is reading behind "Scarlet drapes". This conveys the overpowering darkness of the interior of Gateshead Hall, and we learn also that the house is very large and often overwhelming for Jane, representative of life in general for her at this stage (reading is also a very solitary activity). Furthermore, on a more general note, the setting is often "bland", there is a scene involving "empty hills stretching for miles" and the grand halls she both lives and works in are surrounded by forest and woodland, as well as acres of land, representing the fact that Jane feels as if she is cut off from the outside world, as if she is a distant figure in life. There is also nothing comforting about any of the settings that are mentioned, for example even her home at Gateshead is not comfortable for her, with rooms such as "the red room" and the fact she is locked in it symbolizing isolation, as she feels she is locked away from the outside world. The red room could also be a more sinister representation in the form of the womb, and the entrapment and isolation in the womb, and the fact that Jane is helpless and cannot

escape her isolation is illustrated by the fact that it is not the baby's decision when to leave its mother's womb.

The theme of neglect is very common within the plot, which is one of the root causes of Jane's isolation, and this neglect helps to further isolate Jane. This neglect is most prominent at Lowood School, as Jane is constantly cold and hungry living of "half a slice of bread" for dinner, and no lunch. Breakfast is in one case burnt porridge, which Jane describes as inedible. This hunger is also very evident when the girls think of a one-off lunch of bread, butter and cheese as a treat, as a surprise. Similarly, at Gateshead, Jane is neglected by Mrs Reed and the two girls of the family, and is often insulted and excluded, and even beaten with a book in one case by John Reed. A perfect example of Jane's neglect at Gateshead is when she decides to isolate herself by reading behind large curtains, as she feels neglected by the family, as well as feeling she is not worthy of their company. Also, Jane's imprisonment in the red room shows her neglect within the house, as well as Mrs Reed wanting her to leave to boarding school. Boarding school in general is very isolated and entrapping, and can often damage social skills.

In conclusion, Charlotte Bronte uses a plethora of linguistic devices, imagery and a very effective setting to emphasise Jane's loneliness and isolation, and this can be interpreted as an interpretation of Bronte's own feelings as a child.