NB All quotes and page numbers refer to the 1996 Penguin Classics edition.

An important aspect of the novel is how Jane’s life is influenced and shaped by the attitudes and actions of certain male characters. The characters with the most important influence on her are Mr Rochester and St John Rivers.

First meetings

Read closely the first meetings of both characters with Jane and make notes on the effects of:

1. the context and tone of each meeting - who needs help from whom in each meeting?
2. the interactions and dialogue between characters
3. the effect of having a first person narrator
4. Brontë’s use of imagery and symbolism.

First meeting with Mr Rochester, Chapter 12 (p.127), starting at, ‘On the hill-top above me sat the rising moon; to ‘Like heath that, in the wilderness, The wild wind whirls away.’

First meeting with St John Rivers, Chapter 28 (p.376), starting at, ‘This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering - a throe of true despair -’ to the end of the chapter.

NB The Gytrash was a large, black, dog found in lonely places at dusk, in superstition.

Proposals

Compare the marriage proposals that each man makes to Jane and using the prompts that follow for each character, make notes on:

1. the feelings the men have for Jane and reasons for proposing
2. the settings of the proposals and any symbolism involved
3. Jane’s reaction to each proposal
4. each man’s reaction to the other woman he might marry.

Mr Rochester: Read chapters 23 and 37 for his proposals and comment on:

- Garden of Eden
- moths attracted to danger
- pathetic fallacy
- change in names used
- deception regarding Blanche Ingram
- how both chapters refer to the chestnut tree struck by lightning just after his first marriage proposal to Jane.
St John Rivers: Read chapters 34 and 35 for his proposals and comment on:

- his name
- religious fervour and imagery
- the coldness of his appearance
- behaviour and kisses
- references to white
- war imagery for Miss Oliver’s marriage to another man
- natural imagery and the sudden sound of Rochester calling Jane’s name.

Heroes or villains?

Compare these two men and decide how far each is the ‘hero’ of the novel, and how far each is the ‘villain’ in relation to the following:

1. taking Jane in and giving her employment as a governess/teacher
2. choosing Jane to be his wife and hiding/admitting the true situation
3. the power each exerts to attract Jane to him (compare the end of Chapter 35 with the opening of Chapter 36).

Task

Write a profile of both these male characters. Include information about:

1. their appearance
2. their attitudes
3. importance to the plot and to the narrative of Jane’s life
4. the kind of imagery Brontë uses to add depth of meaning to their actions
5. their dialogue in interactions with Jane and other characters.

Extension activity: In Chapter 37 Mr Rochester calls himself ‘Vulcan - a real blacksmith’ and St John ‘graceful Apollo’. Find out who these are: how accurate are Rochester’s metaphors?
For a higher grade, you could link Mr Rochester to the Romantic idea of the Byronic hero: derived from the poet Lord Byron (1788-1824), based on characters in his poems, and to some extent on his own life. A Byronic hero is:

- considered attractive though not conventionally handsome
- someone with a defect (Byron had a club foot) which is a sign of an inner flaw
- an outcast, with a streak of self-destruction in his personality
- always searching for an elusive happiness.

Use the following additional passages to help you decide how far Charlotte Brontë wants you to see Mr Rochester as a Byronic hero. If so, how does he have to change in the last few chapters to make him a suitable husband for the now independent woman Jane Eyre?

**Chapter 15, p. 167**

But I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former faults of morality (I say former, for now he seemed corrected of them) had their source in some cruel cross of fate. I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged.

**Chapter 17, p. 198**

My master’s colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes and strong features, firm, grim mouth - all energy, decision, will - were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me: they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me, - that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him:

**Chapter 18, p. 213**

And as for the vague something - was it a sinister or a sorrowful, a designing or a desponding expression? - that opened upon a careful observer, now and then, in his eye, and closed again before one could fathom the strange depth partially disclosed;

**Chapter 27, p. 348**

‘What did I do, Jane? I transformed myself into a Will-o’-the-wisp. Where did I go? I pursued wanderings as wild as those of the March-spirit. I sought the Continent, and went devious through all its lands. My fixed desire was to seek a good and intelligent woman, whom I could love: a contrast to the fury I left at Thornfield.’

**Chapter 37, p. 479**

But in his countenance, I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding - that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson.
Extension activity: Go back to Chapter 17 and continue reading from, ‘Who would not be the Rizzio of so divine a Mary?’ to the end of the chapter. Compare Blanche’s outspoken views on men here with her sombre response after meeting the gypsy fortune-teller/Mr Rochester at the end of Chapter 18.

Other male characters: There are four other important male characters. Starting with the chapters suggested, find information from the novel that will help you write a profile of each one. Also, note the role each has in shaping Jane’s life:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John Reed</th>
<th>What is John’s role in Jane being sent away to Lowood school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 1 and 21. How does John turn out as an adult?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr Brocklehurst</th>
<th>In Chapter 7 how is Jane’s inner resolve strengthened by Mr Brocklehurst’s treatment of her?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 4 and 7. Comment on the references to black in both chapters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John Eyre</th>
<th>How does John Eyre help make Jane an independent woman who can marry whom she likes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of Chapter 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter near end of Chapter 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last half of Chapter 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First half of Chapter 33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Richard Mason</th>
<th>How does Richard Mason bring Jane and Mr Rochester closer in Chapter 20?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Chapters 19 and 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 26 - how do Mason and John Eyre know each other? How does this affect Jane? How is Mason related to Mr Rochester?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why does he stop the wedding ceremony between Mr Rochester and Jane in Chapter 26?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation of male characters

Jane Eyre
by Charlotte Brontë

Extension activity: Go back to Chapter 7 and read carefully the description of Mr Brocklehurst’s wife and daughters. How does Brontë show us his hypocrisy in his different treatment of the pupils compared to his own daughters, e.g. their appearance?

Discussion/essay: Prepare to discuss or write about how far you sympathise with the concerns and actions of these male characters. Make notes on the following:

A. Should Mr Rochester have been more open about having a wife already, to both Jane and Blanche?

B. Was it fair for St John Rivers to select a wife (Jane, and not Rosamond Oliver who loves him) just to be a fellow missionary in India, to ‘retain absolutely till death’?

C. Was Richard Mason right to try and protect his family’s interests when he came to Thornfield?

D. Mr Brocklehurst was left the school to look after by his mother, who set it up. Was she expecting too much in asking him to be as committed to it as she had been?

E. Was John Reed’s life destroyed by an over-indulgent mother who constantly spoiled him?

Read the following extract and answer the question that follows. The extract is from Chapter 14, where, for the second time, Mr Rochester engages Jane in conversation after dinner.

‘Young lady, I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night.’

With this announcement he rose from his chair, and stood, leaning his arm on the marble mantel-piece: in that attitude his shape was seen plainly as well as his face; his unusual breadth of chest, disproportionate almost to his length of limb. I am sure most people would have thought him an ugly man; yet there was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious, to atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness, that in looking at him, one inevitably shared the indifference; and even in a blind, imperfect sense, put faith in the confidence.

‘I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night,’ he repeated; ‘and that is why I sent for you: the fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me; nor would Pilot have been, for none of these can talk. Adèle is a degree better, but still far below the mark; Mrs Fairfax ditto; you, I am persuaded, can suit me if you will: you puzzled me the first evening I invited you down here. I have almost forgotten you since: other ideas have driven yours from my head; but to-night I am resolved to be at ease; to dismiss what importunes and recall what pleases. It would please me now to draw you out: to learn more of you - therefore speak.’
Question: Starting with this extract, how does Brontë present Mr Rochester in the novel? Write about:

1. how Brontë presents Mr Rochester in this extract
2. how Brontë presents Mr Rochester in the novel as a whole.

Advice

- Think about how the structure of the extract will help you organise an answer, e.g. to comment on the first paragraph of description, first person narrative and point of view; then to comment on what you learn from Mr Rochester’s direct speech in the second paragraph.

- Read the content carefully; remember Brontë is describing Mr Rochester through Jane’s eyes and giving her reactions to him, then giving you his direct speech for you to react to more directly.

- Underline any words you aren’t sure of and try to work out the meaning from the context, then check your definitions with those in a dictionary. Don’t let your eyes just skip over unfamiliar words - look them up as you read the novel; don’t be put off by them in the exam - many of your guesses from the context will be correct.

- Look at the notes you’ve made whilst completing this worksheet and select some other incidents which show your knowledge of Mr Rochester in the rest of the novel.

- Remember to focus on presentation of the character and don’t just re-tell the story.

- Review your plan then spend about 40 minutes writing your answer.