

In continuation of lectures done in class on Jane Eyre...

The novel 'Jane Eyre' brims with symbols, or physical objects representing deeper ideas, subjects, and themes. Some important signposts in symbolisms are:

1. Gateshead Hall/Tones of setting in Gateshead Hall
 - Jane as a child is lonely without a sense of belonging and longing for kinship. While living at Gateshead Hall she is constantly reminded that she is not part of the Reed family. She is excluded from the activities of Mrs. Reed and her children even though Mrs. Reed had promised her husband, Jane's uncle, on his deathbed, to bring Jane up as one of her own children.
 - Literally, Gateshead holds Jane a prisoner. She could neither escape the place or her social class, that of being a poor orphan looked after by the 'generous' Mrs Reed.
 - Jane does not fit the ideal picture of a small girl at the time, she has a strong sense of justice and she questions too much; traits not suitable in a little Victorian girl who was supposed to be a pretty ornament. Jane Eyre is described as plain, with an elfin look. Jane describes herself as, "poor, obscure, plain and little. "Jane is not a pretty little girl and well aware of it, she is as her name suggests "invisible as air, the heir to nothing, secretly choking with ire" (Gilbert). She is naughty and not sociable. According to Mrs. Reed, Jane was to be excluded until she "was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter, franker, more natural". Even though Jane is like air, invisible on the outside she is like fire on the inside which will be the fuel for her quest for identity and independence.
 - Jane is harassed and oppressed not only by Mrs Reed, but by her cousin John Reed too. When Jane resists John's abuse, she is punished. Jane is constantly harassed by him. He considers the house and all in it his, because he is the male in the house.
 - ..."all the house belongs to me or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows."
 - Until Jane is knocked down by a book thrown at her by John Reed she has tried to hide and endure his abuse but the anger and fear causes her to finally stand up to him verbally calling him "a murderer", "a slave-driver" and comparing him to "the Roman emperors". When he then attacks her physically and she tries to defend herself she is blamed for the whole incident. She is accused of "flying at Master John" displaying "such a picture of passion" and "she's like a mad cat". Jane's act of defending herself from further physical injury is considered unacceptable conduct for a girl who should know her place in the social order and repress passionate feelings such as anger. "Unjust, unjust" (Brontë 11) are Jane's words regarding the sentence of imprisonment in the Red Room without a fair hearing and without having the opportunity to defend herself. How she is punished while he walks free can be seen as a display of the unequal treatment and status of men and women as well as the unequal society at the time.
2. Fire represents in the novel- comfort, destruction, regeneration, passion, heat, light, vibrancy etc.
Fire is shown in the novel as Destructiveness 3 times

- a) Fire in Rochester room symbolises passion as Jane saves Rochester's life
- b) Lightning on the chestnut tree moments after the engagement of Rochester and Jane's marriage as omen of destruction.

c) Burning of Thornfield- destruction and regeneration. Rochester loses his property and eyesight but out of the destruction gains Jane back

3. Red room- One of the earliest and most significant of the novel's symbols.

a) comfort and Passion.

b) It can also be viewed as a symbol of what Jane must overcome in her struggles to find freedom, happiness, and a sense of belonging.

c) The red room also symbolizes how society traps Jane by limiting her freedom due to her class, gender, and independent personality.

- Jane realizes that it does not matter how hard she tries to do right and fulfil her duties; she will not be accepted by the Reed household. She is “termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon and from noon to midnight”. Jane is trapped and imprisoned and cannot escape the confinements of the members and servants of the Reed household.
- “Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: ... the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit.”(Jane Eyre in the red room)
- Her imprisonment can symbolize the way the women of the Victorian time were trapped in the home and their behaviour was restricted by the society. Jane, like most women of her time, has no place to go to, other options to escape are to marry, die of starvation or through madness. She has only herself to trust; a frightening conclusion for a ten-year-old girl, which causes her to mature overnight.

“Jane has faced her fears of superstition and of being completely alone and trapped. Moreover, she faces her anger and rage, the inner demons of her unconscious. After the night in the Red Room Jane grows stronger and is less afraid to defend herself and to speak for herself”. The red-room's importance as a symbol continues throughout the novel. It reappears as a memory whenever Jane makes a connection between her current situation and that first feeling of being ridiculed and abused. Thus, she recalls the room 2 times.

1. When she is humiliated at Lowood. 2. She thinks of the room on the night that she decides to leave Thornfield after Rochester has tried to convince her to become an undignified mistress.

Next notes on Lowood, Thornfield Hall and Marsh End...

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