

Themes, motifs, symbols etc

Below are some of the themes, motifs, symbols, ideas and issues that are often discussed in relation to *Jane Eyre*. As you read the novel see if you can identify these within it and consider which you think are particularly important:

Fire

Ice

Journeys

Birds

Disguise/Deception

Moonlight

Paintings

Children

Dreams/Nightmares/Visions

Escape

Confinement

Starvation

Some useful quotations from Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar's literary work, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (published for the second time in 2000 by Yale University Press) about some of the above topics:

'As many critics have commented, Charlotte Brontë consistently uses the opposed properties of fire and ice to characterize Jane's experiences, and her technique is immediately evident in these opening passages. For while the world outside Gateshead is almost unbearably wintry, the world within is claustrophobic, fiery, like ten-year-old Jane's own mind.' (p.339)

'Escape through flight, or escape through starvation: the alternatives will recur throughout *Jane Eyre* and, indeed ... throughout much other nineteenth and twentieth century literature by women. In the red-room, however, little Jane chooses (or is chosen by) a third, even more terrifying, alternative: escape through madness.' (p.341)

'Though Rochester, for instance, appears in both the gypsy sequence and the betrothal scene to have cast away the disguises that gave him his mastery, it is obviously of some importance that those disguises were necessary in the first place. Why, Jane herself wonders, does Rochester have to trick people, especially women? What secrets are concealed behind the charades he enacts?' (p.354)