**[Jane Eyre: Developing By Setting](https://victorianwomencelebrities.wordpress.com/2014/09/18/setting-the-setting/)**

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Charlotte Brönte creates with *Jane Eyre* one of the first female versions of a bildungsroman. A bildungsroman can be classified as a coming-of-age story or a novel that exhibits individual formation through academic, spiritual, or emotional growth. Jane Eyre moves about during her formative years, living in different locations along the way and experiencing different life events throughout the journey. Five identifiable locations shape each stage in Jane’s life; each setting has a name that characterises the point of development Jane undergoes while living there.

Throughout the novel, Jane views her homes as a temporary resting point and frequently prefers the freedom to come and go as she deems necessary. Typically, Jane leans toward a preference of nature and gardens versus the cage-like feel of civilisation, as revealed in the names of the places she finds herself living.

*Jane Eyre* begins at Gateshead. In terms of the bildungsroman, the name Gateshead represents a starting point in Jane’s journey. The term “gate” and “head” can both be applied to the idea of “beginning.” A gate can represent an entryway to vast beyond; Jane’s stage in life while she resides at Gateshead reveals a strong desire to escape and be free of the cruelty of her cousins and aunt. Jane sees the home as a place to escape from. The word “head” often may be used to describe a starting point, as in trailhead. The name Gateshead also marks the beginning of Jane’s flight to nature: putting the words together creates an illusion of an entryway to nature. Gates frequently lead to a garden, while in this interpretation of head, readers can imagine a trail to nature and freedom as well.

After Jane finds freedom from Gateshead, she makes her way to Lowood School. Jane enters the school with great amounts of hope and excitement. Quickly after arrival, however, Jane faces disappointment. She finds herself in dark and “low” times at Lowood: Jane becomes haunted by past abuse, she has a hard time acquiring close companionship, and, when she does find a confidant, illness strikes the school and Jane loses her friend. Lowood properly holds true to its name: low.

*Mrs. Reed’s choice of Lowood as the school to which Jane is sent, however, does not fulfill Jane’s need for a less tormented life… At Lowood emphasis is placed on the need for the girls to accept their station in life, to learn to endure hardship and deprivation without complaint, and to restrain their passions in the process (Teachman 3).*

Before arrival, Jane sees school as an escape from constant ridicule and put-downs, but reality barely skims expectations. Though Jane experiences spiritual and academic growth there, she falls victim to unfortunate circumstances and low feelings as well.

From Lowood, readers watch Jane grow into a young lady as she departs from the school and takes up residence in the home of Mr. Rochester at Thornfield. The name can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but the use of the term “thorns” and “field” can very easily lead one to think of a field of thorny plants, such as roses. Roses can appear delicate and beautiful from a distance, while upon closer examination and contact, thorns can quickly created pain and anguish to those who grasp hold. Similar to a rose field, Jane views Thornfield and life with Mr. Rochester as an idyllic dream. As events unfold, Jane realises that, like a field of roses, Mr. Rochester holds secrets that wound her and cause great pain.

Once Jane discovers the thorns at Thornfield, she flees to the Moor House. There are several meanings to the word “moor.” First, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a moor can refer to a marshland. It can serve as a retreat to nature, as the reader knows at this point in the story that Jane greatly relies upon throughout her life. The moor typically contains uncultivated land and has a peaceful quality. This similarly supports the second meaning of “moor.” Mooring also, according to the dictionary, means a stabilised place or object on which something can be secured. After emotional turmoil suffered at Thornfield, Jane chooses to retreat to Moor House and takes the time she spends there to regroup and re-centre her life. While at Moor House, Jane also discovers that she has inherited a large sum of money and, not only does she achieve emotional stability, but financial stability as well.

Jane’s final place of rest ends up being Ferndean Manor, and she remains there with Mr. Rochester after Thornfield burns down. Interestingly enough, while Ferndean acts as a protection and safe paradise amongst the nature for Jane at the end of the story, the name also takes on a role of protection. Ferns, common plants that date back to times before dinosaurs, provide safety to smaller animals that frequently fall prey to stronger predators; in a similar manner, Ferndean provides, for the first time, a permanent safe haven for Jane. Another interesting play on the use of “fern” notes that, after forest fires, ferns tend to be the first plant that grows in the aftermath of destruction. After Thornfield burns down and all signs of a previous life become ashes, Mr. Rochester rebuilds his life from the beginning in Ferndean Manor.

Location plays a large role in *Jane Eyre*. The settings both create and soothe Jane through unfortunate circumstances throughout the story. They act as the cause of distress and as a cage in which Jane becomes captive, as well as the gate to freedom Jane so boldly dreams of. The names of each location help readers to understand on a different level how much importance every new place of residence plays in Jane’s coming-of-age development.

**Works Cited**

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