

The Brontë Plot: Five Lessons Learned from Jane Eyre

Over past year, as I plotted and planned *The Brontë Plot*, I spent lots of time with the Brontë sisters.

I grew closest to Charlotte because *Jane Eyre* spoke most deeply to my story. If Emily had... Well, *The Brontë Plot* would be a very different. And I found... Along the way that Charlotte spoke to me as well. Here a few things I've learned from Charlotte and *Jane Eyre* this year.

Good friends are rare.

Jane Eyre doesn't come out and say, "protect them," but I think the story attests that we should.

Brontë doesn't populate *Jane Eyre* with many "good friends." Jane's best friend, Helen, dies when Jane is only ten or eleven and her story has barely begun. But her influence is felt throughout the novel. Their too brief friendship has a profound and life-long change on Jane, adding soft notes of compassion to Jane's implacable spirit. Later Brontë gives Jane new friends, Mary and Diana St. John, and we see adult camaraderie and laughter enrich Jane's life further.

Granted Brontë doesn't give us too many friends, but each are powerful and have an enduring impact on Jane's life.

So protect good deep friendships. They matter.

Secrets always come out.

We want to believe otherwise, but it simply isn't so. We really don't need to dig into this too deeply – you only have to think about the "wife in the attic" and it's all clear. Secrets will come to light.

I think Brontë took it a step further, but we'll look at that later, in the last lesson I learned...

Follow your instincts.

Jane's a good model for us on that one. She demonstrates self-reliance, courage and isn't dissuaded from what she knows to be right. From day one. Need a job? Advertise. A guy wants to make you his mistress? Run away in the night. I might suggest you pack a better bag – a few clothes, a little money... You get the point. And when a man you don't love, and know you'll never love, proposes? Turn him down. Again, I might suggest you do this more gently, but that's a personal choice too.

Forgive and accept forgiveness.

“Love me, then, or hate me, as you will, you,” I said at last; “you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God's and be at peace.”

This final speech didn't reconcile Jane to her aunt; her aunt was a hard woman who, even in her last moments, abhorred Jane. But by forgiving her aunt, Jane walk away with no binds or anger tying her to her childhood. And without Jane learning forgiveness, first from dear Helen Burns, I don't believe Bronte would have given us one of the most unequivocally happy endings in all literature.

But Jane wasn't the only one Bronte had in her sights. As I alluded to earlier, I believe Rochester not only had to come to terms with his “secret” and his responsibility to his wife, but he needed to repent, ask for forgiveness, and accept it. It's his prayer, *“I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto,”* that ushers in that glorious ending we so adore.

All in all, *Jane Eyre* is chock full of faith references and, noting how such strong ones come at the beginning and end of this novel – providing bookends for both the story and Jane's life – I think Bronte felt that keeping a heart soft and forgiving others were top priorities.