

Mr. Rochester and John Reed

The author of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, portrays Jane's cousin, John Reed, as a waste of space and time. John Reed is the first of many male characters that will have an influence on Jane's later life. As a child he is a bully, pushing Jane around, reminding her of her poverty, and trying to keep her from enjoying herself in any way. He treats Jane as nothing more than vermin, even going so far as to liken her to an animal, "...tell mama she is run out into the rain – bad animal" and, 'Rat! Rat!' He takes great pains to make sure that Jane feels unwelcome and abandoned at Gateshead. "He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually..." The use of the word 'punished' might imply that Jane is so used to this abuse that she has even begun to believe it. However, it may also be said in a sarcastic way as if she is repeating the words John has told her but does not believe it. He is the first person, aside from Mrs. Reed, who shows Jane that not everyone in the world will treat her nicely. Due to her orphaned status, John thinks that he is above her in every way possible and he does not wish for her to "live here with gentlemen's children like us". The way he treats her is despicable but it teaches Jane to stand up for herself. She never initiates the fights and just does what he tells her to, as shown in the quotation "Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair..." Nevertheless, he always finds faults in her, as shown by the quotation, "That is not your impudence". This shows that John is a spiteful, cruel child who likes to pick on his younger cousin in order to make himself feel better. Jane will only fight back once provoked, and although John initiates the fights, he is always the first one to run crying to his mama. On page 5 of the novel, Jane says "Wicked and cruel boy!" This is the first of many times that Jane stands up for herself and John Reed may have even been the catalyst that later causes Jane to stand up to Mr. Rochester when he is grilling her about her life.

As opposed to John, Mr. Rochester is shown as having a nicer and calmer nature. He seems a little brusque and accusing to Jane to start with, but she soon warms to him and eventually falls in love with him. When she first meets him on the road leading to Thornfield, she shows her innocence and inexperience in that she "thinks he was swearing, but am not certain; however, he was pronouncing some formula which prevented him from replying to me directly." She appears to think that Mr. Rochester is rather aloof even though she didn't realise who he was at the time. Her kind and considerate nature leads her to attempt to help him anyway, and later on in the novel he even accuses her of deliberately tripping his horse in order to unseat him. Because he is not handsome, Jane does not feel any fear for him and can speak to him as one would an equal even though he is her superior. This, combined with his curt nature, causes Jane to have debates with him that strengthen her character and ultimately gives her the courage she needs to leave him in the end. Mr. Rochester is a sympathetic character because of the mistakes he has made in his past. He is constantly brooding and rejecting the darkness of his decisions. Despite their difference in backgrounds, social status, and age, he is a kindred spirit to Jane, who feels a sort of emotional peace when he is in her presence. He is presented as Jane's superior in intellect and worldly knowledge, and she often comes to him for information. Due to this Jane develops a sort of independence that she didn't have before because now she has more of a clearer understanding of the world and the people in it.