



## **The Secret History of Jane Eyre: How Charlotte Brontë Wrote Her Masterpiece**

*John Pfondresher*

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# From Reader Review The Secret History of Jane Eyre: How Charlotte Brontë Wrote Her Masterpiece for online ebook

## Naomi says

I am so disappointed in this book. I had been looking forward to its release for months. What the book had promised was not delivered. I felt the book was loaded down with more speculation and theory versus proven fact. Next, the majority of information presented in the Bronte biography was common knowledge on any fan of the sisters'.

I must say that it was an easy and quick read. It flowed well in style. I just felt really let down for what was hyped in the content.

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## Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

I grabbed this book because of the cover (gorgeous) and the fact that I'm not a huge *Jane Eyre* fan and I kind of want to be. (I mean, it seems like a book I should be all over.) I love books about books, stories that dive into the nitty-gritty and ineffable magic of writing a novel. And I'm always up to learn more about books and how, possibly, to read them.

But this one really disappointed me.

Pfordresher's argument -- his 'secret history' -- is that Brontë mined her own life for *Jane Eyre*. (No duh.) But he pushes a literal person-for-person sort of equivalency that really disappointed me; while arguing for Brontë's creative genius, I couldn't help but feel like he was minimizing it in this manner.

There are also some intense leaps that just seemed a stretch to me. For example, Rochester's agonizing sexual frustration reflects "...a sexual energy Charlotte Brontë knew, daily, at Haworth," (p82), from the apparent expression of her sexually frustrated father. (Perhaps true, but also, ew. Really?) I've got five pages of highlights of moments like that; Pfordresher is bold, I'll give him that.

My biggest takeaway of this read was a developed dislike for Brontë as a person. In Pfordresher's hands, she seems to hate other women, bubbles with barely concealed disdain for the world around her save for her beloved moors, and wanted desperately to get into a dom/sub romantic relationship with someone.

I'd love for a Brontë and/or *Jane Eyre* fan to read this one and share their thoughts, because I can't tell if I'm not getting it or not. It's a short read (191 pages in my edition) so someone pick it up and discuss with me!

## Initial Thoughts

A remarkably underwhelming book that literally argues *Jane Eyre* is autobiography with wish-fulfillment whirled in. Bronte comes off as into dom/sub, hating women and people of color, and thoroughly unimaginative. Arguing her characters are all based on the people in her life really takes away her creative genius, and it seems wildly simplistic. Kept waiting for the "secret history" to kick in, but all we got were things like Charlotte's familiarity with the look of a man strung taut with sexual hunger because her father stomped around the moors with the same expression, etc. etc.

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### **Chari says**

Un libro que interesará sobre todo a los que han leído *Jane Eyre* desconocedores de la biografía de la escritora y que quieran descubrir cuánto de la personalidad y vivencias de Charlotte influyeron para crear los personajes y argumento de su obra más reconocida.

Lo que más me ha chirriado es la conjectura del autor respecto al apetito sexual de Patrick Brontë por el hecho de que tras el fallecimiento de su esposa hubiera realizado hasta tres propuestas de matrimonio fallidas en busca de una nueva madre para educar a sus hijos. Esa “virilidad”, atribuida tanto a él como Constantine Héger, por tener ambos seis hijos, quizás se debiera más a que por aquel entonces, no existía como hoy día, la planificación familiar, por lo que era común tener una progenie numerosa.

No ha estado mal aunque a mí no me ha aportado nada nuevo.

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### **Karen says**

John Pfondresher, in his book, *The Secret History of Jane Eyre*, narrates the story of Charlotte Bronte's most famous novel. Most people will agree that Bronte's life influenced the story of *Jane Eyre*, and indeed much has been written about this subject, but even as a Bronte lover and reader, I found new facts and ideas about all of the Brontes that I did not know. Besides his insight, the author also shares research from other scholars and words from primary research sources including material from Charlotte Bronte herself. A fascinating read! (I received an advanced copy of this book through NetGalley in exchange for a fair and honest review)

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### **Kressel Housman says**

*Jane Eyre* is one of my all-time favorites, so naturally, I grabbed this off my library shelf the minute I saw it. The book shows how the different scenes of the original novel trace back to events in Charlotte's own life. The author contends that as a young woman, Charlotte fell in love with her French teacher, an older, married man. Her love was unrequited, so she poured all that unfulfilled passion into the fantasy characters of Jane and Rochester. The Bronte siblings had been creating their own fantasy worlds since childhood, so it makes perfect sense that Charlotte would work out her feelings in this way. Anyone who knows the plot of *Villette* will see the parallels to it, too, but the author only points them out in the end. It's the less famous book, though it's just as much of a masterpiece.

If you love *Jane Eyre*, this book will interest you. Perhaps someone with greater knowledge of Charlotte Bronte's biography might find it too cursory – you'll have to keep an eye out for those reviews – but to me it was an enjoyable way to see the creative process behind a novel I cherish in under three hundred pages. It may not be an exhaustive biography, but it was a good balance between entertainment and information.

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### **Douglas Fugate says**

This is a comprehensive biography of Charlotte Bronte, her family and writings. Intertwined throughout the

life story, the author interjects the lives and works of Anne, Emily, and Branwell Bronte. The Professor, Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey all play pivotal parts both in the biography of Charlotte and the writing of Jane Eyre. Charlotte's experiences influence her writings. Learn of how the death her mother and widowhood of her father affected all of the children and their education. Charlotte's experiences at school as both a student and teacher, as well as her unsuccessful love affair, all find a place in Jane Eyre.

I found myself more impressed with this book the more I read. I encourage all fans and students of Jane Eyre, and everyone remotely interested in the Bronte family and their works to read this book. For those who own a copy of Jane Eyre, this volume should become a companion addition to their library.

I highly recommend this book for all high school, college students and adults.

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### **tortoise dreams says**

How Charlotte Bronte's life influenced the writing of Jane Eyre.

Book Review: The Secret History of Jane Eyre is not quite as secret or dramatic as the cover blurb would have the reader believe. And don't be fooled, this is not a biography. Here Georgetown University English professor John Pfodresher attempts to find an intersection between events in Charlotte Bronte's life and in the text of her great novel, Jane Eyre. Having just completed a re-read of the novel less than two weeks ago, this title had to catch my eye. But the Secret History is not all that mysterious. No piece of Bronte's short life is too insubstantial to try to fit into the jigsaw puzzle that is Jane Eyre. There is a wealth of speculation in this book, there is "must have felt," so much "may" and "perhaps." At times these correlations seem simply coincidence, sometimes they seem to be a bit of a stretch, and at points life and novel fit neatly together. But trying to establish a novel as autobiography is always on uncertain ground. Similarities do not mean truth about the author, as surface correspondence may be all there is. Authors have to get their material somewhere: a writer may base a conversation in the Mars Bravo 4 space colony on one she overheard at Starbucks. As the author acknowledges, parts of Bronte's life were worse than the life she gave Jane Eyre. There are too many assertions with too little evidence. At the same time, Pfodresher deserves credit for his creativity, for thinking outside the box, for a careful reading, and sifting together the facts of Bronte's life and the text of her novel. For example, he's largely successful in his analysis of Bertha Rochester's place in the novel, even if far too eager to lay racial accusations. One point the author seemed to have missed is that Charlotte's brother Branwell is an obvious model for John Reed's (Jane's cousin) dissipation, just as is Hindley Earnshaw in Wuthering Heights. Pfodresher is also is a little too obsessed with the sex drives of people in the 19th Century, and seems too sure of his appraisal based on scant evidence. The novel's original title page read "Jane Eyre. An Autobiography. Edited by Currer Bell." The Secret History of Jane Eyre does its best to make the novel an autobiography of Charlotte Bronte, but there is not quite enough substance here. This book is for readers who are not only passionate about Jane Eyre (having read JE at least twice), but also need to know as much as possible about Charlotte Bronte (having read at least one of the actual biographies), wherever that Venn diagram overlaps. Being one of those in the overlap, I had to read this, but I'm not sure that you have to read it. [3★]

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### **Brian Willis says**

I really enjoyed this brief "bio" of Jane Eyre, a closer look at the real life inspirations for Bronte's book.

If you don't want to read spoilers for Jane Eyre, stop reading here. However, this book should only be read after reading the novel. Pfardresher's thesis is that the writing of Jane Eyre was highly autobiographical, with the ending of the book actually coming more as wish fulfillment rather than fact. Rochester is an amalgamation of her father Patrick, her brother Branwell, and most importantly, the married head of the household she found her self serving as governess. Charlotte feel deeply in love this man, but obviously, could never have him. With Jane, Bronte explores her own life and feelings in print, and it is enjoyable to read Pfardresher's connections. Brisk and lively, this book is definitely for lovers of Bronte and her most renowned novel.

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### **Beleth says**

Le pongo un 3/5 porque mal no está para ver las relaciones entre la novela Jane Eyre y su autora, pero no dice nada que no haya leído en mil sitios mil veces antes.

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### **Monica says**

I enjoyed this. As I've been on a mini-obsession with Jane Eyre lately, this proved a lot of context to Bronte's writing if I didn't know. Someone who's actually a Bronte scholar might already know all of this, but as a casual Bronte fan, I found it really interesting.

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### **Macaela says**

I love Jane Eyre. It's one of the books that I reread every few years. However, I knew little to nothing of Charlotte Bronte. I found this book to be a fascinating. Learning about her difficult life and how she wove that into her stories and changed the outcomes for her characters that she couldn't change for herself. She was quite the strong willed woman, held back in a society that didn't like strong willed women.

Thank you to Goodreads and Norton for the book.

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### **Ruth says**

My first question about this book was "Why?" Juliet Barker wrote the definitive book about the Brontes, and I wonder if we need many (or any?) others. However, I'm sure some Bronte fans would rather tackle a couple hundred pages than a thousand pages. Okay, fair enough. My bigger beef with this book is that I just plain disagree with some of Pfardresher's theories. I don't believe that Patrick Bronte sired six children in seven years because he was unusually virile. Rather, I would chalk it up to a little thing called no birth control. (This is a particularly perplexing position to take given than Patrick himself was one of ten children. At the risk of stating the obvious: large families were simply not the exception in the nineteenth century.) I also don't believe that Patrick tried so desperately to remarry after his wife's untimely death because of his virility. I think he needed someone to take care of his brood, who ranged in age from about a year to eight years old when she died.

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### **Jonna Higgins-Freese says**

I picked this up on a whim, partly because I am always mixing up Jane Eyre and Jane Austen, which is ridiculous, since one is a fictional character and the other is an author. Anyway, what I realized yet again is/are (a) I do \*not\* get the appeal of Jane Eyre. Or actually, the whole Rochester thing. I mean, why? What's the attraction? I suppose he's the best option she's got but that's still not a stunning recommendation and (b) the Brontes are just weird, and their writing is weird, and I do not understand the appeal of that, either. I mean, Wuthering Heights? It's just a brutal, depressing, dark book, with really unlikeable characters. About as unlikeable as those in *Casual Vacancy*. I mean, why voluntarily spend any of my life with such people?

And then, the writing of this is very plodding. Some people can make anything interesting. Some authors I'd want to accompany on a trip to the recycling center. Unfortunately, not this one.

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### **Kristin Boldon says**

An odd book, like a close reading of Jane Eyre. I found it overly detailed for the average reader, and referencing outdated sources (Freud, Joseph Campbell, taking Gaskell's bio as truth) so not rigorous enough for a scholar. Why does he refer to Rochester as Fairfax Rochester, as if Fairfax is his first name, or the last name is compound? And when referring to Mary Rivers, she is more than once incorrectly named Maria. The author stretched to make connections--Patrick Bronte fathered 6 kids in about as many years, so he had a strong sex drive and was thus an influence on Rochester as a sexual man?

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### **Melissa Joulwan says**

I've been reading this on and off since summer. This book should be catnip for me, but I was mentally rolling my eyes too much of the time to enjoy it. I feel like Pfondresher makes bold statements with nothing to back them up except a wish that they be true. It reads like fan-nonfiction (is that a thing?! Like fanfic, but nonfiction?).

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