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An educational journey

From the Victorian Age to the present day:

Teaching *Jane Eyre* in an interactive way

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INTRODUCTION

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the
world”

Nelson Mandela

The words pronounced by Nelson Mandela during a speech at the Madison Park High School in Boston on 23 June 1990, take on a pivotal meaning, particularly because of the events of last year, 2020. The latest worldwide occurrences have highlighted the fundamental role of education, especially in young people’s lives. The Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent closure of all schools around the world have shed light on instruction and apparently, only now do we genuinely understand its significance—even though probably not sufficiently yet. As a CELTA-qualified teacher,¹ I have been affected by this challenging period but it has also allowed me more time to ponder about my job and to study, and it has eventually triggered an even stronger desire

¹ Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

to contribute to teaching, as well as reinforced my passion and determination in doing so.

As explained by UNESCO, education is the key to eliminating gender inequality and strengthening women's empowerment, to reducing poverty and enhancing health and wellbeing, to creating a sustainable planet with clean water as well as energy, to preventing unnecessary deaths and illnesses, and to fostering peaceful, fair and inclusive societies.² Some issues such as gender and status inequality presented in this dissertation then—in particular, those regarding Victorian-Age learning—appear to be still a plague in many countries.

Learning a foreign language is and must be part of this process of education. English language in particular is spoken by the majority of the population of the world for both instructional and business purposes, where the use of this idiom among people who do not share the same L1 in international contexts is becoming wider and wider, receiving the name of *lingua franca*. Therefore, current students need to be more intelligible rather than native-like or proficient in grammar, and more important than formal correctness should be functional effectiveness. Unfortunately, what I have observed in my personal experience as a teacher in the last few years and what has arisen after talking directly to students, is that the Italian school system due

² UNESCO, "UNESCO: Sustainable development begins with education", 2015. Available: <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-sustainable-development-begins-education>, Accessed 2021, March

probably to the small number of hours devoted to English language every week, tends to place fluency and activities that are more practical in the second position. The aim of this work is to combine learning a novel and reflecting upon it through communication, but without forgetting the accuracy.

In order to point out the significance of this topic not only for what concerns literature but also for several other scientific fields, psychological studies and theories of the 19th and 20th century have been mentioned. Starting from an excursus on the first basic compulsory schooling of the eighteenth hundreds in England, and after providing examples of the different educational possibilities taken from the pages of the novel *Jane Eyre*,³ the thesis briefly examines some of these early theories and approaches which brought awareness of the student-centered and competence-based class.

All this serves to eventually develop a project on how to teach the Victorian novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë to nowadays high-school students in a practical—deeply laboratory in some parts—way. Therefore, the basis from which I have started to project my final dissertation, are those arisen in the nineteenth century and further developed in the twentieth century as well as firmly established in the last decades, which embrace the key concept of creating student-

³ C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000

centred classes to engage learners and allow them to grow not only as students but as people, too. The methodologies chosen for the lessons are in part drawn from direct experience at university and at work in national and international language schools, and in part studied during the CELTA preparation course in London, where laboratory techniques were daily on the agenda.

After an introduction to the historical context of the Industrial Revolution the study moves to an account of the basic compulsory schooling of the nineteenth century, showing some of the different educational opportunities available presented by the author in the novel, and continues to describe some of the major educational theories of the 19th and 20th century, which concentrated on the pivot of employing techniques which could be effective and memorable to all types of learners, i.e. visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. This dissertation is completed by a practical educational project on the nineteenth-century novel by Charlotte Brontë, entitled "Retelling *Jane Eyre* in an interactive way".

In the first chapter I outline the Victorian Age, one of the greatest and most controversial period that the United Kingdom has ever faced with its great industrial revolution and the consequent 'rural flight' and overcrowded cities, which lead to harsh conditions and alienation, and to the plague of child labour. It is an era that experiences an enormous empire expansion, and which undergoes a new 'urban rhythm', which contrasts, merges, transforms, and eventually leaves space to the new

modern values.

The second chapter focuses on the first basic compulsory education which contextually appears in the nineteenth century. The Victorian controversy becomes visible in the different educational possibilities offered to children, for depending mainly on their social position and wealth, as well as gender. Therefore, a distinction has been made between poor and working children, and upper-class children, along with female education. A section of the second chapter is dedicated to a key figure which blossoms in the nineteenth-century instructional panorama and literature, the governess. This second part ends with a part about education for girls in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where detailed pictures of boarding school, parish school, and the governess are presented.

Chapter three portrays a brief history of educational theories of the modern world, from Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840) about the importance of student's centrality in teaching to the twentieth-century ideas of great thinkers such as Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934), Jerome Seymour Bruner (1915-2016), Stanley Greenspan (1941-2010), and Daniel Goleman (1946-). All experts agree that learning by heart—an unavoidable method in Victorian schools—is not a sufficient practice to embrace if aiming to deliver proper—and memorable—education. Students need to be protagonists and have a central role in the lesson, interact, be motivated, and be led to their

emotional research.

In The last chapter I present an activity designed for high-school students, and is titled “Learning *Jane Eyre* through competence-based student-centred techniques”. It is a laboratory course divided into six sessions on conveying the novel by Charlotte Brontë to the public. Each session represents an important piece of a whole puzzle whose main aim is to develop a new competence in the students, which is the ability to communicate in English as a foreign language and be intelligible. The pupils work together to retell the novel by using different techniques and methods—through maps, role plays, art creativity, recordings—and with the help of collaborations with both the English teacher and teachers of other subjects. They eventually present their final project in an open-day event where they confer their plan and further practise their acquired communicative skills.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE VICTORIAN COMPROMISE

In the modern world education is a concept in continuous development and throughout the years, many changes and improvements have been brought into the educational system. With the exception of Prussia, which commenced at the end of the eighteenth century, all the main European countries gave birth to a compulsory mass education in the nineteenth century, as presented by Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal and David Strang in their article titled *Construction of the First Mass Education Systems in Nineteenth-Century Europe*.⁴ In the first part of my dissertation (chs 1 and 2) I will examine the historical and social contexts of the British Victorian Age and the main actors of this educational change.

⁴Y. Nuhoglu Soysal and D. Strang, "Construction of the First Mass Education Systems in Nineteenth-Century Europe", *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 62, No. 4, 1989, pp. 277-288, pp. 277-278

1.1. The Industrial Revolution: pros and cons of a change



A Manufacturing Town, L. S. Lowry, 1922

The Industrial Revolution represented the beginning of a new era, which led to extraordinary changes in agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation, as well as to developments of new mechanical technologies. As argued by P. Davis, at the end of the eighteenth century “the change in heat-energy sources from wood and charcoal to the mining of coal and the use of coke, resulting in radically increased economic growth through new mass processes of iron and steel

production”,⁵ brought to a new independence from organic raw materials confined in some geographically restricted lands. An explosion of brilliant inventions followed, the boom of the steam-powered railways, ships and boats, along with spinning and weaving machines, electric generators. Innovations made their appearance in the communication field too, where inventions such as the telegraph, the photography and the printing press, transformed the way of exchanging and transmitting information. Every-day's life started to be affected by new technologies and techniques and this sparked a social, cultural and economic revolution. As summarized by Davis, “it was the chemistry of a whole new capacity (...), for production and invention, new factories, new finance, new mobility of transport, new locations”.⁶

The word that can be used to best describe this period is in fact “change”. The rapid industrialisation altered the rural scenery and dramatically transformed the local economy, affecting both social and living conditions. People modified their habits and left their country villages in search of an occupation in the mechanised industry.⁷ A real exodus began, the so-called ‘rural flight’, which led to a labour intensive factory system.⁸ In 1851 England became a predominant

⁵P. Davis, *The Victorians Volume 8 - 1830-1880*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 3

⁶ Ibid., p. 4

⁷ L. Macgill, “Victorian Sunday Schools and Their Mission to Civilise Youth in the Aire Valley, c.1850-1914”, Leeds Metropolitan University, 2013, pp. 1-328, pp. 81-82

⁸ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, London: Abacus, 1995, pp. 206-

urban nation, with more than half of the population living in the cities; London went from having 1 million inhabitants at the beginning of 19th century to 9 millions in 1851.⁹ Cottage industries—little family-owned manufacturer companies where goods were produced in a small scale usually in a home—left space to large industrial buildings. To give an example, 800.000 handloom weavers lost their occupation as handworkers because of the steam power.¹⁰ The main problems caused by this type of industry were disorganisation and a quite inefficient method of production which was no longer able to keep up the speed of the growing population, nor to cover the long distances that the market then required.¹¹ As Davis puts it, there was “a new distinctly urban rhythm (which) belonged to the machine rather than the seasons”.¹² In fact, in order to make raw materials and commodities circulate widely and fast, steam-powered boats and ships made extensive use of a rich and expanding net of canals and rivers. Furthermore, to boost the massive acceleration that the market required, in 1830 the railway in Manchester and Liverpool became the first steam-powered public line in the world¹³. In 1850 the miles

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⁹P. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 13

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 22

¹¹D. Bythell, “Cottage Industry and the Factory System”, *History Today*, 1983, pp. 17-23

¹²P. Davis, *op. cit.*, p.32

¹³C. Robson, *The Norton Anthology of English literature, The Victorian Age*, London:

covered became 6000 and allowed to cover the journey London-Manchester from three days in 1750 to only six hours.¹⁴ These favourable bases laid the foundation for a period of great territorial expansion. The rapid conquest of areas in Africa, South-East Asia, and the Pacific, expanded British colonial power already including territories in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, the Cape, New Zealand, Hong Kong and India,¹⁵ and by the end of the century nearly a quarter of the earth was British, and 400.000.000 people were ruled from Great Britain.¹⁶

Victorian England was considered as the most powerful country in the world in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in London, when the prosperous and stable city showed itself at the flourishest peak of its manufacturing, as well as scientific and technological boom.¹⁷ London became the pivotal city of Western civilization, stealing the supremacy from the continental Paris,¹⁸ and its giant glass-and-iron Crystal Palace displayed the celebration of an

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2018, p. 7

¹⁴Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 30

¹⁵Ibid., p. 407

¹⁶Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 682

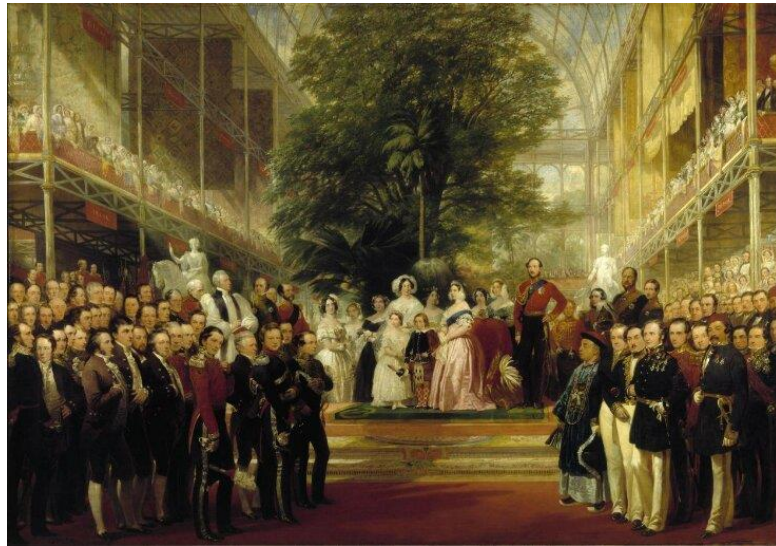
¹⁷L. Picard, "The rise of technology and industry", 2009, Available:

<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-technology-and-industry>,

Accessed 2020, September

¹⁸Robson, *op. cit.*, p.3

evident advancement in “mechanization, meteorology, optics, electricity, engineering, sanitation, transport and communications, and photography”.¹⁹



The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851,
Henry Courtney Selous, 1851-1852

The Victorian Age was a ‘Mechanical Age’ which brought great inventions to life, but which paradoxically impoverished men at the end, turning them into machines themselves. To cite the words of the nineteenth century historian Thomas Carlyle:

¹⁹Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 5

For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.²⁰

In this passage the author presented Nature as rough and fragile, treated with no respect by modern people who believed to be more powerful because of their machines and technology. Carlyle also feared that men could “not only adopt mechanical procedures of thought but come to believe that the mind itself was a machine”,²¹ and this is what actually happened, for ‘materialism’ became a word used both in socio-economic and philosophical contexts and its power was established during the century.²² Moreover, Davis suggests that machinery offered new force over matter to men, but this “world seemed to be gaining power over the men and women within it, like a machine that had developed beyond the control of its own inventors”,²³ a sort of Frankenstein-like supremacy. The term that defined this kind of

²⁰T. Carlyle, *Signs of the Time*, in H. Traill (Ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899, pp. 56-82

²¹Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 158

²²*Ibid.*, p. 159

²³*Ibid.*, p. 14

personal feeling experienced throughout the overwhelming new process of industrialization was coined by Karl Marx and was 'alienation'. This was an accurate, explanatory word for a term Carlyle could not find, when he called the new condition a 'thing'.²⁴

1.2. The Victorian Compromise and the plague of child labour

Part of the headline of this paragraph mentions the word 'compromise', because if on the one hand it was possible to experience a great technological development, involving the progress that increased the wealth of the middle and upper classes, and an extraordinary worldwide territorial expansion, on the other hand Britain faced deeply dark aspects as I have hinted at in the previous paragraph. The industrial revolution was extremely rapid, as Davis explained "it was a whole new order or disorder, a vortex which pulled into the cities' factories and workshops the surrounding population for

²⁴Ibid, pp. 22-23

both labour and consumption”,²⁵clarifying that this change took place within just a few decades and that the system was not prepared and lacked the tools to deal with this phenomenon.²⁶

As a consequence of this unpreparation, industrialised English cities e.g. London, Liverpool, Manchester, hosted a working class who lived most of the time segregated in overcrowded small places where hygiene and safety were not priorital. In Manchester in the 1830s tens of thousands of citizens lived in harsh conditions, settling in “dark and airless cellars, in rooms occupied by several families”.²⁷ Child labour was another plague of the period. According to a report dated 1842,²⁸ very small children were employed to work in bad conditions for up to sixteen hours per day and were paid one fifth of the wages an adult earned. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 –1861), a poet who was “admired by contemporaries (...) for her moral and emotional ardor and her energetic engagement with the issues of her day”,²⁹ wrote *The Cry of the Children*, a poem on the horrible conditions that children

²⁵Ibid., p. 13

²⁶Ibid., p. 14

²⁷Ibid., p. 28

²⁸Great Britain Commissioners for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories, “The Condition and Treatment of the Children employed in the Mines and Colliers of the United Kingdom Carefully compiled from the appendix to the first report of the Commissioners With copious extracts from the evidence, and illustrative engravings”, 1842. Available: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-child-labour-1842>, Accessed 2020, September

²⁹Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 109

experienced in mines and factories. The cruelty and injustice of the system were expressed as a passionate protest in these stanzas:

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's 's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy. (...)

Little Alice died last year—the grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.
We look'd into the pit prepared to take her—
Was no room for any work in the close clay!
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
Crying— 'Get up, little Alice, it is day!
If you listen by that grave in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries;
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the new smile which has grown within her eyes.
For merry go her moments, lull'd and still'd in
The shroud, by the kirk-chime!
It is good when it happens," say the children,
"That we die before our time!"³⁰

³⁰E. Barrett Browning, "The Cry of the Children", 1843. Available: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/elizabeth-barrett-brownings-the-cry-of-the-children-as-first-published-in-blackwoods-edinburgh-magazine>, Accessed 2020, September

Barrett Browning strongly attacked both the societal institutions of the time and the citizens who accepted and even supported child labour. In these two stanzas, the author pronounced her indictment of the appalling use of child labour and depicted children's harsh lives in coalmines and factories. Their sorrow and their wan and depressed look made them resemble old men and see death as a relief from pain and suffering "It is good when it happens," say the children, 'That we die before our time!'. As a writer, she used her poetry as an instrument, to voice social protest and need for reforms.³¹

Together with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, other authors such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell wrote on this topic, firmly condemning social injustice and hypocrisy and unmasking the falsity of the British Victorian institutions. Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) is the amazingly touching story of a young workhouse labourer who eventually redeemed from his troubled life and started a new existence of love. *Mary Barton, A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848) by Elizabeth Gaskell takes the reader through the crying and mourning streets of Manchester to experience the difficulties of a working-class family who ended up in Canada, far away from the Industrial Revolution.

³¹Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 109

1.3. The Complexity of Modernism: old and new values

The Victorian Age is often defined as "a richly complex example of a society struggling with the issues and problems we identify with modernism".³²This complexity could be seen in several aspects of the social, cultural and economic life. If on the one hand there were prosperity and political stability, on the other hand social evils appeared, such as poverty and diseases. Bourgeoisie and middle class' wealth had its counterpart in the working classes' famine and uncertainty, which led to social unrest. It was the peak time of the bourgeoisie's values where generosity, morality and respectability were considered key together with family, charity and philanthropy, for they improved the person's status.³³ Queen Victoria herself gathered the values of earnestness, moral responsibility, domestic propriety, and moral decency in her own figure, for she was a young wife and mother of nine children first, and a sole ruling monarch after her husband's death in 1861.³⁴But on the other side, this moral somehow hosted values which settled, rooted and became a real establishment in the previous two centuries, and now had taken rougher and

³²Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 7

³³M. Praz, *Storia della Letteratura inglese*, Milano, Sansoni Editore, 2007, pp. 489.490

³⁴Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 5

uncouth, almost caricatural, traits, as at the end of their life.³⁵

To conclude, the Victorian Age was a prosperous period of new opportunities, politically stable and successful, and as Mr. G. M. Young puts it "a wise man would choose the eighteen-fifties to be young in".³⁶ However this required great effort and costs in terms of people's lives, as argued by Robson who believes that this leadership and success of Great Britain "was being paid for at a terrible price in human happiness, that a so-called progress had been gained only by abandoning traditional rhythms of life and traditional patterns of human relationships".³⁷

It was the era of Utilitarianism, "which aggressively sought to clarify the complexity of human mind in terms of a calculation of its basic drives in seeking pleasure and avoiding pain".³⁸ It was "an age constantly seeking and constantly failing to find an adequate overview or framework for itself",³⁹ struggling between old and new, which experienced anxiety and uncertainty, and which still now provides "the ground for vibrant controversy" because of its "complex intermixture

³⁵Praz, *op. cit.*, p. 489

³⁶G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an age*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 80

³⁷Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 4

³⁸Davis, *op. cit.*, p.159

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 7

of different meanings".⁴⁰

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 11

CHAPTER TWO

EDUCATION IN THE VICTORIAN AGE: THE FIRST BASIC COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

When discussing education in the Victorian Age we should start by making a distinction between upper and working-class pupils. In this section I shall firstly consider poor and working children's educational opportunities, and subsequently I shall consider the ones offered to middle-class pupils.

2.1. Poor and working children' s education

The educational panorama for the needy and working children was dissimilar compared to its wealthy equivalent, but paradoxically wider if considering the options available. In fact, there were diverse

forms of school, such as the Dame Schools, the Sunday Schools, the Ragged Schools and the Workhouse.

The Dame School was normally run by poor women—some of them were illiterate themselves—who were in charge of looking after children rather than teaching them.⁴¹ Despite there was no quality check and no guarantee of a proper education,⁴² the Dame School was an exclusive private school, as a sum of money—even though infinitesimally small, only a few pence—was handed daily or weekly by the parents, who were mainly concerned about keeping their children off the dangers of the streets rather than making them learn.⁴³ According to historian Higginson, with the industrialization, the Dame Schools “from being humble domestic extensions of the home matching community [...] became, within an increasingly system of schooling, the Inspectors' 'national menace’.”⁴⁴

⁴¹J. H. Higginson, “Dame Schools”, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1974, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 166-181, p. 167

⁴²Ibid., p. 180

⁴³D. Gillard, “Education in England: a history”, 2018. Available: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter06.html>, Accessed 2020, September

⁴⁴Higginson, *op. cit.*, p. 180



A Dame's School, Thomas George Webster, 1845

The Sunday School was a four-time-a-month school whose primary aim was the indoctrination of religious principles and rediscovery of moral values such as honesty, obedience, humility and diligence.⁴⁵ It was believed that if a child attended it, discipline outside the factory would have benefitted too, and so would social order and national unity.⁴⁶ It was a free organization run by volunteers, but the shortcomings of this type of schooling were evident. In fact, if two Rs were taught—religion and reading; it was mandatory to teach children the latter skill in order to make them able to read the Holy Bible on their own—⁴⁷writing and arithmetic missed, and more importantly pupils were not educated to think critically or express their own

⁴⁵T. R. Tholfsen, "Moral Education in the Victorian Sunday School", *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1980, pp. 77-99

⁴⁶Macgill, *op. cit.*, p. 84

⁴⁷W.B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, p.

opinions during the four to six-hour lessons. Moreover, according to Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888), one of the main reasons for instituting this type of school was to “promote the knowledge of the Bible”⁴⁸, but he criticised the methods of the system stating that “all convince me that the knowledge of the Bible in British schools is not what their managers would wish it to be ”.⁴⁹



The Mariner's Sunday School, William Holt Yates Titcomb, 1897

The Ragged School was described by Charles Dickens as a “vast hopeless nursery of ignorance, misery and vice; a breeding place for the hulks and jails”.⁵⁰ The word ‘ragged’ was a synonym for rough,

⁴⁸M. Arnold, *Report on Elementary Schools*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd, 1910, p. 139

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰C. Dickens, “Letter from Charles Dickens on ragged schools”, 1846. Available: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/letter-from-charles-dickens-on-ragged-schools->

disorganized, but it first came to refer to the tattered clothes worn by pupils. It was one of the first forms of free education to orphans, and very poor and working children.⁵¹ Students could attend classes without being charged fees and one of the reasons was that teachers were either volunteers or church people. This form of education combined typical school subjects—the four Rs—with practical abilities such as gardening for boys and domestic skills such as knitting for girls.⁵² Dickens revealed to *The Daily News* that “I have no desire to praise the system pursued in the Ragged Schools: which is necessarily very imperfect, if indeed there be one”⁵³ and criticised the institution by saying “the name implies the purpose. They who are too ragged, wretched, filthy (...) to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity-school (...) are invited to come in here”.⁵⁴ In northern-east London it is still possible to enter one of them, which now is a museum and can be visited. It is located—ironically—on Copperfield Road.⁵⁵

[from-the-daily-news](#), Accessed 2020, September

⁵¹M. Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 19, p. 151

⁵²I. Lee, “Ragged Schools”, 2014, Available: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/ragged-schools>, Accessed 2020, December

⁵³P. Ackroyd, *Dickens’ London*, London, Headline Book Publishing PLC, 1991, pp.169-170

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 170

⁵⁵The Ragged School Museum, “The Ragged School Museum”, Available: <https://www.raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk>, Accessed 2020, September



The First Ragged School, Westminster, Alexander Blaikley, 1851

The Workhouses were institutions “provided by the parish to house and feed the destitute”.⁵⁶They were built under the 1834 ‘New Poor Law’ which aimed to reduce the cost of caring for the poor who were encouraged to work hard to support themselves and which aspired to solve the problem of beggars and vagrants by removing them from the streets—and were required to provide at least three hours a day of schooling for working children.⁵⁷People, children included, were psychologically and physically mistreated, forced to work hard and live under very harsh conditions through starvation and jail-like environments.⁵⁸

⁵⁶C. Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, London, Wordsworth Editions, Wordsworth Classic, 2000, p. 366

⁵⁷R. Pallister, “Workhouse education in county Durham: 1834–1870”, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 16:3, 2010, 279-291, p. 279

⁵⁸U. Henriques, “How cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?”, *The Historical Journal*, 1968, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 365-371



Oliver asking for more, George Cruikshank, 1837

None of these institutions could offer a proper education. Victorian schools concentrated their programmes on the 3Rs Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic. Most schools also included the 4th R, religion.⁵⁹ Additional subjects such as needlework and carpentry were added, as well as nature studies and gardening or drawing of natural objects, especially flowers.⁶⁰

The teacher was a profession which increased in an unprecedented way in only a few years, reaching more than 50.000 units in the 1890s, along with the number of pupil-teachers which increased to 34,000. ⁶¹Discipline and rigour were qualities needed to

⁵⁹Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 25-27

⁶¹D. Gillard, "Education in England: a history", 2018, Available: www.educationengland.org.uk/history.

teach and control large classes. Repetition, imitating the writing, and copying from the blackboard were the main techniques.⁶² For the majority of times, this profession was chosen by unmarried women, who stopped teaching when they got engaged. As Christina de Bellaigue states

Teaching, as an extension of the maternal role, could be reconciled with a prevailing ideology of domesticity, and was considered the only way a middle-class woman could provide for herself without losing her caste. ⁶³

Regulations for teacher training appeared in 1846, when the Committee of Council on Education provided a national framework which gave general requirements for becoming elementary teachers. In order to be eligible to teach, candidates must be first of all without any bodily infirmity and certify moral character. Furthermore, they must possess a strong elementary education—be fluent in writing, reading, counting and catechism—and so it frequently occurred that students became tutors themselves. In fact, learners between thirteen and eighteen could be trained and paid as apprenticed pupil teachers.

Accessed 2020, September

⁶²Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-48

⁶³C. de Bellaigue, "The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2001, pp. 963-988, pp. 965-966

Then, if deserved and after an accurate examination, some instructors might apply for Queen's scholarships and attend specific training colleges for one to three years. These rules for the training of elementary-school teachers applied until the twentieth century.⁶⁴ Concerning payments, they were relatively attractive to all actors. A pupil teacher earned £10 after the first year of fulfillment plus an increment of £2.5 per year in the next five years. One pupil teacher could teach up to 25 pupils in a school. Qualified head teachers saw their incomes augmented when training pupils—£5 for instructing one pupil teacher, £9 for two and £12 for three—and an extra bonus was given if the latter successfully passed their exams. The role of the teacher acquired a certain importance and was a profession which became more organized and gained significant political influence. Nevertheless, pensions were not remunerative enough to sustain tutors who were eligible to retire after 15 years teaching. Therefore, a fund to sustain them was created at the end of the century.⁶⁵

All in all, the mass educational system for the needy during the Victorian Age was a process *in fieri* and for most children it was still a privilege to receive; but regardless of its weaknesses or flaws, it did achieve basic literacy by 1900.

⁶⁴Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-300

⁶⁵E. G. West, "Educational Slowdown and Public Intervention in 19th Century England: A Study in the Economics of Bureaucracy", *Explorations in Economic History*, Volume 12, Issue 1, 1975, Pages 61-87

2.2. Upper-classes children's education



An album of Hampstead scenes, Paul Martin, 1898

Upper classes—bourgeoisie and the new middle class—enriched by the current industrialisation and trade, could afford to pay more than the few shillings given weekly by working-class children. There were two main groups of educational institutions which developed during the Victorian Age, the Boarding School and the Public School.

The Boarding School spread increasingly in the second half of the nineteenth century especially among the middle classes, helped by the rapid growth of the railway net. This institution provided students with social and moral training, as well as with notions of arithmetics, classics, foreign languages, and poetry. Games were added to the curriculum too, as proved that through organised games cardinal skills

could be trained and improved, such as cooperation and team spirit, ability to win elegantly and to lose with no objection, the power to endure fatigue and pain. This collection of abilities became crucial for living in the modern changing world of the industrial revolution.⁶⁶

The Public School—a private school for young people whose parents pay for their education—⁶⁷offered a great variety of types and degrees of education and treatment. It was acknowledged that some were as unacceptable as the fictional Dickensian Nicholas Nickleby's Dotheboys Hall, while others were spotlessly respectable. The diversity lied in the fact that this type of institution depended on individual initiative. For instance, some owner-schoolmasters saw this as a mere means to create profit and only a little care was given to classroom equipment or the choice of competent and qualified assistants.⁶⁸ According to James Pillans, Professor of Humanity at Edinburgh University during the nineteenth century, in some of the most appreciated and considered schools of England—Eton, Westminster, Winchester—instruction was confined almost exclusively to Greek and Latin and pupils, if willing to develop or improve in subjects such as Mathematics, Writing, French and other accomplishments, needed to search for tutors outside the buildings and after school hours.⁶⁹Other

⁶⁶Gillard, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

⁶⁸B. Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780-1870*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974, pp. 112-114

⁶⁹J. Pillans, *Contributions to the Cause of Education*, London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1856, p. 271

academies instead offered a broader curriculum, which included history, geography, French, German, physical science, drawing, surveying, as well as workshops and laboratories, all necessary subjects to prepare students for their future jobs as engineers, in the commercial fields or the government offices.⁷⁰All in all, the main aim of upper-class instruction was to educate children to become gentlemen and to prepare them for their prospective life as businessmen.

2. 3. Female education



A Generic Difference, George Du Maurier, 1860-1880

⁷⁰W. Spens, *Report of the consultative committee on secondary education with special reference to grammar schools and technical high schools*, London: Published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1938, p. 25

Girls were excluded from upper class education. What has been written until now, corresponds in fact to what was a boy's experience. Girls' education, if they were lucky enough to have one at all, mainly consisted of the three Rs —reading, writing, and religious instruction—and of the main accomplishments e.g. spinning, sewing, household chores, which had to be acquired in order to succeed in the 'game of matrimony'.⁷¹ Some boarding schools open to girls attempted to add foreign languages and scientific subjects to their programs, but etiquette and accomplishments took precedence over academic subjects anyway. What is more, the austerity and regime-like methods did not set the fundamentals necessary for a positive learning environment and therefore most of the students left school at an early age, and the luckiest attended school for a maximum of the two-year time.⁷² However, some families still objected to the fact that not enough attention was paid to teaching Victorian values and not an adequately close moral supervision was fulfilled. This was one of the reasons why another important teaching role emerged: the governess. This figure gained extreme popularity during the nineteenth-century, especially in the second half of the century.

⁷¹J. Lawson and H. Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1973, p. 256

⁷²K. Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, London: Hambledon Continuum, 2001, pp. 12-18

2.4. The Governess



The Governess, Richard Redgrave, 1844

According to the 1851 Census more than 25,000 women earned their living by teaching and caring for children.⁷³ Middle-class sisters, less privileged in comparison to their brothers (who were the direct heirs of the family's fortune), had to make a living somehow if determined to become both financially and personally independent and so be able to leave their parents' home, not as a wife. And working in a factory was not considered as an option. One of the few possibilities was to become a teacher, either in a girls' school or in someone else's home, where for the new-born middle-class mothers—too refined at

⁷³M. J. Peterson, "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1970, pp. 7-26

this stage to instruct their daughters themselves—hiring a governess was a status symbol.⁷⁴Moreover, the costs differed terribly. Sending a daughter to a boarding school cost about £70 per year, while a personal instructor only £25.⁷⁵Another motivation for hiring a governess was to replace an absent mother. This outcome was revealed by the fact that the majority of men hiring a governess were widowed drapers or jewellers who searched for someone not only for housekeeping duties, but for family management too.⁷⁶

The subjects taught by the tutor depended on the age and previous schooling of the children but ranged from the three Rs to geography, French, and key accomplishments for girls. Part of the lessons was devoted to moral teaching too, and a particular stress was put on Victorian values, such as modesty, decency and respect, as well as religion. The importance of the religious component within this scale of values was also demonstrated by the families' search for tutors belonging to the same doctrine as the family itself.⁷⁷

The role of the governess was an intermediate one. She was in fact a mother, but with no child of her own, a component of the family not invited to sit at the table for dinner, a semi servant who was avoided by the same servants who considered her as a family

⁷⁴Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-14

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 23

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 18-20

member.⁷⁸ As this figure was multifaceted and complex and it was therefore hard to find a good balance, there were proper conduct manuals to help governesses understand how to behave and act. The job was low-paid and the chances of saving money for future purposes, e.g. illness and retirement, were very little. Luckily, in 1841 an important organization was created with the aim of improving governesses' employment conditions and helping them with pensions: the Governesses' Benevolent Institution:

The GOVERNESSES INSTITUTION has been established to raise the character of Governesses as a class and to improve the tone of Female Education to assist Governesses in making their old age and to assist in distress and age those Governesses whose exertions for their parents or families have prevented such a provision.⁷⁹

As stated in the report dated 1857, a provident fund was provided, together with proper beneficial provisions, annuity funds, and asylum supplements for elderly governesses in order to support the new-born class with both their education and their profession. Moreover, the Queen's College in London was the first school to provide

⁷⁸Ibid., pp 11-13

⁷⁹"Report of the Board of Management for 1857: Incorporated by Royal Charter, with Power to Hold Land by Gift, Purchase, Or Bequest", London: Edward West, 1857, p. 31

a specific education and qualifications for female teachers in 1848.⁸⁰

2.5. Education for girls in *Jane Eyre*: boarding school, parish school, and the governess

Even though a work of fiction, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* presents various facets of the British educational system during the Victorian Age as the author experienced it, namely the boarding school, the parish school, and the governess role in a homeschooling.

Lowood Institution was a wide-spread building with papered walls, carpets and wooden furniture, and the hall was pictured as "not so spacious or splendid as the drawing-room at Gateshead but comfortable enough".⁸¹The guests, consisting of approximately eighty individuals, were girls from nine to twenty years old, and wore brown dresses covered by long aprons. The daily schedule was reminded by the ring of bells, which informed the young ladies about the rigorous

⁸⁰Girls' School Association, Queen's College London, Available: <https://gsa.uk.com/school/queens-college-london/#:~:text=Established%20in%201848%2C%20Queen's%20was,looking%20girls'%20schools%20in%20London>, Accessed 2020, November

⁸¹C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 43

timetable. Studying and prayers were alternated with food breaks throughout the day until bedtime, when the disciplined girls reached their wide-long rooms with shared beds and prepared for the night. To cite Jane's own words

To-night I was to be Miss Miller's bed-fellow; she helped me to undress: when laid down I glanced at the long rows of beds, each of which was quickly filled with two occupants; in ten minutes the single light was extinguished; amidst silence and complete darkness, I fell asleep.⁸²

The conditions at Lowood were harsh. The girls were fed with poor meals, which were rarely good or edible; their morning toilette in winter began with frozen water, which they all shared; illnesses spread quickly because of the poor hygienic environment, and death was often faced, "disease had thus become an inhabitant of Lowood, and death its frequent visitor; while there was gloom and fear within its walls."⁸³The teaching corpus at the boarding school was formed by various roles. A supervisor and clergyman, Mr. Brocklehurst, a superintendent teacher, Miss Temple, who taught the first class in the morning, and other tutors who conveyed lessons on distinct subjects,

⁸²Ibid., p. 44

⁸³Ibid., p. 77

for instance "repetitions in history, grammar, &c. went on for an hour; writing and arithmetic succeeded, and music lessons were given by Miss Temple to some of the elder girls".⁸⁴Accomplishments were learnt and practised too, as explained by the protagonist herself, "I was glad, when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Smith put into my hands a border of muslin two yards long, together with needle, thimble, &c., and sent me to sit in a quiet corner of the school-room".⁸⁵Punishments were also imposed. Mr. Brocklehurst, after Jane's accidental drop of her slate, says to his audience to "avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse."⁸⁶ And continued "punish her body to save her soul".⁸⁷The description of this rough treatment proceeded and the clergyman obliged the protagonist to stand on a stool and no one could approach or speak to her for the rest of the day. Jane's own reaction is narrated in this way

There was I, then, mounted aloft: I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were, no language can describe.⁸⁸

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 48

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 53

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 66

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 67

The conditions in middle-class institutions were harsh and jail-like for certain aspects. They did offer education and some care, but obliged their students to undergo difficulties and experience such treatments which now could be classified as cruel.

After eight years at Lowood, six as a student and two as a teacher, Jane decided to accept a post as a governess at Thornfield Hall, a manor owned by the charming but enigmatic Mr. Rochester. In the novel the author described the entrance of the protagonist in the schoolroom with Adèle, her young lively French student

After breakfast, Adèle and I withdrew to the library; which room it appears, Mr. Rochester had directed should be used as a schoolroom. Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one book-case left open containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travels, a few romances, &c. I supposed he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal. (...) In this room, too, there was a cabinet piano, quite new and of superior tone; also an easel for painting, and a pair of globes.⁸⁹

What results from this account are the subjects and accomplishments a governess was supposed to teach, e.g. literature, geography, music, and painting. Besides, as already mentioned, this

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 103

role did not only imply teaching. Cares, which an absent mother could not give, were offered too, "I brushed Adèle's hair and made her neat".⁹⁰ Eventually, the protagonist married her master, leaving in doing so her post as a governess, "Reader, I married him."⁹¹

Jane gained another experience before her happy ending. In fact, she worked for some time at a local school in a parish named Morton run by her icy cousin St. John Rivers, who explained "When I came to it two years ago, had no school: the children of the poor were excluded from every hope of progress. I established one for boys: I mean now to open a second school for girls".⁹² The reverend continued his speech, specifying that it was "a village-school: your scholars will be only poor girls -cottagers children- at the best, farmers' daughters. Knitting, sewing, reading, writing, cyphering, will be all you will have to teach."⁹³ St. John clarified the subjects which Jane needed to teach, which were the three Rs, along with knitting and sewing.

Despite being a novel, *Jane Eyre* provides reliable information on the Victorian school system drawing from the author's first-hand experience. In her novel Brontë conveyed an authentic portrait of the nineteenth-century schooling and learning in England, presenting the main institutions and roles of the time, among which the working-class pupils' school, the boarding school, the teacher, and the governess.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 128

⁹¹Ibid., p. 448

⁹²Ibid., pp. 354-355

⁹³Ibid., p. 355

CHAPTER THREE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL THEORIES IN THE MODERN WORLD: THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT'S CENTRALITY

As seen in the previous chapters the modern world brought along with progress and new advances critical issues and social problems, among which literacy. A significant increase in the reading/writing ability during the Victorian Era, which reached the 81% of men and the 73% of women by 1871,⁹⁴ along with a growth of skilled professions in the field of education, literature, science, and trade—such as physicians, teachers, commercial white-collar workers, and shopkeepers—and higher disposable income, set the basis for a larger reading market.⁹⁵In spite of the fact that the main instructional methods employed in Victorian schools were still repetition, learning by heart, and copying from the board, this new interest in literature, education, and science brought to new developments in teaching,

⁹⁴ P. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 203

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203

evidenced by the high number of educational writings in this period.⁹⁶ Some treatises and textbooks offered proper courses on teaching methods, and several understood the value of tailoring approaches to help improve children's abilities. Besides, journals such as *The Governess*, discussed pioneering educational theories which I am about to introduce such as, for instance, those advanced by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi about child-centred learning and Joseph Jacotot of learning by association.⁹⁷In the following paragraphs, I will present some of the most remarkable 19th and 20th century studies on learning and will illustrate Pestalozzi's and Jacotot's theories and approaches.

3.1. Nineteenth-century theories on learning: the contribution of Pestalozzi and Jacotot

Inspired by philosopher Rousseau, who emphasised oral education and knowledge gained through inspection, experience, and efforts,⁹⁸ the nineteenth-century pedagogue Pestalozzi (1746-1827) elaborated a new theory of education based on the spontaneous self-

⁹⁶ C. De Bellaigue, *op. cit.*, p. 969

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 969-970

⁹⁸ R. Agarwal, N. Nagar, *Cooperative Learning*, Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2011, p. 27

development of the individual, primarily focusing on intuitive learning, observation and direct experience. Children at his institute would learn to count with the aid of beans or pebbles, read through phonetic and syllabic methods, and were taught to draw not by imitation but by synthesis.⁹⁹The principle of focussing on the child's ways of learning paved the way for the 'child-centred' approach, and the idea of having groups of pupils studying together and teaching each other, was one of the first hints at *cooperative learning*, which would be developed further in the following decades.¹⁰⁰ Pestalozzi firmly believed that "the ultimate aim of education was not perfection in the accomplishments of the school but fitness for life."¹⁰¹ Therefore, he seems to agree with Rousseau who stated "Life is the trade I would teach him. When he leaves me, I grant you, he will be neither a magistrate, a soldier, nor a priest; he will be a man".¹⁰²Pestalozzi anticipated the words of the Hadow Committee which in 1931 established that the purpose of schools was "not to teach pupils to read, but to teach them how to live."¹⁰³

Educational philosopher Jacotot (1770-1840) knew that teaching was not about overloading pupils with knowledge and "having them

⁹⁹ C. Williams, "Pestalozzi and John Synge", *Hermathena*, No. 106, 1968, pp. 23-39, pp. 25-26

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 31

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 25-26

¹⁰² J. J. Rousseau, *Emile*, New York, Dover Publications, 2013, p. 10

¹⁰³ C. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 26

repeat it like parrots”.¹⁰⁴ He was convinced that students needed to follow a leader, that is, someone who could untie, explicate, and simplify more complex ideas to their “young and ignorant minds”.¹⁰⁵ Only after receiving a proper knowledge and creating a personal judgement and taste, was the pupil ready to walk to his destination—which could be teaching, litigating, designing, making instruments and machines, or discoveries in science.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, Jacotot believed that if a student was helped and led by a mentor he could acquire the necessary means and competences to deal with life and take up a career in any field.

Although forward-thinking, these insights found a receptive ground only in the following century, when psychology became an established science, psychological studies moved forward, and several authors started to dedicate themselves to children’s development and define further the role of both learner and teacher. I will now shortly describe the theories of some of the most important voices of the twentieth century who supported the idea of the key role and centrality of the student for effective learning. These names are Jean Piaget, Lev

¹⁰⁴ R. Mukhopadhyay, V. Narayanan, “The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Jacotot/Rancière on Equality, Emancipation and Education”, *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 2014, pp. 221-234, p. 230

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Semyonovich Vygotskij, Jerome Seymour Bruner, Stanley I. Greenspan, and Daniel Goleman.

3.2. Twentieth-century theories on learning: from Piaget to Goleman

Swiss psychologist Piaget (1896-1980) was the first to make systematic studies on the acquisition of understanding in children¹⁰⁷ and believed that they were similar to scientists, as they were involved actively and not passively in their research.¹⁰⁸He spoke about "spontaneous operations",¹⁰⁹referring to the development of knowledge, and explained that "to know an object is to act on it. To know is to modify, to transform the object, and to understand the process of this transformation, and as a consequence to understand the way the object is constructed".¹¹⁰Therefore, he underlined the

¹⁰⁷ N. R. Carlson, *Psicologia- La Scienza del Comportamento*, Padova: Piccin, 2007, p. 399

¹⁰⁸ P. Venuti, F. La Femina, *Percorsi Evolutivi Forme Tipiche e Atipiche*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 2012, p. 90

¹⁰⁹ J. Piaget, "Cognitive Development in Children: Piaget", *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, Vol. 2, 1964, pp. 176-186, p.176

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

importance of a direct experience in influencing a person's development. The pedagogue defined education as something "provoked by situations"¹¹¹, differently from the development of knowledge, identifying the actors of this provocation in either psychological experimenters or teachers,¹¹²but specified that "learning is possible only when there is active assimilation",¹¹³where for *assimilation* he meant "integration of any sort of (new) reality into an (already possessed) structure".¹¹⁴To summarise, in Piaget's opinion adaptation,¹¹⁵ physical maturation, active experience, and interaction are fundamental factors which permit knowledge and development.¹¹⁶

According to doctor Lev Semyonovich Vygotskij (1896-1934), what was needed to acquire and expand knowledge was a social context, interaction, and exchange. The Russian psychologist firmly believed in the necessity of a social context where a child and his/her mentor—a parent, a teacher, a colleague, a peer—could continuously interact so as to encourage and push the pupil in his learning.¹¹⁷According to Vygotskij "education does not coincide with

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 185

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ To Piaget, adaptation stood for equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation, where *assimilation* is the process by which information is incorporated into existing mental schemes, and the process by which existing mental schemes are altered by new experiences is called *accommodation*.

N. Carlson, *op. cit.*, pp. 399-400

¹¹⁶ G. R. Lefrançois, *Psicologia per Insegnare*, Roma: Armando Editore, 1999, pp. 63-65

¹¹⁷ P. Venuti, F. La Femina, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98

development but is constructed in such a way as to develop those psychological functions that will be needed for the next educational step";¹¹⁸therefore, education and development are complementary parts and should ceaselessly interact with each other. The role of the adult is meant to help the child achieve his goal, by simplifying the work, making it usable and more understandable, moderating the level of attention.¹¹⁹The learner is hence guided, supported, and encouraged by the expert, differently from Piaget's theory where the master served as a "provocateur", letting the child improve on his own by interacting with the environment.¹²⁰

American professor Jerome Seymour Bruner (1915-2016) added a further step in the learning field. He recognised that there was "The *Will to learn*"—the title of one of his major writings—in almost every person, something that he himself defined as an intrinsic motive for learning.¹²¹He detected in curiosity almost "a prototype of the intrinsic motive",¹²²for our "attention is attracted to something that is unclear, unfinished, or uncertain",¹²³and added that an extreme pleasure is taken when one is able to reveal this uncertainty, when one can manage to achieve a goal, or develop a new skill.¹²⁴The scholar also

¹¹⁸ A. Kozulin, "Vygotsky's theory in the classroom: Introduction", *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 2004, Vol. 19, n. 1, 2004, pp. 3-7, p. 3

¹¹⁹ P. Venuti, F. La Femina, *op. cit.*, p. 98

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ J. S. Bruner, "The Will to Learn", *Commentary*, Harvard University, 1966, pp. 41-46, p. 41

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 43

advocated that “we get interested in what we get good at”,¹²⁵suggesting that we involve feelings and emotions in the process of learning. About the *process* Bruner stated that to educate is not to stock someone with already-collected data, but it is to get students to think for themselves, to evaluate certain facts, to participate in the process of creating knowledge which is hence a procedure, not a product.¹²⁶Therefore, this form of reflecting—called *Narrative Thought*—becomes a complement of the objective hypothetical-deductive thinking as connected to the emotional dimension of the individual and consequently not detached and factual, but based on interpretation and intuition.¹²⁷

Psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan (1941-2010) was the first to properly introduce feelings in his model of development, recognising the importance and centrality of emotions when apprehending.¹²⁸He agreed with Piaget on the idea of self-discovering through an active process of interaction with the physical world, but maintained that this journey was conducted and moved forward by emotions.¹²⁹The professor Greenspan shared the opinion of Vygotskij—according to whom learning was deeply connected to both a social context and interactions—adding that these relations had to be emotional in order

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ J. S. Bruner, *Verso una Teoria dell'Istruzione*, Roma: Armando Editore, 1999, p. 114

¹²⁷ P. Venuti, F. La Femina, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-104

¹²⁸ P. Venuti, F. La Femina, *op. cit.*, p. 104

¹²⁹ Ibid.

to be effective and to progress in personal development.¹³⁰ According to him the cognitive, relational, and emotional aspects, were all crucial in a person's development.¹³¹

Scientific journalist Daniel Goleman (1941-) wrote in 1995 a best-selling book titled *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ?* and brought to popularity the term and the concept of *Emotional Intelligence*. He focused on the importance of joining together intelligence, empathy and emotions, in order to enhance abilities such as self-control, enthusiasm, perseverance, and self-motivation, by perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions when learning.¹³²

All the aforementioned scholars would agree that the teaching methods used in the Victorian Age—repetition, learning by heart, copying from the board—were not sufficient for a pupil to learn effectively. Besides, they appear to share the concept according to which the benefits of teaching derive from putting the learner at the centre of teaching, and personal interests and skills have to be stimulated and improved if one is willing to deliver an effective education, providing the tools necessary for shaping the minds to educate the future inhabitants of the world. As in a puzzle, each author

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 105

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 104-109

¹³²D. Goleman, *Intelligenza Emotiva - Che cos'è? E perché può renderci felici*, Milano: Bur Rizzoli, 2001, pp. 53-55

has contributed to the research on the process of self-development and learning: Pestalozzi by considering the child first; Jacotot by understanding the key helping role of the teacher; Piaget in recognizing the importance of active operations and direct experience; Vygotskij with his theory of social context and interaction; Bruner by stressing on the influence of motivation and his *Narrative Thought*; Greenspan by emphasizing emotions, and Goleman in promoting the *Emotional Intelligence*. Therefore, all these scholars have demonstrated how important it is to give the student the protagonist's role in the play of education, where other actors such as parents, teachers, and peers participate in it as crucial figures in this developing journey.

In the next chapter, I will plan a model course for high-school students on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre (1847)*, taking into account the ideas advanced and developed by these authors. I will concentrate on the centrality of students and on their potential abilities to design a corpus of lessons which can be both effective in the way of teaching and memorable for the pupils to learn, for being captivating, engaging, and tailored.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRACTICAL STUDY: LEARNING *JANE EYRE* THROUGH COMPETENCE-BASED STUDENT-CENTRED TECHNIQUES

As seen in the previous chapter, student-centred teaching is crucial to permit education to be effective and memorable for the students. Besides, it is fundamental to allow each pupil to learn in their own way, some might be visual learners—learning by reading or seeing pictures, sight is their sense—or auditory learners—they store information by the way it sounds, and spoken instructions are more comprehensible than written ones—or even kinesthetic learners—apprehending is through touch and physical movements.¹³³ Therefore, the curriculum “should include all tools, materials, texts and activities that match all learning styles of students in the classroom.”¹³⁴ A compromise has to be found, in order to transfer knowledge in the most

¹³³H. I. Radhwan, H. Dhia-Alrahman, “Assessment of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning style among undergraduate nursing students”, *International Journal of Advanced Nursing Studies*, 5 (1) 2016, pp. 1-4

¹³⁴Ibid, p. 4

suitable way possible to each pupil, and competence-based teaching can be this compromise. It implies that teachers take on a new and more conscious educational responsibility: to grow as autonomous and responsible citizens, facilitating and coordinating—like an expert coach—the learning of each and all. Competence-based teaching and work on meaningful tasks develop young people's habits of working together: organised in groups, they learn to ask questions and give answers, they get used to making decisions, to discussing responsibly by comparing different opinions, to helping each other, to take responsibility.¹³⁵ Furthermore, by employing competence-based teaching, each student finds a way and space to learn in a way that suits him or her best, in the most satisfying and meaningful way. By bringing into play the potential characteristics and talents of each individual, competence-based teaching makes it possible to enhance excellence and not to depress weaker students or those with significant learning disorders.¹³⁶

But what is competence? According to the Oxford dictionary, it is “the ability to do something successfully or efficiently”¹³⁷. And the final purpose of education should be to enable students to achieve these competencies by giving inputs and trigger their curiosity, and eventually provide them with solid tools to handle to face the world,

¹³⁵D. Ianes, S. Cramerotti, *Insegnare Domani*, Trento, Edizioni Centro Studi Erickson S.p.A., 2016, pp. 250-253

¹³⁶Ibid, pp. 250-252

¹³⁷A.S Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2000

developing the resilience that makes it possible to safeguard their physical, psychological and ethical integrity and to improve interpersonal and social relations.¹³⁸

In the following project, the protagonists are high-school students of a local language lycee. They were given the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë to read during the summer holidays, and they now have to deal with a challenging task of retelling the story through different approaches in preparation for an interactive open-day exhibition. The main competence that it is aimed to practise and eventually achieve is communication. The students at the end of the course will be able to communicate effectively to each other in different situations, in both confined and broader contexts.

4.1. Project description: Retelling *Jane Eyre* in an interactive way

Target students

High-school students aged 17-18 years old (average 4h of

¹³⁸D. Ianes, *op. cit.*, p. 251

English taught per week)

Starting point

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë, Oxford University Press edition, to be read in the summer

Target competence

Use English language to communicate effectively with each other, talk about both specific topics such as the novel taken into consideration and discuss one person's own feelings, as well as wider subjects concerning social issues

The course

It consists of 20 hours divided along 5 weeks as follows: 2 hours plot; 2 hours characters; 4 hours places; 4 hours historical context; 4 hours focus on feelings; 4 hours project presentation and delivery to the public;

Brief description of the activity "Retelling *Jane Eyre* in an interactive way"

In pairs and small groups, students firstly summarise the main features of the novel by Charlotte Brontë, focusing on the plot, the characters, the places, and the historical context. Secondly, they concentrate on considering selected traits that the novel highlights such as feelings. The final and most important whole-class task is to

retell the story in an interactive way through different tools—recordings, posters, maps, paintings—contributing actively and personally to the project, which will be presented and delivered to families and schoolmates on an open-day exhibition;

Methodology

As the main purpose of this project is to give every student the possibility to acquire knowledge and express themselves according to their learning style, wishing to make them develop new skills too, I have planned a course which uses diverse types of teaching techniques and learning methods, among them group work, ideas storming, recordings, art crafts, and the internet.

Tools and gadgets

The internet is an extremely valuable ally in this project. The students can search for information on selected websites or more in general on the net and collect the information they need. Afterwards, while being guided by the teacher, they choose the material they find more appropriate for the task. Moreover, every school has an IT room which is essential but as it often is busy, students can use their mobile phones to make quicker and more flexible research. This gadget serves in the project as a recorder, too.

Other tools needed for the course are basic stationery, printers, and colours for the creation of works of art.

4.2. Lessons planning

Lesson one. The plot

Even in a skill-based teaching path, the importance of a lecture-like lesson is crucial for the benefit of learning. Especially at the beginning of a course, this technique helps better comprehend the topic and its main features and sets the ground for a fresh start.¹³⁹The teacher in this first phase elicits the main stages of the plot of the novel from the students through an ideas-storming technique, giving hints and helping identify the key facts. Then, she/he gives a handout (see attachment) where the passages of the story are randomly put, and the task for the students is to reorder the story into the correct sequence. Pupils are paired up to help each other remember the accounts. Finally, in an open-class activity, they double check the result.

Lesson two. The characters

After having clarified the crucial steps of the plot, the second lesson aims to focus on the characters of the novel. The students are

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 253

now divided into small groups of three people and each needs to describe one selected character with the help of visual representations. Each group has the opportunity to access internet resources suggested by the teacher, printers, and stationery, to create a poster to present to the whole class at the end of the lesson. At the beginning of the session the teacher indicates the main chapters each group has to take into consideration to start shaping the chosen character. Afterwards, by using a collage technique, quotes and detailed descriptions from the book, along with printed images or hand-made sketches, the learners rebuild—according to a shared interpretation between them and the instructor who must clarify and guide them in this first part of the task—the identities of Jane Eyre, Mr Rochester, Bertha Mason, Mrs Reed, St. John Rivers, Helen Burns.

While their classmates speak, the other students shall write notes about the characters introduced and add details at the end of the speech if needed.

Lesson three. The places

In this third lesson, the geography teacher collaborates with the English teacher. The students are gathered into small groups of four people—the teacher should take care of mixing their abilities and levels at best for a better result—and the purpose of this lesson is to detect the moves of the protagonist, Jane, throughout the book and create a

hypothetical literary tour—a blank map of the United Kingdom will be provided. Pupils should concentrate on five locations in northern England: the Reed family’s home at Gateshead, the wretched Lowood School, Rochester’s manor house Thornfield, the Rivers family’s home at Moor House, and Rochester’s rural retreat at Ferndean. The task aims to help the students memorize the sequences of the tale, but the charts do not need to be time-oriented only. Pupils can find their own way to talk about the places in the novel, and can peek into official websites which propose similar tours—with the difference that they usually join together places of both the life of the author and the ones of her novel or novels, such as the ones below:

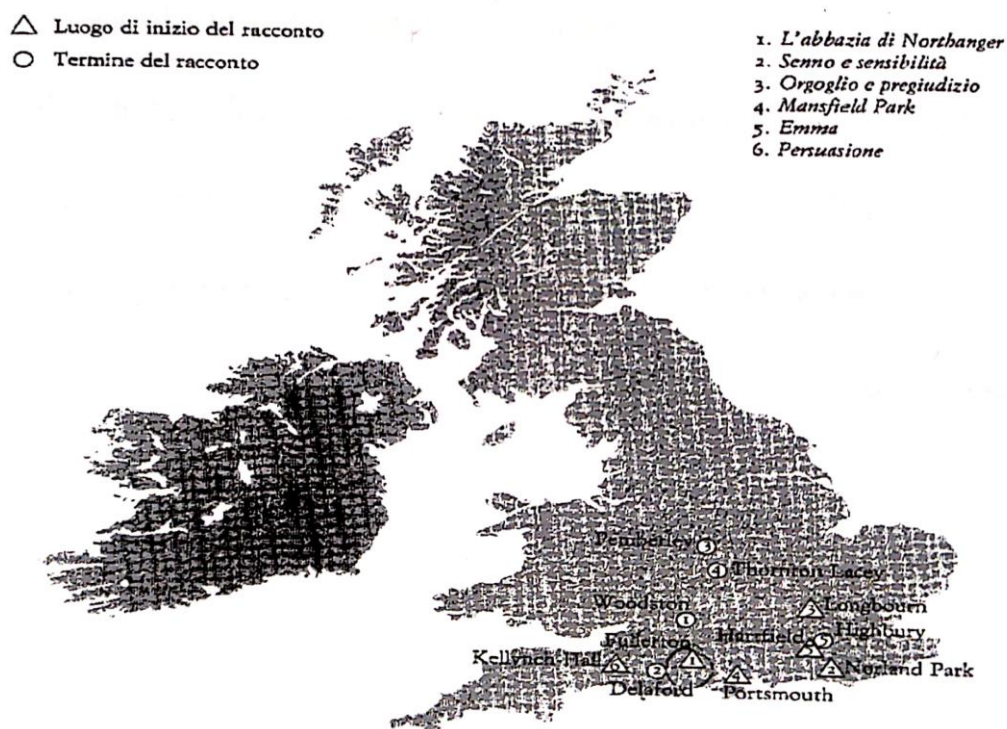
- <https://www.classicbritishdramatours.co.uk/jane-eyre-tours/>
- <https://tours-international.com/group-travel/literary/the-brontes-of-haworth>

The first website of a British travel agency shows four possible *Jane Eyre* tours divided according to their length, each one planned with visits and breaks. The students can get inspired to start projecting their own guided tour.

The second site focuses more on the extras the people can choose to shape their tour, and give several options for accommodation, meals, attractions. The learners in this case can take inspiration from the web page to add extra details to their project.

The result should be a literary tour introduced through its most important moves with the use of a map, such as the one presented by Moretti in *Atlante del Romanzo Europeo*,¹⁴⁰ but which focuses on one novel only. Moreover, the students should role play an act with their classmates, pretending to be an actual international tour agency which presents its tours to the public, and try to sell them.

Figura 1. L'Inghilterra di Jane Austen.



¹⁴⁰ F. Moretti, *Atlante del Romanzo Europeo 1800-1900*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, p.

Lesson four. The historical and social context

Starting from the historical facts present in the novel, students share ideas and define the key history lines of the 19th century, and together with both the English teacher and the history teacher elicit terms and images connected to the period taken into consideration in an open-class activity such as social class, living conditions, women, and education. Students are then divided into groups of five and each watches a short video—it helps practise their listening and pronunciation skills—about one of the selected topics, focusing on differences and similarities with nowadays' situation and compare what they have seen with the parts concerning the same topics in their English literature book in order to shape a more detailed understanding of the historical and social background.¹⁴¹ To reinforce the positive outcome of this task, the history teacher could devote one of his/her lessons expressly to the themes taken into consideration, that are social class and Victorian values, women, living conditions, and education. The English teacher should monitor the learners while preparing their speeches, in order to avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretations, and clarify when necessary. Finally, the students create an oral project of approximately 20 minutes—keywords to be

¹⁴¹ I have considered the book "Face to Face, World Literature in English from the Origins to the Contemporary Age" by D. Heaney, D. Montanari, and R. A. Rizzo, ed. Lang, 2005, specific for Italian high schools. There is an entire section about the Victorian Age at pp. 216-303

written on the board before talking—to be presented to the class and recorded with any technological tool available, either a professional recorder or a mobile phone. Furthermore, the questions that all the groups are required to reply during their talking are connected to the novel, especially to the character of Jane, e.g. what social class was Jane in? What type of education did she receive? What conditions did she experience in the crucial moments of her life?

As in lesson number two, pupils are asked to take notes on their peers' speeches.

Videos at the following links:

- Social class and Victorian values. This video by the Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery gives general hints about social class division and values of the Victorian period
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjOGs-GdEpI>
- Women. This recording by the British Library briefly examines the condition of women in the age taken into consideration
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkJJFX8Qn90>
- Living conditions. Inspire Education provides a general excursus of the living conditions of poor and rich Victorians
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDZe512gPeE>

- Education. At this link the BBC presents a partial image of the Victorian school. The students, especially for this topic, need to analyse the novel and make further research on their book and on the net to clarify the different educational possibilities
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yB7HyNvEUxQ>

Lesson five. Feelings in and outside the novel: pictures of *Jane Eyre*

This lesson is intended to be split into two different moments. In the first part, students are divided into pairs and consider some scenes, discussing how it would be possible to represent them from an artistic point of view. They read the passage in the novel, analyse the tone, the language, the adjectives used, and discuss how to turn the episode explained on the paper into real and material representations. In the second part, the students with the help of their art teacher are shown paintings of the 19th-20th centuries loosely/in some way connected to those scenes and are then asked to paint on their own the feelings they observed and felt, giving a personal free interpretation of the scene.

The materials the learners can use are tempera, brushes, pencils, awls, scissors, cotton wool, paper, and the colours suggested are red, gold, black, magenta red, and light blue.

The scenes from the book can be related to the following famous

paintings:

- The red room (ch. 2): represents fear, desperation, and pain, the artistic current is *Fauves* and the painting is *The Red Room* by H. Matisse, 1908
- The burning heather (ch. 4): depicts anger and rebellion, the painting is *The Scream* by E. Munch, 1893
- Summer at Lowood (ch. 9): portrays freedom and happiness, the painting is *Garden* by P. Bonnard, 1935
- Heavy rain and absence of Mr Rochester (ch. 25): delineates preoccupation and increasing anguish, the painting is *Snow Storm* by W. Turner, 1812
- Deep love, carved in marble (ch. 34): description of a strong, intense, permanent love, the work of art is the sculpture *Anatomia* by G. Penone, 2013.

Lesson six. Open-day exhibition: retelling *Jane Eyre* in an interactive way

This last lesson of the course aims to settle the venue for the open day first, and then to actually present the open-day exhibition to

the public. Students work together to set up the space, arranging all the materials prepared during the sessions—posters, maps, as well as paintings and recordings—and establishing the direction of the tour.

On the actual day, learners are divided into small groups of three and confer with part of the public—parents, family members, schoolmates—as proper tour guides. They convey the information acquired, presenting the novel and the main themes on which they have been focusing on in the previous five weeks. At this stage the students should be ready to communicate properly with each other and with the public in their L2, English.

4.3. Evaluation and testing

This experience aims to be practical, memorable and effective for the future for all participants and the main features that are considered to be then evaluated and tested cannot be the ones examined in conventional tests. Every task of the course encourages the students to work together to dialogue and collaborate.¹⁴²These skills in fact

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 238

highlight the pupil's attitude to relate to the reality in which he or she operates and to engage in authentic assignments, which are characterised by the re-elaboration of one's own knowledge and the complexity of the situations that must be brought to a conclusion.¹⁴³Therefore, a more traditional multiple-choice quiz with questions and answers is not advisable, or at least it could assess the knowledge of contents but not the real competence acquired by the student.

In my opinion, an assessment *in itinere* could be the best option to consider for this type of path. Oral and written gatherings—recordings, posters, projects, and maps—are extremely helpful tools to contemplate and each lesson can be a cause for reflection for every student, and the quality of work can be reviewed through a self-evaluation chart, followed by an open-class activity where to share and compare their own experience, and an assessment table completed by the teacher where to consider content knowledge and acquisition, grammar and lexical accuracy, and fluency. All these data will be combined considering personal initiative and cooperative work throughout the project and added to create the final grade.

¹⁴³Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation aims to present an alternative method to teaching *Jane Eyre* in high schools, focusing on leading students to be intelligible and fluent rather than grammatically exemplary but unconfident. My project intends to be a possible and efficient alternative to teach learners both the novel and its context, and the ability to communicate to each other effectively as unfortunately, due probably to the small number of hours devoted to English language each week and therefore a little time available, the Italian school system tends to place fluency and more practical, speaking activities in the second position.

In order to point out the significance of this topic not only for what concerns literature but also for several other scientific fields, psychological studies and theories of the 19th and 20th century have been mentioned. After an overview of the first basic compulsory schooling of the eighteenth century in England, and later than giving examples of the different educational possibilities presented in the pages of *Jane Eyre*, the thesis briefly examines some of these studies

which brought awareness of the student-centred and competence-based class and concentrated on the pivot of employing techniques that could be effective and memorable to all types of learners—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. This is the reason why I have decided to plan sessions where to experiment different methodologies, e.g. put the story in the correct order using slips of paper to reorder, create a visual poster on one character starting from the analysis of the text (descriptions, speeches), plan a literary map which could be actually used for tourist tours, present orally a topic regarding the Victorian social and historical context joining together contents of the students' literature book and selected videos on the internet, reproduce feelings found in the text through art and creativity, and speak publicly as a Cicero.

All these activities are aimed to overcome some barriers which commonly appear when learning a language—above all the fear of making mistakes—and besides, they require a constant collaboration and participation between students, enabling everyone to improve while feeling supported and encouraged.

In the future, further planning will be needed after putting into actual practice this project at school, as it would be beneficial to really understand the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, to see the response of the students, and to analyse what works and what requires to be adjusted and altered according to both the type of learners and the time available to devote to each task. In any case, the

final and most important goal of this project is to give students the tools necessary to walk out into the 'real world' and be ready to communicate and interact effectively in their L2.

I started this work with a quote by Nelson Mandela who defined education as the most powerful weapon we possess to change the world, and even now it represents the key to a better, peaceful, and sustainable world, for it provides tools to open both our mind and heart and improve our life and the wellbeing of our society.

I would now like to mention the words of a famous Italian film director about learning a language

A different language is a different vision of life.

Federico Fellini

Even though the quote above dates back to some decades ago, it still has a precise meaning for us now. Learning a language in fact is not only knowing words and structures, but understanding and being involved in a world which is different from our normality and that can influence the way we think and act, our tolerance and comprehension. Learning a language is sharing and inclusiveness, two words which take on a pivotal meaning, especially nowadays.

What has changed since Mandela and Fellini spoke, are the methods and devices we currently utilize to learn. In my project I have mentioned the internet as an important instrument for the students, specifying that either the computer or the mobile phone can be equally employed. The latter is probably the most used device among teenagers and I think that using it during the lessons for research while being monitored and guided by the teachers, or at home both for self-study and to support language development, under parental control, can prove that there are other extremely valuable and useful uses of the gadget. Besides, these types of activities can teach students how to establish a safer and healthier relationship with this gadget.

As teachers, I believe we have the responsibility of transferring the passion and dedication of our work to the students and encourage them to find their own way, with respect to their acquired and potential competences. Let us give our students the weapons necessary to stop current wars and prevent future ones, and new, different, wide-open eyes to look at the world, and this can surely be done through education.

APPENDIX

Task: Reorder the story

E) Jane is sent to Lowood School, a charity institution for orphan girls. Despite the difficult conditions at Lowood, Jane prefers school to life with the Reeds. The school's damp conditions, combined with the girls' near-starvation diet, produces a typhus epidemic, in which nearly half the students die, including Helen Burns, who dies in Jane's arms. Jane quickly becomes a star student, and after six years of hard work, a teacher. Following two years of teaching at Lowood, Jane is ready for new challenges.

B) In this frightening room, Jane thinks she sees her uncle's ghost and begs to be set free. Her Aunt Reed refuses, insisting Jane remain in her prison until she learns complete submissiveness. When the door to the red-room is locked once again, Jane passes out. A doctor suggests Aunt Reed to send Jane to school, because she is obviously unhappy at Gateshead.

A) One January afternoon, while walking Jane helps a horseman whose

horse has slipped on a patch of ice and fallen. Returning to Thornfield, Jane discovers that this man is Edward Fairfax Rochester, the owner of Thornfield and her employer. Although he is often taciturn, Jane grows fond of his mysterious, passionate nature. He tells Jane about Adèle's mother, Céline, a Parisian opera-singer who was once his mistress.

D) Jane places an advertisement for a governess position in the local newspaper. Jane accepts the job at Thornfield, where she is warmly welcomed.

C) Jane is ten years old, an outsider in the Reed family. Their brother, John, is more blatantly hostile to Jane, reminding her that she is a poor dependent of his mother who shouldn't even be associating with the children of a gentleman. One day he is angered to find Jane reading one of his books, so he takes the book away and throws it at her. Finding this treatment intolerable, Jane fights back.

F) One night, Jane smells smoke in the hallway, and realizes it is coming from Rochester's room. Jane races down to his room, discovering his curtains and bed are on fire. Unable to wake Rochester, she douses both him and his bedding with cold water.

H) Jane immediately drives to Ferndean. There she discovers a powerless, unhappy Rochester. Jane carries a tray to him and reveals

her identity. Ten years later, Jane writes this narrative.

I) Following this incident, Rochester leaves suddenly for a house party at a local estate. Jane is miserable during his absence and realizes she is falling in love with him.

K) When Jane returns to Thornfield, the guests have left. Rochester tells Jane he will soon marry Blanche, so she and Adèle will need to leave Thornfield. In the middle of this charade, Jane reveals her love for him, and the two end up engaged. Jane is happy to be marrying the man she loves, but during the month before the wedding she is plagued by strange dreams of a destroyed Thornfield and a wailing infant.

J) Instead, Jane sneaks away in the middle of the night, with little money and no extra clothing. She luckily meets Sir John Rivers, the clergyman of a parish who offers her shelter. Jane soon becomes close friends with St. John's sisters, Diana and Mary, and he offers Jane a humble job as the schoolmistress for the poor girls in Morton. John learns that, unbeknownst to her, Jane has inherited 20,000 pounds from her uncle, John Eyre.

M) Although Jane is certain this woman didn't look like Grace Poole, Rochester assures her it must have been the bizarre servant. Rochester

rushes the wedding party back to Thornfield, where they find his insane and repulsive wife locked in a room in the attic. Grace Poole is the woman's keeper, but Bertha was responsible for the strange laughter and violence at Thornfield. Rochester tries to convince Jane to become his mistress and move with him to a pleasure villa in the south of France.

L) He tries to convince Jane to accompany him to India, as his wife. Jane refuses his request. Arriving at Millcote, she discovers Thornfield a burned wreck, just as predicted in her dreams. From a local innkeeper, she learns that Bertha Mason burned the house down one night and that Rochester lost an eye and a hand while trying to save her and the servants.

G) John's real name is St. John Eyre Rivers, so he, his sisters, and Jane are cousins. The Rivers were cut out of John Eyre's will because of an argument between John and their father. Thrilled to discover that she has a family, Jane insists on splitting the inheritance in four. John plans to become a missionary in India.

Keys:

E, B, A, D, C, F, H, I, K, J, M, L, G

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yB7HyNvEUxQ>

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