A GUIDE TO ALLUSIONS IN JANE EYRE

Jane Eyre has an abundance of Biblical, literary, and historical allusions. To enrich their comprehension, students might be asked to track allusions as they study the novel. A sampling of allusions, along with an explanation for each, is provided here for reference.

Bewick's History of British Birds: A book that provides details about various species of birds, along with engraved illustrations. Jane enjoys the book as an escape from her life with her cruel aunt and cousins (7).

Nero and Caligua: Mentioned in connection with John Reed, these notorious Roman leaders were known for excessive spending and evil deeds (10).

Gulliver's Travels: Jane requests Bessie to fetch this novel written by Jonathan Swift. The story uses the form of a traveler’s narrative to develop a satirie about human nature (20).

Guy Fawkes: Jane tells readers that Abbot compared her to Guy Fawkes. As part of the famous “Gunpowder Plot,” Fawkes, along with fellow conspirators, attempted to blow up King James I and the Houses of Parliament in London in 1605. The reference is made in connection with Jane’s status as an “ill-conditioned child” (25).

Babel: A Biblical city in Shinar where the building of a tower is held in Genesis to have been halted by the confusion of tongues; Jane makes this reference to describe the chaos at Lowood School (46).

Rasselas: An essay being read by Helen Burns; this work by Samuel Johnson contends that happiness may not always be within one’s grasp (49).

Bluebeard’s castle: A fairy-tale in which a young wife has access to all the rooms in a castle except for the one that contains the bodies of her dead predecessors. Jane mentions this in connection to her lingering by a passage near the attic (108).

Dian: A Celtic deity, Jane uses this name when she refers to Blanche’s appearance with this name (175).

Eliezer and Rebecca: Rochester and Blanche Ingram dress up as Eliezer and Rebecca during a game of charades. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis, Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, is sent to find a bride for Abraham’s son, Isaac. Eliezer does not marry Rebecca, just as Rochester will not marry Blanche (186).

King Ahasuerus: The Persian king who is found in the Book of Esther and promises to give Esther what she wants, just as Rochester promises Jane (265).

Samson: From the Bible in Judges 16, Samson reveals to his lover Delilah that his hair, the source of his strength, has never been cut; she uses this secret against him to bring about his destruction (265).

Marmion: A book of Romantic poetry written by Sir Walter Scott that is read by Jane while St. John examines her drawings (377).

Medusa: From a Greek myth, Medusa is the mortal Gorgon who is slain when decapitated by Perseus. A person would turn to stone if looking at her. The allusion is made in connection to Jane’s demeanor after she has learned that she is an heiress (389).

Paul and Silas’s prison: Paul, the apostle, was thrown into prison with Silas for serving Jesus. After suffering severely, they were miraculously freed. Jane makes reference to this as she reflects on the voice she had heard that seems like an inspiration (429).

Nebuchadnezzar: The proud king of the Babylonian Empire who experienced a fall. His deterioration is described in The Bible as “he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.” Jane makes a reference to Nebuchadnezzar when she returns to Rochester and finds him in seclusion (444).