Jane Eyre may have a wild, romantic streak, but its heroine’s love counters everything readers have been taught to desire. Neglected in childhood and traumatized at a school where she is humiliated and starved, Jane arrives at Thornfield ready to love. At first, it seems she’ll get her chance: There are romantic promises, forbidden glances, anguished prayers. But though her story delivers sexual tension and an agony of will-they-or-won’t-they that lasts into its final pages, nothing about Jane’s love is what you’d expect.

The centrality of the colonial motif in Jane Eyre has been well established. The figure of Bertha Mason Rochester haunting the text has made this centrality undeniable: her confinement at Thornfield Hall drives the plot, her eventual fiery demise both enables and conditions the conclusion, and the oppression of Bertha and other peoples subjected to imperial domination metaphorises Jane’s subjection to the patriarchal authority of various males throughout the narrative. Moreover, the wealth appropriated from the colonies materially sustains the society with which the novel concerns itself. The conclusion of Jane Eyre reinforces the preponderance of the colonial motif. The imperial project is foregrounded at the novel’s end in St John’s mission to India, and the characters of the novel are sustained by the wealth obtained from the colonies in the form of Jane’s inheritance. The novel’s ending, however, has been read by many recent critics as an affirmation of St John’s evangelising mission, leading some of them to conclude that Jane Eyre represents Charlotte Bronte’s own colonial appropriation.