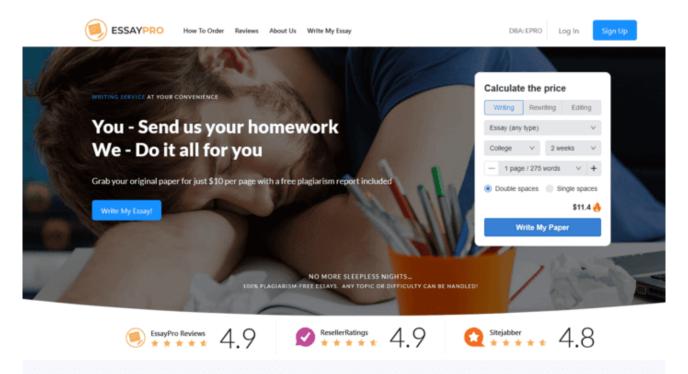
Quakerism in Jane Eyre



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Quakerism is mentioned many times in Jane Eyre. Beyond the explicit descriptions of Quaker-like appearances or behaviors, many parts of Quaker lifestyle are also used in a less obvious manner in Jane Eyre. Quakerism would have been known in the Yorkshire moors where Charlotte Bronte grew up and near where <u>Jane Eyre</u> lived, especially since that is where the religion began (Moglen 19; Barbour and Frost 27). As a more moderate approach to denying the self than Evangelicalism, Quakerism seems to be embraced in the novel. Unlike Mr. Brocklehurst's or St. John River's philosophy (Bronte 95, 98; ch. 7), Quaker simplicity does not mean asceticism or forbidding earthly joys, though it does mean rejecting indulgence (Barbour and Frost 44).

Jane frequently associates herself with the <u>Quakers</u>, more formally known as the Society of Friends, particularly in her clothing and manners. She says of herself, "I was myself in my usual Quaker trim, where there was nothing to retouch-all being too close and plain, braided locks included, to admit of disarrangement" (160; ch. 14). Later she says she is merely Mr. Rochester's "plain, Quakerish governess" (287; ch. 24). Simplicity is one of the Quaker's "testimonies," which included plain clothing of black, brown, or gray (Barbour and

Frost 44). Jane wears black for her everyday outfit and her more formal dress is of gray (151; ch. 13). Even when Mr. Rochester insists on buying her new silk dresses, she persuades him to purchase only black and gray ones (296; ch. 24).

Jane resembles the Quakers in more than what she tells us. Her childhood sympathies mirror Quaker teachings. From her earliest childhood, she sees her <u>disposition</u> as "passionate, but not vindictive," and not inherently bad, as Mrs. Reed does (64-5, 68-9; ch. 4, 267; ch. 21). The Quakers believe that babies "were born innocent and [that] children retained their innocence until they reached an age of reason" (Barbour and Frost 115). The taint from "original sin" is not embraced by Jane nor by Quaker doctrines. Furthermore, Jane sympathizes early on with the plight of slaves (43; ch. 1, 44, 46; ch. 2). Quakers think slavery is barbaric, cruel, and inhumane, and were one of the first religious sects to denounce it (Barbour and Frost 119).

Part of Quaker education is to study the Bible and to learn how to "dress and speak plainly, to control one's temper, to accept moderation in outward desires, and to act with a becoming sobriety of manners" (Barbour and Frost 190, 115-6).

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