Readers are not introduced to the character of Bertha Mason until long after aspects of her personality have been revealed. She is the hidden secret of Thornfield Hall and is depicted as having a piercing laugh and an inhuman appearance. Jane never has the chance to meet Bertha and only knows of her existence from the crazed encounters between the women and the revelation that Bertha is Rochester’s wife. Although Bertha plays a seemingly minor role in the novel, she is used as way to build a separation between insanity and craziness and the image of goodness that Jane represents. Bertha is set up to be the antithesis of Jane and is ostracized and labeled crazy leading to an improved opinion of Jane and the conclusion that she would be a much better match than Rochester’s previous wife.

The negative attitudes formed toward Bertha can be seen in each of the residents at Thornfield Hall. Charlotte Bronte chooses not to give Bertha a voice or a way to tell her own story because she is merely a device used to enhance the image of Jane. The only viewpoint readers have of Bertha is one that completely pushes her on the outside of Thornfield. Mrs. Fairfax and Grace Poole each keep the existence of Bertha a secret because they do not regard her as a member of the estate or a part of the family that she has married into. Rochester speaks of his wife with disdain and dismisses her as completely incompetent and incapable of living a normal life. “Bertha Mason is mad;
and she came of a mad family—idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad-woman and a drunkard!” (Bronte 339). Rochester has no respect for his wife and his attitude toward her does not sharply contrast from Jane’s thoughts about Bertha. “The morning had been a quiet morning enough—all except the brief scene with the lunatic…” (343). Even though Jane does not cast Bertha off as harshly as those around her, she still views Bertha as insane and since Jane is the narrator, readers are encouraged to share this opinion of Bertha.

Bertha’s appearance is also intended to be a distinct difference from Jane’s wholesome and plain looks. “It was a discolored face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!” (329). Her description of this figure is meant to de-humanize Bertha as a character and exclude her from the rest of Thornfield. Bertha’s physical features allow for an uncivilized appearance that does not adhere to the typical colonial woman. Contrarily, Jane is the typical colonial woman. She dresses modestly, behaves with class, and is obedient in social situations. Her physical appearance is so different than Bertha’s that it furthers the argument that Jane would be the better wife and reveals that Bertha ultimately is the antithesis of Jane.

Utilizing both physical characteristics and the generic attitude of the other characters toward the women, Bronte has allowed for a complete separation between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason. This distinction enables the claim that Bertha is the exact opposite of everything that Jane stands for and is the antithesis of the good, colonial woman that Jane represents. She is considered a complete outcast from everyone and is completely caged by her husband and the people who are supposed to be her family. She
shares nothing in common with the character of Jane except the potential for the relationship with Rochester and when given these two options, readers are naturally drawn toward the choice of Jane, the intended selection of Charlotte Bronte.