

How charlotte bronte develops the gothic features of jane eyre



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Gothic literature refers to a period in the 18th 19th century when writing included supernatural or horrifying events. The word Gothic relates to the Middle Ages when stories commonly depicted courtly love, and villainous characters. ' Gothic' is also seen as a derogatory term for the Middle Ages used by the Victorians to describe an immoral and spiritual way of life. ' Jane Eyre' has been described as a Gothic novel, and portrays many characteristics of this particular style of writing. Charlotte Bronte as influenced as a child by the literature, which surrounded her.

As a child, she gained an intense interest in the Gothic style, which is reflected in her novels. A new form of writing was discovered which explored the dark side of the human soul, wild romantic yearnings, and deep passions. Many Gothic novels include detailed description, and add reference to the intimate feelings, and passionate love of their characters. The authors of these novels wanted to entertain and to enlighten their audiences.

Many stories were written with imaginary coincidences, mysterious characters, supernatural, unexplained, or dramatic events and adventures between a hero or heroine and their lovers. The imagery and description in these novels creates an illusion of time, space, and people. The settings for many of the chapters especially in ' Jane Eyre' are often grim and convey uncertainty and fear to the reader. Mystery and suspense in ' Jane Eyre' provides a crucial element to the reader's interpretation of the novel, and many Gothic conventions are displayed through Brontes successful use of the plot and narrative techniques.

Brontë introduces her eponym Jane Eyre in a rather lowly light at the beginning of the novel, “ You ought to be aware Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poor-house”. A servant, emphasising Jane’s immediate status in society, pronounces this sentence aloud. Brontë chooses an immediately unlikely protagonist for her novel. This “ underhand” girl is a mystery to begin with, as she appears to have no immediate relatives, yet she is neither a servant.

To use an underprivileged young girl, with no social standing as a central character in a novel was almost unheard of. Rochester is never properly introduced; however he appears one evening when Jane is walking in a country lane. “ His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared and steel clasped... He had a dark face with heavy features and a heavy brow”. This description installs a sense of dread in the reader; the repetition of the word heavy to describe his facial features creates a morose image. The fact that he is an anonymous character instantly creates uncertainty.

Rochester also, when he appears in the storyline is portrayed as a mysterious, sardonic creature, “ I recognised his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils denoting, I thought, cholera”. Jane describes his features as harsh and angry looking, and she describes rather than praises his features, which is unusual. This effect of this shows Rochester in a mysterious and rather negative light. Rochester’s house ‘ Thornfield’ is also described in a similar way to Rochester himself.

Battlements round the top gave it a picturesque look. Its grey front stood out well from the background of a rookery". The house is portrayed as a rambling ' fairytale' style mansion. The description using the elements of different colour and shape illuminate the description. Bronte's use of nature reflects the atmosphere of the scene. The sinister atmosphere of the house is magnified when Jane visits the leads with Mrs Fairfax, " its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle".

The description of ' black' doors creates a dark impression, and the rows of doors suggest secrecy, Bronte also uses the metaphor of Bluebeard's castle to convey further fear, as Bluebeard was a fairytale figure who preyed on his wives. This foreshadows the future events in the novel. " For the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and, but that it was high noon, and that no circumstance of ghostliness accompanied". Jane experiences many dreams and nightmares throughout the novel, which add to the reader's interpretation of the plot.

Often these dreams are associated with death. Jane experiences a foresight into the death of Mr John and Mrs Reed, " scarcely a night had gone over my couch that had not brought with it a dream of an infant". This image of a phantom infant is foreboding as it describes an almost ghostly figure that creates distress in Jane's spirit. The quote describes a dark scene at night, and the reference to a couch makes Jane appear helpless as she sleeps. This image of a dream also relates to Jane's childhood experiences of death.

Death in ' Jane Eyre' is somewhat underrated as references are made to death so frequently that the reader accepts this as an integral part of the

novel. These images of death are certainly excellent examples of the way Charlotte Brontë incorporates morbid and sinister images into her novels. Jane accepts death as a way of life, "I was asleep and Helen was -dead" Even as such a small child, when Jane was very close to death herself her connection with the dying Helen is of much significance. Brontë uses Helen's death as a symbol of independence for Jane in the novel; however, she also begins to take heed of Helen's teaching.

Magic and supernatural elements recur frequently throughout 'Jane Eyre', which Brontë uses to convey terror to the reader. Jane is introduced to these themes very early on in her childhood, as she frequently fills her mind with mythical images, "all was eerie and dreary; the giants were gaunt goblins, the pigmies were malevolent and fearful imps". Jane's early knowledge of magical creatures and stories forms Jane into a solemn character, and her imagination expands in these areas. The creatures she reads about are grotesque and frightening, which heightens the reader's awareness of the ever-present mythical themes.

The creatures are described with negative traits, which also reflects Jane's feelings at this particular time. Jane deceives her imagination when she profanes to see a ghost, "My heart beat tick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which deemed the rushing of wings". The mysterious enchantment, which overcomes Jane, chills the reader. Suspense is achieved by describing Jane's individual feelings, and the beating of her heart suggests time passing and her tension and anxiety in this situation. The reader then empathises with Jane in the novel as her anxiety is translated to the reader.

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Jane is also wary to the mysterious characters who appear in the country lane whilst she is on her way to Hay, “ wherein figured a north of England spirit called a ‘ Gytrash’ which, in the form of a horse, mule or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers”. The ‘ Gytrash’, a mythical creature in English folklore is at first a frightening and foreboding creature, which has wild passions, violent yearnings and is a stranger to Jane. This creature is used by Brontë to add suspense to her story line as it uses sinister adverbs and adjectives.

Yet, this image of the ‘ Gytrash’ almost mirrors the actions of Mr. Rochester in the novel. Mr. Rochester approaches life rapidly and furiously, capturing anyone who falls into his path, which is similar to the analogy of Jane falling in love with Mr. Rochester. She is at first unsure of his commitments, and is fooled into a false paradise as Mr. Rochester has many faces, rather like the ever changing form of the ‘ Gytrash’. Mr. Rochester also deceives Jane and his visitors by pretending to be a gypsy fortuneteller, “ The library looked tranquil enough as I entered it, and the Sibyl-if Sibyl she were- was seated snugly enough in an easy-chair at the chimney corner.

She has on a red cloak and a black bonnet”. The arrival of the fortuneteller creates a short interlude in the plot, and allows Brontë to introduce subtle characteristics of the Gothic style. The gypsy appears to be a rather enigmatic and mystifying character, and is likened to a priestess of Apollo who prophesied the future in Greek myth. Brontë uses this mythical reference also to highlight Gothic characteristics surrounding the gypsy. Her clothing is described as being red and black. Red symbolises perhaps love or death, and black symbolises hatred, darkness, and mourning.

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Perhaps Brontë is yet again trying to symbolise Rochester's character, as being cunning and dishonest, which is hidden behind a mask of identity, similar to the disguise of the gypsy. The red she wears symbolises the love Rochester and Jane share; however, the black symbolises a future mourning and separation. Brontë's protagonist has mythical references and his character is masked, which enables him to be a perfect Gothic hero-villain. Eventually Jane, and Rochester are separated at the altar, and his wife Bertha is discovered: " He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door: this, too, he opened.

In a room without a window, there burnt a fire guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain" This quote displays a picture of the imprisonment of Bertha, which is an example of the metaphorical and physical sense of imprisonment portrayed in Gothic literature. The description of the room is portrays an image of violence, as the furniture is ' guarded', and there are ' chains' in the room. The room also has no window; therefore, there is almost no light and no hope for Bertha in her ' prison'.

Rochester also displays physical violence to combat Bertha's aggression and unrestrained behaviour, " At last he mastered her arms... and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges" Rochester's treatment of Bertha is described in detail, physically. However, his treatment of Bertha almost mirrors his psychological treatment of Jane. Rochester almost binds Jane into a false sense of security

by offering her his love, and the outworking of his cruelty is his offer of marriage to her.

Brontë also introduces an aspect of madness in the novel, with Rochester's first wife Bertha, " Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations? Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! " Many Gothic novels incorporated unconventional new themes into plots such as ' madness', and ' Jane Eyre' is an excellent example of these conventions. In this quote, Rochester describes her background; the question mark indicates Rochester's questioning of her background.

As a ' Creole', a descendant of European settlers in the West Indies, of mixed race descent, Bertha was probably seen as an outcast in English Victorian Society, and not in human terms. Jane Eyre presents a particularly interesting interpretation of a ' Gothic' novel. The traditional view of a Gothic novel is subverted to produce a writing, which reflects some Gothic aspects, but is not wholly Gothic, especially the denouement. Brontë includes certain essential themes such as, mysteries, imprisonment, dramatic events, ghostly references, and the supernatural.

The establishment of the plot and frequent metaphors throughout the novel are consistent with a Gothic theme; there is heavy use of patterns of meaning and imagery. Although Jane Eyre expresses her views openly, this is only because she is narrating the novel, as even she conforms to the Victorian ideology by submitting to those in greater authority than herself. Jane and Rochester's love goes against recognised theology, as they were

from different social backgrounds and classes and this is typical of the Gothic movement where traditions were questioned.

Nevertheless, what one may at first fail to realise is that Jane is only able to ultimately marry Rochester, once she has inherited the legacy from her late Uncle in Madeira. When Jane eventually marries, she is no longer able to love Rochester as before, since she is compelled to care for him in his disablement, and their new family. Essentially Jane marries into further servitude, yet she is only able to do so once she achieves the required social standing. This element of the novel is certainly not Gothic in its influence as the characters are still bonded by Victorian philosophies.