

# Example of jane eyre essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Jane Eyre is proto-feminist persona at a time when feminism was not a concept let alone a movement. In that era the thought that she and Rochester could enjoy a marriage based upon equality was a totally novel possibility. Jane is allowed to be strong, and so Rochester is freed to sometimes be weak. This inter-dependence is what allows them both a freedom of action and emotion usually denied by the society of that time. Jane has her freedom of choice because she earned it. She grew up as an orphan, endured her cousins, the school, the epidemic, faced mortality when her friend died and found her own way through employment and romance. That she would marry Rochester in the end was expected because that was where her heart led her. It was not a foregone conclusion though. She had turned down an improper proposition from him once before as well as an exceedingly proper proposal of marriage from St. John. She wanted a husband and desired Rochester but did not want a man to support and take care of her in the same way other women of the time did. This is what gave her the right in the end to have the choice and then announce in that simple sentence “Reader, I married him.”

Charlotte Bronte uses a blend of three writing styles, the Bildungsroman, the romantic novel and the gothic novel. According to Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, a Bildungsroman is “ a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character” , and romanticism also emphasizes content and encourages “ freedom of treatment,” “ introspection,” as it celebrates “ nature, the common man, and freedom of the spirit.” . The same source defines the gothic novel as a type of fiction “ characterized by picturesque settings; an atmosphere of mystery, gloom,

and terror; supernatural or fantastic occurrences; and violent and macabre events." . The three word sentence " Reader, I married him" at the start of the final chapter can be seen as a summation that brings together all these elements. Marriage in the Victorian Era was seen as a girl's final passage into womanhood and so ends a growth cycle of the protagonist. It also brings a spiritual light into the story moving it on from its Gothic elements into the Romantic realm of spirit and the nature of man, or woman in this case. Jane Eyre is one of those archetypal heroines that not only found life in her own era but also spawned adaptations and revisions, as subsequent generations interpreted Charlotte Brontë's timeless heroine as part of their own particular social, political and personal context. Charlotte Brontë's 1848 masterpiece is a classic Bildungsroman, in that it follows its first-person narrator through childhood, education, work and romance into that concluding chapter where she marries the right man at the right time. At the time it was written finding the right husband was the full time employment of all proper young ladies. Jane Eyre broke away from that concept in that she sought employment as a teacher passed through a period of introspection atypical for women in England at that time and turned down an offer of marriage because she was not in love and refused to compromise herself. Instead she lives independently until, Reader, she marries the right man and becomes a proto-feminist example of female self-assertion and independence.

A novel is ostensibly a piece of fiction, therefore it is free to explore other options outside the social mores of its time. Because of this it has the flexibility to quickly respond over other literary genres and express new

social ideas. This makes it an art form in itself along with being a social and moral document providing insight into the times it represents. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* serves to prove this argument. Being a combination of the Bildungsroman, the romantic novel and the gothic novel it looks through the stormy Gothic lens at the social idea of romanticism, marriage and social structure and examines moral themes including judgment and honesty. *Jane Eyre* expresses new social ideas can be seen when looking at romanticism. The Romantic Movement started as a reaction against the social order. During the Industrial Revolution it gained support in Europe by stressing freedom from restraints and rules and emphasizing emotion, imagination and mystery. It is this combination of mystery and emotional freedom that gives *Jane Eyre* its combination of both Romanticism and Gothic elements. Jane in her transition from orphan to heiress clearly brings home the truth of the importance of individual over class. She, as a person does not change but society views her differently as her standing increases. Nature is a device used in *Jane Eyre* especially in the aspect of the gothic landscape around Thornton. The description of the stricken chestnut tree could be seen as representative Jane's first experience of a wedding to Rochester. Their wedding was halted at the altar with the revelation that Rochester had wife, insane yes but very much alive. Jane could then relate to the chestnut tree as " it stood up, black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gaped ghastly. The cloven halves were not broken from each other for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below; though community of vitality was destroyed- the sap could flow no more: their great boughs on each side were dead" . The Gothic element starts early on when a

young Jane forced into the red room and encounters the ghost of her uncle, Mr. Reed. It continues again when she first sees Rochester's horse and dog. Bertha, Rochester's wife is also painted in a ghastly supernatural light with "a discoloured 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!" .

In Victorian England at that time marriage was just starting to be viewed as something more than an occupation for women and seen in terms of economic and material gain. This was especially true among the upper classes. It was not viewed as an equal partnership between a man and a woman as it evolved to be for Jane and Rochester. For most couples the husband was a dominant, controlling figure, while the wife was supposed to remain quiet and submit to her husband's wishes. Wives owned nothing not even their personal effects, and the money they had before marriage. Upon marriage the husband took control of all wealth and property. This is not the case in Jane Eyre who refuses to conform to this type of marriage and portrays her marriage to Rochester as an equal one. She refuses the pedestal and chooses to be a woman. This is evident when Rochester calls her his angel, she replies " I am not an angel . . . and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me--for you will not get it". Jane rebels in other ways as well she rejects pet names, the family jewels and asks to be paid a wage. That Jane would rebel at all is astounding for the time, especially considering that she found a good match, while she was seen as orphaned, poor, and not particularly beautiful in contrast to Mr. Rochester who had wealth and a good background.

As a Bildungsroman novel it acts as a moral document and shows us how we should act. Sometimes this is through right action but it is often through the incorrect actions of a character as well. This is shown in Jane Eyre terms of honesty and deceit. It starts in childhood when Jane is accused of dishonesty when her cousins were in fact responsible for the bad acts. This false guilt follows her to school when Mrs. Reed tells Mr. Brocklehurst to “ keep a strict eye on her, and, above all, guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit.” . Ironically it is Jane’s honesty that first attracts Rochester to her. He asks Jane if she thinks he is handsome and she says no. She had too much deceit in her childhood Jane to endure it as an adult and in her maturity comes to hate the idea of deceit as well as anyone who practices it. This is a part of the maturation process typical of a Bildungsroman. However it is a problem her and Mr. Rochester when he tries to make Jane jealous by pretending to be in love with Blanche. This small betrayal of trust is followed by the grand one when he does not tell her he is already married to Bertha. This should have been shared when he asks for Jane’s hand, or at least before they arrive at the altar. As it is he never voluntarily tells her the truth. Jane finds out about Bertha when Bertha’s brother stops the marriage. Mr. Rochester tempts her in other ways, he asks her to stay and live with him as his companion, or mistress. A position of great shame at the time, although tempting because of Jane’s deep love for him. However, her morals steer her away from this although she struggles to decide whether or not to dismiss her moral principles;

It is easy to obey the laws and have principles in the times when there is no temptation. Jane faces temptation in many ways. First it is to accept a life of

passion with Rochester that would bring her outside of the code of her society, then it is to enter into a socially acceptable marriage with St. John that would ever remain devoid of passionate love. Jane Eyre rejects them both individually and in the end achieves it all in doing so. She is her own woman, but to be that she must stand by her personal moral code even in the dark hours of temptation.

Jane Eyre also act as moral documents giving examples of honesty and deceit and the battles an individual faces to remain true to herself. In writing Jane Eyre Bronte captures the movement of romanticism along with Gothic elements in a Bildungsroman novel. This theme continues when, in chapter 12 Jane has her first encounter with Mr. Rochester. After spending several months at Rochester's home, Thornfield Jane is watching the moon rise when she eerily spots first a horse then a dog that remind her of the local legend of a Gytrash. The Gytrash is a spirit which, disguised as a horse, dog or mule frightens belated travelers. The moment passes when she realizes the horse has a rider then turns to momentary distress when it stumbles on an icy patch throwing the rider. Instead of a typical scenario where a couple meet when the man recues the woman it is Jane who helps Rochester to his feet. This foreshadows other events when Rochester's home burns and she again helps him arise in a different way. By asserting herself and playing the role of the rescuer rather than the "damsel in distress" she establishes herself on a more equal basis then women in her society could normally hoe to enjoy and puts her in the position of equality that she and Rochester share in their married state. This could only happen until the hierarchical structure of master and governess altogether collapsed. The final breakdown of this are

the symbolic elements of Jane's inheritance and the fiery collapse of Thornfield Hall. These later events bring Rochester back full circle into a position of again having to rely on Jane's support. This unusual chain of events where the man is dependent upon the woman is what allows Jane to retain her proto-feminist persona so she and Rochester can enjoy a marriage based upon equality. This inter-dependence is what allows her the freedom of choice. She is no longer the orphan, has passed through the vicissitudes of the school, the epidemic, faced her friend's death, and forged her own path through employment and romance. That she would marry Rochester in the end was expected because that was where her heart led her, she was not a frail female that needed a man to support and take care of her. This is what gave her the right in the end to have the choice and then announce in that simple sentence " Reader, I married him."

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In literary criticism, a Bildungsroman is a " novel of formation/ education/culture or coming-of-age story. [It is] a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood [] in which, therefore, character change is extremely important. A

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Bildungsroman relates the growing up or "coming of age" of a sensitive person who goes in search of answers to life's questions with the expectation that these will result from gaining experience of the world. The genre evolved from folklore tales of a dunce or youngest son going out in the world to seek his fortune. Usually in the beginning of the story there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist leave on his journey. In a Bildungsroman, the goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty. The genre often features a main conflict between the main character and society. Typically, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist and he is ultimately accepted into society - the protagonist's mistakes and disappointments are over. In some works, the protagonist is able to reach out and help others after having achieved maturity.