



Depiction of Gothic Elements as an Instrument in the Journey of Jane Eyre's Self-Discovery and Personal Development: An Assessment.

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Abstract: During the Victorian Era, Jane Eyre (1847), a celebrated novel by Charlotte Bronte, became extremely popular due to its depiction of the virtuous and spiritual maturation of an impregnable and independent female protagonist. Though this novel is known more for its use of autobiographical elements, the gothic elements play a pivotal and crucial role in Jane Eyre. It has a deal of gothic elements, like remote settings, spirits, ghosts, ominous and baleful secrets, mysteries to create suspense and terror, and supernatural encounters, which appear in every part of the novel. This paper focuses primarily on the demonstration of gothic elements in Jane Eyre's progress and growth. We will observe that gothic elements have a greater role in the novel than just creating an atmosphere of mystery and horror. Jane's inner passions and desire to connect with the reader in addition to helping in the growth of the character are being revealed by these elements.

Keywords: gothic, enigmatic, eerie, bizarre, fear, supernatural

The name 'Gothic' refers to the Gothic architecture of the European Middle Ages, which is an essential attribute for the settings of early Gothic novels. The Castle of Otranto is considered as the first Gothic novel. It was written by Horace Walpole and got published in 1764. Apart from this, Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794), Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*, 1818), Edgar Allan Poe (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, 1841) and Bram Stoker (*Dracula*, 1897) are considered as stalwarts, and with these authors the genre thrived well during the 19th century. Over the years, it changed, and fused with various literary genres, including early science fiction and Victorian literature. The Gothic genre creates a dark, enigmatic atmosphere and experience for characters and readers by combining supernatural elements, strong emotions, and a fusion of reality and fantasy.

Jane Eyre, written by Charlotte Bronte, was originally published in 1847 under the pen name Currer Bell. This novel was a huge hit and became an enormous best seller; the second and third editions were prepared quickly after the release. Even today, this novel is frequently cited as one of the best and most well-known pieces of English fiction. Charlotte Bronte has been contemplated as a distinctive storyteller. The reader is kept on edge and excited by her careful method of hiding details about strange and frightening incidents and her talent at creating suspense in Jane Eyre. In her novel the protagonist is Jane Eyre. Her narration creates an emotional connection and reaction for the reader since she is a homodiegetic narrator, enabling her to participate in the fictional world as both a character and narrator. She was raised as an orphan in Gateshead Hall, where her evil aunt and her cousins lived. She is not given much respect and admiration in the house and is often suppressed and bullied by her cousins. At a very tender age she was sent to Lowood School by her aunt, Mrs. Reed. After spending eight years at Lowood School as a student and later as a teacher, she becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall. This is the place where she meets Mr. Rochester, and she finds love and scope for personal development. Slowly and gradually, she learns details about the past of Mr. Rochester, including his hidden marriage to a mentally ill woman named Bertha Mason, who is kept in the attic. Heartbroken but still unwavering, she decides to leave Mr. Rochester to forge her own identity and journey. After overcoming several obstacles, and going through her personal growth, she inherits a fortune and returns to Mr. Rochester after receiving a telepathic call from him, who is blind and injured after a fire at Thornfield. They reconnect, and the story concludes with their marriage, which highlights themes of devotion, ethical standards, and self-worth.

If you engross yourself deeply, you discover that there is an unmistakable enigmatic air throughout the novel, which I believe is primarily designed to captivate the reader. Robert B. Heilman, one of the critics, examining the gothic features in Jane Eyre, states that "Bronte departs from the conventional gothic style. Therefore, her purpose of using the gothic elements is not to terrify the

reader but rather to enter into the characters' inner thoughts." (99) In addition to supernatural events, the novel features ghosts and dark realities as well. However, a lot of settings and events appear to be gothic: isolated and gloomy mansions, haunting dreams, ghostly laughter in the night, Byronic hero and a lunatic woman in the attic. In Jane's gothic inspired world, sprawling lawns and paths offer pleasure, happiness and warmth, yet captivating manors and frightful buildings mark the landscape. Gateshead Hall, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Moor House, and Ferndean are the five primary locations. From childhood to adolescent, early adulthood, adulthood, and married life, each one represents a different picture of Jane's development. She fights for her independence and identity, and each one gives it a physical manifestation.

The novel is bursting with perplexing locations and dark landscapes, like Lowood School and Thornfield hall, which are distinguished by their mysterious and crumbling architecture. This setting creates a sense of foreboding and isolation. The Lowood episode plays a significant role in Jane's emotional and psychological development. On her very first night in the Lowood, when she wakes up in the night she hears 'the wind raves in furious gusts, and the rain falls in torrents'(53) but this time she is not alone rather she finds Miss Miller by her side. Ambience at Lowood is somber and gloomy as it is an isolated place, away from progress. Sadness and sickness is prevailing all around because of the ill treatment of girls, and bad administration of Mr. Brocklehurst. At Lowood, Jane is exposed to new environment, and inspiring people that allow her to grow intellectually and gain more control over her emotions.

Thornfield Hall is the mysterious mansion of Mr. Edward Rochester. It is extremely gothic in nature because of its murkiness and peculiarity. Here are a few key words, "in winter-time one feels dreary quite alone"(115), "long gallery"(116), "a very chilled and vault-like air pervaded the stairs"(116), "cheerless ideas of space and solitude"(116), "eerie impression"(116), "cold gallery"(116), "dark and spacious staircase"(116), "silent hall"(137) and "darksome staircase."(137) It carries the mysterious past and present of Mr. Rochester and when Jane first arrived at that manor she could then already sense that something was very strange about that place. Still her lonely room was free of fears and her couch was free of thorns. Subsequently, she found replies of Mrs. Fairfax to be evasive, mysterious and unusual in nature.

....no wonder he shuns the old place.

Why should he shun it?

Perhaps he thinks it gloomy. (150)

The narrative incorporates an additional mystical mention in the story by linking the dog and horse of Mr. Rochester with the legendary Gytrash. Goblins or spirits that assume the shape of horses, mules, or big dogs are called Gytrash. She found Pilot, the dog of Mr. Rochester, to be an eerie creature that was like the Gytrash, "a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head." (132) it is also noteworthy to point out that Mr. Rochester becomes helpless during their first meeting. This whole episode, where Mr. Rochester falls from his horse and requires Jane's assistance, foreshadows his dependence on Jane while reaching the climax. He finds her to be a person to envy.

"I envy you your peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolled memory. Little girl, a memory without blot or contamination must be an exquisite treasure- an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment: is it not?" (159)

Just before her marriage, Jane had a bizarre dream in which Thornfield turned out to be a dreary ruin and it became the retreat of bats and owls. Marrying Mr. Rochester was a crime for Jane as she didn't want to be a part of the sin of bigamy. She immediately leaves the Thornfield and runs away onto the moors. She later reaches Moor House which gives her name, inheritance, family and fortune. The moor in Jane Eyre is symbolic of different perspectives, notably the mysterious realm of the supernatural, an idyllic refuge, and the dangerous natural surroundings. Jane's mental state at this point of time in the novel seems to reflect the 'dark and hoary' appearance of Moor House; she gets shifted from the grandeur and eternal bliss of Thornfield to the unprocessed and untouched beauty of moors. Moor House and Ferndean are notable names in the novel though they have got less physical importance. When Jane reached the manor-house of Ferndean, she found some sort of sadness and vacuum in the environment. The expression 'fern' in Ferndean refers to the fresh development that Jane and Rochester are going to encounter and Jane emphasizes that she had lived ten happy years at Mr. Rochester's side, as both his equal and his wife.

Bronte's gothic embellishments in Jane Eyre can firstly be seen in the 'Red Room' episode. This room evokes the feelings of terror, anxiety, and mystery with its visuals. There is a bed with "curtains of deep red damask" (17), a table covered with "crimson cloth" (17), and a cushioned easy chair which looked like a pale throne (17). When Jane was very small then her aunt, Mrs. Reed in order to discipline her, confined her in the room at Gateshead Hall. She assumes herself as "half-fairy, half imp" (18) akin to a "real spirit" (18) when she looks in the mirror. As a result, Bronte challenges the gothic by turning the heroine into a "tiny phantom" (18) in the novel but at the same time incorporating a strong gothic taste. Later on, we get a major charming approach of Mr. Rochester when he calls Jane an 'elfin fairy.'

The gothic atmosphere intensifies when Jane thinks she sees the ghost of her uncle in the red room.

"My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wing: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I uttered a wind, involuntary cry; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate efforts." (Bronte 21)

This episode infused grit and confidence in Jane and somehow she was able to muster some courage and face the situation. Apart from this, it instilled worldly wisdom in her and this helped her to analyse people and situations. Even at Lowood school also when she first time lived alone away from family, she had mature emotions.

There is no dearth of mystery and suspense in Jane Eyre. Ellis has specified that, "by novelizing the supernatural, the monstrous and the unspeakable, the gothic attempts to inscribe the passions of fear and terror." (21-22) One of the elements that make gothic novels is the uncanny plots or supernatural scenes. Terrifying themes or strange and bizarre settings are the major traits that constitute gothic literature. It can be a frightening as well as invigorating experience to encounter spirits, mysterious visions or voices when reading gothic novels. As per H.P.Lovecraft, fear is the strongest and primordial emotion experienced by humans, and fear of the unknown is the most ancient and strongest type of fear.(Intro.) You can find it abundantly during Jane's stay at

Thornfield, where Jane gets perplexed with the disturbing secrets and unusual & bizarre happenings in the manor. More specifically, she gets baffled and anxious with the wild laughter she hears from the third floor. Apart from this, one unseen attacker sets fire to Mr. Rochester's bed, producing "tongues of flame dart round the bed: the curtains were on fire." (Bronte 174) The attack on Mr. Mason and the nightmarish encounter she had with "the foul German spectre- the Vampire," (327) and later on somebody tore and destroyed her wedding veil. She eventually learns that Bertha Mason, wife of Mr. Rochester is responsible for all these happenings. Addressing Bertha Mason, she seamlessly portrays the gothic standard of royal deterioration, and insanity as a roaring madwoman dressed like a hyena, despite the fact that she holds a prosperous past. In many ways, Jane and Bertha are mirror images of many different aspects of Victorian female life. However, some critics, like Gilbert and Gubar, have this opinion that Bertha played a deeper role in the novel suggesting that Jane's uncontrolled passion and anger were represented by Bertha. She presents a monstrous counterpart to Jane's dark side, much like the young Jane in the red room early in the novel when she is imprisoned in isolation. (336-371) Bertha was a victim who was oppressed and lacked the ability to advocate for her. However, the entire episode strengthened Jane's resolve to find her own meaning in life and identity.

Jane Eyre has many gothic elements and when we do the close reading it becomes apparent that all the gothic tropes have a greater role to play than just creating a frightening or baleful atmosphere in front of the readers. The gothic elements not only provide anxiety, stress and mystery, but they also allow Bronte to examine the uneven power dynamics that existed between both the genders of Victorian society. With each and every episode of Jane Eyre's life, we reach closer to the fact that these mysterious and unexplained elements have a major role to play in the growth and development of the plot and characters. For instance, the Red Room episode gives immense power and strength to Jane Eyre, and she realizes the importance of analyzing the situation and raising her voice against the odds. The gothic elements also help to highlight, for the readers, Jane's restrained emotions and desires as a result of her aunt's rejection of her. At Thornfield Hall, we can see her inquisition and interest to solve the mystery and wild laughter of the third floor. According to Radway, a gothic heroine's tenacity and unwavering attitude are always carefully alleviated by her kindness and becoming reticent. (149) gothic traits give Jane courage and resilience, and provide her maturity to take decisions wisely. She finds a special connection with Mr. Rochester and due to this relatedness, she was able to feel free in front of him despite the fact that he belonged to a greater social strata than her. She later on leaves Thornfield and reaches Moor House that gives her name, inheritance, family and fortune. Apart from this, her stay at Ferndean with Mr. Rochester gives her the status of equals. The magical connection which we find between Jane and Mr. Rochester, in my opinion, is a gothic element that we find throughout the entire novel, and it eventually binds them together.

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