

Jane Eyre, a Gothic novel

The literal meaning of your topic/prompt - what it actually is/means?

Is Jane Eyre a Gothic novel?

Gothic literature can be defined as “writing that employs dark and picturesque scenery, startling and melodramatic narrative devices, and an overall atmosphere of exoticism, mystery, and dread.” Also Gothic writers tend to use “supernatural elements and touches of romance.”

How the topic/prompt related to the material/novel in class

There are many Gothic elements in Jane Eyre like supernatural occurrences and an overall mood of mystery and fright. Jane Eyre took place in the Victorian era when Gothic fiction was prominent to other literary genres. Also, previous books in class that we have read like Frankenstein and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner were classified as Gothic literature as well, so Jane Eyre is following the trend.

Understanding how the author's life is gothic, and therefore Jane Eyre is too

- Mother died at an early age
- Raised by her cruel aunt
 - This relates to how Jane Eyre grew up with Aunt Reed
- The imagery in Jane Eyre shows Charlotte's view on her own life
 - The gothic way in which she describes Lowood adds onto this
 - Two of her sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, died at Lowood
- Charlotte was not satisfied being a governess
 - Jane was therefore partaking in an activity Charlotte did not find enjoyable

How the setting is that of a gothic novel

- When being introduced to different setting, Jane describes each with a consistent, gothic tone
- Mystery surrounds the plot
 - Rochester previously had a wife that neither Jane nor the reader was informed of originally
- Much of the story takes place in Thornfield, which is a castle
 - Many confirmed gothic novels have a story taking place in a castle or mansion
- Many other remote locations add on to the gothic setting

Gothic Example from Text - Thornfield

“While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ears. It was a curious laugh - distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped. The sound ceased, only for an instant. It began again, louder - for at first, though very distinct, it was very low” (Bronte 98).

This scene takes place at Thornfield, and is the first time Jane hears this mysterious laugh. This event reflects the atmosphere of mystery and suspense that a Gothic novel consists of. Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane that she thinks it is just Grace Poole but this contributes to the growing uncertainty of what goes on in the house.

Gothic Example from Text - Gateshead

“...I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; someone near me...” (Bronte 11).

This scene takes place at Gateshead, in the Red Room. This is the first example of Jane's encounters with the supernatural events that take place in a Gothic novel. While she is in the Red Room, she believes that Mr. Reed's spirit has come back from the dead. Jane is haunted by these experiences throughout the rest of her life.

Theme

→ A Gothic theme is crucial for a novel to be deemed as gothic.

- These themes include horror, the supernatural, religion, psychological distress, disease and isolation, to name a few.
- Overall, these novels are characteristic of their portrayal of darkness and tragedy.

- Jane Eyre can be easily classified as a gothic novel when recognizing its themes.
- Psychological distress: Throughout the novel Jane is steadily evolving. However, this is a rocky process in which she constantly sees herself in an inner battle.
- Religion: Although religion is portrayed positively in the novel, skepticism of such is present. Religion is constantly used as guidance for the characters' actions.
- Isolation: Since Jane lived in Gateshead, feeling alone and unloved was the culprit of her life. Furthermore, she struggles to find love and her place in the world.

Pathetic fallacy

- Gothic novels make use of the surroundings, especially the weather to convey the changes in the characters and current situation of the novel.
- Storms and gloomy weather are commonly used to give gothic novels their characteristic darkness.



In Jane Eyre, the weather is a constant indication of Jane's state. From the beginning, in Gateshead, Jane describes the winter setting as "sombre, and a rain so penetrating" likewise, Jane feels sad and angsty due to Aunt Reed and the abuse she endures in the house (1).

Soon after Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane "rain rushed down" and the "horse-chestnut" tree was "struck by lightning, and half of it split away" (244). This foreshadows the immoral nature of their union and the difficult times to come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beVXLuSt57I>

Gothic Elements: Haunted Castle/ House

- In gothic novels, haunted houses are an element that can “symbolize hidden depths on the mind.” This element was seen throughout the novel.
- During Jane’s stay at Gateshead hall, when she was forced into the red room, she believed there was a ghost of Mr. Reed
- This literary device best applies to the prompt, because it shows the introduction of gothic elements during the first segments of the novel. The literary device shows the novel is gothic, as the element is significant in gothic novels.

Int the novel, childhood and adolescent...

- Jane's adolescence differs greatly from the adolescence and upbringing of Mrs. Reed's children. This contrast plays a role in the novel and shows how Jane's terror filled childhood led to a troubled but ultimately fulfilling life while, for example, John's sheltered and easy childhood led to drug abuse and early death.
- The author used the Reed children to depict an easy going and innocent adolescence. They were not punished when they deserved to be and were allowed to explore outside of their comfort zone. Jane was punished even when she was not supposed to be and was very restricted. She was not given any freedom to explore or be a child.
- This influences the novel as a whole, because Jane's terror filled upbringing led her to grow up very quickly and be strong when others may have given up. Her awful upbringing may have prepared her for what was to happen in her life and allow her to appreciate and value those who were especially good to her.

Significant moment one

When Jane is sent to the Red
Room

Jane has a supernatural experience as a child when she is punished and sent to stay in the room where her uncle died. While in this room, she sees a strange light which she thinks is her uncle's ghost appearing. This is the first of many mysterious and seemingly supernatural occurrences, all of which contribute to the gothic theme of the novel.

Significant moment two

When Jane saves Rochester
from a fire

At Thornfield, Jane helps Rochester with two mysterious occurrences. The first of these is when Jane puts out a fire in Rochester's room after hearing a loud sound and strange laughter. When he realizes what happened, he says that someone must have intentionally set the fire, and that he knows who, but will not tell Jane. Because Jane and the reader do not know who is committing these violent acts or why they are, these mysterious events contribute to the gothic theme of the novel.

Citations

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