

FEATURES OF GOTHIC LITERATURE IN “JANE EYRE” BY CHARLOTTE BRONTE

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Abstract. *This thesis examines the Gothic elements in Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre”, focusing on how the novel uses and challenges traditional Gothic features. Set in Victorian England, the story blends horror, mystery, and psychological depth, with key Gothic themes such as isolation, the uncanny, and the clash between reason and madness. Through settings like the mysterious Thornfield Hall and the enigmatic Mr. Rochester, Bronte reworks Gothic tropes, adding layers of feminist and social critique. This thesis argues that the Gothic elements in “Jane Eyre” not only create suspense but also deepen the novel’s exploration of identity, power, and moral choices. By combining Gothic with Romantic and realist themes, “Jane Eyre” stands out as a unique narrative that both follows and pushes the boundaries of the genre to explore larger social and personal issues.*

Keywords: *Gothic literature, “Jane Eyre”, Charlotte Bronte, Victorian fiction, Gothic conventions, supernatural, mystery, isolation, identity, psychological complexity, Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester, feminism, social critique, Romanticism, realism, uncanny, atmosphere, moral autonomy, genre subversion, narrative tension.*

Introduction. Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre” is often celebrated for its compelling narrative, complex characters, and its profound exploration of themes such as love, morality, and social class. However, one of the most distinctive aspects of the novel is its engagement with the Gothic tradition, which infuses the story with an atmosphere of mystery, psychological tension, and supernatural intrigue. While *Jane Eyre* is often classified within the genre of Victorian realism, it simultaneously draws heavily on the conventions of Gothic literature, making it a hybrid work that both reflects and reinterprets the conventions of the genre.

The Gothic novel, with its emphasis on dark, mysterious settings, the presence of the supernatural, and an often-bleak portrayal of human nature, was immensely popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Authors like Mary Shelley, Ann Radcliffe, and Bram Stoker crafted narratives that often centered on isolated, oppressive environments, tormented protagonists, and the disturbing clash between the rational and the irrational. In “Jane Eyre”, Bronte takes these traditional Gothic elements and repurposes them to explore deeper psychological and existential questions, particularly in relation to the individual’s search for identity, freedom, and self-realization.

In this article, we will examine how Brontë incorporates key features of Gothic literature into “Jane Eyre”, focusing on the novel’s use of Gothic tropes such as the

haunted, decaying mansion (Thornfield Hall), the Byronic hero (Mr. Rochester), and the theme of forbidden knowledge and dark secrets. However, rather than simply adhering to these conventions, Brontë also subverts and transforms them, blending them with elements of Romanticism, feminist thought, and social critique. This study will argue that Brontë's manipulation of the Gothic genre serves not only to enhance the novel's suspense and emotional intensity but also to comment on the moral, social, and psychological dimensions of her characters' lives, particularly that of the protagonist, Jane.

By exploring the distinctive features of Gothic literature within "Jane Eyre", we can gain a deeper understanding of how Brontë uses the genre to confront the anxieties and contradictions of her time—namely, the oppressive structures of gender, class, and societal expectations—while also advancing a narrative that is ultimately about personal empowerment and self-discovery. Through this lens, *Jane Eyre* emerges as a work that both celebrates and critiques the Gothic tradition, positioning Brontë as a key figure in the evolution of the genre within the broader context of Victorian literature.

Baldick and Mighall¹⁴ also critique certain trends in Gothic studies, such as the tendency to overgeneralize Gothic's impact or to reduce it to a mere vehicle for psychological or cultural concerns, arguing instead for a more nuanced and historically grounded understanding. The article is a valuable resource for anyone studying Gothic literature or its criticism, offering both a comprehensive overview of the field and thought-provoking insights into its ongoing development.

Coleridge's review¹⁵ is significant for its early engagement with Gothic literature and reflects contemporary reactions to the genre's boundary-pushing themes. His ambivalence toward "The Monk" underscores the tensions between literary innovation and moral propriety that were central to debates about Gothic fiction in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The essay "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture" by Jerrold E. Hogle¹⁶ offers a comprehensive overview of the Gothic as a literary and cultural phenomenon. Serving as the opening chapter of the collection, Hogle examines the origins, evolution, and defining characteristics of the Gothic across various periods and media. Hogle's introduction serves as both a primer and a theoretical foundation for readers and scholars of Gothic fiction. It situates the genre within a broader cultural and historical context, highlighting its adaptability and enduring relevance in Western culture.

The article "Generic Transformation and Social Change: Rethinking the Rise of the Novel" by Michael McKeon¹⁷ explores the relationship between the evolution of the

¹⁴ Baldick, Chris, and Robert Mighall. "Gothic Criticism." *The New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 267-87.

¹⁵ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Review of *The Monk* (1797)." *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820*, edited by E.J. Clery and Robert Miles, Manchester UP, 2000, pp. 185-89.

¹⁶ Hogle, Jerrold E. "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge UP, 2002, pp. 1-20.

¹⁷ McKeon, Michael. "Generic Transformation and Social Change: Rethinking the Rise of the Novel." *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, edited by Michael McKeon, Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, pp. 382-99.

novel as a literary genre and broader social and cultural changes. McKeon examines the historical context of the novel's emergence, its transformation, and its role in reflecting and shaping societal values.

Main part. Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" is a novel that not only incorporates key elements of Gothic literature but also subverts and reinterprets them. The Gothic genre, known for its dark, mysterious, and often supernatural atmosphere, provides a framework within which Brontë explores themes of isolation, identity, and moral conflict. Through settings, characters, and plot developments, "Jane Eyre" intertwines Gothic conventions with elements of Romanticism, realism, and feminist ideology. In this analysis, we will explore several significant Gothic elements in *Jane Eyre*, supported by key extracts from the novel, and analyze how Brontë uses them to deepen the psychological and emotional complexities of her characters.

*"Here then I was in the third storey, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door..."*¹⁸ The idea of being "fastened into one of its mystic cells" evokes a sense of imprisonment and confinement, reinforcing the Gothic theme of isolation. The use of "mystic" suggests that the room is not just physically secluded but also steeped in mystery, as if it holds secrets that Jane herself cannot fully comprehend. The mention of a "murderess" evokes the idea of a looming threat and danger, further enhancing the sense of peril and uncertainty that pervades the scene.

Blood, often a central motif in Gothic literature, symbolizes both physical harm and the moral or psychological violence present in the narrative. In this passage, blood serves as a reminder of both physical trauma and the hidden violence occurring in the mansion. *"I must dip my hand again and again in the basin of blood and water, and wipe away the trickling gore"*¹⁹. The repetition of "blood" and "gore" heightens the sense of bodily violence and the horror Jane is witnessing. The imagery of blood, particularly in the context of a "basin", intensifies the reader's sense of disgust and fear, both on a physical and moral level. This is also an example of the Gothic trope of the "wounded body," where characters are often subjected to physical suffering that reflects deeper emotional or psychological trauma.

*"According as the shifting obscurity and flickering gleam hovered here or glanced there, it was now the bearded physician, Luke, that bent his brow; now St. John's long hair that waved; and anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor—of Satan himself—in his subordinate's form"*²⁰. This passage is rich with Gothic imagery. The shifting shadows on the panel that reveal faces—Luke, St. John, and Judas—represent the haunting presence of the past and the spiritual or moral specters that linger in the house. The images of "Judas" and "Satan" evoke the idea of betrayal, damnation, and moral

¹⁸ Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Richard J. Dunn, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, - P.220.

¹⁹ The same source: - P.220.

²⁰ Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Richard J. Dunn, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, - P.220.

corruption. These faces emerging from the panel suggest that the room itself is alive with dark memories and supernatural echoes, enhancing the eerie atmosphere and the sense that the house is haunted by a violent past.

"I must listen for the movements of the wild beast or the fiend in yonder side den. But since Mr. Rochester's visit it seemed spellbound: all the night I heard but three sounds at three long intervals—a step creak, a momentary renewal of the snarling, canine noise, and a deep human groan"²¹." The idea of a "wild beast" or "fiend" lurking nearby reinforces the sense of danger and unpredictability. The "side den" is reminiscent of the hidden, secret places in Gothic novels where terrifying creatures or truths are concealed. The unsettling sounds—creaks, snarls, and groans—heighten the tension and sense of fear, playing on the Gothic motif of the unknown and the unseen. The silence that follows, interrupted only by these sporadic noises, heightens the sense of suspense and anticipation, making Jane's watch seem like an eternity.

Conclusion. In conclusion, "Jane Eyre" blends traditional Gothic elements, such as mystery, the supernatural, and dark, oppressive settings, with deeper psychological and social themes. Through characters like Jane and Bertha Mason, Brontë explores the complexities of identity, power, and emotion. The novel not only fits within the Gothic tradition but also challenges and redefines it, making "Jane Eyre" a unique and enduring work that continues to resonate with readers today.

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²¹ The same source: - P.221.