Jane Eyre: Victorian Gothic and The Other

Presented by:
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The term Gothic was first coined by Horace Walpole, in his book, *The Castle of Otranto* in 1794.

“Gothic involves the supernatural, it often involves the discovery of mysterious elements of antiquity, and it usually takes its protagonists into strange or frightening old buildings” (Mullan).

It initially meant barbarous, and was meant to ridicule the suspenseful genre.
Examples

Works that follow Victorian Gothic style are:
- Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*
- Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*
- Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*
- Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*
- Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*
The foreboding and morbid tone presented in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* reflects Jane’s emotional and psychological state. This tone, in effect, foreshadows major events and is formed through vivid description of setting, character interaction, and abnormal events that combine horror with the supernatural. Jane’s happiness and stability was always compensated by the supernatural, which caused her to seek out new opportunities throughout the book.
Symbolism

In Jane Eyre, fire is used as a symbol for both passion (mostly sexual) and cleansing. When Rochester’s bed caught on fire, fire represented the growing passion between she and him. Thornfield burning down symbolizes resolution. The burning of Thornfield symbolizes the cleansing of Rochester’s sins and his injuries from the fire serves as his atonement and redemption. Bertha’s act of arson is symbolic of how she has destroyed Rochester and reputation.
“Mr. Reed had been dead for nine years: it was in-this chamber he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker’s men; and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion (1.8).”

*Prompts Jane to become hostile*

“One would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt (11.97).”

“Here, then, was I in the third story, 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” (20.198) foreshadows the abnormal relationship between Jane and Rochester.

*Reflects emotional turmoil*
“I shut the closet to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained; which at this evening hour gave out certainly a most ghostly shimmer through the shadow of my apartment. ‘I will leave you by yourself, white dream,’ I said, ‘I am feverish; I hear the wind blowing: I will go out of doors and feel it.’ ” (25. 261)

Foreshadows the failure of her marriage

“Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze and vapour, Mr. Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep (15.139).”

Sexual attraction

“The fire broke out at dead of night… the building was one mass of flame… Was it known how it originated? Indeed, I should say it was ascertained beyond a doubt. You are not perhaps aware,” he continued… “that there was a lady - a - a lunatic, kept in the house?” (36.406-407)

Reflects her emotional state

Causes her to commit herself to Rochester
“I learned that Miss Temple, on returning to her own room at dawn, had found me laid in a little crib; my face against Helen Burns’s shoulder, my arms round her neck. I was asleep, and Helen was---dead” (8.74).

“And this is Jane Eyre? … just one of your tricks; not to send for a carriage, but to steal into the vicinage of your home along the twilight just as if you were a dream or a shade” (23.122)

“How well you read me, you witch!” interposed Mr. Rochester. “But what did you find in the veil besides its embroidery? Did you find poison, or that you look so mournful now?” (25.267)

“What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal; but it was covered with clothing, and a quality of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face” (26.278).
“The strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had one effect of a real spirit… (1.8)”

“It was exactly one mask of Bessie’s Gytrash—a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: it passed me, however, quietly enough; not staying to look up, with strange pretercanine eyes, in my face, as I had expected it would. The horse followed—a tall steed, and on its back a rider. The man, the human being broke the spell at once (12.103-4).”

*Changed things up in her life, proved to herself that moving to Thornfield was a good life decision.*

“This was a demoniac laugh—low, suppressed, and deep—uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin-laughter stood at my bedside—or rather crouched by my pillow: (15.138)”

*Builds up suspense, allowed Jane to be more cautious of everything in the household.*
“It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next; now it nestled close to, and now it ran from me; but whatever mood the apparition evinced, whatever aspect it wore; it failed not for seven successive nights to meet me the moment I entered the land of slumber (21.208).”

*Made her dependent on Rochester to make her calm down*

“Descending the laurel walk, I faced the wreck of the chestnut-tree; it stood up, black and riven: the trunk, **split down** the centre, gasped ghastly” (25. 262)

*Foreshadows the separation of Rochester and Jane*

“I had risen up in bed, I bent forward: first crept cold through my veins. Mr. Rochester, this was not Sophie, it was not Leah, it was not Mrs. Fairfax: it was not-no, I was sure of it, and am still—it was even that strange woman, Grace Poole... Fearful and ghastly to me—oh, sir, I never saw face like it! It was 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!” (25. 269).

“Sir, it removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them” (25. 270).

*Reaffirms her dependency on Rochester*
“I heard a voice somewhere cry- Jane! Jane! Jane! - nothing more… It was the voice of a human being-a known, loved, well-remembered voice - that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently” (35.401).

“I pleaded… Jane! Jane! Jane! Did you speak these words aloud? I did, Jane… As I exclaimed ‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’ a voice… replied, ‘I am coming, wait for me’” (37.428)
The gothic undertones in this novel primarily serve to create an aura of suspense and create an eerie tone. It was through Jane’s interactions with the abnormal that ultimately led to her character development throughout the novel as seen through the supernatural events. These events prefaced other significant occurrences in Jane’s future and reflected elements of her psyche.


