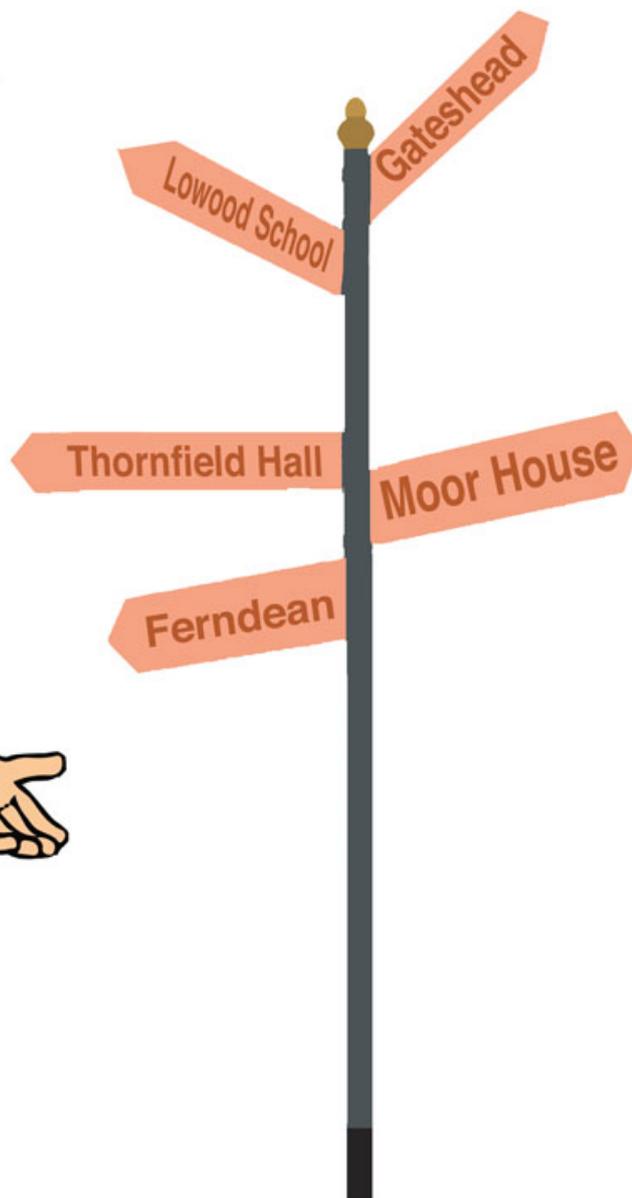


Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION

MR Bruff's Guide To

'Jane Eyre'



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SAMPLE

FORM AND GENRE

'Form' is the shape of a piece of writing; for example, prose, drama and poetry. 'Jane Eyre' is a prose novel, which takes the sub-form of a fictional autobiography (discussed above). The decisions that Brontë made when writing her fictional autobiography have a considerable impact on the ways that we read and interpret the novel.

DECISION 1: FIRST PERSON NARRATION WITH AN OLDER JANE INTRUDING

The story is narrated in the first person ('I'), from the point of view of Jane at each stage of her life. The use of the first person establishes her character, which is introduced to us through themes, and guides our response. Sometimes, an older Jane interrupts. For example, the older Jane says:

No severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident of the red-room; it only gave my nerves a shock of which I feel the reverberation to this day. Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering, but I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did: while rending my heart-strings, you thought you were only uprooting my bad propensities.

When the older Jane says that her nerves are still affected 'to this day', the reader feels sympathy for the younger Jane, as we now appreciate the devastating long-term psychological impact of being locked in the red-room. It is interesting to see the verb 'ought' is used when she says 'I ought to forgive you', implying that she has still not managed to forgive her aunt. This is despite Jane apparently forgiving Mrs Reed on her deathbed: Jane attempted to behave like a good Christian at the time of Mrs Reed's death, but she reveals in her comment that she continues to carry deep psychological scars.

DECISION 2: SHIFT FROM PAST TO PRESENT TENSE

At the beginning of chapter 11, Jane shifts from the past to the present tense when she describes her surroundings at the George Inn at Millcote: the 'large figured papering on the walls as inn rooms have; such a carpet, such furniture, such ornaments on the mantelpiece, such prints' etc. The present tense and long list slow time down, encouraging the reader to share Jane's observations. (The repetition of 'such' adds rhythm—we can almost imagine Jane being lulled into drowsiness by a warm fire after her long, cold, tiring journey.)

DECISION 3: DIRECT ADDRESS

There are many examples of direct address in the novel. After describing the room at the George Inn in chapter 11, for example, Jane directly addresses the reader: 'Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind.' This signifies a change of mood. The focus switches to Jane's own state of mind, shifting from the external world to her feelings, as we realise that appearances can be deceptive and that she is nervous and worried. The use of direct address and present tense together therefore create tension, as the reader identifies with Jane and shares her 'doubts and fears' about whether she will be collected or not. Structurally, chapter 11 starts with loneliness and fear but ends with happiness and companionship. Therefore, the use of direct address and the present tense at the start of the chapter heightens these contrasts and tensions.

DECISION 3: SHIFT FROM PRESENT TO PAST TENSE

Once Jane has expressed her fears about not being collected from the George Inn, she continues the narration of her story in the past tense: 'fear with me became predominant when half-an-hour elapsed and still I was alone. I bethought myself to ring the bell.' The final sentence signals a change in mood as she makes an active decision and takes control. Switching from the present to past tense therefore speeds up the narrative.

DECISION 4: DELIBERATELY WITHHOLDING INFORMATION FROM THE READER

We know that the story is narrated by an older Jane who sometimes intrudes herself into the story. She could have revealed much earlier that Mr Rochester was married, but she chooses to withhold this and other information from the reader. This adds tension and captures the reader's imagination: for example, we share the younger Jane's distress when we discover at the same time as her that Mr Rochester is married.

There are many further examples of withholding information to create suspense for the reader. In chapter 36, the reader wants to see Jane quickly reunited with Mr Rochester when she leaves Moor House and arrives at Thornfield Hall, but Brontë deliberately delays a reunion and creates suspense through:

- A description of Jane's goodbyes and her journey to Thornfield Hall.
- Telling a story about a 'mistress asleep on a mossy bank' when all we want to hear about is Thornfield Hall. This also heightens the shock when she sees that the house has burnt down.
- The use of direct speech when she reports every word of her conversation with the innkeeper. It is only at the end of their conversation that we discover that Mr Rochester is alive.
- Making us wait until the end of the chapter to learn that Mr Rochester is living at Ferndean.
- Even at the end of the chapter, Jane has still not been reunited with Mr Rochester, thus creating more suspense for the reader.

DECISION 5: MIXING GENRES

By simply glancing at a text, we can immediately see that it is prose, poetry or drama. This is called the form of a text. Genre is a category of writing—for example, tragedy or comedy—and we need to read the text to learn its genre. Genre is closely linked to form, as it tells us more about what to expect in the content of the writing. Brontë employs a mixture of genres, which include:

BILDUNGSROMAN

'Bildungsroman' is a German word that translates as 'education' ('Bildung') and novel ('Roman'). A Bildungsroman is therefore a novel about the growth of a central character through several periods of life. During 'Jane Eyre', we learn of Jane's internal and external conflicts in each new geographical setting. We can track her development by how she manages these conflicts. The points in the next two paragraphs are discussed in more detail in this guide.

When we first meet Jane at *Gateshead*, she is an outsider because of her status as a penniless orphan and dependent on her Aunt Reed. She is unable to control her passionate temper and rebels against her cousin and aunt. She has external conflicts with her family and internal ones when she thinks she can see her uncle's 'ghost' in the red-room. Under the influence of the positive female role models of Miss Temple and Helen Burns at Lowood School, Jane learns to control her passions.

Eight years later, she is working as a governess at Thornfield Hall where she falls in love with Mr Rochester. Jane's lower social status leads her to feel unworthy of Mr Rochester; with her plain appearance, she also feels inferior to 'the beautiful Blanche'. These internal self-doubts are paralleled by the external tensions surrounding the mysteries of the laughter; Grace Poole; Mr Mason after he has been attacked; and Bertha Rochester tearing Jane's wedding veil in half. Even when she agrees to marry Mr Rochester, she feels uncomfortable with him lavishing gifts on her, resulting in more internal conflict. Still further conflict is created when she learns that he is married, and she refuses his offer to become his mistress.

In the Moor House chapters, Jane suffers internal and external conflict when she becomes a beggar. As a school mistress, she subsequently has concerns about dropping in social rank. At the end of the Moor House chapters, a huge amount of emotional and spiritual conflict is created by St. John with his marriage proposals and cold ways. Jane almost rejects her own passions and accepts his proposal, but her supernatural connection with Mr Rochester makes her realise that she must marry for love. We have emotional conflict when she learns that Rochester Hall has burnt down and she does not know if Mr Rochester is still living. Finally, we have the famous line 'Reader, I married him', which shows that Jane actively makes choices and has become, for the time being at least, the dominant partner in the relationship.

Brontë challenges the tradition of gender hierarchy by writing from the point of view of a woman. This, combined with her beliefs about how women are restricted in Victorian society, emphasises that, in her view, a woman's inner development is of equal importance to a man's.

ROMANCE

The novel's popularity when it was published was largely due to its style of writing; as we have seen, it was unusual for a novel to be written from a first-person female perspective, especially one that describes the narrator's feelings with such intensity. Moreover, at that time, the readership of novels was predominantly female, so Brontë's fans would better empathise with the thoughts and feelings of a female protagonist.

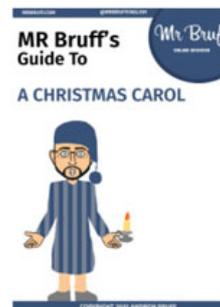
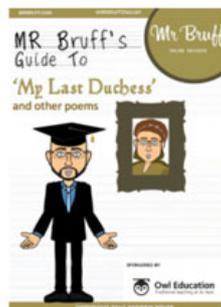
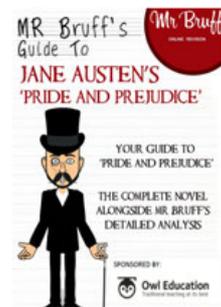
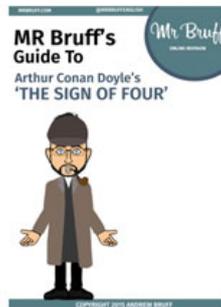
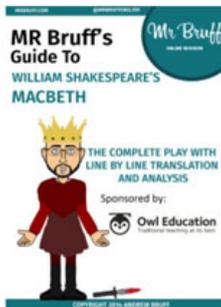
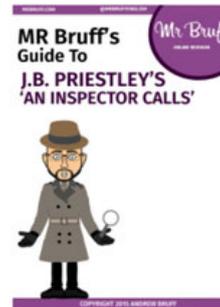
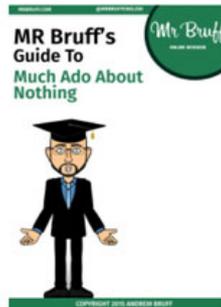
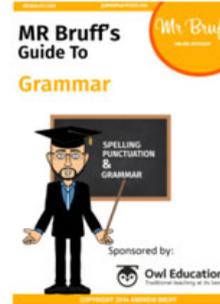
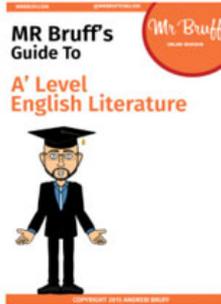
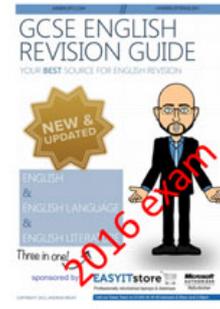
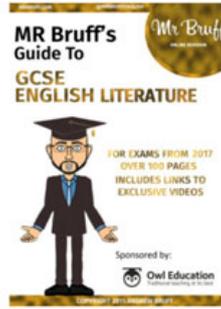
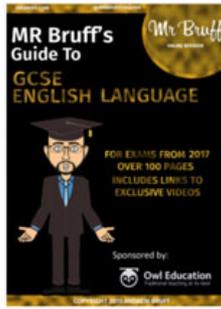
Jane's love interest Mr Rochester is not, like Jane, conventionally good-looking. However, with his 'dark face, stern features and heavy brow', he resembles a Byronic hero, a type of character, named after the English Romantic poet Lord Byron. A Byronic hero is a flawed hero, who is dark, mysterious, moody, rebellious, arrogant, brooding and passionate. By depicting Mr Rochester as a Byronic hero, not only Jane, but also many of her readers would be attracted to him.

Typical characteristics of the romance genre are that two people fall in love with each other, there is an obstacle, they overcome the obstacle, and they live happily ever after. In 'Jane Eyre', the obstacle is Bertha Rochester; she dies in a fire, so Jane and Mr Rochester can now marry and live happily ever after. This is a greatly simplified summary, however, which does not fully explore many important elements of the Bildungsroman genre.

THE GOTHIC NOVEL

The gothic genre combines Romanticism with fiction and horror. In gothic literature, characters usually include a virtuous orphaned heroine (who faints a lot) and a murderous villain with terrifying eyes. Tales are set in the past, often in remote foreign castles or monasteries with secret subterranean passages. Expect to encounter a vampire, ghost or monster. The weather is often horrible, and there will be a lot of melodrama.

This genre was popular in the Romantic Movement but, by the 1840s, it began to decline due to an increasing appetite for more socially realistic novels (such as those of Anthony Trollope). Brontë's success was her ability to combine elements of realism with gothic melodrama. Her orphaned heroine, for example, does not faint at the sight of blood. These elements are described in detail under the *Gothic Imagery* subheading in *Theme and Context: The Spiritual and The Supernatural* section.



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