BBC BITESIZE – JANE EYRE Episode 6

Carl: Hello, and welcome to the Bitesize English literature podcast. If you want to get all the episodes in this podcast, make sure you download the BBC Sounds app.

Jean: And don't forget that whilst you're in the BBC Sounds App, there's loads of other things you can use to help you with your revision. Full versions of some of the texts you might be studying, revision playlists and other Bitesize podcast series to help with different GCSE subjects.

Carl: In this series, we're heading to Northern England in the 19th century to explore Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. I'm Carl Anka.

Jean: And I'm Jean Menzies. And in this episode, we're taking a closer look at the form, structure and language within Jane Eyre. We'll start with the form. Jane Eyre is a novel. This is very common in the Victorian period, everyone was all about the novel. This is right at the beginning of Jane Eyre, setting up the story:

Extract:
Dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

Jean: So this was taken from chapter one of Jane Eyre. In fact, it's the second paragraph. So a good introduction of how we meet Jane, and find out about her in her own words, right from the beginning.

Jane Eyre is a bildungsroman, which is a coming of age story. It's a novel that follows a main protagonist, in this case Jane through the struggles they have from childhood to adulthood.

Carl: This is a story with a lot of twists and turns. Jane Eyre, the character, faces a lot of challenges throughout the book.

Jean: Usually in this kind of story, the character learns from their experiences and once they've developed as a person, this usually leads them to succeeding in later life and finally finding happiness.

Jean: And another thing we've just heard from that clip, which is a really effective choice for a coming of age story, is that Charlotte Bronte writes in the first person, so the reader knows what's happening to Jane, how she thinks and how she feels. We are part of that journey with her.

Carl: And we hear certain points in her life from different perspectives. Not only do we live her childhood moments with her, but she also reflects on them as an adult. In this extract, Jane is newly engaged to Mr. Rochester. And now she's telling a story directly addressing the reader:

Extract:
Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?" (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.)

Carl: So this is her discussing Mr Rochester's comments when they were newly engaged. As she retells the story as an adult a few years later, she can recognise the feelings and have sarcasm about it now, and this makes the bildungsroman even more effective because now the adult Jane Eyre can comment on her own past and how she has changed.

Jean: Charlotte Bronte used this so effectively to draw the reader into Jane Eyre as the protagonist and it makes us feel invested in her story. She even has Jane directly addressed the reader, like we've just heard there, which just gives the reader even more of a personal link to this character and her story. It's like she's rolling her eyes to us that he didn't know the colour of her eyes.
We mentioned another moment where she used this technique earlier, when Jane says "Reader, I married him." She's confiding in the reader. And there's this relationship that's built between reader and character.

Carl: Bildungsroman. Let's look at the structure of the novel and how that impacts the story. Jane Eyre follows a linear format, and it's structured by the places where Jane lives and how each location relates to her development into adulthood. So let's have a listen to them and see where they fit.

Extract:
The red-room was a square chamber, very seldom slept in, I might say never, indeed, unless when a chance influx of visitors at Gateshead Hall rendered it necessary to turn to account all the accommodation it contained: yet it was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion.

Jean: The first place we meet Jane is at Gateshead Hall, and each of these places link to a development or milestone in Jane's life. And the place names are symbolic of that too. Gateshead Hall which is Mrs. Reed's home and not happy place for Jane is her gateway into the journey of adulthood.

Extract:
A stone tablet over the door bore this inscription: -Lowood Institution.

Carl: Lowood school is a low point in Jane's life. She's punished and her best friend dies whilst they're there. Lowood for a low time fits perfectly in this bildungsroman story.

Extract:
"How do you like Thornfield?" she asked. I told her I liked it very much.

Jean: Thornfield - the thorn could be symbolic of the difficulties Jane faces here. She falls in love with Mr. Rochester but finds he is already married to Bertha. I do wonder if perhaps the thorn also references your rose which is all romance except for that little jagged dangerous bit.

Extract:
"Some calls it Marsh End, and some calls it Moor House."

Jean: After Thornfield is Moor House, which is the Rivers' home. Jane ends up there after she runs away from Mr Rochester and Thornfield. "Moor" could symbolise how free Jane becomes there - a moor is a wide open space very common where Charlotte Bronte grew up herself. It has connotations of freedom. Moor House is the place where Jane finally finds her own identity, freedom and future in front of her.

Extract:
The manor-house of Ferndean was a building of considerable antiquity, moderate size, and no architectural pretensions, deep buried in a wood.

Jean: And finally, Ferndean, the place where she finds Mr. Rochester again, and Charlotte Bronte confirms to us later that he and Jane have spent 10 content years together there after they are reunited. The Fern in Ferndean could symbolise the new growth that Jean and Mr. Rochester will experience there, and it's a great name for the happy ending we know exists for them.

Carl: I love the use of place names to symbolise Jane's life in these locations. Sometimes we don't spot these interpretations at first, because we don't truly know exactly what Charlotte Bronte intended. This also leads us quite nicely into the language that Charlotte Bronte uses in Jane Eyre, because she was clearly a woman who used language well, and creates incredible pictures for the readers with her words.

Jean: She is able to create a picture in the readers mind through highly descriptive language.

Extract:
While disease had thus become an inhabitant of Lowood, and death its frequent visitor; while there was gloom and fear within its walls; while its rooms and passages steamed with hospital smells.

Carl: Charlotte Bronte doesn't just want us to be able to visualise the school, she wants us to be able to smell it. This is when she's describing Lowood as a disease, sweeping, threatening, infecting so many of the girls in the school.

Jean: Gloom and fear within its walls. That's another technique she uses - personification. So she's giving a nonhuman object, which is the wall, a human characteristic, which is gloom and fear, to really make a vivid image for the reader and to create a sense of the negative feelings in the setting.

Carl: We've just discussed symbolism in place names throughout the story. But we see that elsewhere in the novel too.

Extract:
The next thing I remember is, waking up with a feeling as if I had had a frightful nightmare, and seeing before me a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars.

Carl: Both red and black have connotations of death, fire, hell and the devil. Charlotte Bronte uses these symbolic colours to evoke the terror that Jane felt when being trapped in the red room as a child. They also highlight the room's supernatural conditions. Later on, Jane believes that she had seen a ghost in the room.

Jean: Pathetic fallacy is about giving human emotions or responses to an inanimate object or animal. So when Jane is on her way to Lowood school, we hear the winter morning was raw and chill, and how she heard the wild wind rushing amongst the trees. This not only helps to paint a picture for the reader, but also foreshadows her time at Lowood school which is not going to be pleasant.

Carl: You will very often experience pathetic fallacy being used to describe the weather, particularly dreary weather. The fact I've just called weather dreary is me using pathetic fallacy there.
Charlotte Bronte is a far better writer than me. So she is going to be using a lot of pathetic fallacy for foreshadowing and telling us things without telling us. Hinting through place names and weather, and however she can. The final part of language that Bronte uses that I want to highlight is her use of imagery.
Imagery is the use of language by writers to create images in the readers mind. Bronte is very good at this. For example, Bronte describing the Moors.

Extract:
High banks of moor were about me; the crag protected my head: the sky was over that.

Jean: Which in turn highlights the wildness and beauty of Jane's personality. We've mentioned in other episodes how the word plane is used a lot to describe Jane's looks in this book. But Charlotte Bronte is challenging this reductive way of judging women by their appearance, by instead highlighting all the wonderful things about this woman that aren't just based on her face or body.

Carl: You are completely drawn to Jane throughout the story for her magnetic personality and ways.

Jean: And then she ends up at Moor House which we've discussed earlier when we spoke about structure. And this symbolises how free Jane becomes. We've just come full circle.

Thank you for joining us for episode six of the Bitesize English literature podcast all about the form, structure and language in Jane Eyre.

Carl: In episode seven we'll be diving into the context of Jane Eyre and when it was written. You can listen to this and the rest of the episodes on BBC Sounds.