

# The passage from charlotte bronte's "jane eyre"

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Throughout the course of this essay I will be examining an extract from the second chapter of Charlotte Brontë's 'Jane Eyre' in which Jane finds herself locked in the Red Room. I will be looking closely at the relevance of this passage to the structure of the novel overall, paying close attention to the narrative devices used.

The novel is a fictional autobiography comprising a first-person narrative, which allows the reader to see events and characters through Jane's eyes, and therefore increases the authenticity of the text.

Jane's experiences within the Red Room are also portrayed solely from her own point of view, giving the reader an insight into how Jane's heightened nerves provoke an unnatural depiction of her surroundings. The room itself is described as a 'vault', the chair becomes a 'pale throne', and the bed is referred to as a 'tabernacle'. The highly fanatical and superstitious tone mirrors the fact that the narrative is told from a child's perspective and also illustrates the more passionate attributes of Jane's character.

As Jane peers into the 'great looking-glass', a distorted reflection of herself is revealed. Brontë appears to use the mirror as a symbol of Jane's inner self, as after she studies her reflection the tone of the narrative changes and becomes a critical examination of her situation and character. She views her reflection as a 'strange little figure' or 'tiny phantom', and her later description of Mr. Rochester as a 'phantom' could be an echo of this portrayal of herself as a child.

Halfway through the extract, the perspective shifts to the adult Jane looking back in retrospect on her experiences within the Red Room. The 'ceaseless

inward question' that could not be answered by Jane as a child is now solved, demonstrating that Jane has been able to overcome the passion and anguish she felt in her youth, and replace it with the composed knowledge of an adult.

Brontë uses a significant number of linguistic techniques to highlight Jane's emotions in this passage. The use of parallelism in the phrase 'from morning to noon, and from noon to dusk' stresses Jane's seemingly endless struggle with injustice at Gateshead, and the repetition of the exclamation 'Unjust!' emphasises her bitterness towards the Reeds. A series of rhetorical questions and exclamations concerning her discrimination within the Reed household is followed by an extended digression in which Jane broods over the injustice of her situation. This highly emotionally charged passage is emphasised by the personification of her 'reason' as it speaks out against her 'unjust' condition in life. Her feelings are often given a voice in this way to display her innermost emotions, and also to allow the reader to identify with her thoughts and actions. The personification of 'superstition' as Jane describes the impending arrival of 'her hour for complete victory' enhances the supernatural atmosphere.

Jane's punishment by imprisonment within the Red Room is the first of a succession of metaphorical captivities, predominantly relating to Victorian society's attitudes towards gender, social class, and religion. Jane criticises the prejudice and superficiality of Victorian society by stating that had she been a 'handsome' or 'romping' child, her presence would have been endured 'more complacently'. The events that take place within the Red Room are emblematic of Jane's isolation from almost every community and

society. As an orphan raised by a wealthy family, she is accustomed to the education and lifestyle of those of a higher class than herself, but she is not in possession of any money and is even shunned by the servants who describe her as 'less than a servant'.

The low ottoman, on which Jane is commanded to sit upon, is representative of her standing in society. The image of being confined to a stool and prohibited from rising is redrawn upon at Lowood School when Mr. Brocklehurst unjustly punishes Jane in such a way. Her imprisonment in the Red Room, and in a similar way her punishment at school, acts as a reminder that she is being socially excluded. The isolation Jane experiences as a child prompts her to search her mind for drastic alternatives, such as 'starving herself' or 'running away'. Although these are rather desperate options, they demonstrate her strong characteristics of determination and pride.

While within the Red Room, Jane considers the cruelty of John Reed, who taunts his mother and calls her 'old girl' and yet is still, in Mrs. Reed's eyes, 'her own darling'. Jane notices with heavy irony that John mocks his mother for her dark skin, despite it being 'similar to his own'. Jane's fiery nature is again displayed by her indignation of the fact that 'no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me'. The quarrel between Jane and John Reed also establishes the theme of gender conflict within the novel. Her status as a female leaves her susceptible to John's violence and taunting, and as he is the only son, his tyrannous character is indulged. By fighting back, Jane refuses to conform to the level of obedience that would have been expected of a female in her situation.

Brontë, often turns to the theme of slavery as a symbol to represent the domestic and social hardships that opposed women in the eighteenth century. The narrative frequently returns to this metaphor in order to illustrate similarities between slavery and gender repression. John Reed is earlier referred to as a 'slave-driver', and while locked in the Red Room, Jane asks how Mrs. Reed could possibly 'like an interloper not of her race', thereby classifying herself as an outcast and also raising questions of racial differences and slavery.

The theme of the Red Room recurs as a symbol several times throughout 'Jane Eyre', reappearing in Jane's mind on occasions when she links her present circumstances to that first feeling of humiliation she experienced in the Red Room. It becomes a leading theme throughout her life, and she recalls on the scene at many later stages in the novel to give context to her most troubled and dark experiences. Brontë also uses figurative language to recall her experiences within the Red Room. The metaphor 'embers of my decaying ire' is used to illustrate Jane's diminishing anger, and in the following chapter Jane is met with the image of a blazing fire as she wakes from her unconsciousness. These references to figurative and non-figurative fires return many times throughout the novel.

The passage is heavy with colour and sound imagery, accentuating Jane's heightened senses and emotions while in the Red Room. The mood is intensified by the repeated descriptions of the room's 'silent' atmosphere, 'chill' air, and the gathering of 'quiet dust'. This somewhat ominous silence is not broken until the end of the extract when a sound fills Jane's ears 'like the rushing of wings'. Jane's initial impressions of the colours within the Red

Room, such as the 'soft fawn' and 'blush of pink', do not at first seem negative, but gradually the colours around her become increasingly more threatening. The colour red is highly significant, being the predominant colour within the room. Red is often used in conjunction with the themes of passion and fury, and the descriptions such as the 'curtains of deep red damask' mirror physically Jane's excessively fervent character.

Charlotte Brontë was greatly influenced by the Gothic novels that were in fashion before the time of 'Jane Eyre'. The Gothic novel was popularised in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was defined by its use of suspense, supernatural elements, and desolate locations to generate a gloomy or chilling mood. The protagonist of the novel would generally be female, and often face distressing or morbid circumstances. In this extract, Jane seems to fit this stereotypical Gothic heroine as her situation is certainly distressing and, although she faints, she demonstrates her resolve to resist those who persecute her, a strength that was common in Gothic women.

The use of suspense is another Gothic technique employed within this extract. The final paragraph of the extract begins with the short, simple sentence 'A singular notion dawned upon me', and then gradually the tension increases as Jane's imagination becomes progressively more frantic and superstitious. The use of long, complex sentences and lists interspersed with commas and semi-colons give the text a fast-paced and frenzied tone. The suspense continues to increase until finally the extract reaches its climax and Jane screams.

The scene within the Red Room is loaded with intricate Gothic imagery and details. The deep red colour of the room is implicative of death and blood,  
<https://assignbuster.com/the-passage-from-charlotte-brontes-jane-eyre/>

and both of these aspects feature prominently in the stereotypical Gothic novel. The descriptions of the 'rain...beating continuously' and the 'wind howling in the grove' paint a vivid Gothic picture of the stormy moors that surround Gateshead. The supernatural elements in the passage, such as the 'rushing of wings' that fills Jane's ears and her vision of the 'herald of some coming vision from another world', are the most noticeably Gothic. The usage of such obvious Gothic elements so early in the novel forecast impending Gothic ideas and locales later in the text.

It is the application of these Gothic characteristics that seem to give the novel its widespread appeal. However, although Charlotte Brontë incorporates many of these Gothic influences within 'Jane Eyre', she has developed the traditional techniques significantly from what would have been the typical Gothic of the late eighteenth century, making 'Jane Eyre' extremely unique in style.

'Jane Eyre' clearly contains many Gothic elements, but there are also many strong features of realism within the text. Brontë provides the reader with lengths of highly detailed prose portraying accurately Jane's surroundings, such as the extensive descriptions of the Red Room's interior in this extract. Careful attention is paid to illustrate thoroughly the 'chairs...of darkly-polished old mahogany' and the 'piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed'. This meticulously detailed imagery adds an element of authenticity and realism to the text, enhanced further by the references to social class and gender issues. Later in the passage, the description of the 'herald of some coming vision from another world' is surrounded by detailed prose, describing Jane's every emotion and movement as she 'rushed to the door

and shook the lock in desperate effort'. This extensive use of detail renders even the most Gothic elements of the text realistic.

The events that take place within the Red Room are highly relevant to the structure of 'Jane Eyre' as a whole. Several themes, such as those of gender oppression and the Gothic, are first used within this extract and then continue to recur throughout the novel. The Red Room's importance as a symbol also continues throughout, and every time Jane experiences fear or humiliation her mind returns to her memory of the horror and ridicule she encountered that afternoon. Many of the Gothic images described in this passage foreshadow future Gothic themes within the plot, and the elaborate Gothic imagery reappears frequently throughout. The extract also provides the reader with an extensive insight into Jane's personality by demonstrating the presence of her easily provoked superstitious and passionate nature.