***Jane Eyre***

***Chapter 2***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Short Summary:***

Two servants, Miss Abbott and Bessie Lee, escort Jane to the red-room, and Jane resists them with all of her might. Once locked in the room, Jane catches a glimpse of her ghastly figure in the mirror, and, shocked by her meager presence, she begins to reflect on the events that have led her to such a state. She remembers her kind Uncle Reed bringing her to Gateshead after her parents’ death, and she recalls his dying command that his wife promise to raise Jane as one of her own. Suddenly, Jane is struck with the impression that her Uncle Reed’s ghost is in the room, and she imagines that he has come to take revenge on his wife for breaking her promise. Jane cries out in terror, but her aunt believes that she is just trying to escape her punishment, and she ignores her pleas. Jane faints in exhaustion and fear.

***Short Analysis:***

Beginning with Jane’s experience in the red-room, we sense a palpable atmosphere of mystery and the supernatural. Like Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre draws a great deal of its stylistic inspiration from the Gothic novels that were in vogue during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These books depicted remote, desolate landscapes, crumbling ruins, and supernatural events, all of which were designed to create a sense of psychological suspense and horror. While Jane Eyre is certainly not a horror novel, and its intellectually ambitious criticisms of society make it far more than a typical Gothic romance, it is Brontë’s employment of Gothic conventions that gives her novel popular as well as intellectual appeal.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Two servants, Besse Lee and Miss Abott, haul the wildly struggling Jane upstairs. Shocked at her violent outbreak, they scold her for disrespecting Mrs. Reed, her benefactress and master. They tell Jane that she depends on Mrs. Reed's generosity. Without it, she would have to go to the poor house.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Because of her uncertain status in the family and in the social hierarchy, Jane is a prisoner of Mrs. Reed's "generosity" as well as the red-room. Adopted children like Jane had few, if any, options of their own.

***Summary Part 2:***

They lock Jane alone in the red-room. Jane catches sight of her gaunt reflection in the mirror and broods on the injustice of Gateshead Hall, where she is always being insulted and punished while the Reed brats enjoy every privilege. She knows that the kindly Mr. Reed would never have treated her so badly. Mr. Reed brought her to Gateshead, and it was his dying wish that Mrs. Reed raise Jane like one of her own children.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Alone with her reflection and her thoughts, Jane starts to realize what she deserves as an individual, and what was promised to her by Mr. Reed—to be treated with love and respect. Though she is powerless, she knows that she deserves better.

***Summary Part 3:***

Jane thinks about the dead and how, when wronged, they can arise to seek revenge. Suddenly, Jane is overwhelmed with a sense of Mrs.Reed 's presence in the room. Convinced she sees his ghost, Jane screams in terror. The servants open the door, but Mrs. Reed refuses to believe Jane or to let her out. Locked back into the red-room again, Jane faints.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Imagined or not, the ghost sets the tone for many of the supernatural elements in the novel. Jane wants revenge, but it takes a terrifying form in Mr. Reed's spirit. The whole gothic set up hints us that Jane must learn another, more controlled way to confront injustice.

***Summary in Depth:***

As she's being dragged to the red-room, Jane resists her jailors, Bessie and Miss Abbott. Bessie and Abbot place Jane on a stool in the red-room, and chastise her for flying passionately at Master Reed. They look at her as if she were insane and evil, calling her "an under-handed little thing." They remind her of her place in the Reed household--less than a servant because she does not earn her keep--that it is up to the whim of Ms. Reed to keep Jane or turn her back to the poor-house. Then they leave Jane, locking the door behind.

After the servants have locked her in, Jane begins observing the red-room. Jane introduces us to the interior of the red-room, a spare chamber with a large, looming mahogany bed, red decorations and drapes, and the chill of the white drawn windows, a wide mirror. It was in this room nine years ago that the late Mr. Reed died, her mother's brother, and was carried away by the undertaker, as well. It is the biggest and best room of the mansion, yet is rarely used because Uncle Reed died there. Crossing the mirror, she sees her own image, and is spooked by her white skin, by how much a spirit or phantom she looks. She compares her image to that of a strange fairy. The oddness of being in a death-chamber seems to have stimulated Jane's imagination, and she feels superstitious about her surroundings. She's also contemplative and starts to retrospect. Why, she wonders, is she always the outcast? Jane confides her own fears, and feelings of anger, injustice and pain toward the Reeds. She questions why she is always the object of cruelty, suffering, accusation and condemnation continuously, with John's violence, his sisters' selfishness, Ms. Reed's indifference. She is still bleeding, but John's abuse was overlooked because Jane tried to fight him off of her. She admits:

"What a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection! Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless inward question--why I thus suffered; now at the distance of--I will not say how many years, I see it clearly." Jane is always the object of abuse because she is completely different from and in discord with everyone else at Gateshead Hall. Neither party love each other, and Jane does not have the necessary personality traits and physical appearance--"a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child"--to be accepted and tolerated by the Reeds. Her own more perceptive and experienced temperament is not liked or understood, and instead, condemned.

The reader learns that Jane's Uncle Reed — her mother's brother — brought her into the household. On his deathbed, he made his wife promise to raise Jane as one of her own children, but obviously, this promise has not been kept. Jane becomes cold and depressed in the red-room.

Suddenly, Jane feels a presence in the room and imagines it might be Mr. Reed, returning to earth to avenge his wife's violation of his last wish. Seeing a white light move above the mirror and across the ceiling, she thinks it is a ghost or the dead spirit of Mr. Reed haunting the room, troubled from the grave. She screams and the servants come running into the room to see if she is ill. Jane tells of the ghost and begs to be removed from the red-room and let her into the nursery, but neither the servants nor Mrs. Reed have any sympathy for her. Believing that Jane is pretending to be afraid, Mrs. Reed vows that Jane will be freed only if she maintains "perfect stillness and submission." She throws Jane back in for another hour as punishment for her insurrection. When everyone leaves, Jane, tortured, crying and hysterical goes into a fit and faints.

Analysis in Depth:

Chapter 2, just like Chapter 1, reveals the hypocrisy of Mrs. Reed, who not only treats Jane with unfair harshness but is shown to have reneged on the deathbed promise made to her husband. The red-room scene brings in some of the gothic elements often found in popular 18th- and 19th-century novels: an elaborately decorated, cold, dark room where someone has died, a mysterious light, and a raging storm. The atmospherics of the storm reflect Jane's tumultuous emotions, as well as contributing to her fright and profound sense of isolation.

The red-room incident clearly is a traumatic and memorable experience for Jane, and she recalls it later in the book when she reaches personal crises. Being locked alone in the red-room—"no jail was ever more secure," she comments—reflects her feelings of isolation and being trapped by her status as an unwanted orphan. These feelings will emerge later, as she bristles against societal restrictions on her because she is a woman. The red-room is often associated with Jane coming of age as a woman.

Reflecting on the incident and her life at Gateshead, Jane the child is bewildered: "I dared commit no fault," she says. "I strove to fulfill every duty." Yet she is always punished. Bessie's comments that Jane has never behaved like this before back up Jane's contention that she has always tried to be good, showing that she is a reliable narrator. While the child Jane cannot understand her situation, the adult narrator has a better view, based on life experience: "I was a discord at Gateshead Hall; I was like a nobody there." Imprisoned in the room, Jane considers two options to end her misery—escape and starving herself to death.

Stating that she is resisting her captors like a "rebel slave," Jane continues to use the imagery of oppression that has begun in the previous chapter. When Miss Abbot admonishes Jane for striking John Reed, Jane's "young master," Jane immediately questions her terminology. Is John really her master; is she his servant? Again, Jane's position within the household is questioned, particularly her class identity.  As a shy, impoverished, and plain child, Jane decides she is a "useless thing." Thus, she needs to discover her "use," one that is outside the realm of class and beauty. Color is once again symbolic, revealing the mood of the scene and providing insight into character. While in Chapter 1, Jane was enshrouded by the red curtains, here she is locked within the red-room.  For Jane, red has become the color of a hellish nightmare, in which she is jailed behind impenetrable black bars. Skin color is also important. Here the reader learns that John reviles his mother for her "dark skin," a supposedly negative quality that he has inherited from her. The novel appears to support an ethnocentrism (evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture.) that links "darkness" with an unacceptable foreignness, while lightness is affiliated with English purity. The characterization of Jane is also developed in this chapter. As she gazes at her image in the red-room's mirror, Jane describes herself as a "tiny phantom, half fairy, half imp" from one of Bessie's bedtime stories, a spirit-creature that comes out of "lone, ferny dells in moors" and appears in the eyes of "belated travellers." We see the first instance of a supernatural intrusion into the novel in this chapter. As Jane sits nervously in the red-room, she imagines a gleam of light shining on the wall and believes it is "a herald or indication of some coming vision from another world." The novel suggests that Jane has psychic powers — she is haunted by other apparitions and by prophetic dreams. Generally, these ghostly visitations prefigure drastic changes in Jane's life, as this one does.

***Gothic Imagery:***

The red-room is dark like blood. It emits strange noises and has a large mirror that distorts Jane's appearance. The late Mr. Reed died there, and Jane imagines his ghost now haunts the room, troubled by wrongdoing regarding his last wishes. Outside it is raining, the wind blows against the moors, faint voices are heard. All of these elements--a dark and foreboding room where a family member died, the color red, ghosts and phantoms, and the romantic gothic scene of rain on the moors--are Gothic and predict future Gothic locales and themes in the plot.

***Theme:***

***Social Class and Social Rules:***

Life in 19th-century Britain was governed by social class, and people typically stayed in the class into which they were born. As an orphan at Gateshead, Jane holds a position that is between classes, and interacts with people of every level, from working-class servants to aristocrats. Jane's social mobility lets Brontë create a vast social landscape in her novel in which she examines the sources and consequences of class boundaries.

***Feelings Vs. Suppression:***

Jane Eyre can be described as Jane's quest to balance her contradictory natural instincts toward independence and submission. Her quest is to find a balance between passionate feeling on the one hand and judgment, or repression of those feelings, on the other.

***The Spiritual and the Super natural:***

Brontë uses many themes of Gothic novels to add drama and suspense to Jane Eyre. But the novel isn't just a ghost story because Brontë also reveals the reasons behind supernatural events. For instance, Mr. Reed's ghost in the red-room is a figment of Jane's stressed-out mind.

***Quotes and Explanations:***

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them.

Jane, isolated and punished in the red-room, reveals how rejected, unloved, and alone she feels among the Reeds. Jane is narrating her ordeal when living with the Reeds. She is stating that she was out of the place in the Gateshead Hall and that everybody felt as if she did not exist. She was not in harmony with the Reed children. Even as a servant, the children did not consider her worth loving. Therefore, Jane did not feel any love for them. In other words, she was not regarded as worthy of being their equal. Her physical isolation in the room reflects how emotionally isolated she feels. In the same speech, she says that, in the Reeds' eyes, she is "useless" and "noxious." The strong terms reveal how deeply and sharply she feels their contempt and disapproval. Considering Jane is only 10 years old, and the preceding pages showed John Reed unfairly attacking her and her aunt unfairly punishing her, the passage adds to the sympathy readers feel for her.