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Between 'the disorderly comfortless home' and 'the beau-ideal of domestic comfort': Domestic Interiors and the Self in three Brontë Novels

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Between ‘the disorderly comfortless home’ and ‘the
beau -ideal of domestic comfort’: Domestic Interiors and
the Self in three Brontë Novels

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Research

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Abstract

Drawing on the work of cultural theorists regarding the impact of domestic surroundings on an inhabitant's psyche, feelings and states of mind, this dissertation develops the notion that novelists carry forward this association into their fictional creations, in terms of plot and, more specifically, of character. This real, psychological relationship is, at times, a means for advancing a plot in a desired direction, but is also narrative device for dramatically enhancing a character's responses in a given dramatic situation. The authors' employment of domestic interiors in relation to their fictional creations, the rooms' contents and their attributes – doors, windows, hearth, furniture – are props in a reflexive relation to those characters, telling a reader more about a character's behaviour but also about the potential meanings of the domestic items.

In this light, this dissertation reinterprets three novels by the Brontë sisters, the main focus being on female characters in their domestic surroundings. Chapter One also discusses the chief male protagonists in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and the manner in which they come to embody the nature of their environment. The central text of Chapter

Two is Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where the eponymous Jane's reactions to her situations are re-analysed to reflect her relation to her various homes as both fluctuate with the arc of the narrative. Finally, Chapter Three deals with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë and the various signals embedded in the text to signify the main character's responses to her changing domestic conditions.

As well as uncovering autobiographical dimensions in the novels under discussion, the thesis concludes that the authors employ these dramatic devices – influencing and reflecting behaviour and state of mind – to allow their female characters to develop transgressive coping strategies.

Introduction

Brontë critics and enthusiasts have recognised the ‘inextricabl[e] [link]’ (Winnifrith, 1988, p. 18) between author and place. Haworth has become renowned for its reputation as a site of literary pilgrimage as people are ‘drawn to places that have connections with the lives of writers’ (Herbert, 2001, p. 314). David Herbert reflects that

former homes, in which a writer lived and worked, may create a sense of nostalgia and inspire awe or reverence. In these places, a visitor can still walk out of a house and into landscapes which barely changed since the writer drew breath from them and breathed literature into them...We walk in our writers’ footsteps and see through their eyes when we enter these spaces.

(Herbert, 2001, p. 314).

It is only natural, then, that we associate the authors of *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* with Haworth and its Parsonage. The three famous sisters, Emily, Charlotte and Anne Brontë, have ‘breathed literature’ into Haworth and in turn created a connection between author and place. A legacy connection between author and place clearly exists. What is more, David Harrison suggests that ‘no matter how

we may try to deny it, we are all part of our geography, and to varying degrees, it influences us, shapes us, and becomes a “backdrop” and “measuring tool” for all other environments we live in and encounter’ (Harrison, 2002, p. 195); our geography contributes to who we are and shapes our sense of self. We may infer, then, that the environment of Haworth defines the sisters and, in turn, their literature.

Like the Brontë sisters, I too have a connection to Haworth. My impetus for studying the Brontë sisters stems from being personally located so close to Brontë Country. Admirers and researchers of the authors travel from all corners of the earth to walk in the footsteps of the Brontë sisters and immerse themselves in the house and landscape that so profoundly inspired them; for me, it is a little closer to home. My close connection to this literary place set in motion my ideas about the relationship between place and person and, from this, space and character. While the temptation is to return to the well-trodden territory of the moors, I have, instead, turned *inside* in order to uncover a connection between the Brontës’ fictional characters and their domestic interiors. This thesis interlinks literary scholarship, human geography, and material historical research into the home in order to offer a new perspective on the ways in which a character’s movement through the novel is affected by the material culture surrounding them, and historical and transhistorical ideas about home.

The contrast between a variety of interiors and the outdoors underpins the detailed analysis of one novel by each of the three sisters. The novelistic treatment of spaces, both internal and external, and the mundane, everyday objects which are contained in the former – doors, windows, furniture - and the ways in which characters, mainly female, interact with them function as meaningful literary devices. Human interactions with these things suggest moods and psychological states, social circumstances, and the autonomy and sense of self, which a character may experience or mourn the absence of. In this context, ‘autonomy’ indicates personal freedom and the exercise of the freedom of the subject’s will; and the ‘self’ signifies the individual who may at times exert her/his will, as having relative freedom of thought and action.

This approach constitutes a departure from much previous Brontë scholarship, which has concentrated on the miles of moorland around Haworth Parsonage – familiar walking country for the sisters, and sought to demonstrate its impact on their imaginations. In contrast, without ignoring the influence of the outdoors on the dramas and the characters of these novels, this dissertation demonstrates the reflexive relationship between the indoors – architecture of doors and windows, kitchen utensils, furniture, hearth and fire – and the characters who use them. As Sue Thomas has written, ‘social relations hide in things’ (Thomas, 2009, p. 152). These indoor features, or props in the literary dramas, in their

turn, are seen to become components of the novels. And it is demonstrated that there is also a perceptible autobiographical dimension to this interaction, including the atmosphere and features of the Parsonage itself. Indeed, Wynne has written of the ‘Victorian-inspired tendency to analyse the author as naively writing autobiography thinly disguised as fiction’ (Wynne, 2017, p. 2). Whilst this dissertation nevertheless retains an element of biography, it does respond to her assertion that Brontë scholarship has gone beyond that and the mass of Freudian analyses of the novels of Charlotte and of her sisters. Wynne writes that ‘most new approaches to Charlotte Brontë’s work are broadly historicist, whether they adopt the perspectives of gender studies, postcolonial approaches, disability studies, adaptation studies or material culture’ (Wynne, 2017, p. 2). My approach here is both historicist and transhistorical, appreciating the human relationships with home that transcend literary periods.

To some extent, this dissertation borrows from cultural theory. The academic work on the matter of the significance to the individual subject of her or his surroundings post-dates the lives of the literary family who inhabited Haworth parsonage in the **nineteenth-century**. These are notions which were not formally extant in the sisters’ own lifetimes. Yet, at some level of consciousness, Emily, Charlotte and Anne as novelists were surely conscious that one’s environment affects one’s mood or suggest the state of a character’s psyche – it is expressed via the literary rather

than the theoretical. These interior accoutrements are symptomatic of authorial intent, purposefully employed to achieve the desired impact, creating a sense of the character as a product of her or his environment as well as an actor on it.

Cultural and design theorists have pointed to the importance of home and personal surroundings in terms which validate a novelist's use of these as narrative tools. Brooker and Weinthal write:

‘Authors apply modes of psychological evaluation established for social settings and reapply them to physical environments as a way to evaluate how occupants affect their interiors, which in turn affects the identity they project. As much as people are social creatures, the personalisation of space is the physical representation of identity’ (Brooker & Weinthal, 2013, p. 254). The connection between a subject's surroundings and her state of mind is made. Similarly, Lipsedge highlights the significance of a character's living space, surely as relevant to understanding in the nineteenth-century as her application of it to the eighteenth:

For the reader to have an intimate knowledge of both character and domestic environment, the narrative also needs to be inwards and subjective, focusing as much on the domestic life of the characters' living space as on the private experience of the characters themselves.

(Lipsedge, 2012, p. 15)

Novelists, conscious of this, produce an overlap between character and surroundings and can manipulate scenes to create a heightened impression of a character's state of mind and through their interactions with domestic spaces and their contents and attributes establish a realistic sense of that character's autonomy or lack thereof. Indeed, as Chapman and Hockey assert, 'our home environment plays a fundamental role in shaping the subject's own sense of identity and "our selves"' (Kadar, 2005, p. 82).

Fictional characters, such as Jane Eyre, are, by definition, the creations of their authors. The rooms those characters inhabit and in which they act out their dramas, the furnishings, the architecture and the surrounding landscapes have been chosen and placed there by the authors. It is Charlotte Brontë who manoeuvres people and places to where she wants them in order to further her story and draw her characters, suggesting their personal development as the narrative progresses. The interpretative method employed here reveals something of the manner in which characters, chiefly women, through their relation to doors, windows etc, are manipulated by the creators to demonstrate the limitations of their freedom of movement and thought and sense of an autonomous self.

Taking as a starting point those critics of the Brontë's novels who have foregrounded feminist readings by highlighting the gendered social constraints undoubtedly placed on female characters, my approach goes on to underline strategies for self-preservation given to prominent female characters by their female authors. These strategies often flag up the significance of the commonplace items around them as they are deployed as indicators of mood and the extent of control over them as a barometer of the extent of an individual's autonomy and self-expression. Whatever limits husbands or other men, or society's conventions, places on women can, at crucial moments, be avoided by transgressive manoeuvres involving personal control of spaces and doors or through the imaginative escape of looking out of a favourite window to the outside world and remote places of less confinement. So far as male characters are concerned these spaces and objects are potentially contested territory.

The three central chapters involve detailed analyses of a novel by one of the three sisters. Chapter One is concerned with Emily Brontë's only novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Strong similarities between the Heights and the author's own domestic situation at Haworth Parsonage itself are underlined in analyses, which uncover the nature of relations between each of the characters and their interior surroundings. For example, whilst not seeking to refute previous claims by critics that the nature of Heathcliff, with his hardness and absence of emotion turning, at times, to

fury, is somehow formed by and reflecting the miles of barren moorland around the Heights; however, this chapter contends that there is also much correspondence between him and the domestic interiors of both the Heights and, by extension, the Parsonage. Furthermore, it demonstrates the manner in which the author can induce narrative tension and relieve it by a character's interaction with inanimate objects in an interior setting.

Chapter two deals with *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, and the various spaces and objects around the eponymous central character. Proceeding through the three separate buildings in which Jane lives, Charlotte is seen deploying interior items to augment the impact of her scenes. There is a particular focus on windows as objects which can be brought to signify a character's state of mind and personal identity; and the extent to which the area around a window is controlled by the character and can be made a function of the individual's autonomy and sense of self. Jane's shifting relation to items of furniture and draperies is explored in various settings and rooms, which are frequently public rooms, occasionally the private space of her bedroom and, in the case of Lowood School, a collective one. Charlotte also describes the effects on Jane's mood and sense of self-preservation of the natural outdoors, usually seen through windows, especially views of landscapes, contrasting with her sense of quasi-imprisonment when indoors.

Chapter Three moves on to Anne Brontë's novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, continuing the theme of windows, but now addressing fire and hearth and the contrasting behaviour of the different characters' interaction with these items in the home.

In terms of narrative, there is a code around subjective human behaviour as it relates to these tangible everyday objects, which is employed for dramatic effect, which we may usually overlook. At times, however, whatever advantage may accrue to a female character through her interaction with doors and windows and furniture, is marginal, usually temporary and often easily and suddenly breached. This is what I aim to uncover. The analyses of these three novels is essentially about domestic spaces and the objects in them, control of which may serve as a measure of an individual's autonomy, free will, sense of self; these are frequently contrasted with open landscapes as sites of less confinement, greater freedom. As narrative devices the description of spaces, domestic, interior or landscape in which the dramas take place contribute to an atmosphere in which external agencies are employed by the authors to influence characters by enhancing the effect of their actions. A reader must be aware that, although these are not the only tools at an author's disposal, they are brought to bear intentionally to manipulate the reader's impression.

CHAPTER ONE

Feeling at home in *Wuthering Heights*

The overtly legible link between Emily Brontë's home environment and her novel *Wuthering Heights* has fascinated scholars for decades. The most obvious parallel that critics have recognised between Brontë and her novel, of course, is that between the natural space surrounding the Parsonage and the natural space surrounding Wuthering Heights. Ann Dinsdale, curator of the Brontë Parsonage, recognises that 'the moors [surrounding Haworth] are present in every scene in the novel' (Dinsdale, 2016). One need not be an expert on place and literature to appreciate this connection. The 'heath and mud' (Brontë, 1998, p. 7) and 'wild and stormy' (p. 43) weather in Brontë's novel offers a remarkable resemblance to the harsh, barren landscape on Brontë's own doorstep. This relationship is no innovative discovery. However, very little has been written about Brontë's *interior* home environment and its influence on *Wuthering Heights*. Yet, there are clear parallels between the

Parsonage and the Heights which have been overlooked. From the furniture, to the lighting, to the inhabitants, there is an undeniable connection between both of these internal domestic spaces. It is this link that the chapter examines further.

Going beyond much existing critical work, which places its focus on the *outside* of the Heights and the Parsonage, I want to examine the significance of the *inside*. It is not merely the ‘wild landscape’ (Fraser, 2015, p. 56) that helped to shape Brontë’s characters, but the interior environment as well. Taking a more inwards approach to the novel, I am going to examine just how far the interior domestic space of the Parsonage and the interior domestic spaces within the novel are linked to the characters of *Wuthering Heights*.

Since 1850, when Charlotte Brontë interpreted *Wuthering Heights* as being ‘hewn in a wild workshop’ (Dickerson, 1996, p. 67), critics have assumed that the main impetus behind the characters of *Wuthering Heights* is the wild and savage Yorkshire moors. Heathcliff’s nature and appearance, for instance, has been interpreted as mirroring ‘the nature of the moors’ (‘Being the Brontës’, 2016). After all, he is described by Cathy as ‘an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone’ (p. 107). The correlation between the moors and Heathcliff is undeniable. However, to

infer that Heathcliff is merely a character that has been crafted from ‘a granite block on a solitary moor’ and ‘crag’ (Dickerson, 1996, p. 67), is to boldly overlook the *internal* and *domestic* ‘workshop’ that his creator was also working in.

The first striking detail about Heathcliff is his lack of emotion. Brontë draws attention to the ‘hardness’ (p. 39) of his character right from the beginning of the novel. We discover how ‘he would stand Hindley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear’ (p. 38) and how ‘he complained so seldom’ (p. 40). It is as though he is completely numb to expressing emotion. To be entirely unmoved by Hindley’s physical violence and psychological abuse creates a strikingly inhuman quality to his character. This element of Heathcliff is at odds with the ‘atmospheric tumult’ (p. 2) and wild winds of the moors. We might associate such weather with extreme passion and emotion but not with a ‘naturally reserved disposition’ (p. 71). There is, however, a congruity between Heathcliff’s lack of emotion and the domestic interiors of the Parsonage and the Heights. It is this congruity which leads me to Heathcliff as a character shaped by these interior spaces.

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Halton from a psychological perspective, ‘the home becomes the most powerful sign of the self of the inhabitant who dwells within (p. 123). Indeed, if we look at

Heathcliff's character from this theoretical perspective, it becomes evident that 'the home' plays a fundamental role in shaping Heathcliff's 'self'. Similar to Heathcliff's 'hardness', the domestic spaces of the Parsonage and the Heights have an obvious 'hardness' about them. The floor at the Heights, for instance, is made up of 'stone' (p. 3), and the chairs are 'heavy' and 'black' (p. 3). Like Heathcliff's emotionless exterior, which Nelly describes as 'hard as whinstone' (p. 35), the floors and the furnishings make the interior of the Heights feel cold and hard. What is more, there are 'no signs of roasting, boiling or baking, about the huge fire place; nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls' (p. 3). All of these utensils would give the Heights a warm, homely feel. Without them, however, this domestic interior feels cold and bare indeed, much like the emotional coldness of Heathcliff's character. The Parsonage was similarly a 'cold' (Thormählen, 2012, p. 24) and 'comfortless home' (p. 83). Due to Patrick Brontë's fear of fire, 'he did not allow curtains or carpets in the Parsonage' (Harman, 2015, p. 41). Thus, the windows were curtainless, the floors were mainly of 'sandstone' and 'the walls were not papered' (Fraser, 2015, p. 34). As such, the domestic interior of the Parsonage would emit a coldness and emptiness not dissimilar to that emitted by Heathcliff. It is by moving our focus to the inside environment that we are able to see how the Parsonage

influenced Brontë's literary interior, and more importantly, how she created a character that mirrors its cold and bleak atmosphere.

Brontë makes the parallel between Heathcliff and the interior even more evident when it is Christmas time at the Heights. On ordinary days, the interior is without ornamentation or decoration, just like Heathcliff, whose hair is 'uncombed' and whose face and hands are 'dismally beclouded' (p. 55). However, at Christmas time both the interior and Heathcliff transform. The furniture of the Heights is suddenly 'polished' and 'decked in holly'; it develops a 'rich scent of heating spices, and 'shining', 'silver' (p. 56) utensils appear. Similarly, Heathcliff 'wash[es]' and 'comb[s]' his hair so 'that he looks like a 'rather handsome' 'prince in disguise' with 'elegant locks' (p. 59). According to, James Baldwin's architectural theory, it is possible 'for the actual house to acquire the physical and moral energy of the human body' (Elam, 2015, p. 215). It is this theoretical concept that Brontë seems to be highlighting. It is as though Heathcliff and the interior share the same 'energy'; they are seemingly inseparable.

Of course, there is an undeniable congruity between Heathcliff and the *outside*. As Helen Oyeyemi argues, 'it's [Heathcliff's] nature... in the way that it's the nature of the moors to destroy you, if you're lost out here

after dark' ('Being the Brontës', 2016). However, what statements such as this overlook is the way that the *inside* reflects Heathcliff's animalistic and savage nature. What is important to recognise is that the boundary between the interior and exterior between the Heights and the Parsonage is very porous. The wild predatory elements of the outdoors can also be experienced indoors. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, home 'protects' from 'inclement weather and predators' and also from 'the public eye' (Tuan, 1975, p. 155). Indeed, we usually see the home as a separate sphere to the outside. But this is not the case when it comes to the Heights and Brontë's home. As the Parsonage and the Heights are situated at the top of a hill, they are very exposed to severe weather conditions. As Brontë indicates, the 'wind blustered round the [Heights] and roared in the chimney' (p. 43). This itself would have produced quite an eerie atmosphere, creating violent and intimidating auditory effects. As Oyeyemi notes 'in *Wuthering Heights* Emily shows us that the domestic sphere can be as volatile and strange and sometimes frightening at least in its intensity as it can be on the moors' ('BBC Being the Brontës', 2016). This becomes more apparent through the language Brontë uses to describe the inside. She employs words such as 'fury', 'violent', 'knocked down' and 'rattling' (p. 158). We might expect this language to define the wild and dangerous Yorkshire moors but we would not imagine these words being used to describe the inside of a home.

However, the inside of the Parsonage did produce such frightening effects. Therefore, it is arguably the *interior* that has played a fundamental role in creating the character of Heathcliff, who is capable of such cruel violence and ‘fury’ (p. 5).

Heathcliff is a character that becomes ‘more notable for savage sullenness and ferocity’ (p. 135). He threatens to ‘split [a man’s] skull against [his] knuckles’ (p. 121) and ‘crush his ribs in’ (p. 122), and he ‘flings a knife at a woman’s head’ (p. 187), after killing her dog. Whilst critics have tended to interpret this wild and violent behaviour as a ‘personification of the moors’ (p. 12), the domestic *interior* of the Heights and the Parsonage help to provide an even greater impetus to his savage characteristics. After all, there is a clear parallelism between the language describing Heathcliff and the language describing the *inside* of the Heights. The inside is ‘violent’ (p. 16) and ‘fur[ious]’ just as Heathcliff embodies ferocity. Moreover, just as the inside ‘roar[s]’ (p. 247) and ‘rattl[es]’ (p. 89), Heathcliff ‘flings’ (p. 104) and ‘crush[es]’ (p. 118). The parallel language used by Brontë is uncanny and should not be overlooked.

The importance of the interior domestic space on the construction of Brontë’s characters becomes even more apparent when we examine the

character of Hindley Earnshaw, another ‘detestable’ (p. 19) and ‘violent’ inhabitant of the Heights. He is described as a ‘wild beast’ and a ‘madman’ (p. 77); and some of his actions are shockingly despicable. He threatens to make Nelly swallow a carving knife and he pushes Kenneth head first down the Blackhorse marsh (p. 77). Instinctively, we might assume that the savage moors are at the root of Hindley's character. However, unlike Heathcliff, Hindley seldom ventures outside; he is very much an *indoor* character throughout the novel. As such, perhaps we should focus more prominently on how Brontë's ‘home’ environment assisted in shaping Hindley's vicious ‘self’.

It is important to note that it was not just the porous nature of the Parsonage that made it sinister, but the male inhabitants themselves. Brontë's father, Patrick Brontë, for instance, had wild and unstable tendencies, and rumours abounded about his ‘strange’ and ‘half mad’ behaviour (Fraser, 2015, p. 36). He was rumored to have cut up his wife's clothes if he did not like something that she wore and to have burned his children's coloured boots because he believed that they encouraged vanity (Fraser, 2015, p. 36). The patriarch of the Parsonage would have ultimately made this space feel tense and unstable, much like Hindley at the Heights. What is more, just as Patrick had a ‘habit of wearing his loaded pistol at all times of the day’ and would ‘work off his

volcanic wrath by firing pistols out of the back door’ (Fraser, 2015, p. 38). Hindley would also ‘play with [his gun] in his insane excitement’ (p. 76). Similarly, Brontë’s brother Branwell would have made the Parsonage feel like a dark and ominous space, and it was during the very peak of Branwell’s decline into depression and alcoholism that Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights*. (L. Duthie, 1986, p. 221). He became dependent on alcohol and very much lived in the shadows of the Parsonage (‘Being the Brontës’, 2016). It is only when you see Branwell’s bedroom first hand at the Brontë Parsonage Museum that you can really appreciate the impact he would have had on the physical interior of Brontë’s home. His unkempt bed, stained pillows, used bedpan, and the lack of ventilation in his room would have all contributed to creating an unsettling and depressing atmosphere. As such, perhaps Branwell and his personal space can explain how a reclusive and unworldly Brontë created a character like Hindley, who dissipated physically and psychologically, becoming a ‘rabid drunk’ (p. 75) who dwindled into ‘suicidal low spirits’, and daily ‘swallowed gin or brandy’ (p. 183). What is more, just as Branwell’s drunkenness created a volatile and unpredictable atmosphere at the Parsonage¹, Hindley’s drunkenness puts the inhabitants of the Heights on edge and feeling at risk of danger.

¹ ‘Branwell, in a drunken stupor, set his own bed on fire’ (Harrison, 2002, p. 85).

Nelly worries, for instance, that Hindley has the potential to ‘fl[i]ng [his child] into the fire’ or ‘dash [him] against the wall’ (p. 52). It is these parallels between Hindley and the inhabitants of the Parsonage that make it clear how the internal space of Brontë’s home played a fundamental role in shaping her characters.

It is understandable why critics see the moors as the main impetus of Heathcliff’s character. After all, he is described as a predatory animal, as having ‘black whiskers’, ‘lowering brows’, ‘deep set’ eyes, and ‘dark face and hair’ (p. 168), as though his character was inspired by a wild, threatening animal from the dark wilderness surrounding the Parsonage and the Heights. But, have they considered the influence of the canine inhabitants of the *interior* of the Heights and the Parsonage? There may have been wild, savage animals lingering amongst the Yorkshire moors, but this is also the case *inside*. Inside the Parsonage, for instance, Brontë looked after a huge bullmastiff. According to the Brontë Society, its ‘huge brass collar gives some indication of his size and power, which clearly frightened guests at the parsonage, including Ellen [Nussey]’ (p. 9). Similarly, inside the Heights dwelled ‘half a dozen four-footed fiends’, and Brontë’s descriptions of them points to their savageness. They are described as ‘hairy monsters’ which ‘fl[y] at Lockwood’s throat’ (p. 13) and ‘sneak wolfishly to the back of [his] legs (p. 4). It is

possible, therefore, to see these *inside* creatures as a key inspiration for Heathcliff, who is described as a ‘savage beast’ with ‘sharp cannibal teeth’ and who ‘gnashe[s] and foam[s] like a mad dog’.

Another possible stimulus for Heathcliff’s character that can be found *inside* the Parsonage is the view from Brontë’s bedroom window. According to Laura Inman, Brontë’s bed was ‘situated under a window with an unobstructed view of the sky’; therefore, she would have had a liberated view of the moon and the stars on an evening. As Laura Inman suggests, perhaps this unique view that she had from her bedroom ‘engender[ed] a feeling of another world beyond the mundane’ (Inman, 2014, p. 16). It is highly possible therefore that Brontë’s view of the outside from the *inside* helped her to conjure up a wild, nocturnal creature (Heathcliff) so hideous as to be described as ‘only half a man’, as ‘a goblin’ (p. 345) and a ‘ghoul’ (p. 15), and who threatens to ‘[tear a mans] heart out, and dr[i]nk his blood’ (p. 157). If curtains had sheltered Brontë’s view or if what she glanced at every night was not a silver moon engulfed by a vast and intimidating black sky, this otherworldly aspect of Heathcliff’s character might well not exist. Coupled with this is the effect that the Haworth graveyard had upon the *inside* of the Parsonage. According to Elizabeth Gaskell, ‘sinister funeral bells and the chipping of the mason on gravestones outside’ (Gaskell, 2014, p. 129) would have

been audible from the inside, thus creating a ghostly and unnerving atmosphere. It is this, along with the fact that the Parsonage itself was built 'over graves' (Johanson, 2000, p. 13) that likely inspired Brontë to create a domestic interior 'swarming with ghosts and goblins' (p. 26).

The theory that it is the *inside* that helped to shape the characters of Brontë's novel becomes even more apparent when we turn to the domestic interior of Thrushcross Grange. There is a distinct correlation between the interior of the Grange and its inhabitants that strengthens the idea that one's domestic interior has a direct influence over them. Every aspect of this interior space, from its furniture, to its upholstery, to its pets, is identical to its characters. The first feature of the Grange that we are introduced to is the chiming 'clock' (p. 22), which articulates an immediate sense of order. From this, Brontë then draws focus to its comfort and beauty. It is described as 'beautiful' and 'splendid'; it is 'carpeted with crimson' and has a 'chandelier' hanging from 'a pure white ceiling bordered by gold' (p. 49). What is more, unlike at the Heights, the pets of this domestic space are tame and gentle, with 'the cat licking its kitten on the rug' (p. 64) and 'a little dog, shaking its paw and yelping' (p. 49). These internal features strongly mirror the inhabitants. The language describing Edgar Linton is synonymous with that describing the Grange. In the same way that the Grange is 'beautiful',

‘splendid’, ‘peaceful’ and ‘pure’. Brontë depicts Linton as ‘handsome’, ‘pleasant’, ‘cheerful’ (p. 82), ‘subdued’ (p. 74), and ‘ordinary’ (p. 85). Essentially, Brontë has created parallel language, which connotes beauty, calmness and order. Similarly, Brontë draws a parallel between Isabella Linton and the Grange. In the same way that the Grange is considered an interior ‘heaven’ (p. 49), Brontë points to Isabella’s ‘pure white skin’, ‘bright yellow hair’, ‘angel's’ eyes’ (p. 112), and ‘dainty elegance’ (p. 103), as though she is an angelic being sent from heaven. Isabella and Edgar are, like Heathcliff and Hindley, physical embodiments of their domestic interior. The congruity between the interior settings and the characters reinforces Baldwin’s theoretical idea that ‘the actual house [can] acquire the physical and moral energy of the human body’ (Elam, 2015, p. 215).

When we turn to the two Cathy’s in Brontë’s novel, this theory on place and ‘self’ develops even more substance. However, Brontë suggests that it is not necessarily the home that acquires the energy of the self, but rather the self that acquires the energy of the home. Beginning with Catherine Earnshaw, Brontë makes it very clear how an individual can develop the moral energy of a domestic interior. Unlike Heathcliff, who remains at the Heights and develops its ‘hard’ and ‘tumult[uous]’ nature,

Cathy relocates to Thrushcross Grange. As such, her physical and moral energy transforms into something congruent with this new home environment. When Cathy is brought into the ordered, beautiful and peaceful domestic interior of Thrushcross Grange she begins to completely transform as a character. Before inhabiting the Grange, Cathy is a 'reckless' and 'unfriended' (p. 48) character that roams the moors 'barefoot' (p. 49). But, upon settling in to this new domestic interior, she begins to develop an aesthetic beauty and gentle energy akin to the Grange. Like the chandelier and the shimmering ornaments, Cathy's eyes now 'sparkl[e]' (p. 160) and her whole façade is 'bright' and 'graceful' (p. 55). Unlike Heathcliff and Hindley, she does not share the 'wolfish' and 'fiend[ish]' nature of the Heights' pets, but rather the gentle and tame nature of the 'kitten' and the 'little dog'. She 'kiss[es Heathcliff] *gently*' (emphasis added) and develops a 'dignified' 'lady[like]' manner (p. 54). What is more, her fingers become 'wonderfully whitened' (p. 55) much like the 'pure white ceiling' of the Grange. It is as though the energy and physicality of the Grange merges into Cathy.

The idea that the self acquires the energy of the home is given greater prominence through Brontë's depiction of Catherine Earnshaw's daughter, Catherine Linton. We see this character go through three

significant transitions in the novel. These developments of character directly correlate to the domestic interiors that she inhabits. At first, we see her as an embodiment of her home, Thrushcross Grange. She is externally 'beautiful', with a 'gentle voice', and has an energy that is as 'soft and mild as a dove' (p. 198). However, when we see her character placed in a new home environment, the Heights, we see a significant transformation in her 'physical and moral energy'. She begins to develop a tumultuous and wild nature akin to the interior of the Heights. She acquires a 'hot temper' (p. 234) and 'passion' (p. 250), and her actions become more 'wild' and 'violent'. There is an overtly clear link between these *interior* spaces and Brontë's characters. In Cathy Linton's final transition, she cultivates a 'hardness' uncannily similar to Heathcliff and Hindley, as though the 'hard' interior of the Height takes over her personality. In her final transition she is described as 'motionless and mute', as a character that 'never open[s] her mouth' (p.8). It is as if she has completely absorbed the cold, hard energy of the Heights.

The connection between environment and self in *Wuthering Heights* then goes much further than the Yorkshire moors. The *inside* environment carries so much importance to our understanding of the novel and its author. By taking this more inwards approach to the novel, we can also gain new insights on the most critically examined parts of the

narrative, such as Cathy's mental and physical deterioration. Some critics interpret her deterioration and eventual death as a result of 'denying [her] love [for Heathcliff and] stifling her emotions' (Bhattacharyya, 2006, p. 41). It might also be easy to assume that Cathy deteriorates because she feels stifled inside at the Grange and wishes to be 'among the heather on those hills' (p. 132). However, it would be more fruitful to examine the significance that the *inside* plays on the deteriorating state of Cathy, which has been greatly overlooked.

In the same way that we see the domestic interior of the Grange transform the character of Cathy, we can also interpret it as one of the main causes of her becoming 'pale' and 'haggard' and refusing to eat, until eventually she dies. According to C.E. Haque, a domestic home can provide 'order, identity and connectedness', however 'a sudden disruption can destroy these qualities' (Haque, 2012, p. 52). Whilst at first Cathy embraces the 'sudden disruption' of being removed from the Heights, over time this disruption appears to destroy Cathy's 'identity and connectedness'. Indeed, at the peak of Cathy's demise 'she sighed, and moaned, and knew nobody' (p. 173). It is as if being disconnected from her home environment causes a disconnection and deterioration of self. This idea becomes even more apparent when Brontë focuses on how Cathy longs for the domestic interior of the Heights. As she remembers

her old ‘oak-panelled bed’ at the Heights, her ‘heart ached with some great grief’ (p. 131). It is the physical details that she misses, not any one person. When she looks out of the window at the Grange, she longs for her bedroom ‘look! She cried eagerly, ‘that’s my room, with the candle in it’ (p. 132). Although she has a bedroom at the Grange, she implies that her identity and connectedness belong at the Heights. Her excited tone, expressed through her exclamative and Brontë’s use of the adverb ‘eagerly’, conveys the idea that the domestic interior is the source of her happiness. What is more, it is the interior furnishings of the Grange that ignite nostalgic feelings for the interior of the Heights. It is when she touches the ‘panels’ of the bed, ‘str[ikes] the table top’ and swe[eps her hand] along the carpet’ that ‘memory burst[s] in’ (p. 131). She is clearly grieving for the internal furnishings that make up the domestic home that she has left. Further to this, when Cathy hears the ‘gimmerton chapel bells’ from the inside of the Grange, she remembers how at ‘Wuthering Heights it always sounded on quiet days...and of Wuthering Heights Catherine was thinking as she listened’ (p. 166). It is the sounds that she experiences from the inside of this new domestic home that make Cathy think about the inside of the Heights. Therefore, her grief and deterioration does not simply stem from her longing for Heathcliff, but rather her longing for the interior space of the Heights. We should perhaps infer that she is suffering from severe homesickness. Even in

death, Cathy yearns for the *inside*. As a ghost, she cries ‘let me in, let me in’ and ‘scratch[es]’ the window with desperation. The repeated preposition ‘in’, along with ‘scratching’ reflect a desperation to be inside. It is not the wild *outside* that she longs for but the domestic interior. As she exclaims, ‘I’m come home, I’d lost my way on the moor!’ (p. 24).

This deep connection between one's self and one's home environment is conveyed even further through the character of Isabella. Isabella expresses how her ‘heart returned to Thrushcross Grange in twenty-four hours after [she] left it’ (p. 143). Moreover, like Cathy, Isabella starts to experience a physical deterioration after leaving her home environment; ‘Her pretty face’ turned ‘wan and listless’ and her perfectly kept hair becomes ‘uncurled’ (p. 155). The perfectly ordered and neat Isabella turns disheveled and spiritless after leaving her home environment. Is it a coincidence that the two characters that change their environment in the novel experience a change of self? Or do these somewhat parallel characters provide an insight into how connected Emily felt to her own home environment?

Similar to Cathy and Isabella it seems that Emily found it very difficult to be away from home. In September 1838 Emily took the startling step of seeking employment as a teacher in a girls' school, Law

Hill near Halifax. She stood it for six months before falling ill, just as she had done at Roe Head School. She immediately returned to Haworth declaring to her pupils that she preferred the housedog to any of them (Barker, 2004). Through Cathy and Isabella, perhaps Emily expresses her own deep connection to her home environment and a deep fear of how a physical space outside of Haworth had the potential to transform her own inner self perhaps ‘destroy[ing]’ her ‘identity and connectedness’. As Yi-Fu Tuan theorises, ‘we go to all kinds of places but return home...home is where life begins and ends’ (Tuan, 1975, p. 155). It is a little like the saying ‘there is no place like home’, and for Emily, Cathy and Isabella this is certainly the case.

Looking at *Wuthering Heights* from this spacial angle also enables us to gain new insights into the most prominent theme of the novel: love. Of course, the outside world of the Yorkshire moors has been recognised as the key environmental inspiration of Cathy and Heathcliff’s love. As Rebecca Johnson notes ‘their love can only exist in the moors, that first inspired it’ (Brontë, 2004, p. 429). However, after reviewing how the internal environments throughout *Wuthering Heights* have so much bearing on the characters. I am going to propose that the internal environment also plays a significant role in shaping the love between Cathy and Heathcliff. Indeed, it is obvious why we might assume that the

outside world is the leading impetus in the development of Cathy and Heathcliff's love. Like the Yorkshire moors, their relationship is savage, wild and tumultuous, with Heathcliff 'foam[ing] like a mad dog' (p. 251) and Cathy insisting to be driven 'mad' by her lover (p. 13). Yet, such wild, savage tumultuousness can be found *inside* as well, with the porous nature of the Heights and the Parsonage, and the savage nature of their pets and inhabitants. What is more, it is from the *inside* that Brontë was able to gain an insight into a love that more closely resembles that between Cathy and Heathcliff than Cathy's love 'resembles the eternal rocks beneath' (p. 86).

It is from inside the Parsonage walls that we should look for Brontë's inspiration for a love that drives two characters into a wild, uncontrollable frenzy, and that eventually leads one of these characters into a slow deterioration. When Cathy 'cl[i]ng[s] fast, gasping; [with] mad resolution in her face' and exclaims "'Heathcliff I shall die! I shall die!'" (p. 172) because she cannot be with him, we should look to the interior environment for Brontë's main stimulus. For, whilst outside the wind was whirling and the moors were 'threaten[ing] to destroy you', inside, Brontë may well have been subjected to the sounds of her brother Branwell, 'bleating like a calf [and] having a fit' in response to the failure of his romantic relationship. The wild, animalistic frenzy that Branwell

created ‘in the Black Bull when he ha[d] just been brought the news that Mrs. Robinson [, his lover, could] never see him again’ (Robinson & Andersen, 2004, p. 145) was likely to have continued inside the Parsonage. It is this extreme reaction to his romantic relationship that appears to mirror that of Cathy and Heathcliff. The parallels between the language that Brontë uses to describe Cathy and Heathcliff and the language used by others to describe Branwell are uncanny. Heathcliff, for instance, is described as ‘mad’ (p. 172) ‘frantic’ (p. 262), ‘foaming’ ‘desperate’ (p. 68) and ‘livid with emotion’; (p. 134) whilst Cathy is described as ‘mad’, ‘gasping’ (p. 172) and ‘haggard’ (p. 166) with a ‘physical weakness’ and ‘excess of agitation’ (p. 169). Similarly, Branwell is described as ‘bleating’ ‘crushed’ ‘frightening’, and wallowing in ‘anguish and depression’ (Harrison, 2002, p. 68). All of these words and phrases are practically synonymous, articulating the idea that love has the power to turn a person animalistic, wild and weak. Such synonymous language brings Cathy, Heathcliff and Branwell together, and helps us to realise that it is not only the ‘moors that first inspired’ their love but the domestic space of the Parsonage.

This becomes even more apparent when we compare Branwell and Cathy’s complete demise and disconnection of self. According to David Harrison, ‘many of [Branwell’s] close friends could hardly recognise

him' after the failure of his relationship. His alcoholism and consumption of Laudanum (Harrison, 2002, p. 30) would have caused him to deteriorate both physically and mentally. We can infer from the dire state of his bedroom at the Parsonage that Branwell would have looked 'haggard' and unkempt, and perhaps carried with him a foul-smelling body odour. Branwell's physical and mental deterioration is almost identical to Cathy's. In the same way that Branwell becomes unrecognizable from his former self, Cathy takes on a 'haggard' appearance and becomes frenzied and 'mad'. When she 'dash[es] her head against the arm of the sofa and grind[s] her teeth' (p. 124) , we might assume that such savage wildness is inspired by the wild, unpredictable moors. However, she uncannily sounds like something borne out of Branwell's own bedroom, which would have been scattered with half-read books, writing utensils and paper.²The chaos and disorder of his room mirrors the frenzy and wildness of this transformed Cathy.

² (TripAdvisor, n.d.) (Branwell Brontë's Bedroom)



With the room's complete lack of hygiene and its sheer disarray, it connotes similar wild and untamed qualities as the moors. The strong smells oozing from his bedroom, due to a lack of ventilation, would also have articulated a strong sense of decay and deterioration. It is as though this one interior room of the Parsonage embodies all the elements of Cathy's transformed character after her failed romantic relationship. In this way, it is the *inside* space that should be looked at as one of the key inspirations for the love between Cathy and Heathcliff.

Taking this inwards approach to Brontë's novel helps us to realise that *Wuthering Heights* was not simply 'hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely material' as Charlotte Brontë interprets. Rather, 'the statuary found a [stone floor and bare walls *inside*] a solitary [home] 'gazing [, and listening], thereon he saw how from the [roof] might he illicit [several] head[s], savage, swart, sinister' (Dickerson, 1996, p. 67). As this chapter has uncovered, by moving into the *inside* world of the author and her characters, we are able to realise just how important the domestic 'workshop' that Brontë was working in is to our understanding of her novel. What is more, by taking this inwards approach, we can gain new insights into the novels of her sisters, Charlotte and Anne Brontë. For decades, critics have discovered a wealth of evidence to establish how 'Haworth and the Brontës' are somehow

inextricably mixed' (Bickerdike, 2015, p. 85). However, by moving our critical eye *inside*, we can also discover an 'inextricable mix' between the Brontës' characters and their domestic interiors.

CHAPTER TWO

Domestic material culture and the self in *Jane Eyre*

Unlike the characters in *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë's protagonist, Jane Eyre, does not have a permanent home. As such, her relationship with the domestic spaces that she experiences throughout the novel is of a different nature. We often take our own interior home environment for granted. From the bed that we sleep in, to the windows that we look out of, to the dining table that we eat at, we might assume that the objects and features of our interior domestic space are merely 'banal and ordinary' carrying little significance. However, as the introduction described, our home environment plays a fundamental role in shaping our sense of identity and 'our selves' (Kadar, 2005, p. 82). As Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey propose, 'the importance of houses and the objects within them [are very important] for people's conception and projection of their selves' (Chapman & Hockey, 2008, p. 134). This connection between one's internal home environment and one's self was, it has been argued, especially relevant in the nineteenth-century, as it is

believed to have ‘provide[d] a powerfully influential space for the development of character and identity’ (Floyd & Bryden, 1999, p. 2). These suggestions about home and the self thus raise one of the central questions with which this chapter grapples: if Jane never has a fixed home environment, how does she develop a sense of self in relation to the interiors in which she lives?

The home environment is shaped not only by structural features such as doors, walls and windows, but by furniture, floor coverings, ornaments and such aspects as ‘texture, colour and light’ (Kilmer & Kilmer, 2014, p. 15). Brontë frequently directs the reader’s attention to the physical objects that make up Jane’s interior sense of space such as ‘coverings’, ‘carpets’, ‘curtains’, ‘upholstery’, ‘dressing cases’ and ‘antique ornaments’ (Brontë 1992, p. 489). Such seemingly trivial details are ‘vital to the shaping of [...] memories, [...] imagination and [...] selves’ (Kadar, 2005, p. 82). No greater reminder of this is in Emily’s *Wuthering Heights*, where the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights display selves clearly moulded by their home environments. The way that the characters understand the world is rooted in their internal sense of space. As Yi Fu Tuan asserts, ‘home is where life begins and ends’ (Tuan, 1975, p. 155): it lies at the heart of who we are.

Returning, then, to *Jane Eyre*, Jane inhabits various internal domestic spaces throughout the novel: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield Hall and Moorhouse. As such, her sense of self is not rooted to one specific space. What is more, since Jane never has a place to call home; she ultimately constructs a sense of self via her experience of *other* people's houses and *their* domestic accoutrements. Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey argue that people make such an investment in their home because 'they hope to create a sphere where they have control over their environment – to mould it to their own needs of comfort and security, style and personal morality' (Chapman & Hockey, 2008, p. 134). Yet, if one does not have control over the choice of furnishings, portraits or upholstery, essentially control over one's environment is also lacking. This makes Jane's sense of self much more complex than that of, for instance Edgar Linton or Hindley Earnshaw, who have a place to call home. Unlike Emily Brontë's characters, Jane develops an understanding of the world through other people's houses, and constructs a sense of herself through other people's windows, floor coverings and furniture.

This chapter focuses specifically on the domestic interiors that Jane experiences throughout the novel. By examining the detail of the material world in which Brontë places Jane, we can come to understand the way in

which Brontë writes Jane into being via other people's homes. It is often argued that fictional 'interiors are intended primarily to elucidate character and plot' and, as such, many cultural historians believe that characters should be 'remove[d] from their fictional contexts' so that we can 'read them into a different narrative, the context of aesthetic and societal architecture' (Dillon, 2001, p. 114). However, rather than 'remove', I want to *locate* Jane Eyre in her fictional settings in order to understand how these various fictional and interior settings help us to understand more fully Brontë's character and novel, thus taking a new angle on Jane's movement through the world of the text. The chapter begins with a thorough exploration of the role of windows in Jane's liminal experience of the domestic, then moves on to consider the objects with which she comes into contact *within* various rooms, concluding that this approach to the text offers an insight into not just material culture but the Bildungsroman form of *Jane Eyre*.

One of the most important and prominent features that make up Jane's experience of domestic material culture throughout the novel is windows. From the windows in the red-room, to the windows overlooking the natural landscape at Lowood, to the high windows at Thornfield Hall, Jane is always drawn to them, and they all play a significant role in developing Jane's sense of self and her understanding

of the world beyond the self.

Gateshead is the domestic space where Jane spends the early years of her childhood. In this interior space, which belongs to the Reed family, Jane struggles to feel a sense of belonging. She is continually ‘bullied and punished’ by John Reed, constantly given ‘strict orders from Bessie’ (p. 23) and endures ‘abrupt command[s] from Georgiana’ (pp. 5; 23). As such, Jane turns to the windows of Gateshead for comfort and refuge. She is frequently sitting ‘in the window seat’ (p. 5) of the breakfast room. According to Richard Wener, ‘windows are important in providing positive distractions from the stress of [a] situation’ (Wener, 2012, p. 218). Indeed, we can infer that Jane turns to the windows to seek refuge and comfort, and to ‘distract’ herself from the stress of this domestic space. However, she does not just use the windows of Gateshead as a means of distraction, but as a means of escape to create her own sense of space separate to that forced upon her by the Reeds. On one occasion when Jane ‘mounted into the window-seat: gathering up [her] feet’ she describes how she ‘sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close’ Jane describes how she ‘was shrined in double retirement’ (p. 3). At once, the windows and their curtains allow her to feel disconnected, or ‘doubl[y] retire[d]’ from the domestic space of Gateshead. What is more, they allow her to construct an autonomous

sense of self, as she compares herself with an individual from another country and culture: a Turk. It is as though the window enables Jane to transcend her environment, making her feel as though she is more than just the Jane at Gateshead who is ‘bullied’ and forced to follow commands. The windows allow her to disconnect from how insignificant and powerless she is in this domestic space. This is not to say that she is entirely connected to the outdoors. The windows enable her to create her own sense of space and self. As she describes ‘folds of scarlet drapery shut in [her] view to the right hand’ whilst ‘to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day’ (p. 3). Essentially, the window is protecting Jane from the oppressive space of Gateshead whilst the ‘drapery’ shields and protects her from the outside. Therefore, the windows with their ‘scarlet’ curtains, allow Jane to create her own autonomous third space, separate from both the inside and the outside. Whilst living at Gateshead, the windows are the one space that she can call her own. Jane describes the windows as ‘my hiding place’ (p. 5) as though using the possessive pronoun ‘my’ gives her a sense of belonging in Gateshead.

This window space is not uncomplicated, however. Whilst the windows help Jane to construct a sense of belonging and autonomy, they paradoxically reinforce her lack of both in this domestic interior. On one

occasion, when Jane tries to open one of the windows at Gateshead, Bessie interrupts her with: 'What were you opening the window for?' (p. 24), implying that she has no right to open it, to the air they let in. Since the windows at Gateshead do not belong to Jane, she has no control over them. Therefore, although they might help her to escape Gateshead, they simultaneously remind her of her lack of freedom and control. Whilst she might want to open the windows, this opportunity to connect with the outside world and escape Gateshead can easily be taken away from her. In some ways, this demand actually questions her autonomy at the level of breathing as it disables her access to fresh air. This lack of control is further reinforced when Eliza exposes her 'hiding place': 'She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack' (p. 5). Again, although the windows at Gateshead are her one means of refuge and independence, this is heavily restricted. Thus, the windows themselves reinforce Jane's circumscribed autonomy and remind her that this environment is not hers in which to operate with free will.

This lack of control at Gateshead is established even further when the Reeds lock Jane inside the red-room. We may infer from Jane's previous experience that she would turn to the windows in this interior space to seek comfort and refuge. However, the windows in the red-room have a different effect on Jane. In this internal space, Jane describes 'two

large windows with their blinds always drawn down' (p. 8). This immediately creates a contrast with the window in the breakfast room at Gateshead, where she is able to look out of the window and frame or block the view by opening and closing the heavy window drapes. In the red-room, however, she does not have this freedom and power, as she cannot see beyond the blinds, creating therefore a deeper sense of enclosure. As Carolyn Lambert remarks, 'windows are potent signifiers of entrapment as well as protective barriers' (Lambert, 2013, p. 166). In the red-room, the windows become a 'signifier of entrapment' because she is not able to look out of the window at all. This feeling of entrapment becomes amplified during the night when 'the fire and the candle [go] out' (p. 14). Being in total darkness and experiencing the unknown, she becomes more aware of sound, which heightens her sense of incarceration and produces psychological terror within her. As Lambert theorises, windows can be regarded as 'ambiguous openings': whilst they can offer comfort and escapism, they can also act as openings through which 'those who wish to harm the occupants of the home can enter' (Lambert, 2013, p. 166). Indeed, through the windows of the red-room Jane 'hear[s] the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the hall'. Brontë's use of the auditory coming from the outside helps us to imagine the acoustics of outside entering into this domestic environment. The continuous

‘beating’ sound of rain and the ‘howling’ sound of the wind join forces to create an animalistic and frightening sound, as though a force is trying to enter the room through the windows. It is this force on the other side of the windows that creates a visceral terror within Jane, so strong that it affects her body temperature; she ‘grew by degrees cold as a stone’ (p. 11). She also sees a light penetrating through the window blinds and ‘gleam[ing] on the wall’. It is Jane's instinctive reaction to relate the light to ‘some coming vision from another world’ (p. 12). She cannot rationalise that it is caused by either ‘moonlight’ or from a ‘lantern carried by someone from across the lawn’ (p. 12). Rather, the room, with the visual and auditory senses that it incites, produces irrational and wild thoughts of the supernatural. In the BBC documentary ‘Being the Brontës’ we see first-hand the effect that windows in a Brontëan domestic space can have on an individual. Helen Oyeyemi spends a night at the Brontë Parsonage, where the windows are single-glazed and thus comparatively exposed, by modern standards, to the outside elements. Although she is trying to experience what it was like to ‘be a Brontë’ we also gain a sense of what it was like to be Jane inside the red-room. Oyeyemi reflects after her over night stay that the sounds that can be heard via the windows can make it ‘fe[el] as if someone [is] trying to get in’ and can make you ‘fe[el] like [you are] seeing things’ (‘BBC Being the Brontës’, 2016). What Oyeyemi experiences gives us a presentist

insight into Jane's experience, and enables us to attempt to understand the complex role that the windows at Gateshead play in developing Jane's sense of the world beyond her self. Whilst the windows undoubtedly help Jane to escape from Gateshead, giving her a positive depiction of the outside world as a space of freedom and possibility, they ambiguously transform the outside world into something quite mysterious and hostile.

Turning to the next domestic space that Jane inhabits, Lowood Institute, I interpret the windows here as playing a fundamental role in shaping Jane's sense of self. One key aspect of these windows is their ability to shape Jane's unique sense of being and emotion. As an 'inmate' stuck inside the repressive 'walls' of this internal space, Jane never really experiences the outside world. As such, the windows compensate for the 'gloom and fear within [the] walls', helping her to connect with the outside world. Jane is constantly drawn to the windows. She '[put her] ear close to the window', her eyes 'raised in abstraction to the window', and when she 'passed the windows, [she] now and then lifted a blind, and looked out (pp. 71; 65; 46; 51; 64). As proposed by Andreas Vogler and Jesper Jorgensen in their psychological approach to architecture 'a window that can be opened and shut for acoustic control and a blind for visual control can provide many possibilities in a confined environment' (Vogler & Jørgensen, 2005, p. 9). Jane is perhaps drawn to the

possibilities that the windows offer. By putting ‘her ear close’ to the window, Jane ‘distinguish[es] from the gleeful tumult within, the disconsolate moan of the wind outside’ (p. 46). The window essentially gives Jane a sense of control as she is able to change the domestic acoustics of the inside of someone else's home and essentially ‘create a sphere where [she has] control over [her] environment’, mould[ing] it to [her] own needs of comfort and security, style and personal morality’ (Chapman & Hockey, 2008, p. 134). By positioning herself close to the windows of Lowood she is able to combine sounds from the inside and the outside, thus creating her own affective soundscape: ‘I derived from both [inside and outside sounds] a strange excitement, and reckless and feverish, I wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness and the confusion to rise to clamor’ (p. 46). Jane is very much restricted in the interior space of Lowood, where everything is ‘measured by the clock’ (p. 39) and where she is forced to live by a strict routine of ‘order’, ‘discipline’ (p. 38), and ‘scripture’ (p. 37). But, the windows make her feel alive: ‘reckless’ and ‘excited’, essentially giving her a sense of her own self and what she enjoys, rather than what is forced upon her. According to Richard Wener windows offer ‘psychological distanc[e] and escape from others’ (Wener, 2012, p. 214) and this is exactly what the Lowood windows provide here for Jane. They bring out a psychological passion and rebellion in her, and she goes on to project

this 'reckless' emotion into words, saying to Helen, 'If [Miss Scatcherd] struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand: I should break it under her nose' (p. 46). It is after Jane sees and hears the snowstorm from the window that this outburst of 'reckless' emotion comes to the surface. What is more, she does 'psychologically distance' herself from the other inmates of Lowood, by declaring that she 'hold[s] another creed' (p. 49), as she ultimately rejects the doctrines enforced upon the inmates of Lowood.

As noted above, windows are a complicated aspect of Jane's material culture. Whilst acoustically they can help her to develop a unique sense of emotion and sense of being, they also strengthen her sense of entrapment at Lowood. After all, the glass that made up the windows in the nineteenth-century would have been markedly different to the glass that makes up our windows today. According to Isobel Armstrong, if we held up a piece of nineteenth-century glass to the light we would discern 'small blemishes, blisters, almost invisible striae [and] spectral undulations' (Armstrong, 2008, p. 29). As such, we should interpret Jane's view out of the windows at Lowood as distorted and unclear. What is more, the windows at Lowood were both 'mullioned and latticed' (p. 40). Therefore, whilst the windows at Lowood provide the only opportunity for Jane to connect with the outside world, her view

of the outdoors would have been severely restricted and distorted. The latticed and mullion design divides the glass up, so that, from the inside, they very much imitate Victorian prison windows, which were themselves ‘mullioned’ (Gibson, 2009, p. 228). What is more, the view out of these windows would have also been a stark reminder of Jane's imprisonment, as the garden itself was ‘a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect’ (p. 40). Therefore, the windows, with their restrictive design, blemished glass and ‘enclos[ed]’ view, act as a reminder of Jane's lack of autonomy at Lowood. The windows act as a barrier between Jane and the world beyond her, essentially controlling what she sees and how she sees it, and in turn controlling how she feels. Therefore the windows make Lowood Institute feel akin to a prison.

However, if we are to think about Jane as a prisoner of this domestic space, perhaps we should think that she is drawn to the windows like a prisoner is, in order to transcend ‘the indefatigable bell’, the ‘great, low-ceiled gloomy room’ of the refectory (p. 37) and Lowood's ‘doctrine of endurance’ (p. 47). A prisoner in a confined space might seek comfort and refuge from windows as they ‘provide a feeling of connection to the outside world and can offer views of nature with benefits of stress reduction, mental restoration and recovery’ (Wener,

2012, p. 214). When Jane looks out of the windows at Lowood, her eyes are drawn to what '[lies] outside the high and spike-guarded walls' (p. 64) of the garden grounds, to the natural landscape beyond Lowood. As Velarde, Fry and Trevit remark, 'landscapes can evoke strong feelings', they 'are important for people's identity and well-being, and exposure to landscapes can even help [...] restore [an individual] from stressful or challenging situations' (Steg, Berg & De Groot, 2013, p. 38). Thus, it can be argued that looking out of the windows is a form of therapy for Jane from the 'stressful' and 'challenging' inner space of Lowood. This becomes more apparent when Jane and her fellow 'inmates' are allowed to roam free into the outdoors on one rare occasion when the indoors becomes disease ridden. When the windows are removed and no longer a barrier, she can experience the full extent of nature's restorative effects. She describes how the garden 'glowed with flowers', how the 'hollyhocks had sprung up tall as trees', how 'lilies had opened tulips' and how 'roses were in bloom' (p. 65). The language she uses to describe the outdoor environment completely contrasts the 'gloom and fear within [the] walls' (p. 65) of Lowood. By focusing on the 'bloom[ing]', 'glow[ing]' and 'open[ness]' of nature she draws our attention to its restorative qualities, how it is filled with energy, life and colour, allowing her to 'ramble' (p. 65) and 'do what [she] like[s]' (p. 65). This change in environment directly affects Jane's behaviour, supporting the idea that the

environment is a ‘key determinant of behaviour’ (Steg, Berg & De Groot, 2013, p. 3). As soon as Jane is outdoors she can act autonomously, without restraint. Therefore, returning to the question of why Jane is drawn to looking out of the windows at Lowood, it is arguably because the natural landscape, whether looking at it or being in it, has a positive effect on her. It is just as nineteenth-century attitudes confirm, nature can have ‘therapeutic powers’ (Frawley, 2010, p. 96) on the individual and this power naturally leads Jane to looking out of the windows.

We should not simply compare Jane's relationship with the windows at Lowood to a prisoner in an actual jail. After all, whilst she may be under the control of those in authority in this domestic space, she is not a prisoner. Therefore, her relationship with the windows is far more complex than that of a prisoner. Returning to the idea that the windows also help Jane to construct a unique sense of emotion and way of thinking, they also play a fundamental role in helping Jane to reflect and process her internal thoughts. As Vogler and Jorgensen state a window is ‘a space that can support self reflection and self projection’ (Vogler & Jørgensen, 2005, p. 9). In fact, Brontë makes it evident that without the windows, Jane is unable to recall thoughts to her mind. During an evening at Lowood when Jane, ‘went to [her] window opened it and looked out’ (p. 73) on to the ‘most remote’ (p. 73) aspects of the

landscape, she begins to develop a strong desire for liberty: ‘for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer’ (p. 73). However, when she returns to her bed, she is unable to conjure such autonomous thoughts. She ‘proceeded *to think* again with all [her] might’ (p. 74), but they just do not rise to the surface, that is until she goes to the window for a second time: ‘I got up and took a turn in the room; undrew the curtain, noted a star or two, shivered with cold, and again crept to bed...a kind fairy in my absence, had surely dropped the required suggestion on my pillow; for as I lay down, it came quietly and naturally to my mind’ (p. 74). It is by looking out of the window that Jane develops the autonomous thought to advertise her services as a governess. If she had not returned to the window, we can infer that these thoughts might never have surfaced. As such, the windows essentially provide two types of prospect for Jane: ‘The action or fact of looking forward or out’ of the window, and ‘expectations of advancement in life or career’ (OED). The window essentially incites adventure and provides prospect for Jane, and allows her to construct a dialogue in her mind where ‘replies rose smooth and prompt’ (p. 74). This impels her to leave Lowood and it ultimately leads her to her next domestic space: Thornfield Hall.

At Thornfield Hall, where Jane is now a governess, she is no less drawn to the windows. However, in this domestic space, she has more

control over them. For instance, in her own bedroom chamber she is able to open the window (p. 85), ‘draw [her] curtain’, and ‘let down [her] window blind’ (p. 180). This immediately creates a disparity with the interior spaces of Gateshead and Lowood, where she has very limited control over the windows. Since windows have played such a vital role in shaping her sense of self from childhood, we can infer that to have more control over them would mean that she would feel a stronger sense of self at Thornfield Hall. In this domestic space, she has her own bedroom and therefore her own windows. As Sian Lincoln puts forward ‘a sense of ownership is achieved’ through the use of materials such as ‘books’, ‘furniture’ and ‘clothes’ (Lincoln, 2012, p. 87). Whilst Jane might not own any of the furniture in her bedroom, her use of the windows might help her to achieve a sense of ‘ownership’, which she has never experienced before. What is more, the windows in this domestic space are homely and more aesthetically pleasing than the windows in the previous spaces that she encounters. For instance, some rooms are fitted with curtains of ‘purple’ and ‘Tyrian-dye’ (p. 90) and have windows ‘rich in stained glass’ (p. 90), whilst the windows in her bedroom chamber are fitted with ‘gay blue chintz curtains’ (p. 85). Unlike the windows inside of Gateshead and Lowood, which incited Jane's sense of incarceration, the windows of Thornfield Hall will allow it to feel much more homely, because of the way that they are decorated.

Despite this disparity between the Thornfield Hall windows and the windows at Gateshead and Lowood, Jane is still drawn to them with an equal magnetism. For instance, following the episode when Jane and the guests of Thornfield Hall hear the disturbing cry of Bertha Mason, Jane immediately turns to the windows: 'I sat a long time by the window looking out over the silent grounds and silvered fields and waiting for I knew not what' (p. 182). Again, windows are depicted as a place of reflection for Jane, emphasising Vogler and Jorgensen's theory that windows are 'a space that can support self reflection and self projection' (Vogler & Jørgensen, 2005, p. 9) It is as though contact with the outside world is essential for her ability to engage with her own thoughts. The window allows her to think autonomously and form her own interpretation of events: 'the explanation Mr. Rochester had given was merely an invention' (p. 182). What is more, the window plays a fundamental role in helping Jane to understand what she wants. When she reflects that she is 'waiting for I knew not what' we can deduce a tone of intrigue and excitement in her language. 'Waiting' implies a sense of wanting, as though she is left unsatisfied by Mr. Rochester's explanation, and wants something more to happen. Just as the windows at Lowood help Jane to think autonomously and seek adventure and excitement

outside the domestic space, here they help her to reflect and project a desire for adventure within the domestic space.

It is this positive reflective effect that the windows have upon Jane that incites her to constantly seek a view of the world beyond Thornfield Hall. Whilst exploring the upper level of this domestic interior, Jane ardently ventures to find a view of the outdoors, unrestricted by windows. She describes how she ‘climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim skyline’ (p. 94). It is as though she craves a connection to the outdoors that the windows have provided her with throughout her life. Since Jane does not own or belong to the domestic space of Thornfield Hall, she feels a considerable lack of connection to it. As Blanche Ingram reminds her, a governess is merely ‘disconnected, poor and plain’ (p. 140). Therefore, Jane arguably seeks out a view of the outdoors, unrestricted by windows, because she feels a closer connection to the outdoors than she does to the indoors. It is during the moment that she is connected to the outside world that she ‘long[s]’ and ‘desire[s]’ and ‘wishe[s]’ (p. 94). Through this connection she comes to realise what she truly wants and needs; she can realise her inner passions and consciousness. This connection to the outside world enables her to transcend ‘an existence all passive’ (p. 101) by triggering her

autonomous thoughts. By viewing the world beyond Thornfield Hall, Jane is able to reflect, 'what I believed in I wished to behold' (p. 95). Such strong reflective language reveals how empowering this connection to the outdoors is for Jane. Returning to the windows, it is clear that she is drawn to them at Thornfield Hall, Gateshead and Lowood because of the connection she experiences to the outdoors and the way in which this strengthens her sense of self.

However, whilst the windows at Thornfield Hall provide Jane with a sense of autonomy, ownership and a connection to the outdoors, they still play an ambiguous and somewhat contradictory role in shaping her sense of self. After all, although coming to Thornfield, Jane is now able to control the windows to some extent and have greater access to the view that they provide, they still offer a restricted view. Just like the windows at Lowood, the windows throughout Thornfield Hall are traditional

Victorian cast iron latticed windows³ (p. 84), again creating a restricted view. What is more, some of them are ‘rich in stained glass’ (p. 90) which would make seeing beyond them almost impossible. As such, although there is some progression in Jane's experience of windows in this domestic space, they still ultimately reinforce her feeling of entrapment, just as they did at Lowood and Gateshead. Another perspective of windows that Jane makes apparent in this domestic space that we have not considered so far is the view that she experiences from the outside looking in. Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti theorise that ‘the window is only meant for looking out’ (Mezei & Briganti, 2012, p. 247).

3



(North Lees Hall in Derbyshire) (http://jane-eyre.guidesite.co.uk/thornfield-hall#link_building, n.d.)

However, for Jane this is not necessarily the case. One afternoon, whilst ‘linger[ing]’ on the lawn, she notices that ‘the shutters of the glass doors were closed; I could not see the interior (p. 101). Just as the latticed design and stained glass of the windows restricts Jane's view from the inside of Thornfield Hall, when she is outside, she is completely shut out from the inside because of the closed shutters. What is more, the effect of the latticed windows from the outside would not permit Jane to see inside. As a visitor of the Brontë Parsonage⁴, which is similarly fitted with traditional latticed windows, we can gain a sense of Jane's perspective when she looks at Thornfield Hall from the outside. With the reflection and blemishes on the glass and the latticed effect, it is not



⁴
(BBC, 2014)

possible to make out the interior. We might take this for granted and assume that it would not significantly affect Jane. However, with insight into the role windows have played for Jane throughout her life, we can infer that it would significantly shape how she feels regarding her place in the world. It is likely to nurture a strong sense of isolation as she experiences a disconnection from the outside as well as the inside; she is both shut out and shut in. This disconnect from the inside and outside could make her feel a strong sense of disconnection from the world. It perhaps explains why she describes her life as ‘monotonous’, ‘passive’ and a ‘stagnation’ (p. 101). Her language connotes a lack of purpose, as though she feels no real place in the world. Ultimately, she does not belong to Thornfield Hall any more than she does to the outside world beyond it; and the windows, her one salvation and comfort in life in all the domestic spaces that she inhabits, reinforce this isolating and empty existence. Therefore, whilst critics acknowledge that ‘*Jane Eyre* takes the form of a Bildungsroman’ (Teachman, 2001, p. 2), with our insight into windows and the effect they have on Jane, this is questionable at this point in the novel. Although Jane has reached the status of governess, she has not really progressed in terms of discovering her sense of self, as her material culture has remained relatively constant.

Whilst windows play such an important role in shaping Jane's sense of who she is throughout the novel, we must not overlook the significance of the internal furnishings in the domestic spaces that she encounters. According to John Potvin, furniture is an expression of who we are: 'materiality and identity [are essentially] indistinguishable' (Myzelev & Potvin, 2017, p. 15). Indeed, we can gain a sense of a person simply by observing their choice of cupboard, or bed, or chairs; these domestic accoutrements are an expression of one's identity. It is just as Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey state, they are a fundamental 'projection of [the self]' (Chapman & Hockey, 2008, p. 34). However, since none of the internal furnishings and objects at Gateshead, Lowood or Thornfield Hall belong to Jane, this idea becomes problematic. For Jane, the domestic accoutrements that she encounters symbolise a *lack* of identity, rather than an expression of it.

Beginning with the domestic space of Gateshead, the furniture here plays a fundamental role in shaping a sense of disconnection and lack of autonomy in Jane. This first becomes evident in the opening chapter when Jane is in the breakfast room. She observes a 'bookcase' (p. 3) and 'possess[es herself] of a volume' (p. 6). At first we might assume that Jane has a form of ownership in this domestic space, particularly with the use of the verb 'possess[es]', which connotes a sense of belonging.

However, this is immediately diminished when John Reed abruptly enters the room and exclaims ‘I’ll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me’ (p. 6). His use of language instantly transfers the possession of the furniture and the objects at Gateshead to him. The possessive pronoun ‘mine’ coupled with the adjective ‘all’ reinforces that absolutely nothing belongs to Jane in this environment. This is further emphasised when he commands her to ‘go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and windows’ (p. 6). Here, Reed ultimately takes away from Jane the aspects of her material culture that could potentially enhance her sense of self. Of course, we already know the significance that windows play in developing Jane’s sense of self. But, a mirror can also help us to connect to our own physical image and help us to ‘form a self concept’ (Newman, 2016, p. 61). Therefore, by taking away the opportunity to connect with the material objects at Gateshead, he is communicating the idea that Jane does not need this connection and does not deserve it either.

Yet, it is not merely the Reeds’ possessiveness over the furniture that restricts Jane’s self-development, but the furniture itself. This becomes evident when Jane is locked in the Red-Room. Much critical attention has been paid to how the colour of the room enhances Jane’s sense of entrapment, how the ‘fiery shades [of] red’ create a

‘claustrophobic’ effect (Brennan, 2010, p. 36). However, little attention has been given to the significance of the furnishings within the Red-Room and how these affect Jane’s interior state. The furniture that Jane observes carries with it an air of ‘grandeur’ (p. 8) and aristocracy. In this domestic space the furniture is of ‘darkly polished old mahogany’ (p.8) and the ‘bed [is] supported on massive pillars of mahogany’ (p. 8). According to Elaine Freedgood, during the Victorian era, ‘mahogany which is always being polished or burnished represents tasteful opulence’ (Freedgood, 2010, p. 31). What is more, the red carpet would also enhance the opulent air of the room as ‘carpets [were] a symbol of wealth and station’ (Pelland & Pelland, 2001, p. 67) in Victorian room settings. It is these material elements of the Red-Room that ultimately affect Jane’s interior state and make her feel a stronger sense of entrapment and insignificance. Jane perceives a ‘cushioned easy chair...with a footstool before it’ (p. 9) as being fit for a royal as she describes it as ‘a pale throne’ (p. 9). We can infer that Jane’s ‘physical inferiority’ (p. 3) at Gateshead would be intensified by the regal furnishings, as they do not belong to her and next to them she would feel rather insignificant. This is further reinforced when she describes, ‘piled up mattresses and pillows of the bed spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane’ (p. 9). The adjective phrase ‘piled up’ suggests that everything is high and above Jane, and therefore out of her reach. The ‘high dark wardrobe’ (p. 9) and bed that

‘rose before’ (p. 9) Jane also heightens her sense of irrelevance in comparison to the large and intimidating furnishings of the red-room. Ultimately, Jane’s main focus when she first enters the red-room is not the redness of it, or the locked door, or even Mr. Reed who previously died there. What leaves Jane paralysed with fear and too frightened to move when she enters this interior space is its furnishings. This arguably enhances her feeling of entrapment in the red-room, and it is what reinforces her isolated place at Gateshead and the world.

This feeling of isolation brought on by furniture is no less present at the domestic space of Lowood. Immediately, Brontë draws focus to Jane’s disconnection to this domestic space. When Jane enters Lowood for the first time, she narrates how she ‘looked round’ and how she ‘puzzl[ed] to make out the subject of a picture on the wall’ (p. 35). Her initial interaction with Lowood is an attempt to understand the space itself. To ‘look around’ and ‘puzzle’ over material objects highlights her lack of connection to this space; and as such reinforces her internal sense of disconnect to Lowood.

Following on from this, Brontë highlights how the furniture at Lowood comes to shape Jane’s self-concept of ‘passiv[ity]’ (p. 101) that she carries with her throughout her life. The room where Jane studies is

described as ‘a wide long room with great deal tables’ and ‘benches’ (p. 36), whilst her bedroom is similarly described as ‘very long’ with ‘long rows of beds’ (p. 36). The furnishings in both of these internal spaces reinforce a strong sense of uniformity and lack of autonomy. Jane does not have her own personal study desk or chair, and she has no personal bedroom. If we apply Vieira’s idea that ‘interiors are an expression of our identity’ (Vieira, 2013, p. 1) we can infer that the furniture in these two rooms has been chosen to forge a lack of identity and individuality on to Jane and the other pupils. The plain and shared benches symbolically communicate to Jane the idea that she is not an autonomous individual but rather a passive and static fixture at Lowood. The rows of beds and the long benches symbolise that at Lowood, Jane is just one of many, and like the rest of the pupils, she has no right to express her own personal passions and desires. Rather, like the plain and prosaic furniture in these spaces she should remain somewhat inanimate. This undoubtedly shapes her later existential self-concept of ‘stagnation’ and ‘monoton[y]’ (p. 101).

However, it is not merely the symbolic function of the furniture that shapes Jane’s sense of self. Brontë also highlights Jane’s lack of control over the internal furnishings, at Lowood. This becomes most apparent when Jane observes Miss Scratchard ‘examining [the girls]

drawers' (p. 63). The bedroom drawers at Lowood are the one piece of furniture that temporarily belongs to the pupils. Therefore, to have this personal object invaded communicates to Jane that she does not have a right to privacy, and Miss Scratchard's use of the drawer ultimately reinforces Jane's self concept of passivity. This is further emphasised when Brontë exposes Jane's lack of control over the light fixtures in her shared bedroom. Jane narrates how 'in ten minutes the single light was extinguished' (p. 51), thus highlighting how the lighting is controlled by those in positions of power at Lowood and reinforcing Jane's lack of control. The teacher's use of the furniture again communicates the idea that Jane is passive and lacks autonomy.

Jane's relationship with the furniture does not really advance when she arrives at the third domestic space of the novel, Thornfield Hall. Before encountering this domestic space, Jane has been forged with a passive and plain identity. Therefore, the furniture that she encounters during her first tour of Thornfield Hall would make her feel utterly disconnected to this domestic environment. On her tour, she is met with furniture that exudes regality and opulence: 'purple chairs and curtains', 'white carpets', 'crimson couches and ottomans', ornaments of 'sparkling Bohemian glass', 'purple draperies and polished furniture', and a 'marble hearth'. According to Estela Vieira, 'our interiors are [an] expression of

our identity, social status, and style' (Vieira, 2013, p. 1), and the style of furniture at Thornfield Hall certainly express an exceedingly high social status and opulent style. Further to this, in the dinning room she observes a 'Turkey carpet' (p. 90). At Gateshead she could only imagine sitting like a Turk whilst at the window; here however, she is actually confronted with furniture imported from Turkey. This would likely astonish Jane and make her feel a sense of awe. What is more, as Vieira points out, furnishings 'have their own language, they tell the story of the lives they shelter' (Vieira, 2013, p. 1). Indeed, without even meeting Mr. Rochester, the man of the house, Jane can establish his identity from the furniture in his home. His carpet, for instance, expresses an appreciation of other cultures and perhaps indicates that he has travelled over seas. Whilst the over all grandeur of the furnishings tell that Mr. Rochester is a man of ostentation and opulence. As such, Jane would feel alienated by the furniture in this domestic space. The furniture solely belongs to Mr. Rochester, and acts as an expression of *his* identity, thus reinforcing Jane's lack of identity, as there is nothing that expresses who she is, rather purely what she is not.

This lack of identity and autonomy is further reinforced through Jane's lack of control over the furniture. Mr. Rochester for instance commands her to 'sit down in the arm chair' and 'place your feet on the

stool' (p. 130). His imperative tone accentuates his ownership over the furniture, and emphasizes Jane's inferior status in the world. What is more, it confirms to Jane that she has no rights over it as she is always told how and when she can use it. Again, the furniture in this domestic space communicates to Jane a lack of autonomy. Jane would undoubtedly acknowledge that her identity has not much advanced since the days at Gateshead, when John Reed claimed possession over the furniture, or at Lowood where Jane would be 'invited' (p. 61) or 'told' (p. 59) to use the furniture. Further to the seating and footstools at Thornfield however, is Jane's lack of control over the one piece of furniture that provides light and warmth. For instance, Mr. Rochester authoritatively says, 'I shall take the candle', thus removing the light and warmth from room that Jane is in. As a result of this, Jane is 'left in total darkness', feeling 'cold' (p. 130). The furniture therefore does not only shape Jane's identity, it also controls her sensory experience in a domestic space: and here she has no control over it what so ever. This would significantly impact on Jane's sense of self at Thornfield Hall. Mr. Rochester has removed Jane's control over all of the furniture that provides comfort. Therefore Jane would undoubtedly feel as though she no right to deserve comfort; and this is even further emphasised when Jane observes how guests of Thornfield Hall interact with the furniture. She narrates how 'some of them threw themselves in half reclining positions on the sofas and

ottomans' (p. 205). The language Jane uses to describe the guests' interaction with the furniture connotes a sense of control and relaxation. To 'thr[o]w' oneself implies that the guests feel at ease in this opulent setting, whilst to 'half recline' suggests that they feel entirely comfortable. They do not have to wait for Mr. Rochester's instructions to use the furniture; rather, they use it freely, immersing themselves in it. These guests do not even live at Thornfield Hall; yet, they have more control to use the furniture at their own disposal than Jane, again, reinforcing her lack of control and sense of belonging in this domestic space.

However, despite how the furniture reinforces Jane's lack of control throughout Thornfield Hall, there is one room in this entire domestic space that she does have a sense of control over: her bedroom. This is so fundamental to her self-development in the novel, and it arguably functions as one of the main catalysts to the Bildungsroman. When she is in this space her language changes and connotes a sense of ownership and autonomy. She describes this space as 'my own room to which I had now withdrawn' (p. 260). Essentially, Jane's bedroom allows her to remove herself from other situations at Thornfield Hall where she does not have control and enter a space where it seems she has full control. In this one room she is able to 'shut [herself] in', and, 'fasten the

bolt [so] that none might intrude' (p. 260). For once, Jane can utilize the space and furniture around herself to create a private space and control who can and cannot enter it. According to Peter Brooker, the domestic interior is 'the universe...of the private person' (Whitworth, 2005, p. 65) and Jane has ultimately created her own private universe in a domestic setting that she feels entirely disconnected from. In this private space she is able to think and act autonomously: 'I thought I would lie down on my bed' (p. 182) and 'I brought a chair to the bed-head' (p. 185). She has control over the furniture and can use it at her own leisure. What is more, her language connotes a sense of relaxation akin to the guests. For instance when she narrates, 'I leaned my arms on a table, and my head dropped on them' (p. 182) we see how she physically uses the furniture in her bedroom to gain relief and respite from the rest of Thornfield Hall.

It is at this point that the Bildungsroman really starts to take form, as creating her own private space allows her to make her own life choices and develop as an individual. Just as the windows at Lowood helped Jane to reflect and make the decision to become a governess, this personal space, where she controls the furniture, helps Jane to reflect and decide not to marry Mr. Rochester and to leave Thornfield Hall. This becomes clear when she narrates, 'and now I thought' (p. 260), as though being in this space activates her autonomous thought processes. She describes

how ‘til now I had only heard, seen, moved- followed up and down where I was lead or dragged- watched’ (p. 260). Until being in this ‘private universe’, Jane’s sense of self has been controlled by her own passivity. However, in this interior she is able to ‘[look] on [her] cherished wishes’ (p. 261) and ask herself ‘what am I to do?’ (p. 262). Essentially, this space incites an internal dialogue in Jane and empowers her. She internally exclaims ‘you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it’ (p. 262). A clear shift in Jane’s language has taken place. Rather than the more passive ‘regret’, ‘wish[ing]’ and desir[ing] (p. 85) that she has experienced all her life, she now repeatedly and quite forcefully uses the modal verb phrase ‘you shall’. Until now such an internal imperative tone has been quite unfamiliar for Jane; it is something that she has only encountered through the voices of others. However, just as this ‘private universe’ enables Jane to take control of the furniture, it also enables her to take control of her own self.

Returning then to cultural historian Steve Dillon’s proposal that we should ‘remove [characters] from their fictional context’ (Dillon, 2001, p. 114), if we were to remove Jane from Gateshead, Lowood, and Thornfield Hall we may lose the very key to the Bildungsroman. The

material culture throughout Jane's life has fundamentally communicated to her who she is in the world and where she belongs in life. It has enabled her to understand her social inferiority, as well as help her to construct an autonomous sense of self, moving beyond passivity and stagnation. Just as Emily Brontë's fictional settings of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights are so essential for our understanding of her literary characters, Charlotte Brontë's interior settings are imperative in allowing us to understand Jane's movement throughout the novel and development of the self.

CHAPTER THREE

Retirement and confinement in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

The literary work of the youngest Brontë sister, Anne Brontë, has received ‘less attention and less praise’ in comparison to her older sisters (Langland, 1989, p. 148). However, out of all of the Brontë sisters, it is Anne who focuses most intricately on the impact of the domestic interior. In her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne constructs the character of Helen Graham, who lives her life inside the marital home. Unlike Jane Eyre, the domestic interior that Helen occupies for most of the novel is a space that she can call home. Moreover, unlike gothic female protagonists such as Cathy and Jane, Helen Graham is a very realistic character, and can be interpreted as a representation of married, middle class women of the nineteenth-century who were ‘increasingly confined to and associated with the domestic space’ (Vieira, 2013, p. 8). As such, the domestic space that Helen is ‘confined’ to throughout most of the novel plays a significant role in the development of her character and her sense of self.

By locating the character resolutely within her internal setting, I offer a new way of looking at the fictional home as a paradoxical space. It

is not simply a space that ‘generat[es] feelings or notions of privacy, sanctuary and security’ that essentially ‘hide[s] and protect[s]’ (Hall, Chouinard, Hall & Wilton, 2016, p. 45). Rather, for a married middle class woman in the Victorian era it could be seen as a sanctuary and punitive ‘asylum’ (Brontë, 2001, p. 299) and both a private ‘secure retreat’ (p. 275) and a public space of ‘riot, uproar and confusion’ (p. 272). What is more, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is often looked at from a feminist critical angle. Critics argue that Helen is ‘imprisoned in her husband’s home’ (Sutherland, 1989, p. 622), and that in the novel Brontë presents ‘marriage [as] *itself* a prison’ (Ellis, 2017, p. 111). So much emphasis has been placed on Arthur Huntingdon and his patriarchal dominance over Helen Graham. However, I intend to offer a different perspective on this domestic situation. After all, Helen does not see the domestic interior as purely her husband’s home, rather, she describes it as ‘my new delightful home’ (p. 159) and how ‘*we* now stood before *our* own door [emphasis added]’ (p. 162). It is easy to focus on an individual man’s treatment of a woman during the Victorian era; but the domestic home, as well as seemingly offering a sense of belonging to Helen in the quotations above, helps to establish the structural patriarchy that oppresses Helen. It is the home and not necessarily her husband by which she is incarcerated. This becomes even more apparent if we consider the domestic interior from Huntingdon’s perspective. For him, the home is

also an incarcerating space. Therefore, this chapter sets out to not only offer a new perspective of the home, but to examine the impact that the interior space has upon both the female protagonist *and* the male characters within the novel, demonstrating the home as an ideological space that contains and constrains both men and women, whatever their personal attachment to it.

There are so many elements that make up the material culture of Helen's marital home, Grassdale Manor. Yet, like in *Jane Eyre*, one of the most important elements is the windows. The way that Helen interacts with the windows in Grassdale Manor tells us a great deal about how she feels within this domestic space. Like Jane, Helen is always withdrawing to the windows: she can be found 'standing at the window' (p. 248), 'standing behind the curtain in the bow of the window' (p. 232) or 'moving to the window' (p. 260). What is more, like Jane, the windows offer Helen privacy and sanctuary. Helen describes one of the windows at Grassdale Manor as 'my retreat' (p. 232). By figuratively referring to the window as a retreat, she implies that the window is a space that she can escape to, withdrawing from her domestic environment. The window acts as a private space within the home for Helen Graham, indicating that the home itself is not necessarily private for this female character. However, whilst we might understand the reasons why Jane turns to the windows of

Gateshead, Lowood and Thornfield Hall, for Helen this is more perplexing. After all, Grassdale Manor is *her* marital home, and as Edward Hall theorises, the home should be a place of ‘privacy, sanctuary and security’ (Hall, 2016, p. 40). Therefore, we would assume that she does not need to turn to the windows as the long-suffering Jane Eyre must. What does this then tell us about Helen’s relationship with her domestic environment?

Feminist critics might argue that Helen uses the windows to escape the ‘absolute power’ (Ellis, 2017, p. 111) of her husband. However, if we look at Helen’s relationship with windows prior to Grassdale Manor, when she lives with her Aunt and Uncle at Staningley, this critical perspective can be challenged. In this domestic space at Staningley, Helen constantly turns to the windows. She ‘sat at [the] window,’ she ‘st[ands] at the window’, she ‘turn[s] to the window’, and ‘return[s] to [the] window’ (p. 121). What is more, she describes the windows as though they belong to her by using the possessive pronoun ‘my’: ‘my window’. This implies that she turns to the windows to gain a sense of control. However, we cannot assume that at Staningley Helen feels oppressed and treated cruelly like Jane at Gateshead, nor can we infer that at Staningley she is trying to gain control and overcome what we might latterly label patriarchy. Rather, perhaps we should interpret that her

connection with the windows is a means of connecting with her autonomous self and escaping a domestic space that lies on the periphery between the private and the public. After all, Helen feels ‘so much constraint and formality’ (p. 106). The language that she uses to describe the atmosphere at Staningley connotes rigidity and order, terms that we would not associate with privacy and comfort in the home, highlighting the constrained paradox of the space of the home in this novel. Furthermore, in this domestic space she is confronted with imperative language from her Aunt such as, ‘be watchful and circumspect’ (p. 160) and ‘Don’t boast but *watch*. Keep guard’ (p. 160). Clearly Staningley is not an environment where autonomy is nurtured but, where dogmatising seems to rule. Aunt Maxwell communicates to Helen that there is a specific way to be and that she should not be herself. Therefore, her relationship with the windows can be interpreted as a ‘retreat’ from such control, as a means to connect with her autonomous self. Returning then, to why she turns so much to the windows at Grassdale Manor, it is not necessarily to escape from any single person, but to escape the home environment itself.

According to Isobel Armstrong a window is ‘an inlet, particularly for women, into real and imagined space’ (Armstrong, 2008, p. 124). This theoretical idea is fundamental to our understanding of Helen’s

relationship with the windows at Grassdale Manor. When she opens the window in this domestic setting it is ‘to inhale the balmy, soul-reviving air, and look out upon the lovely landscape’ (p. 175). Helen’s language suggests that this ‘inlet’ nurtures a metamorphosis in her. To ‘inhale’ implies a sense of release and liberation, whilst the adjective phrase ‘soul-reviving’ connotes renewal of one’s internal self. What is more, her language indicates that the domestic interior is somewhat suffocating, and drains Helen’s autonomy. The window therefore acts as an ‘inlet’ into a space where Helen can gain a sense of autonomy and freedom. This becomes more apparent when Helen spends some time in this alternative space. She describes how ‘some heavenly influence seemed to strengthen me within’ and how she ‘breathed more freely; [her] vision cleared’ (p. 239). Again this outdoor space allows her to fully inhale, and rejuvenates her clouded vision. It also provides her with an inner strength, thus nurturing her autonomous self. She goes on to describe feeling ‘refreshed [and] invigorated’ (p. 239) by the outdoors, as though this space strengthens her sense of self. This is in stark contrast to the effects of the internal domestic space of Grassdale Manor. When she returns to the house, she narrates how ‘much of [her] new-born strength and courage forsook [her]’ (p. 239). The internal space clearly diminishes her autonomy and strength of character. What is more, she does not hold any one person responsible; rather, she says that she feels ‘sicken[ed]’ by ‘the

hall, the lamp, the staircase, the doors of the different apartments, the social sound of talk and laughter from the drawing- room' (p. 292). It is the house itself that she is sickened by, and not necessarily her patriarchal husband. Therefore, Helen continuously turns to the windows at Grassdale Manor because they act as a 'portal' (Schenkel, 2007, p. 181) to a space entirely separate from the confining and suffocating domestic space of this interior environment.

However, just like the ambiguous nature of the windows for Jane Eyre, the windows that Helen connects with are also somewhat ambiguous. Whilst they offer her character sanctuary and liberation, they also communicate to her a lack of privacy and autonomy. This first becomes clear at Staningley when Helen is situated at a 'partly open' window. She describes how 'the sportsmen passed the window' and how 'Mr Huntingdon must have seen [her] as he went by' as 'in half a minute' he 'threw up the sash and sprang in' (p. 125). Whilst the window offers Helen a private space to connect with herself, it also enables others to invade this space. As William Stewart theorises 'the principal symbolism of the window is separating inside from outside', and that 'if the house is taken as representing the person, then the window represents the eye, and the eye is said to represent the person's soul' (Stewart, 1998, p. 31). We can infer from this then, that Mr Huntingdon's invasive actions

symbolically communicate an invasion of Helen's 'soul'. The way that he 'thr[o]w[s]' and spr[i]ng[s]' (p. 125) himself into her private sphere inevitably communicates to Helen that she has no right to privacy or autonomy. This invasion of privacy continues at Grassdale Manor. She describes how Mr Hargrave 'followed' (p. 260) her to the window and how he 'stood beside [her] at the window' (p. 248). Again her personal 'retreat' is being infringed upon. She does not invite Hargrave to her private space, rather his actions reveal that he feels entitled to intrude on Helen's moments of autonomy. What then does this communicate to Helen about her sense of self? The one place that she can turn to for sanctuary and escape is easily invaded. It is not necessarily that *Mr Huntingdon* diminishes Helen's sense of control, but that the domestic interior does as it offers Helen no privacy; the windows are essentially on the periphery between the private and the public, just like the domestic spaces that Helen inhabits.

Whilst feminist critics have argued that Helen is 'trapped' (p. 265) in a patriarchal marriage, little has been acknowledged about the oppressive effects of the domestic interior. However, if we examine the domestic interior from the male characters' perspective, it offers a new insight on the novel. Although it might be easy to interpret Helen as the 'long-suffering wife' (Hyman, 2009, p. 56), Brontë also draws our

attention to the ‘long-suffering’ husband. As Gwen Hyman notes ‘Huntingdon is almost always read only through his effects on his wife’ (Hyman, 2009, p. 56). However, Brontë creates a parallel between Helen and Huntingdon’s relationship with the windows of Grassdale Manor, which draws attention to his own entrapment in this domestic sphere. Just like Helen, Huntingdon is always drawn to the windows. He ‘sauntered away to the window where he stood for some minutes’ and ‘walked up to the window again’ (p. 167). His actions communicate a lack of content and a desire to escape. Just like Helen, he uses the windows as a ‘retreat’ from his ‘deplorable...sufferings’ (p. 165) and ‘depression’ (p. 204). Unable to go out hunting due to the ‘streaming rain’ he feels ‘trapped’ in this domestic space and uses the windows to connect to the outside world. As he ‘watch[es] the clouds’ from the windows and ‘curs[es] the rain’, we can perceive a desperation to be set free from the constraints of this domestic interior. As such, perhaps we should not see this novel as simply ‘a tale of a *woman* who frees herself from the constraints of a bad marriage [emphasis added]’ but a tale of how incarcerating the Victorian domestic sphere can be on both women *and* men.

Another significant aspect of Helen and Huntingdon’s material culture is the doors of Grassdale Manor. The doors play a fundamental role in developing Helen’s sense of self. Again, whilst criticism of the

novel focuses on the impact of the patriarchal husband, I would like to consider the impact that the doors have upon Helen. It is easy to assume that patriarchal ideologies and gender inequalities are forged by the actions and words of a man and woman, but they can also be communicated through one's own material culture. The doors of Grassdale Manor develop a sense of empowerment within Helen whilst at the same time communicate a lack of control. What is more, the doors provide an alternative perspective on the character of Huntingdon.

According to Andreas Vogler and Jesper Jorgensen 'to be able to control a door, to control access to space, is one of the everyday supports of self esteem and self-confidence' (Vogler & Jørgensen, 2005, p. 7). It is by considering the doors of Grassdale Manor from this theoretical perspective that we can understand the impact that they have on Helen's sense of self. They allow her to gain a sense of control in her relationship with Huntingdon and to gain a sense of autonomy. It is through the closing of the doors that Helen is able to communicate her sense of power in this domestic environment. As Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti state, 'the wall is silent but the door speaks' (Mezei & Briganti, 2012, p. 260). Indeed, during one occasion when Huntingdon displays his patriarchal control over Helen, she uses the door as means of taking back control. Huntingdon imperatively tells Helen to 'go!' and 'mutters' the expletive

‘confounded slut’ (p. 167) as she departs from the room. By commanding Helen to, ‘go’ he controls Helen’s access to the space and communicates the patriarchal ideology that he has ownership of this space and her. What is more, his derogatory language is a means of tarnishing Helen’s sense of ‘self-esteem and self-confidence’. However, Helen rejects this by using the language of the door. Rather than obeying his commands, she returns to the room and then ‘shut[s] the door and depart[s]’ (p. 167), thus taking back the power and self-worth that Huntingdon tries to diminish. Without words, she uses the door to communicate that she cannot and will not be oppressed in this domestic domain. Whilst the majority of Victorian women might have been somewhat ‘voiceless’ (Sheetz-Nguyen, 2012, p. 8), the door is not. This is further reinforced on another occasion when Helen and Huntingdon are quarrelling. Helen narrates how ‘*without another word*, I left the room, and locked myself up in my own chamber [emphasis added]’ (p. 164). Again, she does not communicate with words but rather uses the language of the door. This time however, she uses her own chamber door to communicate to Huntingdon a sense of independence and autonomy. As Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti theorise, ‘because the door can be opened, its being shut gives a feeling of being shut out’ (Mezei & Briganti, 2012, p. 260). Through the locking of the door Helen makes it evident to Huntingdon that a space in this domestic interior does exist that is free from the

‘control of [her] husband’ (Mews, 2014, p. 136). Without words she articulates a sense of autonomy and freedom.

The doors at Grassdale Manor, though, do not only give Helen a voice and a sense of empowerment. Like the windows, they offer her retreat away from the ‘riot, uproar and confusion’ (p. 272) caused by the other inhabitants. She describes how she ‘took advantage of the open door and the slight diversion caused by its entrance to slip out’ (p. 123). The door essentially acts as a ‘portal’ giving Helen access to a space of privacy and sanctuary, or as she calls it, a ‘refuge’. As such, this domestic environment is not a space that ‘generat[es] feelings or notions of privacy, sanctuary and security’; rather, she has to seek out ‘privacy, sanctuary and security’ *within* the home for herself. This offers insight into the middle class Victorian home. As Michelle Higgs states ‘the upper and middle classes enjoy[ed] giving dinner parties at home, which [were] aimed at impressing their friends and business contacts, and cementing their place in society’ (Higgs, 2014, p. 64). As such, Helen’s home very much lays on the periphery between the public and the private. It is synonymously a private marital space and a social public space. For Helen then, the door acts as a gateway between these public and private spaces.

What is the more, the doors throughout Grassdale Manor enable Helen to define her own limitations. They allow her to ‘retreat’ and ‘lock [her]self’ (p. 272) into certain spaces within this domestic environment, creating privacy and sanctuary. According to Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti, setting one’s own limitations ‘satisfies [a persons] deepest nature’ (Mezei & Briganti, 2012, p. 260). This is because it provides us a sense of freedom, power and choice. Therefore, by locking herself in, Helen is symbolically empowering herself as she is creating and controlling an autonomous space separate from the social ‘uproar’ that Huntingdon has created. As Vogler and Jorgensen state, ‘the act of taking control and the feeling of having control are directly linked to our psychological state of being’ (Vogler & Jørgensen, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, the control that the doors provide Helen can perhaps be interpreted as one of the major impetuses for her self-development. Just as the windows throughout *Jane Eyre* propel the Bildungsroman, the doors at Grassdale manor enable Helen to ‘transgress Victorian social convention’ (Langland, 2002, p. 35).

Yet, whilst the doors enable Helen to establish boundaries and limitations, they also play a vital role in communicating gender boundaries and patriarchal ideologies. Whilst critics pay much attention to the ‘behaviour’ of the ‘morally dangerous’ husband (Surridge, 2005, p.

75), little attention has been focused upon the significance of Helen's material culture. Yet, according to Eugene Smith, 'doors have great power'. He theorises that 'anyone who has spent time in prison...know[s] the supremacy of doors and locks' (N.Smith, 2010, p. 15). Indeed, just as Helen uses the doors to gain power, the male characters throughout Grassdale Manor use them to diminish her power and establish their own. Hattersley for instance, 'set[s] his back against the door, and swear[s that Helen] should find no passage but through his body' (p. 214). Thus, Hattersley uses the door to communicate his patriarchal dominance over Helen in her own home. As previously established, the door is Helen's portal to escape and freedom. Therefore, he uses the door to symbolically articulate without words, that she is not entitled to freedom or autonomy. It is the men's control of the door and not their direct control over Helen, which oppresses her. This is further reinforced later on when Hattersley, 'burst[s] into the room' (p. 214). The dynamic verb 'burst[s]' implies that there are no limitations to his access of space. Whilst Helen must define her limitation through the shutting and locking of the doors, his forceful opening of the door suggests that he has no limits within this domestic environment, despite the fact that this home belongs to her and *not* him. Though we might expect such behaviour from a character such as Hattersley, who is uncouth and immoral, we might not expect it from the gentlemanly Hargrave. Yet, just like Hattersley, Hargrave uses the door

to assert his patriarchal power. On two separate occasions Helen narrates how Mr Hargrave ‘boldly intercept[s her] retreat to the door’ (p. 278) and ‘gently la[ys] his hand upon the lock’ (p. 237). Like Hattersley, he uses the language of the door to assert his control over this domestic space and to communicate a patriarchal dynamic. By intercepting her ‘retreat’ to the door and placing his ‘hand upon the lock’ he essentially restricts and controls her access to space, and denies her access to the ‘portal’ into privacy and autonomy. Both Hattersley and Hargrave’s use of the door would inevitably affect her psychological state and make her feel that her privacy and autonomy is always under threat.

However, although Brontë undoubtedly ‘points to the political problem of men’s ownership and control of women’ (Surridge, 2005, p. 101), if we consider Huntingdon’s connection with doors at Grassdale Manor, this can be challenged. We should not necessarily interpret Huntingdon as the dominant patriarch but as himself oppressed. After all, Brontë draws our attention to how he is kept ‘within doors’ (p. 177) by the wet weather. Whilst Helen uses the doors within the domestic home to gain autonomy and retreat, for Huntingdon, it is the door to the outside that acts as his ‘portal’ to autonomy and retreat. As such, during wet weather, Huntingdon does not have access to his autonomous space, unlike Helen. Brontë makes the psychological effect that this has upon

Huntingdon explicitly evident. For instance, on one occasion when he is trapped inside the home, Helen narrates how he ‘shut the door with a bang [and] went and stretched himself at full length on the sofa’ (p. 166). His body language connotes frustration, agitation and oppression. It is evident that he uses the door to vent his frustration and feeling of entrapment. What is more, by ‘stretch[ing] himself at full length’ he communicates a desire to be free and not enclosed as a ‘prisoner’ (P. 287) in the confines of Grassdale Manor, as stretching is an act of openness and liberty. Whilst Huntingdon undoubtedly oppresses Helen, it is possible that Huntingdon’s immorally ‘transgressive’ (Parrinder, 2010, p. 211) behaviour is rooted to the domestic environment and the psychological effects this has upon his character.

It is by understanding the negative psychological effects that this limitation of autonomy and privacy has upon both Helen and Huntingdon that we can gain a clearer picture of why Helen ultimately makes the decision to leave Grassdale Manor and move to Wildfell Hall. The catalyst of her life changing decision is not necessarily patriarchal dominance and control; rather, we should consider that it is due to the invasion of her private space. According to Janet Floyd and Inga Bryden, doors function to ‘protect privacy’ (Floyd & Bryden, 1999, p. 9). However, the doors at Grassdale Manor simultaneously protect and

expose Helen's private space. The doors communicate to Helen that her privacy will always be compromised, regardless of the situation. For instance, on one occasion when Helen is in the midst of a private discourse with Huntingdon, 'the butler entered and began to take away the things' (p. 199). The door enables the butler to intrude on a private exchange between husband and wife, thus exposing their private marital space. On another occasion, when Helen is having a private conversation with Hargrave, she notices that her husband may have 'witnessed' much of their private exchange as, 'the door was ajar' (p. 248). Again, the door, compromises Helen's entitlement to privacy. Whilst the door might act as a portal, giving Helen access to a private and autonomous space, this portal can be accessed by others at any given time. This is further reinforced when Helen describes how the male guests 'flung the door [open]' and 'thr[e]w [the door] open' (p. 280). Evidently, the male characters have no respect for Helen's privacy, nor do they recognise the significance of the doors for Helen. This becomes even more apparent on an occasion when Helen 'only want[s] to indulge [in her] thoughts' and go 'unnoticed and undisturbed'. The porous nature of the doors at Grassdale Manor does not permit Helen's moment of privacy. She describes how 'the door was gently opened and someone entered the room' (p. 131). The door exposes Helen, making her vulnerable and again compromising her privacy. It is important to note that, 'our sense of

comfort and belonging within our society depends on whether we feel our home...is safe from intrusion. If others are likely to intrude...we live on edge' (Donath, 2014, p. 157). The porous nature of the doors at Grassdale Manor therefore must make Helen feel 'on edge' in her own home. Not only does she have to seek out 'retreat' and privacy in a space that should ultimately be private, but also this privacy then becomes compromised. Subsequently then, does Helen move to Wildfell Hall to escape patriarchal control or to once and for all gain a private, autonomous space and life that she can call her own?

In order to answer this question, we need to turn to the one aspect of the home that has the most psychological impact on an individual: the fire and the hearth. According to Bruce Smith, the fireplace and hearth is 'the heart, the center [and] the soul of the house' (Smith, 2009, p. 30). It is able to 'enhance our well-being and uplift the spirits' (Clements-Croome, 1999, p. 36). As such, we would assume that it would be the one space that Helen can turn to for psychological strength. However, Brontë makes it evident that, unlike the windows throughout Grassdale Manor, the fireplace is not her 'retreat'. Rather, 'the heart, the center [and] the soul of the house' seems to belong to the guests more than it does to Helen. This is made distinctly apparent through Mr. Hattersley's interaction with the fire. Mr. Hattersley 'str[i]de[s] up to the fire',

‘expand[s] his chest’ and ‘interpos[es] his height and breadth between [the other characters] and [the fireplace]’ (p. 225). The verbs ‘strode’ and ‘expand’ suggest that Mr. Hattersley has the power to openly impose himself on this space. By interposing his whole body in front of the fire and blocking it from the other characters, he makes a symbolic gesture of ownership and control. It is arguably because the fire has such symbolic meaning as ‘the heart, the center [and] the soul of the house’ that in this moment Hattersley feels that ‘the house and all its appurtenances and contents were his own undisputed possessions’ (p. 225). His connection to the fire gives him power in this domestic space and ultimately diminishes Helen’s own connection with *her* home.

Yet, Hattersley is not the only guest whose body language connotes ownership and control over the symbolic heart of the house. Annabella, Huntingdon’s mistress, also communicates an air of dominance over this central point of the home. It becomes a ‘retreat’ for Annabella. Whilst Helen turns to the windows to gain a sense of autonomy, Annabella ‘walk[s] up to the fire’ (p. 245). It is at this central point of the home that Annabella is able to feel a sense of power and dominance, which is made evident through Brontë’s language. Like Hattersley, Annabella’s body language exudes ownership when she is in front of the fireplace. She ‘throw[s] herself into an arm chair, and

stretch[es] out her feet to the fender' (p. 245). Her actions do not connote those of a subservient Victorian woman; rather, they connote a sense of masculine power. Her actions mirror Hattersley's in the way that she 'throw[s]' and 'stretch[es]' her self in front of the fire. Both of these verbs imply confidence and power, as though the fireplace ignites psychological strength within Annabella. The fireplace does not only 'enhance [Annabella's] well-being and uplift [her] spirits', but as with Hattersley, it strengthens her sense of self in this domestic space. Ultimately, Hattersley and Annabella's body language communicates to Helen that she does not have control over the central point of the home.

This would undoubtedly have a negative psychological impact upon Helen and make her feel that the heart and soul of the house does not belong to her. Even when she does try to benefit from the 'uplift[ing]' and 'enhanc[ing]' effects of the fire, by 'lean[ing her] head against the chimney-piece', this opportunity is taken away from her in a 'minute or two' (p.182) by the imposing nature of the guests. As such, Helen seems to develop a disconnection to the 'center' and 'soul' of the home. It becomes apparent that Helen's ability to think and reflect autonomously is propelled by the absence of the fire rather than the presence of it. At night, it is only when a room is filled with 'silence and darkness' that she is able to 'walk... rapidly up and down, thinking about [her] bitter

thoughts alone' (p. 239). As Helen passionately narrates, 'I did not want a light; I only wanted to indulge my thoughts, unnoticed and undisturbed' (p. 131). Whilst the fire might give Hattersley and Annabella a sense of control and empowerment, for Helen, its not being active gives her the ability to engage in her own thoughts. This tells us a great deal about the importance of our material culture and about the psychological impact on the individual when the 'small foci of our world are disturbed or threatened' (Tuan, 1975, p. 154). It is perhaps because the other characters take possession of the 'the heart' of the home that Helen feels such a disconnection to it, a disconnection so strong that she cannot think autonomously in its presence.

It is only when Helen moves to Wildfell Hall, a domestic space that she can entirely call her own, that she begins to develop a connection to the fire and the hearth. In this new domestic space, the fire becomes a central point of focus for Helen. Whilst at Grassdale Manor, the guests are always occupying the space of the fire, at Wildfell Hall it becomes a free and unoccupied space that Helen has ownership of. The fire is described as 'a clear [and] red fire' (p. 319). Nobody is obstructing it from Helen or taking possession of this space. Rather, it is a 'clear', fresh and unscathed space, which, for Helen, now acts as a 'symbolic center of the home' (Heschong, 1978, p. 50). It is arguably for this reason that we

see Helen interact with the fire and the hearth much more at Wildfell Hall. When on her own, she can be found standing ‘before the fireplace’ (p. 311) or when she is in company she can be found ‘gazing abstractedly into the fire’ (p. 79). What is more, her body language evinces a similar sense of confidence and control to Annabella. It is in front of the fire that she ‘throw[s] herself into the old armchair’ (p. 313). It is as though the fire at Wildfell Hall really has ‘uplift[ed]’ and ‘enhance[d]’ her psychological state. To ‘throw’ herself into the chair connotes freedom and autonomy. She is finally able to connect with the ‘heart’ of the home and gain the psychological benefits of it.

Returning then to the critical argument that Helen leaves Grassdale Manor to escape ‘the constraints of a bad marriage’ (Hyman, 2009, p. 56), it is quite evident that this is not the dominant impetus of her departure. From the very beginning of the novel Brontë has made it evident that Helen has always been seeking a domestic space that she can connect with autonomously. At Grassdale Manor she is always ‘retir[ing] away, ‘st[ealing] away’ and ‘retreating’ away (p. 248:249:272) from the public and social spaces of the domestic interior. It is not that she tries to escape the patriarchal powers of Huntingdon or Hattersley but that she tries to gain a private sphere within the home where she can be ‘in company with [her] own blissful thoughts’ (p. 13). What is more, Brontë

continues to draw our attention to the likely impetus of her escape when Helen is introduced as a character that is always ‘out on the hills’ ‘rambling over the moor’ (p. 40), ‘down by the brook’ (p. 42) or by ‘the fine sea (p. 49). When Helen leaves Grassdale Manor, she embraces the outdoors. Her new connection to the outdoor world implies that she is finally free and not oppressed by her material culture. She does not avoid relationships with other male characters, as is made evident by her blossoming relationship with Gilbert; rather, she avoids being confined by an internal domestic space.

As Helen looks upon the new domestic space of Wildfell Hall, she reflects how ‘each separate object seemed to echo back [her] own exhilarating sense of hope and freedom’ (p. 306). Here, she directly addresses the main impetus of her growth as a person: ‘the separate object[s]’, the material culture that make up a domestic space. It is these separate objects, from the doors, to the windows, to the hearth, that have defined who she is and who she is not as a person. When she finally ‘retreats’ to Wildfell Hall, she acknowledges that these ‘separate objects’ speak to her and communicate to her that she has ultimately found autonomy - the one thing she has been searching for her whole life.

Conclusion

In her recent biography, *The Brontës*, Juliet Barker writes that on moving into Haworth Parsonage in 1820, Patrick Brontë ‘brought his wife, six small children and two servants’. She continues with Charlotte’s own biographer, the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, wondering when visiting ‘where on earth they all slept’ (Barker, 2010, p. 115). Although kept spotlessly clean, the house was still crowded even after Mary, Elizabeth and later Branwell died; space remained scarce. Charlotte’s friend, Ellen Nussey, when visiting the Parsonage in the 1830s, was also struck by its cleanliness, but also by its austerity. However, Gaskell, ‘who preferred the softer scenery of her native Cheshire’, was most impressed by the view from the sitting room window and from her bedroom window above (p. 113). The contrast between the small interiors and the expanse of the adjacent moors, which the sisters loved and where they walked regularly, must have been as striking then as it is today. This is the topography in

which the sisters were immersed: the landscapes of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are, of course, reimagined versions of Haworth Moor. Barker describes Patrick's bad temper, which sometimes involved firing his pistol out of the windows (p. 225-226); his demands on his daughters (p. 595); his fear of fire, which meant no curtains in the house and little heat (p. 114). She describes Branwell's decline through excessive drinking (p. 256-257); his opium addiction and his nightmares (p. 366). The environment in which the sisters lived suggests much about what their preoccupations were and the origins of the imagined worlds, which they escaped to. The characters created by the sisters and set in motion by them among the interiors of the novels reflect their own life experiences and environment.

The analyses of *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* have underlined the inseparability of individuals from their surroundings, interior and exterior, the senses in which their existences are interwoven, carried forward from real life into fictional characters and situations. We also see the author sisters bound up with the circumstances of their own domestic lives and projecting those cathartically onto their fictions.

Cultural theorists have confirmed the convincing links between people and their surroundings, particularly interiors. As Burns and Pearson have written:

‘The house and the body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin, a carapace or a second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect’ (Burns & Pearson, 2013, p. 106).

Crucially, as domestic objects – doors, windows, hearths, and furniture – furnish houses, cultural theorists have asserted that aspects of, and influences upon, the individuals who inhabit the same spaces. These objects around a person are inseparably bound up with an occupant’s psyche and state of mind. How she behaves around these objects and towards them says much about her situation. By extension, this notion is applied to fictional characters as a realistic literary device, which serves to round out a character, make her more recognisable, and make statements about her behaviour and state of mind and her social status, especially through the degree of control she can or cannot exercise over them.

For example, Charlotte Brontë has Jane Eyre repeatedly made conscious of her lack of control over her surroundings, through narrative device, suggesting powerfully Jane’s subjugation generally to those who do have control, usually men. In some small way, Jane is allowed control over the contents of her bedroom at Thornfield Hall; her thoughts, usually

so circumscribed, by others and in particular in rooms which are public spaces, are allowed to come to the fore. She exercises her free will in her own room, for instance, making the decision to not marry Rochester. Similarly, at Lowood, solitude had freed her to gaze out of the window at the night sky and ‘reflect’ on her situation and decide to become a governess.

But at times, these seem limited fields of self-assertion, typifying the real situation of young women in the 1840s of the class of Charlotte Brontë – including educated ones. These devices often suggest types of evasive manoeuvring by female characters, through which a young woman might retain or recover a sense of her own self. Windows have significance for Jane as a recurrent catalyst for mentally removing herself from her immediate surroundings. It becomes a tactic for temporary relief from constraint. The spaciousness of a natural landscape, viewed from a window, if not experienced directly, frees the subject temporarily from whatever limitations the interior is imposing. The author places Jane effectively outside to assert her own will for her own ends. The windows become an important liminal area to which Jane is allowed to retreat to distance herself from her domestic environment, simultaneously advancing the narrative. And as Armstrong writes of windows, ‘an inlet, particularly for women, into real and imagined space’ – an observation

which usefully conflates their real function with a potential role as a window into the imaginary world of fiction (Armstrong, 2008, p. 124).

Such an authorial strategy is particularly overt in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. When she is insulted by her husband and ordered from the room, Anne Brontë has Helen Graham wordlessly return to the centre of the room before exiting in her own time. Through the ‘language’ of the door, Helen is made to register a degree of control by the author even in the presence of a dominant male. Similarly, Helen is able to lock herself in her room, an act of self-assertion which is not made by Jane, who on one occasion is left in darkness as Rochester leaves the room with the only available candle.

But, like Jane, Helen frequently returns to a window to gain some sense of control. However, Helen is oppressed in a different way to the more subservient Jane: Helen’s actions are circumscribed by social and domestic formalities, conventions which usually go unquestioned and she seeks to escape the home, where she is often deprived of autonomy. Yet it is also noted that Helen’s husband is occasionally affected by these conventions, and Anne Brontë has him have recourse to the window too.

Anne Brontë employs domestic interiors to greater effect than Charlotte. Furthermore, in contrast to Jane, Helen Graham lives within the marital home, where she is the lady of the house, a middle class and mid-nineteenth-century wife. Even so, her domestic space remains ambiguous

– part sanctuary, part public space of ‘riot, uproar and confusion’ (p. 272).

Both of these novels provide a contrast with to the dark gothic of *Wuthering Heights*. Critics have foregrounded a marked correspondence between the moors around the Parsonage and Brontë’s depiction of the countryside around the Heights, and indeed the former is reflected in the character of Heathcliff. But it is also demonstrated, for example, that Heathcliff’s nature may owe much to the interior of the Heights with its hard floors and sparse furnishings. Autobiographical aspects appear with sparse furnishings bearing a resemblance to the author’s own home, and Branwell’s decline into addiction may have suggested much of Heathcliff’s character to Brontë. Strikingly, the author aligns Cathy’s changed personality with the pleasant interior of Thrushcross Grange, radically different to what had been before, showing clearly that such reformations are narrative devices, consciously deployed by the author.

This engagement with these domestic objects becomes a means of self-expression, including in the fiction they become part of; and the individual’s control over these surroundings is ultimately a measure of her free will, of freedom of thought and movement. By locating the characters in their fictional settings, rather than ‘removing’ them from those settings, new interpretations of the novels have been reached. The characters are, as it were, reformed by their surroundings, and by *reading*

those surroundings. Future research might deploy this spatial and materialist methodology to analyse other Brontë texts – such as *Villette* and *Agnes Grey* – and compare them to the work of other authors of the period to test how unique Brontëan interiors are in their relationship to character and self.

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