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„The Description of Nature and Houses
in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*”

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1. Introduction

In some novels, setting is especially important. Welty asserts, “Besides furnishing a plausible abode for the novel’s world of feeling, place has a good deal to do with making the characters [...] themselves [...] Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course” (Welty, qtd. in Hoffmann 27).

Discussing the literary legacy of the Bronte sisters, Horsman refers to “the non-human part of creation” (Horsman 159), by which he probably means nature and its forces. At another point he indeed mentions “the interplay between human passion and storm, sunset, or harvest moon in these novels” (Horsman 159). His claim is thus that there is a correspondence between the feelings of characters and aspects of nature. Discussing Charlotte Bronte’s prose in particular, Edwards says: “All the novels draw deeply on nature, and use it to generate symbolic meanings. Also, there is plenty of evidence that for Bronte the concept of nature has meanings far beyond its use simply as setting” (Edwards 65). Theuer says that, “generally, the description of a house in country house novels is used predominantly to mirror the owner” (Theuer 66). As we shall see, in *Jane Eyre* but also in *Shirley* the description of a domestic location often has symbolic meanings, including the reflection of the nature of the proprietor.

However, as Edwards points out, “setting is not always sympathetic. It may clash with the human events which are set against it” (Edwards 84). He also asserts that, “setting is perhaps less important in *Shirley* in general than it is in the other novels [by Charlotte Bronte], yet there are several passages of very considerable interest” (Edwards 86). Indeed, this paper is also to show that there is more than one way in which the depictions of nature or houses may relate to dynamics or situations in the plot, or to traits, thoughts or feelings of characters. Also, it will be shown that a description is sometimes primarily given simply to create a reality effect or to provide additional information.

This thesis is then to examine in what way different phenomena of nature and houses are presented in Charlotte Bronte’s novels *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, and for what motive and to what effect their descriptions are given. Other subjects which will be analysed are the harmony or contrast between indoor and outdoor settings at certain places, the response of characters to nature or civilization, as well as the role and beliefs in governing forces behind

nature and civilization, namely (Mother) Nature or Eve on the one hand and patriarchy on the other.

Not only the content of a novel will be the subject of this study, but also the verbal manner in which nature and houses are described in the narrative. At times, we will go into greater detail, discussing the wording of a quote and, thus, Charlotte Brontë's style. Mostly, her novels have been discussed in terms of content rather than form. Peters, however, discusses the latter aspect in a lengthy manner. For instance, she elaborates on adverbs in the author's prose and their effect, saying that, "one of the most striking characteristics of Charlotte Brontë's use of the adverb is the frequency with which it occurs" (Peters 17). She comments on the different effects these adverbs produce in different passages, such as the moment in *Shirley* where "Louis Moore takes out "his little book" to "discourse with it in ardent tones [...] much of the eloquence is communicated through the heavily stressed adverbs" (Peters 35). Language in Charlotte Brontë's fiction is also discussed, for instance, by Smith, who says that in *Shirley*, "Language acts as the central marker of the acute divisions separating [...] groups. Brontë's clear and carefully offered variations of dialect and her comments on language help to undergird her central theme of society's inhumanity to the powerless" (Smith, Susan Belasco 637). In addition, she mentions that "*Shirley* is also striking in relying on language as an indicator of character" and "as a mark of regional pride" (Smith, Susan Belasco 637), among others. The focus in terms of style in this paper is word choice and the effect of lexical items in descriptions of nature and houses.

Before proceeding to the main body of the thesis, definitions of some relevant terms used frequently in this paper will be quoted.

Pathetic fallacy:

As it says in the *Longman Companion to English Literature*, this is "a term invented by the critic John Ruskin [...] to denote the tendency common especially among poets to ascribe human emotions or qualities to inanimate objects, eg the expression 'an angry sea'" (Longman 698). According to this definition, the inclination in question can be observed especially with poets. As we shall see, however, it can also be found in Charlotte Brontë's prose.

The Gothic novel:

The *Longman Companion to English Literature* says the following about this genre:

The 18th C stressed the supreme value of Reason, and the values that go with reason; despite the imaginative richness of Pope and Swift, this emphasis tended to repress emotion and the more mysterious forces of personality, which were thought of as barbaric, and therefore medieval and Gothic. Gothic thus became associated with all that was felt to be fantastic, grotesque, wild, savage, mysterious, and capable of strong appeal to the emotions without restraint by the [sic!] reason. (Longman 545)

A great number of attributes could, then, be ascribed to the Gothic genre. Although neither *Jane Eyre* nor *Shirley* are fully-fledged Gothic novels, the genre very much influenced at least the former of the two and also surfaces in descriptions of some of the houses.

The sublime:

On the whole, there may be different understandings of what the English word “sublime” means. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, at any rate, defines it as “an idea associated with religious awe, vastness, natural magnificence and strong emotion which fascinated 18th-cent. literary critics and aestheticians” (*Oxford* 980). Very frequently, the sublime involves a certain mode of depicting nature. Sublime natural scenes, for instance, are such that cause “religious awe” (*Oxford* 980) – in the sense that, though they may be frightening for their hostile and forbidding quality or large dimensions, they at the same time cause a feeling of wonder at the greatness of God, their creator. Some have distinguished the concept of the sublime from that of the beautiful (cf. section 3.3). The concept of the sublime is important especially for the discussion of *Jane Eyre*, both with regard to descriptions of nature and of houses. In *Shirley*, it has a far less significant role.

2. The Description of Nature and Landscape in *Jane Eyre*

Discussing Bronte novels, Horsman mentions the “contrast of locality”, which could also be observed in Emily Bronte’s work *Wuthering Heights* (Horsman 172). As Horsman says, the latter book’s “simple contrast was multiplied” in *Jane Eyre*, “in particular when the wooded warmth and luxury at Rochester’s Thornfield Hall contrasted with environments which were bleak and hostile: with the earlier winter of discontent at Gateshead and at Lowood school, and with the subsequent region of heath and mountain where Jane was for the first time made quite destitute, before being led to the Rivers family” (Horsman 172). Horsman also asserts that

Such contrasts were accentuated, in the manner of Dickens, by strong and repeated sensory oppositions of warmth and cold, running through the impressions which discriminated between people as well as places [?], and by a relatively unsubtle but insistently suggestive use of weather and season, particularly the behaviour of the moon. (Horsman 172)

The importance of natural forces in particular in *Jane Eyre* is also indicated by Burkhart. He asserts that “there is another key word to *Jane Eyre*: "nature." The word "nature" occurs at least as frequently and as climactically as "moon"” (Burkhart 178).

Smith remarks on Charlotte Bronte’s “narrative landscapes” in *Jane Eyre* and asserts that she describes “scenes of nature using various painterly techniques”, saying that, “like an engraving or illustrated landscape, these word-paintings feature detailed compositional structures comprising contrasts of light, dark, color volume, and mass. Authors like Bronte used recurring motifs throughout their novels” (Smith, Lauren).

In this chapter, the manner of describing nature and landscape in *Jane Eyre* will be discussed in greater detail, as well as the function of these descriptions in the narrative, also with regard to possible symbolism – partly in analogy with Horsman (Horsman 159, 172) as well as with Burkhart (Burkhart 177-179).

2.1. Nature and Landscape at Gateshead

According to Stonyk, “Half of *Jane Eyre* grows out of the Gothic tradition” (Stonyk 128). Indeed, it is understood that, although *Jane Eyre* was written at a time when the influence of the Gothic novel on fiction in general was relatively weak, there is a noticeably Gothic quality about different passages of the work. Notably, the weather outside Gateshead Hall described in the beginning of *Jane Eyre*, for instance, lends the scene a Gothic air, casting, in the truest sense, a shadow over the place.

Early Winter

The first chapters of *Jane Eyre* are set at Gateshead in the months of early and deep winter. Early on, the weather is an important element in the creation of a Gothic atmosphere. In fact, the very beginning of *Jane Eyre*, that is, the book’s opening paragraph, already gives the reader an impression of the weather outside Gateshead and a tempestuous and dismal atmosphere is thus created even before we are given more direct, less symbolic information on Jane’s overall situation and the whereabouts of Gateshead. The book starts with the famous sentence “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day” (Bronte, *Eyre* 9), which even on its own would indicate that the weather is too forbidding to go about by foot in the landscape surrounding Gateshead. The rest of the paragraph hints at the same situation Jane finds herself in on the first day of the narrative, as the reason for this confinement indoors is explicitly given: “the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question” (Bronte, *Eyre* 9). Within this sentence, no less than three aspects concerning the weather on this day are given: firstly, it is the quality of the wind, which at this time of November is already sending a wintry air; secondly, there are “clouds so sombre” (Bronte, *Eyre* 9) in the sky; thirdly, “a rain so penetrating” (Bronte, *Eyre* 9). All these comments on the weather will probably create an impression of bleakness and inclemency in the reader, one that may also be ascribed to Gateshead itself and to Jane’s overall situation there – even more so, as these details of weather are given within the very first paragraph, which introduces the reader to the place and the first person narrator’s mind.

The same “drear November day” (Bronte, *Eyre* 10) is further described as follows: “Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast” (Bronte,

Eyre 10). The hostile atmosphere of landscape and weather thus prevails on the first pages. In this early phase of the novel, we are given information on the outdoor scene, especially on the forces of nature.

While the weather is indeed described sufficiently for the reader to imagine its force outside, we are hardly given a description of the landscape. All the information we get of Jane's view of it from a window is that of a "lawn" and a "shrub" (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). This may partly be explained by the fact that a part of the land is shrouded in fog on that day (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). For many pages to come, at any rate, we are not given any other information on the landscape at Gateshead, as most of the action takes place indoors.

Seemingly, although the narrator uses words like "drear" and "lamentable" (Bronte, *Eyre* 10) to describe the weather outside, Jane is in a sense interested in it. After all, she more than once looks at it from the window seat, with much more than superficial glances: "At intervals [...] I *studied* the aspect of that winter afternoon" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). It may seem that, being sheltered from the weather, Jane is fascinated with the sublime forces of nature outside and therefore may feel comfortable even with the idea of not being absolutely shut away from them: "to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day" (Bronte, *Eyre* 10).

Jane's reading, too, tells of a harsh landscape and hostile weather. The narrator mentions in this context "the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia" (Bronte, *Eyre* 10), and several other lands to the north (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). Woodring says that, "the inhospitability of the arctic zone was a sufficient disturbance to reach the opening of *Jane Eyre*" (Woodring 178). The mentioning of these hostile landscapes, too, contributes to the gloomy air of this early passage of *Jane Eyre*. However, provided she may marvel at it from a safe distance, Jane on the other hand seems to be fascinated with precisely these forbidding but fascinating landscapes:

I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures [...] Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive [...] Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my [...] understanding and [...] feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting. (Bronte, *Eyre* 10-11)

Smith says that the protagonist “reads landscapes just as she might read a vignette from Bewick's History, acknowledging the transportation she feels from their visual and metaphoric power” (Smith, Lauren). Here, as Smith says, the protagonist also renders a description of “the relationship between the narrative and the pictures and the emotional response it elicits“ (Smith, Lauren).

Do these notions of landscapes to some extent correspond with the protagonist's inner life? Clearly, the place and most of its inhabitants do not appear to render her happy. Especially the social circumstances under which this character lives are certainly not beneficial. At Gateshead, Jane has to do more or less without any friends at all, and some of her relatives are, quite on the contrary, more like her much feared enemies. John Reed, for instance, who has no qualms doing serious physical harm to Jane, deeply frightens her (Bronte, *Eyre* 12). In addition, Aunt Reed, who is one of the most significant characters in the first four chapters of the work, is, as we may almost exclusively judge from her actions and words, a cruel and unjust woman, under whose roof and through whose blood-curdling maltreatment, Jane suffers greatly and unnecessarily. Also, Jane's female cousins appear care nothing for the young orphan with her natural aspiration to enjoy the company of people she can rightly refer to as friends. As regards Bessie and Abbot, although especially the former does at times show affection and pity for the poor child, both these characters seem to act as Jane's aunt's servants first and foremost and, as such, do at times inflict suffering on young Miss Eyre as well. It may, thus, be likely that the weather and landscape reflect Jane's feelings of fear, grief and loneliness at Gateshead. We may also choose to believe Horsman, who asserts that there is an “interplay between human passion and storm” (Horsman 159) in Bronte's works. Thus, there could be an analogy between Jane's furious behaviour (Bronte, *Eyre* 13-15) and the tempestuous weather outside in this early passage of the novel.

Deep Winter

In later passages than those we have hitherto discussed, aspects of nature and landscape are hardly ever described, as the action takes place almost exclusively indoors and the characters do not often dwell on what is happening outside Gateshead Hall. Although outdoor phenomena at Gateshead on the whole are not described with great frequency in this phase, when they *are* depicted, a quite typical impression of the season is created. It seems as though the author here wants to emphasise the wintry quality in her portrayal. For instance, just as she mentions a “*leafless* shrubbery” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 10) in one of the first lines of the novel, she uses the same adjective – again as the only qualifier – in “*leafless* cherry-tree” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 37). It goes without saying that one of the features of early and deep winter in the temperate zone is the bareness of deciduous plants, but this also hints at the bleakness of the atmosphere indoors.

In these early chapters, one of the few longer descriptions of landscape and nature at Gateshead, apart from the first few pages of the novel, is as follows:

the shrubbery was quite *still*: the black *frost* reigned, unbroken by sun or breeze, through the grounds. I [...] went out to walk in a part of the plantation which was quite sequestered [...] the *silent* trees, the falling fir-cones, the *congealed* relics of autumn, russet leaves, swept by past winds in heaps, and now *stiffened together* [...] an *empty* field where no sheep were feeding, where the short grass was nipped and *blanched*. It was a *very gray* day; a most *opaque* sky, ‘onding on *snaw*,’ canopied all; then *flakes fell* at intervals, which settled on the *hard* path and on the *hoary* lea without melting. [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 46)

If we look at the vocabulary emphasised here, it is noticeable that many attributes of the season – in this case, winter – are enumerated. Thus, Bronte yields a powerful image of the time of year, which is the coldest season, when open landscapes are quite “empty” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46) and “still” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46). Colours typical of winter are added – namely, “hoary”, “gray” and “blanched” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46) –, and other effects of the cold, such as ice and snow, are mentioned or alluded to – as with “frost”, “congealed”, “stiffened together”, “snaw” and “flakes” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46). Clearly, many of these words carry negative associations and most of them strongly indicate lack of life or colour, which may correspond with Jane’s situation and emotional world.

Regarding the above passage, there may be yet other points of interest for this thesis, especially concerning the use of tropes and rather unexpected modes of expression. For instance, note the personification of frost in “the black frost *reigned*, unbroken by sun or breeze” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 46). Here, frost is given the quality of a ruler, “reigning” over the shrubbery, and the impression of winter’s power is thus strengthened. Another point concerns “onding on snaw” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46). According to Davies, this is “Scots dialect. Having been impressed with Sir Walter Scott’s ‘what kind o’night is’t?’ ‘On-ding o’snaw, father’ (*Heart of Midlothian*, 1818, Ch. 8)” (Davies, “Notes” 539), to Davies, the author of *Jane Eyre* “takes onding to mean threatening rather than the actual ‘snowing heavily’” (Davies, “Notes” 539). Not only does Bronte, then, intend to perpetuate the impression of winter by quoting Scott, nature is also, again, given a “threatening” (Davies, “Notes” 539), quality.

In the same breath – that is, within the paragraph where the above description of winter can be found –, the narrator says, “I stood, a *wretched* child enough, whispering to myself over and over again, ‘What shall I do? – what shall I do?’” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 46). Implicitly, a connection is created between the kind of weather depicted and this sentence. As Edwards says with reference to Gateshead, “a physical and an emotional winter are linked” (Edwards 7). There may be some justification in the assumption that the weather described mirrors the feelings or the situation of Miss Eyre’s. After all, the outdoor scene is described in such a way as to render it “wretched” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46), which is a word used for the protagonist’s state in the latter quote. Also, the “frozen” quality of the winter scene in particular may be interpreted as corresponding to Jane’s concrete current situation: “‘What shall I do?’” (Bronte, *Eyre* 46) is her expression of indecision, as may be reflected by a similarly “petrified” landscape.

When Jane leaves Gateshead Hall for Lowood, we are given an impression of perhaps somewhat milder weather, with the narrator speaking of “a recent thaw” (Bronte, *Eyre* 50); however, the weather is still described as inclement: “Raw and chill was the winter morning: my teeth chattered as I hastened down the drive” (Bronte, *Eyre* 50). Normally, we would expect the sentence to start with “the winter morning” rather than “raw and chill”. Davies says that “the plain style often suffers reversal [...]. Syntactic inversion [...] is used to dramatic effect in *Jane Eyre*” (Davies, *Intro* xxxi-xxxii). Indeed, this infringement of a grammatical rule of English serves to highlight the qualifiers “raw and

chill”. The syntactic structure may be surprising to most English readers and may, for a start, draw their attention especially to the specific part of the sentence. In addition, as the above adjectives feature right at the beginning, they are more noticeable than in any other part of the sentence.

Return to Gateshead

When Jane Eyre returns to Gateshead years later as an adult – currently employed as governess at Thornfield Hall but having left the house to visit her dying aunt – the season is spring; to be more precise, she arrives on “the first of May” (Bronte, *Eyre* 261).

Although Jane meets with some hostility from the side of her aunt and indifference from the side of her surviving cousins Eliza and Georgiana, she does not appear to be altogether unhappy in the place. It seems that the times have changed for her: “The gaping wound of my wrongs [...] was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished” (Bronte, *Eyre* 262).

We would probably be mistaken if we here asserted that these feelings of the protagonist’s are reflected by the weather in this later passage, as the forces of nature, when described, create a much more dismal image, one of hostility and turbulence reminiscent of the earlier scenes: “the rain *beat* strongly against the panes, the wind blew *tempestuously*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 273). Instead, we could rather interpret it as mirroring either the situation of the Reed family in general, which has lost John and is about to lose another of its members and is thus experiencing a time of keen hurt and of change. Also, we could see it as illustrating Aunt Reed’s situation in particular, as it is merely a column that separates the comment on the weather quoted above from Jane’s following thoughts: “One lies there [...] who will soon be beyond the war of earthly elements” (Bronte, *Eyre* 273). If we consider the two parts of the sentence as a whole, we may take it to indicate a connection between the weather on the one hand and Mrs Reed and her death throes on the other.

Despite the fact that it is in the month of May, most of the action again takes place inside Gateshead Hall, and outdoor phenomena are hardly ever mentioned. All in all, the weather is mentioned only twice: firstly, with a reference to a “wet and windy afternoon” (Bronte, *Eyre* 272) that does not prevent Eliza from going to church (Bronte, *Eyre* 273); secondly, with the quote of “the rain *beat* strongly against the panes, the wind blew

tempestuously” (Bronte, *Eyre* 273). What the landscape surrounding the Hall at the time of spring looks like is not described at all. A long “walk in the grounds” (Bronte, *Eyre* 269), which Jane takes with Georgiana, is mentioned, but here the narrative is focussed on their subject of conversation rather than their surroundings (Bronte, *Eyre* 269).

2.2. Nature and Landscape at Lowood

Introduction of Lowood

Dunn states that the author “was severely critical of schooling that stifled the imagination and abused the child” (Dunn 389). This is absolutely plausible considering the section dedicated to Lowood in *Jane Eyre*.

In the description of the journey to Lowood, one aspect of nature that is described is once again the weather: “The afternoon came on *wet* and somewhat *misty* [...] a *wild* wind rushing amongst the trees” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). If we look at the choice of the adjectives we have emphasised, the ferociousness and mysteriousness of nature are stressed, but we do not get as strong an impression of deep winter as when reading the longer passage describing a winter scene at Gateshead quoted earlier (Bronte, *Eyre* 46). However, the weather, which has shifted, again plays an important part in the description of nature, perhaps in correspondence with Jane’s personal change of situation and the uncertainty of her future. “Wild” (Bronte, *Eyre* 51) may be an allusion to the “wild world” at large, which Jane is venturing into.

On her journey from Gateshead Hall to Lowood charity-school, Jane notices considerable changes in the landscape she is passing through: “we ceased to pass through towns; the country changed; great gray hills heaved up round the horizon” (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). This sentence indicates Lowood’s remoteness and foreshadows the place’s uninviting and life-threatening nature. Early on, Jane also gives hints at the more immediate surroundings of Lowood charity-school, which she perceives on arrival by coach: “we descended a valley, dark with wood” (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). This remark, however brief, may hint at the origin of the name of the place: Lowood may have been meant as “low” and “wood”

clustered into one word. The place is thus situated in a basin within an undulating countryside, including dense clusters of trees (Bronte, *Eyre* 51).

On Jane's arrival before the entrance of Lowood charity-school, a gloomy atmosphere is again evoked. She leaves the coach at what is presumably a late hour (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). The description of weather and deep shadow creates an impression of gloominess: "Rain, wind, and darkness filled the air" (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). Again, the vocabulary suggests harsh, inclement weather: "We went up a broad pebbly path, *splashing* wet" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). As happens so amazingly often in these early chapters, it rains heavily.

Similarly, when Jane is in bed inside the building, the weather continues in its ferocious manner: "I only once awoke to hear the wind rave in *furious* gusts, and the rain fall in torrents" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 53). On the night of Jane's arrival, the weather is thus rough and hostile as at Gateshead. This may have a symbolic function connected with Lowood school itself.

Jane's First Days at Lowood

The dark, Gothic atmosphere that the description of landscape, weather and night-time create at Jane's time of arrival at Lowood are only too fitting as an introduction of the so-called charity-school and forebode the disastrous circumstances that Jane will enter into there. Indeed, when Jane arrives at Lowood charity-school, she is confronted with a hostile environment. The pupils who stay there live under appalling conditions. For instance, the meals they are given are at times absolutely atrocious and inedible. As the narrator tells us of Jane's first breakfast at the place, "I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess – burnt porridge [...] I saw each girl taste her food and try to swallow it; but in most cases the effort was soon relinquished" (Bronte, *Eyre* 55). The health conditions at Lowood are clearly abhorrent. However, the appalling living conditions are not the only problem Jane has to face at Lowood. In addition, some of the authorities are definitely despotic and treat the children inhumanely. Mr. Brocklehurst, who manages the school, is, indeed, a heartless tyrant who, for instance, criticises the serving of bread and cheese ordered by Miss Temple to compensate for an inedible breakfast (Bronte, *Eyre* 74-75). Also, the teacher Miss

Scatcherd is presented as cruel and unjust, as she terrorises in particular the good-natured Helen Burns, of all pupils (Bronte, *Eyre* 65).

All this is reflected, for instance, by the description of weather on Jane's first full day at Lowood school. The narrator describes this as "an inclement day [...] not positively rainy, but darkened by a drizzling yellow fog; all under foot was still soaking wet with the floods of yesterday" (Bronte, *Eyre* 58). The hint at the "yellow" (Bronte, *Eyre* 58) hue in the air may already indicate that the area of Lowood is a place where disease spreads easily, as will later be stated much more clearly (Bronte, *Eyre* 91). Already in the same paragraph, the narrator states: "as the dense mist penetrated to their [several children's] shivering frames, I heard frequently the sound of a hollow cough" (Bronte, *Eyre* 58) – the person coughing, according to Davies, being none other than Helen Burns, whom Jane Eyre has not yet met (Davies, "Notes" 540).

As regards the account of Jane's second day, references to the weather are about the only comments on landscape, nature or its forces. There has been a shift in the weather, but it may be just as or even more hostile than the day before: as the narrator says, it is dangerously cold on this day in Lowood:

A change had taken place in the weather the preceding evening [...] a keen north-east wind, whistling through the crevices of our bedroom windows all night long, had made us shiver in our beds, and turned the contents of the ewers to ice.

Before the long hour and a half of prayers and Bible-reading was over, I felt ready to perish with cold. (Bronte, *Eyre* 63)

The life-threatening coldness of the weather, in addition to simply indicating the mercilessness of nature, may also be a correlative to the physical cruelty and emotional coldness of the vicious authorities in the place.

Still, Jane is seemingly curious as to what is happening outdoors, both as regards the look as well as the sound of the weather: "I now and then lifted a blind and looked out; it snowed fast, a drift was already forming against the lower panes; putting my ear close to the window, I could distinguish from the gleeful tumult within, the disconsolate moan of the wind outside" (Bronte, *Eyre* 65). The following statement may come as a surprise to many readers:

Probably, if I had lately left a good home and kind parents [...] that wind would then have saddened my heart; this obscure chaos would have disturbed my peace: as it was, I derived from both 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 clamour” (Bronte, *Eyre* 65).

Again, similarly to what we observed regarding a passage we discussed in the preceding chapter (Bronte, *Eyre* 10-11), we find that Jane is at this point seemingly fascinated with a scene of inclement, hostile forces of nature, even though, in this case, the weather is extremely perilous to her. However dangerous, the weather also gives a voice to her own emotions, which she must suppress. Thus, pathetic fallacy is used again: nature expresses what a character can or will not voice.

The Months of Winter and Early Spring

As the season of winter continues with Jane at Lowood, these forces of nature seem to do anything but lose their grip on young Miss Eyre. Just as she has a hard time getting used to the new demands on her – “my first quarter at Lowood [...] comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks” (Bronte, *Eyre* 70) –, the continuously forbidding weather makes her and her fellow pupils suffer revoltingly:

During January, February, and part of March, the deep snows, and, after their melting, the almost impassable roads, prevented our stirring beyond the garden walls, except to go to church, but within these limits we had to pass an hour every day in the open air. Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold; we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes, and melted there; our ungloved hands became numbed and covered with chilblains, as were our feet. (Bronte, *Eyre* 71)

Because of the forbidding outdoor conditions, the action in this phase takes place mostly inside the house of Lowood school. The inclemency of winter, with its natural coldness, seriously threatens and weakens the girls, especially outdoors, where their being ill-equipped for the season becomes all the more apparent.

In such a hostile environment, the religious duty of attending church seems to be anything on earth but a means of salvation. Instead, it appears like another opportunity for torture:

Sundays were dreary days in that wintry season. We had to walk two miles to Brocklebridge Church [...] we set out cold, we arrived at church *colder*: during the morning service we became almost *paralysed* [...] At the close of the afternoon service we returned by an exposed and hilly road, where the *bitter* wind, blowing over a range of snowy summits to the north, almost *flayed the skin* from our faces. [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 71-72)

The emphasised words are strongly suggestive of torture, stasis, and bitterness.

In these especially hostile surroundings, an army-related simile occurs to Miss Temple. Trying to motivate the children on their way through the frozen landscape, which, except in relation to the weather, is not described by the narrator here, she tells them to “march forward [...] ‘like stalwart soldiers’” (Bronte, *Eyre* 72).

Indeed, Miss Temple is a source of consolation and strength for Jane, and the girl seems to look up to her as to a mother. At one instant in the text imagery from nature connected with the weather and the moon seems to announce and accompany the appearance of the superintendent of Lowood school in the room, declaring her power to alleviate suffering: “Some heavy clouds, swept by the rising wind, had left the moon bare; and her light, streaming in through a window near, shone full both on us and on the approaching figure, which we at once recognised as Miss Temple” (Bronte, *Eyre* 83). Thus, the “heavy clouds” (Bronte, *Eyre* 83), which may represent Jane’s and Helen’s trouble, have been blown away by a “rising wind” (Bronte, *Eyre* 83), presumably representing agreeable change, and have revealed a beacon of light in the sky, which lights the forms of the three female characters. To Davies, Bronte here creates an “association of the moon with the maternal principle” (Davies, “Notes” 542). The former may indeed stand for the latter, and for the character of Miss Temple and her motherly function with regard to Jane. However, Miss Temple, too, usually does not extend charity to the children, even though they suffer and she does not. During the Sunday march described, for instance, we are exposed to her selfish side: possessing a “plaid cloak [...] gathered close about her” (Bronte, *Eyre* 72), Miss Temple does not suffer from the cold, leaving her pupils in their already extremely miserable and deteriorating state.

The Janus-faced Spring at Lowood

In a sense, spring, with its changes of weather and landscape, comes as a relief to the heroine:

the privations, or rather the hardships, of Lowood lessened [...] My wretched feet, flayed and swollen to lameness by the sharp air of January, began to heal and subside under the gentler breathings of April; the nights and mornings no longer by their Canadian temperature froze the very blood in our veins [...] sometimes on a sunny day it began even to be pleasant and genial [...]. (Bronte, *Eyre* 90)

The agreeable aspects of the beginning season are thus expressed by way of contrast with the former. Within the same paragraph, the narrator says, “Spring drew on – *she* was indeed already come [...] a greenness grew over those brown beds, which, freshing daily, suggested the thought that Hope traversed them at night, and left each morning brighter traces of her steps” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 90). Here, the season is personified as a female, perhaps to suggest gentleness, and is associated or even equated with “Hope” (Bronte, *Eyre* 90), which is also personified, being imagined as walking through the garden at late hours, lending the place the very colour that symbolizes it (Bronte, *Eyre* 90).

Here, again, nature is described very strongly in connection with the season and its characteristic qualities and features, which the following quote, too, will demonstrate: “Flowers peeped out amongst the leaves: snowdrops, crocuses, purple auriculas, and golden-eyed pansies” (Bronte, *Eyre* 90). The mentioning of colours in the paragraph is certainly not unimportant, not only because they are characteristic of spring, especially as opposed to winter, but also because the colours suggest life and joy.

Clearly, with the coming of spring, the landscape surrounding Lowood, along with Jane’s way of living, seems to change its face considerably. The hills, the brook and the entire “hill-hollow” (Bronte, *Eyre* 90), which were earlier interpreted as sinister and hostile (Bronte, *Eyre* 90), are now viewed completely differently (Bronte, *Eyre* 90). Another change that spring brings is that it enables the inhabitants of Lowood to spend more time outdoors, close to nature – at first, at least. As the narrator says: “On Thursday afternoons [...] we now took walks, and found still *sweeter* flowers opening by the wayside under

the hedges” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 90). The bright side of nature at this time is also suggested by the use of the word emphasised here.

The spring in Lowood, nevertheless, is two-faced, and after the sheer eulogy of the season referred to above, the reader is introduced to the shocking downside the change of the weather and other attributes of nature have for the children. As Bewell says, “Jane Eyre’s description of the environs of the Lowood Orphan Asylum [...] is shaped as much by the language of medical geography as by aesthetics” (Bewell 773). Indeed, after the prettiness of the landscape surrounding Lowood has been once more confirmed by the narrator, she, within the same sentence, alludes to the catastrophe that will befall the school due to its location: “Assuredly, pleasant enough, but whether healthy or not is another question” (Bronte, *Eyre* 91). With just a few words, the narrator then, quite suddenly, describes the surroundings of Lowood in completely different terms than she did merely two lines before: “That forest dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence” (Bronte, *Eyre* 91). When a terrible disease enters the halls of the school, many children fall ill due to their weakened immune system: “fog-bred pestilence [...] crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into a hospital” (Bronte, *Eyre* 91). Eventually, many children die as a consequence of this disastrous epidemic – among them, Jane’s best friend Helen Burns.

The narrator goes on to draw the reader’s attention to the irony that is caused by the sharp contrast of the beauty of nature as spring progresses on the one hand and the wretchedness of the many young patients on the other hand. She describes nature as displaying ever more lavish beauties, again mentioning different specimens of flowers, as well as colours that suggest qualities of energy and *joie de vivre* (Bronte, *Eyre* 92). Within the same sentence, again, a horrifying aspect is added, this time in a highly ironic tone: “these fragrant treasures were all useless for most of the inmates of Lowood, except to furnish now and then a handful of herbs and blossoms to put in a coffin” (Bronte, *Eyre* 92). Strangely, here, the opposite of pathetic fallacy is then employed. The irony still strengthens the shocking effect the passage has on the reader.

Not all the children, however, are affected by this devastating epidemic. Jane, along with others “who continued well, enjoyed fully the beauties of the scene, and season” (Bronte,

Eyre 92). As Smith maintains, “Jane is an observer-participant who finds comfort in her isolation from the oppressive Lowood School“ (Smith, Lauren). We cannot speak of nature and landscape as mirroring Jane’s situation or emotions, as her benefits are caused rather than reflected by outdoor factors: “they let us ramble in the wood, like gipsies [...] we did what we liked, went where we liked: we lived better too [...] Mr Brocklehurst and his family never came near Lowood now [...] the cross housekeeper was gone [...] there were fewer to feed: the sick could eat little; our breakfast-basins were better filled” (Bronte, *Eyre* 92). This clearly is another instance of irony: while the unholy scourge of nature causes many children to fall ill, with many of them dying miserably, the result on Jane and others are better material conditions of living than they had before the epidemic; in addition they can relish the beauty of nature and freedom outdoors. In the face of both death and loveliness surrounding her, Jane comes to value life: “How sad it is to be lying on a sick-bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant” (Bronte, *Eyre* 94). This is perhaps the first time in the narrative that she gives such a positive thought to nature’s beauties and – surrounded by dying fellow pupils – appreciates that she is still alive.

2.3. Nature and Landscape at Thornfield

Introduction of Thornfield

As befits a writer of the Victorian Age, Bronte seems to attempt to create a reality effect in the reader with regard to Thornfield. In only two passages, Jane finds out what the landscape of Thornfield looks like, seeing a landscape where hardly anything is shrouded, where almost everything is open to her view.

The first real introduction of nature and landscape in the place yields an agreeable image of Thornfield: “It was a *fine* autumn morning; the early *sun* shone *serenely* on embrowned groves and *still green* fields” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 117). This autumn at Thornfield is not rendered as harsh and gloomy but is given very agreeable attributes of an Indian summer: the early hours are “fine”, the sun has a “serene” radiance, and the “fields” are both “still” and “green” (cf. section 2.2) (Bronte, *Eyre* 117).

In this first description of the landscape, there are still elements that may by some be interpreted as hinting at Thornfield and Rochester’s dark secrets and problems, most notably the “mighty old thorn trees” (Bronte, *Eyre* 118) and the “rookery” (Bronte, *Eyre*

118) with its birds, whose flight path Jane's eye seems to follow (Bronte, *Eyre* 118). Despite their culturally established negative connotation, however, the rooks are here interpreted as positive by Jane, who is "listening *with delight* to the cawing of the rooks" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 118). Flying across the plane, gathering altitude and thus increasing the feeling of the vastness that the "*great meadow*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 118) conveys, they may, arguably, symbolise a sense of freedom rather than evil here. As they will be referred to again and again in the text, they may be seen as an important species of wildlife in Thornfield. The aforementioned trees may stand for the "thorns and [...] toils" (Bronte, *Eyre* 116) predicted by Jane a little earlier, and they may also symbolise the hidden thorns in the "rose garden" of Rochester's love – although at this point, of course, Jane has no idea that her master's first wife is hidden in the attic. Jane does not, however, appear to find the trees unpleasant at this first glance and ascribes some positive and sublime attributes to them (Bronte, *Eyre* 118).

The hills in the distance are described with the aid of a comparison to the ones surrounding Lowood: "not so lofty as those round Lowood, nor so craggy, nor so like barriers of separation from the living world; but yet quiet and lonely hills enough, and seeming to embrace Thornfield with a seclusion" (Bronte, *Eyre* 118). Thus, the hills around Lowood and those around Thornfield have in common that they both create a more or less closed space, in which the action takes place. However, the hills at Thornfield are not forbidding in the way that those encircling Lowood are.

From the rooftop, Jane soon has an even more encompassing view of the land, which creates a pleasant atmosphere of colour and spaciousness (Bronte, *Eyre* 126), not like the confinement in Lowood and Gateshead. Most of the colours mentioned, especially the blueness of the sky and the greenness of the flora (cf. section 2.2), enhance this agreeable impression. The following sentence indicates that Jane gets a bird's eye view in the truest sense of the word: "I was now on a level with the crow colony, and could see into their nests" (Bronte, *Eyre* 126). The narrator even says, "I surveyed the grounds laid out like a map" (Bronte, *Eyre* 126). Like a bird, she here gets an overall and detailed view of her surroundings. As the narrator says, "No feature in the scene was extraordinary, but all was pleasing" (Bronte, *Eyre* 126). This description can be seen in stark contrast to that of the landscape at Gateshead, where almost everything is left to the imagination of the reader and which is depicted as uncongenial (cf. section 2.1).

In Winter

One day at Thornfield in winter is described in the following way: “It was a fine, calm day, though very cold” (Bronte, *Eyre* 130). Thus, despite the noticeably low temperature, the day is still agreeable to Miss Eyre, quite in contrast to her reaction at Lowood. The weather does not keep her from leaving the Hall. On the contrary, she even likes to go out: “I put on my bonnet and cloak and volunteered to carry it [a letter] to Hay; the distance, two miles, would be a pleasant winter afternoon walk” (Bronte, *Eyre* 130-131). Her enjoying rather than suffering from the chill may be due not only to her being better clothed and fed than in Lowood but could also mirror her inner well-being at Thornfield.

Although hostile weather is sometimes mentioned (as in Bronte, *Eyre* 153), nature does not seem to threaten Jane. If we compare the description of the winter scene at Gateshead (Bronte, *Eyre* 46) to the following quote, we may again find that the portrayal of the winter at Thornfield is much more positive: “I walked fast till I got warm, and then I walked slowly to enjoy and to analyse the species of pleasure brooding for me in the hour and situation [...] the charm of the hour lay in its approaching dimness [...] I did not feel the cold, though it froze keenly” (Bronte, *Eyre* 131). The vegetation, even in winter, is quite rich in the lands surrounding Thornfield: “a few coral *treasures* in hips and haws [...] whose best *winter delight* lay in its utter solitude and leafless *repose*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 131). The vocabulary highlighted here may create a strong impression of agreeableness of the winter scene described. The focus seems to be on some of the more pleasurable aspects of the season. The winter landscape is also inhabited by birds: again, a group of crows is mentioned (Bronte, *Eyre* 131), and “little brown birds” (Bronte, *Eyre* 131) are referred to, with the warmer season of autumn being alluded to: “[they] looked like single russet leaves that had forgotten to drop” (Bronte, *Eyre* 131).

Not much later, nature again seems to influence the plot, this time rather magically and beneficially. The ice caused by the frost creates an ideal scenario for a trustful beginning of Jane and Rochester’s acquaintance. The male character having had an accident, the heroine comes and offers him help (Bronte, *Eyre* 133), which creates a positive first impression of Jane on Rochester, providing an important basis for a relationship that will eventually result in lawful marriage.

In Springtime

In springtime, nature, too – at times at least – bestows its favours on Jane and others. The weather is described as agreeable in early spring, with the temperature being pleasantly high, already foreboding the next season: “It had been a *mild, serene* spring day – one of those days which, towards the end of March or the beginning of April, rise *shining* over the earth as *heralds of summer* [...] the evening was even *warm*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 193). There are references to spring’s newness and purity. For instance, after leaving the Hall, the injured Mason says, “The *fresh* air revives me, Fairfax” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 248). Rochester seems to appreciate the outdoor scene as well, asking Jane not to re-enter the house at present: “Come where there is some *freshness*, for a few moments [...] all is *real, sweet, and pure*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 249).

The weather, however, is at times also less congenial in these months at Thornfield. Particularly, rain, forcing Rochester and his guests to remain within the walls of Thornfield, is mentioned on more than one occasion (Bronte, *Eyre* 211, 219); yet uncongenial weather is described neither as dangerous as that in Lowood nor as gloomy as that in Gateshead. Also, it is never directly described except in a rather vague manner, such as in “the afternoon was wet” (Bronte, *Eyre* 219). On the whole, there still seems to be a focus on more pleasant manifestations of the weather rather than inconvenient ones.

For a considerable number of pages, at any rate, outdoor phenomena are hardly ever mentioned, as most of the action takes place within the walls of Rochester’s mansion and the attention is mostly directed at the indoors. When finally an outdoor scene is described for more than two lines (Bronte, *Eyre* 249), its lavish, paradisiacal beauty provides an appropriate setting for Jane and Rochester’s romance. Their mutual affection seems to have increased considerably, and the romantic spring landscape may be said to mirror the feelings they have for each other on this morning. The romantic quality of the passage seems to reach a climax when Rochester gives Jane “a [...] rose, the *first* on the bush” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). Smith asserts that, „after Bertha viciously attacks Mr. Mason, Rochester and Jane find themselves stumbling into the garden [...] searching for reassuring signs of a higher, benevolent power“ (Smith, Lauren). The enumeration of the many plants – mostly flowers and fruit trees (Bronte, *Eyre* 249) – strongly suggests

the qualities of the fertility, beauty and supportiveness of nature at Thornfield, and the mentioning of sunshine (Bronte, *Eyre* 249) further enhances the Eden-like impression.

In Summer

On the day Jane returns to Thornfield from her visit to Gateshead, she believes that “the sky [...] promised well for the future” (Bronte, *Eyre* 281). She arrives during the first summer described in *Jane Eyre*, most strongly contrasting with the dismal, desperately cold winter scenes at Gateshead and Lowood. Some of the changes in nature are mentioned already as Jane arrives (Bronte, *Eyre* 281). Again, the notion of a likeness to paradise may be applicable, and in terms of fertility, the vegetation in summer surpasses even the aforementioned spring scene at the same place (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). For instance, whereas before there was only one flower on a shrub for Rochester to pick (Bronte, *Eyre* 249), Jane now marvels, “How full the hedges are of roses!” (Bronte, *Eyre* 281). Thus, since her having been away makes her more aware of the changes at Thornfield, their effect on her is stronger when she returns.

Jane is happily reunited with the residents of Thornfield Hall, feeling welcome (Bronte, *Eyre* 284). Her affection for Mr Rochester is stronger than ever before: “Never had I loved him so well” (Bronte, *Eyre* 285). The bright, hot, and extraordinarily pleasant weather seems to reflect both Miss Eyre’s feelings of bliss and her “heat” of passion at Thornfield: “A *splendid* Midsummer shone over England: skies so *pure*, suns so *radiant* [...] the roads *white* and *baked*, *panting* plain and *scorched* summit” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 287). Later, Bronte herself confirms this pathetic fallacy, having the narrator say, “Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy” (Bronte, *Eyre* 297).

A later passage features Jane and Rochester at “the sweetest hour of the twenty-four” (Bronte, *Eyre* 286) – twilight, which is later called the “hour of romance” (Bronte, *Eyre* 312). What follows after a reverential description of the sky and lighting at this time (Bronte, *Eyre* 286) is the scene at “the orchard. No nook in the grounds more *sheltered* and *Eden-like*; it was full of trees, it *bloomed* with flowers” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 286). Here, various specimens of animals and plants are mentioned. The natural abundance in general and that of flowers and fruits specifically may symbolise Jane and Rochester’s wealth of passion. The animals mentioned are winged creatures (Bronte, *Eyre* 288, 289, 291), which may hint at the possibility of Jane’s leaving for good. After

all, Miss Eyre is compared by Rochester to “a wild frantic bird” (Bronte, *Eyre* 293) in the same passage.

According to Davies, intertextuality with John Milton’s best-known work comes into play in this passage: “Miltonic references cluster, chiefly to Book IV of PL [*Paradise Lost*] [...] These references [...] evoking the Miltonic Eden” (Davies, “Notes” 561). Thus, this scene may involve the most obvious instance of Edenic imagery. Davies may be quite right that the above-mentioned allusions to *Paradise Lost* and, thus, the biblical Eden have a second function of “predicting the inevitable Fall to come” (Davies, “Notes” 561). Allusions to the Garden of Eden provide a fitting scenery for what is passing between Miss Eyre and Rochester: here, the biblical myth of Adam and Eve is inverted: a man seduces a woman rather than vice-versa (Bronte, *Eyre* 293). After Jane has accepted the proposal, nature takes on a gloomy appearance surprising to the heroine, and incredible force and rage are suggested by the wording: “But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were *all in shadow* [...] And what ailed the chestnut-tree? it writhed and groaned; while wind *roared* in the laurel walk, and came *sweeping* over us [...] a *livid*, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking [...] The *rain rushed down*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 296). The very tree Jane and Rochester sit under is later “struck by lightning” (Bronte, *Eyre* 296). Davies interprets “the storm and the cloven tree” as ““signs”” (Davies, “Notes” 562), and indeed, how can we not interpret the fury of the weather in connection with Rochester’s immoral marriage proposal and defiance of divine law? In fact, the weather deteriorates at other points following the incident, namely on the days immediately preceding Jane’s wedding – turning inclement (Bronte, *Eyre* 318, 324) and even spooky (Bronte, *Eyre* 324) –, and after Jane’s disappointment, when it becomes even wintry (Bronte, *Eyre* 341). In front of the church on the day of the wedding, Jane sees a crow (Bronte, *Eyre* 332), which, more clearly perhaps than any other crow in the work, foreshadows unluckiness, namely that of Jane and Rochester’s marriage.

2.4. Nature and Landscape in Morton and Its Neighbourhood

In the Wilderness

Having left Thornfield after a devastating disappointment (Bronte, *Eyre* 334), Jane, quite by chance, lands at Whitcross. On arrival, Miss Eyre describes her view of the landscape from a vantage point in a rather encompassing manner (Bronte, *Eyre* 371), which reminds us of the way Thornfield was introduced (cf. section 2.3). This description gives the reader an impression of large proportions and of wildness: “*great moors [...] waves of mountains [...] that deep valley [...] the heather grows deep and wild*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 371). Thus, now that Jane is on her own in a strange place, the world again seems wide and sublime.

Being alone and afraid of her fellow human being in the place, Jane is drawn to the solitary wilderness, thinking, “I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose” (Bronte, *Eyre* 372). Mason suggests that “the best that can be said for her night out in the heather is that ‘I was not, at least at the commencement of the night, cold’” (Mason x). However, Jane’s troubles soon give way to a remarkably positive response to nature: “*calmed by the deep silence [...] I took confidence*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 372). In contrast to all the instances in *Jane Eyre* where nature is utterly inclement (cf. sections 2.1, 2.2), here, nature for the first time seems like a selfless host and a benevolent mother soothing her child towards bedtime: “I looked at the sky; it was pure [...] Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me [...] I [...] clung to her with *filial* fondness [...] my *mother* would lodge me without money and without price” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 372). The high ground, where Miss Eyre sleeps peacefully, seems to symbolise a very particular aspect of motherliness: “I again nestled to the *breast* of the hill” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 373). Nature prompts soothing religious faith in Jane when she looks at the sublime firmament, causing her to feel and express gratitude (Bronte, *Eyre* 373). Though these feelings of confidence are also deceptive – Jane will soon get into life-threatening danger – they are authentic as they have a highly metaphysical character. Mother Nature is never said to intentionally have made Jane suffer at Morton parish, cruelly “picking” on her.

Next morning, Jane is still filled with reverence of the moor, which in broad daylight she describes as a “golden desert [...] Everywhere sunshine” (Bronte, *Eyre* 373). Later, she

comes to behold cultivated land in contrast (Bronte, *Eyre* 374). In summer at least, the landscape near the village appears bright and agreeable: “a *glittering* stream [...] the *mellowing* grain [...] the *clear* and *sunny* lea” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 374).

These pleasant sights cannot be said to correspond in terms of pathetic fallacy with Jane’s current heart-rending state: “I was so sick, so weak, so gnawed with nature’s cravings” (Bronte, *Eyre* 376-377). However, her uncomfortable night in the wood, especially the coming on of rain, fog and murkiness (Bronte, *Eyre* 378-379) do perhaps symbolise Jane’s state of deprivation and desolation. Now, she really is forced to live outside and is losing hope of survival with the weather having become inclement and menacing.

At the hour of impending doom, Jane again turns to a more pristine landscape, where she would prefer to die (Bronte, *Eyre* 380). She walks to high ground, where she hopes to find shelter but does not, and the mentioning of falling dusk and the resulting absence of colour in the description of this scene (Bronte, *Eyre* 380) may again be symbolic of Jane’s alarming state. As the rain once more starts to fall, the weather presents itself in an abjectly life-threatening fashion (Bronte, *Eyre* 380), in the sharpest possible contrast to Jane’s first night in the moor (Bronte, *Eyre* 372-373) and reminiscent of the equally life-threatening cold of Lowood (cf. section 2.2). Mason asserts that “cold, even in summertime, is one dimension of Jane’s acute suffering at Morton” (Mason x). This is aptly put, especially if we consider the following quote: “the rain fell fast, wetting me afresh to the skin. Could I but have *stiffened* to the still *frost* – the friendly *numbness* of death – it might have pelted on; I should not have felt it; but my yet living flesh *shuddered* at its *chilling influence*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 380). One kind of coldness represents death, the other physical suffering.

However, Jane gets up and in her desperation defies the obstacles of nature on the way to Moor House (Bronte, *Eyre* 380). It is due to the arrival of St. John that Jane is eventually ushered in (Bronte, *Eyre* 386). She is saved from the vicious weather that, along with famine, was about to kill her. She has to spend a few days recovering in Moor House (Bronte, *Eyre* 389-390).

Barren Nature

Just like Diana and Mary (Bronte, *Eyre* 402-403), Jane now relishes nature again, even in its hardy and barren aspects: “I, [...] in [...] its avenue of aged firs, all grown aslant under the stress of mountain winds; its garden, dark with yew and holly, and where no flowers but of the hardiest species would bloom – found a charm both potent and permanent [...] I saw the fascination of the locality” (Bronte, *Eyre* 403). Interestingly, the moor is here a second time interpreted in a very positive manner, in spite of its barrenness (Bronte, *Eyre* 402-403). The reason for this favourable interpretation may again be Jane’s inner life and situation – in this case, her security at Moor House and the harmony especially with Diana and Mary (Bronte, *Eyre* 403). The landscape’s barren appearance can be seen in stark contrast to Thornfield’s abundance of nature and may represent Jane’s having to live without Rochester’s love.

As the narrative continues, the outdoor scene changes from the immediate surroundings of Moor House to those of the cottage. Nature and landscape are again described as idyllic, as in: “I [...] looked at the *sunset* of harvest-day, and at the *quiet* fields [...] The *birds were singing* their last strains – ‘The air was *mild*, the dew was *balm*’” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 414-415). This may reflect Jane’s positive response to her new occupation and way of living (Bronte, *Eyre* 423).

Interestingly, no features especially characteristic of the season of autumn are mentioned before winter is announced in the following way: “it was beginning to *snow* [...] The next day a *keen* wind brought fresh and *blinding falls*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 435). Once more, the weather becomes furious and threatening, contrasting with the idyllic references to nature and landscape in the few preceding chapters: “the *whirling storm* continued all night [...] by *twilight* the valley was *drifted up* and *almost impassable*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 435). Nature is described as hostile also after the storm. For instance, Hannah advises St John not to leave the house before the morning: “there’s *no track* at all over the bog. And then it’s such a *bitter* night – the *keenest* wind you ever felt” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 455). Thus, just as the weather seems wintry in an unpleasant way, the moorland is again presented as a dangerous place rather than merely as an object of delight.

A few pages onwards, on a beautiful spring day (Bronte, *Eyre* 461), Jane and St John go to Marsh Glen. The place and the weather are mainly described as Eden-like, and bright images of nature appropriate for spring, with its typical colours, are again evoked, the sky being of “stainless blue” (Bronte, *Eyre* 462). This contrasts with the other two proposal scenes (cf. sections 2.3, 2.5) in that there is no clear case of pathetic fallacy, as the likeness to paradise may be meant ironically: neither is the proposal romantic nor does the life-long mission suggested to Jane come from heaven. It is an ironic parallel to the first proposal scene from Rochester (cf. section 3.3), when nature really reflected their mutual feelings. What nature may, however, reflect is St John’s belief that he is talking about a divine calling – and not only that: “God and *nature* intended you for a missionary’s wife” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 464).

However, Jane opines that “God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you would wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide” (Bronte, *Eyre* 477). In a pivotal scene, Rochester’s far-off voice emerges from the silence of the natural landscape outside Moor House, crying for Jane (Bronte, *Eyre* 484), and Rochester is later discovered to have heard her response (Bronte, *Eyre* 515). Hearing the voice confirms Jane’s doubts about marrying St John (Bronte, *Eyre* 484). Burkhart points out an important element: “Rochester’s call to Jane through the midnight miles was “the work of nature. She [nature] was roused, and did—no miracle—but her best”” (Burkhart 178). The latter quote from *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, *Eyre* 484) seems to demonstrate that St John has been wrong with regard to the intentions of nature for Jane’s destiny.

Interestingly, nature is here again personified as a female, probably Mother Nature. Thus, in its most benevolent manifestation and almost as a character in its own right, nature seems to intervene, saving Jane from a path of apparent self-destruction and thus considerably changing the course of *Jane Eyre*.

2.5. Nature and Landscape in Ferndean

Only a small part of *Jane Eyre* is set at Ferndean, Rochester's new place of habitation. On account of its natural surroundings and the night-fall, Jane has initial difficulties of finding the manor-house. As the narrator says, "you could see nothing of it, so *thick* and *dark* grew the timber of the *gloomy* wood about it. I found myself [...] in the *twilight* of *close-ranked* trees [...] a grass-grown track [...] stretched on and on [...] The *darkness* of natural as well as sylvan *dusk* gathered over me" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 496). We should again consider the possibility of pathetic fallacy – this time, perhaps, with regard to Rochester's situation. The remoteness and concealment of the house in the thickness of the forest quite clearly reflects the character's choice to turn his back on society; as Mary, for instance, asserts, "he refuses everybody" (Bronte, *Eyre* 499). The rainy, dreary weather and the darkness could reflect Rochester's undoubtedly pathetic inner and physical state, and the all-pervasive darkness in particular may be meant to introduce the theme of blindness.

Jane arrives near the manor-house with the dusk falling: "on an evening marked by the characteristics of *sad* sky, cold gale, and [...] rain" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 497). Next day, the dreary weather has given way to a much more beautiful outdoor scene, so Jane and Rochester are able spend a lot of time in nature (Bronte, *Eyre* 507). Jane intimates the details of the scene to blind Rochester: "*cheerful* fields [...] I described to him [...] how the flowers and hedges looked *refreshed*; how *sparkingly blue* was the sky" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 507). This is another of the many descriptions of an Eden-like landscape we find in *Jane Eyre* (cf. sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4), which is all the more surprising as Ferndean is originally mentioned as an unhealthy place (cf. section 3.5). The change of weather seems to be in analogy with a radical change in Jane and Rochester's situation. They are together again and are glad in each other's company (Bronte, *Eyre* 507). With Jane at his side, Rochester has other subjects to occupy his mind than his gloomy thoughts and physical defects. Now and in the years to follow she can even compensate his blindness by describing the natural beauties: "I was then his vision [...] He saw nature [...] never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words, the effect of field, tree, [...] river, cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of the weather round us" (Bronte, *Eyre* 519). Once more (cf. sections 2.3, 2.4), a scene of proposal takes place outdoors, in an Eden-like landscape (Bronte, *Eyre* 513).

2.6 Conclusion

As we have seen, nature and landscape are described in various different ways in *Jane Eyre*, very often having symbolic functions. At Gateshead, the weather is *always* uncongenial and often creates a Gothic atmosphere, mirroring the suffering of Jane and the Reeds at the place. Frequently, rain and storm are mentioned. Interestingly, very little is said about the landscape surrounding Gateshead Hall, and most of it is left to our imagination. In Lowood, nature is utterly hostile and life-threatening, showing itself from an absolutely merciless side, taking innocent lives. The inclemency of the winter symbolises the emotional coldness of the authorities towards the children. Spring is even worse than winter, and its beauties create irony, as only some children benefit them, while others, in stark contrast, fall ill and pass away. At Thornfield, Jane is presented with a much more congenial landscape and nature, which she mostly enjoys. She even relishes winter, which strongly contrasts with her experience of the season in Lowood. In two early passages, in contrast to the description at Gateshead, the reader is already given an overview of the beautiful landscape, and at various other points, detailed information on the fertile and at times Eden-like landscape is given. Jane and Rochester's love is mirrored by many of these descriptions. Nature, however, is not always congenial at Thornfield, although rain, for instance, is mentioned far less often than at Gateshead. In correspondence to the immoral marriage proposal and Jane's disappointment, for example, the weather becomes inclement. In Morton and its neighbourhood, nature again seems to have contradictory sides. On the one hand, the weather and landscape are sometimes absolutely hostile, especially when the cold almost kills homeless Jane. On the other hand, nature is often described and interpreted as beautiful, despite its barrenness, and it is here that Mother Nature, its most positive representation, is most often referred to, keeping Jane from making the wrong decision. In Ferndean, the atmosphere in nature is at first dark and dismal, mirroring Rochester's terrible state, yet because of Jane's arrival, there is an effective turn from darkness to brightness and a sense of Paradise.

Thus, we may conclude that landscape and nature have various, often contradictory, roles in the work. At Gateshead and Lowood, nature is always, in one way or another, gloomy or dangerous, while at Thornfield, Ferndean and in the parish of Morton it also has very agreeable and, more than once, Eden-like sides, which we have to see in stark contrast to those which are hostile and life-threatening. Pathetic fallacy is employed in all five

places and is very frequently created, yet there are also instances when beautiful nature does not correspond with the inner life or outward situation of any of the characters, or where it ironically contradicts these. Often Jane is fascinated with and soothed by nature and conditions of the weather, yet she is also often threatened or frightened by them. There are also some instances – for example, with regard to the storm at Gateshead – where she clearly both admires and fears sublime scenes of nature, which indicates the strongly Gothic quality of some of the passages in *Jane Eyre*.

3. The Description of Houses in *Jane Eyre*

As Theuer says, “Different types of houses serve as setting in the novel” (Theuer 20). In her discussion of *Jane Eyre*, Theuer strongly focuses on the houses in the book, and she will therefore be quoted several times here.

3.1. Gateshead Hall

Gateshead Hall is seemingly a luxurious-looking house, the representative seat of the Reed family. Theuer remarks on Charlotte Brontë’s attention to detail with regard to the description of rooms in *Jane Eyre* (cf. Theuer 19). At Gateshead Hall as well as at the other four houses we will be discussing, however, some places are focussed on more than others by the narrator. For a reason we shall come to, the frequently mentioned drawing-room is never described in great detail. The red-room, in contrast, is described in a very detailed manner. The nursery and the breakfast-room, the latter of which seems to serve as a sort of lesser drawing-room and a reception room, are described and mentioned a few times. When Jane enters Mrs Reed’s bedroom as an adult, this, too, is described.

The Presentation of the Hall and its Social Spaces

Considering the information that places like the red-room are scarcely used, the house appears to be spacious. Mr Lloyd calls Gateshead Hall “a splendid place” (Brontë, *Eyre* 29), but as an outsider he has hardly any insight into what goes on in the house and cannot know why Jane cannot appreciate the place’s superficial beauties and why she dislikes the place: “The same *hostile* roof now again rose before me” [emphasis added] (Brontë, *Eyre* 262). Any sign of luxury found at Gateshead Hall most strongly contrasts with Jane’s situation at the place. The atmosphere at Gateshead Hall is one of revolting injustice, hostility and cruelty (cf. section 2.1) as well as claustrophobia and ghostliness. Theuer asserts that, “generally, the description of a house in country house novels is used predominantly to mirror the owner” (Theuer 66). Mrs Reed, the mistress of Gateshead Hall, is clearly one of the most disagreeable characters in the whole book. Of course, as we shall see, also Jane’s situation and psychological world are reflected in the portrayal.

Of course, these strongly negative aspects of the place mainly hurt Jane. For instance, she receives neither the literal nor the metaphorical warmth Mrs Reed extends to her own children in places like the drawing-room (Brontë, *Eyre* 9). The drawing-room is

presented as the centre of family life; not being counted as one of Mrs Reed's children, Jane is never actually allowed to enter the drawing-room, which she consequently never describes, except in the beginning, where "a sofa by the fireside" (Bronte, *Eyre* 9) is mentioned. Later, Jane is also excluded from the joyous festivities in the room, but the existence of musical instruments in the room is suggested (Bronte, *Eyre* 35). These hints enhance the impression that this is one of the very few cosy places at the Hall – though for Jane, ironically, it signifies a place of exclusion and rejection. Instead of being admitted to the drawing-room, Jane is in the beginning obliged to repair to a smaller, lonely place: "A small breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room, I slipped in there" (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). There, she shows her tendency towards further seclusion at the Hall due to the hostility of the others, by isolating herself by sitting at the window-seat, reading (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). However, even there she cannot stay for long, being terrorised by her cousin John (cf. section 2.1).

On the whole, the red-room is described in a very detailed manner on the whole (Bronte, *Eyre* 16-17). The atmosphere of snugness of the drawing-room contrasts with the atmosphere of desertion and acute terror in the red-room. This room has a downright Gothic, spooky air, one of negatively symbolic coldness and silence: "This room was *chill*, because it *seldom had a fire*; it was *silent*, because remote from the nursery and kitchens" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 17). Many objects described contribute to the spooky atmosphere, as, for instance: "curtains of deep *red* damask [...] two large windows, with their *blinds always drawn down* [...] Out [...] *glared white*, the [...] mattresses and pillows" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 17). The indications of darkness create a murky impression, the mentioning of the colour red implies the notion of blood, and that of uncongenial whiteness creates impressions of ghostliness. Of all the rooms at Gateshead, this makes perhaps the strangest impression, as it is paradoxically both "one of the largest and stateliest chambers" (Bronte, *Eyre* 17) and "a spare chamber, very seldom slept in" (Bronte, *Eyre* 16). This can be explained by the mentioning of the "secret of the red-room" (Bronte, *Eyre* 17), namely that it is haunted or that there is a lot of superstition connected with it (Bronte, *Eyre* 17). Confined within these four walls, "at night [...] alone without a candle" (Bronte, *Eyre* 28), Jane does, indeed, at one point believe that she sees the ghost and, as she is absolutely terrified, begs Mrs. Reed and her servants to release her from this dreadful prison. This modest wish, however, is not granted her there and then; and, thus, overwhelmed by fear and on her own again, she

faints (Bronte, *Eyre* 15-22). This is perhaps the strongest incidence of terror in the whole novel. Her devastating experience in the red-room prompts Miss Eyre to leave Gateshead in hope of a better life.

Treated even worse after her fit, Jane is even more strongly separated from the rest of the family. Mrs Reed's reactions include "appointing me a small closet to sleep in by myself, condemning me to take my meals alone, and pass all my time in the nursery, while my cousins were constantly in the drawing-room" (Bronte, *Eyre* 33). Thus, Jane is once more confined and separated from the others, while they have fun (Bronte, *Eyre* 34). When the evening comes, the nursery is referred to as a "shadowy room" (Bronte, *Eyre* 35), where Jane, traumatised from the red-room incident, seems to fear ghosts to lurk. Cold and darkness plague Jane at night, prompting her to hasten to her crib as soon as the fire has burnt down (Bronte, *Eyre* 35). The low temperature and the gloominess may also be in correspondence with the coldness with which Jane is treated as well as with her consequent misery, which strongly contrasts with the warm and cosy drawing-room. However, Jane later wins a power struggle, literally standing her ground, refusing to leave the breakfast-room even though Mrs Reed tells her to go back to the nursery (Bronte, *Eyre* 43). Jane opposes confinement (Bronte, *Eyre* 43-45) as part of her rebellion against the cruel oppressor.

Years later, when returning to Gateshead, Miss Eyre enters her aunt's bedroom, which is described. Jane remembers dreadful experiences the protagonist still associates with it and with objects she recognises: "the *well-known* room, to which I had so often been summoned for chastisement and reprimand [...] the footstool, at which I had a hundred times been sentenced to kneel [...] a *certain* corner near [...] a once dreaded switch [...] *used to lurk* there, waiting to *leap out imp-like* and lace my quivering palm and shrinking neck [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 265). Here, the object with which Jane was beaten is described as if it were a living being, a deceitful little monster.

Mrs Reed's state of decline is reflected in the room: "the fire was *dying* in the grate" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 273). Her social space is now restricted to the sick-room: now she is the one who is confined and forsaken: "the very servants paid her but a remittent attention: the hired nurse [...] would slip out of the room whenever she could" (Bronte, *Eyre* 173). On the other hand, the ship of Gateshead Hall being without a

captain, Jane is now relatively free to move about in the Hall and is not separated from Eliza and Georgiana, whose company is now more often described, although Jane still often isolates herself from them by choice: “I used to take a seat apart from them, near the window” (Bronte, *Eyre* 268).

The space of the servants is seldom focussed on or even mentioned, and the Leavens’ living in a different house suggests a general spatial remoteness of the servants from the Reeds (Bronte, *Eyre* 181). As a child, Jane is neither in the drawing-room society nor goes to “the lively regions of the kitchen and housekeeper’s room” (Bronte, *Eyre* 35) or the “porter’s lodge” (Bronte, *Eyre* 37); she seems neither part of the circle of the servants nor of that of the Reeds. As an adult, however, she not only has the freedom to associate with the Reeds but also enters the sphere of the Leavens at the lodge, which seems to have an agreeable atmosphere of warmth and cleanliness: “very *clean* and *neat* [...] the floor was *spotless* [...] Bessie sat on the *hearth* [...] I must be served at the *fireside*, she said” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 261-262). This description suggests that the Leavens are unlike the Reed family, whose disbanding is mirrored by the impending loss of the Hall (Bronte, *Eyre* 267), as Theuer points out (Theuer 23).

3.2. Lowood

Arriving in Lowood, Jane remarks the largeness of the place and is not sure if it really is one unit: “There was now visible a house *or houses* – for the building spread far” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 51). However, only a few rooms are ever mentioned, although most of those referred to are described. The schoolroom, the refectory and the bedroom are frequently mentioned and are also described. We are also given information on two of Miss Temple’s rooms. Jane never enters the place where the typhus patients lie during the epidemic, the fever-room, and there is no information on what it looks like.

The Presentation of the House

From the outside, Jane describes the house as follows: “a large building, half of which seemed gray and old, the other half quite new. The new part [...] was lit by mullioned and latticed windows, which gave it a church-like aspect” (Bronte, *Eyre* 58). “Church-like” (Bronte, *Eyre* 58) hints at the profession of the manager, the cleric Brocklehurst. “A stone tablet” (Bronte, *Eyre* 58) tells us that the place where most of the action is set “was rebuilt [...] by Naomi Brocklehurst” (Bronte, *Eyre* 58), which shows the Brocklehursts’ tendency towards self-glorification. Mr Brocklehurst himself has a high opinion of the institution. The so-called “charity-school”, however, is really a place of immense misery, as it is controlled by hateful and cruel people.

Theuer says about the description of Lowood that “all the spaces we encounter [...] are uniformly utilitarian and cheerless” (Theuer 23). Indeed, the place as a building is a lot different from the luxurious, ornately decorated houses of Gateshead and Thornfield Hall (cf. sections 3.1, 3.3). The architecture shows both Mr Brocklehurst’s unfeeling heart and his purpose for the school and its pupils: he makes them suffer life-threatening privations at the school (cf. sections 2.2, 4). Thormählen rightly states about Brocklehurst, “he is an oppressor and a humbug, a force for evil in an office which needs the best of men and demands the best from them” (Thormählen 185). She calls him “a peculiarly destructive and repulsive character” (Thormählen 185), saying that all other priests in Bronte novels, though many of these are defective characters, “are not in the same monster category as Mr Brocklehurst” (Thormählen 185). Mr Brocklehurst is an utter hypocrite, expecting the children to be self-sacrificing and to put themselves into great dangers of health, just to follow the perverse ideology he promulgates (Bronte, *Eyre* 75). The sparse look and cramped environment of such a “hell-hole” reflect his expecting the children to do with

too little space, appalling privations and without any form of beauty. On the other hand, he himself dwells, as Helen informs Jane, “at a large hall” (Bronte, *Eyre* 60) (cf. section 2.2).

This shows in the descriptions of the house and different rooms. The house is an “irregular building” (Bronte, *Eyre* 52) and the furnishing is very simple and minimalist. The schoolroom, where the pupils gather, study, pray and read from the Bible, is gloomy and insufficiently heated, like the nursery at Gateshead (cf. section 3.1): “the *cold* and *dimly-lit* schoolroom” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 54). After long marches in the extreme cold (cf. section 2.2) to and from the church on Sundays in winter, the insufficiency of the hearths in this room is felt especially keenly (Bronte, *Eyre* 72). The refectory, too, is described in negative terms: “a great, *low-ceiled, gloomy* room; on two long tables smoked basins of something hot, which, however, to my dismay, sent forth an odour *far from inviting*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 55). The refectory is introduced when the famished children are served an inedible breakfast there (Bronte, *Eyre* 54-55) (cf. section 2.2). After the unsuccessful efforts of eating, “the refectory was *evacuated*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 55). The choice of the word emphasised here stresses the infamous role of the refectory, suggesting that it is a place one has to flee from; this is one of the most negative dining rooms in world literature. The bedroom, although it is large, is described as murky and packed: “like the schoolroom, I saw it was very long [...] the long rows of beds, each of which was quickly filled with *two occupants* [...] the *single* light [...] a *rushlight* or two [...] there was *but one basin to six girls*, on the stands down the middle of the room” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 53). Davies comments that a “rushlight” (Bronte, *Eyre* 53) is “*gloomy* light given off by ‘dips’ with wicks of rushpith” [emphasis added] (Davies, “Notes” 539). The cold in the bedroom is a big problem, also for reasons of hygiene: once, “the water in the pitchers was frozen” (Bronte, *Eyre* 63, cf. sections 2.2, 4). In the shadowy bedroom, the pupils are huddled together. There is very little privacy for them: they are obliged to spend all of their time in huge crowds. There are definitely too few facilities and too little space for too many children. The darkness and coldness in this narrow space, which are frequently mentioned or indicated, apart from speaking for themselves, symbolise the cruelty, emotional coldness and parsimony of the vile authorities of Lowood (cf. sections 2.2, 4), as well as the dismal thoughts and feelings of the pupils at the place.

The only places in the building in which Brocklehurst's dictatorship is less strongly felt are Miss Temple's parlour and room. Theuer remarks about Miss Temple's parlour that, in the narrative, it "is the first room in which Jane is ever made welcome" (Theuer 23). The place where Jane is received by Miss Temple on arrival is probably her own parlour. Although the lighting is sparse, it is not furnished in a minimalist but in a rather agreeable way: "there was no candle, but the uncertain light from the hearth showed by intervals, *papered* walls, *carpets*, curtains, *shining* mahogany furniture: it was a parlour, not so spacious or splendid as the drawing-room at Gateshead, but *comfortable* enough [...] a picture on the wall" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 51-52). Later, Jane and Helen are invited to this room, which is far off from the pupils' area: "we had to thread some intricate passages, and mount a staircase" (Bronte, *Eyre* 83). Jane seems to like it, as some of the words indicate: "a *good fire* [...] *cheerful* [...] a low *arm-chair* on one side of the *hearth*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 83). The fire is agreeable to Jane, as it is seemingly warmer than any other fire in the building. Its pleasantness to Jane is remarked again and seen as one of the reasons for Helen's fiery passion at the place (Bronte, *Eyre* 86). The arm-chair indicates the permission to relax for once. The room where Helen dies and Jane bids her farewell (Bronte, *Eyre* 96-98) is probably her bedroom: "Miss Temple's bed [...] a little crib" (Bronte, *Eyre* 96).

Social Spaces

Macpherson refers to Lowood school as "a prison" (Macpherson 97). Indeed, throughout the winter and early spring the narrator focuses on, the pupils are confined to their sphere, similarly to the way Jane is confined to certain places at Gateshead (cf. section 3.1): indoors, it seems that they hardly stay in any other place apart from the schoolroom, the bedrooms and the refectory. Going to church on Sundays is strictly obligatory for the pupils, even though terrible suffering and acute dangers to health result from these trips (cf. section 2.2). The separation of certain children from the others (on account of the behaviour they are alleged to have shown or mistakes they are alleged to have made) is, indeed, a frequent practice in Lowood, similar to Jane's maltreatment at Gateshead (cf. section 3.1): Helen's treatment by Miss Scatcherd during the history class is one of the examples for this (Bronte, *Eyre* 64). This reflects the school's cruel way to deal with pupils: "Brocklehurst enforces a theological 'separation' between the girls [...] a practice observed in extreme Evangelical circles" (Davies, *Notes* 542). On the day of his visit, he says of Jane: "this girl [...] is a little castaway – not a member of the true flock, but

evidently an interloper and an alien [...] avoid her company [...] *shut her out* from your converse” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 78-79). Also, children are often bullied into standing in the middle of the schoolroom for humiliation (as in Bronte, *Eyre* 73). All this does not have anything to do with the teachings of Christ.

We do not learn much about the teachers’ accommodation, as Jane hardly ever leaves the space assigned to the pupils, yet Miss Temple’s parlour and bedroom are described. Mr Brocklehurst visits the school at times but lives “at a large hall” (Bronte, *Eyre* 60). The indication of the size of Brocklehurst’s mansion implies its stark contrast to the pupils’ cramped and confined way of living and further emphasises Brocklehurst’s vice of hypocrisy. When Mr Brocklehurst’s relations visit the school, “seats of honour at the top of the room” (Bronte, *Eyre* 77) are assigned to them in the schoolroom.

As the shocking epidemic strikes Lowood, which will be commented on in a more detailed manner in another section (cf. section 2.2), it “transformed the seminary into a hospital” (Bronte, *Eyre* 91). The house and its social spaces are soon very much changed: “classes were broken up, rules relaxed [...] Miss Temple [...] lived in the sickroom, never quitting it except to snatch a few hours’ rest at night” (Bronte, *Eyre* 91). The house being “the seat of contagion” (Bronte, *Eyre* 92), most people apart from the sick and those attending them seem to avoid it as best they can (Bronte, *Eyre* 91-92, cf. sections 2.2, 4). Most of the sick “*inmates* of Lowood” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 92), however, are confined, more than before, as the highlighted word also indicates: they have to stay in the fever-room and cannot usually leave the building. Helen, however, seems to be the most isolated person: she “was not [...] in the hospital portion of the house with the fever patients; for her complaint was consumption” (Bronte, *Eyre* 93). Helen is staying in Miss Temple’s room (Bronte, *Eyre* 95), which implies that at least the superintendent takes special care of her. The school is now a place of terrible suffering and sickness as well as miserable doom, strongly contrasting with the outdoors (cf. section 2.2, 4): “disease had thus become an inhabitant of Lowood, and death its frequent visitor [...] there was gloom and fear within its walls [...] its rooms and passages steamed with hospital smells, the drug and pastille striving vainly to overcome the effluvia of mortality” (Bronte, *Eyre* 92).

As Theuer puts it, “Lowood school [...] is given a second and much better lease of life by being rebuilt on a different site” (Theuer 23). The rumour of the devastating epidemic causes the outside world to discover the shocking truth of the circumstances under which the children live (Bronte, *Eyre* 99), and, along with other improvements, “several wealthy and benevolent individuals [...] subscribed largely for the erection of a more convenient building in a better situation” (Bronte, *Eyre* 99). The abandonment of the old building dominated by the Brocklehursts reflects Mr Brocklehurst’s loss of absolute dictatorship over Lowood school (Bronte, *Eyre* 99-100).

3.3. Thornfield Hall

Thornfield Hall, more clearly than Gateshead, is a very typical English country house. Girouard asserts that the landowner’s “houses were designed to go with their image. The desired effect could be produced in a number of ways” (Girouard 272). As Girouard states, “originally”, country houses “were power houses – the houses of a ruling class [...] The size and pretensions of such houses were an accurate index of the ambitions – or lack of them – of their owners” (Girouard 2-3). Thus, in a sense, a country house mirrored its proprietor.

Viewing it from the outside, Jane gets an early and rather informative impression of Thornfield Hall: “I looked up and surveyed the front of the mansion. It was three stories high, of proportions not vast, though considerable; a gentleman’s manor-house, not a nobleman’s seat: *battlements* round the top gave it a *picturesque* look [...] gray front” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 118). Thornfield Hall is, thus, a big, impressive building, which looks attractive and has a certain medieval air.

Considering the vast number of rooms mentioned in the course of the narrative, we get the impression that Thornfield Hall must be the biggest house in the entire novel. There are more than one drawing-room and several other representative places, and the many bedrooms are enough to accommodate the residents and several guests, while some rooms are conspicuously unused. Unlike Gateshead (cf. section 3.1), the servants all seem to have been accommodated there. Compared to the four other houses, this one may seem vast and towering, also because from the first floor to “the leads” (Bronte, *Eyre* 125), a great number of rooms, hallways, and other places in the house are mentioned by the narrator. Several of these are described, more than one in a very detailed manner. The

parlour, the main drawing-room, Jane's room, the dining-room, the library, and some of the third-storey rooms are described already on the first days of Jane's stay. By and by, descriptions of several other rooms, such as Mr Rochester's bedroom (Bronte, *Eyre* 174-175), are added.

The Presentation of Thornfield Hall

Jane, understandably, strongly prefers Thornfield Hall to Gateshead Hall and Lowood school. While she occasionally interprets it as murky and depressing – for instance, she once calls it a “gloomy house” (Bronte, *Eyre* 137) – she can also be absolutely appreciative of it: “It seems to me a *splendid* mansion, sir” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). Her master attempts an explanation of the latter judgement: “The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes” (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). Rochester, perhaps because he knows its dark secrets, seems to have a somewhat different view of the Hall, although he, too, is ambivalent: “I like Thornfield, its antiquity, its retirement [...] its gray façade, and lines of dark windows [...] and yet how long have I abhorred the very thought of it, shunned it like a great plague-house? How I do still abhor–“ (Bronte, *Eyre* 167). He also says, “that house is a mere *dungeon*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). The word “dungeon” (Bronte, *Eyre* 249) strongly hints at Bertha's imprisonment at the place. This secret the house holds, along with older issues connected with it, such as the death of his brother (Bronte, *Eyre* 149-150), seem to trouble Rochester. For Jane, the Hall at times represents an unbearable kind of domesticity: “a ‘*too easy chair*’” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 137). This quote includes a reference to “Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* [...] ‘Stretched on the *rack* of a too-easy chair’” [emphasis added] (Davies, *Notes* 547). Sometimes, images of imprisonment are brought up, such as: “rayless *cells*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 137). In a sense, Jane, too, feels imprisoned, being dependent and, in the beginning at least, lacking excitement.

Davies asserts that “Charlotte Bronte distinguishes between the ‘picturesque’ and the sublime. The Brontes owned a copy of Edmund Burke's *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*” (Davies, “Notes” 544). Burke's concepts of the sublime (or great) on the one hand and the beautiful on the other hand are different. For instance, he claims, “Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great rugged and negligent [...] beauty should not be obscure;

the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate, the great ought to be solid, and even massive” (Burke 172).

Indeed, one aspect of Thornfield Hall is its sublime and Gothic atmosphere. Bertha’s madness and the secret of her imprisonment but also the delay of the revelation of this mystery and the hint at possible other secrets (Bronte, *Eyre* 167) strongly indicate the Gothic genre. Also, the description of parts of the house suggests Gothic qualities. Architectural medievalism, eeriness, and sublimity are suggested by the description of the stairs and gallery: “the staircase window was *high* [...] both it and the long gallery [...] looked as if they belonged to a *church* [...] A very *chill* and *vault-like* air [...] suggesting *cheerless* ideas of *space* and *solitude*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 116). At different points (as in Bronte, *Eyre* 137), murkiness is indicated, and there are hints at the age of the house (as in Bronte, *Eyre* 125) and an atmosphere of claustrophobia. Included in a description of the third storey are hints at Bertha’s imprisonment, both in the intertextual reference to the traditional tale of *Bluebeard* (Bronte, *Eyre* 126) and in statements such as: “I by no means coveted a night’s repose on one of those wide and heavy beds: *shut in*, some of them, with doors of oak” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 125). Here, Jane may subconsciously be aware of Rochester’s first wife’s presence but may also be reminded of her own confinement to the red-room and other places at Gateshead (cf. section 3.1). These dark and frightening places seem to at once reflect Bertha’s horrible state of mind and Rochester’s sardonic and grim qualities.

On the other hand, the Hall also has a lot of features that, in contrast, appear colourful, bright, fancy, and less Gothic-looking, as shows, for instance, in the description of the dining-room: “a large, *stately* apartment, with *purple* chairs and curtains, a Turkey carpet [...] one vast window *rich* in *stained glass* [...] vases of *purple* spar” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 123). “An immense easy-chair” (Bronte, *Eyre* 152) and “a sofa” (Bronte, *Eyre* 152) indicate cosiness, while largeness and luxury, too, are characteristic: “the *lustre* [...] *festal* [...] the purple curtains hung *rich* and *ample* before the *lofty* window and *loftier* arch” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 153). The drawing-room, too, to Jane is very impressive: “I thought I caught a glimpse of a *fairy* place” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 123). The impression of the splendour of these rooms is strengthened by being seen through Jane’s eyes (Bronte, *Eyre* 123), which are used to lesser architectural beauties at Gateshead and to utter lack thereof in Lowood school (cf. sections 3.1, 3.2).

The inhabitants seem to take care not to let the most representative rooms appear too old-fashioned (Bronte, *Eyre* 125). On more than one occasion, the word “stately” is used to describe the more graceful places (also, for instance, in Bronte, *Eyre* 117). The less Gothic-looking areas of Thornfield Hall seem to mirror another side of Rochester, or rather a whole bundle of character traits, namely his air of majestic authority and his capabilities for kindness and romantic feelings, which shine through every now and then. The two aspects of Thornfield Hall may also reflect Rochester’s two conflicting sides: although he is a noble person at heart, his unfortunate situation and unhappy past cause him to be rough and act immorally (Bronte, *Eyre* 172).

By the description of the place after the terrible fire, a stark contrast with former stateliness is created: “I looked with timorous joy towards a *stately house*; I saw a blackened *ruin*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 489). This discovery takes both Jane and the unaccustomed reader by surprise, and so the contrast between before and after the fire is even more noticeable: what was once august and imposing about the house is now no more. Ruined and abandoned, the place represents anything but the majestic splendour of the Rochesters. Peters refers to “the melodramatic destruction of Thornfield”, saying that, “Rochester’s punishment has less to it of romance than of the Bible, where terrible and often incomprehensible chastisement is meted out by an avenging God” (Peters 147). As Theuer says, “Just as Gateshead passes out of the family completely, so here the next step is the destruction of the house by fire” (Theuer 23). Booth calls Rochester a “literary martyr to the cause of humbling and reforming men” (Booth 152).

Social Spaces

The assignment of social spaces within a house like Thornfield Hall, of course, depends on the master and on the age. Girouard says that, “a Victorian duke would have found it inconceivable to be waited on by servants who served him on bended knee; but he would have been equally appalled by the idea of playing poker dice in the drawing room with his butler” (Girouard 11). In the novel, there does seem to be a spatial separation between the different social classes.

We often find Mr Rochester in the most spacious and magnificent places, such as the drawing-room and the dining-room. He mostly takes his meals separate from Adèle and Mrs Fairfax and somewhat keeps them at a distance. However, he shows his sociable side in seeking their and Jane’s company (as early on in Bronte, *Eyre* 140) and in inviting fashionable society to the Hall (Bronte, *Eyre* 190). These guests are to sleep in “the best bedrooms” (Bronte, *Eyre* 190) and during the day stay mostly in the splendid rooms of Thornfield Hall, including “more specialised rooms like the billiard room” (Theuer 22).

While Bertha is hidden in the shadows in the third storey, Mrs Fairfax’ characteristic social space is that of her parlour, although as a housekeeper she can be found in many different places in the house. Theuer hints at the positive impression of the place (Theuer 23). In different ways, the parlour and its description mirror the old lady’s personality: “*double illumination* of fire and candle [...] a *snug, small* room; a round table by a *cheerful fire*: an *arm-chair* [...] the beau-ideal of *domestic comfort* [...] no grandeur to overwhelm” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 113). Via the description of this room – namely by its wording – the character of Mrs. Fairfax is strongly indicated while her social status is hinted at. The room is very bright, and an agreeable source of warmth is mentioned twice, which indicates Fairfax’ good-natured quality. Her domestic and calm nature is hinted at by the words “snug”, “arm-chair”, and “domestic comfort” (Bronte, *Eyre* 113). However, the room does not appear majestic like the dining-room or the drawing-room, as Mrs Fairfax is not as high up on the social ladder as Rochester.

Jane’s room is “of *small dimensions*, and furnished in ordinary *modern* style” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 116). This little bedroom of hers provides safety, as she may fasten her door so as to fortify it against any assault (Bronte, *Eyre* 180). Jane is fond of the room, which, in contrast to the school (cf. section 3.2), does not seem to be furnished in a

minimalist manner: “*gay* blue chintz window curtains [...] *papered* walls and a *carpeted* floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster of Lowood” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 116). Jane also seems not to suffer as much from cold and darkness (Bronte, *Eyre* 172) as she used to, for instance, in the nursery at Gateshead (cf. section 3.1).

Jane, Mrs Fairfax and Adèle all have a rather unclear social status at Thornfield, as neither of them are “common” servants nor unambiguously part of the master’s family; consequently, they often spend time together. Apart from the schoolroom, Jane and Adèle, too, often use Mrs Fairfax’s parlour, especially as a dining room: “I and my pupil dined as usual in Mrs Fairfax’s parlour” (Bronte, *Eyre* 140). On the whole, their relatively high social status seems to be indicated by their proximity to Rochester: for instance, Grace Poole says to Jane that “Mrs Fairfax’s room and yours are the nearest to master’s” (Bronte, *Eyre* 179). In contrast to her situation at Gateshead (cf. section 3.1) Jane has the opportunity to go to a variety of places in the house. For instance, she receives an invitation to the drawing-room on the day after Rochester’s arrival (Bronte, *Eyre* 140), whereas access to the drawing-room is denied her at Gateshead. Her sphere, however, also changes at Thornfield Hall. For instance, During the preparations for the arrival of Rochester’s guests, Jane, rather unusually, for a while works only in the storeroom (Bronte, *Eyre* 191). Also, when the guests are there, Jane’s assigned place, though in the same room as Rochester and his guests, is conspicuously set apart from the master and his company: “I hied me to the window-recess” (Bronte, *Eyre* 312).

Not a lot is said about the social space of the servants. Once, Mrs Fairfax makes the vague statement that “they occupy a range of smaller apartments to the back” (Bronte, *Eyre* 125), and Grace Poole says that they could not have heard anything on the night of the fire in Rochester’s room (Bronte, *Eyre* 179), so their bedrooms must be far away from the master. The cook’s words to Grace – “Mrs Poole, [...] the servant’s dinner will soon be ready: will you come down?” (Bronte, *Eyre* 181) – indicate that they have at least some of their meals somewhere on the first floor. Again, obviously, they, rather than characters higher up on the social ladder, can be found in places of housework like the kitchen and the storeroom. All this suggests spatial remoteness and reflects social distance from their master.

3.4. Moor House

The Presentation of Moor House

Not very many rooms at Moor House are described. However, for once, the kitchen of a house is thoroughly described, and in a relatively detailed manner. This is rare for 19th-century British literature. Also, there are a lengthy description of the parlour and perfunctory ones of the bedroom where Jane recovers from her misadventures. Other rooms, such as Mary and Diana's rooms, are described only after a lot has changed in Moor House, mostly with regard to the rearrangements that have been made.

Interestingly, although there is a drawing-room in the house (Bronte, *Eyre* 461), it is hardly ever even mentioned and, in contrast to its equivalents at Gateshead and Thornfield Hall (cf. sections 3.1, 3.3), does not really have a function in the novel.

Like Thornfield Hall, Moor House – also known as Marsh End (Bronte, *Eyre* 392) – is an old mansion, as Hannah says: “old Mr Rivers lived here, and his father, and grandfather, and gurt (great) grandfather afore him [...] Marsh End had belonged to the Rivers ever since it was a house [...] it was [...] aboon two hundred years old” (Bronte, *Eyre* 392, 394). As Hannah indicates (Bronte, *Eyre* 394), this, at least in comparison to the equally aristocratic Thornfield Hall (cf. section 3.3), is “a small, *humble* place” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 394). Both the information and formulation of this quote may indicate St John's role of the self-denying servant of God, as well as the situation of “the financially straitened Rivers” (Davies, *Notes* 571). The family, however, “are old landed gentry” (Davies, “Notes” 571). All this is reflected in descriptions of the house and its rooms. The description of the little parlour, for instance, indicates the relatively limited financial means but also the old aristocratic legacy of the Rivers along with the old age of the house: “The parlour was a rather *small* one, very *plainly* furnished [...] *antique* portraits of the men and women of other days decorated the *stained walls* [...] an *ancient* set of china [...] no superfluous ornament [...] everything [...] looked at once *well worn* and *well saved*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 395-396). These aspects are also reflected in a comment of the narrator's on the building as a whole: “I, too, in the *gray, small, antique* structure – with its *low* roof, [...] its *mouldering* walls [...] found a charm both potent and permanent” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 402).

The kitchen, a scene of cosy domesticity, is introduced early on (Bronte, *Eyre* 381-382). Theuer says, “The kitchens in the novel [...] are all rather attractive places” (Theuer 23).

In this case at least, this is certainly true. Agreeable images are attached to the kitchen: its hearth is often mentioned (as in Bronte, *Eyre* 381), and the place is referred to as “that *clean, bright* kitchen” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 386). Hannah’s rocking chair “on the hearth-stone” (Bronte, *Eyre* 391) adds to this picture of cosiness and warmth. Of the five houses discussed here, Moor House is the only place where the kitchen has such a central meaning. Its agreeableness may reflect the “warm” welcome Jane is given and introduces the idyll of togetherness and fraternity under this roof.

Elements of the exterior of Moor House are described already when Jane reaches it at night and can discern only dim aspects (Bronte, *Eyre* 381). Through “a very small latticed window” (Bronte, *Eyre* 381), Jane also looks into the house. Even before knowing what place this is, then, Jane already gets an impression of it. This is a very ingenious way of introducing a house. Miss Eyre first gets to know Moor House as life-saving shelter (cf. sections 2.4, 4). She overcomes nature’s obstacles on the way to the gate of Moor House, but not at once those of civilization – as Hannah, like most other locals, is mistrustful, closing the door on her (Bronte, *Eyre* 385). However, after St John’s intervention and Jane’s entry, she seems to soon feel welcome: “Somehow, now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house [...] I felt no longer an outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world” (Bronte, *Eyre* 387). Jane fully values the benefits of civilization: “a *warm, dry* bed” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 388), although she stays “in a small room and in a narrow bed” (Bronte, *Eyre* 389).

The situation of Moor House in which Jane gets to know it is one of change and uncertainty for the future of the building: the father of the family died recently (Bronte, *Eyre* 383), while St John has plans for leaving England, and, thus, the loss of Moor House is feared by the sisters (Bronte, *Eyre* 410). Similarly to the situation found on Jane’s return to Gateshead (cf. section 3.1), this fear of loss is accompanied by the dread of the breaking of the family community. A few weeks after Jane’s arrival, “the old grange was abandoned” (Bronte, *Eyre* 412), and Jane lives in a simple cottage in the vicinity. After the heiress Jane has bestowed fortunes on the Rivers, however, the same five people who left Moor House return to it months later. Before they are all reunited, the place is improved by Jane and Hannah. To begin with, Jane wants “to *clean down* Moor House from chamber to cellar” (Bronte, *Eyre* 450). The two words highlighted in the original text may hint at a possible symbolic function, namely the mirroring of Jane’s

partly successful fight against misery and low spirits in the family, as she rescues the Rivers from a precarious situation and commits herself as a sister. All the improvements of Moor House (Bronte, *Eyre* 452) may mirror the family's new hope and its regained communion and prosperity. According to Theuer, Jane makes changes at Moor House that "are in tune with her character", demonstrating "her romantic appreciation of past times [...] [and] her painter's love of colour" (Theuer 73). Some of the rooms now look agreeably familiar – "the ordinary sitting-room and bed-rooms I left much as they were [...] Diana and Mary would derive more pleasure" (Bronte, *Eyre* 452) –, while others appear pleasurable new: "a spare parlour and bedroom I refurnished entirely [...] they looked fresh without being glaring" (Bronte, *Eyre* 452).

Social Spaces

The only part of servant Hannah's typical social space that is mentioned is the kitchen. However, Mary and Diana "sit in the kitchen sometimes, because at home we like to be *free*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 395). This shows that the boundaries and divisions of caste or social roles in the house, at least in terms of social spaces, are not as strong as those in the places of Gateshead, Lowood, or Thornfield (cf. sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3), and that, in contrast, there is freedom rather than confinement. In this house, social interaction between the servant and any of the other inhabitants, including Jane (Bronte, *Eyre* 393), takes place in the kitchen.

Like at Thornfield (cf. section 3.3), Jane enters the servant's sphere of the kitchen. Very early on, however, Diana states her opinion that this is not the social space of a guest: "you are a visitor, and must go into the parlour" (Bronte, *Eyre* 395). Henceforth, welcomed and gradually accepted as part of the family, Jane usually shares the social space of the Rivers rather than that of Hannah at the house.

The parlour is the place where four people again and again convene, while Jane's room seems to be a place of private, solitary reflection (Bronte, *Eyre* 460). However, St John, who "seemed of a reserved, an abstracted, and even of brooding nature" (Bronte, *Eyre* 404), has the habit of isolating himself even in the parlour: "his *accustomed* window recess" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 453) (cf. sections 3.1, 3.3). The place of the three young women, on the other hand, is "by the table" (Bronte, *Eyre* 510).

3.5 Ferndean Manor-house

The Presentation and Social Spaces of Ferndean

Only very few rooms at Ferndean manor-house are actually described, namely the parlour and the kitchen. The narrator gives a brief description of this house from the outside: “The manor-house of Ferndean was a building of considerable antiquity, *moderate* size, and *no architectural pretensions* [...] The house presented two pointed gables in its front; the windows were [...] *narrow*: the front door was *narrow* too, *one* step led up to it” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 496-497). This description is enough to show the contrast to the big, proud, luxurious house of Thornfield Hall (cf. section 3.3): the highlighted words in particular indicate that Ferndean manor-house is a small and simple-looking building, and consequently rather a humble mansion – home to someone who has forsaken the worldly riches and, more recently, begun to turn to God asking for forgiveness (Bronte, *Eyre* 515). As MacPherson puts it, “What’s left is an unpretentious cottage instead of a gothic mansion with galloping aristocrats” (MacPherson 116). The narrator says about the place that “his [Rochester’s] father had purchased the estate for the sake of game covers” (Bronte, *Eyre* 496). When Jane first sees the place, she can hardly tell the house from its surroundings (Bronte, *Eyre* 497, cf. section 4). At Thornfield, Rochester refers to the manor-house of Ferndean as “even more retired and hidden than this [Thornfield Hall]” (Bronte, *Eyre* 347), a place where he would have accommodated Bertha, “had not a scruple about the *unhealthiness* of the situation [...] made my conscience recoil from the arrangement [...] those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 347). Later, he asks his servant Mary about Jane’s place of accommodation in the house: “Was it dry?” (Bronte, *Eyre* 506). Here is, of course, a parallel to Lowood school and its environs (cf. sections 2.2, 3.2): both places are unhealthy. In this case, it may indicate Rochester’s poor state of physical and inner health.

Among the most important points concerning the place is that of its considerable isolation and neglect: “Ferndean then remained *uninhabited* and *unfurnished*, with the exception of some two or three rooms fitted up for the accommodation of the squire when he went there in the season to shoot [...] The whole looked ‘quite a *desolate* spot.’ It was as *still* as a church on a week-day” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 496-497). This is the perfect place for someone who wants to live in solitude (cf. section 2.5). Though there are spare rooms, housing unexpected guests does not seem easy (Bronte, *Eyre* 499).

As in *Thornfield* and at Moor House (cf. sections 3.3, 3.4), Jane again goes not only to places like her bedroom and the parlour but also to the kitchen of the house, which belongs to the social sphere of the servants Mary and John. Even though we are given little information on this, it seems to be a cosy place like the one at Moor House: “the kitchen, where John now sat by a *good fire*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 498). The parlour at first, in contrast, is a murky place, belonging to the sphere of the then still abjectly grievous Rochester: “The parlour looked *gloomy*: a *neglected* handful of *fire* burnt *low* in the grate” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 499). Jane contributes to alleviating this contrast between pleasantly sufficient and uncongenially little warmth and illumination in the house: “let me leave you an instant to make a better fire, and have the hearth swept up” (Bronte, *Eyre* 503).

3.6. Conclusion

We have discussed many different aspects concerning five houses in *Jane Eyre*. The houses differ greatly in size and nature. In each case, some of the history of the respective place is given, which explains its present situation. Theuer discusses fundamental changes that affect some of the houses (Theuer 23). Indeed, as for the first four houses, loss or abandonment are either impending or actually take place. As for Ferndean, the situation is reversed, as the house is at first in a very neglected state but Jane at least improves the parlour. Moor House is the only example of a house saved from abandonment and decay. Certain rooms in each house are described, while others are merely mentioned. Rooms frequently mentioned or described are drawing-rooms, parlours, bedrooms and kitchens. The portrayal of all five houses “is used predominantly to mirror the owner” (Theuer 66) - that is, something of a proprietor present *or* past -, but we also get many impressions of Jane’s and other character’s situations, traits, or psychological world. On the whole, some rooms are so fundamentally different from others that strong contrasts are created. Some rooms, especially at Gateshead and Thornfield Hall, have a noticeably Gothic quality, while others seem more contemporary and beautiful. Some rooms are very luxurious, while others are extremely simple, coarse, and minimalistically furnished (the latter holds true especially for Lowood school). Some rooms are very agreeable, others are downright disagreeable, and indoor scenes of great convenience contrast in the strongest possible terms with abhorring habitation. The nature of a room or house at large is mirrored by references to such diverse elements as

furniture and decoration (or the lack of these two) as well as temperature, lighting, size, hygienic conditions, or apparent age.

Very frequently, characters are confined to or excluded from certain rooms or a certain social sphere in a house, namely at Gateshead Hall, in Lowood and at Thornfield Hall. Often, these are female characters. At Moor House and Ferndean, however, confinement and exclusion are much less of an issue, and different characters in some ways move about freely in the different spheres of the house. This change may reflect Jane's successes in the struggle for personal freedom. Frequently, the free choice of a social space hints at or emphasises a character's personality or habit, as with St John, who, unsociable and introverted, likes to withdraw to the window-recess. The narrative focuses mainly on the social sphere of the upper and middle class and, at Lowood, of young girls so extremely deprived that they have been made almost classless. However, we are at times also given information on the sphere of the servants, and its description seems important especially with regard to Moor House and Ferndean.

4. The Worlds of the Indoors and Outdoors in *Jane Eyre*

Here, the interplay between the outdoors and the indoors in *Jane Eyre* will be discussed. Also, we will take a look at some of the more important characters with regard to the question whether they approve the domestic world or rather to the outdoors and nature.

The famous first sentence "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day" (Bronte, *Eyre* 9) may already indicate that Gateshead Hall, at least in these early chapters, is secluded from the outside world and thus from nature and its forces. However, although Jane lives in a traumatising environment at Gateshead Hall, the house does keep the threatening aspects of nature from harming her: "to the left were the clear panes of glass, *protecting, but not separating me* from the drear November day" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 10). Thus, Gateshead Hall does provide protection from the hostile weather outside, which, however, is not completely shut out, as it mirrors the development indoors (cf. section 2.1). This also seems to be reflected in the information that there is a "*glass-door*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 46) to the outside world. What is especially interesting about the first of these two quotes is the mentioning of the window's double nature: although it does not appear to cut Jane off from the outside world but gives her a

clear view and thus an opportunity to study the outdoors, it also gives her a considerable amount of shelter.

This need for protection from rain and storm outdoors is exactly what creates an atmosphere of claustrophobia indoors, making it even more difficult for Jane to escape, for instance, John Reed's assaults (cf. sections 2.1, 3.1). At Gateshead, there is disharmony between civilization and nature, a tendency in people to torture plants and a negative view of nature and the outdoors: there is a "cherry-tree *nailed* against the wall" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 37), and when Jane opens a window to feed a bird, Bessie immediately scolds her (Bronte, *Eyre* 37). The relative disregard of the world outdoors at Gateshead and the degree of seclusion at the place (cf. section 2.1) also suggest that the Reed family themselves hate or are not interested in nature. This seems to tie in, for instance, with Mrs Reed's style of bringing Jane up, which very strongly involves the radical suppression of the child's natural impulses (Bronte, *Eyre* 14-15).

As regards Lowood, there seems to be a similar tendency towards seclusion from the outside world, which seems to be suggested both by "the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden" (Bronte, *Eyre* 90) and by the description of the hills at the place in comparison with those viewed from Thornfield Hall (Bronte, *Eyre* 118) (cf. section 2.3). This seclusion serves to conceal from the general public the atrocities that go on behind closed doors. However, it has another dimension, which has something to do with the world view in the house and Mr Brocklehurst's attitude towards nature: When this powerful authority visits the school and criticises Julia's hairstyle, Miss Temple defends her by saying, "Julia's hair curls naturally" (Bronte, *Eyre* 76). Mr Brocklehurst, however, replies, "Naturally! Yes, but *we are not to conform to nature* [...] I have a master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 76). Apparently, Mr Brocklehurst sees nature in opposition to Christianity, linking it with worldliness and "the lusts of the flesh" (Bronte, *Eyre* 76), claiming that good Christians are supposed to distance themselves from nature. This perverse and also hypocritical view – his family is "splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs" (Bronte, *Eyre* 77) – view leads to a lot of suffering and the death of many children at the school (cf. sections 2.2, 3.2).

It is remarkable that, in contrast to Mr Brocklehurst, other characters like Helen and Miss Temple appreciate nature. Helen dreams of nature in her home in Deepden (Bronte, *Eyre*

67-68), and nature and its mysteries are of intellectual interest to both of them: “They conversed of things I had never heard of [...] of *secrets* of nature discovered or *guessed at*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 87). These passages as well as the highlighted words in the latter quote indicate how far Helen and Temple are removed from nature and the outside world in Lowood, since they can only “guess” at its “secrets”.

However prominent the hedgehog mentality at the place may be during Jane’s first winter in Lowood, the inclement forces of nature are not completely shut out of the walls of the school: “a keen north-east wind, whistling through the crevices of our bedroom windows all night long, had made us shiver in our beds, and turned the contents of the ewers to ice” (Bronte, *Eyre* 63). This may also demonstrate that the school is a place of emotional coldness.

During the blood-curdling epidemic in Lowood, ironic contrast instead of pathetic fallacy is used (cf. sections 2.2, 3.2). What is also noticeable is that, again, a strong indoor-outdoor contrast is established, though with reversed emotional priorities: the house no longer provides shelter but symbolises illness and death. Outdoors, the healthy children enjoy life and beauty, while in the house, the unfortunate ones suffer illness and death. The chapters set in Lowood, thus, remind us that human beings have basic natural needs and that, if we do not sufficiently take care of our dependants, the forces of nature will take their toll on them.

However, there also seems to be a contrast between nature and the house at Thornfield, as the former is usually agreeable (cf. section 2.3), while the other has a Gothic appearance and holds a horrible secret (cf. section 3.3). In the winter at Thornfield, despite the cold, Jane enjoys being outdoors but hates the house: “I do not like re-entering Thornfield. To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation; to cross the silent hall [...] was to quell wholly the faint excitement wakened by my walk” (Bronte, *Eyre* 137). Rochester, too, appears to appreciate nature and its beautiful scenes (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). In contrast, much more consistently than Jane, he seems to hate Thornfield Hall (Bronte, *Eyre* 249). It seems that he, who has travelled far and wide, seems to enjoy life outdoors rather than the domestic life.

The outdoor-indoor contrast, however, does not quite so frequently appear as disharmonious as it did in Lowood. For instance, when Rochester's guests are there, rainy days enhance the enjoyment of their time indoors: "Even when [...] continuous rain set in for some days [...] indoor amusements only became more lively and varied" (Bronte, *Eyre* 211). Also, Thornfield Hall seems not to be as strictly secluded from nature and landscape outdoors as Lowood is and there does not seem to be as much hatred of nature and the outdoor world as in Lowood or at Gateshead Hall. For instance, on a beautiful spring day, Jane lifts a boundary between the outdoors and the indoors without being scolded like at Gateshead Hall: "the evening was even warm, and I sat at work with the window open" (Bronte, *Eyre* 193).

When she comes to the parish of Morton, Jane's experience of civilization is that it is unhelpful and unmerciful, and she seeks for comfort in nature (Bronte, *Eyre* 372). However, as she is homeless and destitute, her need for the benefits of a roof over her head becomes more vital with every step, and soon the outdoors is an utterly dangerous place to stay in. Moor House at first represents a miraculous shelter from life-threatening nature. In its function as a shelter, however, it does not have connotations as negative as Lowood and Gateshead Hall have. The light issuing from its halls is illumined exactly when Miss Eyre is in utmost danger and is a beacon in the hour of darkness guiding her to the house (Bronte, *Eyre* 380-381). When she seeks entrance, however, both nature and civilization seem to conspire against her: the inclement weather is killing her, and human beings refuse to give her succour (cf. section 3.4).

Although Moor House is protected from the outside world by "a low wall [...] something like palisades [...] and [...] a high and prickly hedge" (Bronte, *Eyre* 381), the Rivers family do not seem as hateful of nature as the Reeds or Mr Brocklehurst. St John seems to belong neither to the indoors nor the outdoors. He hates domesticity (Bronte, *Eyre* 454) but like Brocklehurst suppresses nature, once destroying delicate beauties of nature – "he crushed the snowy heads of the closed flowers with his foot" (Bronte, *Eyre* 418) –, and clearly misunderstands Mother Nature's intentions (cf. section 2.4). Diana and Mary, however, love nature (Bronte, *Eyre* 402-403, cf. 2) without ambivalence.

Ferndean manor-house is quite assimilated and concealed by its natural surroundings, also with regard to its colour, which symbolises nature: "scarce [...] distinguishable from

the trees; so dank and *green* were its decaying walls” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Eyre* 497). The contrast between civilization and nature at Ferndean, thus, is by far weaker than in any other place. Later, Jane comments that Rochester has “metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort” (Bronte, *Eyre* 503). Apparently, at this place, where the natural world dominates, he has been estranged from civilization and become much closer to nature. Jane, it seems, intends to “rehumanise” (Bronte, *Eyre* 503) him.

With regard to Jane herself, throughout the novel, she obviously frequently suffers from the terrible weather conditions and therefore values the shelter houses often provide, and she can be very appreciative of domestic snugness and architectural beauties (cf. section 3.3). Thus, there is definitely a salient domestic and civilization-loving aspect to Jane’s character. However, her capability for reverence for nature and for the appreciation of beautiful natural scenes, even if they are frightening, are remarkable (cf. 2). Milbank, too, remarks Jane’s “aesthetic appreciation of natural forms and forces in all their terror and beauty” (Milbank 145, qtd. in Smith, Lauren). Her decision to follow Mother Nature and refrain from marrying St John, too, may indicate that she may be grouped with those characters who manage to bridge the contrast between nature and civilization.

5. The Description of Nature and Landscape in *Shirley*

Gezari claims that, “Readers who come to *Shirley* with the experience of *Jane Eyre* or *Villette* behind them will be alert to its differences from Bronte’s other novels” (Gezari, “Introduction” viii). Clearly, in *Shirley*, Bronte did not in every way treat nature and landscape as she treated it in *Jane Eyre*. The difference between the two novels with regard to this paper’s subjects will be discussed more elaborately in a later section (cf. 8). As the most important places in *Shirley* are quite close to one another, and the “contrast of locality” (Horsman 172) so important for *Jane Eyre* is far less strong in *Shirley* with regard to nature and landscape, the different descriptions of nature are here not organised as consistently by setting as in section 2, but primarily by season.

5.1. Nature and Landscape in Springtime

The formerly wild land of the Hollow, a major setting in *Shirley*, changed with the influence of Robert Moore when he came to live on the plot: “Of part of the rough land he had made garden-ground, which he cultivated with singular, even with *Flemish*, exactness and care” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 26). Robert’s character and cultural inheritance, thus, may be reflected by some aspects of landscape in the Hollow. The landscape near Hollow’s-mill and Fieldhead is described early on, when Malone traverses it on his way to Robert: “the remaining distance might be considerably reduced by a short cut across fields. These fields were level and monotonous [...] hedge and wall [...] some trees [...] the fields, hitherto flat, declined in a rapid descent: evidently a vale lay below, through which you could hear the water run” (Bronte, *Shirley* 18).

The main action is set in the year 1811. In the beginning phase of the novel, there may be quite a few instances of pathetic fallacy. The weather on the first night of the narrative is described many times and is in many ways depicted as disagreeable: “The evening was *pitch-dark*: star and moon were quenched in *gray rain-clouds* [...] the sky as it now appeared – a muffled, streaming *vault*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 17). Aspects such as rain, clouds and darkness may correspond with the feeling of fear of an attack from the rebels as well as with the actually committed crimes. The word “vault” (Bronte, *Shirley* 17) in the above quote may imply the mortal danger Robert and his companions are in. “The *sickly dawn*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 53), a reference to the next morning, seems to ascribe a quality of animate beings, that of sickness, to a time of day,

which again suggests a connection of the weather with the experiences of people at Briarfield, especially that of starvation and conflict.

The narrative starts in “the middle of the month February” (Bronte, *Shirley* 52). The narrator says, “the spring was late; it had been a severe and prolonged winter [...] the lawn was not verdant, but bleached, as was the grass on the bank, and under the hedge in the lane” (Bronte, *Shirley* 53). Well into the book, there are aspects reminiscent of winter, and there is a contrast between warmth and wintriness: “Though this had been a *fine* day, *warm* even in the morning and meridian *sunshine*, the air *chilled* at sunset, the ground *crisped* [...] a *hoar frost* was insidiously stealing over growing grass and unfolding bud” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 123).

Nonetheless, in the course of the first chapters of the book, there are indications of the coming of a new season, as in: “she told him what flowers were beginning to spring there” (Bronte, *Shirley* 85). On a day when Caroline’s love for Robert makes her feel good, this feeling is represented by the sun’s soothing rays, having a similar effect on her: “Sitting in the sunshine near the window, she seemed to receive with its warmth a *kind influence*, which made her both *happy* and *good*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 64). In the course of the novel, Caroline will sometimes link love and romance with the beautiful landscape near and in the Hollow. For instance, she has pleasant memories of when she and Robert spent happy and romantic times in nature, “in Hollow’s copse, listening to the call of the May cuckoo, or sharing [...] nuts and blackberries” (Bronte, *Shirley* 148). The lavish, congenial landscape mirrors Caroline and Robert’s passion and happiness in these days Caroline looks back to (cf. also Bronte, *Shirley* 152). When she is forbidden to see the Moores, she is still magically drawn towards the Hollow and sometimes looks down into it (Bronte, *Shirley* 159-160).

Nature, however, is not always in accordance with the characters’ emotions. In one of its depictions, springtime is described as beautiful, agreeable and fertile, which is explicitly said not to mirror the way the people are feeling: “The surface of England began to look pleasant: her fields grew *green*, her hills *fresh*, her gardens *blooming* [...] but at heart she was no better” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 142). This contrast may have been created for ironic effect. The exact opposite of pathetic fallacy is achieved here (cf. section 2.2).

On the whole, there are different kinds of weather in spring, both favourable and inclement ones. Caroline, whether it is raining or whether the sun is shining, goes through tremendous suffering at this time. Because Robert will not marry her, she has a broken heart, is depressed, grieving and restless, and desperately searches for a new meaning in life. Once, she experiences the weather as inclement, even though a servant “remarked that the day was fine [...] she only said – “It is *cold*”” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 150). Here it is clear that it is Caroline’s *interpretation* of the weather that reflects her feeling of metaphorical coldness. The ironic contrast between the coming of spring, a season associated with rejuvenation and joy, on the one hand, and Caroline’s agony, lethargy, and despair on the other is intentional, as the words “winter seemed conquering her spring” (Bronte, *Shirley* 158) indicate.

Caroline goes to look down into the hollow from an “old *thorn*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 196), which may symbolise her pain. Argyle mentions “the location of the mill in the Hollow, with its allusion to the pastoral idyll and its conciliatory implications” (Argyle 745). Caroline, being cut off from the Moores and the Hollow, in her heart prizes nature in the place: “If she had dared [...] she would have declared how the very flowers in the garden of Hollow’s cottage were dear to her” (Bronte, *Shirley* 211).

The landscape surrounding Fieldhead Hall, like the building itself from the outside, similarly to the scene in the Hollow, is described as beautiful and idyllic. The garden of Fieldhead, in contrast to the predominant air of the house’s indoor world (cf. section 6.3), has a particularly agreeable appearance: “*profusely* blooming flowers [...] *splendid* blossoms” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 237). The description of the trees surrounding the Hall contributes to rendering the place agreeable and impressive, through the words highlighted here: “The trees behind were *fine*, *bold*, and *spreading*; the cedar on the lawn in front was *grand*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 161). It is suggested that the large plot Shirley owns includes different other beautiful places. For instance, the narrator mentions “the sweet herbage and clear waters of bonnie Airedale” (Bronte, *Shirley* 298). “Sweet”, “clear” and “bonnie” help create an almost paradisiacal impression.

Nunnwood is a place to which Hunt ascribes particular importance (Hunt 57-58). This is described by Caroline as a place that is at once ancient, quiet and pleasant, inspiring feelings of vastness, grandeur and supportive power: “The trees are *huge* and *old*. When you stand at their roots, the *summits seem in another region*: the trunks remain *still* and *firm as pillars*, while the boughs sway to every *breeze* [...]” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 178). It is also referred to as a place where one can connect with higher powers, which “seem in another region” and, as Hunt points out, Bronte “was consciously using “Nunnwood” [...] to symbolize a mythic [...] world” (Hunt 58). When Shirley and Caroline discuss their plan to stay in Nunnwood for some time, nature is personified, probably as the female deity Mother Nature (Bronte, *Shirley* 179). Although the heiress and the Rector’s niece have not known each other for long, both of them seem sceptical as to taking a third person with them. If we are to believe Shirley and Caroline, if a woman wants to “worship” (Bronte, *Shirley* 180) the deity in this monastery of nature, she should enter it in good female company or on her own (Bronte, *Shirley* 179-180). Just as many may opine with regard to the environment of monasteries, they believe that the other sex would be a distraction there: “We forget Nature [...] And then Nature forgets us; covers her vast, calm brow with a dim veil [...] withdraws the peaceful joy with which, if we had been content to worship her only, she would have filled our hearts” (Bronte, *Shirley* 179-180). Here, at the latest, it becomes clear that their love of nature is not superficial but, on the contrary, has a spiritual dimension.

On one occasion, Shirley’s “pensiveness” is a *result* of the stormy weather outside Fieldhead Hall (Bronte, *Shirley* 189). Rather than being a mirror for Shirley’s feelings, the storm influences her mind. Indeed, the gloomy aspects of nature are not always portrayed as terrible but often as quite neutral or, when Caroline and Robert unexpectedly meet, even helpful. The highlighted words in particular may suggest this: “the *friendly* protection of early twilight, kept out of view each traitorous symptom [...] none could prove emotion [...] *sheltered* further by the dusk which deepened every moment” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 208). Both to Caroline and the narrator, nature’s help in hiding her emotions appears desirable in this situation, in this repressed society in general and specifically in company. On the other hand, there is also the effect that Shirley, whose form, on the contrary, is fully illumined in this scene, appears more beautiful to Robert (Bronte, *Shirley* 209-210), which will increase Caroline’s pain.

For a while, the only chance for Caroline and Robert to be alone together is outdoors, where spring, the season most symbolic of love, reigns. They do spend some time together in the open air in the evening, and her rhapsodising after his departure ends only with the first signs of the approach of day, which destroys the magic favoured by the dark of night (Bronte, *Shirley* 218).

5.2. Nature and Landscape in Summer

The favourable description of early June – as in “splendid weather” (Bronte, *Shirley* 246) – may reflect the festive pleasure and religious faith connected with Whitsuntide. There is a reference to the Rectory garden as “old”, though the church has had an even longer history (Bronte, *Shirley* 218). However, in summer this place does not appear barren but blooming, as there are “waving lilacs and laburnums” (Bronte, *Shirley* 250) at Whitsuntide. The weather in the evening of the day of the celebration is described as “still and warm” (Bronte, *Shirley* 269). Standing just outside Briarfield church, Shirley does not see why she should enter it for the villagers’ usual religious celebration, suggesting that Mother Nature is providing an alternative, likewise religious ceremony outdoors, by using the suggestive vocabulary highlighted here: “Nature is now at her evening *prayers*: she is *kneeling* before those red hills. I see her *prostrate* on the great steps of her *altar* [...] she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 269). Mother Nature is here compared to or equated with the First Woman. Thus, in a sense, the heiress seems to think of two kinds of religious service, one outside Briarfield church, the other within. The first, that of British civilization, is of course conducted by men, but as to the second, nature’s celebration, a woman deity seems to have the leading role. As Hunt says, “Nature [...] in *Shirley* is the Great Mother of matriarchal myth” (Hunt 58). Shirley illustratively describes her vision of “my mother Eve, in these days called Nature” (Bronte, *Shirley* 271), comparing her looks to different aspects of nature and placing her in the landscape nearby. Here are just a few examples from Shirley’s elaborate description of her vision: “her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath [...] a veil white as an avalanche [...] Her forehead has the expanse of a cloud, and is paler than the early moon [...] she reclines her bosom on the ridge of Stilbro’ Moor” (Bronte, *Shirley* 270-271). Shirley says that this mythical figure is an equal to her male counterpart: “That Eve is Jehovah’s daughter, as Adam was his son” (Bronte, *Shirley* 271). To this deity, who as Shirley believes gave birth to the Titans (Bronte, *Shirley* 270), she declares her love (Bronte,

Shirley 271). It turns out that Shirley's belief in Eve/Nature can easily get in conflict with the mainstream Christian belief system and that Caroline cannot quite share it. Shirley's speech, however, triggers something else inside the younger woman: "the word "mother" [...] suggested to Caroline's imagination [...] a gentle human form – the form she ascribed to her own mother [...] the longing of her childhood filled her soul again. The desire which many a night had kept her awake in her crib, and which fear of its fallacy had of late years almost extinguished, relit suddenly" (Bronte, *Shirley* 271). Caroline's yearning for her long-lost mother, then, is like a fire, which Shirley kindles with her enthusiastic speech about nature – and the traditional symbol of nature as an equivalent for motherhood is invoked in an additional way.

Later that same evening, Shirley, having been with too many people and having had enough of crowds and sociability for the day, does not want to see off all the guests but prefers to "step into the garden and take *shelter* amongst the laburnums for an instant" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 279). Thus, Shirley again finds being in nature a preferable option. Here, nature provides "refuge" from civilization's tiring social niceties, which are a strain, especially for women.

The night following the feast is full of disturbing events. A host of rioters pass the Rectory, discuss breaking into it and, abandoning this plan, march on to the mill instead. They attack it unsuccessfully, because its defenders are ready for them. Longing to warn Robert, Shirley and Caroline hasten across the fields from Briarfield Rectory all the way to Hollow's-mill, encountering different obstacles - such as "a quickset hedge" (Bronte, *Shirley* 286) and "the beck, flowing *deep* in a *rough* bed" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 286). As we can tell, also from the adjectives highlighted here, these impediments make the already dangerous adventure even more distressing. Nature and landscape are here not presented as agreeable and benevolent as in the previous chapter, but as fierce or hindering. The hedge delays the women, while the rivulet endangers them. However, in the face of their grave mission, they both defy nature's hurdles (Bronte, *Shirley* 286). When they are watching the goings-on at the mill without the defenders' knowledge, Shirley is glad to be outdoors, in nature, rather than inside the mill, the world of unsympathetic men (cf. section 6.1). Again, she speaks favourably of their outdoor surroundings: "We stand alone with the *friendly* night" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 289).

The weather does not seem to reflect the disturbing events of these hours. As Shirley says, “The sky is clear, the stars numberless; it is a fine night” (Bronte, *Shirley* 282). However, the riot takes place at night, which may also have an aspect of symbolism to it, in that it is a dark hour in the history of the Hollow, which wrecks the nerves of sensitive, vulnerable Caroline. In the aftermath of witnessing the horrors of the riot and the battle, Caroline cannot sleep in the early hours of a new day that is already dawning. It cannot be a coincidence that precisely in this context the narrator talks of “that darkest point which precedes the rise of day” (Bronte, *Shirley* 295). The choice to link dawn with this statement of the narrator’s may enforce the foregrounding of improvements that will later take place in Caroline’s life.

Spending time in nature with Caroline is not central and delightful to Shirley only but also to Mrs Pryor (cf. 7). On the day after the battle they go to a ravine in the Hollow, which, due to its relatively pristine condition, is referred to as the “*demesne* of Nature” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 313). The word emphasised here may be understood in all its possible senses, including that of “*domain, realm*” (Pons 236). The ravine, then, is explicitly referred to as a place where Mother Nature, as opposed to human civilization, reigns (cf. 8). The place is abundant with the treasures of nature: “unmolested trees [...] the singing of many birds [...] abounding wild-roses [...] the sweet azure of blue-bells [...] pearl-white blossoms” (Bronte, *Shirley* 313). Nature, then, is described as paradisiacal, as a place of pleasant colours (“*sweet azure*”, “*pearl-white*” [emphasis added]) and full of life, yet free from unwelcome human company (“unmolested”), as is also indicated in the following quote: “Here, when you had wandered half a mile from the mill, you found a sense of deep solitude” (Bronte, *Shirley* 313). It is here that two victims of civilization find a retreat from the human society that has maltreated and is still maltreating them. Perhaps the two are reconnecting with each other as mother and daughter, as well as with those early days when they were inseparably close. If the longing to return to an earlier, better state of affairs is a crucial theme in *Shirley* (Gezari, “Introduction” xx), that yearning is to some extent fulfilled in the plot-strand of Caroline and her mother, whom she lost long ago but is, finally, happily reunited with. In walking to the ravine – pristine and unspoiled by civilization, a place where Mother Nature still reigns supreme – the two go to enjoy a scene that may represent this earlier state of unity, and this is where they can be especially outspoken, affectionate, and appreciative

(Bronte, *Shirley* 314). Here, in this setting of nature, Mrs Pryor manages to overcome “that tyrant timidity” (Bronte, *Shirley* 315).

Nature near or on the grounds of the Rectory, on the other hand, does not have such a desirable effect on Caroline. However, the description of nature there depends very much on the viewpoint. In the chapter “Two Lives”, descriptions are given both from the perspective of happy Shirley and from the point of view of depressed Caroline. To Shirley the place is “*pleasantly* embowered in trees” [emphasis added], while Caroline has a partly negative view of it, which is expressed by the narrator’s comment that “the sun [...] shone bright, *yet sad*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 327). On particularly lonely days in summer, Caroline likes to sit in the garden alcove of the Rectory (Bronte, *Shirley* 331). Admittedly, as a lover of nature (cf. 7) she still seems to be able to perceive the beauty of “the *fair* monthly roses” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 327) in the Rectory garden. However, as Caroline is presently kept apart from beloved people like Shirley and Robert, and consequently lonely, not even nature can render her happy. Instead, the Rector’s niece is described as “still as a garden statue” (Bronte, *Shirley* 327). The Rectory being the main setting for Caroline’s hardship (cf. section 6.2), even its garden and the natural influences close to it, fail to make amends.

This terrible situation of loneliness causes Caroline to be more susceptible to threatening aspects of nature. In the third volume, there are different instances of characters turning sick or being injured. The probably most central and most serious instance is the life-threatening sickness Caroline is subject to. Nature is made partly responsible for her fever: “Probably in her late walk home, some sweet, poisoned breeze, redolent of honey-dew and miasma, had passed into her lungs and veins” (Bronte, *Shirley* 351). This seems to blame the sweet summer atmosphere for her condition. However, it has to be said that her psychological constitution has had a large part in the origin and outbreak of the illness. Caroline’s illness also symbolises the appalling and depressing social circumstances from which she and other women in a similar situation suffer (cf. section 6.2). Thus, like *Jane Eyre* (cf. 4), *Shirley* teaches that if people maltreat an individual in their midst, illnesses caused by natural influences may take a heavy toll on this person.

Caroline’s enigmatic words, uttered during her illness, more than once revolve around nature or its forces. It is suggested by Caroline that the wind is a medium delivering

messages or foreboding suffering, crying like a sad person: “Is it for nothing the wind sounds almost articulately sometimes [...] or passes the casement *sobbing*, as if for sorrow to come” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 356). Soon afterwards, Caroline utters clearly delirious words, again linking her feelings of love and attachment with paradisiacal images of nature (cf. section 5.1), which are strongly connected with the present season: “I smelt the honeysuckles in the glen this summer-morning [...] as I stood at the counting-house window [...] I have been with him [Robert] in the garden [...] a heavy dew has *refreshed* the flowers: the peaches are *ripening*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 357, cf. section 6.1). With the words highlighted here, Caroline focuses on rejuvenation and growth in nature. Paradisiacal nature again symbolises Caroline and Robert’s love and also its agreeable growth in the past – though, ironically, Caroline is separated from Robert and also in danger of dying and never seeing him again.

As Hunt claims, in *Shirley*, “The Great Mother, the feminine principle, is also represented by the moon, its traditional symbol” (Hunt 58). Indeed, Mrs Pryor’s alleviating motherliness, for instance, like Miss Temple’s in *Jane Eyre* (cf. section 2.2), is linked with the moon and moonlight. Before Mrs Pryor confesses to Caroline that she is her mother, the moon rises (Bronte, *Shirley* 358). As if the older woman were aware of this connection, “she threw back the curtain to admit the moonlight more freely” (Bronte, *Shirley* 361).

Mrs Pryor rejoicingly finds out about Caroline’s “first revival” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370) after sunrise and a long night of prayer (Bronte, *Shirley* 369-370). The image of morning and the rising sun is, thus, used again as a symbol of the return to happier circumstances after a period of the deepest suffering. Although this event “seemed like the flicker of a dying lamp” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370), it still represents a beacon of faint hope.

The weather at this time is described as desert-like and very oppressive: “It was the close of August [...] very *dry* and very *dusty*, for an *arid* wind had been blowing from the east this month past: very cloudless, too, though a *pale haze*, *stationary* in the atmosphere, seemed to *rob* of all depth of tone the blue of heaven, of all freshness the verdure of earth, and of all glow the light of day” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 370). The emphasised words show the weather’s oppressive and “insalubrious” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370) qualities. The word “rob” personifies the “pale haze”, suggesting the identity of a wrongdoer or criminal. “The breath of Asiatic deserts” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370) is disastrous

in its effect, as it “parched Caroline’s lips and fevered her veins” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370). With the word “sob” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370), another unpleasant quality, that of mournfulness and grief, is attached to this wind. The weather encourages several characters to leave on different leisurely trips, and “the mother and daughter”, still at the Rectory, “seemed left almost alone in the neighbourhood” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370). The wind, however, later changes direction, starting to blow from the west. Other changes of weather follow as a result, undoing the unpleasant effects of the eastern wind, and light and clarity of view return to Briarfield, while healthy colours replace those of sickness: “wet and tempest prevailed a while. When that was over the sun broke out genially, heaven regained its *azure*, and earth its *green*: the livid *cholera-tint* had vanished from the face of nature: the hills rose *clear* round the horizon, absolved from that pale *malaria-haze*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 371). Especially if we bear in mind Mrs Pryor’s eager prayer (Bronte, *Shirley* 369), the words “a little cloud like a man’s hand arose in the west” (Bronte, *Shirley* 370) may be seen to indicate that this wind is a result of divine *intervention*. Indeed, the narrator links “the pure west wind blowing soft as fresh” with God (Bronte, *Shirley* 371). This contributes to Caroline’s recovery (Bronte, *Shirley* 371). When she is a bit stronger, she very soon feels the yearning to spend time outdoors, which she could not do for a while (Bronte, *Shirley* 371).

5.3. Nature and Landscape in Autumn

Early autumn is mainly described as favourable, and the term “Indian summer” is ascribed to it: “The gilding of the Indian summer mellowed the pastures far and wide [...] The beck wandered down to the Hollow, through a silent district; no wind followed its course, or haunted its woody borders. Fieldhead gardens bore the seal of gentle decay” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 403). “Gilding” and other words referring to colour in the passage render this autumn scene very picturesque, while words like “mellowed”, “gentle” and “silent”, along with the information of there being “no wind” point at the serenity of this “peaceful autumn day” (Bronte, *Shirley* 403). The passage refers to the most typical signs of autumn, such as “yellow leaves had fluttered down again” (Bronte, *Shirley* 403). One day in Fieldhead’s garden, Louis remarks to Tartar, “the autumn sun shines as pleasantly *on us as on the fairest and richest*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 382).

The highlighted part of the quote above betrays the poor tutor’s desire to possess and enjoy Fieldhead – although his strongest yearning is for Shirley’s hand (cf. section 6.3). The beginning of the power-struggle between Shirley and Louis begins with their rivalry over Tartar, but this is soon extended to the subjects of other animals and nature in general. At Fieldhead, Louis relishes the agreeableness of nature and delights in the way the animals at the place obey him, while to some of the human beings he, as a tutor, is simply unimportant. He vexes Shirley, the owner of the land, by emphasising that these delights of nature he feels at Fieldhead are really his own possession (Bronte, *Shirley* 383), and by saying, “With animals I feel I am Adam’s son: the heir of him to whom dominion was given” (Bronte, *Shirley* 383). The latter quote represents Louis’s first assertion in the book that the land of Fieldhead should really be under his rule rather than being governed by Shirley (cf. section 6.3). By claiming the First Man’s kingship over nature, Louis here challenges not only the heiress’ right for power over her land but also the usual assumption in the book that nature is actually governed by a female deity.

Autumn weather can also be uncongenial in *Shirley*. For instance, one night it is wild and inclement: “the equinox still struggles in its storms [...] a continued, long-sounding, high-rushing moonlight tempest. The Moon *reigns* glorious, glad of the gale; as glad as if she gave herself to his fierce caress with love [...] to-night she welcomes Aeolus” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 434). The moon, here written with a capital letter, is

personified as a female ruler of the night – perhaps “Selene, the moon-goddess” (Gezari, *Notes* 567) –, while the storm is associated with a male deity, “the god of the winds” (Gezari, “Notes” 567). On this night, Louis stays behind at Fieldhead Hall, while Shirley and the Symptons are on a visit to the tutor’s rival Sir Phillip. Having little hope of winning Shirley, Louis has reason to think that the baronet is going to marry her. In this case, thus, it may suggest itself that the uncongenial weather mirrors his present feelings.

5.4. Nature and Landscape in Winter

The narrator refers to the coming of a new season with the following words: “Behind November came deep winter; clearness, stillness, frost accompanying” (Bronte, *Shirley* 474). Winter is perhaps the least extensively described season in *Shirley*, probably because most of the action takes place indoors.

In winter, Caroline and Martin twice meet in the wood of Briarmains. As Caroline is not allowed to see the wounded Robert at Briarmains (cf. section 6.4), the young Yorke has to give the Rector’s niece information on him. Their first meeting takes place on an evening with a rather magical and perhaps idyllic aspect: “the world wore a North Pole colouring: all its lights and tints looked like the “reflets” of white, or violet, or pale green gems” (Bronte, *Shirley* 474). This may render Caroline all the more amazing to Martin, heightening his sense of wonder on the occasion, but it may at the same time *reflect* this sense of wonder. The day when Martin steps outside to see Caroline at church is described as very typical, even stereotypical for winter: as Mr Yorke says, “there is a pitiless wind, and a sharp, frozen sleet, besides the depth underfoot” (Bronte, *Shirley* 492). This day’s weather renders the natural landscape very hard to walk through, in particular, “the steep, encumbered field”, which is described as “difficult to the foot as a slope in the upper realms of Etna” (Bronte, *Shirley* 494). These impressions, in particular the arduousness of Martin’s way to the church and the near-impassableness of part of the route he takes on his way back, may symbolise the truth that there is an overwhelming number of obstacles between Martin and the woman he is devoted to.

5.5. Other Descriptions of Nature and Landscape

In Shirley's French homework 'La Premiere Femme Savante' nature has a significant role and is presented very favourably. In this tale, set in the early days of mankind, an orphan girl, forsaken by her tribe, is saved by the abundance and generosity of nature and stays in the wild: "she both lives and grows: the green wilderness nurses her, and becomes to her a mother" (Bronte, *Shirley* 406). Once again, thus, nature is linked with motherliness (cf. section 5.2). Because she lives in a favourable natural environment, the child "sprung up straight and graceful" (Bronte, *Shirley* 406). Called "Eva" and "Humanity" (Bronte, *Shirley* 408, 409), she is one of the early ancestors of mankind. Here, too, Shirley links the idea of the ancient powerful woman (cf. section 5.2) with nature, as opposed to civilization.

Two very clear additional instances of pathetic fallacy in the novel are connected with events that take place later than the time of the main plot or plots. One night, when the narrator is in the middle of writing down the tale of *Shirley*, there is a funeral, and the weather is appropriately dark, misty and dreary, as well as rainy and stormy. Some of the words chosen suggest that nature itself, or perhaps Mother Nature, weeps for the deceased like a human being would: "There is only one cloud in the sky; but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest: it hurries *sobbing* over hills of *sullen* outline, colourless with twilight and mist [...] rain has beat all day on that church-tower" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 343). The spectacle brings back memories to the narrator's mind of Jessie's funeral, when the weather was similar. This is then described with words that, likewise, involve personification of the forces of nature: "This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too [...] heavy falling rain [...] the *sad, sighing* gale was *mourning* above her buried head" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 343).

The final passages of the book are set after the winter we refer to above (cf. section 5.4). As the narrator says, "spring [...] followed with beamy and shadowy, with flowery and showery flight" (Bronte, *Shirley* 532). This is the only reference to the second appearance of this season in Briarfield in the novel. Many of the events of the last chapter are set in June, and nature at this time is described as follows: "It is burning weather: the air is deep azure and red gold" (Bronte, *Shirley* 532). As the narrator comments, this description "fits the present spirit of the nations. The nineteenth century wantons in its

giant adolescence” (Bronte, *Shirley* 532). The heat of the summer may then correspond with the metaphorical heat of the Napoleonic wars, and of the three colours mentioned, “red” may indicate the blood spilt on the battlefields, while “gold” in particular may suggest glory. On the evening of Robert’s marriage proposal the weather is described as appropriately agreeable (Bronte, *Shirley* 535). The mentioning of the visible “silver point – the Star of Love”, “Venus” (Bronte, *Shirley* 535), introduces the return to the subject of the relationship between Robert and Caroline and the conclusion of their plot, symbolising their love and plan of marriage.

Towards the end of the novel, Robert plans to destroy nature in the Hollow to make way for civilization, for labour and industrialization. Surprisingly perhaps, when he mentions the benefits that will probably result from this, even the nature-loving Caroline seems to approve of the scheme. This is an unexpected turn for a novel otherwise quite often emphasising the importance of nature. The novel seems to be saying that for a noble aim of civilization, such as work for “the houseless, the starving, the unemployed” (Bronte, *Shirley* 540), it is justifiable even to destroy nature in the Hollow.

It is suggested by the author that supernatural beings used to live or perhaps still dwell in the outdoor sphere of the Hollow. Early on, Shirley claims that, “When I was a very little girl [...] my nurse used to tell me tales of fairies being seen in that Hollow: That was before my father built the mill, when it was a perfectly solitary ravine” (Bronte, *Shirley* 199). Gezari points out that the end of the novel features the narrator’s “housekeeper’s dream of a much older Hollow that was still home to the fairies” (Gezari xxii).

5.6. Conclusion

In *Shirley*, nature and landscape have different faces, although the main action is set in just one area. All four seasons and different kinds of weather are described, and these influence the look of the landscape. In spring, summer and autumn, the landscape is often described as very idyllic, although the weather is not always agreeable but at times also rainy, stormy, desert-like or unhealthy. In winter, the outdoor scene is more than once very hostile and inclement, but on another occasion the landscape has a rather magical and similarly idyllic appeal to it.

Several times, the weather, landscape or other aspects of nature mirror the characters' feelings, thoughts, or outward circumstances. Sometimes it is not an individual character but instead, for instance, a whole people or even several peoples (cf. section 5.5) nature may correspond with. Much less frequently, the weather is described for ironic purposes, creating a contrast. Frequently, at any rate, neither pathetic fallacy nor irony is employed. For instance, in springtime in the first volume of the novel, the narrator focuses on Caroline, whose psychological suffering may be at its high-point at this time. The weather, however, is not consistently inclement, nor is it always favourable, the latter of which would create an ironic effect. Indeed, the weather is often described for reality effect, in order for the reader to better imagine a scene, rather than in correspondence or contrast with what people go through.

With regard to the outer, superficial appearance of the most important outdoor spaces, there is relatively little contrast between natural landscapes from one location to the other. Still, to Caroline, for instance, the Rectory garden seems to render little consolation while she imagines the garden at Hollow's Cottage as paradise.

As has been mentioned, nature in *Shirley* can be inclement as well as agreeable. The example of the life-threatening illness Caroline must have caught outdoors, of course, shows the hostile side of nature. Her illness, however, also reflects the cruelty of society, showing how weak it has made Caroline. On the other hand, nature is often presented as idyllic or even paradisiacal, especially in places like the whereabouts of Fieldhead or the Hollow (although nature is later destroyed in the latter so that more jobs can be created). The beautiful nature in the Hollow is often linked with romantic love. More than once, it is solitariness or refuge in nature that characters crave for or benefit from. Also, nature is

again and again portrayed as benevolent and august, especially in the form of the deity Nature or Eve, who is revered by Shirley and a vision of whom she describes. Thus, it is a female deity nature is said to be ruled by (although this view is challenged by Louis). She is said to reign in the outdoor landscapes, especially in the pristine ravine. Also, it is suggested that in the nature of Nunnwood, which is presented like a monastery, one can connect with higher powers. Later, God seems to help save Caroline's life via a change of weather, which, too, suggests that nature is under benevolent rule. Nature is also often connected with motherhood, as it is said to be governed by the world's first mother, Eve. Like a mother, nature is sometimes also portrayed as nurturing. In different ways, thus, although violent sides are also described, nature is appreciated and praised in the novel.

6. The Description of Houses in *Shirley*

The five most important houses in *Shirley* are focussed on here. Similarly to *Jane Eyre* (cf. 3), the action takes place in diverse kinds of domestic locations (cf. Theuer 20).

6.1. Hollow's-mill and Hollow's Cottage

Hollow's-mill and Hollow's cottage are both located in the Hollow on Shirley's land and are run and inhabited by the Moores. Some of the rooms and places described in Hollow's-mill are parts of the counting-house as well as "one of my [Robert's] long rooms" where "girls were working" (Bronte, *Shirley* 215). In the case of Hollow's cottage, the parlour and the kitchen are described.

The Presentation of Hollow's-mill and Hollow's Cottage

As regards the history of Hollow's-mill, Robert Moore, after the downfall of his family in commercial terms (Bronte, *Shirley* 25), "saw no other way open to him but to rent a cloth-mill, in an out-of-the-way nook of an out-of-the-way district" (Bronte, *Shirley* 26). The narrator tells us that, "the dingy cottage was converted into a neat, tasteful residence" and that "the mill" itself "was an old structure, and fitted up with old machinery, now become inefficient and out of date [...] his [Moore's] aim had been to effect a radical reform" (Bronte, *Shirley* 26). At the time of the narrative, "in Briarfield [...] Hollow's-mill was *the place held most abominable*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 27), because the acquisition of the latest machines and the sacking of many workers, have led to abject poverty and to starvation in the neighbourhood (Bronte,

Shirley 27). Like Bounderby in Dickens' *Hard Times*, Moore calls his workers "hands", seemingly reducing them to their function at work – as Caroline says, "as if your living cloth-dressers were all machines" (Bronte, *Shirley* 62).

However, Caroline in the same breath also remarks to Moore that, "in your own house you seem different" (Bronte, *Shirley* 62). At our first impression at least, there is also a strong contrast between the respective looks of Hollow's-mill and Hollow's cottage. Malone is the first character from whose perspective the two buildings are described: "A *little white* house—you could see it was white even through this dense darkness" [emphasis added], evidently, contrasts with "a *huge black* mill" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 18) in terms of lightness as well as size. The description of the more private place as light and the seat of business as dark may be an early hint at Robert's two contrasting personalities, his kind and lovable private side on the one hand and his greedy and selfish public aspect on the other hand. A quote from Ford about the Victorian attitude towards cottages supports the assumption that Robert's cottage corresponds with his positive qualities: "Tennyson's usual assumption of the cottager's unspoiled innocence was an accepted pastoralism of long standing. The city streets are corrupt, the manor hall is corrupt, but not the cottage" (Ford 43). In accordance with Victorian ideas, the cottage may even serve to strengthen Robert's positive qualities. According to Ford, after all, it is suggested that "the assumption was that virtue grew under a thatch roof and vice under a tile roof. These associations with unspoiled innocence can also make the cottage into an image of purification" (Ford 44). Two other cottages and minor settings in the novel belong to William Farren (Bronte, *Shirley* 119-121) on the one hand and Miss Ainley (Bronte, *Shirley* 227) on the other hand – in other words, two of the most virtuous characters in the book.

Because she is in love with Robert, when separated from it, Caroline praises Hollow's cottage like a biblical land of happiness before the Fall, from which she is an outcast like Eve: "If she had dared [...] she would have declared [...] how the little parlour of that house was her earthly *paradise*; how she longed to return to it, as much almost as the *First Woman*, in her exile, must have longed to revisit *Eden*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 211). In her delirious moments on her sickbed, Caroline thinks she is at present at Hollow's cottage, connecting idyllic day-dreams with it (Bronte, *Shirley* 357, cf. section 5.2). Also, when granted entry to the cottage after a long time, she loves going to the

place though aware that Robert is absent, because she nevertheless strongly associates the little house with him: “merely to see his home, to enter the room where he had that morning sat, felt like a reunion” (Bronte, *Shirley* 332).

The mill is not all dark and disagreeable on the inside. A room in the counting-house, for instance, which has a hearth, is described as “a light and bright room” (Bronte, *Shirley* 19). The fire in this place is often mentioned. The unpretentious nature of this part of the counting-house shows the functional nature of the building, along with Robert’s relative poverty and need for rationalisation: “The boarded floor was carpetless; the [...] chairs seemed once to have furnished the kitchen of some farm-house” (Bronte, *Shirley* 19).

The narrator says that Robert is “prone to *confine* his attention and efforts to the furtherance of his individual interest” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 143). The word “confine” is interesting as it may imply that Robert, as it were, holds himself a prisoner, sitting in his bulwark of the mill and blocking out not just his enemies but also his own positive aspects and private aspirations. Shirley has the impression that, “his mill is his lady-love” (Bronte, *Shirley* 288). Indeed, he proposes to the heiress primarily for financial reasons.

In the mill he keeps his precious machines, which are in danger of being destroyed by rioters. In the face of danger, Robert seems to have confidence in the strength of the walls: “I defy these framebreakers; let them only pay me a visit, and take the consequences” (Bronte, *Shirley* 21-22). Indeed, the mill is a stronghold to Robert: “My mill is my *castle*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 22). Indeed, he asks Colonel Ryde to send him soldiers (Bronte, *Shirley* 208-209). Robert and Shirley both – the latter through “eleemosynary relief” (Bronte, *Shirley* 245) – try to keep an assault on the mill from happening, but the place is nevertheless eventually attacked. In Victorian literature set in the early 19th century, as Chapman says, “in general, the emphasis is on the calm and quiet, the leisurely pace and stability, of an age that was in fact so full of change” (Chapman 146). He mentions the “mill riot in *Shirley*” as one example of an exception to the rule. (Chapman 146). The eye-witness description of the attack and defence of a building, as acts of warfare, is also a rarity in women’s literature of the 19th century. The event of the attack on the mill, taking place at night, is described from the female perspective of Caroline and Shirley standing by. Robert has reckoned with it, and “he had

fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong building” (Bronte, *Shirley* 291). Soldiers and villagers help Robert in successfully defending the mill from the rioters in a short battle. Hollow’s-mill, the symbol of selfish commerce, is thus not taken or destroyed. Although after the battle it “yawned all ruinous” (Bronte, *Shirley* 292), “its reparation was esteemed a light task; carpenter’s and glazier’s work alone being needed” (Bronte, *Shirley* 323). The narrator in this context refers to the unharmed frames as Robert’s “grim, metal *darlings*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 323), which suggests that he is in love with them almost as with a person. Later, at the hour of Robert’s marriage proposal to Shirley, which he makes for reasons of money and business and not because he loves her, the indignant heiress draws on a biblical metaphor to describe Robert’s mill and point out his relationship towards it: “You would immolate me to that mill – your Moloch!” (Bronte, *Shirley* 447). Gezari explains, “Moloch was worshipped with human sacrifice” (Gezari, “Notes” 568). Shirley has realized, then, that Robert has come to her with the intention to sacrifice her to his mill and business.

Hollow’s cottage is one of the smaller houses discussed in this paper. It features “a narrow passage” and “a narrow stair” (Bronte, *Shirley* 18). This cottage is described as “a snug nest of content and contemplation, but one within which the wings of action and ambition could not long lie folded” (Bronte, *Shirley* 54) – for Robert, that is. This house does not seem to interest him much (Bronte, *Shirley* 54), as he seems to live for his work and his mill rather than for his private life and home. Just as the mill does not in every way look disagreeable, the cottage is not exactly a paradise on earth, although it seems to be to Caroline. It is after all the scene of Hortense and Sarah’s quarrels, which show the difficulties a proud woman from Belgium reluctant to integrate into the vastly different Yorkshire culture is likely to have. Although she is living in England, she wants to some extent to lead a Belgian household, which the English Sarah disparages, wanting to have her own way. However, Hollow’s cottage is also a place of domestic cosiness, especially on evenings of companionship in the parlour. An impression of snugness is created via the terms “elbow-chair at the fireside” (Bronte, *Shirley* 333).

Eventually, Robert’s virtuous qualities associated with Hollow’s cottage seem to gain victory over those qualities connected with the mill. Morris says that, “Moore makes a double confession to his friend Yorke [...] This admission may appear to indicate the successful conclusion of his education into the specifically domestic bourgeois virtues

centered on the individual private sphere of the English home” (Morris 295). When Robert returns to Hollow’s cottage after experiences that have changed him, he takes his business and impending financial disaster less seriously and also has a changed attitude towards his cottage, for the first time calling it “his home” (Bronte, *Shirley* 500). With “the repeal of the Orders in Council” (Bronte, *Shirley* 536) and the end of his deepest commercial difficulties, Robert is all the more able to turn his thoughts to other considerations than those connected with his own commercial interests: “I can take more workmen; give better wages; lay wiser and more liberal plans; do some good; be less selfish” (Bronte, *Shirley* 537). The dark mill is destroyed and replaced by another, which may symbolise the destruction of Robert’s most selfish and negative side. This reform goes hand in glove with his readiness to turn to the less public subjects of private dwelling, love and marriage: “*now*, Caroline, I can have a house – a home which I can truly call mine [...] And *now* [...] I can think of marriage” (Bronte, *Shirley* 537).

Social Spaces

It appears that the mill itself is very much the domain of men, not only because it is a place of work, but also because it is men who defend it from the rioters. The information of the planned attack on the mill is withheld from Shirley, the owner of the land, and she is excluded from the preparations to defend her own property as well as from the short battle. Women and girls, except for working-class females, are more often than not perceived as “out of place”, in the truest sense of the word. This is one of the reasons why Robert at times likes to stay in the mill as opposed to his little house: “it is my fancy [...] to have every convenience within myself, and not to be dependent on the femininity in the cottage yonder for every mouthful I eat or every drop I drink. I often spend the evening and sup here alone, and sleep with Joe Scott in the mill” (Bronte, *Shirley* 23). The room where Robert is first introduced to the reader (Bronte, *Shirley* 19), a place in one of the counting-houses, seems to be the heart of his sphere at the mill. When Moore wants to sleep in the mill at night, he uses “certain sleeping accommodations producible from recesses in the front and back counting-houses” (Bronte, *Shirley* 49). At the cottage, on the other hand, Robert’s sister Hortense, who is not too submissive, has considerable influence – although her brother, as the man in the house, is still highly respected. When he is over at the mill, Robert is “not under petti-coat government” (Bronte, *Shirley* 24) but in a world dominated by men. After disappointing Caroline, as Wilt says, he “retires to a darkened Hollow’s-mill to play out bourgeois *masculinity* in a hail of brickbats and

bullets” [emphasis added] (Wilt 4). Shirley, however, challenges the gender-related distribution of spheres in that she, ironically, is the true owner of the mill and is ready to battle together with Robert against the attackers on what is hers (Bronte, *Shirley* 225). The underage workers in Robert’s service, who are at least partly girls, have limited space for themselves and seem not to have a place to eat outside the work-rooms. These workers and their space in the mill are, however, not focussed on by the narrator. There seems to be a strong division, also spatially, between the workers and Robert. Joe Scott, who as overseer is on an intermediate hierarchical level between the master and the “common” workers, can be found both with Robert in places like the counting-house and in the “work-rooms” (Bronte, *Shirley* 52). He is a character that in a sense “belongs” to the mill, in that the reader knows him especially in connection with this place and his work there. Being one of the most determined women-haters in the novel, he may both represent and enhance the atmosphere of male dominance as well as the tendency to exclude women from the mill: “Joe, holding supercilious theories about women in general, resented greatly [...] the fact of his master and his master’s mill being under petticoat government, and had felt as *wormwood* and *gall*, certain business-visits of the heiress to the counting-house” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 275-276). The highlighted words stress how unwelcome Shirley is to Joe, not in spite of but because of her ownership, because she is a woman. Indeed, this character, so strongly associated with the mill, seems to disapprove of female power, and thus may also not feel too comfortable at Hollow’s cottage. When he is once in the little house, with Caroline and the quarrelling Hortense and Sarah in it, Joe asserts, “A houseful of women is nivver fit to be comed on wi’out warning” (Bronte, *Shirley* 345).

Hortense and the servant Sarah keep the household of Hollow’s cottage, working in places like the kitchen and the parlour. The kitchen is part of Hortense’s and especially of Sarah’s space, but that does not mean that Robert and Caroline never enter it. With its hearth, where Robert can warm up after a long ride through the rain (Bronte, *Shirley* 72), it may have a pleasant atmosphere, in spite of the quarrels that frequently take place between Hortense and Sarah. The kitchen, part of Sarah’s social space, may be described, but scarcely any information is given on the rest of her sphere. Since the cottage is not a very frequent setting, there are other considerable gaps of information, especially on bedrooms.

The “small parlour” (Bronte, *Shirley* 54) at Hollow’s cottage is the place where guests stay. It is a place of social interaction between Robert, Hortense and, up to a certain point, Caroline: “There was no room in England so pleasant as that small parlour when the three cousins occupied it” (Bronte, *Shirley* 67). Towards the beginning of the novel, Hortense teaches Caroline there. Early on, Caroline is a frequent visitor, and not exclusively in the daytime (Bronte, *Shirley* 66). For a long time, however, both the mill and the cottage are forbidden territory for her, and she can only marvel at it from the distance. Towards the end of the novel, Robert himself again invites her (Bronte, *Shirley* 500). After Caroline’s entry into the parlour, “the newly kindled lamp *burned up bright*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 501), which may reflect the happiness resulting from her return. This invitation and visit indicate that Robert has opened his heart for Caroline again and point at Caroline’s future escape from the Rectory to live with Robert.

6.2. Briarfield Rectory

As regards Briarfield Rectory, quite a few rooms are described. These include Caroline’s bedroom, the breakfast-room, the drawing-room, the dining-room, a kitchen, and more than one parlour.

The Presentation of the Rectory

The Rectory is described by an outsider as “a rambling old building” (Bronte, *Shirley* 284). This is the place where the Rector Mr Helstone, his niece Caroline as well as the servants Fanny and Eliza live. Both the Rectory and its master are a far cry from what they should be. He is a negative example of a clergyman, in particular because, as Thormählen says, “his dealings with his parishioners are [...] untouched by that pastoral love which Simeon and his followers regarded as the moving force in all clerical work. He is also the opposite of a man of peace: his martial proclivities are in evidence throughout the book” (Thormählen 199). The Rectory, likewise, is not described as a house of God and divine salvation but very often as a place of suffering.

The drawing-room is one of the representative apartments within the Rectory. It comes across as cosy (as in Bronte, *Shirley* 102), yet it is the setting for the parties Caroline hates so much. The dining-room, too, may seem cosy with its “sofa” (Bronte, *Shirley* 184) and “mantelpiece” (Bronte, *Shirley* 186). In the dining-room, portraits of different members of the family are displayed: “on the wall opposite the sofa [...] hung three

pictures” (Bronte, *Shirley* 185). On Mrs Pryor’s visit, these give Caroline and her mother an impulse to discuss their relatives. There is more than one parlour, which may suggest that this is a rich, representative and spacious house. The “two large schoolrooms” (Bronte, *Shirley* 246), too, are probably places in the Rectory. These are described with reference to changes for the occasion of the feast at Whitsun, for which they are “cleaned out, *white*-washed, repainted, and decorated [...] twenty tables [...] were laid out [...] and covered with *white* cloths” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 246). Positive aspects, here, are suggested especially by the word “white”, which occurs twice in the above quote. The cosiness, beauty and wealth displayed in some parts of the house, however, only reflect one aspect of Mr Helstone’s character, namely a sociable and agreeable side he shows when seeing characters that do not belong to the house (Bronte, *Shirley* 181). This depiction of the Rectory also shows that this is by no means a poor house – financially speaking, that is.

What most outsiders may not be aware of is that the everyday atmosphere at the Rectory is a far cry from the way they may think it is. Privately, behind the façade these rooms may help create, Mr Helstone is neither sociable nor agreeable, and his niece is very frequently unhappy. Indeed, there are images of dreariness, lifelessness, death and unpleasant oldness associated with the house, especially by Caroline: “If I lie awake for an hour or two in the night, I am continually thinking of the Rectory as a *dreary old place* [...] it is very near the churchyard: the back part of the house is extremely *ancient*, and it is said that the out-kitchens there were once enclosed in the churchyard, and that there are *graves* under them” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 202). One reason for these negative images, then, is here said to be the existence of the graveyard. In the same vein, “*vault-like cellars*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 282) are mentioned in the novel. Ghostliness is suggested in the quote, “the *haunted* back-kitchen” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 282). Another room is described as, “a quiet parlour which the sun forsook at noon” (Bronte, *Shirley* 327). Caroline says, “It is scarcely *living* to measure time as I do at the Rectory. The hours pass, and I get them over somehow, but I do not *live*. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 315). Similarly, Rose calls Caroline’s life at the Rectory “a long, slow death” (Bronte, *Shirley* 335), saying, “Might you not as well be tediously dying, as for ever shut up in that glebe-house – a place that [...] reminds me of a windowed *grave*? I never see any movement about the door: I never hear a sound from the walls” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley*

335). These descriptions may make the Rectory appear much more gloomy than the Gothic-style Fieldhead Hall (cf. section 6.3). Gothic qualities normally associated with ancient castles or dark aristocratic mansions are given to the Rectory.

Gubar says that in *Shirley*, “Bronte remains primarily interested in women who exist privately, *confined* precisely by those morals and manners that prevent them from participating in public life” [emphasis added] (Gubar 6). The Rectory is the place at which women like Caroline and Mary Helstone suffer most severely. The latter character is said to have been Mr Helstone’s wife, the spouse of one whom “nature never intended to make a very good husband” (Bronte, *Shirley* 45). The tale of Mrs Helstone and her death is told in an early chapter (Bronte, *Shirley* 44-46) and her tragic demise must be attributed to Mr Helstone’s behaviour towards her, which is said to have been absolutely neglecting and unfeeling. He behaves very similarly to Caroline, who, too, suffers mentally and physically and almost dies due to a circumstance very similar to the reason for Mrs Helstone’s decease. For Caroline, the Rectory in particular represents a cage that is not exactly golden, although Mr Helstone does provide for her. As a woman without parents or heritage, Caroline has no choice but to live there. Her uncle is generous towards her only on a materialistic level (though even this is not in every way true), denying her emotional and intellectual nourishment and not allowing her to seek an occupation as a governess, even if this may be a bad alternative. Also, Mr Helstone is hardly a family for Caroline, being one of the particularly misogynist characters in the book, lacking empathy for the opposite sex and constantly putting it down: “he walked in the garden, pondering over the unaccountable and feeble nature of women” (Bronte, *Shirley* 359).

As a single woman, Caroline is often lonely. She has no work to go to and her unfeeling uncle for a while also forbids her to go to Hollow’s cottage. Caroline is excluded from the houses of Hollow’s cottage and, for a shorter period, Fieldhead Hall, where she would be granted some of the excitement she lacks at the Rectory. This exclusion is partly responsible for her confinement to her home. The recurring circumstance of having to remain within the limits of the Rectory walls for lack of a good alternative or any alternative is often depressing to her, especially in times of tribulations. When not allowed to see Robert, she is once referred to as “an imprisoned bird” (Bronte, *Shirley* 211), and when she cannot go to Fieldhead Hall because of visitors, her situation is very

similar (Bronte, *Shirley* 327). This place, symbolic for the narrow sphere assigned to women, offers no excitement for Caroline. Her uncle's way with her contributes to this; when there are no guests, Mr Helstone is no good society for Caroline at the Rectory, almost as if its atmosphere had some negative influence on him: "he is stern and silent at home [...] he locks his liveliness in his book-case and study-desk: the knitted brow and brief word for the fireside" (Bronte, *Shirley* 181). As Rose says, "nothing changes in Briarfield Rectory: the plaster of the parlour-ceilings, the paper on the walls, the curtains, the carpets, chairs are still the same" (Bronte, *Shirley* 336). The narrator assigns an appropriate colour to the place, calling it "the *gray* Rectory" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 327).

All this contributes to the severe mental suffering Caroline is subject to, and her living in a (relatively) rich house does not make her situation any better: "Many that want food and clothing have cheerier lives and brighter prospects than she had; many, harassed by poverty, are in a strait less afflictive" (Bronte, *Shirley* 204).

Indeed, ever so often, Caroline feels bad at the place, and it is perhaps symptomatic of the oppressive nature of the Rectory that even on a day of festive fun like Whitsuntide, she soon feels uncomfortable indoors and goes outdoors: "It appeared that the *heat* of the room did not suit Miss Helstone: she grew paler and paler [...] she quitted the table" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 262). Bronte's meaning of the word "heat" should be taken literally first and foremost but could perhaps also be understood on a metaphorical level, on which it may, as if another hint were necessary, indicate the mismatch between Caroline's needs and the atmosphere at the Rectory.

Gezari asserts that, "In *Shirley*, the plight of woman is much darker [than in *Jane Eyre*], and their confinement is represented as a condition closer to death than life" (Gezari, "Introduction" xii). Taylor writes about Caroline's horrible situation as reflecting the dreadful situation of women at Bronte's time in general (Taylor 90-92). Indeed, the oppression and consequent agony of woman is perhaps most keenly felt in the passages set at the Rectory, where Caroline cannot experience the comfort or stimulation she at times experiences at other places, like Fieldhead Hall or Hollow's cottage (cf. sections 6.1, 6.3). Caroline's problem in her limited sphere is put in a broader context when the rector's niece thinks about the other women without an occupation in the neighbourhood,

and the novel becomes highly explicit on its general social critique of this matter. The scene of the Rectory is, however, the starting point for this critique, where it is often given implicitly.

However, one night the Rectory is also presented as providing shelter from vicious assaults. Indeed, Mr Helstone does keep weapons (long knives, guns, and a sword are mentioned), with which the women may defend the place from any intruder in his absence (Bronte, *Shirley* 281). The circumstance that there is so much fighting equipment, as is somewhat inappropriate for a rectory, reflects Mr Helstone's passion for warfare and once more goes to show what an unusual rector and Rectory these are. Ironically, despite the misogynist atmosphere at the Rectory, Shirley is charged with the defence of what she on this occasion calls Mr Helstone's "stronghold" (Bronte, *Shirley* 280) (cf. section 6.1). Shirley is again granted the typically male epithet "captain" (Bronte, *Shirley* 280), this time in the cause of defending the Rectory, but this is done to direct her attention away from the mill (cf. section 6.1). Also in other ways, the Rectory seems like a clerical fortress: the house and garden are protected from the outside world by a wall (Bronte, *Shirley* 284), and there is the sentinel of a dog. The latter keeps a rioter from trying to break into the house with the object of killing the parson (Bronte, *Shirley* 284).

As Bailin says, "There is scarcely a Victorian narrative without its ailing protagonist whose physical suffering is metaphorically, or even causally, related to the larger social and moral disorder of the world outside the sickroom walls" (Bailin 254). Caroline's own thoughts about single women in general foreground her life-threatening illness and give the reasons for it: "This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well" (Bronte, *Shirley* 329). Caroline's social situation and psychological constitution, influenced strongly by the unfavourable atmosphere and circumstances at the Rectory, are partly responsible for her dangerous fever, which is made more explicit later (Bronte, *Shirley* 351-352, cf. section 5.2). Having endlessly suffered emotionally, especially at home, she is now also in an absolutely dangerous physical condition. However, Mrs Pryor's stay in the sickroom – which is Caroline's own room –, has a positive effect on its atmosphere: "loneliness and gloom were now banished from her bedside; protection and solace sat there instead" (Bronte, *Shirley* 353) – although Caroline still has her hours of despair. Mrs Pryor's stay altogether makes a change at the

Rectory, as she brings a lot of love to the place and does away with Caroline's feeling of forsakenness, especially when revealing her identity as the young woman's mother (cf. section 5.2). As opposed to before her revelation, there is now a strong atmosphere of family and togetherness at the place. As this gives her something to live for, Caroline is motivated to and finally does get well again (cf. section 5.2).

Social Spaces

The separation of male and female spheres is very strong at the Rectory, causing Caroline to live a particularly lonely life (Bronte, *Shirley* 186). As the young lady says, "I have grown up by myself" (Bronte, *Shirley* 186). Caroline's room is not described in very favourable terms. This is the place to which Caroline often withdraws, as in: "Most of her time had been passed shut up in her own apartment" (Bronte, *Shirley* 201). The place is referred to as a "narrow chamber" (Bronte, *Shirley* 148) and symbolises perhaps the limited, domestic sphere of this woman on the whole. When Caroline is not sleeping well, the narrator once refers to the place where she lays her head as a "bed of thorns" (Bronte, *Shirley* 161). One evening, at a moment when Caroline is particularly depressed, the fire goes out (Bronte, *Shirley* 150). With regard to the furnishings mentioned, these once more go to show Caroline is not deprived of material goods and that there is some wealth in the house, part of which Mr Helstone does not withhold from his niece. This room may neither seem altogether uncomfortable nor may it appear minimalist. A "carpet" (Bronte, *Shirley* 85) and an "easy-chair" (Bronte, *Shirley* 354) are mentioned. What these, however, do not reflect is how extremely deprived and poor she is on a non-materialistic level.

Other places in the house belong to the uncle's rather than the niece's sphere. What is perhaps Mr Helstone's study is very clearly not part of Caroline's social space, as it is referred to in the following manner: "the room in which he sat was very sacred ground to her; she seldom intruded on it" (Bronte, *Shirley* 84). "Her uncle's breakfast-room" (Bronte, *Shirley* 85) is the place where Mr Helstone and Caroline meet to eat in the morning; "that meal over, it was the general custom of uncle and niece to separate, and not to meet again till dinner" (Bronte, *Shirley* 87). It seems that, should Caroline stay in the breakfast-room longer than usual, she is anything but welcome, even if she sits in "the window-seat" (Bronte, *Shirley* 87). Thus, the emotional distance between uncle and niece shows in the dynamics of their spatial distance in the course of the day.

The drawing-room is a place to which guests may come, and if Caroline does not approve of their company, there is the opportunity for her to “escape” upstairs. Usually, it is up to her to stay or leave the room. Sometimes, guests also are invited to the dining-room or one or more parlours in the novel. Caroline, being a very shy character, often hides in her chamber when there are guests. With Shirley at her side, however, the rector’s niece is more sociable than usual at the event of Whitsuntide, even though there are many people invited to the Rectory on the occasion: “instead of sitting down in a retired corner, or stealing away to her own room [...] she moved through the three parlours, conversed and smiled” (Bronte, *Shirley* 250). At the feast, the social hierarchy is reflected by spatial separation: “the three first tables [...] At these tables the élite of the company were to be entertained; strict rules of equality not being more in fashion at Briarfield than elsewhere” (Bronte, *Shirley* 258). Badly wanting Robert to sit next to her, Shirley uses her imagination and exerts her powers to get rid of Sam Wynne and Timothy Ramsden, which shows her eagerness to be in the company she wants (Bronte, *Shirley* 260-261).

Although the servants Eliza and Fanny are often mentioned, their social sphere is not described much. One of the rioters says that their bedrooms are in the back, while Caroline occupies “a front room” (Bronte, *Shirley* 284). The kitchen, where they work, however, is described (Bronte, *Shirley* 96).

When Caroline is sick, her social space is limited to her own room. As at this time Mrs Pryor stays at the Rectory, taking care of her, “Fanny and Eliza became cyphers in the sick-room: Mrs Pryor made it her domain [...] she lived in it day and night” (Bronte, *Shirley* 353). Like Miss Temple in *Jane Eyre* (cf. section 3.2), here is another motherly character spending an extensive amount of time at a scene of illness. In taking care of Caroline and claiming her as a daughter, Mrs Pryor brings, as it were, the light of motherliness to brighten a place of colourless darkness, and, thus, saves her.

6.3. Fieldhead Hall

The three most important rooms described at Fieldhead Hall are perhaps the oak-parlour, the drawing-room and the school-room. However, there are other places described in the house, such as the vestibule and Shirley's dressing-room.

The Presentation of Fieldhead Hall

Fieldhead Hall is the home of Shirley Keeldar, a rich heiress and owner of the land on which Hollow's-mill is built. Although it is not important for the the novel's early part of the plot, the exterior of the house is actually described before the Hollow: "*large* [...] a *long* front [...] *lofty* stack of chimneys" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 18). The words stressed here indicate largeness, and this quality is only fitting, as this house belongs to a rich lineage, and its proprietor also owns a lot of land in the neighbourhood. More than a hundred pages on, the house is also called "picturesque" (Bronte, *Shirley* 161). Waters says that, "in Bronte's description" of Fieldhead (Bronte, *Shirley* 160-161), "the focus is primarily upon the first-order significations of 'picturesque' as a label for pictorially-appealing physical and surface characteristics" (Waters 83). These early descriptions of Fieldhead Hall, given before the proprietor herself, who gave the novel its name, is herself introduced, in an anticipatory manner inform the reader of Shirley's social standing.

Caroline first visits Shirley at Fieldhead Hall when in her psychologically most appalling constitution. It is then that we are given descriptions of some of the rooms inside the building. These impressions are not too positive: "neither a grand nor a comfortable house: within as without it was *antique, rambling*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 166). It is also called "a *gothic* old barrack" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 167), which pinpoints the architectural style of the house. Also, the description of Fieldhead Hall may evoke an – in the literary sense – Gothic mood in that it is gloomy, of medieval origin and of considerable size. The vestibule is described as "very *sombre* [...] *long, vast, and dark* [...] *carved stags' heads*, with real antlers" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 166). The oak-parlour is said to be "lined with oak [...] real *old* furniture [...] two *antique* chairs of oak, solid as sylvan *thrones*" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 167).

The gloomy aspect of this Gothic image of Fieldhead Hall may be misleading. In no way does it mirror the kind, helpful and vivacious nature of its proprietor Shirley, who also

helps to considerably improve the atmosphere: “She keeps her dark old manor-house light and bright with her cheery presence” (Bronte, *Shirley* 324). Also, despite its superficially gloomy appearance, Fieldhead Hall comes to stand for some rather positive aspects in the novel, as it is here where Caroline finds her best friend in Shirley and her mother in Mrs Pryor. At a time of abject emotional agony, long stays at Fieldhead Hall, as opposed to the dreary Rectory (cf. section 6.2), cause the rector’s niece to experience a “happy change” (Bronte, *Shirley* 187). Instead of spooky and distressing goings-on as in Gothic novels, there is testimony to loyalty and friendship at Fieldhead. Shirley and Caroline are here able to experience happiness and pleasant female community. Once, it is particularly dark in the parlour, but neither does this seem to reflect nor cause negative feelings in Shirley or Caroline: “it was now on the edge of dark; candles were not yet brought in [...] all deep peace within” (Bronte, *Shirley* 189).

Robert soon endangers the harmony between Caroline and Shirley, which the heiress is aware of: “He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we should be good friends” (Bronte, *Shirley* 221). It is, thus, a man who interferes and shatters the happiness created by women at Fieldhead Hall.

Still, while the Rectory is the place where a woman is deprived and depressed (cf. section 6.2), Fieldhead Hall, in contrast, is the house where the patriarchal laws of society and men’s absolute rule are for a while challenged or partly broken. For a long time, the place is something of a bulwark of female power and as such is quite an unusual setting for early Victorian literature. In the house, Shirley is in charge, as the “property had descended, for lack of male heirs, on a female” (Bronte, *Shirley* 166). Male characters, even dominant ones like Mr Helstone (Bronte, *Shirley* 229), may here find themselves in situations where a woman is socially more powerful than they are. As guests, Malone and Donne are frightened and humbled shortly after entering Fieldhead Hall. Indeed, while they feel at the mercy of Tartar it takes the mistress or her servant to call him back (Bronte, *Shirley* 234). For his insolent behaviour, Shirley makes use of her power and authority to throw Donne out, saying, “Were you an archbishop: you have proved yourself no gentleman, and must go” (Bronte, *Shirley* 243). As a place of wealth, power, and prestige, the possession of Fieldhead Hall is the aim and desire of more than one male character. Malone, Donne, Robert Moore, and Samuel Wynne all want to marry Shirley for the worldly advantages Fieldhead bestows. When the Symptons come to visit

at the place, the female power at Fieldhead is seriously challenged. Even the idea of a warlike attack and conquest is suggested, while Fieldhead Hall itself, like Hollow's-mill (cf. section 6.1), is likened to a stronghold: "an invasion befell Fieldhead: a genteel foraging party besieged Shirley in her castle, and compelled her to surrender at discretion" (Bronte, *Shirley* 327). From this point onwards, female power at the place is weakened, although Mr Sympson cannot break Shirley's will as to the subject of matrimony. Louis Moore is more successful in breaking the female leadership at Fieldhead Hall and really conquers it. By the word "captor" (Bronte, *Shirley* 534) it is suggested that he has achieved warlike aims when having done so. However, Louis also acts partly like a spy to gain leadership, staying at Fieldhead Hall long enough to find out how he can subdue Shirley. For instance, he finds out a useful detail by observing: "many of her possessions [...] are frequently astray" (Bronte, *Shirley* 438). Thus, he wins Shirley's hand partly because he has gained some insight into the dynamics at Fieldhead Hall. For Shirley, the union with Louis is like a double-edged knife: she has married the man she loves but, as a freedom-loving person, she cannot feel happy (Bronte, *Shirley* 534). Quite a few words – such as "fettered", "restricted", "chained" – strongly indicate that Shirley is confined. Taylor says that because of "her time, Bronte could not imagine what else a woman landowner could do with wealth and independence except give them to the man she chose to love" (Taylor 90).

In one of the surprisingly few descriptions of Fieldhead Hall from Shirley's point of view, it is said that, "The *still* parlour, the *clean* hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky [...] suffice to make earth an *Eden*, life a *poem*, for Shirley" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 326). The vocabulary emphasised here suggest very positive qualities for the mansion of Fieldhead Hall. The above quote also tells us that the Hall is not unpleasantly shut off from the evening scene and air (cf. 7). Despite its partially Gothic appearance, then, the place is not depressing – at least to her – but, on the contrary, like paradise, making her happy, as the last two emphasised words indicate.

The oak-parlour may be Shirley's favourite large room at Fieldhead Hall. The narrator says about the Gothic touch of the wood in the oak-parlour that it is "very mellow in colouring and tasteful in effect, but – if you know what a 'Spring-clean' is – very execrable and inhuman" (Bronte, *Shirley* 167). Zlotnick says about this description that "she [Bronte] focuses on the contribution of the working woman [...] Bronte finds, to her evident displeasure, long days of drudgery for the anonymous housemaids whose duty it was to

keep the dust off the gargoyles” (Zlotnick 286). This room is described by Louis as more attractive than the salon in the same house: “this is *not chill*, and polished, and fireless like the salon: the hearth is *hot* and *ruddy*; the cinders tinkle in the *intense heat* of their *clear glow* [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 435). The italicised words refer to the warmth and brightness in the oak-parlour. Louis seems to be intrigued by this room, as it is where his beloved Shirley very frequently stays. The fire, indeed, may represent something of Shirley’s character – her “*warm good-will*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 437) in particular –, yet it is the mess Shirley has left, betraying regrettable habits of hers, that primarily attract the tutor’s attention: “careless, attractive thing! – called away in haste [...] and forgetting to return and put all to rights [...] There is always something to chide in her, and the reprimand never settles in displeasure on the heart [...] How culpably careless of her to leave her desk open, where I know she has money” (Bronte, *Shirley* 435, 437). He enjoys to secretly spend time in Shirley’s sphere, where so much reminds him of her (Bronte, *Shirley* 436).

The drawing-room has less of a Gothic but a brighter look, being “of a delicate *pinky white*” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 167). With regard to its furnishings, this large room may appear cosy and agreeable: “the pair took seats, *each* in an *arm-chair* [...] the *pretty white* and green carpet” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 458). Evidently, there are also books stored in this apartment (Bronte, *Shirley* 511). However, the drawing-room is perhaps a much less important setting than the oak-parlour.

Another place described at Fieldhead Hall is the school-room. Gargano observes that, “in general, critics have seen both Louis and his schoolroom as troubling images of mediocrity and male authoritarianism” (Gargano 780). As Gilbert and Gubar say, “Shirley’s final return to the rhetoric of the classroom only confirms and completes her fall” (Gilbert and Gubar 393). Indeed, when they are in the school-room, Louis, sitting at his desk, is in a position of power, while Shirley loses much of her authority as the mistress of the house and his, the poor tutor’s, social superior. The school-room is then a place which, due to its function and also because of the characters’ positionings therein, quite magically takes Shirley, Louis, and Henry back in time, changing power-relations. On the other hand, the school-room often does have a positive atmosphere, in spite of its “low lattice” (Bronte, *Shirley* 511). Once Louis observes: “That same schoolroom is rather pleasant in a morning” (Bronte, *Shirley* 511). The fire in this place is mentioned with uncommon frequency and more than

once plays a clearly positive part, for example when Louis summons Henry to it in order to alleviate his suffering by conversation: “Come to the fireside [...] You have a grief: – tell it me” (Bronte, *Shirley* 417). The fire in particular represents friendship and love, but also pleasant memories of past days of affection. Before seeing Louis in the school-room with its fire, Shirley mistrusts the room’s atmosphere and it is impossible for her to resume her friendship with him: “she would sometimes get a notion into her head, on a cold, wet day, that the school-room was no cheerful place, and feel it incumbent on her to go and see if you and Henry kept up a good fire; and once there, she liked to stay” (Bronte, *Shirley* 432). On the other hand, the destructive activity of the fire can also mirror impending loss. When Shirley and Louis talk about Louis’s plans of leaving for the Americas, Shirley “separated a slip of paper [...] she threw morsel by morsel into the fire, and stood pensively watching them consume” (Bronte, *Shirley* 514).

Social Spaces

Splendid, representative rooms like the oak-parlour or the drawing-room are of course part of the sphere of the head of the household. As the narrator rarely writes from Shirley’s point of view, the heiress’ more private places are not important settings in the novel, although, for instance, „Miss Keeldar’s dressing-room“ (Bronte, *Shirley* 248) is described. Her relatives, the Symptons, share much of her social spaces on their visit. Two rooms are central for social interaction in *Shirley*: the drawing-room and the oak-parlour. To either, guests may be invited. The oak-parlour is a room where Shirley is frequently found in the narrative. Since Shirley is the mistress of the house, however, she will be in different kinds of places all over the house, including, though quite rarely, the kitchen. Mrs Pryor, being Shirley’s friend and of relatively high social status at Fieldhead Hall, is frequently at Shirley’s side, sharing her sphere. Otherwise, there is little we learn about her sphere as well.

The oak-parlour is an important place for social interaction between the most central female characters of the novel, namely Caroline, Shirley and Mrs Pryor. Sometimes guests, like the Wynnes, also stay in the drawing-room (Bronte, *Shirley* 391), and Shirley has the duty of receiving them, even if she does not want to do so. Shirley says, “Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform” (Bronte, *Shirley* 391).

In the description of Fieldhead Hall, again, there are gaps of information on the social space of the servants. The kitchen, for instance, is where Mrs Gill, the housekeeper, frequently stays, but the information on it is scarce.

For a long time, because of their social roles, there is a divide between Shirley and Louis. It seems rather unusual for Louis to go to rooms where Shirley frequently stays – like the oak-parlour or the drawing-room –, and he seems scarcely to enter them except when having a practical reason to do so or when the heiress is out (Bronte, *Shirley* 436). In the beginning of his stay in particular, Henry's tutor is "isolated under her [Shirley's] roof" (Bronte, *Shirley* 380), although he takes at least some of his meals in the same room as Shirley and the Sympons. He is kept at a distance, also by Shirley: "she meted out a wide space between us" (Bronte, *Shirley* 432). The narrator once alludes to the tutor's marginal existence at Fieldhead with the words, "confinement to a small still corner" (Bronte, *Shirley* 435). During their stay, the school-room is obviously part of Louis and Henry's sphere, but it is also the space of a trio complete with Shirley and even more significantly the place where Shirley and Louis have the chance to see each other for longer and to get closer.

In Robert's own narration, it is unspecified in what room his proposal to Shirley at Fieldhead Hall takes place, but a window-seat and a hearth are mentioned (Bronte, *Shirley* 447). Robert, as if in need of support of the room's furnishings whilst having to endure Shirley's wrathful reaction, "stood on the hearth, *backed* by the mantelpiece; against it I leaned" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 447).

6.4. Briarmains

Rooms described at Briarmains include the back-parlour and another parlour as well as Robert's sickroom. Also, there is a description of a larder.

The Presentation and Social Spaces of Briarmains

In the chapter "Briarmains", this is claimed to be "rather an old place" (Bronte, *Shirley* 123). As such, and with its name sounding as if it was linked to that of the village of Briarfield, it may represent the heart of the neighbourhood. Here, Mr Yorke, "a Yorkshire gentleman [...] in every point" (Bronte, *Shirley* 39), is master.

Bronte was probably aware that the nature and background of the character of Mr Yorke is relatively hard for the reader to grasp. The description of his house helps to understand it: "His station [...] you could not easily determine by his speech or demeanour; perhaps the appearance of his residence may decide it" (Bronte, *Shirley* 37). The description of the parlour in particular gives insight into Mr Yorke's character. The statement, "There was no splendour" (Bronte, *Shirley* 37) shows that, although high in the social hierarchy, he is far from bragging of his prestigious status. The different details of this room also betray something of his past – "the taste [...] of a travelled man" –, and are supposed to show that he is "a scholar", "a gentleman", and also "a connoisseur": "A series of Italian views decked the walls; each of these was a specimen of true art" (Bronte, *Shirley* 37).

The back-parlour is introduced as "the usual sitting-room of an evening" (Bronte, *Shirley* 125). This is where the rest of the Yorke family is introduced to the reader. Briarmains is the only major domestic place in either *Shirley* or *Jane Eyre* owned by a family with a classical family constellation (consisting of a father, a mother and their own children). Yorke is said to be "an advocate for family unity" (Bronte, *Shirley* 126), which is what Briarmains may represent. The situation of the family's children contrasts with that of the heroines Shirley and Caroline.

In this household, too, there is a strong spatial separation of classes, as we gather early on, when a separate entrance and a separate social space are assigned to guests of lower social standing than that of visitors like Mr Moore and Mr Helstone: "the men he recommended to take the kitchen way [...] The gentlemen were ushered in at the front entrance" (Bronte, *Shirley* 37). The kitchen is part of the space of the servants, where

they also have breakfast (Bronte, *Shirley* 481). This place, however, is also mentioned in connection with Mrs Yorke, who seems to like watching over the servants there (Bronte, *Shirley* 472). At Briarmains, the focus is again not on the servants but on the Yorkes and their guests. For a change, a larder is also described, but this is only because Martin Yorke enters it once (Bronte, *Shirley* 483).

As this is, however, not a very frequent setting in the novel, there is little information either on the more private spheres of the servants or on those of other characters. We are told that wounded Robert is nursed in the Yorkes' "best bed" (Bronte, *Shirley* 470). At this time, Mrs Yorke makes the room where Robert lies and "the upper realm of the house" (Bronte, *Shirley* 471) her territory, admitting only very few people to visit Robert in the sickroom (Bronte, *Shirley* 471). Soon after, however, the nurse Mrs Horsfall takes over the room and is even more rigidly exclusive (Bronte, *Shirley* 472). Mrs Horsfall also disturbs the balance of power in the house, and the description of the power struggle involves the metaphor of warfare, which is visible in the words highlighted here: "Hortense Moore *fell effaced* before her; Mrs Yorke withdrew – *crushed* [...] they *retreated* to the back-parlour" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 473).

6.5. Conclusion

As has been shown, *Shirley* features a variety of possible indoor settings. There are the workplace of Hollow's-mill, the humble house of Hollow's cottage, the larger and less humble Rectory, the very prestigious and wealthy Fieldhead Hall, as well as the noble mansion of Briarmains. All these houses have very different identities and symbolic aspects connected with them. The portrayals of the houses or certain parts of the houses may "mirror the owner" (Theuer 66) or – in the case of Fieldhead Hall – reflect something of the proprietors' family history. Very often, however, places are described to illustrate other characters' situations, feelings, thoughts or traits. For instance, Caroline's situation and inner world are reflected in the portrayal of the Rectory. In the novel, there are contrasts between and within different houses. For instance, Hollow's-mill and Hollow's cottage come to stand for two opposite qualities of the same character, and the representative surface characteristics of some of the rooms in the Rectory strongly contrast with the numerous unfavourable descriptions of the house and its atmosphere. With regard to the situation of women, there are considerable contrasts between different places. At Hollow's cottage, women seem to have considerable power, but men like to

consider Hollow's-mill, a place of work, their very own domain. While Caroline for most of the novel suffers at the Rectory, Shirley is for a long time happy and powerful at Fieldhead Hall, and even Caroline finds a friend and even a mother there. The former place stands for the oppression and confinement of women, while the latter for much of the novel represents their freedom and power, although there are very considerable changes in the third volume and Shirley loses most of her social power to Louis towards the end. The Rectory is also presented in opposition to Hollow's cottage, which Caroline, when excluded from it, imagines as paradise because it belongs to the man she loves, and she happily returns to it eventually. More than one character at some point finds himself in a situation of having to defend a house against intruders. Hollow's-mill, Briarfield Rectory and Fieldhead Hall are all at least once likened to or equated with a fortress. The focus of the novel is largely on the social spaces of the masters and mistresses of the houses as well as on their family and guests, and there is typically very little information on the sphere of the servants. In all places, there seems to be some spatial separation of the respective spheres of working-class and other characters.

In each location, different rooms are described. The types of rooms that are often mentioned or described are parlours, drawing-rooms, and perhaps bedrooms and kitchens. The bedrooms at the private homes of some of the important characters, like Shirley and Robert, however, are scarcely described. Bedrooms often become important settings in the case of sickness or injury. On the whole, kitchens are scarcely significant settings, although they are not infrequently mentioned. Descriptions of splendid rooms contrast with those of humble rooms, and some rooms are described as having an agreeable atmosphere, while others are portrayed in unfavourable terms. Via information on size, furniture, lighting, temperature, or age, the qualities of a house or a place in a house are explicitly given or indicated.

7. The Worlds of the Indoors and Outdoors in *Shirley*

The narrator says about Hollow's cottage that "the hedge and high bank [...] served to give it something of the appearance and feeling of seclusion" (Bronte, *Shirley* 53), and the cottage does provide Robert with warm shelter from the more inclement weather (cf. section 5.4). However, this house does not seem to be unpleasantly shut off from the outside world. For instance, Caroline, sitting in the parlour, is free to enjoy the pleasant rays of the sun while studying (cf. section 5.4). Hollow's-mill, on the other hand, is treated like a fortress by its master (cf. section 6.1), which causes a far stronger seclusion from the world of the outdoors. On the night of the riot, the mill indeed becomes something like a fortress, and the battle makes the indoor-outdoor duality a contrast involving mortal danger, and its doors divide two hosts engaged in a disastrous fight (cf. section 6.1). Robert's determinacy not to abandon the mill and to keep out the rioters with violent means is due to his devotion to his work. It does not mean that he does not approve of nature and the outdoor world: "the full-flowing beck in the den would have delivered continuously the discourse *most genial* to his ear" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 28). Usually, he does not shut himself in with as much strictness as other people in his situation would employ: "The door of the counting-house stood wide open, the breeze and sunshine entered freely" (Bronte, *Shirley* 107-108). In spite of personal danger, Robert likes to roam outdoors at night: "when it is moonlight and mild, I often haunt the Hollow till daybreak" (Bronte, *Shirley* 199). One reason for this remarkable bravery – or carelessness – may be his love of nature. Shirley thinks that from his gentleness with cats and dogs she may gather that Robert, unlike many other men, would be a good husband (Bronte, *Shirley* 183), which indicates that Caroline's later act of marrying Robert is a good idea. Another reason why Robert usually does not lock himself in and does spend time outdoors may be his love for freedom and his unwillingness to be confined to the mill, as well as his passion for adventure and even danger. All of this seems to become evident in the enthusiasm with which he travels through the country when after his enemies: "Many a time he rode belated over moors [...] with feelings far more elate, faculties far better refreshed, than when safety and stagnation environed him in the counting-house" (Bronte, *Shirley* 323).

As regards the Rectory, we should consider Caroline's confinement. Although she hates the place and is mostly eager to go outdoors, she is often obliged to stay indoors (cf. section 6.2). For a while at least, she does not leave the Rectory because she does not

want people to see her in her grievous state (Bronte, *Shirley* 165). The immediate surroundings of the Rectory may often appear quite idyllic (cf. section 5.2). Shirley's rhapsody about Mother Nature may be prompted or inspired by the landscape just outside the church (cf. section 5.2), and the church and the Rectory are once described as "pleasantly embowered in trees" (Bronte, *Shirley* 324). Although the garden fails to make Caroline happy in her lonely days and is then not really described favourably (cf. section 5.2), the unpleasant atmosphere within (section 6.2) to some extent still contrasts with the beauties of nature without. The rector Mr. Helstone does not seem particularly appreciative or respectful of nature: "he took the heiress's two hands—causing her to let fall her whole cargo of flowers" (Bronte, *Shirley* 169). However, the Rectory does not seem to be very strictly cut off from the outdoor world. For instance, the feast at Whitsuntide takes place outdoors as well as indoors, and windows may be opened: "Mr. Hall stood near an open window, breathing the fresh air" (Bronte, *Shirley* 253). Also, it is "a glass-door" [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 284) that leads into the open air from the dining-room. The west wind that helps Caroline to recover from her life-threatening illness (cf. sections 5.2, 6.2) is freely admitted "through the ever-open chamber lattice" (Bronte, *Shirley* 371). In addition, Caroline is often able to leave the Rectory in order to spend time in nature. Caroline's situation, then, is not mirrored by an extreme hate of nature on the part of Mr Helstone, or exaggerated seclusion from the outdoor world ordered by him – although, when nature-loving Shirley and Caroline are left in charge of the house one night, a window is left open for longer than when the parson is at home, so that the rector's niece can even hear the brook close to Robert's cottage from the Rectory (Bronte, *Shirley* 281). On the other hand, like a fortress, the Rectory can provide favourable seclusion in the form of safety from malevolent people (cf. section 6.2). Still, because she very often does not feel at ease at the Rectory (cf. section 5.2), she, apart from going to the houses of dear friends, prefers spending time outdoors. Caroline herself is said to appreciate nature (Bronte, *Shirley* 157, cf. 5).

Fieldhead Hall does not appear very secluded. There are references to "a glass-door from the garden" (Bronte, *Shirley* 168), an "open porch-door" (Bronte, *Shirley* 324) and a "window opening on the twilight sky" (Bronte, *Shirley* 326). Although all these quotes are taken from a part of the novel set in summer, they may still indicate that the Hall is not very strictly shut off from the outdoor world. At Fieldhead Hall, similarly to the situation at Hollow's-mill, there is at times a strong contrast between the dark, Gothic-

style house itself and the landscape just outside, which often appears idyllic. This contrast may sometimes be said to exist even though the atmosphere of Fielhead Hall is considerably improved by the presence of the vivacious heiress (cf. section 6.3). Shirley appreciates nature and praises its deity (cf. section 5.2). Nature is linked with a pleasant sense of being alone when Shirley “sought solitude: not the solitude of her chamber [...] but that wilder solitude which lies out of doors” (Bronte, *Shirley* 416). This quote once more reflects Shirley’s appreciation of nature but also her love for freedom outdoors and her unwillingness to be confined in the realm of civilization: “she refused to mope, *shut up* between four walls” [emphasis added] (Bronte, *Shirley* 416, cf. section 6.3).

Mrs Pryor, too, loves nature and appears to be happy there in the presence of her daughter, while tending to be timid and often nervous or frightened in the realm of civilization. This is also shown in the following quote: “when once she got away from human habitations, and entered the still demesne of Nature, accompanied by this one youthful friend, a propitious change seemed to steal over her mind and beam in her countenance” (Bronte, *Shirley* 313). As mother of one of the two heroines, in a novel that links motherhood with nature, Mrs Pryor is very connected with nature, not just emotionally, like Shirley and Caroline, but also intellectually, seeming to know more about it than any other character: “Mrs Pryor talked about the various birds [...] English natural history seemed familiar to her. All the wild flowers round their path were recognised by her” (Bronte, *Shirley* 314). All this suggests that there are a salient connection and parallels between Mrs Pryor and Mother Nature, the latter of whom we may imagine, too, as both loving and being familiar with the sphere in her custody and also with its creatures. All these qualities of Mrs Pryor’s and her reaction to nature may suggest that in the passage set in the ravine (cf. section 5.2) this character is in some way meant to stand for Mother Nature.

In the situation of Robert’s being nursed by Mrs Yorke and his sister at Briarmains, there is again a kind of confinement and seclusion from the outdoor world: “They held the young millowner *captive*, and hardly let the air breathe or the sun shine on him” (Bronte, *Shirley* 472). Otherwise, Briarmains is not necessarily a place that is to an unusual extent secluded from nature outdoors.

8. Final Comparison and Conclusion

In a very basic way, the two novels differ greatly in the use of setting: the main action of *Jane Eyre* takes place in five separate spaces relatively far apart from one another, while the main setting of *Shirley* is one large area.

In both books, the description of outdoor spaces is often very effective. Both in *Shirley* and in *Jane Eyre* there are many beautiful, idyllic, sometimes even paradisiacal scenes. Such scenes are sometimes symbolically linked with love and romance. The action of both *Shirley* and *Jane Eyre* takes place in all four seasons of the year and thus also in times of typically inclement weather. As regards nature and landscape as setting, these are symbolically very important in *Jane Eyre*, where the five main outdoor locations are very different, partly also with regard to developments of the weather. Outdoor spheres and weather, however, are perhaps less often symbolic in *Shirley*: since the main setting is one large area with neighbouring central points, there are neither so many nor so strong regional differences between the immediate outdoor surroundings of the important houses. Very often, nature and landscape are described in a Gothic manner in *Jane Eyre*, involving the repeated use of sublime or gloomy scenes. In *Shirley*, too, there are scenes with inclement weather. There is, however, no house around which the weather is always described as inclement, as Gateshead Hall in *Jane Eyre*. This may partly be explained by the circumstance of the considerable proximity in *Shirley* of all major houses to one another. However, it also shows the less extensive use of pathetic fallacy in the latter novel. In both novels, also idyllic nature is described frequently. Idyllic scenes, too, are more often described for pathetic fallacy in *Jane Eyre* than in *Shirley*. Both books, nevertheless, feature ironic contrasts between nature and the circumstances of characters. In *Shirley*, however, it is often neither pathetic fallacy nor irony but a reality effect that we are confronted with. Occasionally, though less frequently, nature or landscape in *Jane Eyre* also seem to be described for reality effect rather than pathetic fallacy or irony.

In both novels, nature is presented in two very contrasting ways. On the one hand, it can be gloomy, intimidating, and dangerous; in both books, it brings about life-threatening and in many cases deadly illnesses. In some of these cases, houses to some extent provide much-needed shelter from these outdoor influences. On the other hand, in both *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, nature also has a spiritual dimension, and a kind female deity can be contacted outdoors. In both novels, this being has the role of a mother and is deeply

connected with nature. In *Shirley*, the background and even appearance of Nature are discussed, while in *Jane Eyre*, although Mother Nature can almost be called a character in her own right, rather than a mere figment of Jane's mind, there is little information or speculation on her. Although the deity in *Jane Eyre* is never called Eve by any of the characters, which the one in *Shirley* is, they may be assumed to have the same identity. There is also at least one scene in each of the two novels where nature is directly linked with (the Christian) God.

In both novels the sense of place is of central importance with regard to indoor space, and houses do have a symbolic significance. In both cases, there are contrasts between different houses, which are indicative of the different social situations of the respective inhabitants. Also, different symbolic meanings are connected with these places. A variety of rooms are described. This variety, however, is much larger in *Jane Eyre*, where the heroine is condemned to stay in a "hell-hole" like Lowood but also spends time in at least one mansion with some splendid rooms. Also, there are more rooms with unambiguously negative symbolic functions in *Jane Eyre*. In nearly all houses, more or less representative rooms of social interaction, such as parlours and drawing-rooms, are described, but all in all there are descriptions of many other types of rooms, such as bedrooms, school-rooms, dining-rooms, and kitchens. The two novels also single out many similar features for characterisation, creation of atmosphere, like lighting or temperature.

With regard to the depiction of indoor spaces, too, Bronte employs far more Gothic elements in *Jane Eyre* than she does in the succeeding novel. Although Fieldhead Hall is built in a Gothic style, this scarcely seems to be important in terms of what the place stands for in the novel, except to create or enhance an impression of prestige. Elsewhere in *Shirley*, the style of architecture seems more contemporary and perhaps less remarkable. In *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, a Gothic building style often goes hand in glove with – in a literary sense – Gothic atmospheres and other genre-specific aspects such as the confined madwoman or the fear of a ghost. At Thornfield Hall in particular, all of this contrasts with a more contemporary architectural style representing agreeableness and beauty, the latter of which is presented as in opposition to sublimity. Similarly, at Briarfield Rectory, superficial beauty and cosiness on the one hand contrast with gloomy aspects and associations with death, old age, and ghostliness on the other

hand. The Rectory is a much more depressing place than Thornfield Hall, yet the atmosphere in and aspect of Thornfield Hall is far more Gothic in that its Gothic elements are more numerous and less abstract than those found at the Rectory. For instance, Thornfield Hall has the appearance of a medieval castle, and it is undoubtedly haunted by an uncanny mad woman, while at the Rectory there are *moments* of fear of ghosts.

Most of the houses in *Shirley* are not destroyed or abandoned, apart from Hollow's-mill, which is indeed destroyed, a new mill being built to replace it. In *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, most houses are threatened by decay or abandonment, and some of them actually become ruins or are left by their inhabitants.

With regard to the description of social spaces in the different houses, the two novels have in common that the sphere of working-class characters is rarely focussed on. Usually, the respective social spaces of middle and upper class on the one hand and working class on the other hand are separated, and more than once this division is very strict.

In *Jane Eyre*, there are houses whose indoor spaces themselves are disagreeably and exaggeratedly secluded from outdoor spaces and nature. The clearest case is Lowood, which in winter is shut off from the outside world like a prison, which mirrors its master's exaggerated hatred of nature. (Lowood, in its isolated position, is also shut off from other houses and, thus, from civilization, as, for instance, the long way to church indicates.) The phenomenon of separation of indoor and outdoor spaces can also be observed at Gateshead Hall, where civilization is out of sympathy with nature. The situation in other houses in *Jane Eyre* is less extreme in this regard. In *Shirley*, there is no major house at all whose indoor spaces are characteristically shut off from outdoor spaces in an exaggerated, disagreeable fashion, although no less than three houses are at one point likened to or equated with fortresses. In *Shirley* there is no master or mistress of a house that is undoubtedly hateful of nature to a highly unusual degree. Most of the main characters, on the contrary, love nature. In *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* likewise, the virtuous – or, in the case of Edward Rochester and Robert Moore, at least highly potentially virtuous – characters are often fond of nature. On the other hand, many

characters the reader is not supposed to side with do not seem to have love or respect for nature and may or clearly do hate it.

With regard to the description of nature as well as houses, problems of the oppression of women or girls are central. In both novels, with regard to domestic spheres, confinement and exclusion, mostly of women or girls, are important themes. However, it also seems that the confinement or exclusion of the heroines Jane Eyre and Caroline Helstone is sooner or later weakened or even ended. In *Jane Eyre* the development from imprisonment and limitation to freedom is perhaps more gradual and fluctuating, while the situation of confinement and exclusion of *Shirley's* Caroline seems not to change fundamentally until the end of the novel. However, although Mr Helstone, too, is tyrannical and unsympathetic and cruelly limits Caroline's freedom, he is not the vile "prison warder" of the likes of Mrs Reed, who habitually limits Jane to certain rooms in her house, or of the different authorities of Lowood, where many girls are confined in a small space and are at times purposely separated from their fellow pupils. Compared to the child Jane, Caroline is still relatively free to visit places outside the Rectory, to spend time in nature and meet characters her uncle does not disapprove of. Also, she has more possibilities to move about within the Rectory. Mr Helstone's patriarchy, on the other hand, has a limiting effect on Caroline practically until the end of the novel. This and other social circumstances make it impossible for Caroline to take mighty leaps towards freedom, like Jane Eyre. Shirley Keeldar is like Jane Eyre in that she openly defies the patriarchal system. However, although there may be a strong similarity in the spirit of these two characters, the situations from which they start in the respective novels could not be more different, also in terms of accommodation: Shirley owns a large house, in which – in the beginning at least – no one seems to be able to limit her space, while Jane for years has to struggle for freedom. Another difference is that while towards the end of the book named after her, Shirley's confinement is indicated, Jane Eyre breaks free at the end of her novel. In *Jane Eyre*, it is always women or girls who are confined, while *Shirley* also features the siege of the mill as well as Louis's marginalized situation at Fieldhead Hall, and consequently forms of confinement of male characters.

However, houses often also provide shelter from inclement weather but also, like fortresses, from other people's attacks, as in *Shirley*. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* there are situations in which nature has a very harmful, life-threatening aspect. Both novels

contain passages where serious illness is brought about by perilous effects of nature and takes a heavy toll. In all these cases, however, society or the circumstances created by it have a part in the disaster, contributing to the illness.

In some cases, nature reflects what happens indoors, but this is more often the case in *Jane Eyre* than in *Shirley*. In different places in both of the novels there are strong contrasts between indoor and outdoor worlds, or between the atmosphere of a house on the one hand and that of its natural surroundings on the other hand. In the cases of Thornfield, Fieldhead, Briarfield Rectory and the Hollow with its mill, this mostly has to do with Gothic or negative aspects linked with the house, and beautiful, paradisiacal aspects connected with nature. Lowood in springtime is a special case because nature is partly responsible for the calamity of the pupils, though here there is also the contrast between beauty and life outdoors and suffering and death indoors, and, evidently, the house again comes to stand for something negative.

Civilization and its realm is, then, in many ways presented in a negative manner. Both novels focus on problems arising in a civilization dominated by upper and middle-class men, who oppress women and, in *Shirley*, clearly also the working class. Mother Nature, on the other hand, governs the outdoor world in the English countryside. When referred to as a personal deity, she is depicted as kind, benevolent and helpful and is never herself referred to as cruel. Although the weather can be extremely cruel and life-threatening illnesses take their toll, Mother Nature herself is never blamed, just as God is not always blamed for the world's misery. In both novels, nature is very strongly linked with motherhood. (Mother) Nature – also called Eve by *Shirley* – is the supreme being revered both by Jane and Shirley. Also, this deity – or rather, in *Shirley*, the mentioning of her – causes both Jane and Caroline to find the right path, encouraging the former to return to Rochester and the latter to open her heart towards her mother, who is thus in turn encouraged to reveal her identity to her daughter. Thus, both novels may be said to favour the power that governs nature and not the powerful people that rule over civilization. However, there also seems to be a belief that the ruling stratum of the realm of civilization, corrupt, brutal and unfeeling though it is, can also – to some extent – be reformed. In both novels the male main protagonists, Robert and Rochester, both powerful people in society, change for the better. Both possess two houses, one large, the other small and humble. In the larger building, there is some evil at work, while the

smaller place almost seems to foster positive qualities (cf. section 6.1), which eventually win over in the respective characters' inner world. This may mean that the two novels value humility and lack of ostentation in connection with houses. In *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, the natural landscape or also the house where the main male character lives is associated with idyllic, paradisiacal images, but the heroine makes herself or is made an outcast like Eve from Eden. A pivotal change of heart in the male character is necessary for the female protagonist to come back. The heroine's return to her lover and to paradise is then an essential element in the constitution of the happy ending. In spite of the wrongdoings of society criticised in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, such an ending may still also be imaginable, not only desirable – provided there is a groundbreaking reform.

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Abstract

Die Diplomarbeit hat Beschreibung und Rolle von Natur und Häusern in Charlotte Brontes Romanen *Jane Eyre* und *Shirley* zum Thema. Dabei wird auf die Bedeutung verschiedenster einzelner Phänomene in Natur und Häusern sowie auf deren verbale Beschreibung eingegangen. Auch bezieht sich die Arbeit zum Teil auf die direkte und symbolische ganzheitliche Bedeutung von Häusern und Landschaften sowie auf deren Atmosphäre. Dabei ist die Frage wesentlich, ob diese Darstellungen des äußeren Umfeldes die Innenwelt einzelner Figuren oder die Handlung des Romans widerspiegeln, oder aber diesen auf ironische Weise widersprechen oder nur der Schaffung eines Wirklichkeitseffekts dienen. Gegenstand der Arbeit ist auch die Rolle von herrschenden Kräften in Natur und Zivilisation, wie zum Beispiel Mutter Natur und Patriarchie.

In den vier längsten Kapiteln werden die Darstellungen von Natur und Häusern vorwiegend isoliert voneinander betrachtet. In zwei kürzeren Kapiteln hingegen wird auf Zusammenspiel und Gegensätze zwischen den Sphären innerhalb bzw. außerhalb der Häuser sowie auf das Verhältnis unterschiedlicher Figuren zur Natur bzw. zur Zivilisation eingegangen. In einem abschließenden Kapitel werden die beiden Romane bezüglich der Schwerpunkte der Arbeit verglichen.

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