Girl at a Window: Jane Eyre - A Plain Reading of the Eponymous Novel

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La fenêtre est un élément d'architecture présent tout au long du roman de Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, comme témoin des différents moments de la vie de la jeune gouvernante éponyme. L'étude qui suit analysera les significations de ce leitmotiv, dont le symbolisme sera décodé à divers niveaux: décor gothique, sentiments de solitude, angoisse du futur, souffrance psychique profonde et même surnaturel. En outre, on montrera que le procédé met en lumière la stratégie de l'intrigue et que Brontë parvient à travers lui à cette variante du réalisme qu'elle appelait elle-même "poétique".

window architecture, window symbolism, window affect motif, Jane the 'eyer'

There are in *Jane Eyre*[1] many references to all sorts of dwellings. The book fittingly opens at Gateshead Hall, Mrs Reed's (Jane's aunt's) genteel house. Then young Jane Eyre is sent to a charity school for orphans and destitute children, Lowood Institution, where she remains eight years as a pupil and two as a teacher. Her first position as a governess takes her to Thornfield Hall, Edward Rochester's family seat, where her destiny is somehow sealed. The next homesteads to be mentioned have to do with the Rivers family, her providential cousins, who intermittently reside at Moor House (*alias* Marsh End), and include the quaint but gratifying cottage where Jane settles for a few months before returning to Thornfield. The place, however, has burnt down and Jane is eventually reunited with Rochester at Ferndean.

Many of these proper names have an evident symbolic meaning and in many of these places Jane is shown standing at, or close to, a window, which, the present article would like to argue, seems a telling attitude of Jane's through the peripeteia of her existence. Two remarks must be made from the start: by "window", one is most of the time to understand the English contemporary form of the casement window, wide enough to provide with seating facility and framed with curtains;[2] and it is equally noteworthy that, the houses never belonging to Jane herself, it is not possible, as we shall see, to use the possessive marker (*her* window).

Some of the references to a window are reiterated, especially those of a descriptive nature, not innocently as one may detect; others highlight the uniqueness of an episode. When they do disappear altogether, this absence may still be assessed in an interesting fashion.

The window motif appears early in the novel and is truly part of Jane's childhood at Gateshead Hall. Dismissed from her aunt's presence for example, Jane takes a book from a bookcase in the breakfast-room and hides away to a place of her own:

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[1] The edition used here is the following: Richard J. Dunn ed., New York/London, Norton (2000) 2001. References thereafter are to chapters first, then to pages.

[2] See Peter J. Bellis, 'In the Window-Seat: Vision and Power in *Jane Eyre*', *ELH* 54.3 (1987): 639-652. Bellis is concerned with notions of power, property, and propriety.

> I mounted into the window seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement. (I,5)

The reader may presume this is not the first time she has acted so. The window-seat offers protection from an hostile environment (her aunt's hatred, her cousins' bullying, the servants' animosity, her poverty) and it also offers the possibility of "retiring" into literature and imagination. Contrary to her secret aspirations, however, it cuts her from the world outside on that "dreary November day": in the distance, mist and cloud, and closer, a storm scene with rain and wind. (I, 6) This description of a "stormented" (to coin a portmanteau word) setting, complete with the archetypal romantic staples, is paralleled by the descriptions she reads about simultaneously in Bewick's *History of British Birds*,[3] the work she has just borrowed, including solitary rocks, melancholy isles, bleak shores, and culminating in the encompassing phrase "these death-white realms" (I, 6). Follows, rather clumsily, a list of disheartening views introducing a (yet again) solitary churchyard, "a torpid sea", fiendish creatures and a gallows (*ibid*.). Jane-the-child, ensconced on the window-seat, finds interest in, and happiness through, these stories, until the moment she is made to emerge reluctantly from her "hiding place" (I, 7). The term is important in as much as it encapsulates the essence of Jane's behaviour in life at the time: because her family and the household would like to make her invisible, Jane comes to like being invisible.

Almost three months later, after she has been barred by the Reeds from the Christmas and New Year festivities, Brontë meaningfully shows her again as a victim of ostracism (IV, 24-25). She is by now a sort of under-nursery-maid, helping Bessie in her chores. Jane's tasks include tidying the children's room, which she is attempting to do in this episode, when her cousin Georgiana brusquely interrupts her - the toys are *hers* -, and Jane, listless, turns to another activity by the window-seat:

> … for lack of other occupation, I fell to breathing on the frost-flowers with which the window was fretted, and thus clearing a space in the glass through which I might look out on the grounds, where all was still and petrified under the influence of a hard frost. (IV, 25)

Against references to Nature comparable to those of chapter I, Brontë blends here narration device (it is through Jane that the arrival of a carriage is announced) and psychological insight (the fragility and despondency of the child, her alienation because she is never allowed to enjoy a ride outside like her cousins). She further unravels the symbolism of the passage by introducing just after a vignette that figures a bird, in search of food this time:

> My vacant attention soon found livelier attraction in the spectacle of a little hungry robin, which came and chirruped on the twigs of the leafless cherry-tree nailed against the wall near the casement. The remains of my breakfast of bread and milk stood on the table, and having crumbled a morsel of roll, I was tugging at the sash to put out the crumbs on the window-sill, when Bessie came running upstairs into the nursery. (*Ibid*.)

Pointedly, Jane fails to open the window, and is also prevented to do so.

It is striking to see that years later, when Jane is back at Gateshead Hall to assist her dying aunt, she resumes sitting by the window in the presence of her detestable female cousins, busying herself with sketching what her imagination forwards to her thanks to its "ever-shifting kaleidoscope": sea, moon, ship, reeds, water-flags, a naiad's head, lotus-flowers, an elf, a sparrow's nest, a hawthorn wreath (XXI, 198-199). The window allows Jane to recede from unwanted presence (the hiding-place symptom) and at the same time offers access to artistic evasion through fancy. The scene is clearly a duplicate of that in chapter I.

The most terrible, in the gothic sense of the word, the most poignant event at Gateshead Hall, however, is not Mrs Reed's death. It is rather little Jane's confinement in the so-called red room as she herself, once a grown-up, is well aware of: the contents of chapter II were to

[3] The bird is another, certainly more well-known, connected symbol of the novel.

leave an indelible mark. After her tussle with John Reed, which caused a bloody wound for her, Jane is locked up in a spare room, cold, silent, secluded, and above all the place of her uncle's death and wake. The room is described at length (II, 10-11), partly to justify its name (mahogany furniture, red damask counterpanes, red carpet, crimson tablecloth, fawn and pink walls). Yet, the reader's attention cannot but turn to the notations concerning the windows and their death-suggestive configuration:

> The two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery [i.e. deep red damask]. (II, 10.)

Further down, Jane mentions the "muffled windows" (*ibid*., 11), also a reference to death. But she stresses too that the earlier hiding-place has been exchanged for a frightening jail, and a most secure one (*ibid*.), from where she perceives rain and wind outside (*ibid*., 12-13), and which persuades her that she is an interloper and an alien to the family (*ibid.*, 13). In a paroxysmal frenzy, the child mixes imagination with reality:

> I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room; at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred; […] I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by some one across the lawn; but then, […] I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. (*Ibid*., 13-14)

Her scream of distress brings part of the household to the room; she nonetheless remains sequestered there and falls into a fit. The windows are still muffled.

Jane's first contact with Lowood Institution has night, rain and wind in common with the preceding episode (V, 35). The bleak and gothic setting barely lets the newcomer discern "many windows, and lights burning in some" (*ibid*.), once - this must be underlined - she has been admitted beyond the entrance door.[4] The next day, she discovers by daylight a "convent-like garden", i.e. enclosed, and a building whose inner façade is partially "lit by mullioned and latticed windows, which [give] it a church-like aspect" (*ibid*., 41). After the hiding-place and the jail, the nunnery, yet another image of *huis-clos*. The charity school obviously lacks comfort and Lowood becomes for Jane synonymous with physical hardship: the wind that blows "through the crevices of [the] bedroom windows all night long" (VI, 44) has the girls shiver in bed and turns water into ice in their ewers. These defective windows are the harbinger sign of death, so prevalent at Lowood with tuberculosis and typhus bouts.[5] On her way to see her friend Helen Burns for the last time, Jane stealthily picks her way by the light of moonshine entering at passage windows (IX, 68).

At Lowood as at Gateshead, Jane keeps on looking from the inside outside and her rebellious nature[6] is once again underlined in a night scene, when she sets herself off from the rest of her fellow-pupils and even from the meek Helen Burns. She depicts herself, companionless, passing the windows and lifting the blinds to discover already abundant snow, and listening to the moaning wind (VI, 46). The paragraph that follows and in which the reader can detect a deep desire to witness the unleashing of the natural elements sums up what can be regarded as the "objective correlative"[7] of her mood:

> … reckless and feverish, I wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness, and the confusion to rise to clamour. (*Ibid*.)

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[4] Therefore, Jane is still describing from *within* the precincts of the charity school.

[5] Mr Rochester, who had heard about Lowood Institution, thought Jane "must be tenacious of life" to outlive such a harrowing experience (XIII, 104).

[6] As an echo of Jane's feelings, Brontë makes Helen Burns read Johnson's *Rasselas* in the same passage. (VI, 41) The name of the oriental Prince, one knows, is often interpreted as a pun on / hint to the hero's 'restless' temperament. Rasselas and Jane, therefore, are likely to be the victims of illusion and disillusion.

[7] T. S. Eliot, who coined the phrase in 1919 in his essay ‘Hamlet and his Problems’, explained: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

The vehemence of Nature perfectly corresponds to Jane's vehement, unchristian (so Helen warns her) wording when she expostulates:

> When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should – so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again. (*Ibid*., 48)

The narrative approach used for inspector Brocklehurst's visit to Lowood three weeks later harks back to that used for his arrival at Gateshead Hall as shown above. Jane writes:

> … as I was sitting with a slate in hand, puzzling over a sum in long division, my eyes, raised in abstraction to the window, caught sight of a figure just passing. (VII, 51-52)

The presence of the despicable clergyman is meant here to give Jane's fellow-students a portrait of the newcomer as a "careless" girl (*ibid.*, 55), a sycophant of Satan, no less, "a little castaway", "an interloper", and "an alien",[8] "worse than a pagan", and "a liar" (*ibid.*, 56, *passim*) into the bargain, someone therefore whom peers and teachers alike should beware of because she wills herself as an independent being, the odd one out, totally lacking in gratitude. By contrast, the window motif in this particular instance directs attention at Jane's intellectual capacities (abstraction), which will develop as time goes by, providing her with a social status - governess, later schoolmistress - and small but decent means of sustenance.[9]

At Lowood, Jane is not the only one of her sort, however: Helen Burns and Miss Temple share in some of her strangeness, as the reader is made to understand in the epilogue of Brocklehurst's visit, after Jane's quasi pillorying:

> Some heavy clouds, swept from the sky by a rising wind, had left the moon bare; and her light, streaming in through a window near, shone full both on us and the approaching figure, which we at once recognized as Miss Temple. (VIII, 59)

It is as though, through the window, the tutelary protection of the moon was extended to the two girls (both orphans) and embodied in the maternal figure[10] of the superintendent, who takes them to her apartment and feeds them with food and affection till bedtime.

Life at Gateshead was pinnacled by the red room experience. Life at Lowood climaxes when Jane comes to grips with the nature of her professional future. The much beloved Miss Temple has married and gone, and Jane is feeling uneasy (X, 71). In the solitude of her room, she acknowledges the existence of a wide real world awaiting her on the other side of the panes. In a passionate outburst, - a mine of clues of all sorts for the scholar - she writes from memory:

> I went to the window, opened it, and looked out. There were the two wings of the building; there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks. It was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of a mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two. How I longed to follow it farther! […] I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication. For change, stimulus. That petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space. 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'grant me at least a new servitude!' (*Ibid*., 72)

In the wake of this scene, in the dead of night, as she mulls over any possible suggestion to metaphorically escape her prison, return from exile, a star or two noted beyond the curtain eventually bring an answer: she will advertise for a position as governess (*ibid*., 73). This is the turning-point in Jane's existence, in the sense that she has acquired awareness of her aspirations and that she is trying to act to fulfil them. Unfortunately for her, the goal - liberty - is still very far off.

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[8] Words she had already used herself about herself (II, 13).

[9] Cf. what she confides to the alleged gypsy about her hopes for herself in the future in XIX, 169.

[10] In X, 71, Jane analyses: "she [Miss Temple] had stood me in the stead of *mother* [italics mine], governess, and latterly, companion."

Chapter XI opens on the famous sentence:

> "A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play" (79). It would seem from it that Brontë has turned to a new source of images, but just after, the ambiguous word "curtain" also hints at the domestic piece of architecture. A variation of the notation is even introduced with the window of the one-horse vehicle that takes Jane to Thornfield (*ibid*., 80).

Thornfield Hall, which is going to become so dear to her heart,[11] is moderately appealing to Jane at first. She uses to describe it the same terms as the ones she used for Lowood:

> The steps and banisters were of oak; the staircase window was high and latticed; both it and the long gallery into which the bedroom doors opened looked as if they belonged to a church rather than a house. (XI, 83)

Beyond the fact that she has not developed feelings for Rochester or anyone else at Thornfield yet, one explanation for this simile, at discourse level, could be found in that Jane's hopes of getting married with Edward Rochester are going to be dashed there, just as when at the charity school she had felt let down by Miss Temple and Rev. Mr Nasmyth marrying (X, 71). Indeed, when she flees Thornfield, she is single and lonely, exactly what she was on leaving Lowood. For the time being, Rochester's manor-house only suggests to her "cheerless ideas of space and solitude". (XI, 8) Her own room, however, strikes another note, more akin to the near-happiness she comes close to in the months to follow her arrival:

> The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue[12] chintz window curtains … (*Ibid*.)

Before meeting Adèle for the first time the next day, she makes her room tidy and opens her window, a gesture that sums up her new departure in life[13] as well as her desire to be a perfect example of self-discipline for her charge (*ibid.*, 84).[14]

Thornfield's dining-room dazzles the novice-like[15] Jane by its size, furniture, panelled walls, high and decorated ceiling, and of course "one vast window rich in stained glass" (*ibid*., 88). But the drawing-room, which is copiously described, strangely echoes the red room at Gateshead through its colours (red and white) and the mirrors between the windows repeating "the general blending of snow and fire" (*ibid*.). In other words, be it new, Jane is still in a state of servitude.

Correspondingly, the episode at the stile overlooking Hay, where she unwittingly meets with Thornfield's master, discreetly initiates change: Jane is physically placed in a position to describe the manor-house from the outside. This occurs under moonlight when she is returning from her errand, while she pauses in reminiscence of the encounter:

> I heard only the faintest waft of wind roaming fitful among the trees round Thornfield, a mile distant; and when I glanced down in the direction of the murmur, my eye, traversing the hall front, caught a light kindling in a window: it reminded me that I was late, and I hurried on." (XII, 99)

The inside light points at her newly acquired autonomy but the last words, imparting her fear of having transgressed the limitations of the situation, maintain her in the character of "a dependent", "a paid subordinate" (XI, 85; XIV, 115), that being a governess suggests.

Once Rochester present, the house is no longer silent as a church (XIII, 100), but Jane quickly reverts to her watch-like position, standing by the window (*ibid.*, 101). Little by little, however, as the master takes to the girl, she is made to sit on an evening by the fire in his

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[11] She will never live there as Mrs Rochester, however, nor *could* she, if we grasp the symbolism of the window.

[12] In the novel's last chapter, that of long-wished-for and finally-found happiness, Jane is wearing a pale blue dress (XXXVIII, 384). Cf. also "the blue peaks" of X, 72 above.

[13] A few lines before, she observes: "Externals have a great effect on the young. I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me, one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils" (XI, 83).

[14] Mrs Fairfax too lets in air and sunshine into Thornfield's reception rooms (XI, 88), unconsciously underscoring the homonymy between "Eyre" and "air" severally exploited throughout the novel.

[15] In XIII, 105, Rochester tells Jane that she has lived the life of a nun. Cf. also XIV, 112 ("the air of a little *nonette*").

company (XIII, 102 and XIV, 111). Chapter XV brings Rochester and Jane close to each other through the master's long confession that takes place on an afternoon and his rescue from fire by the governess in the hours following. Contrary to Jane's expectation, Rochester is nowhere to be seen the day after and she resumes her place… near the window:

> 'Evening approaches,' said I, as I looked towards the window. 'I have never heard Mr Rochester's voice or step in the house to-day; but surely I shall see him before night: I feared the meeting in the morning; now I desire it, because expectation has been so long baffled that it is grown impatient.' (XVI, 133)

Jane's hopes, wishes and sentiments are struck hard when she hears through Mrs Fairfax that Rochester will be absent and is interested in a young lady of the neighbourhood, Blanche Ingram. A funny scene of chapter XVII (almost faithfully reported in Zeffirelli's film)[16] depicts the return of Thornfield's landlord in the company of his guests, spied onto by the female trio - Mrs Fairfax, Adèle, and Jane - from the schoolroom window, each member acting in character: the eldest "in rustling state", the youngest in sheer excitement, and Jane surreptitiously, remaining "screened by the curtain" (*ibid.*, 141). The scene is iterated the next day, with just Mrs Fairfax and Jane at the window - where is not detailed - commenting on the equestrian pair formed by Rochester and Blanche on their way from the house to an excursion and back (*ibid*., 143). This is a short but crucial passage in that, thanks to it, Brontë contrives for herself, in a rather forced way, one must admit, the narrative capacity for Jane to report what is going to take place from now on over some thirty pages, namely social life at Thornfield with, in particular, the charades and gypsy episodes (chapters XVII to XIX). Brontë does the trick by imagining that Rochester orders Jane to attend his guests with Adèle that evening, after dinner (XVII, 144). Mrs Fairfax, another dependent, who relays the master's will to Jane, is also the one who mentors her about how to behave in such a situation: speaking from experience, she suggests getting to the drawing-room when it is still empty, choosing a seat "in any quiet nook", staying just enough to be seen by the master, then retreating unnoticed (*ibid.*). Not surprisingly for the reader, Jane chooses to retire to a window-seat with a book, a verbatim echo of the scene in chapter I, except that little Adèle is sitting on her stool at her feet (*ibid.*, 145). This time, however, what there is to see is displayed this side of the casement-window. It just needs for the curtain to be swept back from the drawing-room arch for the actresses - the lady-guests - to be let in (*ibid*., 145). From her privileged and yet eclipsed standpoint, Jane can describe everything as a spectator,[17] and once the gentlemen have joined in, Mr Rochester in particular. A witness she may well be, watching from the inside, close to the core of action, i.e. the alleged courtship between Rochester and Blanche, but she is still overlooked, invisible as at Gateshead, "estranged" as she says herself (*ibid*., 148). This is the time Brontë chooses to make Jane acknowledge her love for Rochester (*ibid*., 149), while the latter apparently studiously avoids even glancing at her. After she gingerly slips out of her "sheltered corner" (*ibid*., 154), he demands that she be present every evening to come. Thus, Brontë, cruelly and graphically, sets off their respective behaviours: she, nothing but the obedient though love-wrecked employee, and he, performing the almighty, and indifferent ("sundered", Jane says, *ibid.*, 149) employer.

Accordingly, from her "usual seat" (XVIII, 155), Jane attends the society's games, and it is she who describes "the pantomime of a marriage" between Rochester and Blanche (*ibid*., 156). In this sham ceremony, the reader can discern the fiasco of the Rochester-Ingram alliance and also the prolepsis of Jane's own interrupted wedding. The "dumb show" (*ibid*.) of the charade will be iterated in the unuttered oaths before Reverend Wood. Jane is no Bible Rebecca. As for now, she is made to sit in the drawing-room for hours (*ibid*., 158), which causes "ever-torturing pain" to her (*ibid*.) and also causes her to believe that Rochester is

[16] Miramax, 1996, with C. Gainsbourg, W. Hurt, G. Chaplin, *et alia*.

[17] The curtain resumes the theatrical connotations of chapter XI for social life at Thornfield.

acting out of interest and a desire for connections (*ibid*., 158-159): money and relations she knows she cannot offer, of course.

The gypsy episode starts off with an interesting prologue – skipped by Zeffirelli - that also takes place within the boundaries of the drawing-room window-seat. Both Adèle and Jane are sitting there at dusk. On Adèle mistakenly announcing Rochester's return, Blanche Ingram darts to the window,[18] but Jane's presence drives her to move to another casement.[19] When it is revealed that the newcomer is not Rochester, Blanche includes Jane and Adèle in her resentment:

> "Provoking!' exclaimed Miss Ingram: 'you tiresome monkey!' (apostrophising Adèle) 'who perched you up in the window to give false intelligence?' and she cast on me an angry glance, as if I were in fault. (XVIII, 161-162)

From the vantage point of her "usual nook" still (*ibid*., 162), Jane will be made to examine Mason, Rochester's brother-in-law, so unlike him she concludes (*ibid*., 163).

With the private interviews between the intriguing gypsy and the young, single female members of the party, the reader might think that such references to the window-seat are over. Yet, Rochester in disguise heavily mentions it when it is Jane's turn to join him in the library: no less than three specific allusions in the course of one page (XIX, 168-169), which obviously put the lie to the assumption that he did not even realise Jane was present all along.

As to the terrifying night of Mason's aggression, it is bracketed by sentences that do refer to a window, in the style preceding socialising at Thornfield. Jane initiates the lurid mood of the events and Rochester puts a term to it.

Jane had forgotten to draw the curtain and let down the window-blind in her room and the moon despite deep silence woke her up. It is then she hears a cry:

> The night - its silence - its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall. (XX, 175)

The reader is bound to notice that the phrase "rent in twain" would be fitting for a piece of material, such as a curtain.[20]

A long time, Jane waits at the window, uncertain what about (*ibid*., 177), until Rochester comes to ask for her help. A long time, in one of the "fateful third story" rooms (*ibid*.), she tends to Mason while Rochester has gone for a physician, until, the candle out, she can perceive "streaks of gray light edging the window curtains" (*ibid.*, 180), a sure sign that dawn is approaching and Rochester will be back. Once he is back, to allow the physician to take care of Mason, full light is required. Unsurprisingly, Jane comments:

> Mr Rochester drew back the thick curtain, drew up the holland blind, let in all the daylight he could; and I was surprised and cheered to see how far dawn was advanced: what rosy streaks were beginning to brighten the east. (*Ibid*.)

These lines *are* surprising, however. They do not really sound in keeping with the situation. A man has been wounded in circumstances unclear to Jane and keeps fainting; the physician has not yet examined the patient: perhaps his condition is serious. These lines can only be justified if they are understood as evincing Jane's relief at Rochester's return, Jane's delight at Rochester's presence, a feeling confirmed in the orchard scene that follows where Rochester and Jane platonically play Adam and Eve, with a half-blown rose in lieu of the apple (*ibid*., 184), which is a rehearsal for the definitive love scene of chapter XXIII. These lines aptly actualize the "poetic realism" Brontë advocated.

The Thornfield pages also include in typical Brontëan fashion a return to the "governessing slavery" attitude (XXIV, 230) analysed above, when Jane, judged a mediocre pianist, is replaced at the instrument by a talented Rochester in the role of a troubadour. Jane writes then:

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[18] Again a female triplet at the window as in chapter XVII.

[19] Again Jane is characterized by invisibility: "…in her [Blanche's] eagerness she did not observe me at first, but when she did, she curled her lip…" (XVIII, 163).

[20] Similarly, Jane's wedding veil is rent in two parts by Bertha Rochester in XXV, 242.

> I hied me to the window-recess; and […] I sat there and looked out on the still trees and dim lawn…(*Ibid*., 231)

No sadness in the remark this time but a self-elaborated strategy to keep Rochester on a reasonable track for the next four weeks before the wedding.

On the eve of their wedding, in a token of matrimonial bliss to come, Rochester and Jane together, after lifting a curtain, look through window-panes and concur on the serenity of the night, a sure presage, so they believe at any rate, of their happiness: heaven, the clouds, the wind, the moon cannot err (XXV, 244).[21]

So far portrayed as a prisoner, a nun, an overlooked, sometimes despised, menial employee observing the lives of other people from the margin, Jane turns, away from Thornfield, "an outcast, a beggar and a vagrant" (XXXI, 307). The demise of her hopes compels her to sever any previous link and sends her on the by-roads of a north-midland shire, day and night, by wind and rain, through moors and desolate villages, until, rejected by all and sundry, desperate and exhausted, she reaches a place where she catches glimpse of a light. The "friendly gleam" is issuing "from the lozenged panes of a very small latticed window" (XXVIII, 282). Over three pages then, Brontë details the idyllic scene that, mesmerized by the opening and under sheets of rain, Jane discovers inside this modest but spick and span kitchen. The scene (totally discarded by Zeffirelli) is highly improbable and Brontë must have felt it because she goes to great pains to explain where the window stands (at a convenient height for diminutive Jane!), and how vegetation has succeeded in concealing most of it so that curtain or shutter are unnecessary (*ibid*.). Overtly eavesdropping on the protagonists of the tableau inside, Jane discovers two young ladies and their elderly female servant. Not only can she watch them, she can also hear them (one of them implausibly uttering some German sentences…), thereby learning their respective names, including that of an absent brother, and understanding that their father, a clergyman, has recently died (*ibid*., 283-285). Jane's voyeuristic description of the homely, convivial, lit up room inside gives a measure of her craving for family life,[22] abruptly shattered by Hannah when she rejects her into "the pitch-dark night" (*ibid.*, 286).

A distanced but again outside-inside view of Moor House is presented in chapter XXX when Jane compares the attraction of the place for herself and the Riverses:

> They loved their sequestered home. I, too, in the gray, small, antique structure – with its low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls, 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. (298)

Jane, believing that she has at long last found a family – *her* family: two "sisters" and a "brother"[23] –, from now on, actually leaves the vicinity of the window. And she is replaced there by… St. John Rivers. It is he who is pictured henceforth sitting at the window with his desk and papers before him, deep in tormented reverie (*ibid*., 299): he has indeed transformed part of the parlour, by the window-recess, into his study (*ibid.*, 300).[24] That very window by which he passes holding a letter stands for his own yet undecided future owing to family and money obstacles (*ibid.*, 304). St. John and Jane, it might be objected, bear the same name (Eyre) and wear similar clothes (the clergyman's uniform and the Quakerish outfit). But, in chapter XXXIV, Brontë makes clear that St. John's and Jane's temperaments are antagonistic. Whereas the latter rejoices in having introduced domestic alterations to Moor House with a view to her cousins' return, St. John ostensibly demonstrates his disagreement by asking for a book and setting to read it by "his accustomed window recess" (334).

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[21] In chapter XXV too, Bertha Rochester had drawn aside a window curtain in Jane's room and looked out. Her retreat as in fear of dawn may be interpreted as an omen for Rochester and Jane's felicity (242).

[22] Cf. "a mixture of interest and despair", in XXXIII, 328.

[23] The Riverses are the positive version of the Reeds.

[24] See also XXXVII, 377.

The cottage at Morton where Jane lives while being a schoolmistress introduces a parenthesis in the Moor House episode. A close reading of its description (XXXI, 305) reveals a complete absence of any reference to window openings. Yet, there must be one at least as the beginning of chapter XXXIII suggests just before St. John's visit there on a snowy day (321).The justification for the omission is easily to be found in the fact that at the time Jane herself believes the cottage at Morton to be her home.[25]

As for Moor House it is not, and will never be. In a grand, dramatic scene Brontë shows Rivers trying once more through his choice of an appropriate Bible reading, followed by an *ex tempore* prayer, to convince Jane to marry him and become a missionary with him, all this on the background of the "uncurtained window" (XXXV, 355). St. John's persuasion is to no avail, however, when as they say goodbye in the moonlit room, Jane, on the verge of being subdued, catches the voice of the master of Thornfield and there and then makes up her mind to return to him (*ibid*., 357-358). Rivers, as the picture of him working, praying, daydreaming by his window suggests, cannot be more than a sibling for Jane: she scorns his idea of love (XXXIV, 348), whereas her spirit is an equal to Rochester's (XXIII, 216).

Thanks to her uncle in Madeira, Jane is by now an independent and rich woman, with connections. The *Bildungsroman* is almost completed, but for the effective reunion of Jane and Rochester.

The last three chapters are divided between Thornfield and Ferndean: one residence the reader well knows, the other is a new one to discover.

To Thornfield Jane comes back both elated and timid. Stopped by a gate, she hides behind one of its pillars - the whole thing being construed as an avatar of the window - to view the homestead from afar. At three intervals, and although the scene takes place outdoors with Jane standing on the verge of a meadow, the verb "peep"[26] is used by the anguished protagonist/narrator on the same page (XXXVI, 361): the first time, with a wish to check on life in the early morning by the bedroom window-blinds of the manor-house; the second time, once out of her "niche", to take stock of the scene in stupefied amazement; the last time, to renounce the possibility to witness life at "chamber lattices" as well as hear the sound of doors or the screeching of gravel. The once family seat is a shambles, a ruin. The windows at Thornfield Hall are now paneless, snow and rain can enter as they please (*ibid*., 362). Where can Rochester be?

Rochester is at Ferndean, "a building of considerable antiquity, moderate size, and no architectural pretensions, deep buried in a wood", almost vegetal (XXXVII, 366). Jane gets there just before dark in poor weather. True to herself, she notices the outlook of the windows, "latticed and narrow", and the silence overhanging ("as still as a church on a week-day") (*ibid*., 367). A subtle, diluted allusion brings the windows and the curtains of Thornfield to mind when Jane describes herself unseen and invisible to Rochester (*ibid*.). The very last mention of a window in the novel, however, bears no link with gothic aesthetics or sentimentalism. It is to be found a few days later on now-blind Rochester's lips and it introduces the account of the mystical and emotional experience that was lived by the deep-suffering owner:

> I was in my own room and sitting by the window, which was open: it soothed me to feel the balmy night-air; though I could see no stars, and only by a vague luminous haze knew the presence of the moon. I longed for thee, Janet! Oh, how I longed for thee both with soul and flesh! […] Cooler and fresher at the moment the gale seemed to visit my brow: I could have deemed that in some wild, lone scene, I and Jane were meeting. In spirit, I believe, we must have met. (*Ibid.*, 380-381)

[25] Cf. "My home, then - when I at last find a home - is a cottage" in XXXI, 305. Rivers having hired it and Miss Oliver having given the furniture (XXX, 302), Jane can only be under a delusion that this is *her* home.

[26] The lexical field of sight is rich here: to be at one's command, take a survey, stare, protracted gaze, look, see…

Jane at once recalls her own simultaneous, symmetrical experience at Moor House (chapter XXXV). The "eyer" (to use Janet Gezari's term)[27] that she is can stop looking out of, or looking in through, the window. She can stop being in hiding in casements. She is at long last free; she has reached home.[28]

The window motif in *Jane Eyre* deftly offers a counterpoint to the heroine's adventures. With deliberate and on the whole consummate artistry, in association with Nature (birds or the elements), Brontë wields it from beginning to end to span the formative years of Jane's life, to reveal the protagonist's or her partners' deep-seated feelings, and to create a specific atmosphere. The variations of this very present symbol underscore Jane's quest for liberty, self-reliance, and love, and thanks to an apt re-shunting, shift its use from the girl to her two suitors once she is nearing her goal. By day-, candle- or moonlight, the window lets through the heroine's dreams, joys, and (more often) pains which the reader adheres to via the poetically realistic narration. The persistent return of the architectural detail roots the story in concrete, space and time descriptions as much as it unveils redemptive, both spiritual and affective, vistas for Rochester and Jane.

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[27] See Janet Gezari, *Charlotte Bronte and Defensive Conduct: The Author and the Body at Risk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992. One will also be interested in reading Elizabeth Michelle Whittington's on-line M. A. thesis (2004) entitled *Identity in the Eye of the Beholder: Examining the Function of the Gaze in Charlotte Bronte's* The Professor *and* Jane Eyre.

[28] On returning from Gateshead, Jane had blurted out to Rochester: "… wherever you are is my home – my only home." (XXII, 209) She is not to build her own house after all, a possibility she suggests to Rochester in XXXVII, 370.