Chapter 10 of *Jane Eyre* begins eight years after the end of chapter 9.

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life, I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography: I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection. (98)\(^1\)

The "future" is upon us. Oliver and the foundling novel no longer figure prominently in our projected version of Jane’s future, for in the interval she has become a teacher. The governess novel now moves to the forefront—for a time. For it is characteristic of the structure of expectations in this novel that readers are never left fully certain for long of just what specific species of novel they are reading, and as a result each scene and narrative move is occupied by "alien words," by scenic topoi and generic conventions that refract the Brontë text.

Our projection of Jane’s future and our perception of the nature of the novel, refracted by other narrative utterances, frequently focus on our view and judgment of Jane’s character. At this point there seems to be a gap between the reader’s perception of Jane and the Jane that the narrator describes. Jane as narrator claims she was always naturally obedient, even submissive, but for these past eight years, she
says, under the influence of Miss Temple, she has been tranquil as well. Though we are told there was such a Jane, we do not see her, for the time of tranquility is just the period that Jane has decided to skip. The obedient and submissive Jane, the Jane who never struck back or answered back—Jane before the opening of the novel—we also have never seen. The Jane we now see once more—or still—is therefore that less-than-tranquil Jane of the opening chapters, reinforcing the primacy of that characterization of the heroine (see above, ch. 1). There were, however, anticipatory cautions which the narrator’s description of Jane’s character may retrospectively reinforce. On the dreary day on which the novel opened, for example, she seemed content to go forth only in her imagination. She seemed to yearn primarily for the fireside, home, acceptance, and love; she did not absent herself from the hearth but was banished. True, she finally rose up in passionate rebellion against John Reed’s persecution, but her outbreak in the red-room was terror, not rebellion. True, she confronted Aunt Reed and accused her of deceit, but her sense of triumph was brief and her repentance swift, and would have been followed by an apology had she thought there was any chance of its being accepted.

Nonetheless, the eighteen-year-old Jane of the tenth chapter seems more like the “uncautionary,” rebellious, saucy, and self-reliant Jane of the early chapters. On the afternoon of the very day Miss Temple left Lowood, Jane discovers that she feels once more “the stirring of old emotions,” the desire “to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils” (100). Such a quest, especially for one young and poor and unprepossessing and female, may very well seem to reinforce our first impressions of Jane and of the potential Godwinism of the novel. Is this Jane’s “true” character authorized by the mature narrator? Or has the mature narrator allowed young Jane to speak here so that we can understand and sympathize with her unenlightened state? The utterance here seems a mixture of both, double-voiced or hybridized. First-person narration frequently suggests moral growth, the immature “I” becoming through the recounted experience the mature narrator. The major fictional autobiographies of the middle of the 19th century—Jane Eyre and Villette, David Copperfield and Great Expectations, Henry Esmond—all seem to function in this way and are thereby

47
period-specific, reflecting the transition from Romantic egocentricity to Victorian sociocentrism. But when, as in *Jane Eyre*, the mature narrator is reticent and the young heroine compelling, the result is dialogic: the primacy of the virtually unqualified experience of the heroine and the reader’s experience of those chapters claim equal or greater authority than the “hindsight” of the narrating voice or even the ultimate revelation of the moral universe of the novel. This dialogism between the experience of the novel (both young Jane’s and the reader’s) and the interpretation of that experience (both by the mature narrator-Jane and the configurative final structure of the narrative) mark the special nature of Brontë’s novel and its contribution to the development of the genre. Indeed, a narrator who is reticent but not without didactic purpose is appropriate to that period between the hegemony of authority and order and that of subjective or intersubjective relativism. The reader is allowed, indeed invited, by the narrator’s reticence, to share young Jane’s experience as if her self-reliant secularism were as viable as any other worldview, even though that narrator has earned a knowledge of another truth and seeks by the narration to lead the reader to that truth just as she, Jane, was led. The personal and the providential, experience and meaning, are in a dialogue of contradiction without confrontation. A narrative with this epistemological, experiential ambivalence is the prose equivalent of what Robert Langbaum some years ago defined as the Victorian “poetry of experience,” embodied chiefly in the dramatic monologue, a form suitable to a period in which traditional values were everywhere questioned but not yet jettisoned. The equivalent form to the dramatic monologue in the novel is the fictional autobiography, in which an author/editor of authority, acknowledged or unacknowledged, is hidden behind a speaker. *Jane Eyre* is just such a “novel of experience.”

If the narrator has been reticent, however, her surrogates both in text and context have been cautioning the reader. Not only Miss Temple but Helen Burns has intervened between the Jane of the first chapters and Jane in chapter 10. The generic and contextual signals have also shifted—by the foregrounding of Dickensian radical sentimentalism and even of the pious and didactic governess novel—so that for some time now we have been in the world of “domestic” fiction. To
a contemporary reader more familiar with that world, Jane’s thoughts and intentions might have seemed more puzzling—or suspect—than they might to us: not powerful enough, perhaps, to overcome the primacy of the opening scenes or the Godwinian and Byronic signals, but strong enough to make the outcome and the nature of the moral world of the novel more problematic than they may appear to a modern reader, thus refracting the words, intensifying the suspense, and dialogizing the moral universe of the novel.

That Jane is no longer tranquil, is restless, and yearns to “go forth” into the world to “seek real knowledge of life” arouses expectations of a less domestic order than those of recent chapters. Jane’s first entry into the world, however, will be as a governess, domestic enough but with some promise of adventure. For, whether they sought it or not, governesses outside the world of fiction were getting “real knowledge of life,” often “amidst its perils.” Representation of the life of the governess is refracted not only by the literary but by the social repertoire as well. The plight of the governess was a matter of some concern in the 1840s. With the burgeoning middle class entering the market as employers, by midcentury there were some 27,770 governesses in England, and their problems were serious and widespread enough to occasion the founding of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution in 1841. Appeals to the new Institution revealed such misery that the Christian Socialists set about to improve the governesses’ status by improving their education. In the year in which Jane Eyre was published, a series of Lectures to Ladies began in London, their popularity leading immediately to the founding of Queen’s College for Women in 1848 and Bedford College in 1849. “It is easy,” then, “to understand the popularity of the governess with the Victorian novelist,” Patricia Thomson tells us. “An allusion to a governess in a novel was ... sure to arouse a stock emotional response in the minds of readers” (39).

The popularity of the issues surrounding governesses and of the fictional genre they had spawned is evident, for example, in Elizabeth Rigby’s reviewing Jane Eyre in the Quarterly along with another new novel that she saw as concerned with the governess issue, Vanity Fair, and with the annual report of the Governesses’ Benevolent Association. Thackeray’s novel is seldom treated as a governess novel,
nor is Becky Sharp discussed primarily in her role as a governess, but Rigby—soon to be Lady Eastlake—wants to score a point against *Jane Eyre*. She clearly does not think much of governesses, especially those who aspire to marry "above themselves," to marry, if they can, their gentlemen masters. Both Becky and Jane are just such governesses, she contends, but at least Becky is honest about it, and Thackeray, unlike Currer Bell, makes no claims for his "heroine's" morality.

Most of the public and novelistic concern about governesses, however, came from a different direction. A genteel, educated, unmarried woman living in a household not as a servant, not as an equal, but as a dependent is in a situation with great potential for exploitation, in reality and in narrative. The situation was not brand new but was exacerbated in the second quarter of the nineteenth century by the confusing reversal of class and power, when the governess was quite often genteel, and an increasing number of the masters and mistresses were newly rich and newly empowered bourgeoisie. Governesses were not new to fiction either, but the new social conditions revived and altered the form, and the character type of the governess as she would appear in Victorian fiction was becoming increasingly familiar in the early decades of the century. There are, for example, a number of governesses in Jane Austen's novels. Those who are currently governesses (like Miss Lee in *Mansfield Park*) are minor and shadowy, and those who have important supporting roles (like "poor Miss Taylor" and Jane Fairfax in *Emma*) are either no longer or not yet governesses. Mrs. Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt* (1835), apparently the first novel to exploit the new situation in a full-length work, seems also to have established the pattern. Thomson indicates that the fictional governess of the period had "conventional attributes. She was bound to be a lady—preferably the daughter of a clergyman; she was always impoverished, unprotected, and, by virtue of her circumstances, reasonably intelligent and submissive" (39). Jane fits the description (at least Jane the narrator tells us she is naturally submissive). Ewbank adds that the conventional governess is usually orphaned (as is Jane), that she is subjected to some form of social humiliation, and that where she is the heroine she marries either a gentleman (if not a lord) or a clergyman.
DIALOGIC GENRES

(Ewbank 59–63). The convention, then, not only refracts our reception of *Jane Eyre* but channels our expectations.

This is the kind of novel that has been threatening to emerge and control the reader's expectations from its early chapters. Jane is to be a governess. This announcement reflects on all the details of the novel to this point, elevating the ordinary and obvious to new referentiality and polysemy.

The potentially Godwinian Jane, wanting to go out into the world "to seek new knowledge amidst its perils," prays, as might be expected, for "liberty." Her prayer "seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing." Does the wind scatter the prayer or does it only seem to do so? Though it is difficult to know for sure, the consciousness here seems to be monologically young Jane's, the mature narrator having withdrawn. Young Jane must take the possibility of the wind's dispersal of her prayer as meaningful, as sign or some sort of intervention, for she tries again with a judiciously altered request: "'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'Grant me at least new servitude!'" (101). This more modest request will, it turns out, be granted, but not before Jane racks her brain to figure out how to go about getting a position. Without family or friends, she must rely on herself. But how to manage? A "kind fairy" drops the suggestion to advertise on her pillow.

Is this "fairy," though archly introduced, a response to her desperate prayer? Young Jane does not stop to conjecture. Nor do most modern readers, reading monologically from the experiential perspective of young Jane, without guidance from the narrator and with a literary, social, and moral repertoire that dismisses even the prayers and the wind, considering them, like the fairy, as metaphor or "stage business." How "kind" was the fairy? And why does the suggestion come from the fantasy of a fairy and not some more authoritative voice if we are to take these messages seriously? The incident here is refracted by its counterpart in other governess novels. Most fictional governesses get positions through friends or relatives, but Jane has already dismissed that possibility—she has neither. Others answer advertisements from prospective employers who seem respectable and safe; they do not themselves advertise. When Clara Neville, Rachel
McCrindell's English Governess, decides to seek a position and "began seriously to consider what would be the best means of accomplishing her purpose," she, like Jane, proposes to act for herself, and, as in Jane's case also, the suggestion seems to come from outside herself: "The idea of advertising in a newspaper presents itself" (48). This seems reasonable enough, we would think, but the rector's wife "entertained a decided objection to this method, and she [Clara] therefore, for the present, relinquished it. She did not see, however, much probability of her obtaining a situation in any other way" (48). Not if one needs to rely on oneself, but if one has faith, a lady requiring a governess will providentially soon appear. And so she does to Clara.

A reader aware of the conventional way governess positions were obtained in novels, and especially if aware of the McCrindell episode—or of the convention, social or fictional, behind it—such a reader might fear for the consequences of what might be conventionally considered Jane's indecorous act. Jane herself betrays a little apprehension—perhaps a slight anticipatory caution—and is quite relieved when her advertisement is answered by a "Mrs. Fairfax," who writes in a hand old fashioned and rather uncertain, like that of an elderly lady. The circumstance was satisfactory: a private fear had haunted me, that in thus acting for myself and by my own guidance, I ran the risk of getting into some scrape; and above all things, I wished the result of my endeavours to be respectable, proper, en règle. (105)

Without the McCrindell episode or its equivalent in our repertoire or consciousness, we are liable to pass over Jane's apprehension rather blithely or attribute it to her youth, inexperience, excessive scrupulosity, or timidity. If so, we miss some of the suspense in this relatively quiet portion of the novel.

Another faint echo, audible only to those whose ears are tuned to the voice of the governess genre, involves the awkward bit of scene-shifting with which chapter 11 of Jane Eyre begins:

A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote... and I am warming away the numbness and chill contracted by sixteen hours' exposure to the rawness of an October day. (112)
Such a shift is not unique or even highly unusual in eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century novels. The narrative device or space is occupied and polysemic, but there is a strong echo of a passage in Mrs. Sherwood’s *Caroline Mordaunt*. The popularity of that novel and the other echoes of it in *Jane Eyre* make this otherwise trivial resemblance audible and noticeable: “And now, my readers, if they please, must follow me again to the stage [coach], hear my cousin’s parting advice, and accompany me till I am set down at the White Hart, in the beautiful city of Bath, where I arrived about six in the evening” (227).

The coach and inn, the address to the reader, the specification of the time and place seem notably parallel, and the similarity is heightened by the contrast in the young travelers’ reception: Caroline is met by a sedan chair and carried off to her new place of employment in the “beautiful city of Bath”; there seems to be no one to meet Jane, and when, a half-hour later, she finds that there is transportation, it is not a sedan chair but “a one-horse conveyance . . . a sort of car” driven by a plain and rather abrupt servant. The Sherwood passage, compounding the implications of the McCrindell allusion when we are already alerted to the governess-novel context by Jane’s new career, makes Jane’s reception, or lack of one, foreboding, ominous, antiromantic, and both narratively and thematically significant. Without the governess-novel context or guidance from the narrator, we are as inexperienced as Jane. The episode seems dull and drab; uncomfortable and boring for Jane, just boring or unpromising for us. Just as we were excited into indignant sympathy with Jane in the opening chapters, so here we are lulled into a state analogous to Jane’s.

It is reassuring to Jane (and to the reader of governess novels) to find that Mrs. Fairfax is elderly and ladylike but not haughty or domineering, as so many mistresses are in governess novels. It is also somewhat disappointing: what adventures, what interest can we anticipate in so ordinary a household? By the middle of the chapter, however, there are some promising developments: Thornfield has a master, one Mr. Edward Rochester; Jane’s charge is a ward of Mr. Rochester. She is, alas, French and sings songs unsuitable to her tender years, having been trained by her mother, an actress and a “dear friend” of Mr. Rochester’s.
An unmarried gentleman-master is sure to arouse expectations in the novel-reader familiar with the contemporary conventions, for governess-marry-gentleman is one of those bournes to which governess novels eternally return. His name, his ward, and his relationship to the ward’s mother suggest he might be dangerous to an unprotected young lady living in his household as a dependent, however, and the conventional scene of humiliation may not be far off. Jane may be especially vulnerable. Her religious convictions were never too strong. Her sauciness to Brocklehurst was delightful, but is it quite right for a child not to like the Psalms? (Surely we do not want to identify Jane with another “selective” reader of the Bible, one who hated Solomon and wrote that, “I made it a condition with my tutor... that I would not read my Bible at all, if he would not excuse me one of the wisest books in it: to which, however, I had no other objection than that it was called The Proverbs”—for that reader was Lovelace [Clarissa, Letter 191, 611].) Was she not still expressing serious religious doubt at Helen’s deathbed? We have heard nothing of her religion since. Where religious conviction is not deep and strong, can moral strength suffice? Jane has already proved just a bit too confident in her own powers, a bit too self-reliant, too unaware that at times human resources alone may not be enough. Can it be that Rochester will be or will seek to be The Vile Seducer? And will Jane be strong enough to resist his blandishment? It is, perhaps, difficult to recapture the naïveté of what we assume was that of the Victorian reader, though I suspect the adolescent and preadolescent readers of Jane Eyre in our own time also thrill to the possibility of danger from Rochester. This openness to an alternative outcome is obviously not “essential” for the understanding of Jane Eyre, but it is essential to the full experience of the novel’s effect.

The locus classicus of sociosexual harassment in fiction is, of course, Pamela. We have just had occasion to refer to Richardson’s Clarissa; Pamela, mentioned in the very first chapter of the novel, is the fountainhead of the governess novel. Janet Spens, among others,⁴ has pointed out that “Jane is a nursery governess and her social position as such is nearly indistinguishable from that of Pamela as a waiting-woman to Mr. B.’s mother. Both habitually talk of the hero as ‘my Master’ and are sent for to his presence. ... Mrs. Fairfax corresponds
closely to Mrs. Jarvis—the housekeeper who befriends Pamela” (5). But if we remember our Pamela, we recall that there was an evil housekeeper (Mrs. Jewes) as well as the kindly Mrs. Jarvis, so we cannot be too confident about Jane’s safety. Knowledge of predecessors, fortunately, does not rob the narrative of suspense but, on the contrary, multiplies possibilities.

Part of the success of both novels, too, was due to the titillating episodes leading up to “the rise of the heroine in social position” and the nature of the “perils” the heroine faced. Sexual harassment was, of course, a delicate subject for Victorian novelists, and it is seldom free of concern with class. The Countess of Blessington’s Clara Mordaunt, for example, is herself a lady and feels socially superior to most of her employers, many of whom are quite vulgar. Even the titled can be vulgar, however. The Ladies Meredith gossip unreservedly and insensitively in Clara’s presence. Lady Elizabeth rattles on from one bit of gossip to another:

“. . . Have you heard about Lady Fanny Elton’s femme-de-chambre? O! it is a horrid affair, I assure you; but, if people will take beauties into their families, they must take the consequences; it is not every woman who has the good fortune to possess such a husband as Lord Axminster [Clara’s employer].” (2:155)

Not all Clara’s employers or their friends are as decent as Lord Axminster, and they are all worse when they are socially and even culturally “inferior.” The Marsdens, West Indian friends of Clara Mordaunt’s parvenu mistress, Mrs. Williamson, are, in their “half-caste” way, even crasser than their hostess. West Indian blood is conventionally “hot” (Bertha Rochester, of course, is from the West Indies), and so is that of Hercules Marsden, the vulgar son of the vulgar family:

“How much do you pay miss for looking after your piccannies?” asked Mrs. Marsden [in Clara’s presence].

“I pay her twenty-five guineas a year,” replied Mrs. Williamson.

“Just what I pay my maid,” remarked the creole.

“And what I have agreed to pay my tiger [groom or footman]” said her hopeful son. “Faith! I think I shall take a governess for myself . . . but I shall bargain for her being as young and pretty as miss,” looking
impudently at Clara, who felt indignant at being made the object of his indelicate remarks.

"Single gentlemen do not keep governesses," said Mrs. Williamson.

"O! that, I suppose, is a privilege reserved for the married men, and a devilish agreeable privilege it is, eh,—my old boy!" turning to his host, "do you find it so?" (1:93–94)

Blessington, like Richardson, makes explicit the vulnerability of the governess/employee to humiliating sexual exploitation—the capitalist version of the droit du seigneur—that is very near the surface in Jane Eyre and implicit, even if in some instances unthinkable, in the governess novel as a kind. Mrs. Ryals, in Mrs. Hall’s “The Governess, a Tale,” finishes her litany of the sins of governesses with this: “Another [governess]—really the world is very depraved—occasioned a painful difference between Mr. Ryals and myself; and let that be a warning to you, my dear friend, not to admit any pretty quiet sentimental young ladies into your domestic circle . . . men are but men” (53). In an embedded tale in Margaret Russell, Ruth, a governess, is a victim to all sorts of nameless indignities, including “dishonorable pursuit” by the ward of the owner of the house in which she is employed (255).

Governesses, however, at least fictional governesses, do sometimes marry aristocrats, whether the master, the son, or a distinguished guest. In The Governess; Or, Politics in Private Life (1836), Mrs. Ross’s Gertrude Walcot marries Sir Herbert Lyster, her mistress’s brother, but Ross makes clear that this is not a case of social climbing: “The candid reader will not fail to have observed,” she tells us, “that it was as the intimate friend of Lady Trevor, Sir Herbert Lyster first loved Gertrude Walcot,—as his sister’s governess, he never had,—most likely never would have thought of her in any other light” (310). Not all the governesses are so well-born or so pure, even in this same tale. Lady Carhampton was governess to the daughter of Lord Carhampton and, Ross tells us, “acquired the title of wife by the most disgraceful preliminaries” (247). In another tale, “Our Governess,” the employer of Miss Pierrepoint, the governess, feels obliged to “check her mildly, and in private, for some forwardness with one of our male guests” (Hall 180).

The stage seems set for the appearance, for better or worse, of the “master,” Edward Rochester, who will apparently enter into the
conventional complications of a governess novel. That is the fictional world foregrounded here in the middle of the eleventh chapter of Jane Eyre's autobiography. All thoughts of Contarini Byronism and false, ghostly apparitions have long since faded into the background. The complicating factor, the center of interest, seems to be in what I have been calling the novel's "Godwinism," though it, too, seems subsumed by the domestic or governess tale, Jane's rebellious character offering only an interesting variation on the species, placing her in greater danger and the outcome in greater doubt. It seems possible that strong-willed Jane will have some sort of confrontation with this master—perhaps a sexual one. Or, she may begin with him a series of confrontations between her and subsequent masters and mistresses, a kind of pilgrimage common in governess novels, including Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey, which Charlotte had read but which had not as yet been published, as well as Caroline Mordaunt. We can settle down to a familiar, but not too familiar, domestic tale.

But almost immediately another voice (literally) is heard: the Gothic, a voice that for a number of chapters has been silent, suddenly echoes through Thornfield Hall. Mrs. Fairfax is showing Jane through the Hall when they come upon several rooms on the third story.

"Do the servants sleep in these rooms?" I asked.
"No; they occupy a range of smaller apartments to the back; no one ever sleeps here: one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt."
"So I think: you have no ghost then?"
"None that I ever heard of," returned Mrs. Fairfax, smiling.
"Nor any traditions of one? no legends or ghost stories?"
"I believe not. And yet it is said, the Rochesters have been rather a violent than a quiet race. . . ." (128)

The last "ghost" that threatened to appear was in the red-room, and this scene and its generic baggage are once more foregrounded from the repertoire of the reading. Then, Jane was a child and was overwrought, and the older Jane, the narrator, conjectured (but only conjectured) that the "ghost" was surely just the gleam from a lantern. Now Jane is grown—if not quite mature—yet she keeps pumping Mrs. Fairfax about a Thornfield ghost or ghost story and does not want
to take no for an answer. Surely there is no ghost. The narrator is silent, the novel at this point once more monologic. Does Jane simply want to conjure up the fiction of a ghost to break the boredom? Did she—before she reached the maturity of the narrator—still believe that a ghost had been about to appear in the red-room? Some mature novelists and readers in the 1840s did believe in ghosts. Catherine Crowe, known for her realistic fiction, in 1848 published a collection of supposedly authentic stories of ghosts, apparitions, and supernatural events, and the volume was respectfully referred to in the North British Review within months of the publication of Jane Eyre (see above, ch. 2, n. 4).

Jane and Mrs. Fairfax go out onto the leads to survey the grounds. Jane then precedes Mrs. Fairfax down the staircase to the attic and waits there while Mrs. Fairfax fastens the trapdoor.

I lingered in the long passage to which this [garret staircase] led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle. (129)

References both serious and facetious to the eponymous villain of Charles Perrault’s fairy tale, in which the innocent young wife is forbidden entrance into one room in the castle (because the bodies of his former wives are buried there), are fairly common in the early nineteenth century. They crop up in Austen’s Northanger Abbey and Sheridan LeFanu’s A Chapter in the History of a Tyrone Family; in Thackeray’s Barry Lyndon and the first (January 1847) number of Vanity Fair; and, a few months after the publication of Jane Eyre, in a serial appearing in Douglas Jerrold’s Shilling Magazine, entitled The Gallant Glazier; or, the Mystery of Ridley Hall. Fatherless Fanny (1819) perhaps deserves special mention. Louis James says its popularity “may well have brought it, [sic] potentialities to the notice of novel-writers; it[s Cinderella theme] is the theme of many domestic romances, including Oliver Twist” (130). Even more important for our purposes is that its preface, with its claim to realism, its justification of the marvelous, its protestation of morality and the healthy depiction of passion, and its claim to be something new in the novel genre, might well have been the preface to Jane Eyre:
This Novel is one of the newest and most modern now extant, and is out of the common track of Novel writing: it is an attempt to unite the various merits and graces of the ancient romance and modern novel; and, like history, represents human nature as real life. To attain this end, there is required a degree of the marvellous to excite the attention and real manners of life to give an air of probability to the work, and to engage the heart in its behalf. . . . the whole [is] so closely connected, as to keep the imagination of the reader continually alive to the subject before him.

...The passion that awakens and gives energy to life, is alone painted in those colours which Aurora gives to the morning . . . when all is ecstasy, harmony and joy. ([Reeve] iii-iv)

The fifth chapter of Fatherless Fanny is entitled "A Modern Bluebeard." Lord Bellafyn, the Bluebeard of Ireland, accusing his wife of infidelity, has shut her up in the castle, allowing no one to see her and reportedly abusing her. She is later reported dead, poisoned by her husband, and her ghost is said to have been seen on a rock overlooking the sea, though other reports say she has escaped to England and her funeral was a sham, staged so Lord Bellafyn could marry his longtime mistress.⁶

At this point in Jane Eyre, following upon the heels of the reference to Bluebeard, the Gothic leaves its indelible rubric upon the text: "While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh: distinct, formal, mirthless." Mrs. Fairfax says she often hears that laugh, but it is only Grace, one of the servants. She calls her.

I really did not expect any Grace to answer; for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and, but that it was high noon, and that no circumstances of ghostliness accompanied the curious cachination; but that neither scene nor season favoured fear, I should have been superstitiously afraid. (130)

The narrator's silence continues, but the action itself de-emphasizes for Jane thoughts of the supernatural. The squarish figure and hard, plain face of the servant appears: "Any apparition less romantic or less ghostly could scarcely be conceived" (130). It is the "lantern" explanation but without the narrator's intervention. The novel-reader knows that there are possible reasons for terror other
than ghosts, and the appearance of the servant does not necessarily eliminate even the possibility of a ghost. Jane's monologic description of her own responses and conclusions may not suffice. Bronte's narrator knows when to remain silent.

At this point readers even remotely familiar with the Gothic are likely to readjust the configuration of the novel as they have been piecing it together from what has already been presented and projecting it forward toward what is yet to come. The governess novel will be pushed into the background while a series of details that have lain more or less dormant in the mind will be brought once more to the fore, the fullness and clarity of the recall depending on the reader's original perception and present retention. From the very opening pages we may recall the pictures in Bewick's *History of British Birds* that Jane pored over as she sat in the window seat before John Reed so rudely interrupted her:

I cannot tell what sentiments haunted the quite solitary churchyard with its inscribed headstone. . . .

The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms.

The fiend pinning down the thief's packet behind him, I passed over quickly: it was an object of terror.

So was the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows.

Each picture told a story . . . as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings. (5)

The Gothic, at least implicitly, thus preceded the rebellion motif; it also preceded and now overwhelms the generic indicators of the governess novel. But neither of these is erased; both hover in the near background, waiting to come once more to the fore. The "rebel-novel" (Jacobin and/or feminist) and the Gothic are comfortable bedfellows (in Godwin, for example). The rebellious heroine and the governess novel, a somewhat less familiar grouping, do sometimes appear together: Ellen was tempestuous as a child, and Caroline Mordaunt had to undergo a moral education or reeducation. The governess and the ghost? Not a familiar mix, but once put side by side it is apparent that the Gothic heroine, captive rather than employee of the . . . . . . . . . .
villain, is nonetheless, like the governess, defenseless in his household/castle and subjected to the same threats as Pamela and Jane. The simultaneous presence of three voices, the polysemic refraction of the situation in the context and competing languages of the contemporary novel, makes it difficult for readers to know just what kind of novel they are reading but makes it equally difficult for them to ignore the generic signals. What is new in *Jane Eyre*, then, are the dialogic voices which not only complicate the reader's expectations but also problematize—at least for a time—the moral universe of the novel. Despite the familiar materials, a new species of novel, an original, is before us.

But this is too static a description of the experience of reading this portion of the novel. The pacing here is extraordinary. Chapters 10 and 11 each began in halting fashion, shifting time and scene. The novel seemed to be floundering in search of a direction. The reader was searching for direction as well, but without the pressure of suspense, urgency, or even significance. Since there was little need to project forward, there was little need to recapitulate, to deduce from the earlier portions of the text a configuration that would predict what was to come. The reader was in a position similar to Jane's: there had been a tranquil, generalized summary of the eight quiet years at Lowood, a sudden move, and then the "promise of a smooth career" at Thornfield. We did not have much more to look forward to than did Jane. Then a series of generic signals and quick cuts in the action forced the reader to rapidly reassess the nature of the story, simultaneously recapitulating what has gone before in order to help identify the terms and strategies of the text. Both the forward-moving, horizontal/temporal movement and the recapitulatory, synchronic, vertical/spatial movement of the novel thus quicken. Now there is the master, Rochester, whose very name may suggest a sexual threat; his ward, who is French and of dubious background; and though there are no ghosts at Thornfield, Jane is told, there is a preternatural laugh. Elements of governess novels, of Godwinian rebellion novels, and of Gothic novels are serially recapitulated and juxtaposed in a new and puzzling configuration.

The two dimensions of the text—the temporal and the spatial—are not, as is often suggested, antithetical. The unusually hectic movement in these two chapters and the two that follow is only in part due
to the action. There is a strange laugh, a meeting in the dark woods, the arrival of the master, and a somewhat bizarre interview with him. But what fully energizes the text and its language is its thickening texture, its picking up of generic stitches that have been dropped earlier, its blurring without erasing the governess-novel configuration. That model does not at present seem to serve even as an alternative possibility of the future development of the novel. The Gothic offers its own alternative possibilities, its own possible transformation into something else, most likely a Byronic love story. Though no longer in the forefront of the reader's imagination, the governess novel is still hovering in the background, even as the Gothic had been hovering for so long.

In chapter 8, at Lowood, Jane tells Miss Temple about Mr. Lloyd's having attended her "after the fit; for I never forgot the, to me, frightful episode of the red-room" (83). Since the episode was so memorable to Jane, we must remember it too, and it may be well for us to revisit that scene briefly now, even at the risk of some repetition, in order to give it its new emphasis in the new context of the strange doings at Thornfield.

In this seldom-used room where Mr. Reed had died, young Jane, having been locked in for punishment, sees her own white face and glittering eyes reflected in the mirror. She looks "like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors" (112), she thinks. At first, she is too angry at the injustice of her treatment to be frightened. As the anger turns to depression and the room turns dark, she begins to think of her dead uncle, and as she glances from time to time toward the dimly gleaming mirror:

I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr. Reed's spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode—whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed—and rise before me in this chamber. . . . This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realized. . . .
A light shines on the wall and glides to the ceiling over her head.

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, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. (15)

The autobiographer explains the ghostly appearance away, but the explanation is hedged—"I can conjecture . . . in all likelihood"—and her confession a few chapters later that she has never forgotten the episode leaves in doubt just how the novel will resolve the issue of supernatural appearances. Other Gothic elements have entered the text and more will be introduced. Some are treated as superstitions—as when Jane overhears the servants talking: "'Something passed her, all dressed in white, and vanished'—'A great black dog behind him'—'Three loud raps on the chamber door'—'A light in the churchyard just over his grave'—&c. &c." (18). Others are treated as jokes, as when the "kind fairy" drops a suggestion to advertise on Jane's pillow. But their very presence and frequency keep some sort of Gothic configuration a possibility. Though no reader can be expected to recall the past text in its totality, and some readers will have made up their minds whether Jane's world is naturalistic or Gothic, there would seem to be sufficiently conflicting signals to ambiguate the issue, so that even the convinced will recognize the possibility of the dialogic worldviews.

Rochester himself makes a Gothic entrance. One evening in January, Jane takes a walk. She rests on a stile. The sun goes down. She hears a horse approaching.

In those days I was young, and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind: the memories of nursery stories were there amongst other rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give. As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie's tales wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a "Gytrash;" which, in the form of a horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me.
... close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees. It was exactly one mask of Bessie's Gytrash. (135-36)7

The horse and rider appear and prove to be all too earthly: the horse slips, the rider falls. Jane helps him remount. Later she learns he is Mr. Rochester, master of Thornfield, and he admits, "When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet" (149). He makes much of her having been seated on the stile, waiting, he suggests, for her "people... the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them" (149). Stiles are associated elsewhere with the supernatural, not with men in green but with ghosts, as in Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), which was republished in Bentley's Standard Novels and Romances as no. 57 in 1837:

"... when I was in Devonshire," Mr. Flosky says, "the following story was well attested to me. A young woman, whose lover was at sea, returning one evening over some solitary fields, saw her lover sitting on a stile over which she was to pass. Her first emotions were surprise and joy, but there was a paleness and seriousness in his face that made them give place to alarm. She advanced towards him, and he said to her, in a solemn voice, 'The eye that hath seen me shall see me no more. Thine eye is upon me, but I am not.' And with these words he vanished; and on that very day and hour, as it afterwards appeared, he had perished by shipwreck." (177-78)

Jane as narrator, speaking from the vantage point of her maturity, excuses her momentary fears by reminding us of her youth and calls the nursery tales "rubbish." When a stile and ghost are introduced much later in the novel, the superstition is also dismissed, but it does testify, as perhaps the overtones do in the Rochester/Jane meeting, to a more-than-usual if not more-than-natural emotional experience. When, on that later occasion, Jane returns from her visit to her aunt unannounced, she comes upon Rochester sitting on the stone steps of a stile, and as on their first meeting, there is an air of the insubstantial or supernatural. The ghost "appears" in the text by negation: "Well," Jane says, "he is not a ghost; yet every nerve I have is unstrung"
(306). Bits of the supernatural or superstitious are being dropped into the reader’s repertoire, casually populating the background, building, perhaps, to a critical mass.

The talk of ghosts at Thornfield occurs at the end of chapter 11; the appearance of Rochester occurs in chapter 12; at the end of chapter 13, after he and Jane have formally met, Jane challenges Mrs. Fairfax’s earlier description of him as not “peculiar.” The housekeeper admits that he may have “peculiarities of temper,” but she says that allowances should be made because of “family troubles.” His elder brother, Rowland, had done him some grievous and unforgivable wrong, had died without a will, and Edward Rochester has come into the property. Since that time, nine years ago, the new heir has been unable or unwilling to stay at Thornfield more than two weeks at a time. Why can he not abide the Hall? Mrs. Fairfax is evasive. It is a mystery even to her, she claims. “It was evident, indeed, that she wished me to drop the subject; which I did accordingly” (156).

Thus ends chapter 13. Jane does not at this point remind the reader of the preternatural laugh. But the end of the chapter strategically gives readers time to pause a few seconds, to reflect, to readjust their configuration of what had gone before, and to project that which might yet come. What evil lurks in Thornfield Hall? What kind of fictional world are we in?

Earlier fiction may help answer the questions. Shut-up rooms in a house or castle was a common device in Gothic novels of the early nineteenth century. In 1814 Scott, in his “Introductory” chapter to Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since, suggests that the motif was already old:

Had I . . . announced in my frontispiece, “Waverley, a Tale of other Days,” must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than Udolpho, of which the eastern wing had long been uninhabited, and the keys either lost, or consigned to the care of some aged butler or housekeeper whose trembling steps, about the middle of the second volume, were doomed to guide the hero, or heroine, to the ruinous precincts? (63)

Watt calls the device “the deserted wing,” and says that in the shilling shockers of 1818 . . . . . .
no Gothic castle, was complete without its "deserted wing." . . . We learn early in the story that one of the lords of the castle has shut up the access to a certain wing, for some reason, and we are immediately held in suspense about it. After reading a dozen [Gothic shilling] shockers, we begin to realize that deserted wings are reserved for the explorations of curious heroines or rightful heirs . . . bent on solving the mystery of a murder perpetrated by the ancestors of the current usurper. (24–25)8

Is the laugh that echoes through the third story that of a ghost? If there were, despite Mrs. Fairfax’s insistence, a ghost in Thornfield Hall, whose ghost would it be? Would it be that of “the rightful heir,” Rowland? Perhaps, but there are other possibilities: “The deserted wing is not necessarily the residence of the ghost of an unburied ancestor. It often serves as the base of operations of villains and their female counterparts [like Grace Poole, perhaps?]. In Mrs. Radcliffe’s Sicilian Romance, a Gothic husband found it a convenient depository for his wife” (Watt 25).

Here the narratable is so narratable, such a fictional topos or cliché, that it is not its narratability but its verisimilitude that needs defending. A reviewer of Harriet Martineau’s The Billow and the Rock, published just a year before Jane Eyre, defends Martineau’s depiction of the kidnapping of a wife and the placing of her on an island, not only because it was based on the actual case of Lady Grange, a drunkard with “an ungovernable temper,” but because a note to Maria Edgeworth’s Castle Rackrent reports an actual case in which a wife was imprisoned for twenty years in the “upper room in an Irish country-house” where the husband still entertained. Released when he died, she “scarcely had clothes sufficient to cover her; and her understanding seemed stupefied.” When she recovered she said, “I have been three times married; the first time for money; the second, for rank; the third, for love—and the third was worst of all” (Edinburgh Review 85:247). Not a very promising prospect if Jane Eyre is to become a love story.

Another reviewer, defending Jane Eyre in the Athenaeum, claimed that he had heard of someone’s actually having been confined in a mansion house for years without public knowledge (Allott 71–72). Brontë may have based her own novel on another such actuality or at least on a tradition taken for actuality (Clarendon 588–89, 600–601)
rather than directly on other novels. Actual or fanciful, the fictional topos was still alive a generation after the shilling shockers, Waverley, and Austen's satiric Northanger Abbey, which was meant to put it to rest. The same reviewer who defended its actuality in Jane Eyre recalls, "Some such tale as this was told in a now forgotten novel—Sketches of a Seaport Town." The reviewer gives no details of that "novel" and is, indeed, slightly inaccurate, since, as the title suggests, the cited text is not a novel but more like a series of sketches or novellas. It is strange that the anonymous reviewer would make that mistake, for the author of the "novel" was H. F. Chorley, and the anonymous reviewer was ... H. F. Chorley.

The tale referred to is "Parson Clare," which appears in Sketches (1834) in three parts. The early portions of the story might almost be the prehistory of Rochester's marriage, except the greed motivating the marriage was not Rochester's own but his family's, and the seaport town is not in the West Indies. Wilson Herbert, a young clergyman, jilts Anna Oldacre, whom he has been courting for some time, in order to marry the ugly and base heiress of the fatally ill miser Parson Clare. After the marriage, Herbert tries for years to discipline and "feminize" his wife, but without success.

Even during that short period of constraint, strange rumours of her eccentricities transpired. She was not one of those passive personages, conscious of their own deficiencies, whom you may persuade or terrify into whatever you please, for the time being. She was vain, vulgar and violent; incapable of being stirred to the task of amending herself by either shame or emulation. Many even went so far as to say that, during the course of that time, she had shown glimpses of more disgraceful propensities than the love of tawdry finery, or the distaste to everything polished and refined. (Chorley 199)

A year passes, a daughter is born, and Mrs. Herbert wallows in luxury and self-indulgence. There follows an episode that has a striking parallel in Jane Eyre, except that Rochester discovers that he is betrayed not by his wife but by his mistress: A "kind friend" enlightens Herbert as to certain aspects of his wife's conduct that the husband is always the last to know. He decides to become better acquainted with

67
his wife’s activities. One night he sits up to await her return from a party he had left earlier:

At last the sound of wheels is heard;—not, as before, to die away into deep silence. The chariot stopped.—The drawing-room where Herbert had been sitting, was in darkness, the candles having burned their last. He ran out to the top of the stairs, and leaned over to listen. The lamp in the hall too was just expiring, so that he could see without being seen. He heard his wife’s coarse voice, and that of a gentleman. He breathed short and thick, and clenched a small cane between his hands so violently, that the print of his fingers was seen on the bamboo next morning. There was some bidding of good-night, and the door closed upon the cavalier. (205)

In only his second conversation with Jane, Rochester recounts his “discovery,” with interruptions, over the space of some six pages. There is a similar pattern: the betrayed man, sitting in the dark, listens to the carriages pass until one stops; he then rises and stands above the scene, invisible in the dark.

“I recognized the ‘voiture’ I had given Céline. She was returning: of course my heart thumped with impatience against the iron rails I leant upon. . . . Bending over the balcony I was about to murmur, ‘Mon Ange’ . . . when a figure jumped from the carriage after her; cloaked also: but that was a hatted head which now passed under the arched porte cochère of the hotel.” (174)

Rochester interrupts his narrative to describe the tumultuousness of jealousy, to comment on the weather, to look at and curse Thornfield—misleading the reader, perhaps, into believing Céline has something to do with the mystery therein—to shoo Adèle away. And then he continues: “When I saw my charmer thus come in accompanied by a cavalier, I seemed to hear a hiss, and the green snake of jealousy, rising on undulating coils from the moonlit balcony, glided within my waistcoat and ate its way to my heart’s core” (176). He hides behind curtains to ambush them should they enter Céline’s boudoir. When they do, he recognizes his “rival” as an unworthy young viscount. The conversation he overhears he finds “frivolous, mercenary, heartless, and senseless” (177). He hears Céline making fun of his “deformities.” His jealousy, as well as other passions, dies. “Opening the window, I
walked in upon them; liberated Céline from my protection; ... made an appointment with the Vicomte for a meeting at the bois de Boulogne" (178). He wounds the vicomte in the arm and is quit of "the whole crew;" except for Adèle, who had been given into his custody as his own daughter by Céline six months earlier.

Neither Wilson Herbert nor Rochester is alone in his betrayal, for the episode is a scenic topos of the period. Eustace Conway, the eponymous hero of a John Frederick Denison Maurice novel published in the same year as Sketches, is similarly victimized by his French mistress. He, like Rochester, has been leading a life of dissipation. Like Rochester, he visits one night to find his mistress not at home. He sits reading a novel while awaiting her return; he dozes; the candle burns out. The door opens, and his friend Mr. Morton enters with Louise, who tries to claim that Eustace has arrived uninvited. Morton believes Conway and they leave together, Eustace cured of Louise but not of dissipation (1:243–44).

Wilson Herbert is less resolute than either Eustace or Rochester. He has confronted the "cavalier," but he cannot decide what course of action to pursue with regard to his wife. She staggers away from him, heads up the stairs, falls, and strikes "her head against the sharp corner of a step. Her husband heard the fall, and the outcry of the assembled servants who pronounced her to be killed" (Chorley 205).

Eighteen years later, Herbert's daughter, Phoebe; her fiancé, Sir Thomas Dulwich; and his mother are out riding when they come to a house at what proves to be the back entrance to Herbert's estate, a site he had abandoned ever since his wife's accident. Sir Thomas and his mother playfully insist on visiting the house. They snatch the housekeeper's keys from her and explore half the house, opening all the long-locked doors but finding no more of interest than had Catherine Morland at Northanger Abbey or Jane at Thornfield in their extensive but incomplete tours.

"And now, Madame la Conciergerie," said Sir Thomas, "I think we are satisfied. We have seen nothing worth making such a fuss about; never a ghost, not a picture. Is there any thing precious on the other side of the house?"

"No, Sir—I do not know, Sir," replied Markland, in great agitation, "I have never been in several of the rooms myself, Sir."
Sir Thomas insists that they explore the "deserted wing":

they were on the point of entering the corridor, when they were transfixed by a sound which made itself heard above the highest pitch of their voices;—an outcry, something between the yell of a terrified wild beast, and the shriek of a strong man in his death-struggle, rung from the further end of the right-hand passage, again and again. . . . a second scream was heard, and louder than the first,—a scuffling of feet,—the rattle of a chain;—and Markland was seen issuing from the passage crying out, "save me!—help!—murder!"—and pursued by a ghastlier figure than any of the party had ever before beheld.

It was a strong middle-aged woman, of a herculean figure, upon whose face was stamped every bad passion, intensified by insanity. Her brilliant eyes were distended to their utmost;—her head was overgrown with a felt of shaggy black hair. Her attire was little more than a foul blanket, strapped round her waist; and a broken chain appended to this belt, and the rings about her wrists which had belonged to manacles, told how strictly she had been coerced, and how mighty had been the effects of her present paroxysm of frenzy. From the slight bedstead close outside the door of her prison-chamber, on which Markland had been accustomed to sleep, she had wrenched out a post, and was pursuing her dismayed keeper with the utmost fury, when her eye lighted upon the strangers. With a bound, and another inarticulate shout, she rushed toward [sic], brandishing her weapon, and aimed a violent blow at Sir Thomas, who vainly endeavoured to oppose her progress. It descended,—but not as she had directed it—upon the fair forehead of Phoebe. Then the maniac sprang down stairs, and in another instant, the fiendish sound of her lawless laughter was heard upon the lawn without. The unfortunate girl fell at her lover’s feet, covered with blood.

"What have I lived to see!" cried Markland. "Heaven have mercy upon us! she is killed!—and by her own mother too!" (211-12)

Austen’s Mrs. Tilney, had she indeed been incarcerated, would have been pure victim. Mrs. Herbert, though improperly imprisoned and so a victim of sorts, is a dangerous and immoral creature, driven mad by lust. She kills her own daughter, unintentionally, in her mad rage. The upper story of Thornfield may, then, be populated by Rowland’s ghost or Rochester’s mistress or wife, and the incarcerated woman may be a helpless victim or a lustful, murderous madwoman.
(could it be Céline?) who kills her daughter (is Adèle in danger?). The ghosts of many possibilities haunt the third story of Thornfield Manor.

That Chorley, reviewing anonymously, did not take the opportunity to claim his own story as the "source" for Jane Eyre but argued instead that both works were credible, based on or consistent with reports of actual incidents, may testify to his modesty or his credulity, but it may also suggest the invisibility of conventions. That is, conventional stories are accepted and enjoyed because they are familiar; the expectations aroused are familiar, and, though not always predictably, in one form or another they are fulfilled conventionally or meaningfully modified. The whole reading experience validates the convention and its "realism": it seems real because it is familiar, that is, like "everyday" events—or "everyday" stories.

New meaning, new views or versions or visions of reality, are therefore usually embodied in conventional narratives with a "twist": "Something created is always created out of something given... What is given is completely transformed in what is created" (Bakhtin, Speech 120). The use of the convention is not necessarily a conscious strategy on the part of the author, an attempt from above to communicate with the rabble of readers. The author is also a reader. The "novel" is defined for the author by prior novels, and the genre is what it is at the moment, its "utterance" specific to the occasion. The world according to novels—"reality"—is also defined to a significant degree by the novels of that particular time. The original author, one who says, "It has been written [thus], but I say unto you [otherwise]," is therefore dependent for his or her ability to see and to say on the fact that "it" has been written. Charlotte Brontë can create Jane Eyre not in spite of conventions like the "deserted wing" but through them. Readers are surprised by this new species of novel and assent to its "realism" not because it is unlike anything they had read before but because it is like but unlike, strange but somehow familiar, shocking but recognizable. The recombined conventions are defamiliarized and, paradoxically, while they are accepted and found original in their new form, they call into question the old conventions themselves.

This procedure of using multiple fictional conventions to defamiliarize the familiar and make surprising what is commonplace, make
new from the old, is analogous—if not identical—to the means by which Iser sees literature recombining societal conventions in new relationships, reorganizing them from their stable "vertical" arrangement of the past to a new "horizontal" combination, and thus forcing the reader to reexamine the conventions themselves:

The fictional text makes a selection from a variety of conventions to be found in the real world [for our purposes read "in the fictional context"], and it puts them together as if they were interrelated. This is why we recognize in a novel, for instance, so many of the conventions that regulate our society and culture [read "our novels"]). But by reorganizing them horizontally, the fictional text brings them before us in unexpected combinations, so that they begin to be stripped of their validity. As a result, these conventions are taken out of their social [read "fictional"] contexts, deprived of their regulating function, and so become subjects of scrutiny themselves. (Iser 61)

In literature, however, the new combination replaces to a considerable extent the old conventions and effectively redefines the novel genre. By inbreeding and crossbreeding conventions and varieties of Gothic and governess novels with an admixture of still others, Brontë has created not a Frankensteinian monster but a new, heartier species of novel out of old varieties that will now be replaced. Indeed, in time the new hybrid will itself seem trite.9 When the convention fades from memory, the familiar, conventional plots may seem less "realistic," and the new combination made of these old parts may seem so too (as do some social realism novels of the 1930s, for example). These once conventional, realistic, and new works may now seem arbitrary and even bizarre. Some of the quieter conventions with which a work like Jane Eyre is created virtually disappear. The more flamboyant recede but are readily recognizable once we run across them. So it is, then, that when we encounter one of these once conventional but now "unrealistic" yet recognizable plots in two separate works, we often identify the earlier as the "source."

One "source" for the Thornfield plot of Jane Eyre was suggested long ago by A. A. Jack in an appendix to the Brontë section of The Cambridge History of English Literature: Sheridan LeFanu's A chapter in
the History of a Tyrone Family, being a tenth extract from the Legacy of the Late Francis Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh. Later to appear in the Purcell Papers, it was first published in the Dublin Magazine for October 1839. By citing Brontë’s letter to that periodical in which she thanks the editors for a good review of her and her sisters’ Poems and identifies herself as a “constant and grateful reader,” Jack establishes the likelihood that Brontë read LeFanu’s work. Whether or not it is a true source for Brontë—and we have seen enough of the convention to recognize that Brontë’s plot probably does not originate in any one specific work—Le Fanu’s tale was certainly in the repertoire of a good many novel-readers of the period and offers situational and scenic topoi that appear as well in Jane Eyre. It is useful, then, to follow—and extend—Jack’s comparison of the two works, not to demonstrate influence, but to help define further the fictional dialogue into which Jane Eyre was speaking.

LeFanu’s narrator is a young Irish girl, Fanny Richardson, who, recently married to Lord Glenfallen, accompanies him for the first time to his country house, Cahergillagh Court. Calling himself her Blue-beard—a reference we have noted before—he mysteriously forbids her that portion of the castle accessible by the back door. A month after her arrival Fanny discovers a blind woman in her room. When, in response to the blind woman’s question, Fanny says she is Lady Glenfallen, the intruder grows angry:

The violence of her action, and the fury which convulsed her face, effectually terrified me, and disengaging myself from her grasp, I screamed as loud as I could for help. . . . I heard Lord Glenfallen’s step upon the stairs, and I instantly ran out: as I passed him I perceived that he was deadly pale and just caught the words, “I hope that demon has not hurt you.” (qtd. in Jack 461)

Glenfallen tells Fanny that the blind woman is out of her mind, but he assures her that he will not let her bother Fanny again. That very night, however, the blind woman appears in Fanny’s bedroom. She insistently questions Fanny about whether the young girl is really married to Glenfallen, and after Fanny says she was married “in the presence of more than a hundred witnesses,” the blind woman claims to be the
first and the true Lady Glenfallen (LeFanu 3:88; Jack does not treat this episode fully). Fanny sees

something in her face, though her features had evidently been handsome, and were not, at first sight, unpleasing, which, upon a nearer inspection, seemed to indicate the habitual prevalence and indulgence of evil passions, and a power of expressing mere animal rage with an intenseness that I have seldom seen equalled. (Jack 461)

The novel-reader’s repertoire is stocked not just with the motif of the deserted wing, not even with the mere fact that one possible inhabitant of that wing—or third story—might be an imprisoned wife, but there is built up in the convention something of a taxonomy of clandestinely incarcerated wives. The first-time reader of Jane Eyre does not of course know that it is Rochester’s wife upstairs, though the convention makes that a possibility, and of course Bertha herself is not known to the reader, so that any comparison with Lady Glenfallen is at this point proleptic. Still, some of these qualities of the blind woman may not only be stored for later recall but may condition the expectations. This is not to say that LeFanu’s story is a prerequisite for the reader’s repertoire, but it can serve as one instance of how that repertoire may be stored and how any earlier work in the convention may influence the reading (whether or not it has influenced the writing) of the text of Jane Eyre prospectively and retrospectively. Though not a lunatic, despite Glenfallen’s charge, Lady Glenfallen, like Bertha, seems to have unsettled her nature by passion, though lust is not specified here as it is in Bertha’s case. Like Bertha, too, she is not English—few passionate women in nineteenth-century English fiction are—but Dutch (not to my knowledge conventionally thought of as a passionate people). Passion, violence, insanity, and otherness—the wife upstairs at Thornfield, if there is one, is being described in absentia by her imprisoned sisters. Lady Glenfallen joins Mrs. Herbert and even the fancied poor Mrs. Tilney of Northanger Abbey in the attic (but not in Gilbert and Gubar’s attic).

Unlike Austen’s satire or Chorley’s novella, LeFanu’s tale, like Jane Eyre, is a first-person narration, and the horror is intensified because the narrator, Fanny, is at risk, as Jane might be. Fanny is twice myste-
riously threatened, then attacked: The mirror in her room pivots away to reveal a concealed door, through which the blind woman enters. The intruder stops, listening, finds a razor, and attempts to murder the fear-frozen Fanny. "A slight inaccuracy saved me from instant death; the blow fell short, the point of the razor grazing my throat" (Jack 462). The blind woman is seized and tried for murder; she then implicates her husband. She is sentenced and dies; Glenfallen is acquitted but goes mad and cuts his own throat.

Jack does not push the parallels, indeed may not push them far enough. Glenfallen, for example, like Rochester, is "neither young nor handsome" (LeFanu 3:51) and is capable of being gay and kind or gloomy and morose, though he seems to change from one mode to the other in the course of the story rather than vacillate back and forth as Rochester does. He is sensible, ironic, and disarming in describing his castle (which is as disappointingly modern and unmysterious as General Tilney's abbey was to Catherine Morland):

"I much prefer a snug, modern, unmysterious bedroom, with well-aired sheets, to the waving tapestry, mildewed cushions, and all the other interesting appliances of romance. However, . . . if old Martha be still to the fore . . . you will soon have a supernatural and appropriate anecdote for every closet and corner of the mansion." (LeFanu 3:64-65)

Fanny finds the scene tranquil, and "a hale, good-humoured, erect old woman was Martha, and an agreeable contrast to the grim, decrepid hag which my imagination had conjured up" (3:67). Jane finds the scene at Thornfield tranquil, Mrs. Fairfax agreeable, and gets a whiff of the supernatural (or allows the reader to sniff tentatively at the must of the Gothic) despite, not because of, the housekeeper.

In A chapter in the History of a Tyrone Family, the false scent of the supernatural covers the real stench of crime and violence and the evil nature of the supposed hero. It is difficult to remember, perhaps, that first-time readers of Jane Eyre, particularly those in the 1840s, may not be sure for some time whether Rochester is Gothic villain or Byronic hero. His character seems unambiguous only in retrospect; there are numerous indications of his basic goodness, but there are other signs of his potential for less-than-admirable behavior, and neither one nor
the other is given temporal primacy. No matter which configuration
a reader might project, there are ample "anticipatory cautions" to
keep the wary reader from being certain. Indeed, to be too certain of
Rochester's character and intentions too soon is to miss a good deal of
the tension, appeal, and significance of Jane Eyre. Reading other con-
temporary novels with Byronic/Gothic hero/villains can help us stay
alert to the heteroglossic potentialities of the text.

The maiden alone, in a manor house or castle with a deserted
wing (or section or upstairs room or suite of rooms) from which noises
emanate or strange events originate; mysteries that might be ghosts;
mysterious malefactors; incarcerated wives, dead or alive, blind or
mad—these conventions dominate the early chapters of the Thornfield
center of the novel. Though the mystery is never far from the forefront
through much of the rest of this section of Jane Eyre, it is the possibly-
Gothic/possibly-not puzzle of Rochester's character that sometimes
moves front and center. Though Gothic novels are almost always love
stories, that love usually takes place within the aura of the Gothic.
Here the Gothic retreats from center stage, still haunting the dark re-
cesses, but like a shadow. The spotlight of the reader's attention is
focused not on the mystery of the third story but on the sweet mystery
of love and its story—and on its narrative and moral suspense: What
is the true nature of the enigmatic master of Thornfield? How strong
is the moral fibre of the self-reliant, skeptical, unconventional heroine?