From the end of the ninth of the eleven chapters in volume 2 of *Jane Eyre* (chapter 24 in editions in which the chapters are numbered consecutively) to the new end of the volume, the sky grows darker and darker. At first, on the day before the wedding, only figuratively: "the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil" Jane will wear the next day she shuts in her closet, "to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel... which, at this evening hour... gave out a most ghostly shimmer" (347). The sky, however, becomes literally darker; the "Italian summer" is past. Rochester has been away, and the reader absent. During his—and our—absence, something disquieting and incomprehensible has happened, the details of which the narrator deliberately, ostentatiously, and awkwardly withholds: "Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence" (348). This hybridizes the utterance as both young Jane’s and the narrator’s utterance and, moreover, it hybridizes or conflates the auditors, Rochester and the reader. Paradoxically, this fusing of action, narration, and reception does not mask but rather discovers the fictionality of the event.

As Jane awaits Rochester’s return—on the day following the as yet undisclosed happening—the weather turns sympathetically turbulent. In the course of her troubled walk she comes upon the chestnut tree whose trunk had been split in half the night of Rochester’s proposal of marriage. The halves are still joined at the base and root.
“You did right to hold fast to each other,” I said: as if the monster-splinters were living things, and could hear me. “... you will never have green leaves more—never more see birds making nests and singing idyls in your boughs; the time of pleasure and love is over with you; but you are not desolate: each of you has a comrade to sympathize with him in his decay.” (349)

The identification of a tree with lovers is somewhat refracted by its previous appearance in the fiction of the time, particularly the revisiting of a text earlier encountered in the repertoire: Frederika Bremer's *The Neighbours*. There, an oak tree, the site where the missing hero had proposed, carefully tended since with flowers planted around its base, is used as the emblem of the separated lovers. These lovers are happily reunited, as the tending and the emblematic flowers prophecy (207-8). The emblem here in *Jane Eyre* is more portentous. What Jane suggests is that she and Rochester, like the chestnut tree, will be split apart, will not marry (the time of love is over), and so will have no children (no green leaves); but they will—in their hearts, probably—somehow be together and so not entirely “desolate.”

The gloomy emblem and the fictional context might further prefigure an unromantic outcome. If the omen is fulfilled, Jane will not marry Rochester, and we may be in for something like Mrs. Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt*, an antiromantic, religious, providentialist governess novel we have had occasion to refer to in every one of the preceding chapters: there the heroine makes a solemn but unpassionate match with a clergyman cousin. (We will have reason to remember this possibility in the third volume of *Jane Eyre*.) Or Jane may not marry at all—many governesses do not. Or the omen could be a false clue meant to mislead and mystify the reader.

The false lead is a recognized element in narrative strategy, but its function is usually assumed to be merely that of creating suspense. That it may function ontologically is largely unacknowledged and its praxis largely unexplored. The novel is narrationally dialogic: “oppositional” plots—narrative roads not taken—are often marked by the false clue, the ignis fatuus; even when the “right” choice is made and the “true” story unfolds, the other potential plots suggested by the false leads shadow the text. The novel is thematically dialogic
or responsive as well, written "against" an opposition whose views and conventions are incorporated into the text. The opposing conventions are both ideological and narrational—thus the importance of the reader's alertness to and awareness of generic signals—and they are "rebutted" or rejected by the novel's narrative and thematic structure. The very notion of an opposition introduces into the text "voices" other than the monologic voice of the author or narrator, setting up a dialogue in which the presumptively intentional and oppositional views dialectically redefine each other. A worldview whose opposition is X and a similar worldview whose opposition is Y are therefore not the same, having been defined by their dialogic interaction with the oppositional utterance. The novel is dialogic thematically more than narrationally, since the fictional actions are definitive in the text (it is difficult to say that Rowland Rochester's ghost "in fact" haunts the third story of Thornfield if the novel says otherwise); but not only is the worldview often open to controversy but the authority of the narrator's or author's voice is more subject to dispute, more readily considered one voice among other, equally pertinent voices. Exclusively valorizing one voice, therefore, even that presumptively carrying the authorial intention as comprehended by the authorial audience, is a partial reading that in its omissions becomes, in effect, a misreading.

The false expectation or ignis fatuus created by Jane's musings about the lightning-struck tree is, however, rather different from and more subtle than the typical one, such as the Gothic false leads about who or what inhabits the third story, and it reveals a narrational strategy central to the effect and quality of Jane Eyre. That Rowland's ghost haunts Thornfield is never verbally suggested by the narrator, nor is it an interpretation or even suspicion of young Jane's. The narrator (or author: Bakhtin sees an author's hand most clearly in selection and juxtaposition) has merely juxtaposed passages about ghosts and the vaguely suggestive history of the Rochester family in the guise of sequential narration. The rest is the work of readers familiar with Gothic novels or shilling shockers. That Grace Poole is the cause of the disturbances is verbally in the text, however, as young Jane's hypothesis, reinforced by Rochester; but it, too, is unconfirmed by the narrator and unsubstantiated by the text. The action within the text—lightning
striking the chestnut tree just as Rochester is proposing—seems to have authorized the tree as a sign of the future of Jane and Rochester; that young Jane takes no notice of it does not so much undercut the value of the sign as it underscores Jane’s passion-induced blindness. The text, in a patently double-voiced passage, has authorized the validity of “signs” in the name of both the “pilgrim” Jane and the narrator. If signs—like presentiments—are authorized by the text/narrator, must we not therefore believe Jane’s reading of the sign of the chestnut tree? Must we not believe that it prophesies correctly that Jane and Rochester will not “flourish,” though they may still be “connected”? Must this not be a true rather than false harbinger of what is to follow? If not, is the text playing fair with the reader? How, given the clear authorization of signs by the text, can the love story of Jane and Rochester have anything other than, at best, a bittersweet ending?

Jane’s reading of the significance of the tree is, however, in quotation marks. Thus, despite the authorization of signs, this interpretation of a sign is marked as only a monologic report of what she said to herself at the time and therefore not necessarily authorized by the narrator. The narrator is, then, “playing fair,” and the reader best beware. Outside the quotation marks there are other cautionary words or phrases possibly separating the voice or vision of Jane at this narrative moment from that of the narrator. The moon is said to have “seemed to throw on me one bewildered, dreary glance” (349, emphasis added). Did it “seem” to Jane at the time that the moon glanced at her? Or is it the narrator who now recognizes that the moon “did” no such thing but only “seemed” to young Jane to do so? In other words, is this short passage double-voiced?

The subtlety in the handling of focus and voice here is reminiscent of the passage early in the novel in which young Jane, in the red-room, sees a moving light and thinks it heralds the appearance of a ghost: “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” (15; emphasis added). Here, the ostensible purpose of the narrator’s intervention—“now”—is to “unauthorize” young Jane’s fear of an imminent ghost, but the contrary, the “fact” that it was not an apparition but a sublunary lantern light, is also not fully authorized—it is merely
"conjectured," likely but not certain. The way is left open for all kinds of worlds—natural, supernatural, or spiritualistic.

The narrative agility in these scenes does more than create suspense or mood; it destabilizes the fictional and ontological repertoire. Is this the kind of fictional world in which nature, or God through nature, communicates with human beings, or is young Jane merely projecting upon nature her own fears? Such questioning of the ontology of the novel is as responsible for the affective quality, the excitement of the experience of reading *Jane Eyre*, as the somewhat conventional, not to say hoary, question of who or what inhabits the upstairs rooms at Thornfield Manor. Indeed, that these questions cannot be separated is the hallmark of Brontë's novel.

While the narrator has authorized signs but put the younger Jane's interpretation of the sign of the tree in quotation marks and so disclaimed responsibility, it is not just the subtlety or unobtrusiveness of this marking that allows us to be trapped into accepting young Jane's interpretation: it is the primacy of our sympathy for and belief in Jane—and thus in her reading of the world—from the very opening of the novel. That sympathy and trust is a measure of the reader's moral horizon, roughly that of the ten-year-old Jane,¹ and that which the novel is subtly challenging. The handling of focus, voice, and authorization is, then, more than narrative strategy; it is moral and ontological strategy as well. Those of us who are reading as members of the authorial audience are in the dark with young Jane and, like Jane, are being led toward the light.

Jane's account of the unsettling events of the night before are also placed literally "in quotation marks," narrated the following day by Jane to Rochester upon his return. These strange events are made to seem credible, or almost so, not only by our long-standing trust in Jane, but by her circumstantial narration of the events and her convincing responses to Rochester's questioning. They are also made to seem more "real" within the terms of the world of the text, paradoxically, by the wholesale problematizing of everyday reality in the text: an atmosphere of unreality has already been established by reference to the ghostliness of the bridal gown and veil, the unsettling wind, and
the bewildered, blood-red moon; now Jane would reduce Rochester himself to the spectral. Jane tells him of her disorientation:

"I cannot see my prospects clearly to-night, sir; and I hardly know what thoughts I have in my head. Everything in life seems unreal."

"Except me: I am substantial enough:—touch me."

"You, sir, are the most phantom-like of all: you are a mere dream."

He held out his hand, laughing: "Is that a dream?" said he, placing it close to my eyes. He had a rounded, muscular, and vigorous hand, as well as a long, strong arm.

"Yes; though I touch it, it is a dream," said I. (352)

The evidence of the senses, even the intimate sense of touch, is put in doubt. Everyday realism, Jane’s ability to identify the real through her senses, the whole ontological grounding of the novel, is problematized. This is a very daring gambit. It risks the deconstruction of the referentiality of the fiction. It challenges the reader to say, "Of course, Rochester is a dream. The story I am reading is all a dream. Even Jane is a dream. All is fiction." But her account, even without this gambit, would strain the reader’s credibility and change the register of referentiality of the text. While the tale is being told and until such time as it is satisfactorily explained in terms consistent with the rest of the story, the nature of the whole novel itself is in question.

She had disturbed dreams, she tells Rochester. In the first, he was leaving her, and, burdened by a little child, she could not reach him or make him hear her call. Disturbed dreams before a wedding were not unusual in brides, at least fictional brides, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Before her wedding to Sir Charles Grandison, Harriet Byron also has an anxious and confused dream in which there is a howling wind. She tries to hide but is "dragged out of a subterraneous cavern. . . . A dear little baby was put into my arms" (Richardson, Grandison 3:148; vol. 6, Letter 32). The wind at Thornfield is real and outside Jane’s dream; Harriet tries to hide herself and escape, but Jane is abandoned; both brides are rejected; Harriet’s baby is dear, Jane’s a burden. Overall, Harriet’s dream is anxious, Jane’s foreboding. Even to dream of a baby, as Bessie told her and as Jane had confirmed before she was called to her aunt’s deathbed, is a fatal omen.
Both women wake and go back to sleep only to dream again, Harriet imagining Sir Charles Grandison a ghost, even as the awakened Jane finds Rochester—and all else—"unreal." Harriet dreams of Italy as "dreary, wild, covered with snow, and pinched with frost," England as "gilded with sun" (3:149). Jane’s England was having an Italian summer as well. Jane’s second dream is more continuous with her first than is Harriet’s but also centers on the transformation of place: Thornfield Hall is in ruins, Jane is still carrying the child, Rochester is galloping away, "departing for many years"; she tries to get one last look at him, but as she bends forward, "the wall crumbled; I was shaken; the child rolled from my knee; I lost my balance, fell, and woke" (357).

But this is only the preface to the tale she has to tell. She awakens with light shining in her eyes, candlelight. She thinks it must be Sophie, her maid. But, "Mr. Rochester, this was not Sophie, it was not Leah, it was not Mrs. Fairfax: it was not—no, I was sure of it, and am still—it was not even that strange woman, Grace Poole" (357).

NOT GRACE POOLE. What to this point has been the most reasonable solution to the mystery of Thornfield; the most mundane and realistic possibility, and therefore the possibility most consistent with Jane’s view of reality; the longest-lived hypothesis, present as part of the mystery from the moment after Jane first heard the goblin laugh, and that which testified to Jane’s sanity and perspicacity—and thus to her reliability as a witness—has suddenly, definitively been erased. Grace Poole was Jane’s sole candidate—if not the reader’s, who has been looking over her shoulder at other possibilities throughout—for the source of the mystery. That the mysterious roomer is not Grace Poole not only heightens the suspense and sends the reader’s (as well as Jane’s) mind spinning through other possibilities, other configurations, but also suggests the limitation of Jane’s vision: her hardheaded realism, her refusal to be spooked by the superstitious and the supernatural are now no longer unqualified virtues. It requires a total and instantaneous reconfiguration of the novel, its ontology, and its future course. If definitely and certainly not Grace Poole, who was it, then, who set the fire? Who bit Mason as if to suck his blood? Who was
snarling behind the curtain? What in the (fictional) world is there beyond Jane’s mundane imagination?

This intruder, Jane insists, was a stranger. She can describe her clearly enough to make her identity as someone other than Grace entirely credible. She was a tall, large woman with thick, dark hair, dressed in something white, a “gown, sheet, or shroud.” Her features were “fearful and ghastly”:

“—oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!”

“Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.”

“This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eye-brows wildly raised over the bloodshot eyes. Shall I tell you of what it reminded me?”

“You may.”

“Of the foul German spectre—the Vampyre.” (358)

Young Jane thinks the midnight intruder looked like a vampire, but the narrator makes no comment confirming that fearful supposition; it is the reader familiar with vampire tales, remembering that Mason said his attacker sucked his blood and that something is snarling behind the curtain like a wolf or dog, who makes the inference. Though the possibility of a Thornfield vampire had been hinted at earlier, such a Gothic phenomenon seemed inconsistent with the ontology of the text and Jane’s skeptical common sense. Even if a recent article in *Blackwood’s* attested to the reality of vampires, it did not to this point seem likely that tough-minded Jane would believe in such “nonsense.” Now, however, for the first time, vampirism explicitly enters the text, and on Jane’s—or, at least, young Jane’s—own testimony and authority. We saw earlier that the vampire’s face as it appeared at the victim’s window in *Varney the Vampire* was “perfectly white—perfectly bloodless. The eyes look like polished tin” (2). This is quite unlike the face Jane describes. But that description of the creature in *Varney* was before his “hideous repast.” Afterward, “That face . . . was hideously flushed with colour—the colour of fresh blood; . . . the lips receded much from the large canine teeth. . . . A strange howling noise came
from the throat of this monstrous figure, and . . . then, as if some impulse had seized upon it, it uttered a wild and terrible shrieking kind of laugh . . .” (6). Purple or blood-red face;\(^2\) canine teeth—not described in *Jane Eyre*, but Jane has mentioned canine snarling; a howl; and a shrieking laugh!

Rochester, of course, says Jane’s experience was all a dream. The validity of dreams as signs and the existence of vampires are cleverly equated. Jane insists her experience was real. “And your previous dreams: were they real too? Is Thornfield Hall a ruin? Am I severed from you by insuperable obstacles . . .?” he asks (359). Jane replies, with prudent ominousness, “Not yet.” Whether we share Jane’s inferred fear that what she knows was dream—ruin and separation—is a true sign of what is to come, we are soon convinced that the horrifying incursion was no dream. She had herself thought it might have been, but “there, on the carpet—I saw what gave the distinct lie to my hypothesis,—the [wedding] veil, torn from top to bottom in two halves!” (359).

This shakes Rochester (and, for a different reason, the reader who believes that Brontë’s novel takes place in everyday reality). Rochester must acknowledge the fact of the intrusion, and he is concerned for Jane’s safety; but he recovers his poise after a few moments, and “explains” what must have happened:

“It was half dream, half reality: a woman did, I doubt not, enter your room; and that woman was—must have been—Grace Poole; . . . but feverish, almost delirious as you were, you ascribed to her a goblin appearance different from her own . . .; the spiteful tearing of the veil was real; and it is like her. I see you would ask why I keep such a woman in my house: when we have been married a year and a day, I will tell you; but not now.” (360)

Grace Poole as the only “possible” explanation of the mystery, seems to get something of a reprieve—depending on how we gloss “possible.” Nonetheless Jane, like the reader, is not satisfied. Readers of earlier vampire novels may be even less reassured by Rochester’s explanation, or by his promise to tell Jane the story of Grace Poole “when we have been married a year and a day.” For in the vampire context that is an ominous stipulation.
About this point in the narrative readers must review what they know of the mystery of Thornfield, and though all may not do so at precisely this time and in this way, it seems legitimate to revisit the vampire scenes and whatever other incidents and implications are drawn into its magnetic field. We know that the creature that attacked Mason was female, and we may presume it to have been Grace Poole. At the time we wondered why Mason and Rochester were so solicitous about this snarling, violent thing. Now, however, we know that unless Jane's eyes deceived her, this purple-faced specter was not Grace, was much larger than Grace. We may remember how Rochester received the news of Mason's arrival when he was dressed as a gypsy crone, and that Jane failed to penetrate the disguise because she thought it might be Grace Poole. Rochester dressed as a woman; Rochester and Grace!

Grace, then, probably attacked Mason as if she were a vampire. If it were someone we know, it had to be Grace, certainly not Rochester, for he was with Jane, tending Mason, and Mason referred to "her." Someone or something like a vampire was in Jane's room, but it was not Grace. Jane is sure of that. Rochester was away from home. Or was he? Wasn't he supposed to be away from home when he showed up as the gypsy woman? Was the large figure Rochester, again dressed as a woman? Is the mystery so deep because there are two vampires? Vampirism is, after all, "contagious"; victims often become vampires in their turn. Was Grace an earlier victim of Rochester's? And Blanche? It is difficult for the reader to rule out any of the possibilities, for not only was the state of knowledge such that Blackwood's could publish articles suggesting the reality of such apparent legends as vampires in the far reaches of Middle Europe, but the fictional genre of the Gothic in the 1840s was also problematic. Though from the beginning of the species there were those tales that explained away the apparently supernatural and those that affirmed it, in the 1840s more than ever the ontology of the genre was in doubt. For example, at one point Varney explains that he is spreading false rumors and arranging false incidents of vampirism to frighten the occupants of Bannerworth away so that he can search for hidden treasure, but later, when the treasure has been recovered, he discovers that he is in fact a vampire. James suggests that though some of the zigs and zags are in response to the success of
the story and the publisher's wish that it be prolonged, Rymer is himself experimenting with types of characters, plot, and, we might add, ontological structures (100).

In Polidori's *The Vampyre*, a Greek girl, Ianthe, tells the English protagonist, Aubrey, "the tale of the living vampyre, who had passed years *amidst his friends, and dearest ties*, forced *every year*, by feeding upon the life of a *lovely female, to prolong his existence for the ensuing months*" (41-42, emphasis added). (Every year! Will a year and a day be one day too late? No, surely. Not Rochester.) Ianthe's description of the fiend sounds to Aubrey very much like Lord Ruthven, a profligate nobleman who leads young men to self-destruction through gambling. (John Reed, we remember, was ruined by gambling and committed suicide; when Jane told Rochester she had been called to her Aunt Reed's, he said he had heard of the family, including a son—"one of the veriest rascals on [sic] town" [280]. Was that ominously disingenuous? No, surely. Not Rochester.) Later, lost in a Greek forest, Aubrey hears "the dreadful shrieks of a woman mingling with the stifled, exultant mockery of a laugh" (46). He is thrown down by a superhumanly strong creature and nearly strangled. The attacker is shot. It is Ruthven, who has killed Ianthe and is himself dying. As we have seen, he asks that his corpse be "exposed to the first cold ray of the moon after his death" (56). Dying, he insists that Aubrey "swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that *for a year and a day* you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see" (55, emphasis added). Later, back in London, Aubrey hears a voice reminding him of his oath. On the last day of the year of his oath, he learns that Ruthven is to marry the next day. His bride? Aubrey's sister! On the day of the wedding he escapes confinement (he has been thought insane) and manages to get into the apartment where the wedding is to take place. Ruthven blocks his way: "Remember your oath, and know, if not my bride to-day, your sister is dishonoured. Women are frail!" (71). There will be no interrupted wedding in this tale. By the time Aubrey can persuade anyone to believe him, "Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPIRE!" (72).

The dark shadow of the vampire and the threatened catastrophic
interruption of the marriage ceremony and separation from Rochester hang over the morning of Jane's wedding day. Rochester had suggested that Jane sleep with Adèle for comfort and protection. She did not sleep. Adèle, however, "passionless" and innocent, is asleep when Jane gets out of bed. Jane is still seeing signs: to her Adèle "seemed the emblem of my past life; and he, I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day" (361). The chapter ends on that note of love and dread, precisely the elements, Praz contends, that are inherent in all tales of vampirism. In the specific instance Praz cites, Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), there are also the Byronic elements familiar to the reader of Jane Eyre and an element that is now threatening to manifest itself in Brontë's narrative, the interrupted wedding (76).

Choosing to believe Rochester not a dream and Jane's life not unreal, are we now being led to believe not only in the prophetic reliability of dreams but in vampires? The ripped wedding veil, whether it was ripped by a vampire or a vicious slattern, is a bad omen; we are prepared to be as apprehensive as Jane when she notices two strangers in the churchyard. She feels her "forehead dewy, and [her] cheeks and lips cold" (364). Not much later—for the reader, one page—in the middle of the marriage ceremony, one of the strangers steps forward and declares "the existence of an impediment" (365).

An interrupted-wedding scene is a topos not occupied only by Gothic tales of vampirism in the fiction of the period. Though Melmoth is Gothic melodrama, the slightly less Gothic but highly melodramatic "orphan" novel visited here before, Fatherless Fanny, offers another version. Amelia interrupts her own wedding by announcing that, to foil the marriage being forced upon her, she had that morning married Sir Everard, the man she loved. In Scott's A Legend of Montrose (1819), Annot Lyle's wedding is interrupted by the madman Allan M'Aulay (Dry 39), and in one of Chorley's Sketches of a Seaport Town, "The Furnivals," on the eve of her wedding Alice Furnival's groom, purportedly her cousin the Reverend Sydney Furnival, is unmasked as Mr. Barton, a cutlery salesman (65-66). Lady Georgiana Fullerton's Ellen Middleton. A Tale, published only three years before Jane Eyre, is, though also somewhat melodramatic, closer than Gothic or romances to what we
think of as everyday reality; like Brontë's novel, it is told in the first person by the eponymous heroine and involves dreams and weddings. Ellen, like Jane, has a foreboding dream just before her wedding, but her dream, unlike Jane's, is, as she knows, the product of a guilty secret. She has covered up her involvement in a fatal accident and has thereby put herself in the clutches of the tempestuously moody and Byronic Henry, who, somewhat like Rochester, vacillates between keen remorse and lawless passion. He had witnessed the accident, but so had a Mrs. Tracy. It is she who appears to Ellen in her dream. And it is she who appears the next day at the wedding ceremony. She does not actually interrupt the wedding, but Ellen "felt that she had cursed me" as she leaves (285). The dream is realized, though the ceremony goes on, and Ellen is married. But, we learn in a long conclusion appended to the "confession," she dies of consumption and Henry goes mad; the outcome is not unlike that of Melmoth, though without the benefit of vampire or vampirelike intruder.

Ellen has a guilty conscience, Jane does not. If there is just cause for the interruption of Jane's wedding, it is more likely to be the fault of the groom, as it is in the interrupted wedding of another Jane, the half-orphan Jane Bruff in Theodore Hook's Fathers and Sons, also published in the 1840s. Jane Bruff is being pushed by her father to marry the roué George Grindle, though she loves his half brother, Francis. So she is not distraught when Miles Blackmore interrupts the ceremony with the news that the groom "has a wife living. I have necessary witnesses at hand to prove her right to that title" (3:349).

Jane's wedding is interrupted because of the same impediment: "It simply consists in the existence of a previous marriage: Mr. Rochester has a wife now living" (365). The speaker is the lawyer for Mason, who is brought forward to confirm that Rochester is married to Mason's sister, Bertha, and that she is alive . . . and living in Thornfield Hall! Rochester admits it is all true but adds details of his own:

I have been married; and the woman to whom I was married lives! . . . I daresay you have many a time inclined your ear to gossip about the mysterious lunatic kept there [at Thornfield] under watch and ward. Some have whispered to you that she is my bastard half-sister; some, my cast-off mistress;—I now inform you that she is my wife, whom I married fif-
teens years ago. . . . Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family:—idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard!—as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. (368–69)

He takes the company to the third story of Thornfield Hall and shows off his wife. "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell," Jane tells us. When Bertha sees Rochester, "the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet" (370). She attacks him, he pins her arms and has her tied up.

The mystery of Thornfield is solved. The "deserted wing" houses not a ghost but an incarcerated wife; the Gothic is resolved narrationally and ontologically in realistic, not fantastic, terms, more Udolpho than Otranto. Whole batteries of expectations have been realized, modified, reversed, or canceled out by the appearance of Bertha Mason Rochester on the scene, and new configurations of what is to come and of what kind of world this is must be assembled and projected.

Bertha is not a pure, innocent victim, locked away by her villainous husband, but a drunkard, a powerful, violent madwoman, "intemperate and unchaste," whose "excesses . . . prematurely developed the germs of [hereditary] insanity" (391). This female figure is "occupied" territory, and her image, role, and meaning are refracted by those of her predecessors, the chorus of mad wives, "intemperate and unchaste," in early nineteenth-century fiction. We have met some of them before: Mrs. Herbert, in Sketches from a Sea Port Town, who was stashed away for years and escapes only to kill her own daughter; like Bertha, she is large and violent, and her madness was largely engendered by lust and dissipation. There is no mock marriage, no bigamy or interrupted wedding in her story. In LeFanu's The Purcell Papers, the blind, first, real Lady Glenfallen raves, threatens violence, and her features "seemed to indicate the habitual prevalence and indulgence of evil passions, and a power of expressing mere animal rage" (Jack 461). Fanny Richardson, the first-person narrator of LeFanu's tale, was, as Jane nearly is, victim of a bigamous mock marriage. Glenfallen, less a hero than Rochester, goes mad and kills himself. Though we do not
see his first, legitimate wife, the story of another Edward, Edward Lee-
ford, the father of Oliver Twist, is recognizable in Rochester's story
of his marriage: two "Edwards" forced into marriage for family pride
and gain; wives who are "unchaste" and marriages broken (though the
Leefford marriage was broken before the wife indulged in "continen-
tal frivolities" [Dickens, Oliver xlix]); bigamous marriage—or intended
marriage—to an innocent girl. The character of Leeford's wife is only
briefly described but her evil nature is reflected in that of her son,
Monks, who has an estate in, of course, the West Indies, where he fled
to "escape the consequences of vicious courses" (xlix) in England. 3

Bertha does not say a single word in the text and appears directly
on only a dozen or so pages and indirectly on another dozen (Lerner
280). Because she is "the other Mrs. Rochester," the solution to the
mystery of half the novel and the impediment to the happy ending for
much of the final quarter, she is nonetheless a major element in the plot
of the novel. Symbolically and thematically she is a major element as
well (Grudin 145). Not only is her image multitudinously occupied by
the mad wives and bigamous marriages in the contemporary fictional
context but for the past quarter-century, largely through the influence
of feminist criticism, Bertha has become the pivot upon which much
vigorou critical discussion and multiple interpretations of Jane Eyre
have turned. The contemporary fictional context and modern criticism
thus make Bertha's space doubly occupied and her role and meaning
multitudinously refracted. At this point it seems appropriate, then, to
pause in the sequential reading of the text of Jane Eyre to review this
modern "occupation."

Regardless of how they evaluate it or what they mean by it, most
critics see Bertha's intended role as "monitory": "Bertha does (to say
the least) provide the governess an example of how not to act, . . . a
lesson more salutary than any Miss Temple ever taught" (Gilbert and
Gubar 361). And most authorial readings see her as a warning to Jane
of the consequences of unbridled passion: "Jane Eyre is a didactic novel
which subordinates the values of passion to those of desire. . . . As a
figurative representation of something unspeakable and as a projec-
tion of Jane's own dark potential, Bertha is used to show why Jane
must act as she does" (Grudin 145); "[Jane's] past life suggests a . . .
capacity for passionate excess," which Mrs. Reed described as "a com­
pound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity'—a
description which is eerily applicable to Bertha" (Nestor 60–61). The
"excess," "the unspeakable," the "dark potential" link unchecked pas­
son and madness: "Both Bertha's license and her insanity represent
the tyranny of passion over intellect" (Grudin 148). The text links un­
restrained passion and madness in Jane most explicitly after Bertha's
existence has been revealed. Jane recognizes her temptation to yield
to Rochester's proposition that she become his mistress to be a form
of insanity: "I will hold to the principles received by me when I was
sane, and not mad—as I am now. . . . They have a worth—so I have
always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am in­
sane—quite insane" (404–5, emphasis added). 4

Bertha's madness has been seen both as a warning against female
sexuality and as a representation of Jane's repressed sexuality (e.g.,
Martin 103; Eagleton, Myths 32; Grudin 153–54). Gilbert and Gubar,
however, see it as a covert representation of women's rage against the
conditions of women in the Victorian patriarchal society. They contend
that "the most successful [nineteenth-century] women writers often
seem to have channeled their female concerns into secret or at least
obscure corners. In effect, such women have created submerged mean­
ings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, 'pub­
lic' content of their works" (72). Their reading of Jane Eyre, therefore,
sought its submerged meaning or meanings, and, as the title of their
seminal study—The Madwoman in the Attic—suggests, they found that
meaning in Bertha. Bertha, they maintain, is "Jane's dark double," and
each of her "manifestations" is a mad, enraged response to a thought
or repressed response of Jane's: Bertha's setting fire to Rochester's bed,
for example, follows his "apparently egalitarian sexual confidences";
Jane's "fears of her own alien 'robed and veiled' bridal image, are ob­
jectified by the image of Bertha in a 'white and straight' dress, 'whether
gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell'"; Jane's dream of Thornfield in
ruins is an angry wish that Bertha fulfills; the baby that falls from
Jane's knees in the dream is her own childhood self from whom she
is released by Bertha’s death in the conflagration (360, 362). The subversive feeling is Jane’s—or Brontë’s or women’s—rage against patriarchy; her autobiography is the story of a journey toward wholeness, a female bildungsroman. Her “confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester’s mad wife Bertha, is the book’s central confrontation, an encounter . . . not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned ‘hunger, rebellion, and rage,’ a secret dialogue of self and soul on whose outcome . . . the novel’s plot, Rochester’s fate, and Jane’s coming-of-age all depend” (339).

It is a shrewd and challenging reading that would be more formidable if it did not implicitly (and unnecessarily) claim that it is a reading of Brontë’s “intention.” To make rebellion and rage, which are clearly in the text, central to the text, its real if submerged meaning, requires significant distortions or omissions which weaken the argument. Jane’s feeling about her “extraordinarily self-assertive act” of telling off Aunt Reed, for example, is, indeed, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, compared to “a ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring,” but they neglect to report what follows—“the same ridge, black and blasted after the flames are dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent condition, when half an hour’s silence and reflection had shewn me the madness of my conduct” (41, emphasis added)—or, indeed, what immediately precedes it—“A child cannot quarrel with its elders, as I had done . . . without experiencing afterwards the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction” (40). Had she not known that she would be rejected, Jane says, she would “willingly . . . have gone and asked Mrs. Reed’s pardon” (41). Gilbert and Gubar might have acknowledged this framing of Jane’s exultation at her self-assertion by guilt and regret, identifying it as part of the “accessible ‘public’ content” behind which nineteenth-century women authors hid their subversive content, but by omitting these “appeasing” passages, apparently in order to make the expression of rage more clearly intentional, they undermine their argument.

Another instance of their leaping to the subversive reading without at least pausing to deal with the “accessible content” concerns a passage following the revelation of Bertha’s existence. Jane’s voice
within tells her she must tear herself away from Rochester, figuratively plucking out her own right eye, cutting off her own right hand. Gilbert and Gubar, again for the purposes of their theme of feminist rage, read this without qualification as a "terrifying prediction" of Rochester's fate arising from Jane's "disguised hostility" toward him (360). In context, however, this is literally a warning to Jane from within herself—"conscience . . . held passion by the throat"—to leave Thornfield and avoid committing adultery (which is what the passage in Matthew [5:27-30] is about). This Biblical passage had also been used before in contemporary fiction, in Mary Brunton's *Discipline* (1814), to represent the termination of a potentially sinful relationship. Ironically, it has also appeared before in *Jane Eyre*—the girls at Lowood had been forced to learn this fifth chapter of Matthew by heart (69)—and it is perhaps from that exercise that the passage is in Jane's repertoire. Though Rochester, who has indeed committed adultery many times, will literally suffer such a fate—or nearly so, for it is his left hand he loses—it is difficult to translate this passage describing Jane's passionate love and tortured temptation to remain with him as "disguised hostility."

The critics' shift of Brontë's target from Jane to Rochester diverts attention from the increasing intensity of Jane's moral danger, the power of her temptation, the inadequacy of her unaided resources, and the increasingly religious emphasis of her life story, which a truly "authorial" reading would need to notice. Gilbert and Gubar's reading, refocused and redocumented, may serve to show the text as it cannot see itself, but is not convincingly that of the authorial audience.

Later feminist critics also object to their predecessors' reducing one woman, Bertha, to the role of another woman's—Jane's—"dark double," making her ancillary, important only in relation to Jane's life and moral growth:

contemporary feminist criticism must not, surely, reproduce the silences and occlusions of the nineteenth-century English culture in allowing the white, middle-class woman to stand as its own 'paradigmatic woman.' . . . it is possible to trace in the trajectory, in the very form of the novel [*Jane Eyre*], a complex configuration of the determinations of class, kind, gender and—what is nowhere spoken of but is omnipresent—race. . . . The
difficulty is to honour what can be honoured of its female heroism without suppressing a recognition of the social formation to which, along with her twenty thousand pounds, Jane is heir. (Boumelha 63-64)

Though Jean Rhys’s 1966 novel, *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, told a version of Bertha’s own story, it was not until the 1980s that feminist critics like Boumelha focused not only on Bertha but on the other non-English or non-middle-class women in Brontë’s novel as potential subjects with their own lives and claims. One of the earliest (and angriest, and best), Jina Politi’s “*Jane Eyre* Class-ified” (1982), looked at Bertha and *Jane Eyre* from the “outside,” seeing Brontë’s novel as it could not see itself, as a product and expression of English middle-class women’s values. Following Politi, Gayatri Spivak’s “Three Women’s Tales and a Critique of Imperialism,” and other critics of the mid-1980s, Boumelha finds that the early feminist view of *Jane Eyre* has changed and,

another story emerges: “no social revolutionary,” argues Lee R. Edwards, “Jane is rather a displaced spiritual aristocrat”; Politi analyses how “the narrative together with the girl-child will grow from revolted marginality to quiescent socialisation, reblending the marginality which it initially exposed, thus securing its survival through the convention of a ‘happy ending’”; and [Judith] Weissman concludes that “the end of the book reveals the first half for what it is—not the rage of the Romantic radical who wants justice, but the rage of the outsider who just wants to get in.” (60)

Cora Kaplan agrees that “Charlotte Brontë was no political radical” (173), supporting her position by challenging Virginia Woolf’s gender-bound criticism of the “awkward break” of “continuity” between the “feminist” passage of Jane on the rooftop of Thornfield Hall in chapter 12 and the mad laugh of “Grace Poole” that interrupts it. She points out that in its inclusion of “men,” “masses,” “millions,” and “human beings,” Jane’s meditation deals with “more than sexual difference,” and that “its significant moment of incoherence” lies in the linking of “the subordination of women and the radical view of class oppression” which runs counter to “the class politics of the text” (172–73). The laughter that interrupts Jane’s meditation, then, is a warning “quite literally that the association of feminism and class struggle leads to madness”: . . . . . . .
[Bertha] and her noises become the condensed and displaced site of unreason and anarchy as it is metonymically figured through dangerous femininity in all its class, race, and cultural projections. Bertha must be killed off, narratively speaking, so that a moral Protestant femininity, licensed sexuality and a qualified socialized feminism may survive. Yet the text cannot close off or recuperate that moment of radical association between political rebellion and gender rebellion. (174)

Boumelha confirms Brontë’s “politics of class” by pointing out how she treats—or rather ignores—women of the lower class, the female servants, Bessie and Grace Poole (John Kucich [“Jane Eyre and Imperialism” 106] adds Hannah). She focuses, however, not on class but on the treatment of the issues of race and imperialism that surround Bertha, “the maddening burden of imperialism concealed in the heart of every English gentleman’s house of the time.” It is, she points out, from Bertha’s blood relations and her native Jamaica that all the underlying wealth and the inheritances of the novel depend (60–61). “Race” and “racism” in the text may be difficult to define precisely for modern readers, perhaps, because of our almost exclusive construction of “race” in terms of “color” and the ambiguity of the term “creole.” The OED says that in the West Indies “creole” means born in the West Indies rather than in Europe or Africa and is not related to color. Spivak insists Bertha is white, and Boumelha suggests that Bertha is “dark, but not black: while the word ‘creole’ marks a double displacement of origins, Bertha is fixed as white by her status as daughter of settler planters” (61). Nestor, however, points out Brontë’s identification of character, behavior, perhaps capacity, and “blood”: “Bertha’s madness and licentiousness are inextricably linked to her Creole blood, whereas Jane’s sound and chaste nature is the legacy of her English inheritance. Though Bertha is of mixed blood, the daughter of ‘Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta, his wife, a Creole,’ her madness is . . . unequivocally linked to her foreign mother” (63).

Of course, unrestrained passion is, as Pumblechook would say, and Brontë seems to affirm, “not English”: “There are references to a ‘pleasure-villa’ in Marseilles; the ‘slime and mud of Paris’” and national/racial identification of Rochester’s mistresses—French, Céline; Italian, Giacinta; and German, Clara—“which reads like a
checklist of continental laxity” (Nestor 63)? As we will see later in the text, however, British superiority extends beyond sexual morality: “the British peasantry,” Jane says, “are the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe” (407), and, it surely goes without saying, any throughout the world. (See below, ch. 7.)

It does not seem likely that Brontë would deny such “patriotic” sentiments (though she may have been amazed that such an obvious truth as British superiority could be questioned). Recent analyses of the classist and racist/nationalist assumptions or ideology of the text do not, then, run counter to what is explicit or assumed in the text. They read the text from within the authorial audience’s repertoire but also see the text from the “outside,” interrogating that audience’s unconscious preconceptions, thus seeing the text as it “is,” but as it could not see itself.

After the revelation of the existence of Bertha Rochester, Jane, unlike some of her fictional predecessors, has to make a moral choice. Oliver’s mother did not know there was already a Mrs. Leeford; she did not have to choose to stay with or leave her Edward. There was no second Mrs. Herbert in the Seaport Town. Fanny Richardson did not choose but was already involved in a bigamous or mock marriage, and when she learned the truth events unraveled so quickly it was not her choice that determined the outcome. Jane, however, must make a choice within social and literary conventions that will significantly influence the authorial audience’s inferences of meaning in the world of the text. The Gothic topos has been preceded and infiltrated by so many other novel kinds—orphans or foundling novels, Byronic novels, bildungsromans, Godwinian “feminist” novels, religious novels—many with their own ideological presumptions, that the familiar literary and social norms have in Jane Eyre been defamiliarized. This is precisely the defamiliarization through multiple or newly juxtaposed conventions that, Wolfgang Iser suggests, generates the quest for meaning in the contemporary reader:

literature takes on its function though the weaknesses of the prevailing system—either to break it down or shore it up. The contemporary reader will find himself confronted with familiar conventions in an unfamiliar
light, and, indeed, this is the situation that causes him to become involved in the process of building up the meaning of the work. (Iser 78)

Though it is the text that defamiliarizes, it is not necessarily the text that determines whether it thereby breaks down or shores up the prevailing system (as a reader-response critic should certainly know). Though most contemporary reviewers and readers were swayed by the defamiliarization of the literary conventions of genre and found the central "mystery of Thornfield" and the plot of Jane Eyre strange and original, a few, like fellow novelist Thackeray, thought it "hackneyed." Whether Jane Eyre sought to break down or shore up social and political conventions was even more dependent on the reader: Elizabeth Rigby in the Tory Quarterly and the reviewer in the Christian Remembrancer, concentrating doubtlessly on Jane's childhood revolt, the criticism of Brocklehurst, and the satiric treatment of Blanche Ingram and her aristocratic circle (as well as later things in the novel which we have yet to come to), thought Jane Eyre subversive of church and state, while the Observer, Era, and People's Journal, among other publications, saw it shoring up contemporary moral conventions and apparently detected no threat to the monarchy. 8

The defamiliarization of social and cultural conventions does not, as Iser implies, lead automatically to a uniform "reassessment" of norms and therefore a single, occasion-specific evaluation or interpretation of the meaning of the text. It is the defamiliarization of the norms that "for the later reader . . . help to re-create that very social and cultural context that brought about the problems which the text itself is concerned with" (Iser 78). A text without "problems," without defamiliarized norms, can in later periods be viewed from the outside, seen as it could not see itself, but it cannot be entered into, its context recreated from the inside as well as seen from the outside, whether breaking down or shoring up conventions. The multifarious genres, manifold generic topoi, and social "incoherencies," signally implicated in Bertha and the mystery of Thornfield, keep Jane Eyre alive, relevant, meaningful, and unfinalizable. Modern readers, even when feminists all, can recreate and reinhabit its "social and cultural context" and the very "problems which the text itself is concerned with." Gilbert and
Gubar can, like Elizabeth Rigby, find Jane revolutionary (though as a term of praise, not opprobrium), and an interesting group of the most recent feminist critics can, like most of the reviewers of the 1840s, though in somewhat different terms and with rather different evaluations, find Jane "a spiritual aristocrat," "a girl-child [who] will grow from revolted marginality to quiescent socialisation" (Boumelha 60).

So dramatic and traumatic is the revelation of Bertha and the solution of the mystery of Thornfield, so disruptive of the reader's expectations and Jane's, of her life and her life story, it is difficult to go on. Jane has remained calm, almost numb, throughout the scene and the disclosures. Now she retires to her room, to think.

I was in my own room as usual—just myself, without obvious change: nothing had smitten me, or scathed me, or maimed me. And yet, where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday?—where was her life?—where were her prospects?

Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride—was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate. (373)

She is devastated, her life since Gateshead emptied of significance. Her memories of her recent past and the prospects then before her seem to mock her present state, but she cannot wholly exonerate herself from blame—"Oh, how blind had been my eyes! How weak my conduct" (374).

The novel too is laid waste. The love story as well as the Gothic mystery seems to be over, to have vanished. The reader too is bereft of recent prospects, expectations, generic indicators, and perhaps a bit ashamed of his or her "blindness" or conventional expectations. We are invited to retreat to the Jane of page 1: to concern ourselves with "a cold, solitary girl again."

Neither Jane nor the reader can (or would want to) retreat to Gateshead. Jane amid life's perils may have found or be about to find some "real knowledge" (100).

... I seemed to have laid me down in the dried-up bed of a great river; I heard a flood loosened in remote mountains, and felt the torrent come: to rise I had no will, to flee I had no strength. I lay faint; longing to be
dead. One idea only still throbbed life-like within me—a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer: these words went wandering up and down in my rayless mind, as something that should be whispered; but no energy was found to express them:—"Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help."

It was near: and as I had lifted no petition to heaven to avert it—as I had neither joined my hands, nor bent my knees, nor moved my lips—it came: in full, heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, "the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me." (374)

It is at this point that the second volume ends, producing a powerful pause. The hectic forward movement of the love story and the mystery checked, the narrative comes to a close and curls back on itself. Thornfield, even Lowood, and the intervening years are as if erased. Her situation is now as it was—Jane is a cold, solitary girl again—but she has changed, as the reader's perspective of her must. She is not the girl who saucily told the Reverend Mr. Brocklehurst she did not like Psalms. She is a bereft young woman-child who, in her pain, finds in her "rayless mind," though she cannot utter them, the words of the eleventh verse of Psalm 22: "Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help." And the elder Jane, the narrator, can only describe that painful time in words adapted from another Psalm (69:1-2): "That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, 'the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me' " (375).

"'Psalms are not interesting,'" she had told Brocklehurst. He replied, "'That proves you have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it: to give you a new and lean one: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh'" (35). Her saucy answer in retrospect seems ironic indeed: her heart is all too much of vulnerable "flesh." It is ironic, too, that that black marble pillar Brocklehurst seems in retrospect right—if no less repulsive—and spunky, lovable Jane wrong. We would seem to be driven at this point to review that
past and dramatically adjust our judgments if not our feelings about Jane the rebellious child, and therefore our moral configuration of the world of the novel.

The passage at the end of volume 2 in its water imagery recalls the passage with similar imagery, and similarly placed, at the end of volume 1. Then, Jane, having rescued Rochester from fire, tossed and turned the rest of the night in a turbulent sea of trouble and joy, hope and doubt, glimpsing the shore of matrimony (Beulah), but, prophetically it turns out, being pushed away every time she nears it (187-88). The billows of trouble now overwhelm her, washing away that turbulent idyll of love that all but filled the second volume. Her dream of a parting from Rochester is about to be fulfilled but not quite in the way the dream “predicted.” In the dream, Rochester rode away from her; now, in the wakened world, she must leave him—“from his presence I must go.” The baby that rolled from her lap in the dream is now figuratively her love, which “shivered in [her] heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle.” The child/love is not dead, but “never more could it turn to him” (374). The prophecy of the cleft tree as well as that of the dream now seems justified: not only is there an impediment to their marriage but, she now feels, she could not give her love to him, no matter how precious and persistent it remains. A shadow darker than a vampire’s wing is cast over the future of the novel, or at least over Jane’s and Rochester’s love.

All Jane has left at the end of the second volume is “a remembrance of God.” So the volume ends as it would have ended with chapter 9, on a religious note. Had it ended earlier, as intended, the note would have been a warning—Jane was making an idol of Rochester and he was coming between her and God. The emphasis of such a volume-ending might well suggest there was trouble ahead, but probably would not jeopardize the reader’s confidence in a happy ending. Now, however, the final note is more somber. If we can believe the experiencing-I—the mature narrator is strategically silent—Jane and Rochester are parted forever, even though some love may remain. If there will be passion ahead, it will be religious; if there is religion ahead, it will be religious passion, agony. This dark shadow over the future cannot wholly
obliterate our hope that it will be otherwise, but it can (should) put it in doubt.

Modern readers may expect *Jane Eyre* to end happily because that, after all, is what Victorian novels almost invariably do, and that was what Victorian readers expected and demanded, we have been told over and over. It comes as a surprise to us, then, to discover that in October 1847—the very month in which *Jane Eyre* was published—a critic in the *Westminster Review*, reviewing Anne Marsh's *Norman's Bridge*, could complain that "it has of late been the fashion among novelists to avoid what is called 'poetical justice,' and to disappoint the reader with a catastrophe made as unhappy as possible, to harmonize with what is assumed to be the natural order of events" (48:132). Many of the domestic novels of the day and others that claimed in subtitles or text to be "stories of everyday life" distanced themselves from what they thought of as the romantic popular fashion, the happy ending. Thus Mrs. Hall, in "The Governess," published in *Chamber's* in 1842, says,

And now, if my tale were to end, as made up stories do, with a report that the old man found his grandchild [Emily, a governess, suffering from consumption] much better than he had anticipated; that they lived for a short time happily together, and then the governess was married to a great lord, to the discomfiture of all gossip, I should substitute fiction for fact—which I cannot do. (92)

Cold, solitary Jane no longer seems a figure of romance but of a novel of domestic realism. There may be no happy ending, and if there is to be one, its means and nature now seem obscure. The final volume of *Jane Eyre* does not, despite the terminal nature of the ending of volume 2, open on a new scene,10 nor does it promise relief from the despair at the end of the second volume or even a hint of a happy ending. Though Jane has already been reduced to a cold, solitary girl again, "erasing" Thornfield, Lowood, and even the moment of rebellion at Gateshead, more is yet to come. The very nature of reality in the world of *Jane Eyre* must be reassessed, and Jane's pride in the independence and power of her very self must be torn from her.

When the newly cold and solitary Jane asks herself what she is to
do, "the answer my mind gave—'Leave Thornfield at once,'" comes immediately and insistently. She tries to squirm out of it, but "conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat," and tells her that if she were to stay he would "thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony" (379). One Thornfield chapter, one long, wrenching farewell scene, one more devastating stripping away of a layer of selfhood remains.

That chapter opens with her coming to the surface of the flood, still questioning what she must do. It is then that the awful and relentless voice within tells her, "You shall tear yourself away; none shall help you: you shall, yourself, pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim" (379). When she emerges from her room, Rochester is waiting, full of love and violence, almost like Lovelace. He urges her passionately to enter a bigamous marriage, to fly with him to France. Jane confesses that she loves him but must leave him. To resist, she realizes, is cruel, "to yield was out of the question. I did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity—looked for aid to one higher than man: the words 'God help me!' burst involuntarily from my lips" (388). Again we revisit Lowood. Helen Burns had warned Jane that she cared too much for the love of human beings—as she cares for the love of Rochester now—and relied too much on her self and not on God and the world of spirits. Jane’s agonized echoing of the Psalms, her recollection of the passage from Matthew, and now her involuntary prayer suggest a cataclysmic change in the moral world of the secular, self-reliant, and independent Jane. This is not the voice or world of the first, the rebellious and skeptical Jane, but a second, more knowledgeable Jane.

She will need all her new resources, for Rochester, telling her the story of his marriage and misery, pleads with her to come live with him and be his love. There are vague echoes of Clarissa again—Lovelace argues as does Rochester that he can be saved from returning to dissipation, perhaps debauchery, only through true, pure, self-sacrificial love; and Rochester at one point even conjectures about taking Jane by force (405). Lovelace has had in the intervening years numerous progeny in the English novel, however, and these sites the reader may revisit as well. Colonel Hargrave, in Mary Brunton’s Self-Control, tells
Laura that "bound by your charms, allured by your example, my reformation would be certain, my virtue secure" (18), but when she resists, he turns ugly: "Cold, pitiless, insensible woman—yes, I renounce you. In the haunts of riot, in the roar of intemperance, . . . when I am lost to fame, to health, to usefulness—my ruin be on your soul" (39). He finally asks for, and receives, two years' "probation" to prove his resolve but fails again. In Bremer's *The Neighbours*, where we have seen the tree emblematic of the lovers, the Byronic hero Bruno, whose past sins are greater than those of Rochester, proposes to his childhood sweetheart Serena and says he would change if he had a pure wife: "'She must become mine,' he says, 'if I am to find peace on earth'" (193). Later, when they are to be married, he says he sought her in order "to acquire an angel for my distempered soul" (373), but like Jane she had not yielded while there was a moral impediment. When Clara Neville, McCrindell's English Governess (visited in chapters 2, 3, and 5 above) discovers her fiancé is living loosely and has lost his religion, she breaks the engagement, but he urges her not to treat him so; even if he were worse, he insists, "she might very easily have reclaimed him" (42). Later, he says she still has the power to reform him if she would marry him. "Ah, Edward [yet another Edward]!" she says, "you speak against your own convictions. I have no such power. How can I hope to sway a heart which continually resists the stirrings of the Spirit of grace?" (125). To those familiar with the fictional context, Rochester's threats and protestations sound hollow, and Jane's response expected and applauded. Saving your lover's soul by sacrificing your own moral values is not, in nineteenth-century fiction, a laudatory, moral, or religious act.

Nor is this morality or definition of what is properly an act of love limited to religious or domestic fiction. Such scenes appear not only in the more modest and religious of eighteenth-century and contemporary novels but also in Gothic novels. In Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, Valancourt, in his gentler way, tells Emily (who he thinks is casting him off at another's behest), "Would you not otherwise be willing to hope for my reformation—and could you bear, by estranging me from you, to abandon me to misery—to myself! . . . if you still loved me, you would find your happiness in saving mine" (515). There are as well
comparable scenes in that very recent melodramatic, heated, notorious novel, Jewsbury's Zoe, which we had occasion to look at in relation to the fire-and-dishabille scene. The priest Everhard and Zoe part, and despite her attempt to live up to Everhard's image of her, Zoe is later tempted to "live the life of passion" by her strong feelings for the Byronic Comte de Mirabeau. Only the existence of a wife prevents her from doing so. Mirabeau must return to France, to a high post, and asks Zoe to accompany him, "to be my angel, my support, my counsellor" (120). "If it is to become your wife, Gabriel, that you are asking me, I am willing to do so," she responds. Even though he is divorced he cannot marry again, he says, and when she refuses him he accuses her of being capable only of shallow love, of loving position and wealth like all ordinary women, and warns her that by her "selfish" refusal she will save her reputation but damn him: "When I am gone, what comfort will you find in the consciousness that you have saved yourself and lost me? for if you fail me now, all hope of good is over for me. You have the power to do with me what you will, make of me what you will" (121). Like Jane, she refuses; like Jane (and Clarissa), she says once she becomes his mistress, she will lose her power over him, and will be like the others.

Zoe is as staunch and moral in her refusal as Jane, and indeed re-dedicates her life in "Platonic constancy" to Everhard and is ennobled thereby—which may cast some shadow over what is to come in Jane Eyre. But Zoe is not your typical Victorian heroine. She is illegitimate, half-Greek, attains a "masculine" education, and hates domesticity. She is passionate (permissibly so because half-Greek, no doubt) and unconventional. As noted earlier, Jewsbury says, "Women gifted like Zoe often present instances of aberration from the standard of female rectitude" (41). They have too much energy and not enough channels for activity (42). Even when they have children, as Zoe does, they realize "the maternal instinct is only one passion amongst the many with which a woman is endowed" (104). Their feelings are so strong that maxims do not always guide them: "A strong, vivid sensation, a vehement temptation, has, when it comes, a vitality and reality that make the most firmly believed and most emphatic maxims seem very vague and ineffectual" (104).
So Richardson and his progeny do not have the stage to themselves, and the "generic static" makes the ultimate shape of Jane's story problematic. If Zoe is the prototype, the projected configuration of the last volume of Jane Eyre will assume the shape of the novel of Godwinian and feminist rebellion prefigured in the first volume: "vivid sensation" and "vehement temptation" may still deflect Jane from her "emphatic maxims"—and many readers have wished this to be the case.

Though Jane resists, and advises Rochester to "trust in God and yourself. Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there"—a moral growth in Jane since Lowood, where she wondered if heaven existed—her struggle with her sense of right, with her "most firmly believed and most emphatic maxims," is terrible. When he pledges fidelity and asks her to pledge the same, she must play iconoclast. She experiences "an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning! Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol" (402-3). When he pits humanity, compassion, against mere law; when he argues that if she says no, he will be injured, but that if she says yes, since she has no family, no one will be hurt, Jane's "very Conscience and Reason turned traitors against [her]" (404). There is, however, a Self beyond feeling, conscience, and reason. "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself."

But now as important as respect for the autonomous self are those "most firmly believed and most emphatic maxims" that Jewsbury finds weak in time of crisis, but Jane finds the only safe stars to steer by; we have quoted a portion of the passage before, but it is important enough to quote more fully here:

"I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour: stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?
They have a worth—so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane—quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot.” (404-5)

Even after this outburst, even when Rochester knows himself defeated, she cannot leave the room without turning back, kissing his cheek, smoothing his hair. “‘Farewell!’ was the cry of my heart, as I left him. Despair added,—‘Farewell for ever!’” (407). The temptation would not be so great, the struggle so titanic, if her love were not so powerful. Nor would other possible outcomes to the fictional events still be possible were it not for the din of generic voices, the generic overdetermination.

Jane gets help, though whether from within or without is uncertain. That night, having decided to leave Thornfield, she revisits her past at Gateshead in a dream; she believes that she is in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause at the centre of the obscured ceiling. I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come—watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disk. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke, to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—

“'My daughter, flee temptation!'”

“Mother, I will.”

So I answered after I had waked from the trance-like dream. (407)

This is an extraordinarily powerful though extraordinarily qualified episode. To start within the experience: Is the vision that of Jane’s mother, Mrs. Eyre, emerging from the image of the moon, or is it the moon it-/herself that speaks to Jane and she to it/her?¹¹ This may be rendered moot, since the experience takes place within a dream and
indeed communicates the montage-like experience of many dreams. But dreams have been authorized by the narrator for the accuracy of their predictive value earlier in the text (prior to the summons to her aunt's deathbed, prior to the invasion of her room by Bertha on the night before the wedding), and perhaps by their ontological relationship to presentiments, signs, and sympathies, which were explicitly endorsed by the narrator (276). This experience, too, may gain some credence in being described as a "trance-like dream." That the vision may be, indeed, that of Jane's mother, whose spirit is guarding her daughter, might be reinforced by the firm belief of Helen Burns that alongside this world is "an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us" (81).

The substance of Jane's dream may seem qualified by its taking place "in the red-room at Gateshead" and by the fact that the vision of the moon/mother is preceded by a repetition of the experience of a gliding light. That earlier experience, we recall, had been explained away with the apparent, if qualified, authority of the narrator: "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" (15, emphasis added). Should this episode, like the earlier, be "conjectured away," or should the red-room "herald of some coming vision" be retrospectively authenticated? 12

There seems no easy way at this point to define with any certainty the ontology of Jane Eyre. Nor is there any easy resolution to the issue in the contemporary context. We have already seen that the secular and skeptical novelist Catherine Crowe had recently become convinced of the possible existence of ghosts. On the other hand, in an episode like that in Jane Eyre involving a dead mother, Fatherless Fanny (like Crowe and Jane, level-headed), is forced to face the possible reality of supernatural appearances by her own experience—only to have her experience explained away. Fanny, motherless as well as fatherless, is told of ghosts that haunt Bellafyn Castle and a rock where Lady Ballafyn, Fanny's mother, walks in white. Fanny climbs the rock and prays, "Oh, would to Heaven that I might be permitted to behold it! ...
oh deign to show thyself”—even though under normal circumstances, Fanny's "better judgement [like Jane's] would reject the idea of the appearance of supernatural beings" ([Reeve] 323–24). A tall slender figure does appear, holding its arms out to sea, and praying. It is indeed Fanny's mother! It is only later that Fanny discovers that it is not her mother's ghost, but her living mother who has been hidden away in a "deserted wing."

We must not, then, jump to conclusions about the nature of reality in Jane Eyre. Or, rather, based on the previous details of the text and on the multivalent context, we should jump to many conclusions so long as we do not settle on one prematurely, for the experiential and even the interpretive function of this ontologically problematic passage at this point in Brontë's narrative does not lie in its meaning but precisely in its problematic nature, the fact that it puts in doubt just what is "real" in the fictional world of Jane Eyre. This reinforces the breakdown of the dominant generic structures—the Gothic, the governess-domestic, and all the others—at the end of the second and beginning of the third volumes of the text. The reader, like Jane, is in limbo.

Awake and asleep, however, Jane has decided to leave Thornfield, and at dawn she does so. She is tempted to go to Rochester, tell him she loves him and will live with him for the rest of her life. Her hand reaches for the knob of the door to his room, but she pulls it back, walks out of Thornfield and toward "a road that I had never travelled" (409). Even now she thinks of turning back, sickened by the thought of what her disappearance will do to Rochester. The dissolution of her former self, of her only self as she knows it, is all but complete. A few hours earlier, though Conscience and Reason and Feeling aligned themselves with Rochester, she could and would resist, she told him, because "I care for myself. . . . I will respect myself" (404); but that passage cannot be extracted from the context and be used to represent Jane's ultimate moral position or to define conclusively the reality of the world of the fiction. It is, in effect, one of Jane's voices, the voice of Jane at one stage of her moral growth, one of the many world-visions that speak through Jane. Like all other passages in this novel it must be treated in sequence and as occasion-specific, a tentative if momentarily convincing stage in the gradually evolving history of Jane's moral life,
as if, that is, in quotation marks. For within a half-dozen pages her present moral solution or resolution will be itself devastated, her self no longer autonomous or in control, even her "frantic effort of principle" offering no sure guidance or goal:

What was I? In the midst of my pain of heart, and frantic effort of principle, I abhorred myself. I had no solace from self-approval: none even from self-respect. I had injured—wounded—left my master. I was hateful in my own eyes. Still I could not turn, nor retrace one step. God must have led me on. As to my own will or conscience, impassioned grief had trampled one and stifled the other. (410)

Jane is more devastated than when she thought of herself as a cold, solitary girl again. It is not her voice that now says God led her, but the qualified voice of the narrator: "God must have led me on." The experiencing-Jane, on the contrary, fears—or hopes—to die, prays in agony not for her own life but that she may not bring evil upon Rochester. She has neither self nor will. She boards a coach, intending (or being led? the narrator is silent) to go as far away from Thornfield as her money will take her.

The Thornfield center of the novel is left behind. Jane is not only a cold and solitary girl again, but a person whose world is not as she had imagined it to be at Gateshead and Lowood or during the months at Thornfield. Even her vaunted sense of "self" has been left behind, and she is dependent on forces or a force outside herself. Left behind are only shadows, and left behind for the reader all the generic landmarks: the Gothic, the Godwinian, the foundling, the governess, even the ontology of domestic realism. The reader is in the wasteland, the wilderness, and that seems to be where Jane is going.