That St. John does practice what he preaches, “Placing the same demands on his own life as he sets out for others” (Gallagher 66), is dramatized in an incident on the evening Jane and the Rivers are celebrating the return of Diana and Mary to the refurbished Moor-House. He does not join in the joyful spirit of the welcome-home festivities and is relieved to be called across the dark moors on a mission of mercy: “He did not return until midnight. Starved and tired enough he was: but he looked happier than when he set out. He had performed an act of duty; made an exertion; felt his own strength to do and deny, and was on better terms with himself” (504).

This sense of duty, this Christian goodness, this mercy, even this life of self-denial have their austere attractions even for Jane and, as we have seen, represent a prevailing contemporary norm, though one that even in the early capitalist England of the 1840s was a borderline or marginalized norm. It is not long before Jane falls under his “freezing spell” (508). Rosamond Oliver has married, and St. John is pleased his battle over self has been won. He watches Jane as she studies German, approves of her visits to Morton-school and admires her endurance of bad weather. Finally he asks her to abandon German and study “Hindostanee” with him. She agrees, though perhaps “obeys” is closer to her feelings. He was “a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master . . . By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind. . . . I did not love my servitude”
Those readers with long memories will recall that when she was anxious to leave Lowood, Jane prayed first for "liberty," but when that seemed denied, pled for "at least a new servitude!" (101). We may have felt the position of governess, so nearly servant-like, was the servitude granted. Now, however, this "new servitude" may be the true answer to that prayer (Gilbert and Gubar 365). On one occasion, at Diana's teasing insistence, St. John kisses Jane goodnight, and she "felt as if this kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters. . . . I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, . . . force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation" (509).

To disown half her nature cannot be good, surely, so it is a relief that at this point Jane as narrator intercedes again, in effect to apologize for having omitted telling us something central to her inner life: "Perhaps you think I had forgotten Mr. Rochester, reader." Not so, she says; the thought of him has been continually present. She had inquired about him, had even written Mrs. Fairfax twice asking his whereabouts, but surprisingly had got no answer. After six months she lost hope, "and then I felt dark indeed" (510). There is not much hope, then, for the disowned half—the romantic and sensual half—of Jane's nature.

Now that the hope of hearing from or about Rochester is dim, there is room once more for the projection of the possibility of Jane's lot joining her cousin's. There may be some justification for hoping so. That acceding to St. John's demands would mean disowning half her nature is qualified by "I felt" and is not therefore confirmed—or denied—by the voice of the narrator. It is possible, too, to conclude that "half" her nature may best be disowned if it is on the "wrong" side of a conflict between love of God and love of his creatures. Put this way, given nineteenth-century norms, the choice is not so easy as primacy, romance, and twentieth-century norms would suggest.

St. John says he finds her worthy and offers her "a place in the ranks of [God's] chosen" (513), which we may find arrogant, presumptuous, or otherwise ideologically antipathetic. But Jane—in the company, no doubt, of many Victorian readers—does not. She feels under a spell, but she asks whether the worthy would not be told of their role
by their heart, for, though she is "struck and thrilled," her heart, she says, is "mute" (note: not negative, but mute). St. John offers to speak for her heart. There follows one of those passages, like the final paragraphs of the first two volumes, in which Jane—and to some degree the narration—is overwhelmed and confused. The first time this occurred was when the prospect of love and marriage loomed, the second time when that prospect was lost. This time, too, love and marriage are involved, but here the imagery is not of the sea or waters but of glens and hills, the allusion not to Psalms and the Old Testament but to the New Testament: "The glen and sky spun round: the hills heaved! It was as if I had heard a summons from Heaven—as if a visionary messenger, like him of Macedonia [who appeared to Paul, Acts 16:9], had enounced—'Come over and help us!' But I was no apostle,—I could not behold the herald,—I could not receive his call" (513-14).

The narrator neither authorizes the call from heaven nor justifies Jane's failure to respond if call it were. St. John issues his own call: "A missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service" (514). That she has had no "call," he declares, is only evidence of her humility—only Providence can make one worthy. And St. John has found her worthy: "docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous; very gentle, and very heroic," with "a soul that revelled in the flame and excitement of sacrifice" (515). Though she feels clasped in an "iron shroud," she is nearly persuaded that this is indeed her work and her way. The love story is subsumed, overwhelmed by the religious, by duty and service. She asks for a few minutes to compose herself before answering. She does not ruminate; her thoughts proceed logically but monologically toward a conclusion, all the time narrationally qualified by quotation marks: She is capable of the task, though she will likely die in India. With no news of Rochester, she has nothing to live for, certainly nothing to remain in England for. It is, indeed, a glorious vocation he offers her. If she goes, she will work wholeheartedly, will exceed St. John's expectations. But: "Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? . . . No, such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. As his sis-

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ter, I might accompany him—not as his wife" (517). Marriage, he says, is the only practical way they could serve together, and, though she now says she does not love him, enough love would follow. She scorns his notion of love (which we may recall, however, is not much different from Caroline Mordaunt's, and in her case love did follow; so Jane may be up against a borderline norm). St. John will not admit defeat; he gives her two weeks to think it over: "Refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity" (522). Though many modern readers quite understandably see St. John as the selfish one—his sense of "duty" masking the will to possession and sexual desire—his "threat" at this point in the novel has a certain weight. The rebellious Jane we applauded early on has been chastened, the self-reliant and self-guided Jane was left at Thornfield. Is the Jane who wants to fulfill her sense of life and love in earthly terms really the "selfish" one? St. John has, we recall, already urged her to look "higher than domestic endearments and household joys, . . . the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilized affluence" (499).

Indeed it is she who in the next chapter makes the first move toward reconciliation, though she still insists she will not go to India as his wife. "He is a good and a great man," she tells Diana, "but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views" (531). It is not because Jane is a "little person" that most readers applaud her disinclination to marry St. John, but it is imperative that we keep this evaluation in view—it reinforces the clash of contemporary ontological norms already brought to the surface: those of Jane's domestic and St. John's cosmic worlds. It raises the ante of anticipation, the suspense about the outcome of the plot, for more is put at risk than a conventional, romantic, happy ending.

The novel now approaches that which Jane will call her crisis and the point at which the narrative and ontological crux is defined. The passage is crucial as well in defining the relation of the linear and spatial dimensions of the act of reading. In the narrative the crisis is the necessity for Jane to choose once and for all to accept or reject St. John's proposal that she marry him and accompany him to India. The choice is also thematic and ontological: if Jane accepts, she knows it will probably mean her early death, and so will valorize the sacrifice of
this life for the eternal, and the primacy of divine love over the human. In the event, however, this binary religious theme, which has surfaced periodically throughout the novel, is subsumed by a wider religious view that reveals itself as not merely constitutive but essential and pervasive in the novel. The crucial scene and situation also explicitly recall and thus “juxtapose” an earlier scene “spatializing” the text at this point. What follows the scene, however, suggests how rigorously sequential the “argument” of Jane Eyre is, how relentlessly the spatialized configurations are modified or contradicted by what follows.

Spatialization is doubly dangerous in Jane Eyre because of the subtlety of the first-person narration: some passages are double-voiced; some are overtly from the perspective of the elder Jane; others are monologically Jane-in-the-middest, sometimes, but not always, marked off by quotation marks, question marks, or the present tense. The subtlety, however, permits, even invites, deliberately or not, “misunderstanding”—that is, views that at the textual moment seem to legitimately fill gaps or project configurations of the novel and its world but turn out to be “wrong,” not affirmed by later events. Moreover, the voices of the two Janes are not the only voices here: though St. John speaks in quotation marks and out of a worldview that is neither Jane’s younger nor older view, his voice is not ultimately denied or discounted in the novel. These projected voices, like those of the contemporary fictional context, however, remain part of the reader’s experience of the text no matter when or if they are countered or undermined by later events or elucidations (especially since, dialogically, the elder narrator/author is only one voice and not “the” voice or the one authoritative voice in the text).

On the evening Jane refused him and he had refused her refusal—giving her two weeks to reconsider—St. John reads from the twenty-first chapter of Revelations, and Jane thrills as he reads what is apparently directed at her:

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But,” was slowly, distinctly read, “the fearful, the unbelieving, &c., shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Henceforth, I knew what fate St. John feared for me. (532)
Read monologically from a worldview emphasizing the autonomous (and sensual) self, St. John is threatening Jane with damnation in order to force his will and himself upon her. Jane—both Janes—does/do not read him so, nor does the authorial audience. She believes he has a voice and a belief system of his own and has her best interest, as he understands it, at heart. He truly believes he is saved and she, unless she accompanies him to India as his wife, is damned. Jane understands this at the moment and later, even as she narrates her story, for she gives his words in quotation marks, neither authorizing them nor denying their validity. He prays "for those whom the temptations of the world and the flesh were luring from the narrow path." We are likely to emphasize "the flesh," but "the world" and the rich man's loss of "his good things in life" (534) emphasize the earthly and not just the earthy. Nor does either of the two Janes even hint at the possibility that he was rationalizing his physical desires. Jane with both her mature voices acknowledges with awe how sincerely "he felt the greatness and goodness of his purpose" (533). His look "was not, indeed, that of a lover beholding his mistress; but it was that of a pastor recalling his wandering sheep." Just as she, on her principles, has renounced Rochester, so he, on his, has renounced Rosamond: "Like him, I had now put love out of the question, and thought only of duty" (535). If it is objected that this is only Jane's fallible reading of St. John, we must remember that though we may have three Jane voices they are all the voices of Jane. We have no way of going outside Jane's perspectives and into the mind of the other characters except in the narrative itself. If from outside Jane and the text we interpret St. John's motives as the text does not, this is not so much seeing the text as it cannot see itself as it is an "instance of ideological interference," where suppositions about human motivation differ (Rabinowitz 195).

The crisis is as much that of Jane's judgment and will as it is that of St. John's importunity. All sincere "men of talent," she says, "have their sublime moments: when they subdue and rule." Her "veneration" (cf. veneris and the conflation of divine and human love) for St. John, tempts her "to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there to lose my own" (534). Does "own" refer to "existence" or "will"? If the former, it refers only to Jane's certainty that she
CHAPTER 8

will die if she goes to India with St. John, but if the latter, it may legit­irately reinforce the cause of the rebellious, self-reliant experiencing­Jane and isolate the issue as proud preservation of the self versus submergence to the "official" voice—to the patriarchy and its patriar­chal God. Indeed, at this moment, St. John, for better or worse, does seem to represent the voice of religion, virtually of God: "Religion called—Angels beckoned—God commanded—... death's gates opening, shewed eternity beyond: it seemed, that for safety and bliss there, all here might be sacrificed in a second" (534). That life may be sacr­ificed for eternal bliss goes without saying for those who believe and believe that sacrifice is called for, and so it "seemed" (the reservation added by the narrator); yet it is perverse, destructive, downright evil for those for whom life ends at death. Jane is about to make the sac­rifice. How close she comes, and how suspenseful the decision for the reader, can only be realized by imaginatively entertaining at least the possibility that St. John's cause is just.

Here the subtle interplay or double-voicedness may strongly influ­ence response and interpretation. At the crucial moment the narrating Jane refers to Rochester and evokes an earlier scene and its moral reg­ister.

I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment. So I think at this hour, when I look back to the crisis through the quiet medium of time: I was unconscious of folly at the instant. (534, emphasis added)

Jane at the moment is not recalling Rochester, and her choice is not de­termined, or, so far as we can tell, even influenced by her love for him. It is the narrator from the text's future ("at this hour, when I look back to the crisis") who evokes the text's past ("as I had been once before"), and "spatializes" the moment. (See above, introduction to pt. 2, for treatment of time element and spatialization in this passage.) As the scene approaches its climax, when there is physical contact between St. John and Jane, Rochester is evoked, but in a passage of delicate and precise ambiguity: "He surrounded me with his arm, almost as if he loved me (I say almost—I knew the difference—for I had felt what it
was to be loved; but, like him, I had now put love out of the question, and thought only of duty)" (535).

How much consciousness is implied in "I knew"? in "had now put love out of the question"? Some, perhaps, but the narrator's voice seems to preempt the scene by calling attention to the fact that the very words and the punctuation of the text are her responsibility—"almost... (I say almost...)." For the authorial audience to grasp the text's full force and effectiveness here the reader must recognize that at the time of St. John's renewed and powerful proposal Jane did not consider her temptation foolish or impossible because of her love for Rochester. (Indeed, she says, "The Impossible—i.e., my marriage with St. John—was fast becoming the possible" [534].) If it is necessary for the scene's effectiveness that the reader consider St. John acceptable and his offer perhaps even desirable, why should the narrator interject the name of Rochester and juxtapose the two proposals spatially? Would not this diminish the possibility that Jane would marry St. John? For whom?

Here it may be well to recall Bakhtin's insistence on the particularity of the utterance in time and place and the productive role of the auditor/reader. Perhaps Brontë is addressing imagined readers who would be only too likely to forget or to prefer to forget the morally flawed Rochester for the soldier of Christ. The narrative strategy seems aimed at the kind of reader Robert Colby had in mind when, in a passage quoted earlier, he says, "Probably a greater shock to Lady Eastlake's generation than Jane Eyre's boldness in declaring her love to Rochester was her rejection of St. John Rivers" (194). St. John, at least, is so sure he is fulfilling a divine plan that when Jane says, "[I] could decide if I were but certain, . . . were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now," he assumes she has acquiesced: "'My prayers are heard,' ejaculated St. John."²

The conditionality of Jane's statement is intentional, but not because of memories of Rochester. However much her own will has been overwhelmed by St. John's, she is still not sure of God's will, and it is that she wishes to ascertain, and, having ascertained, to follow. She does not depart from the religious, certainly not the providentialist, tenets, and the novel does not force her to choose between religion

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and life or love. It brings to the surface more clearly than ever its (and Jane's now developed) religious grounding. She appeals directly to Providence for intercession and guidance: "I sincerely, deeply, fervently longed to do what was right; and only that. 'Shew me—shew me the path!' I entreated of Heaven. I was excited more than I had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement, the reader shall judge" (535).

What follows is the merging and modification of the religious and love themes through the famous or infamous incident of Jane's hearing at this moment Rochester's voice calling "'Jane! Jane! Jane!'" (536), though he is a thirty-six-hour coach ride away. She believes her prayer has been answered and believes at this moment that her love for Rochester is now authorized by extraordinary but natural forces. The "shock to the reader of Lady Eastlake's generation" has been cushioned somewhat by the narrator's strategic introduction of Rochester into St. John's proposal scene. And the narrative device of the telepathic experience is authorized by precedent. Many of her readers then and now recall a similar incident in a well-known novel of the previous century: Moll Flanders's lover returns to her because he had heard her calling, not from quite so great a distance as Rochester's call, but at least from a somewhat preternatural twelve miles away:

he told me he heard me very plain upon Delamere Forest, at a place about 12 miles off; I smil'd; Nay says he, Do not think I am in Jest, for if ever I heard your Voice in my Life, I heard you call me aloud, and sometimes I thought I saw you running after me; Why said I, what did I say? for I had not nam'd the Words to him, you call'd aloud, says he, and said, O Jemy! O Jemy! come back, come back. (Defoe 1:164)

These were in fact her words, and Moll is "amaz'd and surpriz'd, and indeed frighted." The Clarendon edition (607) cites Gaskell's testimony that Charlotte Brontë said such a call "really happened" and Fanny Ratchford's account of the appearance of Marian Hume to the Marquis of Duoro in Brontë's *The Legends of Angria*⁴ Dessner also instances George Sand, whose Consuelo hears distant calls from Albert even though she believes him dead (Dessner 97). Such telepathy often has the sanction of divine or human love; it was probably assumed
to be actual and it was certainly assumed to be narratable. Not so for many modern readers. This "act of mental telepathy" is, for example, the climactic "silly feeble part" in Mark Schorer's catalogue of such parts in *Jane Eyre* (xi). Many readers and critics, embarrassed, perhaps, by this "melodramatic" event, have taken the license Jane seems to grant and have attributed the voice to Jane's excitement, and thus to unconscious desire. Others secularize the episode by suggesting that it is Jane on her own authority who "decides" (Leavis 25; Boumelha 27) or "resolve[s]" (Nestor 55).

Jane has given the reader the right to interpret the nature of the call, but judgment at this point must be tentative or suspended; the reader "shall judge" may seem to suggest that the judgment may be immediate, but it also may hint that the reader can judge appropriately only when Jane has told the rest of her story. We have already seen how occasion-specific the language is, and how subtly Brontë/Jane modulates the narration back and forth from the double-voiced to the monologic, and thus we have seen how cautious we must be about reifying any specific passage, claiming that *this* is what Jane and the novel "mean." In this very passage, for example, the experiencing-Jane—note the quotation marks—almost immediately attributes the call not to her excitement, as she has just proposed, but to "nature":

"Down superstition!" I commented, as that spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate. "This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused, and did—no miracle—but her best." (536)

Nor is the case yet closed. Though the work of nature—She—the miracle of the call is also, it seems, the work of or at least has the authorization of God—He—for no sooner does Jane reach her room than she falls on her knees:

[I] prayed in my way—a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving—took a resolve—and lay down, unscared, enlightened—eager but for daylight. (537)
The next morning, she entertains once more the possibility of "excitement," "a delusion," but prefers to think of it as "inspiration":

it seemed in me—not in the external world. I asked, was it a mere nervous impression—a delusion? I could not conceive or believe it: it was more like an inspiration. The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundation of Paul and Silas's prison: it had opened the doors of the soul's cell, and loosed its bands—it had wakened it out of its sleep, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast; then vibrated thrice a cry on my startled ear, and in my quaking heart, and through my spirit; which neither feared nor shook, but exulted as if in joy over the success of one effort it had been privileged to make, independent of the cumbrous body. (539)

"Inspiration," out of context, might seem to authorize the psychological and secular reading of the experience that most twentieth-century readers would doubtless prefer—if we could suppress the reference to soul and the New Testament (a passage from the same biblical book, Acts 16, that, ironically, Jane had earlier cited as like the call St. John's importunate proposal had sounded in her [513]). But this is clearly described by Jane at this point as an out-of-body experience, an experience of the soul, and though "inspiration" may refract meanings having to do with inner experience, in the religious context, and Jane Eyre has become increasingly imbued with religious coloration, it refers specifically to the divine influence on human beings. Inspiration is an experience of the soul, then, not the body (nature); not a psychological experience, but one influenced by stimuli, probably divine, from without. But both passages contain the cautionary "seemed," and the second contains an "as if" and a question. We have not heard the last of the explanations or an authorized explanation yet.

Jane's trip back to Thornfield is full of excitement and suspense, both in general and in its specific details, details that, Florence Dry points out, are reminiscent of (and refracted by) Sir Walter Scott's Waverley (76-80): just as Edward (still another Edward) Waverley finds Tully-Veolon a fire-ravaged shell, Jane finds Thornfield Hall in ruins, destroyed months ago by fire, and there is anxious delay for both Edward Waverley and Jane before they find out the fate and the where-
abouts of the inhabitants. Jane hastens to the nearby inn and suffers with the reader through the innkeeper's lengthy recapitulation of the story of the mad wife and the governess. This serves not only to retard the outcome and so increase the suspense but also to pull the narrative carpet up from behind, as it were, the readers' retrospection done for them with all the pressures of the reading now projected forward.

Jane and the reader learn at last that Mrs. Rochester is dead and that Rochester, having lost a hand and an eye and having been blinded in the other in attempting to rescue his wife, is living at Ferndean. The lost hand and eye point to the passage in Matthew 5:27-32 that deals with adultery, advising those who are tempted to sin to pluck out their right eye and cut off their right hand rather than succumb. The Matthew passage has been alluded to earlier in *Jane Eyre*, as we have seen in the previous chapter, most recently in an emphatic position at the very beginning of volume 3 (379), when Jane's inner voice tells her to flee Thornfield after the revelation of Bertha's existence.

As soon as she learns his whereabouts, of course, Jane is off to seek Rochester in his eyrie at Ferndean, and the chapter ends. The scene that many readers have long been waiting for, the reunion of Rochester and Jane, now quickly follows. Jane is at her sauciest, and most tender, teasing him with suspense and jealousy. At this point once more the love and religion themes interact and are at last harmonized. Rochester tells her of his own conversion: "Jane! you think me, I daresay, an irreligious dog: but my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth just now." He admits the justice of her having been snatched away from him and even of the lowering of his pride in his strength. "Of late, Jane—only of late—I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray" (571). His path has been in its way similar to that which Jane has trod, from rebellion to humility, from self-reliance to acknowledgement of Providence. Jane has gone through only metaphorical flood, Rochester through real and metaphorical fire. He then tells her that four nights ago, on Monday, near midnight, having long felt Jane must be dead, he prayed that if it were God's will, he might die.
"... I asked God, at once in anguish and humility, if I had not been long enough desolate, afflicted, tormented; and might not soon taste bliss and peace once more. That I merited all I endured, I acknowledged—that I could scarcely endure more, I pleaded; and the alpha and omega of my heart's wishes broke involuntarily from my lips, in the words—'Jane! Jane! Jane!'" (572)

She cross-examines him—did he speak aloud? the very words? Monday night near midnight? Yes. Yes. Yes. And he says he heard her reply, which he repeats. "Reader, it was Monday night—near midnight—that I too had received the mysterious summons: those were the very words by which I had replied to it." Jane is overwhelmed by the implication, for what this means is that the telepathy was not the work of nature, not intuition, if that implies only a secular inner voice, but that it was the work of Providence, of Divine Will:

The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed. If I told anything, my tale would be such as must necessarily make a profound impression on the mind of my hearer; and that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things, then, and pondered them in my heart. (573)

This is the final confirmation of the ontological world of Jane Eyre. It is, for the authorial audience, a world governed by Providence. Not Fate, if Fate implies predestination, but the intercession of God in warning and guiding the sinner, giving him or her every chance to follow the straight and narrow path, but giving that human being the choice, free will, to follow or not. If it has not already done so, this makes those of us reading as part of the authorial audience now read the novel backward, through "shew me the path" to "aid—direct me" to the chestnut tree and between and beyond on our way back to the very beginning of the novel. That retrospective spatializes the novel in a final configuration.

Rochester now knows it was not a mere vision and utters a prayer of thanksgiving and an entreaty that he be given "the strength to lead henceforth a purer life" (573). It is only now, when human love and
divine are harmonized that Jane and Rochester can enter the wood and wend their way "homeward"—the last crucial word of the body of the autobiographical narrative that began with the protagonist exiled from family and hearth. Only then that we can turn to the "Conclusion," which brings the narrative up to the narrating present and begins with those plain but memorable words, "Reader I married him" (574).

The conclusion is in many ways conventional, typical of Victorian final chapters that bring the events of the narrative up to the time of the narration, if not to the first-readers' present. There is a brief description of the wedding day and an account of how Jane spread the news to those we know, including but not ending with St. John Rivers. Then there is a summary of the ten years since, their happiness, Rochester's recovery of his sight, their firstborn (a boy, of course), and then a return to the Rivers.

The last three paragraphs of the novel are devoted to St. John Rivers. He knows his death is imminent, he writes from the East. "My Master . . . has forewarned me. Daily he announces more distinctly,—'Surely I come quickly;' and hourly I more eagerly respond,—'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!' " These are the last lines of the novel, somewhat reminiscent of the call of Jane's "Master" and her response, but much more directly an echo of the penultimate line of the final book of the New Testament, the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

Why, in the autobiography of Jane Eyre, should St. John have the emphatic, sanctioned, if not sanctified, closing words that seem to echo, even encapsulate, her own narrative closure? The inadequacy of Jane to represent the human condition, Bakhtin would maintain, is typical, perhaps essential, in the novel (though once more we must in our minds adjust his gender-specific language):

One of the basic internal themes of the novel is precisely the theme of the hero's inadequacy to his fate or his situation. The individual is either greater than his fate, or less than his condition as a man. He cannot become once and for all a clerk, a landowner, a merchant, a fiancé, a jealous lover, a father and so forth. If the hero of a novel actually becomes something of the sort,—that is, if he completely coincides with his situation and
his fate (as do generic, everyday heroes, the majority of secondary characters in the novel)—then the surplus inhering in the human condition is realized in the main protagonist. . . .

An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs. (Dialogic 37)

That Providence leads Jane, when she asks for guidance, back to Rochester, away from St. John, does not mean in an authorial reading that St. John’s way is wrong or antilife, as many modern readers would have it, but only that his way is not Jane’s way. His path to salvation lies through self-denial, self-sacrifice, martyrdom. His is the life of agape. Jane’s way to salvation—as the leadings and her experience and Rochester’s indicate—lies through everyday, domestic life, the life of eros (Eyre-os?). St. John’s way is wrong—for Jane; Jane’s way, which for him would mean marriage to Rosamond Oliver, would be wrong—for him. This distinction has been increasingly recognized in the past decade or so. Politi, for example, spells the two ways out quite well, despite the ironic phrase “ordinary mortals” and her thinly disguised sneer at the “transcendental” (note also the lower-case “c” for “Christian”); she is, after all, only obliged to see what is “there,” not necessarily to like it or agree with it:

[Jane] is meant for the “second” type of Christian life which is accomplished in holy marriage, whereas St. John belongs to the first type, that of a higher calling which dictates a form of conduct that escapes the understanding of ordinary mortals. . . . this “difference” is only a mark of his transcendental calling, the path to Christian heroism achieved only through the annihilation of the individual self. (59)

Gallagher emphasizes Jane’s religious quest, contextualizes St. John’s Evangelicalism as a “prevailing norm,” and is more sympathetic:

Faced with the dilemma of how best to serve God, Jane is tempted to follow the influence of St. John, but the answer that she receives to her prayer is a call to an earthly vocation: the sacrament of marriage. Jane Eyre suggests that Christian vocations encompass more than the mission field and that domestic life is a valuable avenue of service. This emphasis
is typical of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism, which saw "the family as a unit particularly favored by God" [Jay 142]. (68)

It is vital for the authorial audience's reading of the novel to see the two as different ways for different kinds of individuals, but each way as equally viable for the appropriate pilgrim. It is difficult, however, in a first-person novel to make the Other equal. The mode is almost by definition ego-centered. But the function of the fictional autobiography in the mid-nineteenth century, in the move between Romantic egoism and Victorian "duty" or socialization, is to exorcise that Romantic ego or transcend—not escape or ignore—egoism. Just as Jane must see that she is not in total control of her life (and Rochester that he is not in control of his) but that control of all is God's, so she as narrator, or Charlotte Brontë, must insist that there has to be more than just Jane's personal salvation at stake: there must be room for the Other. In a first-person narrative it is impossible to give St. John equal time or space, but he is given pride of place, the final words of the novel, a voice that powerfully echoes both Jane's at the climactic moment of her life and the language of scriptural closure, thus validating his "way," though it is Other. Though she is not "wrong," neither is Jane's way the only right way; her way and her life story, her narrating "I," are decentered, not just to make room for St. John but to reveal the real center, which, in the authorial world of Brontë's novel, is everywhere, God.