Masked Atheism
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CHAPTER ONE

Extravagant Creature Worship

Protestant and Catholic “Sermons” on Marriage

Let me caution you against permitting your affections to be placed on any one who is not a partaker of the grace of God. Suffer no attachment to take possession of your breast, upon which you cannot conscientiously ask your heavenly Father’s blessing. How is it possible for you to enjoy happiness with one who is still in a state of nature? For one, professing religion, to unite himself to an irreligious person, is like a man uniting himself to a dead corpse.

—Thomas Jackson, Marriage and Adultery Considered, 1810

The extent to which the Evangelical Revival insisted on the sanctity of the family is evident in the wealth of early nineteenth-century Protestant sermons and tracts on marriage. Repeatedly, texts such as Jackson’s present marriage as a sacred institution and its primary function to foster the spiritual salvation of husband, wife, and children. The very vehemence of preachers’ warnings against “ungodly” marriage—conveying images resonant, in this case, of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1816)—attest both to the growing secularization of marriage and the enormous cultural anxieties generated by it. We cannot fully understand Victorian novelistic depictions of marriage—complete with all their inconsistencies and ambivalence—unless we familiarize ourselves with Protestant religious discourses on the same. Sermons were enormously popular as leisure reading in the nineteenth century, and the older genre of the sermon cross-pollinated the newer, if more worldly, genre of the novel.¹ Nowhere is this more clearly

the case than in intersections between sermons on marriage and the courtship plot in Victorian novels. This chapter explores the ways in which both Charlotte Brontë and her Catholic contemporary, Lady Georgiana Fullerton, appropriate elements of Catholicism to critique Protestant constructions of marriage. Although each author’s text represents Catholicism very differently, ultimately each makes a similar argument: the Protestant construction of “sanctified” marriage could prove just as much an obstacle to women’s spiritual integrity as any profane or worldly distraction. Brontë

2. Fullerton was born Georgiana Charlotte Leveson-Gower, the daughter of Lord Granville Leveson-Gower and Lady Harriet Cavendish. She married Alexander Fullerton, heir to landed estates in England and Ireland, and a member of the Guards, in 1833. Upon Alexander’s appointment as attaché to the English embassy in Paris, the Fullertons traveled extensively, taking up residence in both France and Italy. Alexander converted to Roman Catholicism in 1843, and Georgiana joined the church three years later. Fullerton claimed to write in order to raise money for her many charities, and her works deal with explicitly religious themes. In addition to Ellen Middleton and Lady-Bird, Fullerton published six other novels, assorted short stories, biographies, poems, and a play. Although her first three novels (including Grantley Manor [1847]) received considerable public attention, her later works appear to have been popular predominantly among Catholic circles in England and France. More biographical information about Lady Fullerton is available in Henry James Coleridge, Life of Lady Georgiana Fullerton, from the French of Mrs. Augustus Craven, 2nd ed. (1888); Fanny M. Taylor’s The Inner Life of Lady Georgiana Fullerton (1899); and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (entry by Solveig Robinson).
and Fullerton were, as women, of course barred from the pulpit. But both their novels can be read as revisionary sermons on marriage. *Jane Eyre*, like the sermons that influence it, persists in constructing the ideal marriage as an emphatically Protestant one. Fullerton’s *Lady-Bird*, almost certainly a deliberate “Catholic rewriting” of *Jane Eyre*, proposes Catholic sanctity as an antidote to the spiritual pitfalls inherent in Protestant and secular ideas of marriage. Although each novel asserts the power of religious faith to help women balance the competing demands of sanctity and domesticity, the conclusion of each text betrays a lingering apprehension of the overwhelming secularism of Victorian marriage.

Despite the great disparities between Charlotte Brontë and the aristocratic, Catholic Lady Fullerton, their work exhibits some striking parallels indeed. Most critics who reviewed the works of these women together did
not remark upon this. However, in 1853, when each novelist published her third novel (Villette and Lady-Bird), a reviewer in the Christian Remembrancer explained his rationale for reviewing these two best-selling authors in tandem:

There is enough of a resemblance in the two authoresses [ . . . ] to justify placing them in contrast and juxtaposition. [ . . . ] Both excited a very unusual interest and attention by a work of fiction [Jane Eyre and Ellen Middleton (1844)] . . . both chose female autobiography as the form in which to express, with much energy and power, [their views] [ . . . ] both, while professing a zeal for religion and a reverence for morality, allowed a heated imagination to betray them into scenes opposed to the interest and dictates of either. (401)

Although we are accustomed to thinking of Brontë as a rebel and a free-thinker (however overstated that assessment may be), what surprises here is the critic’s accusation of Fullerton’s seeming disdain for religion and morality. Fullerton, in fact, led so pious a life that her friends and associates attempted, after her death, to build a case for her beatification in the Catholic Church.3 What really seems to have provoked the reviewer is not Fullerton’s piety (or lack thereof), but her unconventional representation of women and female passion. According to this same reviewer, both Brontë and Fullerton endorsed “extravagant creature worship” (402): that is, they “opposed” themselves to religion and morality in making human, romantic love (rather than religious devotion) the highest aspirations of their heroines. Moreover, because Brontë and Fullerton similarly depicted women displaying unsolicited love and passion toward male characters, their female characters were, in the reviewer’s estimation, “without the

3. In their efforts to build a case for her beatification, Fullerton’s friends and biographers downplayed her literary output and emphasized instead her extensive work in philanthropy (see The Inner Life of Lady Georgiana Fullerton [1899]). Fullerton gave a great deal of time and money to charitable causes; most notably, she cofounded, with Fanny Margaret Taylor, a Catholic sisterhood, the Poor Servants of the Mother of God. Fullerton would have been pleased that her reputation as a philanthropist soon eclipsed her role as a novelist. Literary accomplishments generated a considerable amount of anxiety for Lady Fullerton’s scrupulous conscience. In the later years of Fullerton’s life, she took to burning her favorable literary reviews as an exercise in spiritual mortification (Inner Life 248). Fullerton’s piety was never officially recognized by the Church, but its outward manifestations seem to have been exceptional even among Catholic converts. After the death of their only son, William Granville, in 1855, Georgiana and her husband, Alexander Fullerton, joined a Catholic lay order, The Third Order of St. Francis. From 1857 until her death in 1885, Fullerton devoted herself to ascetic practices, religious contemplation, and care of the poor—all the while continuing her literary work to raise money for charity.
feminine element, infringers of modest restraints, despisers of bashful fears, self-reliant, contemptuous of prescriptive decorum” (442). “A restless heart and a vagrant imagination, though owned by a woman,” concluded the review sadly, “can have no sympathy or true insight into the really feminine nature” (443; emphasis added).

This critic unwittingly observes what twentieth-century scholars have overlooked—Fullerton’s novels, although hardly radical at first glance, do exhibit a contempt of prevailing social values—in particular, the Victorian fetish for romantic love and matrimony. Ironically, however, this critic also accuses both Brontë and Fullerton of promoting “extravagant creature worship,” seemingly unaware that each author’s depiction of it was a cautionary example in their respective “sermons” against the sin of erotic idolatry. The fact that both authors, despite their widely diverging religious beliefs, were so fascinated with idolatry attests to a much larger cultural preoccupation with it. In an 1845 sermon, *Beware of Idolatry*, Joseph Irons defines idolatry as a “departure from the simplicity of the worship of God.” Irons explains that any obstacle between the worshiper and God can constitute idolatry: “I do not ask whether it is Baal […] or whether it is Dagon, whether it is literature, attainments, personal parts and talents, applause of creatures […] any thing that hath thy heart rather than God, thou art an idolater, and God abhors thee” (156). Many Victorians who articulated their anxieties about idolatry seem to have been concerned primarily about substituting human beings for God. And women were deemed particularly susceptible to this sin. In a letter of 1853, Charlotte Yonge describes the spiritual pitfalls of idolizing others, remarking that “I know women have a tendency that way [toward hero-worship], and it frightens me, because the most sensible and strong-minded are liable to be led astray […] I am very much afraid of live Bilds [heroes]” (qtd. in Christabel Coleridge 190).

Perhaps most often, however, Victorians equated idolatry with Roman Catholicism—a religious system that appeared to clutter the worshiper’s relation with God not only with priestly intermediaries, but also with innumerable saints, liturgical formalities, “sacred” relics, and other material fetishes. Evangelical novelist Charlotte Tonna, in her memoirs, describes how she inculcated a young deaf boy with a thorough hatred of Catholic idolatry, so that one day he “worshiped” a hairbrush in mockery of Catholics and then scolded it: “Bad god, Bad god!” (201). Tonna reports being at once startled and gratified by the “sudden and violent turn his feelings took against Popery” (201). “How guilty I felt!” she exclaims. “However, I distinctly intimated my detestation of idolatry, and confirmed his strong repudiation of it” (*Personal Recollections* 203). Tonna’s anti-
Catholicism seems to have been extreme even for her time, but she was far from alone in calling Catholics idolaters. Walter Farquhar Hook, in an 1842 sermon entitled *Peril of Idolatry*, argues that despite “much to admire in the Romish church” and “many similarities” between Catholicism and Anglicanism, Catholic idolatry (which he identifies primarily as Catholics’ devotion for the Virgin Mary) will forever stand in the way of ecumenical reconciliation. Indeed, the frequent interchange of “idolater” for “Catholic” in much popular literature constructed the two words as synonyms in the Victorian imagination.4

Considering the extent to which *both* romantic love and Catholicism were troped as idolatry in Victorian culture, it should be no surprise that women, in representing and critiquing Victorian marriage as potentially idolatrous, should appropriate aspects of Catholicism as well. Brontë and Fullerton both suggest, however, that Catholics did not have the corner on idolatry; Evangelical Protestantism, in its zeal to reclaim marriage as a holy vocation, could in turn thwart women’s *ultimate* vocation to serve God. To understand how Protestantism could be deemed implicit in idolatrous practices, we must examine more thoroughly Protestant discourses on marriage, and, in particular, the figure of Milton’s Eve. Eve figured prominently in early nineteenth-century sermons and tracts on marriage, and both Brontë’s and Fullerton’s novels attempt to come to terms with Eve’s implications for Victorian women of faith.

**Searching for Miss Righteous**

*The Protestant Evangelical Context*

A survey of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conduct books and sermons on the topic of marriage reveals two points in common: first, a pressing concern over the growing secularization of marriage, and second, the extent to which the model of Milton’s Eve enchanted clergymen across religious denominations. Repeatedly, conduct books and sermons urged readers to choose marriage partners who were earnest and upstanding Christians. Sermons such as Thomas Jackson’s represented religious compatibility not merely as preferential, but *essential* to happiness both in this world and the next. After likening the unbelieving wife to a corpse, Jackson explains: “In a word, she is dead in trespasses and sins. Go, and be happy

in such a partner if you can! Think what gloomy evenings you must pass in such society; there can be no spiritual conversation [. . . ].” Even more serious, however, than “gloomy” nights at home and awkward mixings in society, is the risk posed to the believer’s immortal soul. “Even Ahab would not have been half so wicked,” cautions Jackson, “if he had not married a Jezebel” (31). In his popular treatise, The Golden Wedding Ring (1813), Anglican preacher John Clowes, in an attempt “to restore marriage to its primitive sanctity, purity, and bliss, by pointing out its connection with religion” (Foreword), describes “pure conjugal love” as “a representative image or picture, of the union of all divine and heavenly principles, from their SUPREME SOURCE to their lowest state of descent and operation” (13). Not surprisingly, such comparisons of marriage to the divine hierarchy inevitably relied upon gender hierarchy and essentialist claims. Clowes casts husbands in the role of Supreme Being, while wives represent the “lowest state.” “For contemplation he and valour formed,” declares Clowes of the husband, quoting Milton’s description of Adam; “For softness she, and sweet attractive grace; / He for GOD only, and she for God in him.”

The perfect wife, like Milton’s Eve, was to rely upon her husband’s judgment in matters of religious opinion and even morality. Clowes states that “every sensible and well-disposed woman attaches herself to a man of understanding, and that every sensible and well-disposed man attaches himself most to the woman who most loves his understanding. Here then is the true ground of the union of minds between two persons of different sexes” (9; emphasis in original). Because women’s salvation relied so heavily on men’s “understanding” of religion and God’s will, conduct books and sermons urged women to be especially careful in their choice of a spouse. In his often-reprinted sermon, The Mutual Duties of Husbands and Wives (1801), Dissenting minister William Jay (who also quotes Milton) allows that “[i]f the demands of a husband oppose the will of GOD, you are pre-engaged by a law of universal operation, and ‘ought’ [sic] obey GOD rather than man” (10). Yet Jay never provides any examples or explanations of such “exceptional” cases. He then goes on to say that although man “is often absurd in his designs, capricious in his temper, tyrannical in his claims, and degrading in his authority,” women, by consequence of Eve’s original sin, “cannot dispense with this subjection [to husbands] without opposing the express will of GOD, and violating the marriage laws to which you have acceded” (13).

By invoking Milton’s Adam and Eve as a model for the perfect mar-

5. Similarly, the Presbyterian minister James Fordyce, in Sermons to Young Women (a text that ran through at least fourteen editions between 1765 and 1809), lauds “that obsequious majesty ascribed [by Milton] to innocent Eve” (130). He urges his female readers to “command by obeying, and by yielding to conquer” (131).
riage, preachers drew upon a literary tradition that was unmistakably Protestant. Only Protestant Christianity, these sermons implied, restored to marriage the dignity that God originally intended it to have. Robert Sandeman, in *The Honour of Marriage Opposed to All Impurities* (1800), describes the destructiveness of Catholic monasticism: “By extravagant commendations of virginity and single life [. . .] the honour of marriage in general was greatly sunk, and marriage forbidden to numerous classes of men altogether, by which means uncleanness reigned through the nations called Christian, attended by the most inhuman cruelty, now necessary, to conceal its effects” (20). Luke Barlow, in *Marriage Commended, and Adultery Condemned* (1816), piously affirms that “in opposition to the doctrine and practice of that ‘Mother of Harlots,’ we have the testimony of God, and of the most pious men in the purest state of the church in [marriage’s] favor” (15). And Jackson, quoting Hebrews 13:4 (“Marriage is honourable in all”), explains that “it is highly probable that the Holy Spirit intended, in this scripture, to anticipate and expose the sentiments and the practice of the church of Rome; who denies marriage to her clergy, under the idea that persons set apart to sacred offices are too holy to enter into it” (21; emphasis in original). Jackson, calling this idea an “antichristian sentiment,” also establishes it as an anti-Protestant one as well.

By presenting the marriage bond as primarily an instrument of divine salvation, preachers sought to achieve a fundamental goal of Evangelicalism—to infuse the sacred into everyday life. But the transference of this doctrine into the genre of domestic fiction reveals the slipperiness of boundaries between sacred and secular. Hannah More, in her phenomenally popular novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), delivers a fictionalized sermon on holy marriage consistent with Evangelical preaching. The novel’s hero, young Charles ("Coelebs" means “bachelor”), sets out upon the death of his beloved father to find a wife worthy of his high religious and moral principles. Charles embarks on a Protestant quest; a clergyman in the book, describing the right to marry as “emancipation from the old [Catholic] restrictions,” advises Charles that “we ourselves ought, by improving the character of our wives, repay the debt we owe to the ecclesiastical laws of Protestantism for the privilege of possessing them” (70). Charles does due honor to the Protestant reformers. After meeting a great many silly, frivolous women in the course of his travels, Charles arrives at the home of his father’s friend, Mr. Stanley, and finds his perfect Christian mate in Stanley’s daughter Lucilla, a woman whose upbringing has been deliberately patterned on Milton’s Eve. Lucilla is virtuous, quiet, and possesses no opinions independent of what she has been taught. She will, the novel assures us, be ideally suited for a Miltonic marriage, in
which Charles lives “for God alone, and [Lucilla] for God in him.” When Charles seeks Lucilla’s hand in marriage, Mr. Stanley reveals that he had conspired with Charles’s late father in “educating our children for each other; in inspiring them with corresponding tastes, similar inclinations, and especially [ . . . ] an exact conformity in their religious views” (223; emphasis added).

The fathers’ successful scheme, and the novel as a whole, presents religious compatibility as a crucial foundation to a happy marriage. Yet the novel’s emphasis on what Mr. Stanley describes as “the great arts of home enjoyment” (112) exposes the material underpinnings of this idyll. Evangelicals sought to enter God’s heavenly home, but in the meantime they would enjoy domestic bliss on earth. While much of “home enjoyment” seems to depend on what Stanley calls the “morality of being agreeable and even entertaining in one’s own family circle” (112; emphasis in original), certainly Stanley’s wealth does not diminish the pleasantness of his domestic life. Charles notes that Stanley’s mansion is “commodious and elegant” (59) and that his table is well supplied for guests. Aside from material resources, this home comfort also depends upon the considerable exertions of Lucilla Stanley. Having taken over the household duties from her mother at age sixteen, Lucilla oversees the accounts, supervises the servants, teaches her younger siblings, cares for the poor, acts as her father’s secretary and nurse, and tends the lush gardens on the estate, all the while keeping up a course of improving reading (62). No wonder that Florence Nightingale criticized the Evangelical family as being all-consuming for women.

More’s novel also has mixed success in counteracting what Mrs. Stanley describes as “the omnipotence of love” (82) promoted by so many foolish popular novels. More’s novel—like the sermons surrounding its production—insist that men choose women for spiritual and other interior qualities rather than mere surface attraction. Not surprisingly, however, this heightened dimension of compatibility also serves to render romantic love more irresistible than ever. And despite the novel’s insistence on religious partnership, the notion of literally creating two people for each other (as Charles and Lucilla’s fathers do) resonates uncannily well with secular notions of finding a “soul mate” and “the one,” ideals disseminated in twenty-first-century romantic comedies and Internet articles on dating.

These tensions between spiritual and worldly marriage, barely perceptible in More’s novel, are confronted head-on in Brontë’s Jane Eyre. Charlotte Brontë, as the daughter of an Anglican clergyman with pronounced Evangelical views, undoubtedly was familiar both with More’s novel and with Evangelical tracts and sermons on marriage. Jane Eyre, in
which the heroine narrates her travels and her quest for the perfect mate, could be considered a rewriting of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. Jane's search for a husband levels a stinging critique of Evangelical models of marriage patterned on Milton's Adam and Eve. At the same time, Jane longs for a marriage of true spiritual and emotional compatibility, and the narrative struggles to frame Jane's marriage as a sanctified vocation, one in which she and Rochester, like Lucilla and Charles, can enjoy domestic bliss while also ensuring the joys of the world to come. *Jane Eyre*'s resemblance to a Protestant sermon on marriage is intensified by the subtle but pervasive references to Catholicism throughout the narrative. Just as Protestant clergymen presented Catholicism as the enemy of godly marriage, Catholicism in *Jane Eyre* is almost always aligned with behaviors and interpersonal dynamics antithetical to Jane's ideal of true love. Unlike the sermons, however, *Jane Eyre* suggests a dangerous slippage between the seemingly polar opposites of Protestant and Catholic. While Jane's ideal marriage is still a Protestant one, the novel suggests that Protestant constructions of marriage—in particular, the model of Milton's Adam and Eve—could contain within them the seeds of Catholic idolatry.

Jane in Search of a Husband

In *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, Charles's challenge is to find a woman and a home compatible with his Christian worldview. Jane Eyre's journey is significantly more complicated by the fact that at the beginning of the book she could not even be considered a Christian. Although Brocklehurst's examination of Jane reveals that she is familiar with some parts of the Bible (mostly the Hebrew Scriptures), her subsequent conversation with Helen betrays an ignorance of the basic tenets of Christianity. Until meeting Helen Burns, "an eye for an eye"—a tenet Helen labels as "heathen" and "savage" (68)—is Jane's governing creed. Clearly, young, "heathen" Jane is the product of Mrs. Reed's neglect and a domestic sphere that is cold, comfortless, and most important, thoroughly secular. Jane's journey exposes her to a succession of domestic spaces, few, if any, of which provide Jane with the proper balance of spiritual nourishment and temporal comfort. Jane's search for a comfortable yet sanctified domestic space parallels the development of a spiritual self that struggles to love God above any human creature.

Protestant discourses on marriage seem to influence Jane's longing for a spiritually and emotionally compatible soul mate, yet she emphatically
resists the role of Milton’s Eve. In contrast to Milton’s account, which, like Genesis itself, renders Eve an agent in Adam’s fall, Jane Eyre implies that Adam could be as much a stumbling block for Eve. A revisionary Protestant “sermon” on marriage, Jane Eyre explores the theological dangers inherent in both Milton’s and More’s marital ideal through the novel’s insistent concern with idolatry. Jane’s idolatry for Rochester, which temporarily “eclipses” God (307), and St. John’s arrogant certainty of God’s will suggest a dangerous conflation between male spiritual mediators and the divine itself. Rather than regard her husband as the mouthpiece of God, the novel suggests, a woman might come to mistake her husband for God. And while Jane identifies herself as a Protestant Christian, the novel’s critique of Protestant models of marriage and of human idolatry relies heavily on images and popular stereotypes of Catholicism.

While I have argued elsewhere that idolatry in Jane Eyre is a leitmotif centrally bound up with the heroine’s spiritual progress, I am indebted to Kathleen Vejvoda’s 2003 essay, “Idolatry in Jane Eyre,” for drawing my attention to the prominence of Catholic imagery in the novel and its relation to Jane’s struggles with idolatry. Vejvoda regards Rochester as the figure in the novel most closely associated with Catholicism; his Continental wanderings and his “customary reliance on the rhetoric of Roman Catholicism” (245) in his conversation mark him as a figure especially susceptible to “creature worship” who also encourages it in others, namely Jane. Rochester’s Thornfield, as Vejvoda notes, is described more like a church than a home, and Bertha’s attic “is a repository of symbols linked to medieval Catholicism” (246). Vejvoda’s insightful essay has inspired me to identify further appropriations of Catholicism in the novel. Catholic associations, in fact, saturate nearly every domestic space Jane inhabits on the course of her spiritual progress. Furthermore, while the novel appropriates Catholic imagery to code certain characters, behaviors, and attitudes as idolatrous, “Catholicized” spaces throughout Jane Eyre also demonstrate the narrative’s preoccupation with the dangers of a wholly secular, material domesticity that pampers the body at the expense of the spirit. Throughout the novel, Jane seeks not only a way to love erotically without affronting God, but a domestic space in which she can be at once physically comfortable and spiritually vital.

Jane’s obsession with physical comfort is evident from the first lines of the novel: “We saw no possibility of taking a walk that day,” she notes,

6. I have already discussed Jane Eyre’s representation of Victorian marriage as potentially idolatrous in my article “Jane’s Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in Jane Eyre” (2002). My later reading of Vejvoda’s article, “Idolatry in Jane Eyre” (2003), helped me to see the “Catholic” resonances of idolatrous marriage in Brontë’s novel.
as the “cold winter wind” and “rain so penetrating” had driven all the children inside. “I never liked long walks [. . . ] dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes [. . . ]” (13). At splendid Gateshead, Jane experiences a paradoxical life of asceticism in the midst of luxury; while her cousins Eliza and Georgiana revel in their splendid holiday clothes and John “gorged himself habitually at table” (16), Jane, in contrast, is beaten up, tied up, and locked up in the book’s opening chapters. So traumatized is she by this experience that she considers “never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (22). Jane’s early experiences of physical mortification seem to contribute to her constant cravings for material comfort throughout the novel. While still at Gateshead, Jane rejects the idea of living with poor relatives, dwelling on the thoughts of “ragged clothes, scanty food, [and] fireless grates” (32). Jane’s forced asceticism, combined with her longing for creature comforts, is aptly represented through Gateshead’s Catholic associations. In Victorian anti-Catholic propaganda, Catholicism is condemned both for pampering the bodily senses and unnaturally repressing and mortifying them. Brontë, like many anti-Catholic writers of her era, seems strangely unconcerned with this obvious contradiction in popular perceptions of Catholicism. But this paradox serves Brontë well, since her novel appropriates Catholic elements to represent any domestic space that is “unbalanced” in its orientation toward either the material or the spiritual. And just about every space Jane inhabits fits this definition, as she seeks a truly Protestant domestic space like that of Hannah More’s novel, in which an interest in flowerbeds is not incompatible with larger spiritual strivings.

Gateshead’s Catholic associations are all the more significant because they are concentrated in the Red Room, the “womb” of Jane’s self, and the real starting point of her bildungsroman. As Gilbert and Gubar note, Jane’s traumatic experience in the Red Room “forces her deeply into herself” (340); it is a place where she becomes cognizant of the extent of her entrapment: psychological, physical, and social. Gilbert and Gubar describe it as a paradigmatic scene in the novel, since later, crucial moments in Jane’s life are “variations on the central, red-room motif of enclosure and escape” (341). Indeed, the red room is a clear and highly effective symbol for Jane’s rage at the circumstances in which she finds herself. But what do we make

7. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe observes that in the Catholic school in which she teaches, “great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers: a subtle essence of Romanism pervaded every arrangement: large sensual indulgence (so to speak) was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint. [. . . ] There, as elsewhere, the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, unthinking, unquestioning. ‘Eat, drink, and live!’ she says. ‘Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me.’”
of the fact that the Red Room is also a parodic description of a Roman Catholic sanctuary?

[ . . . ] [I]t was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep-red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre, the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth [ . . . ]. Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample, cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne. (21)

In the anti-Catholic Protestant Victorian imagination, red would immediately have conjured up images of the Scarlet Woman and the Whore of Babylon. The four “massive pillars” sheltering a tabernacle calls to mind the sanctuary of St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican, complete with a crimson-covered “altar” and a bishop’s throne. This association of the “womb” of Jane’s self with a Catholic church is highly significant. Clearly, young Jane harbors tendencies toward Catholic excesses such as idolatry, materialism, and unnatural asceticism; all these tendencies, along with Jane’s antisocial rage, must be contained and properly channeled for her to become a mature, moral, and productive member of society. While still at Gateshead, however, Jane’s rampant, unacceptable impulses are also coded Catholic through her half-humorous reference to herself as “a sort of infantine Guy Fawkes” and the fact that she is expected to confess her sins to Aunt Reed. When Jane, as a grown woman, returns to the bedside of her dying aunt, she recalls the footstool “at which I had a hundred times been sentenced to kneel, to ask pardon for offences, by me, uncommitted” (258).

When Jane leaves Gateshead for Lowood, she encounters the first of three male characters (two of whom are Protestant clergymen) who are convinced that they know God’s plans for Jane. The Reverend Brocklehurst tells Jane’s fellow pupils that she is not “one of God’s own lambs” but “a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien.” He tells her teachers to monitor her every act and to “punish her body to save her soul; if, indeed, such salvation be possible” (78). Brocklehurst, by attempting to condemn Jane in God’s name, sets himself up as the voice of God, or an idol. This dynamic between Brockle-
hurst and his students is emphasized by Rochester's later, ironic comment, “[Y]ou girls probably worshiped him, as a convent full of religieuses worshiped their director” (140). Although Jane emphatically denies that she or her schoolmates “worshiped” Brocklehurst, the description of Lowood and its inhabitants indeed suggests a Catholic convent. The house, which had a “church-like aspect,” was surrounded by a fenced-in, “convent like” garden (59). Brocklehurst, in his attempt “to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh” (76), dresses them alike, subjects them to a harsh ascetic regimen, and, most significant, cuts their hair—an act traditionally required of nuns upon taking the veil. Despite Brocklehurst's militant Evangelicalism, which would have distanced him doctrinally from Catholicism, his status as an “idol” renders him a Catholic figure, and Lowood another Romish landscape. Jane, in moving from one “Catholic” setting to another (from the church to the convent), is still far from finding a true, Protestant home.}

Fortunately, Reverend Brocklehurst's power is limited. Helen Burns quickly exposes him as a sham: "Mr Brocklehurst is not a god," she tells Jane, "nor is he even a great and admired man" (81). At the same time, Helen warns Jane of her sinful tendency to privilege human over divine love: "Hush, Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings [. . . ] God waits only the separation of spirit and flesh to crown us with a full reward" (81–82). The extent to which Helen's teaching takes root is not clear at first; however, from the first moments of her love for Rochester, Jane is aware of the perils of human idolatry. Jane's passion, as much as Rochester's arguments, distorts her judgment, so that “while he spoke my very Conscience and Reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him” (356). Jane is particularly susceptible to Rochester's seduction because he makes his appeal on religious and moral grounds. Rochester puts upon Jane's shoulders the responsibility for his moral rebirth: “Is the wandering and sinful, but now rest-seeking and repentant man,” he queries, “justified in daring the world's opinion, in order to attach to him for ever, this gentle, gracious, genial stranger; thereby securing his own peace of mind and regeneration of life?” (246). Rochester, rake that he is, attempts to manipulate Jane through the same Miltonic notion of male moral superiority so celebrated by nineteenth-century Protestant clergymen. Rochester insistently describes his romantic desire as a product of God's will when he proposes to Jane, explicitly an Eve-figure in his “Eden-like” orchard (278), contending that “my Maker sanctions what I do” (287).

8. Although of course she gets glimpses of one, as the motherly Miss Temple treats Jane and Helen to tea and seed cake in her room, which “contained a good fire, and looked cheerful” (86)
While Jane recognizes the presumptiveness of Rochester’s position, she nonetheless cannot resist the role Rochester has assigned her. In response to his religious arguments, Jane retorts: “Sir [. . .] a Wanderer’s repose or a Sinner’s reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature. Men and women die; philosophers falter in wisdom, and Christians in goodness: if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to amend, and solace to heal” (246). Jane’s insistence that an individual’s salvation “should never depend on a fellow-creature” is consistent with Evangelicalism’s emphasis on a “religion of the heart”—that is, an intimate, direct, and unmediated relationship between the soul and its Creator. But Jane cannot live up to her spoken convictions.

Shortly afterwards she reveals the extent of her spiritual dependence upon Rochester, who has become “almost my hope of heaven.” More frequently, however, the text emphasizes Rochester’s spiritual dependence upon Jane. Victorian readers, familiar with Christian typology, undoubtedly would have noticed the strong religious resonances of Jane’s account of the first Thornfield fire: “I [. . .] deluged the bed and its occupant, flew back to my own room, brought my own water-jug, baptized the couch afresh, and by God’s aid, succeeded in extinguishing the flames which were devouring it” (168). While the flames enveloping Rochester prefigure the second, devastated fire at Thornfield, allegorically the text depicts Jane throwing the waters of baptism—spiritual rebirth—upon Rochester, ostensibly quenching the fires of Hell which threaten to devour him.

Not surprisingly, Thornfield, as the site of Rochester and Jane’s mutual idolatry, is no more of a proper home for Jane than Lowood, despite its luxurious contrasts. Jane, upon first meeting Mrs. Fairfax, knitting by the fire, marvels over “the beau-ideal of domestic comfort” she encounters. But Thornfield is too comfortable. Jane, rather like Goldilocks trying out beds, surveys her new existence at Thornfield and declares it a “too easy chair” (133). Jane’s life there—at least before she is confronted with the challenge of reforming Rochester—is “an existence whose very privileges of security and ease I was becoming incapable of appreciating” (132). But even Rochester’s arrival at Thornfield cannot transform it into a proper home for Jane. Rochester understands the moral contagion housed in Thornfield; when Jane refers to it as “a splendid mansion,” Rochester retorts, “[Y]ou cannot discern that the gilding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs; that the marble is sordid slate, and the polished woods mere refuse chips and scaly bark” (242). Because there is no spiritual element to Rochester’s life at Thornfield, his home is nothing but a pile of material dross.

Charlotte Brontë, along with many of her contemporaries, “did not look with favor upon the ‘serious conversation’ in which many Evangelicals delighted, preferring to keep their religion a matter for private contemplation” (Elisabeth Jay 255).
To further emphasize the antidomestic character of Thornfield, it, like Lowood, is implicitly compared to a convent. Anti-Catholic Protestant tales of convents—a popular nineteenth-century genre that I discuss in chapter 3—presented them as dark, corrupt, gothic interiors: the antithesis of happy Victorian homes. Vejvoda has argued, persuasively, that Eliza Reed is “a nun shadow-self whom [Jane] must disavow” (249). Bertha Mason is another, more sinister nun “shadow” for Jane. When Jane sees Bertha for the first time, she stands before the mirror wearing Jane’s wedding veil, which she then rends apart. If Bertha is Jane’s “truest and darkest double,” as Gilbert and Gubar argue, is her headdress a bride’s veil or a nun’s veil? Victorian anti-Catholic literature commonly represented the newly professed nun as radically opposite—and at once perilously similar—to the radiant Victorian bride. Moreover, insane nuns (their brains addled from their “unnatural” existence) were stock characters in Victorian anti-Catholic novels, and they were usually kept locked away in some remote part of the convent. Bertha’s nun-status is also reinforced by the fact that, as a Spanish Creole, she is most likely Catholic as well. Her third-story quarters, after all, contain a massive cabinet bearing “an ebon crucifix and a dying Christ” (237). Considering Jane’s own repressed Catholic sympathies and leanings, Bertha’s Catholicism and nunlike existence add an additional, sinister dimension to her role of “externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self” (Rosenfeld qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 360).

Of course Jane flees the “convent” of Thornfield, as well as the temptation to make Rochester her god: “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. One drear word comprised by intolerable duty—‘Depart!’” (354). While this temptation is difficult to resist, Jane nonetheless remains firm in her resolution to leave Thornfield and expresses little genuine doubt about her decision. Surprisingly, it is St. John Rivers—that ostensibly unattractive, even repulsive character—who poses to Jane the greater temptation, the one she clearly has the more difficulty resisting. The difficulty of Jane’s position at this point of the novel only becomes evident once we accept that Jane truly and sincerely regards her cousin as a saintly, devoted Christian. In light of Evangelical tracts and sermons counseling women to think more of religion than love as a foundation for marriage, St. John would have

10. See chapter 3 for explicit comparisons of nuns’ profession ceremonies to Victorian weddings.
been viewed in many circles as a most eligible bachelor indeed. Thus while Jane has no trouble resisting the sophistry of the religious hypocrite Brocklehurst, and can, with difficulty, see through the machinations of the all-too-human Rochester, how can she repudiate a “good man, pure as the deep sunless source,” in possession of a “crystal conscience” (458)?

Critics have filled pages detailing the reasons why St. John repulses Jane, but although he is clearly self-aggrandizing, manipulative, inflexible, and legalistic, these traits are presented to the reader less as inconsistencies or blemishes within his otherwise sterling character, than as the inevitable result of it. In short, St. John buckles under the weight of his own perfection. His countenance—so perfect and regular it suggests the hard lineaments of Greek statuary—accurately reflects a soul made rigid by its own moral strengths. Despite Jane’s recognition of St. John’s personal shortcomings, she does not let her awareness of “the corrupt man within him” (457) diminish her veneration for the “pure Christian” (457) side of his nature. Jane even suggests that St. John’s faults are part and parcel of a truly great and active nature: “[H]e was,” she observes, “of the material from which nature hews her heroes—Christian and Pagan—her law-givers, her statesmen, her conquerors: a steadfast bulwark for great interests to rest upon; but, at the fireside, too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place” (438).

Considering Jane’s “veneration” of St. John, then, his attractiveness to her—and the difficulty with which she turns down his proposal—is more complex than any Freudian inclination for abjection or self-punishment. As Jane considers St. John’s offer, Brontë does not ironize her reflection: “[I]s not the occupation he now offers me truly the most glorious man can adopt or God assign?” (450). That Jane believes in St. John’s cause is perhaps best demonstrated by her complete willingness to help spread the Gospel in India, despite all its attendant privations, on the condition that she be allowed to remain single. To complicate matters further, Jane must once again deal with a domineering male character who is firmly convinced of God’s will for them both. Because God is all-knowing, St. John seems to believe that he himself, as God’s servant, is likewise omniscient. “I am the servant of an infallible master,” he exults, “I am not going out under human guidance [. . . ] my lawgiver, my captain, is the All-perfect” (447). Just as Rochester perceives in Jane “an instrument” of God and tries

11. Considerations on Marriage, Addressed to Christian Professors (1840) urges women to think of love “as little as possible” (11) and “never to give their hearts to an object, whose heart was not, as far as they could judge, on scriptural grounds, given to God [. . . ] never to arrange, by their own choice an act, to spend a life of unsanctified enjoyment on earth, with one with whom they cannot hope to spend an eternity of hallowed happiness in heaven” (13).
to convince her that to abandon him would be an act of wickedness, St. John warns Jane, “[I]f you reject [my offer], it is not me that you deny, but God” (455).

All these elements—Jane's veneration of St. John as a stalwart Christian, her support of his missionary cause, and St. John's unwavering certainty of God's will for them both—appear to cloud and obscure her judgment even more than her passionate love for Rochester had. At this crucial juncture of the narrative, Jane—just moments away from being “chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool” (463)—cannot bring herself to rely solely on St. John's judgment: “I could decide if I were but certain,” she tells him, “were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now—come afterwards what would!” (466). At this point in the novel the reader arrives at that notorious “thumping piece of Gothic claptrap” (Prescott 90) which depicts Jane, in response to her frantic prayer, suddenly able to hear Rochester's voice summoning her. Her reaction:

I broke from St. John; who had followed, and would have detained me. It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forebear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. [ . . . ] I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and 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 [ . . . ]. (467; emphasis in original)

When read as a Protestant “sermon,” this scene is indisputably the climax of the narrative. Jane, placed in the position of Milton's Eve by St. John, a man she regards as a Christian hero, nonetheless finds the strength to resist his influence and instead turn to God directly in prayer. Her way of praying is different than St. John's but “effective in its own fashion,” and Jane, who retires feeling “unscared” and “enlightened,” has demonstrated that she needs no male spiritual intermediaries, no matter how noble their intentions or saintly their characters.

While there are fewer Catholic allusions in the Moor House section of the novel than elsewhere, some hints nonetheless point both to St. John's idolatry and the fact that residence at Moor House, although pleasant for Jane, is still not her true calling. Although St. John wants to marry Jane, his renunciation of his family and of his true romantic desires for his vocation liken him to a Catholic priest. As St. John contemplates the lovely
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Rosamond Oliver, he crushes a tuft of daisies with his foot (406), representing the “unnatural” repression of his feelings. Clerical celibacy was presented as similarly “unnatural” in Victorian anti-Catholic literature. St. John’s training of Jane is also telling; he teaches her Hindustanee to prepare her for the mission field. By doing so, however, St. John figuratively transforms Jane into one of the same “idolaters” that she is meant to help convert in India. Finally, although Moor House is decidedly not a convent, Rochester’s earlier comment about Lowood—that the girls all must have “worshiped” their director—echoes uneasily through this part of the novel. Clearly, Diana and Mary have minds of their own, and they are far less susceptible to their brothers’ influence than Jane is. Yet curiously, almost every domestic scene in the novel (with the exception of Gateshead) contains a community of women looking up to, or directed by, an authoritative male figure. Jane and Rochester may seem alone much of the time at Thornfield, but Mrs. Fairfax, Adele, Grace Poole, and Bertha are also indisputably part of their household. And despite the rich possibilities of the female community Jane so enjoys at Moor House, Brontë chooses to disrupt it (much as she does in Shirley) for a romantic dyad at the end. Rochester becomes Jane’s only community—the Rivers sisters each marry, and even poor Adele gets packed off to boarding school. This ambivalence about female community is a disturbing element of all Brontë’s novels, and leads us to wonder whether Brontë, like so many outspoken critics of female convents, considered permanent female communities as “unnatural.”

But convent or no convent, Moor House, like Thornfield, is simply too comfortable for Jane. When Jane comes into her inheritance, her first act is to transform Moor House into her ideal of domestic bliss. She says to St. John:

My first aim will be to clean down [ . . . ] Moor House from chamber to cellar; my next to rub it up with bees-wax, oil, and indefinite number of cloths, till it glitters again; my third, to arrange every chair, table, bed, carpet, with mathematical precision; afterwards I shall go near to ruin you in coals and peat to keep up good fires in every room; and lastly, the two days preceding that on which your sisters are expected, will be devoted by Hannah and me to such a beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince-pies, and solemnizing of other culinary rites, as words can convey but an inadequate notion of the uninitiated like you. (435)

When we recall that the last Christmas Jane described was at Gateshead, when she was excluded from all festivities, we can well understand the
importance of this Christmas feast (and the variety of sensual comforts it promises) for Jane. St. John, in response, admonishes her not to turn “slothful” and advises her to “look beyond Moor House and Morton, and sisterly society, and the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilized affluence. [. . .] And try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into common-place home pleasures” (436). Jane immediately dismisses St. John’s response, and, like her, we may see little else in it beyond St. John’s usual overzealous and curmudgeonly nature. But taken within the context of Jane’s anxious search for a comfortable and spiritually uplifting domestic space, St. John’s condemnation of “common-place home pleasures” assumes greater weight and significance.

When Jane arrives at the site of her final home, Ferndean, her description of its uncomfortable accommodations might please even an ascetic such as St. John. Because of Ferndean’s “ineligible and insalubrious site” (478) Rochester had left it untenanted; the rooms were mostly unfurnished, and when Jane arrives, she notes its “dank and green [. . .] decaying walls” (479). Jane, with her longings for comfort and domesticity, truly has her work cut out for her; Rochester himself, like his house, is a wreck. Jane immediately sets out to “clean down” both. “Summoning Mary, I soon had the room in more cheerful order: I prepared him, likewise, a comfortable repast” (485). After supper, Jane combs Rochester’s hair and resolves on the morrow “not to rise on your hearth with only a glass of water, [. . .] I must bring an egg at the least, to say nothing of fried ham” (487). Jane and Rochester’s domestic situation is a peculiar one, indeed, but it seems appropriate that Jane’s residence at Ferndean—and, more important, her marriage to the maimed, blind, and demanding Rochester—require a certain degree of self-denial, especially after St. John’s warnings about “sensual comfort.” Jane’s final domestic situation is not comfortable, but it does satisfy her deepest hungers for love. Jane’s marriage, therefore, is framed as self-gratification rather than self-renunciation. When Rochester suggests that Jane “delight[s] in sacrifice,” Jane replies, “To be privileged to put my arms round what I value—to press my lips to what I love [. . .] is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice” (494).

Ultimately, both extremes, self-indulgence and self-restraint, must be purged from the text before Jane and Rochester’s domestic paradise can be realized. Just as Bertha, the lascivious madwoman, conveniently falls to her death, St. John, Jane’s other double, must remove himself to the deadly privations of missionary life in India. St. John’s prominent position at the book’s conclusion also helps Jane to frame her own marriage to Rochester as a kind of religious vocation. St. John and Jane, each in their “own fashion,” have discerned God’s will for themselves and are living out
their respective callings. But several elements of the conclusion threaten to undermine this neat binary and, consequently, the spiritual integrity of Jane’s happy home. Jane and St. John’s callings are certainly different, but they are not equal. As Jane herself notes, St. John “aims to fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth [. . . ] who are called, and chosen, and faithful” (502; emphasis added). Certainly, St. John’s vocation, at the novel’s conclusion, is presented as more selfless, heroic, and spiritual than Jane’s. This inequality is further reinforced when Jane notes that St. John continues to warn her about the perils of secular domesticity: “[H]e hopes I am happy, and trusts I am not of those who live without God in the world, and mind earthly things” (499). Despite Barry Qualls’s assertion, then, that Jane in her marriage to Rochester opts for a more secularized earthly paradise “and alliance [of nature and religion] which does not oppose [. . . ] a genuinely human and creative life lived in this world” (46), the conclusion’s ambivalence about this secular paradise cannot be overlooked. By the novel’s conclusion, Jane and her narrative seem awkwardly straddled between this world and the next. Jane, unwilling to sacrifice herself for heaven, betrays genuine anxiety and guilt about living on earth.

A similar kind of ambivalence also lingers around the issue of idolatry in the novel. Has Jane purged her inner Catholic and overcome her idolatrous tendencies? The book’s conclusion offers one, final, explicit Catholic image—Jane figured as the Virgin Mary. This comparison could suggest Jane’s acquisition of an autonomous spiritual power. Aside from “keeping and pondering” like Mary, miraculous events in her heart, Jane, when the chastened Rochester first glimpses her, is garbed in a light blue dress, the traditional color of the Virgin. In the very next paragraph, Jane describes Rochester receiving his infant son into his arms. As Rochester holds the infant and “acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy” (501), the reader is reminded once again of Christ’s birth and of the infant who came to redeem humankind from sin and death. Jane, initially faced with the dilemma of Milton’s Eve, has been transformed from a woman relying on her fallen husband as an intermediary between herself and God, to a woman who is figured in Scripture as favored daughter of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christian theologians have traditionally figured Mary as a Second or New Eve, one who would, by bringing Christ into the world, participate in the atonement of Eve’s Original Sin. Mary’s obedience to God’s will (“be it unto me according to thy word” [Luke 1:38])

12. All scripture passages are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament.
atoness for Eve’s original disobedience; Jane, accordingly, through accepting what she perceives as Divine Will, has mastered the temptation to be led astray by others. Although faithfully reflecting scriptural precedent in this regard, Jane’s retelling of Eve’s story is nonetheless a radical departure from Milton’s account: Milton (in common, no doubt, with the original writer[s] of Genesis) had not considered that Adam and the Snake might, for Eve, be one and the same.

However, the Marian allusions also raise questions as to what extent Jane has truly liberated her spiritual self from dependency upon fallible human beings and human relationships. Jane’s association with Mary may signify a special, unmediated relationship between herself and the Father; it also suggests, however, that Jane now acts as a Mediatrix for Rochester, or even an idol, considering that Victorian anti-Catholic propaganda depicted Catholics “worshipping” Mary. Keeping in mind the fire-quenching scene earlier in the novel, the reader is left with the impression that Jane has simply reverted to her earlier role as her master’s Savior. While Jane is still pondering St. John’s marriage offer, she tells him, “[B]efore I definitely resolve in quitting England, I will know for certain, whether I cannot be of greater use by remaining in it than by leaving it” (461). Recalling St. John’s dedication to potential Indian converts, Jane invests her relationship to Rochester with redemptive, Evangelical overtones. Although Jane’s marriage, framed as an alternative missionary endeavor, could be perceived as “balancing the book,” ultimately Jane—having taken upon herself the redemption of her husband—rejects Eve in favor of another conventional female role: that of the Victorian household angel. Rochester, who is unable fully to recognize God’s love and mercy until Jane returns to him, becomes spiritually as well as physically dependent upon her. Jane, by taking on the role of divine intermediary for Rochester, ironically renounces spiritual autonomy for a reciprocal dependence. Just as St. John cannot follow the will of God and carry out his vocation unless he goes to India, it is only through Rochester, we are led to infer, that Jane can fulfill her religious and spiritual destiny.

Jane Eyre’s ambivalent conclusion leaves open the possibility that Jane may not have fully resolved her struggles against human idolatry or her desire to reconcile domestic comforts with religious and spiritual integrity. While this compromises the successful outcome of Jane’s bildungsroman, it does not blunt the force of the novel’s critique of Protestant ideals of marriage that mandate women’s subordination to husbands in matters of religion and morality. However, Jane’s inability to fully reconcile spirit and matter, heaven and home, in her quest points to a problem much larger and more pervasive than traditional Protestant doctrine. Although the
novel implies that Protestant teachings on marriage contribute to idolatry, Jane's inability to relinquish fully her idolatrous tendencies or to find a domestic situation that truly measures up to St. John’s spiritually heroic vocation is troubling. Jane's problems persist even after she has rejected her culture's tradition of female religious subordination (as represented by St. John Rivers); Jane's tendencies toward idolatry are sanctioned not just by human nature, but by an increasingly secular culture that—like Catholicism—celebrates and gratifies innate human desires. This culture is exemplified by the structure and conventions of the relatively new courtship novel, which, for Victorian women, proved a particularly challenging medium through which to articulate doubts about matrimony and domesticity. While Brontë's reservations about marriage and domesticity arguably clash with narrative convention and readerly expectation in all her novels, Fullerton's *Lady-Bird* explicitly targets the romance novel in its condemnation of human idolatry, in part through creating a self-consciously “Catholic” commentary on Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

**Fullerton's *Lady-Bird*: A Catholic Response to *Jane Eyre***

There are numerous likenesses between *Jane Eyre* and *Lady-Bird* in matters of plot, character, and theme. Most significant, each novel’s heroine must conquer her tendency to value human love over moral duty in the course of her spiritual progress. Each novel’s engagement with the issue of idolatry forms part of a larger, implicit critique of Victorian gender and domestic ideals. These similarities notwithstanding, Fullerton's condemnation of idolatry is no mere shadow of Brontë's. By defining its heroine's spiritual agency and integrity in terms of a Catholic notion of vocation, *Lady-Bird* subverts the expected marriage plot. And while Jane Eyre seeks just the right balance of ease and asceticism in her domestic life, Fullerton's domestic economy allows little room for comfort. Jane's painful sacrifices are temporary and ultimately reap her a greater domestic bliss, but Fullerton does not allow her heroine (or her readers) such consolation. For Fullerton, true love is suffering, and that love justifies an intensity of pain that would otherwise seem masochistic. Many of *Lady-Bird*'s critics, unconvinced by this implicit logic, labeled its representation of extreme suffering as “morbid” (Jaeger 302); Emily Dickinson's brother Austen, for example,

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13. I could not find evidence that Fullerton had read *Jane Eyre*, but it is reasonable to assume that she did, given the novel's popularity and its apparent influence on *Lady-Bird*. 
described *Lady-Bird* as “an unhealthy book [ . . . ] a story of deeper suffering than many ever know—that it’s not best *any should know* till they are obliged to” (qtd. in Jaeger 302; emphasis in original). The discomfort, even indignation, that the novel sparked in its readers attests to the strength of Fullerton’s “sermon.” For all its resemblance to Brontë’s novel, *Lady-Bird* offers in some ways a stronger, more daring interrogation of Victorian cultural and literary conventions.

*Lady-Bird*’s heroine, Gertrude Lifford, is an imaginative, passionate, and impulsive girl whose loveless childhood renders her both rebellious and starved for affection. The sin of idolatry overshadows Lifford Grange, just as it taints so many domestic spaces in *Jane Eyre*. Gertrude’s father, a cold, proud, authoritarian man, has no love for Gertrude’s mother, an aristocratic Spaniard. An early, failed love affair had “burned out of [Lifford’s] heart every trace of gentle feeling and affection,” and Gertrude’s mother soon realizes that “the little affection his nature was susceptible of had been previously expended on another” (I:214). Angustia herself, however, has also committed idolatry. “[H]alf in weakness, half under a transient impression wrought on her fancy” (I:213) for Henry Lifford, she had renounced her vocation to the religious life. Broken down by her loveless marriage, Angustia has become a paralytic. This family dysfunction is represented in the novel’s description of Lifford Grange. Like Gateshead, it possesses “a certain kind of grandeur [ . . . ] but there was a total absence of comfort in its arrangements, and of charm in its aspect both within and without” (I:4). It is surrounded by “sepulchral-looking” yew trees (I:2), and a nearby stream flows “deeply and sullenly” (I:3) past the dismal garden. Despite the fact that Gertrude’s wealthy, distinguished family stems from a long line of Catholic recusants, the book does not employ Catholic stereotypes or imagery in describing her home. Here, the contagion of idolatry is not coded Catholic; rather, the practice of idolatry is linked to Henry’s *lack* of Catholic faith. Henry demonstrates merely “an hereditary attachment to a religion, the precepts of which he did not observe, the spirit of which he certainly did not exhibit” (I:5).

The loveless, deathlike atmosphere of Lifford Grange oppresses Gertrude, and she attempts to escape through daydreams and books. In a scene which closely parallels one of Jane Eyre’s experiences at Gateshead, the novel describes how Gertrude finds refuge in the window seat of the family library:

> It was a dull desolate-looking room, but yet Gertrude liked it, and had spent in it some of the pleasantest hours of her life. [ . . . ] She could take down a volume from the aforesaid bookcase, and sit for hours on one
of the window-seats, alternately reading and gazing on the sky and the careening clouds; or watching with interest the struggles of a fly in some spider’s web, or the resuscitation of a paralysed moth, on which a ray of sunshine might have accidentally fallen. (I:193)

In *Jane Eyre*, we see Jane, through her reading and daydreaming, developing a rich inner life that will sustain her throughout the narrative. *Lady-Bird*, however, implies that Gertrude’s reading habits are excessive, as well as dangerous. Gertrude’s favorite reading material—the romance novel—inclines her to mistake fiction for reality. In a conversation with her saintly friend Mary (the Helen Burns of the novel), Gertrude reveals that her idea of love has been exclusively shaped through novel reading. “[A] quiet calm feeling I do not think [love] can be. I have read that it stirs up the heart and moves the inmost soul, as a storm does the sea, or a hurricane the forest.” Mary gently responds that this passionate, tumultuous, idealized emotion “is not the right sort of love [. . .]. What is right should be calm” (I:43). When Gertrude’s uncle, a Catholic priest, finds his niece reading an Italian version of *Romeo and Juliet*, he condemns the book for expressing “[n]othing but praise of that poor creature for killing herself on the body of her lover.” “I had not thought of that,” replies Gertrude. “But do you think Juliet could have helped being in love with Romeo?” “Of course she could,” [responds Father Lifford]. “Why, if Romeo had been a married man—and so he might have been for aught she knew at first—what would she have done? Put him out of her head, of course, or been a great sinner” (I:275).

Although here the novel seems to poke a little fun at the gruff, unimaginative priest, his warning foreshadows the central conflict of Gertrude’s spiritual life. Gertrude, in short, is easy prey to the temptations of human idolatry. While in *Jane Eyre*, Jane’s control of her idolatrous impulses is equated with renouncing “Catholic” tendencies and behaviors, Gertrude, in contrast, can conquer idolatry only by becoming a better Catholic. Specifically, she must renounce all temporal values through cultivating self-discipline and otherworldly focus.

A tendency to ennui, joined to a craving for excitement even of the most trivial description, is the disease of certain minds, and there is but one cure for it. Call it what you will; self-education, not for this world but for the next; [. . .] the dream of human happiness resigned, and in the same hour its substance regained; the capital paid into the next world, and the daily unlooked-for interest received in this;—such is the strange alchymy [sic] in which God deals, and the secret of so many destinies which the world wonders over, and never learns to understand. (I:56–57)
Although Fullerton’s economy of renunciation—that is, renouncing this world’s “capital” in the expectation of heavenly dividends—is never explicitly labeled as Catholic, the only characters who model this orientation for Gertrude are devout Catholics such as Mary Grey, Father Lifford, and, especially, Adrien d’Arberg.

Gertrude’s greatest temptation to human idolatry is all the more insidious as it comes in the person of Adrien d’Arberg, who is an overt masculine double of Gertrude’s saintly friend Mary. Gertrude cannot imagine how her love for the pious d’Arberg, a Catholic writer and theologian, could bring her anything but closer to God. Gertrude imagines that marriage with Adrien will bring her pleasure both for this world and the next. “While she knelt at church by his side, she once thought if ever she became his wife, how easy a thing it would be to be good,—how every duty would be a pleasure, and life a foretaste of Heaven” (II:176; emphasis added). As Gertrude gazes adoringly at Adrien during Mass, his sanctity takes on a near-erotic dimension:

There is something more touching in a man’s devotion than in a woman’s; when it is earnest it is so real, so humble, and so deep. It seemed to her as if the light of heaven played round that noble head bowed down in intense adoration. Though she was looking at him, she knew he would not look at her. His spirit was soaring far above earthly thoughts, and she was glad of it [. . . ] a glance from him at that moment would have disappointed her. (II:157; emphasis in original)

Aside from conveying some ominous signs of the extent of Gertrude’s infatuation—in Fullerton’s novels, there is no true foretaste of heaven on earth—this passage locates d’Arberg’s sexual appeal in his wholly masculinized, direct communion with God, as opposed to the feminine, subordinate, and idolatrous position occupied by Gertrude. While Adrien’s gentleness toward others, his “adoration” of God, and his “tendency to mysticism” seem feminine, this passage emphatically stresses the masculine character of his piety. Adrien’s devotion seems more “real,” “humble,” and “deep” than Gertrude’s not from any essential quality, but because of his relative position to Gertrude. In the role of Gertrude’s spiritual superior, Adrien, a former army commander, now takes on the status of a heroic leader in God’s own army, much as Jane compares St. John Rivers to “the warrior Greatheart.” Although subordinate to his God, Adrien retains his masculinity (and his erotic appeal) because Gertrude knows that “Adrien [. . . ] would never love her in that way, he never would adore her” (II:207). As Gertrude’s idol, however, Adrien easily assumes power over her heart,
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mind, and soul: “His unconscious power over her was unbounded. She did not conceive the possibility of differing with him in opinion, of ever acting again in any way that she might have heard him casually condemn. His slightest word was law, his books [were] her daily meditation” (II:124).

In *Lady-Bird* and *Jane Eyre*, each heroine’s spiritual dilemma—and the dangers it poses to her religious, spiritual, and moral integrity—is practically identical. Gertrude, like Jane, is placed in the position of Milton’s Eve—Fullerton’s novel, in fact, makes this association even more explicit in its description of the happy couple, “both so handsome and so highly-gifted, and looking formed—‘He for God only; she for God in him’” (II:194). Once again, the novel reminds us of the dangers of playing Eve. Gertrude’s love for Adrien seems to bring her closer to God, but it is only a superficial devotion. “She had not gone with [Adrien] to the source whence he drank, she had only caught the drops as they fell from his cup: he did not see this and, in his admiration of the fruit, he saw not or could not see that the roots had not struck deep into the soil” (II:194).

The novel’s many warnings of the illusion of earthly happiness include another Eve-figure, Lady Clara Audley, a wealthy friend of Gertrude’s. Lady Clara does not idolize her husband—fortunately, she “loved him enough [. . .] [but] not too much to give her any of the heartaches which are almost invariably attached to an absorbing affection” (II:55). However, the pleasant tenor of Lady Clara’s life is unbroken by any ennobling struggle. Audley Hall, in contrast to Lifford Grange, is a bastion of domestic comfort—indeed, it is described as one large flower garden. Even inside the house, “Flowers, birds, children's laughing faces, ivy wreaths and clustering grapes, sunny landscapes and graceful figures, appeared at every turn [. . .] Gertrude closed her eyes for a moment [. . .] [and imagined herself] transported to one of those fairy abodes which she had so often pictured to herself in her childhood” (II:44). Gertrude is enchanted by her friend’s domestic paradise, but d’Arberg voices a gentle criticism. “[W]as she, “ he queries, “sent into the world to live the life of a rose, or to bear her part in the great battle-field of life? Her existence always seems to me too much like Eve’s in Paradise—Eve before not after the Fall” (II:140; emphasis in original). Although the book portrays Lady Clara in a positive manner, it nonetheless conveys through her character a sense of wasted potential, as there was “in her nature a power of loving which had not been called into full exercise” (II:56).

Fortunately for the salvation of Gertrude’s soul, a series of plot complications arise to bar her from any chance of domestic bliss. Gertrude and Adrien pledge to marry, but Gertrude’s father forbids the union. Adrien leaves England, and some time later Gertrude hears a rumor that
he has joined the priesthood. Gertrude takes rumor for fact; at the same time her father tries to force on her a suitor of his own choosing. Instead, Gertrude desperately marries Maurice, a poor composer who breaks off his engagement with Mary Gray to marry the woman whom he has idolized from childhood. But Gertrude, “looking more like a corpse than a bride” (III:35), cannot forget Adrien and cannot love Maurice. Counseled by Father Lifford to “devote yourself to your husband as if you loved him” (II:85), Gertrude settles into an even more harshly uncomfortable domestic space than her first home:

She worked at her needle for several hours in the day; she went into the kitchen, and [. . .] mastered all the details of domestic economy, and spent less money, and made her husband as comfortable as the most experienced housewife could have done. She never had spoken harshly, or unkindly to him. Her submission was implicit. [. . .] With him she went wherever he asked her [. . .]. Some have walked on hot ploughshares and not winced as they did so, weak women as they were, when their honour was at stake. Perhaps they did not suffer more than she did during these summer walks by the cool river [. . .]. She toiled all day long. She copied out music for him till her head throbbed, and he snatched the pen from her aching fingers; but she never asked him to play. (III:94–95)

Given the novel’s emphasis on the spiritual value of suffering, we might expect Gertrude’s arduous domesticity to transform her into a saint. But what Gertrude lacks is love—not the pleasant, comfortable love she learned about in romance novels, but true Christian love. “She never tried to love or prayed for the power of loving her husband” (III:97). Had Gertrude only prayed, the reader is urged to believe, God might have worked a transformation on her mind and heart, and her suffering, motivated by love, would then reap spiritual benefits. This lesson seems inspired by Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians, in which he explains that the Christian value of self-renunciation is rooted in love for others: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Gertrude persists in her empty gestures of self-sacrifice until, to save Maurice from debtor’s prison, she relinquishes her inheritance and devises a plan for them to emigrate to America. Gertrude’s progression from one dismal domestic space to another is as striking here as it is in Jane Eyre; Gertrude has exchanged a humble, loveless domestic existence for cramped, third-class steerage in “[o]ne of those vast receptacles of human beings, one of those floating worlds, those temporary homes [. . .]"
one of those ocean caravans that bear away so many youthful energies, and so much life, and spirit, and hope, and sorrow from our shores to the New World [...]” (III:144–45). On this voyage, Gertrude’s spiritual crisis comes to a head: Adrien—who has not joined the priesthood after all—takes passage on the same ship. As Adrien and Gertrude still love one another, it is obviously a painful and frustrating situation for both. It is, moreover, an increasingly dangerous one, for by this point, Gertrude and Adrien are not merely susceptible to idolatry, but adultery as well. It is a situation that leads even the near-perfect Adrien into error. Taking random circumstances for evidence of God’s will, Adrien suggests to Gertrude that they have been thrown together again because God “deigns to use me as His instrument to reawaken in you [...] the deep enthusiasm of a real vocation” (III:193). Although well intentioned, Adrien’s self-construction as God’s “instrument” ominously echoes Rochester’s declaration that he considers Jane a divinely ordained “instrument for my cure.” Gertrude, however, unquestionably accepts Adrien as “God’s instrument”: “Teach me, then, to submit,” she cries, “[... ] show me the way” (III:189–90).

Jane Eyre and Gertrude Lifford thus face a similar temptation, in which the lure of adultery is mingled with the temptation of idolatry. Both heroines ultimately resolve their dilemmas through the same course of action: active self-denial and prayer. Jane and Gertrude both perform sacrificial gestures that resemble what James Eli Adams calls a “virtuoso ascetic regimen” (7)—that is, a strenuous, active, heroic form of self-renunciation most at odds with Victorian ideals of passive feminine endurance. In Jane’s case, we see this active embrace of suffering most clearly in her resolution to leave Rochester, when she invokes Scripture’s command to pluck out any eye, or tear off any hand, that causes one to sin. Jane also hears a seemingly miraculous call from Rochester right at the moment of St. John’s proposal, but not before she has cried out to heaven to show her the way. Once Jane physically tears herself away from St. John, she rushes to her room and prays. Of course Jane’s insistence on praying her “own way” is crucial here—St. John Rivers may be convinced of God’s will for himself, but he cannot dictate God’s will for Jane.

Similarly, Gertrude prays her way to redemption. Although both Fr. Lifford and d’Arberg urge Gertrude at various times to pray, prayer brings Gertrude to her own understanding of God and God’s will. The turning point in Gertrude’s progress occurs when Gertrude, nursing her sick husband on board ship, accidentally administers to him a draught of poison. Although the text carefully points out that Gertrude does not intentionally poison her husband, she had caught herself the day before wishing for freedom through Maurice’s death: “If he were to die, I should be free”
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(III:206). Obviously, Maurice's poisoning is classic subconscious wish fulfillment; Gertrude's guilty, adulterous thoughts have literally turned to poison. As Adrien d'Arberg (who claims more medical skill than the ship's doctor) works through the night to save Maurice, Gertrude fervently prays for her husband's life. Gertrude's prayers—her direct appeals to God—are answered and then some: not only does Maurice survive the night, but another, wondrous transformation occurs. Gertrude's adulterous, idolatrous longing for Adrien is supplanted by her overpowering love for her husband:

She vowed to love her husband. O, she loved him already. A single hair of his head had grown precious to her heart, and her burning lips were pressed to his cold hands with feelings that hope and joy could never give. Truly, as Adrien was striving and watching by her side that livelong night, [ . . . ] she felt that an angel had come to her aid; but earthly passion passed away, even then, from her soul, and never from that day forth did she think of him but as one of those ministering spirits who lead the way to Heaven, but are not destined to walk the common paths of life by our side. (III:226–27)

In the course of a single tortuous evening, all is resolved. Maurice commences a rapid recovery. Gertrude herself is a changed woman, her love for Maurice subduing the violent passions with the "unspeakable peace [ . . . ] reigning in her soul, and hovering over her every moment." Here the narrative most explicitly points to the moral of Gertrude's suffering:

She remembered [Fr. Lifford's] words—"If light sufferings are not enough to bring you to His feet, God will in His mercy send you some of those strange trials which break what would not bend, and crush what would not yield." But He had not crushed her—no; He had bowed her down under His Almighty hand, and showed her in one horrible hour what His wrath can do; and then His saving hand was stretched out, and she stood on the shore, strong and erect with the strength He had given her, with the energy He had implanted in her. (III:230–31)

The brief sermon on God's loving punishment echoes a speech made by another character similarly purged of adulterous inclinations, Edward Rochester: "Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me for ever. [ . . . ] I thank my Maker that in the midst of judgment he remem-
bered Mercy” (495). Although God’s divine justice forces Rochester to repent and recognize his wrongdoing, it does not, as we have seen, seem to cure him entirely of creature-worship. Gertrude’s reconciliation with her Maker, however, also erases from her heart any human passion which would be an obstacle to her religious and spiritual growth. At the end of the twenty-fourth chapter, on the eve of disembarking in New York, Adrien takes a last farewell of Gertrude and Maurice. Although Gertrude weeps at this moment, “There was no passion in that grief, no bitterness in that parting” (III: 233). Adrien delivers parting words befitting the closing scene of a novel, “God bless you both for ever!” (III:234). And as he moves away, the novel gives us what would seem to be a last glimpse of Gertrude and Maurice: “[ . . . ] [B]oth for a few minutes wept together. She was the first to dry her tears, and when he raised his eyes to hers there was not a cloud on her brow” (III:234).

Having delivered Gertrude from near-fatal “creature-worship,” demonstrated the importance of direct, unmediated prayer for women as well as men, and preached a lesson on the virtue of religious suffering, the novel would seem to have arrived at a satisfactory closure. And if the reader can believe that Gertrude really no longer loves Adrien, she might breathe a sigh of relief at the prospect of the long-suffering Gertrude finally enjoying a quiet, loving, even comfortable domestic life with Maurice. But inexplicably, Fullerton unsettles both her heroine and her readers. In a final chapter that looks suspiciously like an afterthought, the ship catches on fire. While this plot development brings to mind the devastating, yet purging, fire at Thornfield, there seems little left to purge in the wake of Gertrude’s spiritual reformation. But the fire does, indirectly, kill Maurice, who is also guilty of idolatry in his selfish and overpowering love for Gertrude.14 This plot development leads readers to believe that Gertrude, newly widowed, will end up with Adrien after all. And this makes sense: didn’t Jane Eyre get Rochester as a reward for renouncing him? Maurice, in his dying speech, only reinforces these readerly expectations. Declaring that he has stood between Gertrude and d’Arberg for too long, Maurice joins their hands at his bedside: “Promise me that you will marry,” he says. “For my peace, my sake” (III:246).

According to the old and revered tradition of the death-bed scene (a literary device dating back at least to the late medieval period, but particularly favored by Evangelical tract writers and other Victorian

14. Gertrude flees to Maurice’s home (and away from a father trying to force her into an arranged marriage) under the mistaken impression that d’Arberg has abandoned her for the priesthood. Maurice knows this assumption is false, but conceals the information from Gertrude because he wishes to marry her himself.
authors [Jay 154]), Gertrude and Adrien would of course honor Maurice's dying request not only out of respect for the dead, but out of some vague acknowledgment that Maurice, as a man with one foot already in Paradise, possesses privileged knowledge of the mind and will of God. After encouraging all readerly hopes that the pair, destined for one another, will finally marry, however, the novel frustrates these expectations. While Gertrude and Adrien do not give an outright and direct refusal to a dying man's last wish—perhaps an integrity too harsh for Victorian readers—neither do they give a definite assent. Immediately after Maurice's funeral, Adrien and Gertrude go their separate ways, never to meet again on earth.

Why this rebuke to novelistic conventions, an act that one reviewer criticized as “unreasonable self-sacrifice” (*Christian Remembrancer* 402)? The resistance to conventional narrative closure is perhaps intended to remind readers that the will of God may often be radically opposed even to a course of behavior that society—and institutionalized religion—might fully approve. Although no obvious legal, social, moral, or religious encumbrances now exist to prevent Gertrude and Adrien's marriage, each has bypassed social and religious intermediaries to determine God's will directly through prayer. And if prayer has truly transformed Gertrude's heart and mind, marriage to Adrien would simply be a relapse into the disease of creature worship. Gertrude's ultimate fate is more consistent with a narrative that—in the interests of her spiritual health—continually denies her domestic stability or comfort. After parting with Adrien, Gertrude bears Maurice's son and passes several years serving the Irish poor in New York. Finally, Gertrude returns to England and Lifford Grange and spends the rest of her life caring for her son and elderly father (with whom she has reconciled) and doing charitable works. In the closing paragraph of the novel, she assures her brother Edgar that she is happy, but clearly it is a happiness built on spiritual rather than temporal rewards: “[She possessed] a heart full of the peace and joy which the world cannot give nor the world take away” (III:271).

As a novel warning readers against the dangers of human idolatry, *Lady-Bird* is not without its problems. The novel so romanticizes—even as it condemns—Gertrude and Adrien's idolatrous passion that female spiritual autonomy triumphs only at the novel's end, with Gertrude and Adrien safely residing at opposite ends of the earth. Moreover, Gertrude would never have arrived at this spiritual maturity, the novel suggests, without Adrien's help and guidance. *Lady-Bird* upholds a relationship between women and God that is distinctly separate from men's encounters with the divine, yet the ensuing models of female religious agency, while separate, are not exactly equal. In *Lady-Bird* (as in *Jane Eyre*), women continue to
exercise religious agency by quietly, passively serving others in domestic settings, whereas men’s agency resides in active, spiritual leadership and ostensibly heroic missionary work overseas. The novel’s final pages also include a laudatory newspaper account of Adrien, now indeed a priest “braving the danger of martyrdom in the remote countries where his zeal has led him [. . . ] preaching the Gospel to the children of Asia” (III:262). At the novel’s end, Adrien’s career as a Christian warrior is as much lauded and magnified as St. John’s otherworldly heroism at the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*.

*Lady-Bird’s* conclusion obviously chooses a radically different strategy in its attempt to uphold female spiritual integrity and autonomy than does the final chapter of *Jane Eyre*. Neither choice is, in the end, completely satisfactory for readers. In *Jane Eyre*, not only does Jane’s vocation—and her hope of salvation—still revolve around Rochester, but her spiritual gains are rather difficult to represent. In the course of the novel, Jane continually chooses the straight and narrow path—rejecting Rochester, and later even St. John, presumably in the interests of preserving her immortal soul. Yet the only way the novel can convincingly represent the rewards of Jane’s spiritual sacrifice is through temporal goods—matrimony, money, and status. Brontë was well aware that her audience would find the words “Reader, I married him” more compelling than “come Lord Jesus.” And for this reason *Lady-Bird* is both a more daring and a more “painful” novel than *Jane Eyre*. Although Gertrude’s sufferings are not necessarily more pronounced than Jane’s, they are not visibly rewarded in the end. How can one represent “the peace and joy which the world cannot give nor the world take away” in a narrative form that is preoccupied with representing the material world?

*Jane Eyre’s* ambivalence between the worlds of flesh and spirit is surely part of the novel’s enduring appeal as a rich and challenging literary work. But as a social critique, *Lady-Bird* issues a stronger, more challenging “sermon.” In *Lady-Bird*, Gertrude must fight the temptation of idolatry from without—that is, idolatry as promoted by popular romance novels, Protestant models of marriage, and her secular culture’s mistaken ideas about love. By rejecting the world and its values, Gertrude simultaneously triumphs over the problem of idolatry. *Jane Eyre*, however, by equating idolatry with Catholicism, implies that idolatry is a natural human tendency—in particular, a symptom of Jane’s “Catholic” shadow-self. Not only does Jane have to distinguish between her Catholic and Protestant selves, repressing the one and affirming the other, but she must also sift through her Protestant culture’s teachings on marriage, rejecting those that encourage Catholic idolatry. In short, idolatry in *Jane Eyre* is figured in the same
way many Victorian Protestants represented Catholicism: deep-rooted, easily hidden, and extremely difficult to eradicate. It is rather hard to fault society for Jane's idolatry, when she sees it so deeply embedded within herself.

Finally, Jane Eyre's most enthusiastic affirmation of Victorian social values is of course her choice of marriage and motherhood. The strongest facet of Fullerton's social critique, on the other hand, is her radical suggestion that Victorian women might find their true vocation outside of marriage and traditional domesticity. In contrast to Evangelical Protestantism, which based its understanding of vocation on constructs of home and family, Catholicism presented to women other valid alternatives, such as lay ministry and organized religious life. Authorized by the Catholic tradition, Fullerton seems to have been less constrained than Brontë in stretching the envelope of novelistic convention in crafting her heroine's unique “happy ending.” Fullerton's Lady-Bird, with its daring, albeit unpopular conclusion, presents a Catholic challenge not merely to the social status quo, but to the form and genre of the novel itself.

We may be tempted to think that Brontë and Fullerton, with their daring critiques of Protestant domesticity and matrimony, were distinctly at odds with the male-authored values and institutions of their era. This is to some extent true, but as Victorian sermons on marriage, both Jane Eyre and Lady-Bird share the same ultimate goal as Thomas Jackson's 1810 sermon, Marriage and Adultery Considered. All three “preachers,” Brontë, Fullerton, and Jackson, seek to define a “godly” marriage, and each presents secular marriage—or marriage which is only nominally Christian—as a nightmarish state of living death. Jackson portrays profane marriage as a man united to a corpse; Fullerton describes Gertrude, newly married to Maurice, as “looking more like a corpse than a bride”; and Jane's zombie-like double, Bertha, dons Jane's wedding veil prior to Jane's adulterous wedding ceremony. Figures evoking both marriage and death may well be an enduring cultural archetype (consider Dickens's ghoulish Miss Havisham, or more recently, Tim Burton's 2005 movie, Corpse Bride), but for these Victorian preachers, the death imagery seems colored by fears about secularization. The ideal modern marriage, as so many preachers lamented, privileged every sort of compatibility except that of religious doctrine; Brontë, Fullerton, and Jackson all express genuine concern that the wrong marriage partner could sabotage one's journey to heaven.

But leaving the possibility of eternal damnation aside, popular ideals of secular marriage conveyed other nightmarish undertones. The bar for modern marriages was set dizzyingly high. Marriage was to provide individuals with unprecedented levels of physical, emotional, and spiritual
gratification: a tall order to fill, especially in a society with a documented shortage of eligible male partners. Marriage framed as a religious duty could be deemed successful if both partners went to heaven. Secular marriage, however, depended upon sexual passion, emotional bliss, and lifelong mutual attraction. Suddenly, getting to heaven may have seemed relatively easy. Marriage to Maurice Redmond, for Gertrude, and a potential marriage to St. John Rivers, for Jane, may be framed as spiritually deadening, but each author is much more convincing at portraying the earthly consequences of choosing marriage partners unwisely.