Bold faith and secret unbelief: a study of two Anglican clergymen, St. John Rivers in "Jane Eyre" and Harold Gwynne in "Olive"

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Bold Faith and Secret Unbelief:
A Study of Two Anglican Clergymen,
St. John Rivers in Jane Eyre
and Harold Gwynne in Olive

by

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Abstract

Many Victorian women novelists included Anglican clergymen as characters, both minor and major, in their works. Two of these works, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Dinah Mulock Craik’s *Olive*, feature Anglican clergymen as important characters who interact at length with the novels' main female protagonists. In addition, the men are shown relating to other women in the novels in a variety of ways.

Brontë and Craik use these interactions to develop the characters of Mr. Brocklehurst and Mr. Rivers, revealing in the process authorial attitudes toward religion and the clergy. This work attempts to trace these attitudes through a close reading of each novel and the relationships between the clergymen and the female characters in their respective novels.
Introduction

One of the most ubiquitous characters in Victorian literature is the Anglican clergyman. From Austen to Eliot, Victorian women writers included vicars among the characters in their novels. Someday someone should compile an encyclopedia of clergymen to show how widespread the practice of including a "man of the cloth" in 19th-Century novels was. The term "man of the cloth" is used intentionally, since the Church of England only ordained men as clergy.

Given this fact, how did Victorian woman novelists write about the clergy? Many women who wrote works of fiction during this period were daughters, granddaughters, nieces, sisters, wives, or close friends of clergymen, both Anglican and otherwise. For example, Charlotte Yonge's closest friend was John Keble, pastor of the rural parish of Hurley. Keble read each of her books before she sent them away to the publisher and suggested modifications that Yonge usually complied with (Wolff 117). Many Victorian women writers were daughters of clergymen, including Jane Austen, Mary Martha Sherwood, Rhoda Broughton, Juliana Horatia Ewing, Frances Milton Trollope, Henrietta Eliza Vaughn, and Palmer Stannard. Maria Charlesworth's father and brother
were both Anglican vicars, and Olive Emilie Schreiner was a missionary's daughter. These women had the opportunity to observe the attitudes and theology of the men around them; sometimes too closely for the peace of mind of the religious people they lived with. Because women were excluded from the ranks of the church leaders, they could approach the topic of the Anglican vicar from a unique viewpoint. Depending upon her own religious belief, the woman novelist could praise or condemn the clergy for perceived strengths or weaknesses by using a clerical character in her fiction.

I have chosen two clergymen from women novelists' works, in an attempt to discover how the women authors defined these men through their relationship with the women around them. The two novels are Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Dinah Mulock Craik's *Olive*.

I will begin with a discussion of the 19th Century reception of each novel. R. W. Crump reports that "although *Jane Eyre* received mixed reviews, praise predominated over censure" (xii); out of 28 reviews in 1847 (when the novel appeared), only a handful were negative. Writing in "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine" in October of 1848, John Eagles referred to the novel in strong, approving terms: "It is not a book for Prudes--it is not a book for effeminate and tasteless men; it is for the enjoyment of a feeling heart and vigorous understanding" (596). In 1850, H.R. Bagshaw called *Jane Eyre* "a work of singular talent," but he
cautioned that one should not give the novel to "very young people" because it is "too worldly, too passionate" (675-76).

Those critics who did not like the novel were vehement in their disapproval. Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake was one of the most outspoken critics:

It is true that Jane does right, and exerts great moral strength, but it is the strength of a mere heathen mind which is a law unto itself. No Christian grace is perceptible upon her. . . . We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written Jane Eyre. ((619-20)

The North British Review agreed that the novel was "unamiable...if not positively irreligious" (Tillitson 260). Whether because of such controversial reviews or in spite of them, the novel became a phenomenal best-seller, and continues to be widely read today.

It is more difficult to find critical reviews of Olive, because Craik's work has been largely forgotten until recently. From the beginning of her career, however, critics put Craik "into the class of 'writers' rather than 'silly lady novelists'" (Mitchell 31), suggesting that she enjoyed some popular success even before her most well-known work, John Halifax, Gentleman appeared. In 1851, "Colburn's New Monthly Magazine" devoted a seven-page article to "The Author of 'Olive'" which treated Craik "as a writer with a growing oeuvre, rather than merely a novelist of the season,
and giving special praise to her strength in portraying ordinary people" (Mitchell 117). Louisa Parr reported that one unnamed critic of the time said that he could not forgive the incredible conversion Harold Gwynne undergoes: "'Sceptics are not plastic and obliging. Would to Heaven scepticism could be cured by bright eyes, dulcet tones, and a novelist's art of love!'" (228). In 1892, however, Mrs. Oliphant described Olive as

showing a pure and elevated purpose with something of the over-sentiment of youth, and that sadness in which the poetical imagination so generally takes refuge at the age when everything external is naturally most bright. (485)

Praise came from unexpected quarters; George Henry Lewes commended Craik's "great gift of eloquence, and considerable power in the dramatic presentation of character" (51).

Craik's publisher appreciated her potential; she received one hundred and fifty pounds for the copyright of Olive, which was "not munificent," but "more than most beginners were offered" (Mitchell 10). She became one of the most popular female novelists of the time (Williams 165).

Dinah Mulock Craik and Charlotte Brontë were both popular authors, but had little in common otherwise. Their characters, St. John Rivers in Jane Eyre and Harold Gwynne in Olive, have little in common, either. Both are male clergymen created by female writers, but they differ in age, in religious convictions and practice, and in their attitudes toward women and marriage. By examining these
clergymen, I hope to show that the way in which they interact with the female characters in their respective novels reveals their character—and perhaps something of their authors’ attitudes toward organized religion in general and Christianity in particular.

In order to accomplish this task, I will briefly summarize each novel and then explore the relationship of each of these men to the women in their world. St. John Rivers is examined in the context of his relationship to his sisters Mary and Diana; his housekeeper Hannah; the neighbor whom he loves, Rosamond Oliver; and, of course, Jane Eyre. The discussion of *Jane Eyre* focuses on St. John’s exercise of power over those women around him, both as a man and as a minister.

Harold Gwynne is examined in the context of his relationship to his mother, Alison Gwynne; his wife Sara Derwent Gwynne; his daughter Ailie; and the main character of the novel, Olive Rothesay. The focus of the discussion of *Olive* is Harold’s lack of faith and Olive’s attempts to bring him to belief in God.

Both of these novels deal with issues that were important to 19th-Century readers and that remain of interest today: relationships between men and women; questions of faith and doubt; the coexistence of science and religion. By including clergymen as major characters, Brontë and Craik introduced into their novels
representatives of one of the major institutions of their day, the Church of England. The Church's influence was waning at mid-Century, but the Anglican vicar was still a force among local congregations. By putting words of praise or condemnation in the mouths of these characters, the novelists were adding weight to the characters' pronouncements. Perhaps subliminally, the audience of Jane Eyre and Olive would be likely to respond to St. John Rivers and Harold Gwynne with more respect than if the men had been, for example, simple farmers. This respect is part of the power that both characters hold over the people around them.
Part I: St. John Rivers: "As Inexorable as Death"

Charlotte Brontë's first novel is the story of a strong-willed woman. The author created a strong-willed man to match wits with Jane; St. John Rivers is as determined to have his way as Jane is to have hers. The struggle for Jane's future is one of the most interesting power plays in the novel, although it comes rather late in Jane's story.

*Jane Eyre* begins when the title character is ten years old. She is an orphan, living on the charity of her aunt and tormented by her cousins. Jane is sent to Lowood Institution, a wretched boarding school run by Rev. Robert Brocklehurst, and eventually becomes a teacher there. After two years of teaching, Jane is restless and advertises her services as governess.

Jane goes to Thornfield to be governess to Adela Varens, the ward of Edward Rochester. Mr. Rochester is a mysterious, dark, brooding figure of a man who enjoys Jane's company and her outspokenness. He is often away on business, and in his absence Jane becomes close to the housekeeper, Mrs. Fairfax, and little Adela. Mrs. Fairfax explains the strange laughter and weird nocturnal events at Thornfield by telling Jane that an old woman, Grace Poole, lives in the attic. Eventually, Jane and Rochester fall in love, and Rochester asks Jane to marry him.
Jane accepts, although she has strange dreams and misgivings. At the altar, the ceremony is interrupted by men claiming that Rochester is already married, to the woman in the attic—not Grace Poole, but Bertha Mason Rochester, a madwoman. Edward asks Jane to run away with him, but she refuses. Rather than remain under the same roof with him, Jane runs away from Thornfield.

She wanders across the moors and ends up at Moor House, where the Rivers take her in. Diana, Mary, and St. John Rivers have just lost their father. St. John, who is preparing to go to India as a missionary, is an Anglican minister. He offers Jane a job teaching school, and she settles in to life at Marsh End.

After some time, Jane discovers that her uncle has died and she is no longer penniless. In addition, it turns out that St. John, Diana, and Mary are her cousins. Jane divides her inheritance with them, and they live together at Moor House until St. John asks Jane to marry him and accompany him to India. She is about to accept his proposal (against her better judgment), when suddenly and supernaturally she hears Rochester call her name. She leaves Moor House and finds Rochester, badly injured as the result of a fire in which Bertha has died. Rochester and Jane are married. The last few pages of the novel are a paean to St. John and his missionary endeavors in India.
In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë created two very different clergymen: Robert Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers. Brocklehurst is a cruel caricature of an evangelical hypocrite, but Rivers' characterization is much more complex. Since the novel first appeared, critics have debated which man, if either, best reflects the author's religious philosophy. Most reaction to the "unorthodox religious and social views" (Crump xii), however, centered around the person of Jane.

The *Church of England Quarterly Review*, for instance, asserted that Jane "might have been a Mahomedan or a Hindoo for any bias of Christianity we discover in her actions or sentiments" (Crump 9). An anonymous reviewer in the *Guardian*, on December 1, 1847, concluded that "religion is stabbed in the dark" (Crump 1); and Elizabeth Rigby reported that "almost every word [Jane Eyre] utters offends us" (Crump 14). Little was said about Brocklehurst and Rivers.

Clearly, Brontë despised Brocklehurst and his kind. As a girl at Cowan Bridge School, she and her sisters had suffered at the hands of William Carus Wilson, the man who may have been the prototype for Brocklehurst. Even the most fervent evangelical could not condone the actions and pious hypocrisy of Brocklehurst (or Wilson), although evangelicals might object to the portrayal of such a man.

At the same time, it is clear that Brontë felt some sympathy for St. John Rivers. Her father, Patrick, was
acquainted with Henry Martyn, a famous and heroic missionary upon whom Brontë may have modeled St. John (Gerin 129). The novel ends, not with the conventional domestic happy hearth, but with a long paragraph in praise of St. John's dedication and a verse from Revelations which could be read either as the Christian prayer for the quick return of Jesus Christ to earth or as a longing for death. To what extent did Brontë sympathize with St. John Rivers' spiritual zeal?

I believe that St. John Rivers helps us understand Jane Eyre. Through his relationships with the women around him, Rivers reveals a personality as narrow in its own way as Brocklehurst's, but less despicable because it is not hypocritical. There is an element of the heroic in St. John Rivers because he is completely devoted to an ideal, unwilling to compromise, and, as his sister Diana puts it, "as inexorable as death" (340). Rivers is an ironic character. Brontë shows us that he is unable to love, even as he preaches the great gospel of love. Her portrayal of the man's inner struggle—strictly through Jane's observation and the other characters' conversations with and about St. John—is a good example of human psychology.

It is significant, I think, that St. John is not at home when Jane first looks in the window to see the domestic scene. She sees a peaceful, happy family scene, with only the two sisters, Mary and Diana, and the aged housekeeper, Hannah, engaged in domestic pursuits. We can imagine,
because we have accompanied Jane through her childhood and through the heartbreak of deception by Rochester, the appeal that such a scene holds for her. Jane has been a "loner" throughout the novel. From the first chapter when we see her excluded from her guardian's family because she is a dependent orphan, Jane is alone. At Lowood school she is one of many destitute children; her friend Helen Burns is taken from her by death. She believes she has found some stability with Rochester, but even so the mysterious woman in the attic and Jane's troubling dreams prevent her from being totally "at home." So as she observes the Rivers' cozy parlor, Jane is greatly taken by the "rosy peace and warmth" (316) of the scene.

She knocks at the door but Hannah refuses to let her in. Jane looks like a beggar; weak, faint, and dirty, she is desperate for food and shelter. After a moment's despair, Jane resigns herself to death: "'I can but die,' I said, 'and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence'"(320).

At that moment, St. John Rivers reveals his presence. From the start, he shows his solemn turn of mind and his practicality. Jane can't see him in the dark of the doorstep, but his voice startles her: "'All men must die . . . but all are not condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want'"(320).
I find it interesting that our first exposure to St. John reveals him as an activist of sorts; he is not willing to let Jane "wait God's will in silence," but intervenes. Clearly, St. John is not of that school of religious thought which teaches that the poor should know their place and be grateful for what they have. Cold as his charity might be, it is practical aid for Jane, at a time when St. John believed her to be only a beggar. St. John's attitude is at odds with prevailing Victorian philosophy.

From this beginning, St. John has the advantage over Jane. Her surrender to death is a "confession of her complete powerlessness," intended for God but overheard by "an audience standing behind her in the dark, an observer who has seen her clearly in the light of the kitchen window and door and has heard her clearly from a vantage point of obscure proximity" (Bock 92-93). It is startling and embarrassing to have a stranger observe us in unguarded moments, and even worse when the stranger contradicts what we have said.

Rivers thus intervenes in Jane's attempt to "wait God's will in silence" (320). In a sense, he is taking God's place, working his own will by allowing Jane to enter Moor House. In addition, he already has more power over Jane than she would probably wish. He knows that she is powerless, devout, passive, and physically ill. She knows that he has overheard her petition to God, but she doesn't
know how long he has been watching her. This unevenness creates tension between the two, as St. John seeks to know Jane's secrets and Jane retains them as the only shred of privacy she has left. The tension develops into "polite but implacable warfare, with St. John demanding nothing less than unconditional surrender" (Keefe 110-11).

I believe with Earl Knies that "this episode is functional and part of the careful balance of the plot, not just a diversion to pass time between the flight and the call from Rochester" (133). There are critics who disagree; in her Introduction to *Jane Eyre*, Joyce Carol Oates relates that "numerous readers have felt that the long Whitcross section...is an awkward digression" but concludes that "the carefully transcribed section is required for symmetry's sake" (xiii). I believe that Jane learns so much about herself and about the nature of love through her experiences in Whitcross that the section could not be deleted from the novel without doing major damage to the plot. The Whitcross episode is also an opportunity for Brontë to create an Anglican minister who is the antithesis of Brocklehurst's hypocrisy--and of Rochester (Craik *Brontë* 99).

St. John Rivers is not a hypocrite, but neither is he perfect. He gives orders to everyone--he orders Hannah to open the door, orders Jane to rise and enter the house, and oversees Diana's feeding of Jane. It is he who decides that
Jane has had enough to eat, though she is still famished. This introduction to St. John Rivers reveals that he is accustomed to ruling the household. Furthermore, the quiet and peace of the female domestic circle are broken the moment he sets foot in the house.

Hannah might be expected to take orders; she is a servant. But the alacrity with which St. John’s sisters do his bidding reveals that he is accustomed to being obeyed. Even though Jane is "'as white as clay or death'" (321) St. John "demands an account" (322), fires rapid questions at her, and expects an answer.

Carol Bock points out that St. John’s insistence "warns [Jane] of his intent to exert his authority over her and accordingly provokes her defensive claim to remain silent" (92). In fact, she doesn’t quite remain silent; she gives a false name because she is "anxious as ever to avoid discovery" (321). Jane has done nothing wrong, but she is pursued by guilt. She is afraid that Rochester will discover her whereabouts and convince her to return to him.

Part of St. John’s insistence upon knowing everything about Jane may stem from his instinct that something is odd about this sophisticated young woman suddenly turning up on his doorstep, nine miles from the nearest village. Part of it, though, is that he is accustomed to exercising authority over the women in his life. Perhaps it seems a simple equation to St. John: Jane is a woman; therefore, she will
submit to his masculine authority and tell him all he wants to know.

But Jane has no intention of behaving as he desires. She has endured a terribly painful experience, discovering that her marriage to Rochester would have been bigamous and feeling compelled to leave him despite her love for him. She is emotionally drained. She refuses to be bullied by St. John into revealing any more of her story than she is ready to reveal. Bock addresses Jane's strength in the middle of her apparent weakness:

Her adopting a false name, her apparent incapacity to speak of herself, and her nearly total physical debilitation might suggest Jane's severely, even dangerously, diminished ability to define and express herself. Yet what is most telling about Jane's behavior in this scene is not her incapacity in these respects but rather her self-pride and stubborn insistence on not telling the story she has been asked to tell. (91)

St. John is not pleased with her reluctance, but as Jane turns her attention to his sisters, he stops pressing her for an account of herself. He is willing to wait for what he wants.

From this opening view of St. John Rivers, we see that he is authoritative, patriarchal, and outwardly unemotional. Jane arouses his curiosity, not his libido; on the doorstep he decides that "this is a peculiar case--I must at least examine into it" (320). His very knock is "loud and long" (320), self-assured, and demanding. There is nothing indecisive about the man.
Even at Jane's sickbed, St. John delivers his diagnosis of nervous exhaustion with deliberation but no doubt, "in a quiet, low voice" (323) which is different from his usual, commanding tone. St. John is a man of "few words;" he pauses in his speech to show his deliberateness. He is also a student of physiognomy and phrenology, then believed to be a "science" that taught that

the enlargement of a particular portion of the brain shows that there is an excess of the property associated with that portion and--worst of all--that an enlarged portion of the brain causes a bump in the skull at that place. (Encyclopedia Americana 42)

Actually, Charlotte Brontë was very knowledgeable about physiognomy and its related pseudo-science, phrenology. According to Brian Wilks, "readings in phrenology and an understanding of its terms and implications [were] part of the common education and interests fostered in the parsonage" (132). And the Brontës were not alone in their interest in reading character through physical characteristics; others who took this practice "seriously" were Hegel, von Bismarck, Marx, Balzac, George Eliot, Walt Whitman, and Queen Victoria (Gillispie 255). Penny Boumelha says that, to the Victorians, "class [was] written legibly upon the body" (71).

In fact, in the first part of the 19th Century the practice was so widespread that "it has been said that homes in Britain which contained only three books would have the Bible, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and Combe's System of
Phrenology" (Gillispie 255). In Jane Eyre we see that "a knowledge of [physiognomy] is assumed in the reader" (Wilks 132), doubtless because of the practice's popularity. Phrenology was "convenient shorthand" for the Victorian novelist (Pickrel 167).

Rivers shows talent for phrenological observation when he describes Jane's face. He traces "'lines of force in her face which make [him] sceptical of her tractability'" (324), an observation which will be proven true later in the novel. Such close observation—and the knowledge of physiognomy—reveal Rivers' scientific mind.

This scene also demonstrates St. John's bluntness. Jane, he says, "'looks sensible, but not at all handsome ... Ill or well, she would always be plain. The grace and harmony of beauty are quite wanting in those features'" (324). That he can appreciate beauty is in St. John's favor; that he can speak of Jane in such terms to her face is not. Jane comments later about St. John's lack of sensitivity: "'He is a good and a great man; but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views'" (398).

We also see St. John's pessimism about human nature in this passage. When Diana speculates about Jane's past, her brother tells her that Diana "'will find she is some young lady who has had a misunderstanding with her friends and has probably injudiciously left them'" (323-24). Actually, and
ironically, Jane has fled from what St. John would admit was the temptation to sin horribly. To his credit he considers Jane a "young lady" and does not contend that she is a criminal. But why jump to the conclusion that Jane has been "injudicious," rather than that she is in some trouble? St. John, when he thinks of others at all, seems to think the worst of them. Perhaps this lack of charity stems from St. John's own adherence to a strict code of behavior; a code which he cannot imagine anyone else maintaining.

St. John is one of the first major characters in British fiction to be both an evangelical Anglican clergyman and a sympathetically-treated character. As often as not, representations of clergymen in Victorian novels were "extremely hostile" (Dalziel 159), and "the clergyman as hero is unexpectedly rare" (Dalziel 102). But Brontë treats St. John with respect. We may see only St. John's faults, I'm afraid, in our age of equality and secularism, but to Brontë's contemporary readers, "in those days of missionary zeal, [St. John] was appreciated as an heroic figure" (Burkhart 69). Certainly her treatment of him at the end of the novel indicates that Brontë's narrator appreciated Rivers' courage and dedication. Brontë was not experienced in novel-writing, but she managed to create St. John Rivers in a way that made him seem real and believable to her public. Critics lauded her "deep insight into character" (Crump xii). John Eagles wrote in 1848 that ". . . it is
very difficult to avoid believing that much of the characters and incidents are taken from life" (595).

Perhaps one reason why we see St. John so differently is that Victorian readers expected an earnest clergyman/missionary to act just as St. John does. St. John Rivers is a gentleman; his family has lived at Marsh End for over two hundred years. He has been to college and travelled widely (327). He has grown up in a household with servants, and although there is not much money available to him because of his father's poor judgment in trusting a relative, St. John retains an air of gentility. Brontë's readers would expect such a man to command respect and to demand obedience.

In addition, St. John's fervent faith probably struck Brontë's readers differently than it does us. Regardless of their personal beliefs, Victorians liked to read about other people's faith and their thoughts about God. Margaret Dalziel discusses the religious tone of the fiction of the early Victorian period:

In reading this fiction, one is struck by its generally religious tone. Innumerable references, some of them very brief and slight, others more substantial, make it clear that the existence of God is taken for granted. Almost always it is clear that the conception of God is definitely Christian, though not necessarily Christian in the most orthodox sense. (159)

Altick refers to this fiction as "a veritable religion of print" (191). And Owen Chadwick observes that as the century went on, "society was more secular, [but] men were
not less religious" (466). They believed that a good
clergyman (which St. John strives to be) should be devout,
hard-working, stern, and a gentleman. St. John satisfied
their picture of what a minister should be.

He also represented the Victorian ideal of a man. St.
John is tall, handsome, authoritative, and reserved. He has
no doubt that he, as a man, is privileged above women. His
attitude toward Hannah and his sisters--and, initially,
Jane--is imperious and rude. He expects to rule over his
wife with absolute power, if he should ever marry. As
Dalziel says, during this time period "men's duties were
clearly defined by laws based on religion. . . they are made
unnaturally clear, since the possibility of a true conflict
of duties is seldom seriously faced" (168). St. John Rivers,
probably like many in Brontë's audience, never expected to
face such a "conflict of duties." He took for granted that
the women in his environment would react to him in a
subservient way.

Rivers is not without faults, but he does not
compromise his beliefs or his morality. Even those
Victorians who were beginning to doubt their own commitment
to Christianity admired attention to duty and adherence to
standards of morality. The struggle that George Eliot began
to expose and explore in 1859's Adam Bede--can one have
personal morality without religious belief?--was not yet
widely-debated in 1847 when Jane Eyre was published.
St. John Rivers has his own struggle, but it is not the same as Eliot’s. As Peter Dale says, "we are never worried about" St. John’s faith (121). St. John’s morality is based on his religious belief; they cannot be separated.

Because Queen Victoria "set a high standard of morality," according to Amy Cruse, "her people responded by demanding books whose morality was perhaps over-emphasized" (13). To some modern readers and critics, Jane Eyre is one of those books. But the Victorians loved it.

The strength of St. John’s will seems more than human, especially in his relationship with Rosamond Oliver. We have seen that St. John is not physically attracted to Jane; we also see that he finds Rosamond very attractive. Rosamond is the greatest obstacle to St. John’s career as a missionary. His passion for her is the "last human weakness" (345) he must overcome before going to the East.

Brontë makes clear from our first introduction to Rosamond that she is a temptation to St. John. As St. John and Jane stand talking at her garden gate, Rosamond Oliver’s "gay voice, sweet as a silver bell" hits St. John like a "thunderbolt" (346). When he has mastered himself, he turns deliberately to face the "vision" that is Rosamond. We see the young woman’s beauty through Jane’s eyes. Rosamond is dressed in white and wears a long veil; she is ready to be St. John’s bride. But she is only an "earthly angel" (346), and St. John’s heart seems more inclined toward heaven.
Jane observes St. John’s reaction to Rosamond closely. He glances at Rosamond, and then looks at a bunch of daisies before crushing them with his foot. This small episode shows St. John’s intention to deny Rosamond’s power over him—the "snowy heads of the closed flowers" (347) are like St. John’s passion for Rosamond. He will subdue it and destroy it before it can blossom.

St. John struggles with his all-too-human emotions as he listens to Rosamond’s prattle. She stoops to pat the dog, and Jane watches St. John’s reaction to Rosamond:

I saw a glow rise to that master’s face. I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion. Flushed and kindled thus, he looked nearly as beautiful for a man as she for a woman. His chest heaved once, as if his large heart, weary of despotic constriction, had expanded, despite the will, and made a vigorous bound for the attainment of liberty. But he curbed it, I think, as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed. (348)

Jane alone has seen the flash of passion. The single-mindedness with which St. John pursues his goal forces him to sublimate sexual passion, but, given the proximity of Rosamond’s pure beauty, only St. John’s iron will allows him to rein in his desire.

Rosamond invites him home, under the guise of visiting her father, who is "‘not very well’" (348). We already have seen that St. John does not allow anything to keep him from his parish duties, but Rosamond represents a greater threat than rain or wind. He declines her invitation, but Jane says "himself only knew the effort it cost him thus to
Rosamond continues to put herself in St. John's way. She visits Jane's school "at the hour when Mr. Rivers was engaged in giving his daily catechising lesson" (351). Thus, as St. John is imparting the gospel to the children, temptation sits close by. He is very aware of Rosamond's presence:

Keenly, I fear, did the eye of the visitress pierce the young pastor's heart. . . his cheek would glow and his marble-seeming features, though they refused to relax, changed indescribably: and in their very quiescence became expressive of a repressed fervour, stronger than working muscle or darting glance could indicate. (351)

And Rosamond is very aware of her power over him, because he "could not conceal it from her. In spite of his Christian stoicism. . . his hand would tremble and his eye burn" (351).

St. John is a deeply passionate man. Rosamond cannot understand his devotion to a god who demands St. John's utter loyalty, but Jane can because she has experienced the sacrifice of desire in the name of morality. By refusing to run away with Rochester, Jane suffers terribly—but not as much as she felt she would suffer if she surrendered to what she knew to be wrong. Because of her experience, Jane can interpret St. John's self-denial and rejection of Rosamond's love:

He seemed to say, with his sad and resolute look, if he did not say it with his lips, 'I love you, and I know you prefer me. It is not despair of success that keeps me dumb. If I offered my heart, I believe you would accept it. But that
heart is already laid on a sacred altar: the fire is arranged round it. It will soon be no more than a sacrifice consumed.' (351)

Jane has known deep love and self-denial. Even though her reasons for rejecting Rochester are different from St. John’s reasons for rejecting Rosamond, Jane understands the pain St. John feels and the effort he expends. Rosamond, blessed with beauty and riches, has never been denied anything. Thus she has no understanding of St. John’s struggle.

The modern reader may wonder along with St. John’s sisters why he didn’t simply marry Rosamond, stay at Morton, and concentrate on soul-winning among the people of his parish. Geoffrey Best addresses the question of the appeal of missions during for Victorians:

Enthusiasm for missions among the Evangelicals was huge and we may well wonder why. Partly, I suppose, because the missionary world was remote and romantic; partly because heathens who bowed down to wood and stone were rather more exciting than local lapsed Christians who were often dirty, drunken, and dangerous. Overseas missionary work was a kind of challenge more bearable, perhaps, to the educated mission-minded Evangelical than the contemporary equivalent of taking the road to Wigan. (52)

St. John is an Anglican, not an Evangelical, per se, but I believe we could safely place him in the evangelical wing of the Church of England and I think the quotation is fitting. Given his pride and ambition, St. John should have found a wife like Rosamond a marvelous asset to his career. But St. John believed he was called by God to India, and
while he "would have given the world to follow, recall, retain her. . . he would not give one chance of Heaven" (351).

I believe that it is not just God's call that prevents St. John from yielding to Rosamond's tempting, however. Jane relates to us that St. John "could not bound all that he had in his nature—the rover, the aspirant, the poet, the priest—in the limits of a single passion" (351). The mission field offers St. John more scope for his talents than his present charge. Alan Haig asserts that during the early part of the 19th Century, "a ministry of a dozen years or so in a country parish tended to drain a man's energies, and gradually reduced him to a state bordering on inertia" (291). Despite his love for her, Rosamond offers only a continuation of St. John's life as a clergyman; as he tells Jane, his "uniform duties wearied [him] to death. . .[his] life was so wretched, it must be changed, or [he] must die," (318).

Despite her beauty and appeal, Rosamond would merely become part of that wretched life, which does not offer enough variety for St. John's restless nature. Both St. John and Jane realize that Rosamond is "not profoundly interesting or thoroughly impressive" (352); she would never do as a wife for St. John.

I see St. John's recognition of Rosamond's unsuitability as his wife as a positive aspect of his
character. He is attracted to her, but unwilling to take advantage of her interest in him. He does not lead her on or engage in flirtation. He keeps himself under tight control and refuses to put himself—and her—in a compromising position.

I wonder, though, how much of this rejection of Rosamond reflects St. John’s awareness of the power she would have over him in marriage. Not only does Rosamond’s physical attractiveness exert influence on St. John, but she also exercises the power of the purse. It is Rosamond who helps support the school where Jane teaches; Rosamond who furnishes it; and Rosamond who continues to contribute to Jane’s salary.

St. John, with his pride, knows that though "all Morton once belonged to [the Rivers]" (353), he is reduced to owning only a third-share of Moor House. He serves in a small country parish, "buried in morass" (340). By marrying Rosamond, St. John would gain her fortune, but he would always be aware that it was she who brought the money to the marriage.

St. John envisions life at Vale Hall, when "this present life and passing world" would be sufficient for him (356). Significantly, in his vision St. John is at Rosamond’s feet, as she gazes down at him. He understands that his role at Vale Hall would always be subservient. There might be an element of snobbery in this awareness, as
St. John considers that he comes from landed gentry, while Rosamond's father is a newly-wealthy industrialist. It is unpleasant for such a proud man to see himself as a type of lap dog.

In fact, snobbery might be the best explanation (besides St. John's belief that becoming a missionary is God's will for him) for St. John's rejection of Rosamond. When Mr. Oliver talks to Jane about the Rivers family, she concludes that "he regarded the young clergyman's good birth, old name, and sacred profession as sufficient compensation for lack of fortune" (353). In other words, Rosamond's father would not stand in the way of their marriage. But who is this man? He is "the sole rich man" in St. John's parish, "the proprietor of a needle-factory and iron-foundry" (338) whose own father was a "journeyman needlemaker" (327). In other words, he is a man who has bought his way into gentility. St. John's family has lived in Morton for over two hundred years; could he really bring himself to mix his gentle blood with the Olivers'?

In addition, Rosamond "could sympathise in nothing [he] aspired to--co-operate in nothing [he] undertook" (357). She could not suffer, and thus could not be a missionary's wife. Since St. John cannot--or will not--give up his calling, he must give up Rosamond. His passion is totally directed toward becoming a missionary, because it is a position of power.
This is a paradox; ostensibly St. John rejects Rosamond’s offer of comfort and wealth because he wants to serve others. He is sacrificing the "normal" life of home, wife, and children in order to spend his life in a foreign land, far from his family. But in reality St. John is going to India to fulfill his own desires:

'Relinquish! What! My vocation? My great work? My foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven? My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambition in the glorious one of bettering their race--of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance--of substituting peace for war--freedom from bondage--religion for superstition--the hope of heaven for the fear of hell? Must I relinquish that? It is dearer than the blood in my veins. It is what I have to look forward to and to live for.' (357)

It is not for the sake of the ignorant heathen that St. John wants to be a missionary, but that he might be "numbered" among those honored by God. His ambition is spiritual, not temporal--but it is still ambition.

Much has been written about the motivation of Victorian missionaries; current scholarship seeks to prove that the British hunger for colonialism drove these men and women to spend their lives in service far from England. St. John has been called a "spiritual imperialist" (Roy 723). and some critics, such as Susan Meyer, have made much of the fact that he is a white man preaching to dark-skinned people. Like it or not, the fact remains that the missionaries were, first and foremost, Christian believers. As Max Warren puts it, "[Their] most distinguishing characteristic was their
profound conviction that the Christian gospel was not, in the first place, something to be argued about, but something to be proclaimed" (61).

This is not to say that the missionaries could divorce themselves (or their gospel) from Victorian social values. Where Christianity went, "civilization" followed—in the form of Western clothing, social mores, and trade practices. In 1853, Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonial Department, wrote:

The authority of the British Crown is at this moment the most powerful instrument, under Providence, of maintaining peace and order in many extensive regions of the earth, and thereby assists in diffusing amongst millions of the human race, the blessings of Christianity and civilization. (Warren 60)

We deplore the racism of the Victorians, as there was an undeniable element of racial superiority in the missionary movement. With our current emphasis on multi-culturalism and tolerance for other ways of life, we question the actions of those who replaced entire cultures' belief systems and heritage with Western European ones. But the Victorians did not see things the way we do; deplorable or not, evangelism and colonialism combined to shape the face of the British Empire throughout the 19th Century.

St. John Rivers understands that he is doing more than exporting more than Christ's gospel to India. He is ambitious for himself as well as for the gospel. He acknowledges his ambition to Jane, because of her insistence
on asking hard questions. Jane's way is "ever to meet the
brief with brevity, the direct with plainness" (329), and
because St. John is being honest with her, she asks blunt
questions. In addition, she speaks to St. John as an equal,
not as a coquette or a child. That such free speech is
unusual for St. John is evident by his reaction: "Again the
surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined
that a woman would dare to speak so to a man" (357).

We have seen the deference shown St. John by his
sisters and Hannah. We have also seen the way in which
Rosamond interacts with St. John; she flirts, pouts, teases.
It is probable that St. John has never met a woman like Jane
before. He responds with surprise, pleasure, and reciprocal
honesty.

Joan Peters sees St. John Rivers' function as a foil
for Jane's need for self-expression:

Legitimate dialogue...requires two equal parties.
As a result St. John Rivers, in contrast to [the]
earlier characters, is developed as a complete
person—with a distinct psychology and pattern of
speech—one who cannot be comfortably categorized
and who is capable of engaging in convincing
argument with another fully-developed person, the
now-mature Jane. (236)

Only Rivers and Rochester are "complete people," capable of
helping Jane work through her feelings and decide what she
should do. Or, as Kucich puts it, "in general Brontë's
characters use others only as the friction necessary to a
heightened inward dynamic of feeling" (921). Kucich,
however, feels that because St. John "would control her
absolutely" (932), Jane cannot trust him with her self, regardless of how much they talk. Thus, "Jane herself increases their intimacy and consequently his power over her by invading his feelings for Rosamond" (Craik Brontë 100).

His reaction to Rosamond, he tells Jane, is not self-pity, but scorn for his weakness, which he knows "is ignoble; a mere fever of the flesh: not...a convulsion of the soul. That is just as fixed as rock firm set in the depths of a restless sea" (358). When he tells her he is cold and hard, Jane does not believe him. She wants St. John to be different; she wants to see him marry Rosamond.

But St. John tells Jane the truth; after all, he says, "'You have taken my confidence by storm...and now it is much at your service'" (358). So Jane hears the best about herself, which seems pale compared with Rosamond's perfection:

I honour endurance, perseverance, industry, talent; because these are the means by which men achieve great ends and mount to lofty eminence. I watch your career with interest, because I consider you a specimen of a diligent, orderly, energetic woman; not because I deeply compassionate what you have gone through, or what you still suffer. (358)

St. John has observed Jane's hard work at the school, and he admires her for it, but he is utterly devoid of knowledge about her inner life.

In the same way, he denigrates Rosamond's love for him because she "is ever surrounded by suitors and flatterers. . .she will forget me; and will marry, probably, some one
who will make her far happier than I should do’" (357). The ultimate power over Rosamond is to impugn her motives. In fact, St. John has never spoken to Rosamond about feelings—he is silent, withdrawn, shy in her presence. He has no idea about the possible depth of her feeling for him, because he is only concerned with suppressing his feeling for her. Pinion says St. John has no heart (112), but I think it is rather that his heart belongs to God.

Though much of their conversation seems to involve Rosamond, St. John and Jane spend a good deal of time talking about themselves—and each other. St. John looks at Jane from the vantage point of an employer—which, in a sense, is what he is. Jane is doing a good job, but he cannot forget that she is "accomplished" and fears that she will not be happy in the country school. To St. John, the children Jane teaches are "‘only poor girls—cottagers’ children—at the best, farmer’s daughters’" (339). Jane tries to see the girls as individuals, but she has a hard time adjusting to the job of teaching these humble children to read and write.

St. John has told Jane that "‘human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold’" on her (340), but Jane has a spiritual side as well. In some ways, she is closer to the essence of orthodox Christianity than St. John is. She tries to follow the Golden Rule, while St. John tries to manipulate other people. St. John refers to
herself as a "Christian philosopher" who follows "the sect of Jesus" (358). Jane does not call herself by any religious name, although she is willing to go to India as a Christian missionary and she does believe in God.

One of the questions raised by the interaction of Jane and St. John concerns the nature of God. Jane’s God is nebulous, but accessible. She prays to her God, and seeks to find out what her God’s will is for her life. In many ways, Jane’s God seems compatible with the Christian God.

But St. John’s God seems formed in his own image. When St. John declares that reason, not feeling, is his guide (358), I wonder whose "reason" St. John is being guided by. Jane opposes St. John’s will by refusing to marry him, but he interprets her refusal as opposition to the will of God. St. John’s God wants what St. John wants—always. When every other ploy fails, St. John turns to threatening Jane with Scripture (God’s word). He uses the word of God to threaten her with damnation if she opposes St. John’s—and therefore God’s—will.

I don’t think that this confusion of his will with God’s is intentional on St. John’s part. He seems to need to control people, to exercise power over them. By using his status as a clergyman, St. John is able to gain respect from people who otherwise might not give him any; after all, he is a poor man whose father speculated away the family fortune. Unfortunately, except for Rosamond’s father, we
are not shown the effect that St. John has on any of his parishioners. He visits the sick and performs his duties zealously, but Brontë gives us no idea of the reaction of his congregation to St. John's hard work. Nevertheless, we can assume that the people of Morton have respect for their curate, if only because of his office.

But St. John wants more than respect. His desire for power is clearly shown when he sees Jane's name on the corner of her cover sheet. Instead of sharing with her the news that she is his relative, St. John acts mysteriously:

He took it up with a snatch; he looked at the edge; then shot a glance at me, inexpressibly peculiar and quite incomprehensible; a glance that seemed to take and make note of every point in my shape, face, and dress; for it traversed all, quick, keen as lightning. His lips parted, as if to speak; but he checked the coming sentence, whatever it was. . . I saw him dextrously tear a narrow slip from the margin. It disappeared in his glove; and, with one hasty nod and 'good-afternoon,' he vanished. (359)

With this piece of knowledge, he knows something Jane doesn't know, and by withholding the knowledge from her he makes the secret more important and retains power. The tables are turned now; the scene in the kitchen is reversed. St. John is the one who holds the secret of Jane's identity. As Welsh says, "sharing a secret confers the pleasurable potential of revealing it, but once the secret is revealed, the power and pleasure are gone" (16).

When St. John returns the next day, the manner in which he chooses to reveal the secret indicates his need for
power. He decides to "assume the narrator's part" and convert Jane "into a listener" (362). She will no longer ask questions; the information he holds will be meted out as he sees fit. In telling her story St. John comes "dangerously close to possessing her self" (Bock 94). The identity she has tried so long to conceal is revealed through St. John's "critical sleuthing" (Hennelly 703). If, as Peter Bellis contends, "sexual and social power [in Jane Eyre] is visual power" (639), then St. John's possession of visual proof of Jane's identity gives him power over her.

Throughout this scene, St. John controls the conversation. He wants to impart his information only in his way. He "'can guess'" Jane's feelings, but tells her to "'restrain them for a while'" (363). Jane urges him to speak of Rochester and hear about what part he might have in her story, but St. John's "head is otherwise occupied than with him" (364); to talk of Rochester is to pursue "trifles" (364).

Once the information is out, however, Jane takes the upper hand. She "scorn[s] the insinuation of helplessness and distraction, [shakes] off his hand and [begins] to walk about again" (368). Then she orders St. John to write to his sisters, and engages in a spirited argument with him that reveals the shift in the balance of power. Jane is now financially independent and knows all the secrets St. John so recently harbored. He has no power over her.
Or has he? Having lost the advantage that Jane’s physical neediness gave him over her, St. John now holds an emotional advantage. He agrees to "easily and naturally make room in his heart for [Jane], as [his] third and youngest sister" (371), a vow that contents her temporarily.

Jane’s joy in fixing up Moor House with new furnishings and accessories is tempered by St. John’s distinct lack of excitement or interest: "not a syllable did he utter indicating pleasure in the improved aspect of his abode" (374). He withdraws from the feminine excitement; "in the glow of fervour and flow of joy he could not sympathize" (376). When the summons comes to attend a dying woman, he is glad because it gives him a chance to feel "his own strength to do and deny" (377).

I think St. John’s "grim refusal to take pleasure in ordinary things" (Berg 96) is significant. Until Jane comes into his life, St. John has had his way; it is he who "does and desires," while those around him yield to his will. The joy that Jane, Hannah, and the sisters feel is alien to St. John. He finds joy in serving God, and apparently finds no connection between earthy pleasure and such service.

In this section of the novel, St. John is aware of his waning power. Jane has had her way about the renovations at Moor House, and she insists that he keep away during them. She reports that "the bare idea of the commotion, at once sordid and trivial, going on within its walls, sufficed to
scare him to estrangement" (374), so it isn't too difficult to enforce her edict, but St. John still obeys her wishes. He is no longer master of Marsh End.

Just as he escapes from the noise and confusion of renovation, he finds "daily business in visiting the sick and poor" in his parish (377) so that he doesn't have to be a part of the women's "vivacity." Not until the merriment gives way to their usual way of life and things return to normal does St. John "stay more at home" (378). The women are now his "fellow-students," engaged in serious pursuits. Their studiousness gives St. John an opportunity to begin to reassert his control over Jane, as he persuades her to abandon her German studies and learn Hindustani to assist him in his own studies.

In addition, he pushes Jane to exert her strength and perseverance by visiting Morton School even when the weather is very bad. She is "puzzled" by his insistence, but "never dared complain, because...to murmur would be to vex him" (379). St. John is beginning to exercise his power again:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him. I was so fully aware that only serious moods and occupations were acceptable, that in his presence every effort to sustain or follow any other became vain: I fell under a freezing spell. (380)

St. John has tamed Jane, apparently, by expecting great
things of her. She is willing to be driven by this man, but why? What is there in Jane that makes her so easily persuaded to change for St. John's sake?

She tells us herself:

I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other. . . (382)

St. John has not yet provoked her to "volcanic vehemence;" she is still under his spell. It takes a supernatural event to break that spell.

John Kucich addresses this "supposed vulnerability of reserved characters to figures of authority," maintaining that it is instead "a kind of necessary, endless cooperation between polarized extremes of power" (930). Thus, Jane will eventually exert her own will, but for the present she is willing to allow St. John to exert his. Jane has learned what Bette London calls "the pleasure of submission":

If Jane Eyre posed any threat for Victorian audiences, it was probably less from its overt revolt against domestic culture than from its too perfect enactment of it: its danger might be, in fact, that it brought to the surface the hidden pleasures of the submissive state. (210)

London claims that only because of "scrupulous observance of a position of silent self-abnegation" is Jane able to assert herself so outspokenly; it is "masochism's excess" (203).

Kucich tells us that such outbursts cost Brontë's
characters more than they gain from them:

... the very few spontaneous outbursts of passion by Brontë's heroines--Jane Eyre's verbal conquest of Mrs. Reed, for example--are found to be deeply disturbing in ways that the characters cannot adequately articulate for themselves. ... expressed passion most often becomes a sign not of the self's unmediated relation to others and to discourse, but of entrance into a complicated fluctuation of disclosures and concealments that obscure individuals. ... even as it brings them into charged contact. (919)

Thus, as Jane and St. John interact, the struggle between them over whose will shall be dominant often seems one-sided. To Brontë's audience in the 1850's, however, the ascendent party was the one who showed greater control.

Actually, St. John Rivers has an advantage from the outset; as an ordained minister, he is set apart from "normal" men. He is privy to the mysteries of the Church and privileged to administer the Sacraments. From his own admission, St. John is convinced that he can speak for God. This spiritual power is very difficult for Jane to resist, since she is uncertain of her own faith and St. John is so very sure of his. What weapon does she have against his clerical person? Jane has failed to submit to his will simply because he's a man; she is independent enough to stand up for herself against masculine authority. But when St. John begins to use Scripture and the name of God to back his arguments, Jane falters.

As Carolyn Williams says, "Jane 'knows no medium,' but St. John claims to be God's 'medium.' Her struggle with him
represents the struggle with the Father and with the voice of God he presumes to convey" (73). Jane has not heard the voice of God; when she tried to be silent to hear God on the Rivers' doorstep, St. John stepped in and spoke. From the beginning of their relationship until the last words of the novel, St. John is acting as spokesman for God. As a minister, he assumes he is a mediator between God and others—but St. John's "God" is foreign to Jane. The price St. John's God would exact is too great.

St. John wants a wife, not just a sister as Jane offers, because a wife is "the sole helpmeet [he] can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death" (388). Jane shudders at these words. Like a helpless victim caught in a web, she feels St. John's influence "in [her] marrow--his hold on [her] limbs" (388). She is temporarily captivated only because she is in awe of his total confidence that he is doing God's will. This certainty is "St. John's most ostentatiously patriarchal characteristic" (Williams 75).

But St. John's pride is his undoing. If he were truly concerned with Jane's soul and/or with taking another missionary worker to the field to evangelize the heathen, St. John would have accepted Jane's counterproposal. By insisting that Jane is cheating God by refusing to marry him, however, St. John reveals his desire to dominate her totally. And Jane has enough sense of self left to see
through his desire: "Oh! I will give my heart to God... You do not want it" (388).

St. John has wounded her deeply by saying she was formed for labor, not for love (384); he wounds his own cause fatally by claiming to speak for God. Jane suddenly sees that it is St. John's own cause he argues for, not God's. She no longer fears him, because he, too, is mortal: "I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist" (388).

Jane seems to realize here that St. John's vision of God—stern, exacting, hard, and wrathful—is not in line with hers. She is willing to go to Asia to take the gospel to those who haven't received it, but she reserves the right to maintain her own emotions, nature, and mind as her God has created them. Because she has known love with Rochester, she cannot accept the parody of love offered by St. John. The "very name of love is an apple of discord" between the two; she scorns St. John's idea of love (391) because it is so far from reality.

St. John is convinced that he knows what God's will is—not just for himself, but for Jane, too. Such conviction, especially when delivered by a handsome, earnest man who can use Scripture to back up his arguments, is difficult to argue with. Eventually, Jane almost yields. "Were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now—come afterward what would!"
I felt veneration for St. John—veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned. I was tempted to cease struggling with him—to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own...I stood motionless under my hierophant's touch. My refusals were forgotten—my fears overcome—my wrestlings paralysed. (400)

Jane entreats Heaven to guide her, and is given an answer in the form of a triple cry from "a voice somewhere"—not the voice of God, but the voice of Edward Fairfax Rochester, filled with pain and woe (401).

The voice calls her name, the only thing she has left that is still absolutely hers. She is shaken into reality and St. John loses his power over her, permanently.

She exults in her freedom:

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 forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. (402)

And so Jane takes her leave of Moor House and rediscovers Rochester. St. John fades into the background until the final chapter, when he is given the last word.

I am fascinated by the use of Jane's name in this novel. As we saw, St. John once "owned" her name when he chanced to see it on her drawing tablet, and he used that information to unlock the secrets of Jane's past and her true identity. But the written name gave St. John no real
power over Jane; she retained her heart. Because Jane was not fundamentally changed by the revelation of her written name, she could respond to the voice when it called to her. Hearing her name, she was released from the spell, and freed to be herself.

Critics argue about the meaning of Brontë's ending. Terry Eagleton wryly observes that "it is convenient to leave Rivers with the last word when the genuine threat he represents has been nullified" (24), but the question remains: why give the last page to St. John Rivers when Jane has so thoroughly rejected him? After all, says Margaret Blom, Jane's rejection of Rivers "not only celebrates Jane's decision to be governed solely by her own will but reverses the traditional Christian view of the superiority of men over women" (103). So why did Brontë reassert the validity of Rivers' religion by giving him the last word?

One possible reading of the ending is that the novel, which has been taken for years as a feminist text, is truly a novel of the status quo. Instead of trying to undermine the traditions of the establishment, perhaps Brontë wanted to reinforce the "rightness" of "things as they are." Bette London makes a good case that Jane’s movement through the novel is "movement not from bondage to freedom but through increasingly powerful and interiorized forms of discipline" (201). If we read the novel this way, St. John is a model for Jane, as he first renounces the outward obstacles to
fulfilling his goal (his father's objections, the appointment of a successor to his post, some business affairs) and then his own "weakness" in loving Rosamond. In fact, Terry Eagleton contends that Rivers "represents more than mere convention. In his fusion of disciplined aloofness and restless desire he is an extreme version of Jane herself" (19). So the ending could be seen as St. John's being given the last word for Jane to follow; surely she can face life and death with as much faith and courage as St. John has evidenced.

If we accept the view that Jane does not break out of the accepted social order—after all, she does marry Rochester—then, as London points out, Jane's liberty is really only a "new servitude, a choice of masters" (196). The novel (when considered this way) is no longer a manifesto of self-creation but [is] a textbook of self-discipline. . . No longer a challenge to the conventions of Victorian womanhood, Jane Eyre can be read as a 19th Century deportment book, offering its readers—within and outside the text—lessons in the proper forms of feminine conduct. (London 209)

Because piety was one of the hallmarks of "feminine conduct," the long passage in praise of St. John and the concluding Bible verses would seem fitting.

Yet another possible reading of the novel's end, set forth by Peter Bellis, agrees that Jane has not overcome the prevailing values of her world. "Bronte's novel," Bellis writes, "does not, finally, escape from the masculine
structures of power; it struggles instead to reverse and redefine them, to appropriate the gaze and the written word for the novelist and her heroine" (640). One could interpret the final passage as a failure of that redefinition and reversal, as St. John successfully achieves his life’s goal despite Jane’s refusal to be part of it. Or, one could say that Bronte appropriated the very Word that St. John insisted only he could interpret correctly. After all, from the beginning of the novel, Revelations has been one of Jane’s favorite books of the Bible (Bronte 26). In St. John Rivers’ last letter, he uses the words of St. John the apostle from Revelations. Perhaps, by including these words in her story, Jane meant to take them from Rivers and reattribute them to St. John of Patmos. Such an action would strip Rivers of his claim to speak for God and give authority back to the author of Revelations.

Carolyn Williams addresses the question of intertextuality in the last chapter of Jane Eyre, but her conclusion is that Bronte’s inclusion of Jane’s quotation of Rivers’ quotation of St. John the apostle’s quotation of Jesus represents the contradictory impulses throughout the novel. Williams sees Jane’s story as a struggle between outward authority and inward desire; a struggle that is not really resolved:

In closing her book, Jane closes with the other Book. I mean she ‘closes with’ the other Book in a spirit of struggle, engages it, and maintains a strong sense of difference from it. And she ‘closes with’
the other Book in the sense of using it to her own contradictory ends. (84-85)

At the end of the novel, Jane is free to believe as she will, but the belief system that created St. John still exists. Peter Dale reminds us that "The only triumph allowed the dominant structure is the triumph of the last word/Word, and St. John Rivers can only utter it; he has no power to enforce it" (128).

Finally, and much more simply, St. John may have been given the last word because of Jane's fond memory of how much she owed to him. St. John has given Jane much more than he took from her. He gave her a place to stay when she was destitute and friendless, found a job and a home for her, considered her his sister, and offered to share the remainder of his life with her. Through her conversations with the minister, Jane has learned what she truly believes in and what she is capable of. She remembers his charity, cold though it seemed, and she continues to respect his dedication to his calling. It is this respect and gratitude, I think, that make the final page of Jane Eyre understandable and fitting.

Jane Eyre continues to evoke new readings because of the ambiguous nature of Bronte's message. Was Jane a feminist ahead of her time, trying to shake off the oppression of a patriarchal system? Or was she a happy practitioner of submission, glad to be Mrs. Rochester? Was St. John a "spiritual imperialist," determined to take the
Union Jack to a strange land so that commerce would prosper? Or was he a Christian soldier, interested only in winning lost souls for the sake of the gospel?

What we can say for certain is that Jane Eyre and St. John Rivers learned from each other. Jane learned that she could be appreciated as a human being with worthwhile character traits and abilities. She also learned that she had the strength of will to deny a course of action that would kill her, figuratively and literally. St. John learned that not all women were like his sisters and Hannah, humoring him in whatever he wanted to do. He also learned that he could not always bully and threaten people into doing his will, even when he claimed to speak for God, as evidenced by Jane's refusal to marry him.

And what of Bronte's "purpose" in writing Jane Eyre? The novel explores the uses of power and the idea of relationships between men and women, poor and rich, educated and ignorant, Christian and heathen. The conclusions that Bronte draws are ambiguous, I think; depending upon one's theological or critical background, the novel is a subversive text or a triumph of conventionality. St. John Rivers can be seen as a "spiritual vampire" (Keefe 111) or a "martyr and hero" (Eagleton 20). He is "an amalgam of repressed sexuality and sadistic will to power" to Parama Roy (723), and the epitome of Christian virtue to Peter Dale (121). The debate goes on; St. John Rivers remains an
enigma.
Harold Gwynne, the Anglican clergyman in Dinah Mulock Craik’s 1850 novel, Olive, is very different from St. John Rivers. I find Harold a more interesting character than St. John, because Harold is a dynamic character who is still struggling with the question of whether or not Christianity is true. St. John is rather frightening at times, with his coldness and his absolute certainty; but Harold is vulnerable and insecure.

The novel opens with Olive Rothesay’s birth. Olive is born while her father, Captain Angus Rothesay, is in the Caribbean on business. Olive’s mother is horrified to discover that the baby is deformed; there is a slight problem with Olive’s upper spine. Because of her love for beauty and her immaturity, Mrs. Rothesay rejects the baby and neglects to tell her husband that all is not well. Olive is left to the care of her Scottish nurse for two years, until her father returns. When he discovers that his wife has deceived him about the child’s perfection, the marriage is broken. Captain Rothesay begins to drink and to speculate, and Mrs. Rothesay spends her time at parties with other flighty women.

As Olive grows up, she is aware that she is different from other people, but she lives such an isolated life that it is not until she is a teenager that she realizes her
physical difference. At a ball with her only friend, Sara Derwent, Olive sees the two of them reflected in a mirror and understands that she is seen by the world as deformed. Only the strong, Christian faith taught to her by the nurse (a staunch Presbyterian) keeps Olive from despair. She resigns herself to living as God has made her, and to helping others.

Captain Rothesay is saved from becoming a drunkard by Olive’s intervention, and he determines to be a better father and husband. He goes to Scotland to his boyhood home to gain some insight into how to become a better person. While visiting his old friend, Alison Balfour Gwynne and her clergyman son Harold, news comes of an investment which could pay all of Rothesay’s debts and help him start over. Alison insists upon loaning him the money for the investment, even though it represents a year’s salary for Harold. Captain Rothesay intends to inform his lawyer of the loan, but forgets.

Meanwhile, Sara Derwent is being courted by Charles Geddes, a serious young man who is in love with her. Olive is charmed by Charles’ devotion to Sara, but Sara is more interested in flirting with every man in the county. Because she feels herself hopelessly unattractive because of her spinal deformity, Olive believes she will never marry. She can’t understand Sara’s carefree attitude toward a good man who wants to marry her, and they quarrel. Charles goes
away to sea, first securing Sara's promise to marry him.

But Sara meets Harold Gwynne, who is immediately taken with her and asks her to marry him. Impulsively, she accepts. The last time Olive hears from Sara, she is planning the wedding and boasts of how she can manipulate Harold and his mother.

Things get worse for Olive. Having lost her only friend, she now loses her father. The investment upon which Captain Rothesay had counted fails, and he suffers a stroke. Before he dies, he scribbles the word "Harold," but no one understands why. Olive and her mother are forced to sell everything; bankrupt, only Mrs. Rothesay's trust fund from her parents enables them to live.

The Rothesays move to London, where they live with an artist, Michael Vanbrugh, and his sister, Meliora. Olive has always dreamed of becoming an artist, and under Michael's tutelage she learns to paint. A letter comes from Harold Gwynne, demanding payment for the loan, and Olive replies that she will pay every cent. In order to do so, Olive paints furiously and sells several paintings.

Olive's mother goes blind, and Olive nurses her lovingly. In addition, Olive and Meliora visit the poor and sick in their neighborhood in an effort to bring them Christian charity. One of those visited is a French woman with a little girl named Christal Manners. When the mother dies, Olive becomes responsible for Christal, and sends her
to Paris to school.

Michael and Meliora decide to move to Rome to further Michael's career, and Michael asks Olive to marry him. She refuses, since she doesn't love him, but she is thrilled to have been asked. With the Vanbrughs gone, Olive and her mother go to live in the country through the kindness of a wealthy patron. Recently returned from Paris, Christal goes with them.

Coincidentally, the village they go to, Harbury, is Harold Gwynne's home. Olive discovers that Sara is dead, but that Harold and Sara have a little girl, Ailie. At Sara's grave, Olive learns that the child has been given no religious instruction, and determines to find a way to teach Ailie Christian truth.

The Rothesays are happy in Harbury, but Christal is not. She defies convention and embarrasses Olive. Olive finds a letter in her father's desk that reveals that Christal is really his illegitimate daughter. When Christal discovers her low origins, she runs away to Paris.

Harold and Olive spend a lot of time together, discussing everything but religion. Harold has achieved recognition in the scientific community. He refuses to allow Ailie to be taught about Christianity—even though he is an Anglican minister—because he doesn't want her filled with superstition and illogical ideas.

Eventually, Olive and Harold fall in love. Harold is
brought to belief in Christianity through Olive's quiet example and total faith. When Olive's mother dies, Harold is awed by Olive's assurance that they will meet again. Harold goes to Paris on Olive's behalf to find Christal, and prevents Christal from committing suicide. She joins a convent, and Harold returns to England in time to rescue Olive from a burning building. Harold resigns from the clergy, marries Olive and becomes a famous scientist.

When Craik first introduces Harold, however, he is still a clergyman. Harold, an only child, has been spoiled by his mother, who is proud to say that in the "'sinful, sinful world,'" she never knew "'one truly good man, save [her] son, Harold'" (III.239). Mrs. Gwynne dotes on her son, seeing him as morally superior to all others and refusing to admit that he might have any faults.

In return, Harold is attentive to his mother's wishes without being particularly devoted to her. He often ignores her advice. For example, he marries Sara Derwent despite his mother's disapproval, and later takes off on a pleasure tour of Europe to his mother's extreme displeasure. Harold seems selfish at first; his scientific pursuits take priority (though he performs his religious duties scrupulously) and his mother screens callers to make sure Harold's work is not interrupted.

In many ways, Harold's mother is both father and mother to him. His father died not long after Harold was born and
is remembered by Captain Rothesay as "a young, roistering, fox-hunting fool," a "contemptible" man (I.244). His widow asserts that while Harold may bear some physical resemblance to his father, their personalities are nothing alike. Alison tells Olive's father that "'Mr. Gwynne has been dead so many years that my son--'" it was always my son--'has no remembrance of his father'" (I.243).

Harold was raised by his mother "'in the poor Highland cottage where he was born'" (I.245), but, through the fortunate circumstance of befriending an English nobleman, Harold managed to go to Cambridge. His mother, with "the soul of a man, and the heart of a woman" (II.235), sacrificed silently so that Harold could complete his education. Craik makes it clear that Alison Gwynne is a determined, domineering woman whose ambition for her son is boundless. In Harold's mother, says the narrator, are "no petty feminine follies--no weak, narrow liberalities of judgment" (I.235):

Thus, when Olive's father visits the Gwynnes, he discovers some interesting aspects of the relationship between Alison and her son. Clearly, Alison Gwynne is in charge of the household, even though Harold is a grown man; for example, although Harold is a clergyman, Alison leads the family prayers:

On this morning, as on most others, Harold Gwynne did not appear until after prayers were over. His mother read them, as indeed she always did morning and evening. A stranger might have said that her
doing so was the last lingering token of her sway as 'head of the household.' (I.253)

Harold is content to let his mother take on the spiritual role in their home. As the novel progresses, the reader discovers that Harold's reluctance to lead prayer stems from his lack of belief rather than from any deference toward his mother. Harold has abdicated his position as spiritual head; his mother has not usurped Harold's power.

Actually, we learn more about Harold through his shadowy coming and going than from the pages of laudatory description his mother provides. Filled with pride in her only son, Alison ascribes Harold's every action to the purest of motives, while Harold seems sullen and reserved whenever he appears. Craik's use of contrasts works well to show that Harold is under a great burden; not only does he know that he is living a lie by serving a Christ and a Church in which he does not believe, but he also bears the guilt of deceiving his mother. Harold is a miserable man throughout most of the novel.

He tries to relieve his misery by marrying Sara Derwent, Olive's childhood friend. His mother has "never wished for" a daughter, and as Captain Rothesay observes, "'[Sara Derwent] is scarcely the girl for [her] to choose'" for a daughter-in-law (I.240). Alison, however, is resigned to the marriage: "'He chooses, not I. A mother, whose dutiful son has been her sole stay through life, has no right to interfere with what he deems his happiness'"

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(I.241). We are not shown the relationship between Alison and Sara after the marriage, but we are given an explanation of what drove Harold Gwynne to make such an unsuitable match:

I have had enough of studying; I must have interest, amusement, excitement. I think I have drunk all the world's pleasure dry, except this one...I know no rest except I am beside Sara. (I.264-65)

Harold is convinced that he will be happy with such a beautiful, vivacious young wife. His mother only sighs.

As for Sara herself, she gaily writes to Olive to tell her of the wedding plans:

'This clever man--this noble man (as people call him, and most of all his mother)--I could wind him round my little finger. What think you, Olive? Is not that something to be married for? You ask if I am happy. Yes, certainly, happier than you can imagine.' (I.273-74)

Olive is horrified and saddened by Sara's flippant manner toward marriage. Sara's heart was "lightly won and lightly lost" (I.273), and Olive is unable to understand her friend's fickleness.

Harold and Sara have different ideas about marital fidelity. To Harold, both partners need to be absolutely committed for life. But Sara has never told Harold of her previous engagement to Charles, and when she receives (by way of her brother) her old love letters, Harold feels betrayed. As she sits crying over the letters, Harold interprets the tears as a sign that she still loves Charles.
Sara's brother Lyle relates the scene to Olive:

. . . his words [were] so freezing, so stern. He grasped her arm, and said, 'Sara, when you said you loved me, you uttered a lie! When you took your marriage oath, you vowed a lie! Every day since, that you have smiled in my face, you have looked a lie! Henceforth I will never trust you or any woman more.' (II.223)

Sara returns to her parents' home of her own volition, but after a short stay she goes back to Harold, who "[is] never unkind to her. . . but she pine[s] away" (II.224). News comes of Charles' sudden death by accident, and "'Sara never quite recovered from that shock'" (II.224). She gives birth to a daughter, Ailie, and dies several weeks later. Her brother tells Olive that her death "'was almost a relief to us all'" (II.224).

What does this series of incidents show about Harold Gwynne? We see his emotional neediness, as he turns to the first young woman who flirts with him in an attempt to find any "food" for his "famishing soul" (II.276). We see his intense jealousy, similar to his mother's jealousy when anyone takes up too much of Harold's time. We also see his strict moral code and his hurt pride; because Sara deceived him once, she has forfeited her right to be trusted ever again.

Also, Harold is aware that he is living a lie daily. When he blasts Sara for lying when she took her wedding vows, he is condemning himself as well, because he took an oath of loyalty to the Church of England though he did not
believe its doctrines. The vehemence of his reaction to what he considers Sara's betrayal may stem from Harold's awareness of his own deceit. And, of course, since his own motives for marriage were far from pure, Harold feels disappointment that the earthly angel he married did not bring him the lasting "domestic peace" he sought (II.276).

Like St. John Rivers, Harold Gwynne is a restless and ambitious man. But St. John does not seek to know God, as Harold does. St. John, secure in his faith, can pursue his goal of self-martyrdom. Harold, on the other hand, can't settle down to achieve anything worthwhile because he is spiritually empty. He goes through the motions of scientific work and pastoral duties, but his heart is not in either pursuit. Much of his energy is given to brooding and introspection.

From his mother and his wife, Harold has received unconditional love and unforgivable betrayal, respectively. Coddled, yet pushed to excel by his mother, Harold feels the constraints of filial duty and the need to make a living. Widowed and left with a young daughter to whom he is "a good and careful, [but] not a very loving father" (II.243), Harold is still bound by the bitterness he feels toward Sara. When he finally meets Olive face to face, he is an amalgam of guilt, despair, duty, bitterness, and propriety. Craik uses Olive to transform Harold Gwynne into the man everyone always thought he was.
The first direct contact between Olive Rothesay and Harold Gwynne comes when Harold writes requesting repayment of Captain Rothesay's loan. Harold is unaware that Olive's father has died; he only wants the money owed to him. But the letter is cold and direct, and Olive says the writer of the letter "'seems so harsh, and so unlike what a Christian pastor ought to be'" (II.22).

Olive's comment brings up an interesting question: how ought a Christian pastor to be? Harold's letter is courteous, if brusque; he is only asking for money that he needs to support his family. Does Olive think that a Christian pastor shouldn't ask for repayment of a loan? Should he have included God's name in every line? Even though Craik does not elaborate on Olive's observation, we can guess that Olive's idea of proper form for the Christian pastor involves love, kindness, and tact—all of which, admittedly, Harold Gwynne lacks.

On the other hand, Harold Gwynne is not a Christian pastor; he is only the pastor of a Christian church. In Jane Eyre, St. John Rivers tells Jane, "'I believe; and I believe the Gospel... I am not a pagan, but a Christian philosopher—a follower of the sect of Jesus'" (358). Harold Gwynne, however, tells Olive, "'I believe in none of these things—I am an infidel!'" (II.274). Although the author does not reveal Harold's lack of belief until quite late in the novel, Olive has presentiments of it from the
beginning of their correspondence.

Harold's very name fills Olive "'with bitterness--even disgust'" (II.24), though he has only sent a brief, business-like note. Olive writes back, assuring Harold that her father had no intention of defrauding the Gwynnes and promising that she will repay every penny of the debt. When her first painting sells, she tells her mother, "'It almost seems as if that hard-hearted Mr. Harold Gwynne had held the threads of my destiny, and helped to make me an artist'" (II.60). The implication is that even though Harold does not believe in the ways of Providence, Providence has used him to shape Olive's future.

In fact, bit by bit, Olive's initial judgment of Harold is softened. His name "'does not look quite so fearful'" (II.94); his return letter is "'not so stony-hearted'" (II.95). When a letter arrives bordered in black, Olive and her mother deduce (wrongly) that Harold's mother has died, and Olive feels compassion for him. Actually, of course, Sara's death has left Harold a bitter widower.

In one of the many coincidences in Olive, Harold Gwynne actually visits Vanbrugh's studio in London. Olive doesn't see him, but the Vanbrughs' descriptions of him fascinate her. Meliora declares that he has Olive's "'favourite style of beauty--dark, cold, proud, with such piercing, eagle eyes; they went right through me!'" (II.109). Her brother describes him as having "'a grand, iron, rigid head..."
close curling hair'" and a bitter nature when he talked about "'a wife who loves her husband'" (II.118). Again, these descriptions imply that Harold is not a standard Anglican vicar; darkness, coldness, pride, and bitterness are not Christian virtues.

After the Vanbrughs move to Rome and the Rothesays to Harbury, Olive meets Ailie Gwynne in the churchyard of Harold's church. Olive doesn't know who the child is at first, just that she has eyes like Sara Derwent's. Ailie asks Olive to explain where her mother is; is she really under the stone in the churchyard where they are standing? Olive begins to tell the girl about Christian belief, but Ailie asks, "'What is heaven, and what is God?'" (II.175).

Olive is horrified and amazed. She determines to tell the child about religious truths as she understands them, but she is interrupted: "'Stay, madam,' said a man's voice behind, calm, cold, but not unmusical; 'it seems to me that a father is the best guide of his child's faith!'" (II.175-76). The man is, of course, Harold Gwynne. For the first time, ignorant of who he is, Olive faces her former nemesis:

Handsome he was, as Olive discerned at a glance, but there was something in him that controlled her much more than mere beauty would have done. It was a grave dignity of presence, which indicated that mental sway which some men are born to hold, first over themselves, and then over their kind. Wherever he came, he seemed to say, 'I rule--I am master here!' (II.177)

He tells her that as a father and a clergyman, "'I choose to judge for myself in some things; and I deem it very
inexpedient that the feeble mind of a child should be led to dwell on subjects which are beyond the grasp of the profoundest philosophers'" (II. 178-79).

Olive is surprised that he is a minister, although "in dress at least, [he bore] a clerical appearance" (II. 178). Her ready faith leads her to retort that these subjects are "'not beyond the reverent faith of a meek Christian'" (II.179).

From this first exchange, the battle is joined. Harold is seeking an answer to his doubts. He responds "eagerly, 'You think so, you feel so?'" (II. 179). Perhaps this woman has the answers he's sought so long! But then he retreats into his usual skepticism and speaks condescendingly to Olive:

'Certainly--of course--I often find that the great beauty of a woman's religion. She pauses not to argue,--she is always ready to believe; therefore you women are a great deal happier than the philosophers.'

It was doubtful, from his tone, whether he meant this in compliment or in sarcasm. (II. 179)

Olive chooses to believe that the man is being sincere, and she continues to defend the cause of faith. Her countenance, filled with "faith, holiness, peace" causes the minister to gaze silently at her "as a man who in the desert comes face to face with an angel" (II.180).

Eventually, she realizes that his arguments are a cry for help: "It seemed as though he would tear away every flimsy veil, to behold the shining image of Truth" (II.181).
Olive loves a challenge. She has met one problem after another with fortitude and courage: her father's death, the bankruptcy, her mother's blindness. She "saved" her father from the folly of drunkenness when she was a young girl. Now she makes it her mission to redeem Harold Gwynne from a life of bitter unbelief, and to see that his daughter is also redeemed.

Olive realizes the great challenge she faces, when she goes for the first time to hear Harold Gwynne preach. She is sorely disappointed in the service. The minister's face is "stern;" there is "iron coldness" in his reading. He "repeats the touching liturgy of the English Church with the tone of a judge delivering sentence--an orator pronouncing his well-written, formal harangue" (II.195).

Because Olive's faith is complete and simple, she sees Harold Gwynne's automatic observance of the church service as troubling. He has no feeling for what he is doing; he only goes through the motions. Olive can hope only that the sermon will be better:

From what she had heard of him as a highly intellectual man, from the faint indications of character which she had herself noticed in their conversation, Miss Rothesay expected that he would have dived deeply into theological disquisition. She had too much penetration to look for the meek, beautiful Christianity of a St. John--it was evident that such was not his nature; but she thought he would surely love to employ his powerful mind in wrestling with those knotty points of theology which might furnish arguments for a modern St. Paul. (II.196)
But he does neither. He gives his listeners "a plain moral discourse--an essay such as Locke or Bacon might have written; save that he took care to translate his high philosophy into language suitable to his hearers" (II.196). Olive "liked him" for tailoring the message to the working class people of his congregation, and was interested in his "teaching of a lofty, but somewhat stern morality" (II.196). But she is not pleased with the sermon as a whole:

...despite his strong, clear arguments, and his evident earnestness, there was about him a repellent atmosphere, which prevented her inclining towards the man, even while she was constrained to respect the powerful and noble intellect of the preacher. (II.197)

His prayers, too, are lacking. They "sound like a mockery" (II.197) and he doesn't fold his hands to pray; instead they are "clenched like those of a man under some strong and secret agony" (II.197). Olive is moved to pray for him, and the author makes clear that her prayers will be answered: "Years after, it seemed to her that there had been a solemn import in these words" (II.199).

In fact, Craik reveals Harold's tortured soul through Olive's spiritually sensitive eyes. The other members of Harold's parish may be less discerning or simply less critical; one rustic described the minister as

'not much of a parson; he wunna send yer to sleep wi' his long preachings. [But he's] a good man: he'll coom and see yer when you're bad, an' tajk t'ye by th' hour; though he dunna talk bot o' th' Bible.' (I. 230)

Harold's is a simple congregation.
The other woman who might be able to sense a lack of sincerity in Harold's service is his mother, too blinded by her love for him to suspect anything less than perfection. When Olive accepts an invitation from her to return to the Parsonage for lunch, they do not discuss the service. Olive is in awe of Mrs. Gwynne, because the older woman "carried with her dignity, influence, command" (II.200). At the Parsonage they find Ailie and her dog having too much fun for the Sabbath, and Mrs. Gwynne severely orders the little girl away. Though Harold has decreed no religious instruction for Ailie, her grandmother proudly tells Olive that the girl is required to observe the Sabbath strictly.

Olive is disturbed by such legalism: "She felt that this was not the way to teach the faith of Him who smiled with benign tendencies on the little child 'set in the midst'" (II. 202). Olive sees such observance to tradition as just one more piece of evidence that the Gwynne household is more concerned with outward show than inward spirituality.

Craik was clearly aware that this strict observance of the Sabbath was a major issue between the evangelicals and the traditionalists. A.O.J. Cockshut addresses the issue in his book, Religious Controversies of the Nineteenth Century: Sabbatarianism, which had been experienced as a glorious gift to the Creator of part of the time which he had given them, and as a real aid to holiness, became in many mid-Victorian households no more than a boring, negative habit. Then again, just because their feelings were so strong,
and their ideals so lofty, they paved the way for a set of hypocritical canters... (3)

Obviously Olive was among those who did not see sabbatarianism as "a real aid to holiness," especially in the case of Ailie, who was not allowed to read the Bible or go to church.

Olive manages to hide her growing love for Harold, despite spending much time with his family. When she again brooks the subject of Ailie's religious education, the minister denies that such education can be worthwhile:

'Nay, what is more false than the idle traditions taught by ranting parents to their offspring—the Bible travestied into a nursery tale—heaven transformed into a pretty pleasure-house—and hell and its horrors brought to frighten children in the dark. Do you think I would have my child turned into a baby saint, to patter glibly over parrot-like prayers, to exchange pet sweetmeats for missionary pennies, and so learn to keep up a debtor and creditor account with Heaven? No, Miss Rothesay, I would rather see her grow up a heathen.' (II.251)

Olive realizes that Harold is, by his own definition, "'a strange specimen of Church of England clergyman'" (II.251). Harold concludes their discussion, "'All men's faith is free; and in some minor points of Christianity... I perhaps think differently from my clerical brethren'" (II.254). How differently, Olive soon discovers, when she observed Harold at a deathbed:

Harold looked round, and saw he had to face the woe that no worldly comfort or counsel can lighten;—that he had entered into the awful presence of the Power, which, stripping man of all his earthly pomp, wisdom, and strength, leaves him poor, weak, and naked before his God.
The proud, the moral, the learned Harold Gwynne, stood dumb before the mystery of Death. It was too mighty for him. He looked on the dead boy, and on the living father; then cast his eyes down to the ground, and muttered within himself, 'What should I do here?' . . . And with his hard-set face—the face he wore in the pulpit—he went up to the father of the dead child, and said something about 'patience,' 'submission to the decrees of Providence,' and 'all trials being sent for good, and by the will of God.'

'Dun ye talk to me of God? I know nought about Him, parson—ye never larned me.'

Harold's rigid mouth quivered visibly, but he made no direct answer. (II.264)

Harold has no answer to the man's pain, because he has no belief in an afterlife. When John Dent asks where his boy has gone—he's only left a shell—Harold is silent. Olive realizes that "to that awful question there was no answer in [Harold's] soul" (II.265).

Olive takes over for Harold and preaches a sermon to the distraught father. By the time she and Harold leave the house, the father is peaceful and no longer despairing, but Olive is troubled:

As she leaned on Mr. Gwynne's arm, she had a presentiment that in the heart whose strong beatings she could almost feel, was prisoned some great secret—some wild chaos of woe or wrong, before which her own meek nature would stand aghast. Yet such was the nameless attraction which drew her to this man, that the more she dreaded, the more she longed to unveil his mystery, whatsoever it might be. (II.267)

Harold admits that he "'tried to preach peace with [his] lips, and could not, because there was none in [his] heart. No, nor ever will be!'" (II.268). He tells Olive the deepest secret of his heart: he is not a Christian.
His life has been and is "one long lie—a lie to man and to God! For I do believe in a God...in one ruling Spirit of the universe—unknown, unapproachable" (II.275).

Once his secret is revealed, Olive finds a new strength. She demands to hear his story, and Harold obeys because she is "stronger than he, even as light is stronger than darkness, heaven then hell" (II.278). Harold is more educated than Olive, but she is spiritually alive. Her faith enables her to encourage him, even as he pours out the story of the loss of his faith.

Harold’s confession marks a turning point in his relationship with Olive. Michel Foucault explains why confession makes such a difference:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (61-62)

Before Harold’s confession, she was in awe of him. He was not only a man, but a minister. Olive’s deep faith in Christianity extended to those she believed were called to preach the gospel, and because Harold wore the uniform of
the Church, she believed that he represented all its power:

Hitherto, in all their intercourse, whatever had been his kindness towards her, towards him she had continually felt a sense of restraint—even of fear. That controlling influence, that invisible rule, which he seemed to exercise over all with whom he deigned to associate, was heavy on Olive Rothesay. Before him she felt more subdued than she had ever done before anyone; in his presence she unconsciously measured her words and guarded her looks, as if meeting the eye of a master. And he was a master—a man born to rule over the wills of his brethren, swaying them at his lightest breath, as the wind bends the grass of the field. (II.269)

Harold's pride has made him seem unapproachable; he "deigns" to associate with people. Olive sees him as very powerful, although it is unclear how much of his perceived power stems from his position as a clergyman. We know that not all of Harold's power is associated with his status as a minister, since the Vanbrughs and Olive all recognized his power before they knew who he was.

Immediately before his confession, Harold changes his aspect.

But now the sceptre seemed torn from his hand—he was a king no more. He walked along—his head drooped, his eyes fixed heavily on the ground. And beholding him thus, there came to Olive, in place of fear, a strong compassion, tender as strong, and pure as tender. . . He was a great and learned man, and she a lowly woman: in her knowledge not worthy to touch his garment's hem—in her faith able to watch him as from Heaven. (II.269)

What has made this change in Harold? Realizing that he is powerless to help a grieving father, because Harold has no answer to the questions of life and death. He has fallen
back on the same worthless platitudes that he accused his teachers of spouting, and he understands that he has no power to heal. Olive has proven that her faith has value.

In a strange way, Olive has won a power struggle that neither she nor Harold was aware of: Harold’s reason vs. Olive’s faith. Having comforted the old man, Olive earns the privilege of hearing Harold’s confession. He swears her to secrecy.

Confession serves to cleanse the person who confesses, but the confessor is left to deal with the weight of knowledge shared. The confessor, Foucault writes, "was not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth...[his power] was to constitute a discourse of truth on the basis of its decipherment" (67). Thus, Olive feels constrained to carry Harold’s secret until such time as she can help him acknowledge Christian doctrine as truth. Olive suffers with her new knowledge:

Never since her birth had Olive felt such a bewildering weight of pain, as when she awoke to the full sense of that terrible secret which she had learned from Harold Gwynne. This pain lasted, and would last, not alone for an hour or a day, but perpetually...Never across her soul—in which the spiritual sense was ever so bright and undimmed—had come the image of such a mind as Harold’s, a mind whose very eagerness for truth had led it into scepticism. (II.285)

She realizes that Harold’s daily life is a "sacrilege" (II.286); that "this agony of self-humiliation must be to him a living death" (II.287). Olive determines to help
Harold, but before she can do more than pray, her mother is taken ill and Harold has one more chance to see faith in action.

Harold visits Mrs. Rothesay and reads Tennyson to her, but she wants to hear the Bible, and asks Olive to read from "the last few chapters of the Revelations" (II.300).

Olive read them—the blessed words, the delight of her childhood—telling of the heavenly kingdom, and the after-life of the just. And he heard them: he who believed in neither. He sat in the shadow, covering his face with his hands, or lifting it at times with a blind, despairing look, like that of one who, staggering in darkness, sees afar a faint light, and yet cannot, dare not, believe in its reality. (II.301)

When Mrs. Rothesay dies, Olive and Harold exchange some of the most significant words in the novel:

'God,' [Olive] whispered, 'has taken from me the desire of my eyes, and yet I have peace—perfect peace!'

She ceased. Harold looked at her with astonishment. 'Tell me,' he muttered, involuntarily, 'whence comes this peace?'

'From God, and from the revelation of His word.'

He was silent. He sat, his head bent upon his hands; his aspect of hopeless misery went to Olive's heart. She came and stood beside him. 'Oh that I could give to you this peace—this faith!'

His keen, searching glance was tempered with deep sorrow, as he answered, 'Alas! if I knew what reason you have for yours.' (II.319)

The struggle between faith and reason continues; they are apparently incompatible, at least in Harold's eyes.

Eventually, Olive "reasons" Harold into allowing Ailie to study the Bible and attend church. Her arguments for the faith are the standard ones used in Christian apologetics.
for centuries--one might assume that Harold, with his wealth of books and university education might have run into them before, but there is no indication of it--and Harold finds himself beginning to believe. Eventually he exults that he has become a Christian and gives credit for his salvation to Olive.

Harold's conversion to Christianity is not only sudden, but unconvincing. Twentieth-Century evangelicals are fond of saying that "faith is caught, not taught," and perhaps that was Craik's belief, too. Olive's example of Christian virtue--especially her peace following her mother's death--is admirable, but hardly the stuff of which dramatic conversions are made. Her explanations of God and the nature of the world ("'My friend, think you that an all-wise God would leave His work so imperfect as to give to the creature He has made no revelation of Himself?'" [II.322]) are uninspired. But Craik needed to have Harold saved, if only so that he and Olive could marry--for Olive's faith would not allow her to marry an unbeliever.

Ironically, Harold leaves the ministry after his conversion. Now that he believes in Christianity, he will stop living a lie and give himself completely to his scientific pursuits. Why did Craik do this? Throughout Olive we see hints of the author's sympathy for different religions: the Presbyterianism of Olive's Scottish nurse is admirable; the nuns in Christal's convent are praised for
their dedication to God. In fact, the Church of England may come off the worst of all religious institutions in this novel.

The message of Harold Gwynne’s deception and redemption is a non-denominational one. Harold credits Olive with his salvation. Although Craik was considered a novelist who upheld the conventional view of women, Olive wins every battle in this novel. Even after her marriage to Harold, the narrator tells us, Olive "oftentimes controlled both Mrs. Gwynne and Harold. . . by her meekness" (III.333). Craik managed to create a Victorian heroine, complete in her femininity yet aware of the power inherent as her position as the "weaker sex."

In his book, Gains and Losses, Robert Lee Wolff says that Olive was one of the first novels to deal with a man’s loss of faith because of science and a woman’s successful redemption of him through her love (422), but it is not science that led to Harold’s doubts. He tells Olive:

"Face to face with Him I might have worshipped his revelations. But when between me and the one great Truth came a thousand petty veils of cunning forms and blindly-straight precedents; when among my brethren I saw vile men preaching virtue—men with weak, uncomprehending brains set to expound the mighty mysteries of God—then I said to myself, "The whole system is a lie!'" (II.280)

Harold’s young mind, striving after truth, was "hedged in by a thorny rampart of old, worn-out forms’" (II.279).

It was the Church itself—or, rather, its empty ritual
and unworthy preachers—which led to Harold’s agnosticism.

In a passage which may help us understand Harold’s disenchchantment with his fellow ministers, Gertrude Himmelfarb describes the way in which men were led to join the ranks of the clergy:

> The final recourse of Victorian society for the maintenance of misfits and dullards was the church. Young men with no other discernible calling were graced with the highest calling of all. That the church was, at the same time, the refuge of the talented and brilliant did not in any way hinder it from performing the humble but useful service of relieving despairing fathers of surplus sons. (31)

William Irvine claims that in the 1840’s and 50’s, people complained that "among the new generation of churchmen few were as talented as their predecessors and none were as orthodox" (89).

Perhaps this decline in orthodoxy resulted in part from the way in which clergymen were taught. Harold’s professors were "'too idle or too weak to fathom their creed, took it upon trust, did what their fathers did, believed what their fathers believed--were accounted orthodox and pious men'" (II.276). On the other hand, he tells Olive, "'those who, in their earnest eager youth, dared--not yet to doubt, but meekly to ask a reason for their faith--they were at once condemned as impious'" (II.276).

T.W. Heyck relates that the Utilitarians of the 1840’s concurred with Harold’s assessment of the educational system for Church of England ministers: "Since the Oxbridge tutors
were clergymen by profession, they failed to teach anything well, including theology. Religious instruction was taught. by 'drones and sluggards,' instead of by 'professors'" (156). There is no evidence that the other universities which produced ordained ministers turned employed a better breed of teachers. To Harold, a mind incapable of examining the "whys" of belief, a person who blindly accepted "things as they are" without question or reason, a minister who swallowed and regurgitated the established creed with no thought, was beyond contempt.

Mrs. Gwynne tells Captain Rothesay early in the novel that, even as a child, Harold "would come to the root of everything, and would not believe anything that he could not quite understand" (I.244). Because no one took the time to explore Christianity with Harold, the man rejected it as unbelievable. He preferred that which he could analyze and prove.

As one pursuit after another failed to satisfy Harold, and as his hopes for domestic happiness faded, he became more interested in his scientific work. Frank Miller Turner might be describing Harold Gwynne in this passage about Victorian scientists:

Men who construe both religion and science broadly can rarely do business with men who conceive either one narrowly. During the years of the Victorian crisis of faith they found the Christianity in which they had been reared too limited for their intellects and the scientific naturalism that bid for their allegiance too restrictive for the range of their ideals and aspirations. Consequently, they came
to dwell between the science that beckoned them and the religion they had forsaken. (1)

Harold, of course, rejected only the inward form of religion. Because he felt it his duty to provide for his mother, he continued to practice religion outwardly.

Craik apparently felt that science was an acceptable pursuit for an Anglican clergyman of the time. According to Tess Cossett, the 19th Century "began with science and religion not just in harmony, but mutually interdependent . . . Science was seen as a religious pursuit, providing ever more evidence for God's existence" (25). Not until the 1860's did science and religion finally part company. Indeed, in the first half of the century, "The book for would-be Anglican clergymen was Archdeacon Paley's Evidence of Christianity [which equates] the truths of religion . . . to scientific truths . . . [it is] not a religious work at all" (Somervell 19).

Such "natural theology" was widely prevalent and held by even the highest members of the Anglican church. Heyck says that before Darwin's Origins came on the scene in 1859, "Victorians normally did not see science as opposed to religion or theology but as a vital element in natural theology" (52). This partnership of religion and science led many Anglican ministers to dabble in both.

That Craik was aware of this duality is shown in her description of Harold Gwynne's study. This is a long
passage, but worth quoting because of all it reveals about Harold's character:

The breakfast-room was Harold's study. It was more that of a man of science and learning than that of a clergyman. Beside Leighton and Flavel, were placed Bacon and Descartes; dust lay upon John Newton's Sermons, while close by, rested in honoured well-thumbed tatters, his great namesake, who read God's scriptures in the stars. In one corner lay a large unopened packet—marked "Religious Society's Tracts;" it served as a stand for a large telescope, whose clumsiness betrayed the ingenuity of home manufacture. The theological contents of the library was a vast mass of polemical literature, orthodox and heterodox, including all faith, all variations of sects. Mahomet and Swedenborg, Calvin and the Talmud, lay side by side; and on the farthest shelf was the great original of all creeds—the Book of Books. (I.252-53)

Today, with such a wide tolerance for variety of belief and unbelief, we cannot understand how shocking such a collection would have been to the more orthodox of Craik's readers. The neglect of the Bible alone—by a clergyman—would have brought forth horror from many fervent Christians.

Chadwick says, "We are so familiar with a free market of religious or philosophical ideas that we find it hard to realise the discomfort of early Victorians when religious argument came out of the lecture-room or back street..." (I.4). New ideas made the Victorians uncomfortable, but that discomfort did not stop the growing movement away from orthodox Christianity, or the growing tendency of writers to address the issue in their fiction.

Craik obviously was not afraid to tackle the bugaboo of
"loss of faith," as her creation of Harold Gwynne shows. Harold has not so much rejected Christianity as neglected it; the dust on Newton's sermons and the inaccessible Bible show that Harold does not have much time for religion. The unopened tracts represent the unpreached gospel; the telescope on top of them indicates that he would rather look outside for answers than inside his soul. As Wolff says, in Olive, "science is important, but it is not easy to specify how" (420).

Harold does not lose his faith because of his interest in science. He has been struggling with the question of faith for a long time: "Though little more than a boy in years, struggling in a chaos of mingled doubt and faith, I bound myself to believe whatever the Church taught, to lead erring souls to Heaven in the Church's own way" (II.279). Sally Mitchell says that Harold's "knowledge of his own hypocrisy has curdled his faith" (30).

Apparently Harold was not alone in his struggle. In her book Varieties of Unbelief Susan Budd explores such wrestling with faith. She recounts the experiences of 150 people who were "converted" from Christianity between 1850 and 1950, and reveals that more often than not, loss of faith resulted from "moral or social causes" rather than intellectual ones (104). Harold, like many agnostics and atheists of his time (and ours), believed that the Church—and, by extension, the Bible—had nothing to say about the
real world. According to Budd, many people who rejected Christianity believed that Christian beliefs and those who practiced them were "morally wrong" (106).

The question of morality is important because Harold is determined above all things to be morally upright. Despite his unbelief, he does his best to be "'a very honest, painstaking clergyman; doing good, preaching, not doctrine, but decent moralities, carrying a civil face to the world'" --but with a heart filled with "'blackest darkness'" (281). Harold's failure to reconcile himself to his own hypocrisy leads to his despair. He has rejected the teachings of Christianity as "'idle tradition'" and the idea of heaven and hell, but he cannot find a substitute on which to base his morality. Craik understood that this was a dilemma facing many of her contemporaries. The question remained: could one truly do good in the world if the motivation for such moral conduct did not spring from religious belief?

Walter Houghton addresses this issue from the Victorians' point of view:

It was then assumed, in spite of rationalist denials, that any collapse of faith would destroy the sanctions of morality; and morality gone, society would disintegrate. Mill described the age as one in which the opinion that religious belief was necessary for moral and social purposes was universal, and yet real belief was feeble and precarious—a situation well calculated to arouse anxiety. (58-59)

Because morality, both personal and corporate, was seen as a cornerstone of Victorian society, any threat of its
breakdown would be disastrous. As long as people shared a common basis for morality—and at least in the first fifty years of the 19th Century, "[people's] duties were clearly defined by laws based on religion" (Dalziel 168)—society could work together for progress and the betterment of humankind. But when the religion upon which these laws rested was called into question, the consensus was destroyed.

Chadwick writes:

Many educated Christians ceased long before 1860 to believe in a universal flood or Jonah's whale or the 6,000 years of world history. But quiet men in pews knew nothing of these matters and were untroubled until they met the question in a newspaper, a pamphlet, an agitator or a friend. This governed everything. The churches taught something that could no longer be believed, and therefore all the other teachings of the churches fell into question. (2)

As people began to doubt and to openly express their doubt, "English society was poised on a double paradox which its critics, within and without, called hypocrisy. Its practical ideals were at odds with its religious profession, and its religious belief was at issue with its intelligence" (Young 16). This is a good description of Harold Gwynne.

Craik's readers would have been able to identify with Harold's character; like Olive, they might have been scandalized at the idea of an unbeliever serving as an Anglican curate, but because of Craik's careful handling of the situation—and its happy outcome—they accepted Harold Gwynne as she created him. There is no way to determine how
many of Craik's readers were knowledgeable about science—Wolff berates her lack of scientific sophistication—but the idea of a loving woman redeeming a doubter struck chords with Victorian readers. What mattered most was that the Christian faith triumphed over doubt, skepticism, darkness, and moral compromise—science was secondary.
Conclusion: *Jane Eyre* and *Olive*

There are immediate parallels between these two novels. Sally Mitchell says that

The emotional power of *Olive* is the power of *Jane Eyre* twisted one degree tighter. *Jane Eyre* is small and plain; *Olive* is small, plain, and deformed. *Jane* is rejected by her relatives; *Olive* is rejected by her father and mother. *Jane* loves unsought a man who has at least amorous potential; *Olive’s* love is fixed on a man that she believes is incapable of loving a woman ever again. (30)

Both are women’s stories. Both involve struggle and pain that results ultimately in happiness. And, of course, each novel features an Anglican clergyman as a main character. But these men are vastly different. Both seem cold at times, but St. John’s coldness is part of his being, part of his stern Calvinism, without any latitude for human weakness. Harold Gwynne’s apparent coldness, on the other hand, stems from his uncertainty and guilt. He has no faith, until *Olive* convinces him to believe in Christianity—a Christianity based on love, unlike St. John’s judgmental Christianity.

Both men wield power, as men and as representatives of the Church of England. As a brother, St. John expects and receives respect from his sisters. As a son, Harold receives adulation from his mother. The difference is that Diana and Mary see St. John as he is—a hard, ambitious man—and love him anyway, while Mrs. Gwynne is blind to
Harold’s real character.

I think it’s fascinating that neither man has much to
do with other men. Their spheres of influence seem to
encompass only women; we are told that St. John has
established a school for boys (338), but we see him at
Jane’s school for girls. Harold and Olive go to John Dent’s
when his son dies, but it is Olive who communicates with the
old man. Harold has a mother, a late wife, and a daughter.
St. John has sisters and a female housekeeper.

There are other men in each novel, of course: John
Reed, Rochester, and Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre, and Michael
Vanbrugh, Sara Derwent’s brothers, and Captain Rothesay in
Olive. But at Marsh End and in Harbury, St. John Rivers and
Harold Gwynne represent the masculine presence. Isolated as
he is, each man is a ruler over his domain. In fact, the
only aspect of his environment that neither man seems to be
able to control is the young woman whose story we are
reading. Only Jane is able to resist St. John’s
"inexorable" will; only Olive’s determined, persistent love
can break Harold’s wall of pride and superiority.

A good part of each man’s isolation comes from his
status as a clergyman. Immediately recognizable by his
clerical clothing, the clergyman is respected because of his
education and because he represents a larger institution.
For Harold Gwynne, born in a poor Highland cottage, the
achievement of becoming a curate brings a sense of pride,
even though he does not believe the doctrine of the church. For St. John, the ministry was a way to attract attention to himself for good deeds done, even though he hated the routine of the rural pastorate. Neither of these men wanted to become a minister. Harold entered the ministry to assure that there would always be an income for his mother; as she says, "'Alas! he knew, as well as I, that there was no other path open for him'" (I.249). St. John's father was too poor to set him up in business, so St. John became a clergyman.

There are similarities, too, between Jane Eyre and Olive Rothesay, as Sally Mitchell has observed. Jane is an orphan; Olive is rejected in her childhood by her parents so that she is psychologically an orphan. Both women feel that they are unattractive; Jane continually alludes to her lack of beauty, and Olive is all too aware of her spinal deformity. Both are attracted to strong, authoritative men. Finally, both women are interested in spiritual things as well as temporal ones, although their interest takes different forms.

The great difference between Jane and Olive is that Jane's actions can be construed in different ways: was she part of the Establishment, or a rebel? With Olive, there is never any doubt. Although she becomes a successful artist, she does so only to earn money to support her mother and herself; once they go to Harbury, Olive never paints again. Olive is the model of Christian virtue. She is never
angry, overwrought, selfish, or disagreeable to those around her. Because of her exemplary character, Olive seems much less real than Jane.

In their relationships with Harold and St. John, this contrast shows. Olive is submissive, docile, and loving to Harold. She gives him the benefit of the doubt when she is uncertain whether or not he is being sarcastic or means to hurt her. Jane, on the other hand, does St. John’s bidding only up to a point. She will not be coerced--by any means, including spiritual blackmail--into marrying the man.

The difference between the two women emphasizes a difference between Harold and St. John. Harold desires a wife like Olive: a woman who will shine at his hearth and hang on his every word. Craik describes the type of ideal womanhood that Olive exemplifies:

. . . there scarce ever lived the woman who would not rather sit meekly by her own hearth, with her husband at her side, and her children at her knee, then be the crowned Corinne of the Capitol. . . . Thus woman, seeking to strive with man, is made feebler by the very spirit of love which in her own sphere is her chiefest strength. (II.55)

Harold’s wife must be the angelic presence in the home, to make his life on earth heavenly.

St. John is seeking a submissive wife, too, but one who can help him in his own sphere. Much more than Harold, St. John is looking for a helper—a woman dedicated to the same cause and willing to work alongside him to achieve his goal. Jane is not physically strong enough to endure India’s harsh
climate or St. John’s rigid schedule, but we have no doubt of her intellectual abilities or her perseverance. St. John actually might have made a good choice in seeking to marry Jane, if only Rochester hadn’t come along first.

The question of power is uppermost in both novels. Harold Gwynne and St. John Rivers are impressive figures, even apart from their roles as clergymen. Both men command respect from and instill awe in the women around them, but for different reasons. Harold is handsome, dignified, masterful, and intelligent—but it is his neediness that most appeals to Olive. She is attracted to Harold’s need for salvation, and through her prayers and discussions with him she convinces him to embrace both her faith and herself. St. John is intense, dedicated, commanding, and ambitious. He does not attract Jane sexually, but his certainty about his mission in life is awe-inspiring to Jane, who has little surety about anything.

Each novel features a confession. Harold’s dramatic admission of unbelief ties him to Olive emotionally and gives her the upper hand in their relationship. St. John tries to gain a confession from Jane at their first meeting, but fails. Hence, Jane retains her autonomy and some power. St. John’s eventual discovery of her identity comes about by accident, not confession, so there is no lasting transfer of power.

Harold and St. John end up leaving the "mainstream"
ministry; both abandon their rural charges for other fields. In the end, each remains faithful to his God, using his talents in the best way he knows how. At the end of *Jane Eyre*, St. John awaits death without fear, having completed the task he set out to do. Jane's defection was an anomaly; otherwise, St. John has achieved his goal. At *Olive*'s close, Harold Gwynne is reconciled to God and married to an unbelievably good woman. He is no longer engaged in Christian service, but he intends to use his science as a means of doing God's will on earth. I think it fair to say that both St. John Rivers and Harold Gwynne retain much of their power to the end of *Jane Eyre* and *Olive*, as their authors intended.
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