All in the Family? Missionaries, Marriage, and Universal Kinship in *Jane Eyre*

WINTER JADE WERNER

$\mathcal{I}$N Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the missionary St John Rivers, over several months, campaigns to mold Jane into his ideal wife. "I have made you my study for ten months," he declares when he finally proposes marriage; "In the tractability with which, at my wish, you forsook a study in which you were interested, and adopted another because it interested me . . . [and] in the unflagging energy and unshaken temper with which you have met its difficulties—I acknowledge the complement of the qualities I seek."[1] Numerous critics have turned to missionary history to explain this moment of St John's bizarre proposal.[2]

[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Michael Mason (New York: Penguin, 1996), p. 449. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

[2] See, for instance, Sue Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in "Jane Eyre"* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Mary Ellis Gibson, "Henry Martyn and England's Christian Empire: Rereading *Jane Eyre* Through Missionary Biography," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27 (1999), 419–42; Valentine Cunningham, "'God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife': Mary Hill, Jane Eyre and Other Missionary Women in the 1840s," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present:*

Where much has been said on Jane's motivations for defying St John's "despotic ambition" (Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness*, p. 55), scant attention has been paid to the most pressing and perplexing issue of this episode: St John needs a wife, and, for motives that are not obviously clear, only Jane will do.

In fact, while St John offers a litany of reasons as to why Jane ought to become a missionary's wife for her own sake, he says little as to why a wife is so indispensable to *his* work. True, he gives one reason for his wish to wed Jane—"As a conductress of Indian schools, and a helper amongst Indian women, your assistance will be to me invaluable"—but Jane's helpfulness alone little justifies the vehemence with which St John presses his case, especially considering that Jane, using words that St John calls "violent, unfeminine, and untrue," proves not at all to be the "docile" creature St John desires in a wife (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 449, 459). Ultimately, he departs for India with no wife at all, reflecting that he "himself has hitherto sufficed to the toil" (p. 502)—a concluding statement indicating that Jane's absence ultimately leaves him no choice but to take no wife at all.

So why should marriage to Jane specifically represent such a burning issue for St John? Several answers seem readily available: Jane's unique capacity for suffering and "labour" attracts and excites him (*Jane Eyre*, p. 448); he wants to mortify himself by turning from an ideal image (in Rosamond Oliver) to a "real" one (in Jane), just as Jane mortifies herself in drawing Blanche Ingram's picture and comparing it to her own mirror-image; or he wishes to guard against the temptation to pursue a sexual relationship with one of the "Indian women" he anticipates meeting in the mission field. Yet none of these explanations fully account for why any other Englishwoman—trained in missionary work, seized by evangelical fervor, and, of course, adequately plain and hardy—would not make a suitable, if not preferable, substitute to the unwilling and unruly Jane. After all, there were women who aspired to be matched with a missionary, as well as

Anthropological and Historical Perceptions, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 85–105; and Suvendrini Perera, *Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

missionary societies and clergymen willing to facilitate these pair-ings.[3] Perhaps most important, these explanations do not entirely make clear why the novel takes such pains to juxtapose the near-marriage between St John and Jane with an emphasis on their being *kin*, relations so closely connected that they even share the same name ("You are not, perhaps, aware that I am your namesake?—that I was christened St John Eyre Rivers?" [*Jane Eyre*, p. 428]).

To comprehend St John's fixation on marrying his "name-sake" as well as the stress the novel places on the fact of their being blood relations,[4] I argue that we must first comprehend St John's vocation as a missionary—a vocation that the novel marks as being in tension with Jane's and St John's ideas of kinship. That family and marriage are vexed issues in Brontë's novel is no original insight, of course. As Mary Jean Corbett notes, the novel prompts interest in these issues because it seems so intent to foreground how "kinship, far from being given or fixed, is historically created and culturally contested."[5] Yet little critical attention has focused on what *Jane Eyre* insists is a major complicating factor in Victorian ideas of kinship: the extent to which kinship was mediated by the inescapable fact of nineteenth-century religious culture, a culture in no small part underwritten by missionary conceptions of universal kinship

[3] Such women were known enough to be satirized in a short story titled "The Missionary Bride" (1838). Appearing in *Bentley's Miscellany*, "The Missionary Bride" opens with the narrator remarking, "there are not a few instances of young females of respectability and accomplishment educating themselves for the avowed purpose of becoming the wives of missionaries" (C. F. Hoffman, "The Missionary Bride," *Bentley's Miscellany*, 4 [1838], 330).

[4] In a number of other texts published in the same mid-century period as *Jane Eyre*, the marriage (or near marriage) of a character to a cousin seems incidental to rather than part of the driving logic of the union. Examples include the speaker and his cousin Amy in Lord Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" (1842); Caroline Helstone and Robert Moore in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849); Richard and Ada in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53); Henry Esmond and Lady Castlewood in William Makepeace Thack-eray's *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852); Aurora and Romney Leigh in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1857); and Rachel Verinder and Franklin Blake in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868). My point is that *Jane Eyre* is somewhat unique in repre-senting St John and Jane's cousinship as a significant and complicating factor in their contemplated union.

[5] Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), p. ix.

and their efforts to unite "the whole human race in one har-
monious and affectionate brotherhood."[6] In what follows, then,
I suggest that the issues of kinship and marriage addressed by
Jane Eyre—which receive fullest exposition in the question of
St John's choice of a missionary marriage partner—gesture
toward the long history of these issues as they were enacted in
missionary literature. More specifically, I contend that *Jane Eyre*
roots itself in a remarkable and fraught phase of the Protestant
missionary movement.[7]

In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the moral
emphasis on universal kinship in missionary work manifested
itself in a startling way with respect to missionary marriages,
though rarely have critics appreciated its full significance. Prior
to the 1820s and the writing of *Jane Eyre*, missionary societies
not only permitted but actually encouraged missionaries to

[6] *The Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Seventh General Meeting of The Missionary Society,
usually called The London Missionary Society, on Thursday, May 10, 1821* (London: F.
Westley, J. Nisbet; Bristol: A. Browne and T. D. Clarke; Manchester: M. Richardson;
Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh, and Innes; Dublin: La Grange, 1821), p. 1. In their
treatments of nineteenth-century kinship as well as those related debates surrounding
human origin in relation to *Jane Eyre*, Corbett and Cora Kaplan downplay the extent to
which monogenist theories were fueled by the religious revivalism of the early nine-
teenth century. See Corbett, *Family Likeness*; and Cora Kaplan, "A Heterogeneous
Thing': Female Childhood and the Rise of Racial Thinking in Victorian Britain," in
Human, All Too Human, ed. Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 169–202.
However, as Boyd Hilton convincingly shows, "Before 1850, especially, religious feeling
and biblical terminology so permeated *all* aspects of thought (including atheism) that
it is hard to dismiss them as epiphenomenal" (Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence
of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795–1865* [Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1988], p. ix). Considering how thoroughly religion saturated the family life of the
Brontës, let alone middle-class Victorian culture more broadly, it seems an oversight
to neglect the role that religion must have played in mediating Charlotte's understand-
ing of marriage, family, and "kin."

[7] By this statement I mean the fervor for missionary work among British evangelicals
that commenced in the 1790s. Brian Stanley notes that while "neither the Church of
England nor English Dissent in the eighteenth century was so absolutely indifferent to
overseas concerns as is frequently imagined," there was nevertheless "no consistent
acceptance of the missionary obligation by either Anglicanism or Dissent" prior to the
1790s (Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the
Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* [Leicester: Apollos, 1990], pp. 55–56). Interestingly,
the denominational differences that split the broader British Christian community
were deemphasized when it came to missionary work. Thus the modern missionary
movement displayed a remarkable "cultural and ideological unity, in which the ideas
and movements spread from one sections to another with remarkable rapidity" (*The
Bible and the Flag*, p. 57).

interracial marriages. Seeing unions with converted native women to be fiscally desirable, politically strategic, and, most of all, morally and theologically praiseworthy, missionary societies in the early nineteenth century urged their missionaries to enter into marriages with converts. Assuming that influence flowed from husband to wife (in keeping with Victorian notions of the patriarchal nature of marriage), a number of missionaries acted on the recommendation of their societies.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, however, these marriages had produced unanticipated repercussions for missionary work. Although they literalized the metaphor of universal kinship (as native women became part of white missionaries' families), they also proved more reciprocal in terms of influence than missionaries had originally anticipated. As such, intermarriage began to undermine assumptions of British Christians' "natural" superiority over "natives," assumptions that underwrote missionary work in the first place. This situation produced something of a dilemma for missionary societies. While their continued evangelical support for universal kinship in principle meant that intermarriage could never be explicitly outlawed, the destabilization caused by interracial unions was alarming enough to provoke a profound shift in missionary practice. By the 1820s, then, intermarriage was actively discouraged. Seeking to uncouple universal kinship from their former acclaim for intermarriage, missionary societies increasingly portrayed interracial unions as moral pitfalls to be avoided.

This period of controversy informs the thematics of kinship developed throughout *Jane Eyre* and, further, unifies the novel's anxious focus on family formation and interracial marriage—most obviously in Rochester's marriage to the racially ambiguous Bertha Mason—with its sustained interest in missionary work. Thus where many prominent readings of the novel's treatment of race in the colonial context tend to concentrate on Bertha,[8] I suggest that there exists a crucial link

---

[8] See, for instance, readings by Carolyn Vellenga Berman, *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006); Carl Plasa, "'Silent Revolt': Slavery and the Politics of Metaphor in *Jane Eyre*," in *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*, ed. Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 64–93; Firdous Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (London:

between the Bertha-Rochester interracial marriage plot and the later St John missionary plotline.[9] *Jane Eyre*, I propose, makes clear that St John's proposed endogamous union to his kinswoman represents the conceptual alternative to Rochester and Bertha's "incongruous" intermarriage (*Jane Eyre*, p. 350). If the novel disparages Rochester's marriage to someone (at least coded) as utterly racially other, then it criticizes just as vehemently St John's singular determination to wed Jane, a woman who literally shares his blood and name.[10]

In its juxtaposition of St John's resolve to wed someone who, in the narrowest possible sense of the term, is of his own "race" with his lofty evangelical dedication to the universal human "race" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 24),[11] the novel not only displays its attunement to missionaries' sentiments concerning universal kinship. It also underscores how, in their attempt to realize

---

Routledge, 1993); and Susan L. Meyer, "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*," *Victorian Studies*, 33 (2009), 247–68. Feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* do tend to mention St John as well as Bertha, but mostly insofar as the missionary represents an obstacle to (and thus an opportunity to define) Jane's feminist agency and "ascendency into power." See Kaplan, "A Heterogeneous Thing," p. 186; Perera, *Reaches of Empire*, pp. 85–89; and Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 54.

[9] Gayatri Spivak's influential "Three Women's Texts and a Critique in Imperialism" represents the most prominent and sustained attempt to link what she terms the distinct narrative registers of "childbearing" (in the novel's marriage plots) and "soul making" (in the novel's attention to the work of "civilizing" colonial others). Yet even Spivak ultimately foregrounds the irreconcilability of "childbearing" and "soul making" within the narrative logic of the novel, calling the latter "a sort of tangent in *Jane Eyre*, a tangent that escapes the closed circle of the *narrative* conclusion" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry*, 12 [1985], 248). A focus on the ideological structures motivating missionary work, I suggest, closes this distance and makes evident the connection between the novel's foci on familial relations and missionary culture.

[10] My thanks to Saree Makdisi and Beverly Lyon Clark for encouraging me to make this argument more explicit. I am also grateful to Nick Dorzweiler for his infallibly good advice on this matter (as well as many others).

[11] See Charlotte Brontë, "The Missionary," in *The Professor, by Currer Bell, with Poems*, vol. 4 of *Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1873), p. 341. Brontë often played with the various meanings of the word "race," sometimes using the term to refer to the larger "race" of mankind (as in "The Missionary" where she writes, "There [overseas] pagan-priests . . . / . . . / Crush our lost race" [p. 341]) and at other times using it to demarcate a definite group bound by family and blood (in *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Jane asks rhetorically, "how could [Mrs. Reed] really like an interloper not of her race?" [*Jane Eyre*, pp. 23–24]).

those sentiments in practice, missionaries were forced to reject their societies' initial support for interracial marriage in favor of less "corrupting" unions with more appropriate "kin." The novel, then, ultimately exposes the ways in which the history of missionary marriages legitimated and problematized evangelical understandings of "universal kinship."

To develop these arguments, the remainder of this essay unfolds in four sections. The first section recounts the relationship between the concept of kinship and the concept of marriage as set forth in *Jane Eyre*, demonstrating that the novel figures the marriage bond as exemplifying feelings of kinship, while also expressing anxiety that this bond exceeds and surpasses ties of "mere" kinship to sometimes troubling effect. The next two sections delve into the larger missionary context of these anxieties, detailing, first, the ways in which "universal kinship" became such a central precept of missionary work, and, second, how missionaries sought to actualize—and then moved away from—these imagined ties by way of intermarriage. In the final section, I return to St John's desire for his kinswoman in order to argue that this context is integral to understanding fully the argument of Brontë's novel. A key purpose of *Jane Eyre*, I contend, is to explore the contradictions inherent in Christian notions of kinship and marriage, contradictions that the novel suggests are most evident in the ways in which missionaries' efforts to obstruct any interracial mixing belied their outward devotion to the idea of "universal kinship." In making its missionary St John one of the primary foci in its exposition on these issues, Brontë's novel explores the distance that, by the 1820s, had opened between the inclusive beliefs initially touted by missionary supporters and their ever-more-prejudiced practices.

⁂

Jane Eyre has as a central theme the analysis of certain essential contradictions in a constellation of ideas concerning nineteenth-century kinship and race. The first and perhaps most striking of these contradictions is the discrepancy that exists between Jane's idealized expectation of kinship as

automatically conferring intimacy and "full fellow-feeling" and the tenuousness of the family bond in practice (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 432–33). One even could say that Jane's longing to find family is repeatedly offset by the novel's insistence that the family ties are conditional, fragile, and little worth having. Take for instance Helen, who tells Jane before she dies, "I leave no one to regret me much: I have only a father; and he is lately married, and will not miss me" (p. 94); or Rochester, who suffers "family troubles" and has "broke[n] with his family" (p. 145). There is also the Rivers siblings' father, who quarreled and "never reconciled" with his brother (p. 400). Adèle is "forsaken by her mother," and Mrs. Fairfax says of her distant relation to Mr. Rochester, "it is nothing to me" (pp. 165, 115). Moreover, Eliza Reed—further driving home the realization that blood is no guarantor of family—renounces her relationship to her sister Georgiana, declaring, "I wash my hands of you: . . . you and I will be as separate as if we had never known each other" (p. 265). In the world of the novel, Jane's strained familial relation with the Reeds is not exceptional, but rather well within the norm.

The distance between Jane's idealized notion of kinship and feebleness of kinship-in-practice is most distinct in the St John Rivers plotline. When Jane discovers that Diana, Mary, and St John are her "kindred," she exclaims, "I want my kindred: those with whom I have full fellow-feeling," and tells St John: "Say . . . you will be my brother" (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 432–33). Jane's notion of kinship—influenced by the supposition that to be kin is to be intimate equals—is most prominently on display in her insistence that St John, Diana, Mary, and she herself are all entitled to equal portions of the inheritance bequeathed to Jane after her uncle's death. Remonstrating against St John's objections, Jane argues: "I, wealthy—gorged with gold I never earned and do not merit! You, pennyless! Famous equality and fraternization! Close union! Intimate attachment!" (p. 432). Her association of "fraternization" with "equality" (as well as with "close union" and "intimate attachment") is significant: kinship, Jane believes, ought to confer equality, closeness, and union.

Yet St John refuses to return Jane's enthusiasm. Instead, he gives a measured and relatively cold response: "I think I can [be your brother]. I know I have always loved my own sisters; and

I know on what my affection for them is grounded,—respect for their worth, and admiration of their talents. You too have principle and mind . . . your presence is always agreeable to me; in your conversation I have already for some time found a salutary solace" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 433). He finally decides, "I feel I can easily and naturally make room in my heart for you, as my third and youngest sister" (p. 433). The deliberateness of St John's response belies his professed "ease" and "naturalness" in feeling kinship with Jane. Where in Jane's imagination "kindred" necessarily signifies "full fellow-feeling," St John makes clear that kinship, for him, promises no such sympathy. Rather, he ties his affection—not to mention his acceptance of being related to Jane—to certain conditions: "respect for [her] worth," "admiration of [her] talents," and the agreeability of her company.

St John again underscores the tenuousness of family ties when he asks Jane to go with him to India as a missionary wife. Arguing that she must accompany him as his spouse and not his sibling, he asserts that the bond between brother and sister is a "loose tie" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 452). "I . . . do not want a sister," he adds: "a sister might any day be taken from me" (p. 452).[12] St John's choice of phrasing is especially piquant in light of his earlier calculated acceptance of Jane as his "sister"; in a moment when Jane asserts her sisterly relation to St John, he denies wanting the familial tie and adds that the bond between brother and sister is one easily dissolved. Though Jane delights in her newly discovered relationship to Diana, Mary, and St John, and though the reader is to understand this as the fulfillment of what Jane calls her lifelong "craving" for family (*Jane Eyre*, p. 432), Brontë still depicts these familial ties as conditional, uncertain, and, at times, barely binding. The novel, in short, foregrounds the vast distance between the ideal of kinship and how family is actually practiced and experienced, even—or perhaps especially—by its missionary and most staunchly Christian character, St John.

---

[12] On the one hand, St John obviously refers to the Christian edict that no other family relation takes precedence over that of the marriage tie. If Jane were to marry in India, she would certainly be "taken" from St John. On the other hand, St John never makes this concern explicit. Tellingly, Jane's insistence that she shall never marry has little impact on St John's determination that kinship ties are "loose."

In contrast to its depiction of the "loose" ties among kin and family, *Jane Eyre* treats marriage as a remarkably binding and potent relationship (not least because of the impossibility of divorce, as illustrated in Rochester's indissoluble union to Bertha and in the novel's allusions to biblical prescriptions against divorce).[13] Indeed, the premise that marriage for better or worse establishes radical oneness between husband and wife is central to the narrative of *Jane Eyre* and, in fact, generates much of its plot. In the larger context of the nineteenth-century marriage plot, the peculiarity of this narratological design becomes exceptionally pronounced. Where most marriage plots feature some "meaningless and blissful" union (to use F. George Steiner's wry characterization of Celia and Sir James's coupling in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* [1871])[14] to serve as the foil to the "ideal" marriage to be achieved by the end of the novel, *Jane Eyre* is intent on denying that any such "meaningless" marriage could exist. In the world created by Brontë, marriage necessarily means becoming "one person.... not sentimentally or poetically, but with the profoundest sense of reality and seriousness," to borrow Margaret Oliphant's apt phrasing.[15] In other words, the virtues *and* problems arising from marriage in *Jane Eyre* are always tied to permeability and becoming "one" with another—not only in the eyes of society, but also on significant mental, cultural, and spiritual levels.

The "oneness" of marriage in the novel, moreover, is figured in terms of kinship and blood, a formulation that evokes the Christian understanding of marriage as the realization of ideal kinship. Jane, for instance, draws upon the language of kinship to express her romantic feelings for Rochester: to Jane, her bond with Rochester is as corporeal as it is spiritual. Thus when he says to her that they "must become one flesh without any delay," or when she describes herself as "akin to him" and "absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh" once they marry (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 495, 199, 500), their language not only

---

[13] I am indebted to Kelly Hager for pointing this out.

[14] F. George Steiner, "A Preface to 'Middlemarch,'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 9 (1955), 265.

[15] [Margaret Oliphant], "Mill on *The Subjection of Women*," *Edinburgh Review*, 130 (1869), 581.

brings to mind the original union between Adam and Eve. Significantly, it also draws on a particularly embodied notion of universal kinship as used by missionary societies and alluded to by St John to prompt Christian sympathy for the unified "race" of mankind (p. 501).

Jane and St John's hypothetical marriage is imagined in similar terms of "influence," identification, and kinship, but to disastrous ends. Despite having no amorous feelings for Jane, St John nevertheless describes marriage as a "physical and mental union," indeed as "the only union . . . [with] a character of permanent conformity" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 453). Such sentiments give new significance to an earlier statement made by the missionary when he reveals to Jane their relationship as cousins. "But, Jane," he tells her, "your aspirations after family ties and domestic happiness may be realized otherwise than by the means you contemplate: you may marry" (p. 432). Though Jane rejects his suggestion out of hand ("Nonsense. . . . I don't want to marry, and never shall marry!" [p. 432]), St John never fully dismisses the subject. As he reveals with his proposal to Jane, marriage constitutes not just a means of establishing "family ties"; it is, rather, the very basis of any "permanent" familial union. St John wishes to "influence" Jane, as he puts it, and insists to her that in marriage, "A part of me you must become" (pp. 452, 454).[16]

The union of Rochester and Bertha earlier in the novel makes most clear what is at stake in St John's choice of spouse. That Rochester and Bertha's marriage is one of corruption and contamination is no original insight; critics have often observed that the relationship is described as one of "infection" and

---

[16] Strikingly, Brontë hints that this "influence" may not be entirely one-way. Despite St John's conviction of his mastery over Jane and Jane's professed sense of inferiority to St John, the novel leaves open the possibility that if the cousins were to marry, they would be more "equal" than either fully foresees. When she contemplates marriage to her cousin, Jane suddenly apprehends that "revelations were being made" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 452). A "veil," she recounts, falls from St John's outward "hardness and despotism," and having "felt [St John's] imperfections" for the first time, Jane realizes she is "with an equal" (p. 452). The removal of a "veil"—reminiscent of the wedding veil—thus reveals to Jane that there could be parity between St John and herself. One is left to wonder if St John fully appreciates that by marrying Jane, he risks becoming as much "a part of" her as she would become of him.

"penetration."[17] "Rochester," contends Sue Thomas, "represents his contact with Bertha's depravity as a contamination of his being . . . and carries her contagion inside him as a corporeal memory and as a monitory presence" (*Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness*, p. 40). In becoming "a part of" Rochester after they wed, the racially ambiguous Creole Bertha undoubtedly influences her husband's character. What critics have missed, however, is how this language of "penetration" and "contamination" corresponds with descriptions of the novel's other marriages, in particular Rochester and Jane's successful partnering.

   To convey the horror of his marriage to Bertha, Rochester describes their "daily" intimacy in terms of "mix[ing]" air. "I yet saw her and heard her daily," Rochester admits to Jane; "something of her breath (faugh!) mixed with the air I breathed" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 346). In her reading of the passage, Patricia McKee notes that "air" and "spirit" are closely associated throughout *Jane Eyre* ("Racial Strategies in *Jane Eyre*," p. 71). As Brontë was aware, the word "spirit" derives from the Latin *spirare*, "to breathe."[18] Seeming to draw on Robert Burton's famous pronouncement in *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), "Such as is the Aire, such be our spirits,"[19] Brontë capitalizes on the linguistic relationship between "spirit" and "air" to convey Rochester and Bertha's corporeal and spiritual closeness as a married couple. The trope later recurs when Rochester describes his psychic reunion with Jane: feeling a "gale" upon his brow, he could have sworn, he says, "in some wild, lone scene,

---

[17] See Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness*, p. 41; Patricia McKee, "Racial Strategies in *Jane Eyre*," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37 (2009), 70–71; and James Buzard, "'Then on the Shore of the Wide World': The Victorian Nation and Its Others," in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Malden and London: Blackwell, 1999), p. 449.

[18] Elizabeth Gaskell mentions Brontë's particular virtuosity in playing with words in different registers, valences, and languages. Charlotte, she writes, "would wait patiently searching for the right term, until it presented itself to her. It might be provincial, it might be derived from the Latin" ([Elizabeth Gaskell], *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 2 vols. [London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1857], II, 10).

[19] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, Volume 1: Text*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 233. Thanks to Whitney Taylor for bringing Robert Burton and the various valences of "spirit" to my attention.

I and Jane were meeting. In spirit, I believe, we must have met"
(*Jane Eyre*, p. 496). Though Rochester's spiritual "mix[ing]" with
Bertha is "gross" and "impure" in contrast to his airy "meeting"
with Jane (pp. 345, 353), the metaphor of mixing airs suggests
a vital similarity shared by these outwardly unlike relationships.
In both unions, partners become "like one spirit" (to return to
the words of the *Evangelical Magazine*).

In addition to their spiritual intermingling, Bertha and
Rochester also share the same "flesh," albeit in a peculiar
sense. Bertha, the novel stresses, physically mirrors Rochester.
In "stature [she] almost equal[s] her husband" and is as "ath-
letic as he" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 328). With their "dark" countenances
and similar black "manes" of hair (pp. 476, 328, 486), we find
in Bertha someone who not only acts as "Rochester's double," as
Thomas observes (*Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of English-
ness*, p. 49), but who also resembles him. When she transforms
into something like a "Vampyre" after wedding Rochester, even
attempting to "la[y] her teeth" into him, Bertha similarly litera-
lizes the act of securing a "good race" or bloodline by way of
marriage (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 317, 328, 343).[20] In Bertha, then, we see
how the qualities that make for an ideal marriage tip into the
stuff of nightmares: "union" becomes "corruption," "influence"
transforms into "contagion," and oneness with another means
a catastrophic loss of identity and self.

Bertha and Rochester's doomed union thus is a sort of
perverse realization of Jane and Rochester's marriage. Not only
is Bertha united in "flesh" and "assimilat[ed]" by "blood and
nerves" to Rochester (as Jane describes her own marriage at the
novel's end), but, in its mingling of air and spirit, Bertha and
Rochester's marriage also prefigures Jane's spiritual, airy
(re)union with her future spouse—a commonality suggesting
that as different as these marriages appear, the institution of

---

[20] The voluminous scholarship on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) anticipates the
argument I make here. The vampire, "taking the body and blood of the innocent and
transmuting them into [her] own identit[y]," enacts the metaphors associated with
matrimony (H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* [Stanford:
Stanford Univ. Press, 1996], p. 124). Inextricably associated with sexual pleasure,
securing her bond to another by "body and blood," and demanding the obliteration of
her victim's previous identity and connections in the making of the new bond, the
vampire embodies the qualities celebrated in Christian marriage.

marriage invariably possesses certain attributes. "As far as my experiences of matrimony goes," Brontë wrote in an 1854 letter to her friend Ellen Nussey, "I think it tends to draw you out of, and away from yourself."[21] As though in anticipation of this thoroughly ambivalent sentiment, the marriages and near-marriages of *Jane Eyre* appear premised on one central idea: marriage, for better or worse, necessarily means profound "physical and mental union."

Thus a dizzying array of contradictions appears in the novel's treatment of kinship and marriage. In contrast to Jane's belief that family means "full fellow-feeling," the novel portrays such familial ties as "loose" and impermanent. Marriage is the "only" relation that realizes the otherwise empty promises of kinship. Bringing these issues into sharpest focus in St John's behavior toward Jane, the novel gestures toward the history of kinship and marriage as enacted in missionary literature. To understand the forces at work here, we must put ourselves in possession of the background information that Brontë no doubt had in mind.

＆

Dependent on the voluntary contributions of their supporters, missionary societies preoccupied themselves with a central problem: how could feelings of sympathy be engendered in the British Christian heart for faraway peoples? What "definite idea" (to use the phrase from an 1832 issue of the *Scottish Missionary Register*) could enlarge "compassion for the heathen" and make tangible the Englishman's moral responsibility to the multitude of lost souls around the globe?[22] In missionary writing, universal kinship emerged as this "definite idea." "Suggest[ing] to those at 'home' that they had familial connections with unknown 'heathen' kin overseas," the language of kinship with what missionaries called the "universal

---

[21] Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey, 9 August 1854, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995–2004), III, 283.

[22] "Introduction," *The Scottish Missionary Register for 1832*, 13 (1832), p. iii.

human family" constituted a primary "means of identifying with those who otherwise seemed remote."[23]

Judging from its ubiquity, the language of universal kinship must have garnered missionary societies considerable support. Repeatedly societies construed British Christian responsibility to others in terms of kinship and what they felt to be the natural corollary of kinship, sympathy. "Sympathy," announced an 1826 issue of the *Baptist Magazine* (a periodical affiliated with the Baptist Missionary Society [BMS]), "is one of the most amiable feelings which glows in the bosom of man"; "Shall we not feel, deeply feel for those who are 'bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.' . . . Shall we not extend our view to the whole world?"[24] In its annual report for 1827, the influential London Missionary Society (LMS) similarly declared, "it was the design of the Creator, that a feeling of universal brotherhood should bind together the whole human family."[25] Finding perhaps its best expression in the popular abolition motto, "Am I Not a Man And a Brother," Christian universal kinship disseminated the notion that common "man"-hood indicated common "brother"-hood, and, moreover, that this revelation of common kinship would stimulate pity, compassion, and sympathy for the distant "heathen."[26]

The donation lists included at the end of each issue of the *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* offer a striking example of how far missionary societies went in cultivating feelings of kinship between British Christians and foreign

---

[23] Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire, 1840–1900* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 29. See also "The Peace," *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 5 (1827), 393.

[24] [Anon.], "Jesus Wept," *The Baptist Magazine*, 1 (1826), 504, 506.

[25] "Thirty-third General Meeting of the London Missionary Society, Held on the 9th, 10th, and 11th days of May, 1827," *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 5 (1827), 266.

[26] Noting the moment when Jane receives the gift of the new edition of *Marmion*, Sue Thomas convincingly demonstrates that Jane meets St John in 1833, the year that saw the death of William Wilberforce and the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act (see *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness*, p. 11). Thomas continues, "According to this dating, Bertha Mason and Rochester married in 1819; Bertha was born in 1792, Rochester in 1797, and Jane in 1814" (p. 11). Thus Brontë sets significant moments in the novel at a time when, arguably, the missionary rhetoric of universal kinship had reached its most fevered pitch due to popular evangelical support of abolitionism.

"heathens." In exchange for donations, the LMS allowed its subscribers to give Christian names to newly converted children. Regularly (and more than a little surprisingly), donors bestowed their family surnames onto these children. A brief glance over a single issue of the *Evangelical Magazine* reveals that the practice, while not frequent, was fairly common. For just over £3, for instance, a "Mrs. Jacomb" from Cheltenham could give the name Nathaniel Pierce Jacomb to a "Boy in Calcutta"; a month earlier, records indicate, a Mrs. Schroder donated £5 to the LMS to have a "Nat. Girl" in south Africa renamed Sarah Schroder.[27]

The colonial preoccupation with renaming, of course, participated in the broader imperial effort to overwrite indigenous cultural systems and consolidate imperial control. Undoubtedly, some missionaries' desire that native converts change their original names served a similar function. Heike Liebau, for instance, observes that by taking a Christian name, the convert symbolically assured missionaries (as well as their British readership) that he had truly "chang[ed] religious identity.... Since the original name of a local person represented that person's former faith, it could not be used when that person became a Christian."[28] Yet the fact that missionary supporters were willing, even eager, to give foreign children their own family names suggests the sincerity with which these supporters aspired to those feelings of universal kinship espoused by missionary societies.

The popularity of universal kinship almost certainly is due to its success in masking an ideological contradiction inherent to the missionary project. On the one hand, missionary work drew much of its popular appeal from the Christian "ideal of equality": the notion that all men, being made by God, possessed souls that were equal in His eyes and as such deserved

[27] See "Missionary Contributions, From the 1st to the 31st of December, 1842, inclusive," *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 21 (1843), 154; and "Missionary Contributions, From the 1st to the 30th of November, 1842, inclusive," *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 21 (1843), 51.

[28] Heike Liebau, "Country Priests, Catechists, and Schoolmasters as Cultural, Religious, and Social Middlemen in the Context of the Tranquebar Mission," in *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 81.

the same fundamental rights and freedoms on earth.[29] The power of this idea should not be underestimated. Missionaries and their supporters derived much of their moral high ground from positioning themselves against the worst excesses of authoritarianism, as illustrated by evangelicals' efforts to ban slavery. On the other hand, universal kinship also facilitated the "ideology of colonial paternalism" (Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 42), allowing "free-born' Britons" to govern their heathen "kindred" without feeling themselves to be despotic.[30] It comes as no surprise that when missionaries invoked the family of mankind they tended to portray "indigenous people as their younger brothers and sisters (occasionally as their children), not as equals" (Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference*, p. 30).

Demonstrating, to borrow a phrase of Madhavi Kale's, "the prolific instability of empire as a discursive resource,"[31] the language of universal kinship masked a rent between the equality it exalted on a moral plane and the hierarchization it facilitated de facto. So long as "equality" remained an abstract ideal rather than a practicable course of action, British Christians easily believed themselves both equal with *and* superior to all other peoples around the globe. In regarding his fellow man to be his own kin—as like himself, as knowable and sympathetic—the British missionary supporter could bask in "the majesty of the ideal of global kinship" without having to face realities of cultural, national, racial, and moral difference (Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 107). Predictably, when the idea of universal kinship was put into practice it was, in the words of Partha Chatterjee, "destined never to fulfill the normalizing mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was . . . the preservation of the *alienness* of the ruling group."[32]

---

[29] See Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p. 41.

[30] See Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 37–38.

[31] Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 5.

[32] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), p. 10, emphasis added.

Chatterjee's argument is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the troubled history of missionaries' interracial marriages, a history of which *Jane Eyre* is cognizant.

☙

Moments before proposing to Jane, Rochester asks, "Are you anything akin to me, do you think, Jane?' (*Jane Eyre*, p. 283). His question draws upon a discursive tradition in British Christianity that linked romantic love to feelings of kinship. Marriage, needless to say, played an important role in British Christian society not least because it was what established kinship in the first place.[33] Yet marriage occupied an even more curious role within the evangelical scheme of kinship than critics have fully appreciated. Not only was the institution regarded as the foundation of family (an 1841 missionary report, for instance, defined the institution as "the basis of family ties");[34] it was also considered the bond that best epitomized feelings of kinship, as Rochester's question to Jane indicates. If kinship meant feeling for another as though they were (to use the words of the *Baptist Magazine* mentioned earlier) "Bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,'" then marriage was the preeminent expression of this feeling.

The bond of marriage, moreover, was not only kinship *par excellence*; it was also the relation that, in being the "basis of family ties," clarified and superseded in importance all other family relations. "Under the shelter of this domestic economy," argued Jerome Alley in *Vindiciæ Christianæ* (1826), "new or better relationships spring up. The duties due to father and mother, or by them, are more clearly ascertained."[35] Drawing from Matthew 19:5, Alley asserted: "No other relationship of life is to be suffered to interfere between [the married couple]. They are to leave father, and mother, and sister, and brother,

---

[33] See, for instance, Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), p. 197.

[34] Thomas Timpson, *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries: with a Survey of the Condition of Women in Heathen Countries* (London: William Smith, 1841), p. xlviii.

[35] Jerome Alley, *Vindicæ Christianæ: a comparative Estimate of the Genius and Temper of the Greek, the Roman, the Hindu, the Mahometan, and the Christian Religions* (1826), quoted in "Alley's *Vindicæ Christianæ*," *The Christian Remembrancer*, 1 (1827), 9.

rather than suffer the sacredness of their common engagement to be impaired. They are to become one; to be united in the sameness of interest and of heart" (quoted in "Alley's *Vindiciæ Christianæ*," p. 8). The passage, then, makes two crucial arguments regarding marriage. It suggests that conjugal relations in some sense not only extend but also supplant older family ties in the creation of new ones. Simultaneously, it also stresses that marriage is, at its heart, a relationship of "sameness" as well as one of "mutuality" and "equal and impartial duty," in Alley's words (quoted on pp. 8, 9).

As Ruth Perry demonstrates, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a shift from a kinship system based mostly on consanguineal relations to one that privileged conjugal ties.[36] The new stress on the "second family" over the family of origin certainly helps account for the rise of a rhetoric that emphasized the importance (and, crucially, the inescapability) of complete identification between spouses. If Victorians tended to conceive of marriage, in Rachel Ablow's phrase, according to "the Christian notion of husband and wife constituting 'one flesh'" and "the Platonic notion of soul-mates as two halves of a single being,"[37] then evangelical writers in particular advanced these ideas with unparalleled descriptive force. *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (1816), for instance, asserted that marriage meant the joining of "kindred souls in body and spirit [who], uniting before the throne of grace . . . seem like one spirit," and, in *Theology; Explained and Defended* (1818), the Rev. Timothy Dwight praised marriage as "*the most Intimate Union, which exists in the present world.*"[38] According to such formulations, once man and woman had become husband and wife they were to aid each other, fully empathize, and be permeable to the

---

[36] See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004).

[37] Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), p. 10.

[38] [Anon.], "On Marriage," *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 24 (1816), 48; Timothy Dwight, "Sermon CXIX. Seventh Commandment. The Origin, Nature, and Benefits of Marriage," in his *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, 5 vols. (Middletown, Conn.: Clark and Lymon, 1818), IV, 226; emphasis in original. Dwight's sermon was reprinted in the appendix of Rev. John Morison's *Counsels to a Newly-Wedded Pair* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1830).

influence of their partner. When Sarah Lewis argued in her popular treatise *Woman's Mission* (1836) that female "influences" in motherhood and matrimony "act by a sort of moral contagion, and are imbibed by the receiver as they flow from their source, without consciousness on either side," she reinforced the prevalent notion that openness and unconscious reciprocity of influence characterized the best Christian marriages.[39]

The British Protestant imagination thus attributed three remarkable qualities to marriage. First, it held up marriage to be both the foundation and exemplification of feelings of kinship. Second, it suggested that new family ties created by marriage superseded older ties in significance and importance. And, finally, it maintained that marriage established a "sameness" or reciprocity between husband and wife that was a natural result of each being open to the other's feelings and sentiments.

I specify these attributes because they underpinned debates surrounding missionary intermarriage and universal kinship that took place in the early nineteenth century. In fact, it was because these marriages appeared to confer relations of mutuality and openness between racially different spouses that they so deeply unsettled missionary societies. In her study on missionary intermarriages in southern Africa, Julia Wells notes: "Within such relationships, all suggestions of inherent European superiority melted away, as African women became not only intimate partners, normally accorded equal status to that of their husbands, but also the mothers of bicultural children."[40] The phenomenon that Wells identifies is generalizable: as travelogues and missionary reports made public stories of South Sea and African missionaries who had "married non-Christian women and defected from the mission, in effect going native," missionary societies expressed ever shriller alarm that their missionaries identified too much with their native wives.[41] Taking to heart the evangelical exhortation to view racial others as cousins and kin, white missionaries treated (or appeared to treat) native wives as

---

[39] [Sarah Lewis], *Woman's Mission*, 4th ed. (London: John W. Parker, 1839), p. 94.

[40] Julia C. Wells, "The Suppression of Mixed Marriages among LMS Missionaries in South Africa before 1820," *South African Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), 2.

[41] Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 107–8.

partners and peers. In doing so, their marriages threatened to destabilize the hierarchized binaries between "Christian" and "heathen," "primitive" and "civilized," and "Us" and "Other" upon which missionary work was predicated.

In light of their collusion in the imperial project of mapping difference along racial and civilizational lines, it perhaps is surprising that at the turn of the century missionary societies not only tolerated but also encouraged interracial unions. In a 1795 article, for instance, the LMS director Thomas Haweis suggested that missionaries in the Polynesian islands "'would do well' to form 'matrimonial connexions' with the first converts of the natives."[42] As Wells notes in regard to the African missions, "it is clear that the LMS in its early years did little or nothing to dissuade its missionaries from marrying African women. . . . In those days, missionaries wrote home about the exemplary achievements of colleagues who had African wives, often giving credit to the women for their role in smoothing over cultural difference" ("Suppression of Mixed Marriage," pp. 18–19).

At least three considerations motivated the early tolerance of missionary societies for intermarriage. First, from an economic standpoint, unmarried missionaries and missionaries with native wives were cheap to provide for, certainly cheaper than a British missionary family. Second, missionary alliances with the families of native leaders made political sense: to paraphrase a recommendation issued by LMS director Joseph Hardcastle, by taking "indigenous women, ideally from within the ruling aristocracy" as their wives, single missionaries would "cement relationships between the mission society and local powers" (Wells, "Suppression of Mixed Marriages," p. 18). The third consideration, however, was theological. Simply put, missionary societies in their early years felt bound by their religious beliefs to recognize and even embrace intermarriage. As James Cowles Prichard's *Researches into the Physical History of Man* (1813) strongly suggests, the veracity of biblical history was evinced

---

[42] Thomas Haweis, "The Very Probable Success of a Proper Mission to the South Seas Islands," *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 3 (1795), 267. See also Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference*, p. 68.

precisely in the propagation and viability "of mixed breeds in the human kind."[43]

In his study on the subject, historian Damon Salesa makes clear the religious stakes of intermarriage and "mixed breeds." In the 1770s, writers such as Henry Home, Lord Kames, and the planter Edward Long brought the monogenist account of human origin into dispute, a development that focused particular attention on racial crossings and that made the issue "a proving ground for debates about humans, species, races and the natural and divine."[44] Faced with such religiously skeptical polygenists, who distanced themselves from the Adamic account of mankind's origin and denounced miscegenation as degenerate and unsustainable, evangelical groups such as the LMS found themselves backed into supporting racial crossings in the process of upholding biblical literalism. In this way, "Christian universalism and Christian teaching on the sanctity of marriage converged to uphold the legality if not the wisdom of interracial marriage" (Cox, *British Missionary Enterprise,* p. 107), making intermarriage, as the LMS missionary Thomas Lewis argued in defense of his own marriage to a Polynesian woman in 1798, appear "essential to faith and practice" in the early years of missionary work.[45]

In seeming to achieve a degree of intercultural sympathy and openness, however, these unions exacerbated concern that the missionary—and, by extension, British morality itself—did not improve but degenerated upon contact with foreign women. "The 'foreign field,'" observes Cleall, "was feared to harbour forces of corruption and contamination which, through the family, could corrode the very identities of the missionaries" (*Missionary Discourses of Difference,* p. 27). When in 1817 the *Evangelical Magazine* called upon British Christians to "*pray for the Missionaries who are employed in pagan countries . . .* that their purity may be preserved immaculate amidst the peculiar temptations to which they

---

[43] James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind,* 4th ed., vol. 1 (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1851), p. 150.

[44] Damon Ieremia Salesa, *Racial Crossings: Race, Intermarriage, and the Victorian British Empire* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 3–4.

[45] Thomas Lewis, quoted in "Otaheitean Journals," *Transactions of the Missionary Society,* 1 (1804), 65.

are exposed," it implicitly expressed this growing unease among missionary societies.[46] To the extent that intermarriage actually attained and realized the unification of "kindred souls in body and spirit" between spouses, it was seen as an exceptional threat to missionary purity.

The case of the aforementioned missionary Thomas Lewis exemplifies this dilemma. Although LMS directors had urged their South Seas missionaries to form unions with native women, the missionaries, upon reaching the islands, instead decreed all Polynesian women to be "harlot[s]" ("Otaheitean Journals," p. 58). "From the manner in which the children of the natives are brought up," they declared, "it is probable that there is not a female on the island, above the age of twelve years, that is not debased" (p. 58). According to this convoluted logic, all Polynesian women being thus "debased" were also necessarily "heathens," and thus, "to marry an heathen woman was directly contrary to the word of God" (p. 16). When Lewis took a Polynesian woman as his wife in 1798, his fellow missionaries, predictably, refused to acknowledge or perform the rites for his marriage. Insisting that his union was unsanctioned, the missionaries excommunicated Lewis from their community.

Lewis in turn rebutted these charges, asserting that the sanctity of his marriage was determined not by the missionary community but by God and the common "consent" of the nuptial parties:

> I am informed . . . that marriage is a civil ordinance of the God of nature: and the following description is very similar to that which Mr. Eyre was pleased to give once—'Marriage is the conjunction of man and woman, importing an inseparable custom of life. That conjunction is rather of the minds than of bodies, for the consent makes the marriage.' ("Otaheitean Journals," p. 132)

Quoting the preeminent evangelical and LMS director John Eyre, Lewis drew upon the missionary ideal of marriage as "an inseparable custom of life" born of mutual agreement to argue for the legitimacy of his marriage. In doing so, however,

---

[46] [Anon.], "A Call to more Importunate Prayer for the Success of Missions," *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 25 (1817), 7; emphasis in original.

Lewis inadvertently exacerbated his fellow missionaries' dread of "corruption."[47]

Believing their authority to derive from the moral and cultural distance between themselves and the natives they sought to convert, the Tahitian missionaries resented what they saw as Lewis's transgression of cultural boundaries. Where Lewis should "have shone in a conspicuous manner among these dark heathen," they complain, he instead "endeavour[ed] to make friends with the world" and "sunk into the arms of a poor idolatress" ("Otaheitean Journals," pp. 110, 81, 110). The language chosen by the missionaries is revealing. Rather than make himself "conspicuously" distinct from the "dark heathen," Lewis, so the missionaries alleged, had yielded to the sexual temptations of a "harlot" and assimilated himself into the heathen "world." Small wonder that Lewis's assurance of having "an inseparable custom of life" with his wife failed to win over the Tahitian missionaries. Such "inseparability," far from being a missionary aim, was what missionaries most feared. Rather than accept the marriage, the missionaries "summarily tabooed" Lewis "lest [his] contamination infect anyone else."[48]

The missionary George Vason, who married a Polynesian woman, took to wearing the native dress, and joined in native "amusements," further exacerbated British anxiety that intermarriage threatened to breach the cultural and moral barriers separating white missionaries from the "uncivilized" islanders.[49] In a repentant autobiography published in 1810, Vason admitted: "My marriage, which for a time rendered me very happy, threw down every barrier of restraint, which hitherto conscience had opposed to my inclinations. . . . I lament to say, that I now entered, with the utmost eagerness, into every pleasure and entertainment of the natives" (*Authentic Narrative*, p. 112). Yet, Vason asserted, there was a lesson to be learned: "my case

---

[47] I am profoundly grateful to Christopher Herbert for his feedback and sharp insights on this section of my argument in particular, in addition to this essay as a whole.

[48] Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 179. See also p. 180.

[49] See [George Vason], *An Authentic Narrative of Four Years' Residence at Tongataboo, One of the Friendly Islands, in the South Sea, By——* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), p. 110.

may. . . . show the expediency of sending married men chiefly as
Missionaries, or else of not sending them to such tremendously
alluring scenes" (pp. 113–14). Missionaries, Vason's narrative
implies, are whom they marry: if a missionary marries a British
wife he shall remain properly British abroad. A union with an
"alluring" native wife, however, portends mental and cultural
fusion with her people. The curious cases of Vason and Lewis—
the former narrated by a repentant returnee to England, the
latter recounted by hostile missionaries after his death—thus
appear to impart the same message. Because intermarriage
makes a wife "a part of" her husband ("associat[ing]," to use
Rochester's description of his marriage to Bertha, a "nature the
most gross, impure, depraved . . . with" that of her spouse [*Jane
Eyre*, p. 345]), such a union precipitates the intellectual and
moral "contamination" of the white missionary.

    Similar cases arose in South Africa, as the once celebrated
marriages of missionaries to African women became a source of
vexation for the LMS.[50] The abandonment of British cultural
forms in favor of those practiced by his wife, for instance, made
the missionary James Read an object of ridicule, as accounts of
him living barefoot in a clay hut with a Khoekhoe wife trickled
back to London.[51] Perhaps most shocking to British audiences
was the apparent "backsliding" of the missionary Johannes Van
der Kemp. There was a certain irony to this scandal, as just a few
years earlier the LMS had looked to Van der Kemp to improve
its prospects after the public relations disaster of its first mission
to the South Seas (caused in no small part by Lewis).[52] Yet, in
1806, just a few years prior to his death, an elderly Van der Kemp
took a thirteen-year-old Malagasi girl as his wife (Elbourne, *Blood
Ground*, p. 217). Reports of the union scandalized the LMS back

---

[50] My forthcoming manuscript offers a more detailed account of these marriages.

[51] See Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for
Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ.
Press, 2002), p. 214.

[52] The first issue of *Transactions*, which contained the full account of the alleged
fiasco of Lewis's marriage, opened with the assurance that though the South Sea
missionaries "have been attended with the infirmities incident to our fallen nature,"
"the illustrious Vanderkemp . . . [is] about to establish a Hottentot Village . . . for the
purpose of civilizing and collecting such of the natives as are willing to hear the Gospel
of the kingdom" ("Otaheitean Journals," pp. xvii, xviii).

in England and decimated Van der Kemp's reputation in the British press. Van der Kemp, sneered the conservative-leaning *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register,* "took unto himself a Hottentot Venus of thirteen, and, like the Santon Barissa, sacrificed a long life of piety and benevolence to a few days of spiritualized concupiscence which he was unable to gratify, and fell a hasty victim to the impotent attempt."[53]

By the 1820s mixed marriages were shunned.[54] "Native" wives, far from making exemplary partners for the missionary, instead were regarded as both evidence of as well as the catalyst for the missionary's moral and social degeneracy. "A connexion so unequal," proclaimed an 1823 missionary history extrapolating from Van der Kemp's case, "not only sinks a man in the eyes of the world, but tends insensibly to debase the tone of his own mind and manners."[55] To account for this "debasement"—which was so contrary to missionary societies' original expectations of these intermarriages—indigenous women were increasingly represented in missionary literature as irresistible, inherently corrupt objects of sexual desire. White missionaries could not but be tempted by such "tremendously alluring" women in such "tremendously alluring" scenes. By contrast, the English missionary wife was increasingly figured as de-sexed; "she was expected to contain the potentially disruptive male sexuality of her husband, while not, apparently, being a desiring [or desirable] subject herself."[56]

The obvious solution, of course, would have been for missionary societies to forbid the practice of intermarriage entirely. Yet, as Jeffrey Cox observes, the ethical standard explicitly adopted by missionary societies to shore up their moral authority

[53] J. R., "Reflexions on the Conversion of the Natives of India to Christianity," *Monthly Magazine and Universal Register,* 2 (1814), 32.

[54] The missionary synod of 1817 held in Cape Town played a central role in shifting LMS opinion against interracial marriage. After 1817, Elbourne observes, "the LMS would discourage 'racial' intermarriage, would urge envoys to 'civilize' as well as Christianize the [Southern African] Khoisan, and would attempt to project an image of respectability" (*Blood Ground,* p. 231).

[55] William Brown, *The History of the Propagation of Christianity among the Heathen since The Reformation,* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton & Co., 1823), II, 414.

[56] Wendy Woodward, "The Petticoat and the Kaross: Missionary Bodies and the Feminine in the London Missionary Society 1816–1828," *Kronos,* no. 23 (1996), 92.

made banning intermarriage an ambivalent endeavor. "Unable or unwilling to rule out racial intermarriage in principle," missionary societies instead quietly worked to "stigmatiz[e] interracial marriage without outlawing it" (*British Missionary Enterprise*, p. 109). Thus, alongside their strategy to portray intermarriage as fundamentally degrading, missionary societies also began to exalt the importance of maintaining a proper British Christian family abroad. In his "Introductory Essay" for the American edition of *Memoir of Mrs. Mary Mercy Ellis, Wife of Rev. William Ellis* (1836), for instance, the influential missiologist Rufus Anderson argued that the missionary in possession of a British wife would "bear up better against adverse circumstances than one who is unmarried, will be more of a man, a better christian." Moreover, he insinuated, a British wife would protect the missionary from "temptations" that "violate[d] the laws of purity."[57] One imagines that Anderson must have had in mind missionaries such as Vason, whose marriage by his own account "threw down every barrier of restraint."

If we view this history of controversy in a different light, it becomes clear that what alarmed missionary societies—and what also prevented them from banning intermarriage explicitly—was the fact that these interracial marriages did not fail. Instead, they lived up to the expectations placed on them. In producing bicultural, biracial children, these marriages concretized the racial intermingling implicit in the ideal of "universal kinship." Moreover, the conversion of wives to Christianity (in many cases) and the transformation of husbands' minds and manners to accommodate the cultures of their wives demonstrated the full sympathy and radical openness that characterized ideal Christian marriages. A spouse was indeed "a sort of moral contagion," and marriage, creating actual rather than metaphorical bonds of kinship, was undeniably the union of "kindred souls in body and spirit." No matter the author's stance on the morality or advisability of intermarriage, all accounts of missionaries' marriages reinforced this remarkable message. The language used to

---

[57] Rufus Anderson, "Introductory Essay to the American Edition," in *Memoir of Mrs. Mary Mercy Ellis, Wife of Rev. William Ellis, Missionary in the South Seas, and Foreign Secretary of the London Missionary Society* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1836), pp. x, xi.

defend interracial unions in missionary and evangelical publications dovetailed with the rhetoric deployed to denounce them.

∽

As she makes evident in her poem "The Missionary" (1846) as well as in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë was fascinated by missionary work in general and by the conjugal challenges faced by missionaries in particular. In stark contrast to the relatively asexual missionary figure imagined, for example, in R. M. Ballantyne's novels, Brontë's fictional missionaries teem with barely contained sexual longing. The titular figure from "The Missionary" represses what he calls his "carnal will" to carry out his duty ("The Missionary," p. 340), and, below his icy demeanor, St John Rivers "almost rave[s] in [his] restlessness," vowing to "overcome" his "last conflict with human weakness" (as he unflatteringly refers to his feelings for Rosamond Oliver) (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 398, 405). Brontë, in other words, was well aware that even the most respected and zealous single missionaries struggled to control their romantic and sexual feelings.

This struggle would have been no secret to those acquainted with missionary narratives and periodicals written in the early nineteenth century, as the Brontës were. Both Patrick Brontë and Aunt Branwell shared an admiration of missionary societies and society founders of various denominations.[58] Moreover, as Valentine Cunningham notes, Charlotte herself was as much "brought up in Church-Methodism as a kind of surrogate Dissenter" as she was in the Church of England ("God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife," p. 96).[59] Charlotte gravitated especially toward the story of Henry Martyn,

[58] See Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), p. 16; Cunningham, "God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife," p. 96; and Timothy L. Carens, *Outlandish English Subjects in the Victorian Domestic Novel* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 171, n. 12.

[59] Patrick Brontë particularly admired Henry Venn, one of the original founders of the CMS, who exhibited the more ecumenical tendencies that tended to distinguish missionary movement supporters from the stricter denominationalism exhibited by other eighteenth-century Dissenters. For instance, Venn (like Patrick Brontë) set himself against the religious indoctrination of children in contradistinction with a "large number of Evangelical Christians . . . [who] watch[ed] . . . young ones for early signs of evil propensities" (Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, p. 21; see p. 16).

a renowned missionary affiliated with the CMS who worked in India in the first decades of the nineteenth century and who helped sponsor her father Patrick Brontë's education at (the significantly named) St John's College, Cambridge.[60] As Brian Stanley and others have demonstrated, "the forbiddingly pious figure of Saint John Rivers" is "certainly modeled on Martyn."[61]

Martyn's memoir would almost certainly have led Brontë to the stories of Van der Kemp and Read in South Africa.[62] More importantly, however, it also would have alerted her to the ways in which missionaries struggled to reconcile the demands of their "calling" with their romantic feelings and familial aspirations. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of Martyn's narrative was the numerous difficulties he faced in his decision to pursue a life of celibacy as a missionary. At a meeting of the Eclectic Society in June 1805, for instance, Richard Cecil, the renowned Evangelical clergyman associated with the Clapham Sect, warned Martyn that he "should be acting like a madman, if he went out unmarried," and Martyn himself admitted that

[60] See Cunningham, "God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife," p. 96; and Gibson, "Henry Martyn and England's Christian Empire," p. 93

[61] Brian Stanley, "An 'Ardour' of Devotion: The Spiritual Legacy of Henry Martyn" (2004), in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding—Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical—in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, ed. Richard Fox Young (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdsmans, 2009), p. 109. Indeed, Brontë's depiction of St John so closely resembled the real-life missionary that "when her father read *Jane Eyre* he believed he was being presented with old family stories and that Charlotte had had Henry Martyn in mind when she conceived St John Rivers" (Cunningham, "God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife," pp. 96–97).

[62] As Cunningham notes, Charlotte almost certainly read John Sargent's memoir of the missionary Henry Martyn (see "God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife," p. 96). Certainly Charlotte's familiarity with Martyn would have led to her to the (in)famous Read and Van der Kemp. In his *Memoir* (1819) Martyn repeatedly mentions his admiration of Van der Kemp and his elation at finally conversing with both him and Read in Cape Town in January 1806. He says of his initial encounter with the LMS missionaries, "The circumstance of meeting with these beloved and highly honoured brethren, so filled me with joy and gratitude for the goodness of God's providence, that I hardly knew what to do" ([John Sargent], *Memoir of the Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D.*, 3d ed. [London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1819], p. 164). Omitted from the *Memoir* is any mention of these missionaries' marriages, although these marriages were hardly secret. If Brontë was familiar with Martyn's biography, as Mary Ellis Gibson argues, she would have been aware of his meeting with these two missionaries who eventually proved so controversial within the LMS (see Gibson, "Henry Martyn and England's Christian Empire").

having no female company "in a scene and climate of such temptation" as India was a formidable prospect.[63] His misgivings proved justified, as after spending just a year in India, Martyn called for his English love interest Lydia Grenfell to come join him as a missionary's wife. Lydia, it is worth mentioning, never came.[64]

It is unsurprising then, that both "The Missionary" and *Jane Eyre* display awareness that the institution of marriage represented a particularly contested site in missionary work. Regarding intermarriage to be a looming threat to the "cultural boundary" between "'civilised' and 'uncivilised'"—a boundary from which missionaries drew (what they considered to be) their moral, intellectual, and spiritual authority (Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference*, p. 49)—missionary societies began to guard against the "allure" of intimate unions with racial others. Consequently, standard practice increasingly called for missionaries to marry before heading to the mission field, in order to maintain British "family and household structures" while overseas (Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference*, p. 27). To return to Rufus Anderson's 1836 words, the married missionary was now considered less likely to be "led into such temptations" as exist among heathen peoples ("Introductory Essay," p. xi). A wife, moreover, in "secur[ing] [for the missionary] regularity and comfort in his establishment, and such food, clothing, and retirement as habit has made necessary," would support the missionary in being "a better christian" ("Introductory Essay," pp. ix, x). Not only did the adoption of this policy help mission societies head off charges that their missionaries, in taking "native wives," had themselves "gone native," but it

---

[63] Henry Martyn, *Journal and Letters* (1857), quoted in Stanley, "An 'Ardour' of Devotion," p. 118.

[64] In the late 1810s, missionaries were still documenting their struggles to resist the "temptations" of indigenous women. In 1818, the LMS missionary to South Africa Robert Moffat petitioned his fiancée to join him in the mission field to prevent him from "taking a native [wife]." "I could not easily brook the idea," Moffat added, "...but rather than fall into sin, feeling that I am mutable I shall say little and I have seen Missionaries more set against marriing a native than myself and have married" (Moffat, 1818 letter to Mary Smith, quoted in Woodward, "The Petticoat and the Kaross," p. 91).

also conveniently obviated the necessity of banning intermarriages because of explicit racial prejudice.

It is therefore no wonder that St John insists upon a wife prior to leaving for India. Undoubtedly, he would have faced some pressure from his missionary society to procure a suitable partner before leaving England. More threateningly for the austere St John, however, he would also have been cognizant of the well-documented "temptations" represented by the "native" women awaiting him in the mission field. The novel itself alludes to the existence of such temptations in its conflation of Rochester's sultry "West-India" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 346) with the India of St John's missionary work. Not only do the British holdings share similar names and climates in the novel, but Rochester also describes the voluptuous, black-haired Bertha as his "Indian Messalina" (p. 350). Given Rochester's sensuous "Indian" wife haunting the narrative, St John's request—that is, for Jane to "help" him with the "Indian women" by becoming his wife—takes on added significance. Although he labors for the human "race" (pp. 396, 417, 501), a term that aligns St John with the monogenism of the evangelical movement, the novel intimates that St John hopes to guard against the temptation of taking a racially other wife by marrying Jane as a prophylactic measure.

As a missionary who necessarily sought to extend universal kinship, then, St John markedly restricts his choice of wife to one who is already understood to be, in the strictest sense, his kindred. In so doing, he is in effect practicing the most extreme form of what Ann Laura Stoler terms "white endogamy."[65] For not only is Jane a close blood relative of St John (being of his "race," in the sense that Mrs. Reed might use the term [*Jane Eyre*, p. 24]), but she also, as mentioned above, already shares the same name as St John. Brontë thus suggests that St John's lofty goal of realizing the universal human family is belied by how strictly he feels he must constrain his own marriage to one who is *already* his kin, who already holds his name, and who is, he believes, already prepared to "think like [him]" and to "trust like [him]" (p. 448). This disjunction—between St John's laboring

---

[65] See Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002).

for the united human "race" (in the most expansive understand-
ing of the term) and his singular determination not to mix
"race" (in its most narrow, biological, familial sense) in mar-
riage—is integrally connected to the challenges facing early-
nineteenth-century missionary work. Drawing inspiration for the
character of St John Rivers from figures such as Martyn, Van der
Kemp, and Read, who dominated the missionary landscape in
that period, Brontë evokes a moment when the idea of "universal
kinship" exalted by missionary societies was being undermined by
their simultaneous efforts to circumscribe missionaries' marriage
partners according to ever-stricter racial lines.

Here we begin to see, at least in part, why the question of
whether Brontë endorses or critiques the missionary project
has proved so difficult for literary critics to decide. Written in
the 1840s, but looking back on the years when the practice of
intermarriage was straining the missionary commitment to uni-
versal kinship, *Jane Eyre* seeks to thread a middle path between
early-nineteenth-century missionary enthusiasm for intermar-
riage and the excessive backlash against "connexion[s] so
unequal" that subsequently took place in the 1820s and
1830s. Thus, on the one hand, the Rochester-Bertha plotline
condemns "the risks, the horrors, the loathings of incongruous
unions" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 350), thereby lending support to the
1820s missionary determination that interracial partnerings
sink "a man in the eyes of the world [and] debase the tone of
his own mind and manners" (Brown, *History of the Propagation of
Christianity*, p. 414). On the other hand, however, the Jane-St
John plot vehemently denounces the opposite extreme of the
missionary's obsessive determination to marry a woman who is,
he believes, *absolutely* like him—indeed, so much like him that
she poses no risk of sparking inconvenient feelings of romantic
desire. In Jane's final choice of marriage partner, then, the novel
ultimately stresses the importance (to draw on Corbett's apt
phrasing) of "marrying the [person] who is *like* a relation, rather
than the [person] who actually *is* one" (*Family Likeness*, p. 110).
Jane's union with Rochester can thus be seen as occupying an
intermediate space between the interracial, "incongruous un-
ion" of Rochester and Bertha and that of complete and utter
racial sameness represented in St John's proposal.

Rejecting the idea that strong (and quite literal) kinship ties make for strong connubial ties, the novel thus positions itself as a key work in the conceptual transformation of Christian "universal kinship." Where it had been inseparable from interracial mixing in the early nineteenth century, by the late 1800s universal kinship had become a peculiarly "sterile" idea.[66] Indeed, as Gauri Viswanathan demonstrates, the metaphorical global family invoked by British religionists in the late-Victorian period effectively "displace[d]"—rather than irrepressibly brought to mind—the "threatening aspects of interbreeding" (*Outside the Fold*, pp. 187, 190).[67]

In *Jane Eyre*, the "sterility" of missionaries' universal kinship finally finds its fullest expression in the revelation that ten years after Jane leaves Moor House to reunite with Rochester, "St John is unmarried" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 502). The sentence (as declarative and succinct as Jane's own famous pronouncement, "Reader, I married him" [p. 498]) draws attention to the fact that even as the missionary "labours for his race," St John's own "race," the Rivers family line, is doomed to extinction by his decision to remain an "uncontaminated" missionary by foregoing marriage entirely (p. 501)[68]—a fate that St John unknowingly presages

[66] See Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), p. 195.

[67] *Jane Eyre*, one could say, occupies and looks to represent a transitory moment between an early-nineteenth-century "universal kinship" that necessarily involved sexual intermingling (in the novel's relatively frank acknowledgment that St John would indeed like to "mate" and would "scrupulously observe" his conjugal duties) and the "sterile" universal kinship of the late-Victorian period identified by Viswanathan (*Jane Eyre*, pp. 452, 451). For as antiseptic as St John's proposal to his kinswoman is, the novel also makes clear that the marriage would hardly be sexless. In fact part of what repulses Jane in contemplating a union with her cousin is the "monstrous" knowledge that once married to him she would have to "endure all the forms of love (which . . . he would scrupulously observe)" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 451). What makes Jane recoil, in other words, is exactly what St John wants in proposing to someone "like him": a union with someone "of his race," a cousin-marriage with sex sans romantic desire, a coupling from which his "spirit [could be] quite absent" from the contaminating influences of matrimony (p. 451). Using curiously clinical language that subordinates marriage to vocation and reduces sexual intercourse to Christian responsibility, St John repeatedly insists in his proposal to Jane that it is not "the mere man, with the man's selfish senses . . . I wish to mate: it is the missionary" (p. 452). If there is such a thing as "sterile" sexual intercourse, sex without the specter of comingling and corruption, certainly this is it.

[68] St John relates to Jane earlier in the novel, "Rivers is an old name; but of the three sole descendants of the race, two earn the dependant's crust among strangers,

when he declares to Jane that his vocation "is dearer than the blood in [his] veins" (p. 418). That Brontë's missionary decides never to marry, since he cannot marry someone who in his view is essentially himself or at least of his own "race," indicates that Brontë perceived how missionaries' "incorrupt[ibility]" after the 1820s was intimately connected to—and, even more, potentially threatened by—their choice of spouse (p. 502).

By establishing St John's supposed purity in opposition to Rochester and Bertha's "impure" intermarriage, Brontë's novel stages missionary anxieties surrounding kinship and matrimony. Although during the early decades of the nineteenth century missionary societies evoked the ideal of kinship in order imaginatively to extend British Christian responsibility and sympathies to the heathen abroad, *Jane Eyre* suggests that such evocations were ultimately cheap—mostly rhetorical rather than genuinely felt. Only the interracial marriages sanctioned during the first years of the century gave full evidence of missionaries' beliefs in the creed of the fundamental oneness of mankind. However, as these marriages seemed to approach the complete identification and reciprocity between races exalted by the discourse of universal kinship, missionary societies and missionaries grew increasingly unnerved by what they saw to be the practical erosion of missionary authority, an authority that was predicated precisely on the distance separating the "civilized" Christian Englishman from the "uncivilized" foreigner. Although these intermarriages instantiated the principles that helped legitimate the missionary movement—the equality of all believers in the eyes of God, the necessity of cultivating sympathetic bonds transcending race and nation, and the desirability of instantiating actual relations of universal kinship—their very success ultimately forced missionaries to abandon such unions in practice.

Thus even as *Jane Eyre* stresses the traditional Christian notion that marriage constitutes the most complete expression of kinship, it also highlights the troubled historical experiences

---

and the third considers himself an alien from his native country" (*Jane Eyre*, p. 395). With Diana and Mary married at the end of the novel, only St John remains of the Rivers family line.

of missionaries—experiences in which the establishment of openness and union between spouses seemed dangerously close to "contamination," to loss of identity and the attenuation of older forms of cultural, national, even spiritual, affiliation. In attending to evangelical "universal kinship," then, Brontë's novel examines not only the communion promised by this ideal but also the threatening corollaries of achieving such openness. Foregrounding the vast distance between the embodied practice and abstract idealism of missionary kinship, *Jane Eyre* also exposes the limits of the global "human family" that missionaries supposedly wished to achieve.

Wheaton College Massachusetts

ABSTRACT

Winter Jade Werner, "All in the Family? Missionaries, Marriage, and Universal Kinship in *Jane Eyre*" (pp. 452–486)

As a number of critics have shown, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) has as a central theme the analysis of certain essential contradictions in a constellation of ideas concerning kinship and race. In this essay, I propose that these contradictions—which receive fullest exposition in the missionary St John's determination to wed his kinswoman Jane—gesture toward the history of these issues as they were enacted in missionary literature. *Jane Eyre*, this essay contends, roots itself in a fraught phase of the Protestant missionary movement: the brief period of time prior to the 1820s when missionary societies, eager to realize what they termed "universal kinship," not only permitted but encouraged missionaries to enter into interracial marriages. These marriages, however, proved more reciprocal in influence than missionary societies had anticipated. Ultimately they undermined assumptions of British Christians' "natural" superiority over "natives"—the very assumptions that underwrote missionary work in the first place. Unnerved by the reciprocity and openness these unions appeared to establish between spouses, missionary societies began discouraging intermarriage and dissociated conceptions of "universal kinship" from actual racial mixing. This period of controversy unifies the novel's anxious focus on family formation and interracial marriage. In exposing how intermarriages worked to legitimate and problematize evangelical understandings of universal kinship, *Jane Eyre* ultimately suggests that there exists a crucial link between St John's proposed endogamous union with his kinswoman and Rochester and Bertha's intermarriage—the former becomes the conceptual alternative to the latter.