

**POETESSES AND POLITICIANS:
GENDER, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN RADICAL CULTURE,
1830-1870**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how questions of knowledge and power were of major concern to women in different radical communities in the years 1830 to 1870. It contests the view that radical women saw themselves primarily as auxiliaries to men and compares their understandings of their "rights" and "duties", their "power" and "influence" in the following radical cultures: freethought in London in the early 1830s; the Chartist movement; the Unitarian radicalism of the South Place Chapel in the 1830s and 1840s; and the literary, reforming and women's rights circles from the late 1840s to the early 1860s. The thesis explores the different ways in which women shaped new ideas of education and politics and how they remade themselves by becoming "poetesses" and "politicians".

While identifying women's intervention in particular political and intellectual traditions, I suggest that these alone cannot explain women's politicisation. By focusing on women's autobiographical writing in political addresses as well as formal memoirs, I explore the successes and failures of women to politicise their experience of family, social position, work, religion, education and desire. The difficulties of and resistances to making individual experience the basis for a collective practice is an important theme.

The thesis investigates issues of silence and marginality as well as of self-representation and empowerment. By exploring the debates about work in the London needle trades, I examine the exclusion of working-class women from formal political organisations at the mid-century. By contrast, I suggest that some middle-class radicals like Mary Leman Grimstone and Eliza Meteyard attempted as writers to forge a new cultural politics and yet could not conceive that lower-class women might also act for

themselves. The reformation of relations between the sexes was of crucial importance for these radical women and as "poetesses" and "politicians" I suggest that they participated in the construction of mid-Victorian liberalism.

Introduction

POETESSES AND POLITICIANS:

RETHINKING WOMEN AND RADICALISM, 1830-1870

...to break through the trammels of custom and become poetess or politician...

Sophia of Birmingham, 1841.

The axiom "Knowledge is Power" was a guiding principle for many radicals in Britain in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. From the late eighteenth century political radicalism, which attacked the privilege of exclusive government, had frequently been associated with campaigns for freedom of conscience, speech and the press. By the 1830s some radicals were extending their criticisms of monopolistic power to the organisation of industry and advocated the principle of union as an alternative to competition. Other radicals held that men's monopoly over education and knowledge secured their power over women. They suggested that female education was the key to equalising the sexes. Radical politics offered its adherents ways of understanding and thereby changing their social position.

Women's use of radical knowledge, their attempts to bring their own experience to radical movements, and their creation of new forms of knowledge and power form the themes of this thesis. While women committed themselves to particular radical programmes, they stretched the definitions of radicalism and invented their own. We shall begin, therefore, by examining how Sophia, an upper-middle-class Chartist writing in *The English Chartist Circular*, believed women needed to become poetesses and politicians. Her attempts to outline what Chartism meant for women highlight some of the problems and opportunities afforded women by radical culture that will be examined

throughout my thesis.

Part One: Poetesses and Politicians

In April 1841 The *English Chartist Circular* printed "Woman - Her Social and Political Influence", the first of nine letters written that year by "Sophia of Birmingham".¹ Sophia wrote in praise of John Watkins' "beautiful 'Address to the Women of England'", published a few weeks earlier, yet the two writers marked out very different conceptions of what "the political" meant for women, thus revealing the divergence of views about women's political capacity within as well as between radical movements.²

The Chartist movement was still recovering from the government repression that followed the demonstrations and strikes of the "sacred month" of August 1839. Its resources were straining to aid imprisoned Chartists and their families. The general decline in mass participation was accompanied by the disbandment of many of the female Chartist societies established between 1838 and 1839.³ The *English Chartist Circular* was still interested, nevertheless, in the question of women's role in politics and had reported encouragingly on the formation of the East London Female Chartist Total Abstinence Society. Sophia contributed to the debates about education, temperance

¹'Sophia of Birmingham', "Woman - Her Social and Political Influence", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 16, 16.4.1841, p. 67.

²John Watkins, "Address to the Women of England", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 13, 26.3.1841, pp. 49-50.

³For the most recent calculation of the numbers and duration of female Chartist associations see Jutta Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991, pp. 199-200.

and republicanism that were the major concerns of the "New Move" Chartism advocated by the journal.⁴

Watkins and Sophia justified women's public activity in Chartism as an extension of their domestic duties. Women's incursion into the public sphere was for Watkins an extraordinary and temporary measure to defend the integrity and independence of the "labouring man's" family against poverty, class legislation and the New Poor Law. Echoing the calls of female Chartist associations, he argued that "Women should meddle with politics" because "politics meddles with them".⁵ Like so many Chartists, he held that since the interests of wives and husbands were "at one", women would return to their "proper sphere" on the enfranchisement of working men. Then the husband would represent the family's private interests to the legislature by consulting with his wife, "the best advisor in domestic happiness".⁶

While addressing the "Women of England", Watkins opened with an analysis of the class oppression of men that derived from the natural rights discourse of Paineite constitutional radicalism. He contrasted the ruin of families by bad government with the labouring man living "according to nature's laws" in a "cottage of content". Rather than persuading women to become equal participants in the struggle for political rights, he

⁴On the "New Move" of 1840-1 see Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* Pantheon Books, New York, 1984, pp. 258-266. The place of female education in Chartist discussions of social and political transformation is the subject of chapter three.

⁵For this argument see also Titus Clutton Salt, "To the Women of Birmingham", *The Northern Star*, 25.8.1838, p. 8bc and chapter three of this thesis.

⁶For the opinions of Chartist men on female suffrage see Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 37-77.

applauded women who pleaded for their husbands and urged them on to greater heroism. He evoked a mythic history of female public activity from biblical heroines, to early Christian women who endured "cruel torments with serene fortitude", to patriotic commoners like Joan of Arc. In place of a programme of public action, however, he asked women only "to smile on the Chartists, and encourage them to seek that freedom, without which a man is not worthy a 'woman's love!'"

Watkins repeated the call of the Chartist R.J. Richardson for an extension of the suffrage to include unmarried and widowed women who were not represented virtually by a husband. By paying rates and taxes, these women, he argued "participate in the prosperity and adversity of the nation".⁷ Sophia did not respond to this proposition or the question of the female franchise for she claimed interest in "the social and political *influence*" (my emphasis) rather than the "rights" of women. She tied women's political capacity to their duty to raise their children for citizenship and to teach them their rights. Although she may have denied women independent political selfhood, she defined motherhood itself as political. Mothers would continue to be political instructors after the implementation of the Charter. A major argument of this thesis will be that many other radical women defined their rights and citizenship primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of their rights to reason and their duty to educate children, rather than in claims for enfranchisement.

Women's access to knowledge was a central part of Sophia's model of Chartist motherhood. She renounced Watkins' contention that women "are too apt to be caught

⁷See also R.J. Richardson's pamphlet, "The Rights of Woman", 1840. Extract reprinted in Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1971, pp. 115-128.

by appearances", arguing as had Mary Wollstonecraft fifty years earlier, that if women were vain and ignorant it was because men had made them so. By associating women's political capacity and citizenship with questions of female education and child rearing, Sophia placed herself firmly in a republican political and intellectual tradition. Her model of Chartist motherhood was reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's concept of "republican motherhood" to be discussed in chapter one. The *English Chartist Circular* certainly made connections between the two writers, publishing quotations from Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* next to some of Sophia's letters.⁸ Despite the "dangerous reputation" of Wollstonecraft's legacy, and particularly her association with free love and sexual libertarianism, freethinking and Unitarian radical as well as Chartist women, reinvoked Wollstonecraft's call for female education, as will be explored through the thesis.⁹

For Sophia, as Wollstonecraft, social "regeneration" was dependent on the creation of a new rational femininity:-

Shall woman be taunted with frivolity, and said to be absorbed in the contemplation of her own beauty, while man lends himself almost to deify those charms? Shall woman be blamed for habits of thought, when for ages it has been inculcated that woman should *only* attend to *domestic* matters, and the vanities of dress? I decidedly answer no; *man* has never sought to render *us* intellectual companions; and when one mind amongst us has been sufficiently powerful - shall I say *masculine*? - to break through the trammels of custom and become poetess or politician, it has almost invariably been at the expense of her domestic happiness. And why? The reason is not in the distaste for the female poet, or the politician, to the pure

⁸For quotations from the *Vindication*, see *English Chartist Circular* vol. I, no. 22, 28.5.1841, pp. 87-8 on education and patriotism; and no. 27, 2.7.1841, p. 108 on female education, the standing army, the degradation of women, hereditary honours and female vices.

⁹For an important discussion of Wollstonecraft's reputation and sexual politics see Cora Kaplan, "Wild Nights: Pleasure/Sexuality/Feminism" in *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism*, Verso, London, 1986, pp. 31-56.

enjoyments of *home* - a word charming to every woman's ear; but a disinclination in *man* to allow her equality of mind.¹⁰

The suppression of women's intellect, often felt from childhood, frequently provoked radical women's first perceptions of men's oppression of women, their fiercest denunciations of male tyranny and their clearest analyses of gender inequality. The pursuit and expression of intellect and reason constituted an emancipatory and liberatory gender politics for most of the radical women studied in this thesis. For many, this involved becoming poetesses *and* politicians.

Since few women were given the opportunity of speaking in public, especially in front of a mixed audience, many of the radical women examined in my thesis sought to validate writing as a legitimate form of public expression for women. In this respect, it is revealing that Sophia, who expressed herself in prose, specified woman's right to become "poetess", rather than using the more prosaic term "writer". In claiming the more elevated literary title, she perhaps hoped to emphasise the special qualities of "female sentiment". The poet could also speak as visionary and prophet, a persona adopted by some contemporary popular female preachers and by the freethinker Eliza Sharples studied in chapter two.¹¹ As E.P. Thompson and Barbara Taylor have explored, visionary and prophetic language sometimes permitted the expression of the emotional and psychic life and the conflicts surrounding love and sexuality which often

¹⁰Sophia, "Woman - Her Social and Political Influence".

¹¹On female preachers see Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Surrey, 1985 and "Cottage Religion and the Politics of Survival", in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987, pp. 31-56.

were repressed by rationalist radical traditions.¹²

That said, radical women were anxious to be recognised as rational subjects. Derided as bluestockings and meddling politicians, they felt compelled to prove that their intellectual capacity enhanced rather than tarnished their femininity and domestic duties. Sophia urged:-

We, as Chartist women, have then a far mightier effort to make than the men of the same good name. Not only have we to assist *them* in the regeneration of our beloved country, but to contend against those old prejudices which have so long militated against our improvement, and consequently our happiness. We have to *prove* our eagerness to abandon frivolities and seek *knowledge*. We have to show our husbands that in turning poets &c., we do not neglect the *poetry reality*; that, while we cultivate the powers of mind which we feel ourselves to possess, in common with them, we are careful that our houses be more clean, our children better instructed, our own persons scrupulously neat; and that, when in conversation, they are gratified to perceive our taste improved, and never turn a frowning reproof upon any inattention to domestic comfort.¹³

While so many radical women asserted their rights to intellectual freedom they were often conscious of the need to discipline that freedom. Sophia's "*poetry reality*" neatly encapsulates the ambitions and limits of women's radical vision to be explored in this thesis.

Unlike Watkins, Sophia drew up a practical programme of female political activity, although limited to married women. She advocated the formation of female associations where Chartist mothers would "instruct and encourage each other", as educators of

¹²Edward Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993 and Barbara Taylor, "Radicalism in the 1790s", paper delivered at the History Workshop Conference, *E.P. Thompson and the Uses of History*, London, July 1994.

¹³Sophia, "Woman - Her Social and Political Influence".

children.¹⁴ Women should be admitted to the Mechanics' Institutes although "under severe restriction and altogether separate from the youths". Deploring the "glaring, and manifest partiality displayed toward the other sex" she held back from the ideal of intellectual equality with men and female academic excellence, reassuring her readers that:-

we do not wish to aspire to become Astronomers, Mathematicians or political economists, but... intellectual companions to men...¹⁵

Sophia suggested that women would benefit especially from lectures on human and child development, delivered where possible by a woman. She seems to have been influenced particularly by Owenite theories of character formation and indeed the Owenites were active in Birmingham at the time. Contending that children were "naturally good" and parents generally the authors of vice, she proposed that Chartist women instruct other working women on how to raise considerate and inquiring children. Mothers should always answer their children's questions to encourage open, reasoning and unsuperstitious minds. By cautioning against "gossip" and "whispering" she proscribed *irrational* female behaviour and elevated radical women to a position of authority over other women.¹⁶ The assumption of their "enlightenment" frequently led radical women to distance themselves from other women and may have inhibited the popularisation of radicalism among women. In the light of Sophia's prescriptive politics, it is revealing that she did not refer to the existing Owenite female classes or even the

¹⁴Sophia, "True Principles of Education. To the Chartist Mothers of England", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 19, p. 76.

¹⁵Sophia, "Education", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 22, pp. 87-8.

¹⁶Sophia, "True Principles of Education", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 19, p. 76.

Chartist Female Political Union in Birmingham that devised its own political education.¹⁷

By designating a role for woman as "poetess" and "politician", Sophia constructed writing as a political act. Just as she opened up new areas of political action by redefining the relationship between public and private spheres, she developed different ways of writing. Sophia's first letter followed the conventional polemical style of an address. Her second letter "True Principles of Education" was written in a more philosophical mode but, in discussing how women should speak to children, she introduced dialogue and her own experience as an educator. Relations between women and children which were usually constructed as personal were here the subject of political theory and practice.¹⁸ In "Conversations with my Children", Sophia again recounted a dialogue with a child which used the child's "natural" naivety to ridicule the idea of monarchy and to assert the rational and natural principle of republicanism.¹⁹ She employed melodrama here and in "Reflections of Early Childhood" to reveal her contempt for a bigoted, reactionary patriotism and a corrupt, monarchical institution.²⁰ The association between modes of representation and the development of political consciousness forms an important part of the following studies.

¹⁷George Jacob Holyoake reported that the Owenite Rational School in Birmingham had established a ladies' class after the Mechanics' Institute refused a memorial from the ladies requesting one. See "Classes for Mutual Improvement in Birmingham", *New Moral World*, 6.6.1840, pp. 1279-1280.

¹⁸Sophia, "True Principles of Education".

¹⁹Sophia, "Conversations with my Children", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 27, 2.7.1841, p. 108.

²⁰Sophia, "Reflections of Early Childhood", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 33, 13.8.1841, p. 129.

Sophia narrated her own childhood as a way of discussing the development of a political consciousness in childhood. She described her revulsion for the sentiments of the "high Church and King party" voiced by the *Anti-Gallican Monitor* and her military family:-

though I durst not have breathed a syllable against the doctrine... - the fire of resistance to that bloodthirsty maxim, inculcated by it, only burned the more fiercely within my young heart.

Unable to explain why the daughter and sister of a colonel, major and lieutenant should become a Chartist, Sophia used her experience to assert the importance of education for children. She noted that "somehow the seed sown by the wayside, by some chance or other has grown and flourished, until Reform, or Chartism, or whatever it may be called, has become the vital principle of my existence."²¹

In her studies of the mid-Victorian radical soldier, John Pearman, and of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Burnley, Carolyn Steedman suggests that by articulating a "language of exclusion", political radicalism politicised feelings of loss, longing and marginality. Its appeal to a general experience of exclusion rather than the narrower focus on the workplace in subsequent labour politics, could include and give voice to the experiences of women and children.²² Political radicalism enabled Sophia, a woman from an elite, military family to identify imaginatively with "we working

²¹Sophia, "Reflections of Early Childhood".

²²For political radicalism see Carolyn Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale: John Pearman, 1819-1908*, Routledge, London, 1988, pp. 29-30, 66 and 99-100 and "Exclusions" in *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, Virago, London, 1986, pp. 110-124. See Steedman's *The Tidy House: Little Girls' Writing*, Virago, London, 1986 for autobiography, writing and the development of consciousness in childhood.

people".²³ The following studies explore how women used the autobiographical voice to politicise personal experience and to invoke a collective, shared identity in a variety of representational forms which included the political address as well as the formal autobiography. Certain forms of "experience" were privileged over others, however, and this thesis examines how relations between different radical women, and between radical and working class women, were fractured by familial, cultural and class differences.

Sophia aimed to develop a programme of female politics that enabled individual and collective action. She asserted her authority by presenting herself as an educator of children and women and, in her capacity as a writer, the Chartist movement and the public. She may well have chosen the name "Sophia" because of its personification of wisdom.²⁴ Although she grounded women's political activity in their domestic affairs, she did not restrict the domestic to the home. Through her emphasis on "social and political influence", she redefined the relationship between the public and private, the personal and political. The succeeding studies consider how different women organised these relationships and represented themselves as radical women in the period 1830-1870.

²³"A Walk Beyond the Fiveways Gate", *English Chartist Circular*, vol. I, no. 24, pp. 97-8.

²⁴Other exponents of women's rights adopted the pseudonym "Sophia" such as the author of *Woman Not Inferior to Man*, n.p., 1739.

Part Two: Rethinking Women and Radicalism, 1830-1870

A series of important investigations of women in radical movements have been written since the growth of women's history in the 1970s. These include the pioneering studies of Chartism by Dorothy Thompson; of Owenism by Barbara Taylor; and of the early reform movements by Catherine Hall. Comparisons of women's roles within political and protest movements have been drawn by Jennifer Grimmett and Michael Thomis, and by Jane Rendall.²⁵ This area of investigation has opened up challenging questions for women's, labour and cultural history. Where Thompson sought initially to recover the experience of radical women as a distinct "constituency" within Chartism, Alexander and Taylor now use insights from psychoanalytic theory and post-structuralism to examine the construction of sexual difference by radical movements.²⁶ Before outlining the major themes of my thesis I shall refer briefly to the ways in which my research builds on and departs from these existing histories.

Historians have been particularly interested in the extent to which women's

²⁵Thompson, "The Women", *The Chartists*, pp. 120-151 and "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension", in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, pp. 112-138; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London, 1983; Catherine Hall, "The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Early-Nineteenth Century England", *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 124-150; Michael Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in Protest, 1800-1850*, Croom Helm, London, 1982; Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1985.

²⁶Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830's and 1840's: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History", *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 17, 1984, pp. 125-149; Barbara Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism", *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 33, 1992, pp. 197-219.

participation in the early reform societies and Chartism, and in the factory and anti-poor law movements, drew on the traditions of militant communal protest by plebeian women, most notably in the food riot. Indeed, John Bohstedt has argued that women food rioters developed a form of female citizenship.²⁷ By arguing that Chartist women defined their citizenship in terms of their position as wives and mothers, Thomis and Grimmett and Schwartzkopf suggest that they brought the values of the "moral economy of the crowd" into radical and working-class politics.

These are important connections for the very success of radical movements depended on their ability to mobilise large sections of the community, across age and gender, and the decline in the effectiveness of Chartism as a movement coincided, as Thompson and Belchem have argued, with the replacement of the mass platform and community demonstration by the politics of the committee in the late 1840s, which was dominated almost exclusively by men.²⁸ However, there are dangers in eliding women's involvement in radical culture with so-called "traditional" forms of protest. We can easily lose sight of the nature of women's commitment to very different kinds of radicalism, and the ways in which they helped to change the agenda and forms of politics in the early and mid-nineteenth century. By attempting to reconstruct the politicisation of women working within or at the margins of radical movements, I shall be arguing that women's self-representation needs to be understood in terms of their endorsement of and challenges to a range of rationalist, republican and freethought

²⁷John Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots 1790-1810", *Past and Present*, 120, 1988, pp. 88-122.

²⁸Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 122; John Belchem, "1848: Feargus O'Connor and the Collapse of the Mass Platform" in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson, eds., *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1982, pp. 269-310.

traditions.

Sophia's insistence on the importance of education for women was shared by women in republican, political reform, freethought and utopian movements from the 1790's onwards. This should not be surprising for as Edward Thompson, Richard Johnson and David Vincent have shown, education was one of the chief means by which radicals sought to change themselves and their world.²⁹ These historians paid scant attention, however, to the profoundly gendered nature of "really useful knowledge" that for Johnson was at the heart of radical culture. Movements rarely troubled themselves to offer a political education to women and in demanding access to knowledge, women had to battle with radical men, as well as with convention. I shall be comparing the education radical movements provided for women with the education women devised for themselves. Did women seek an academic, domestic or political training? How did they teach themselves and how far did they aim to educate their movements or a wider public?

Richard Johnson has argued that in creating their alternative "really useful knowledge" working-class radicals in the early nineteenth century did not separate formal and informal education but rather extended existing forms of education and recreation, including the home, the workplace and the public house. Similarly, I shall be analysing how women conceived education in its broadest terms. Indeed, one of the

²⁹Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, London, 1982; David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography*, Methuen, London, 1981; and Richard Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working Class Culture, 1790-1848", in J. Clarke, C. Critcher, R. Johnson, eds., *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, Century Hutchinson Ltd., London, 1987, pp. 75-102.

reasons why education was of such pivotal importance to radical women was because it brought together "domestic" and "political" issues and enabled them to move between private and public spheres. The patriotic mother required a sound political education in order to raise her children as good citizens.

Johnson examines how education was central to radical plans for changing the world but also to restructuring working-class culture and behaviour. If radicals set out to re-educate working people, he asks whether they can be seen as representative of the working classes and considers the methodological problems in assessing the "popularity" of the radical leadership. He argues that the possibilities for social mobility for working men were so limited, that self-educated working class radicals tended to find employment within the movements, as journalists, publishers, composers and teachers and had "only their popularity" to depend on. Using Antonio Gramsci's discussion of the relation between the party and the intellectual, he contends that there was an "organic" relationship between working class intellectuals and their class, evidenced by the ability of radical movements to produce their own indigenous and popular leadership. From 1816 to the early 1840s, he concludes that in general, "the relationship between the radical leadership and working-class people was extraordinarily close."³⁰

However the rhetoric of class deployed by radical movements was constructed primarily by male experiences and identities of work, skill and sociability. Radical movements rarely offered women institutional positions from which they could articulate a community between themselves and other women. The "popularity" of radical women is therefore much more difficult to assess. By speaking from a position of assumed

³⁰Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge'", pp. 91-4.

enlightenment, like Sophia, radical women frequently differentiated themselves from other women, even while trying to identify with them. The problems of the relationship between radical and non-radical women and between women from different class and social positions are central to this thesis.

As for Sophia and Wollstonecraft, it was education, or the lack of it, that had taught many radical women that they were different from men. Although most continued to advocate the importance of domestic training for women, they deplored the intellectual confinement of women which, in their eyes, made them inferior and subordinate to men. For these women, their educational deprivation, far more than their political exclusion, prompted their first analyses of the oppression of women by men, yet education was also to be the key to their emancipation.

Taylor and Jutta Schwartzkopf have suggested that women in the early reform and Chartist societies tended to disassociate themselves from the feminist claims of some Paineite republicans and Owenites by prioritising male suffrage over their own.³¹ I will argue that the educational demands of radical women suggest a wider diffusion of and attachment to "feminist" claims for women's reason. However, women's appeal to their rights frequently overlapped with and blurred into a discussion of their duties. Despite its commitment to "natural rights", political radicalism from the 1790s through to Chartism was still concerned with the obligations, as well as the rights, of the individual citizen to the nation, the community and the family. This was doubly so for women, for radical conceptions of female citizenship were always tied to women's responsibilities

³¹Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 265-75 and Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 283-8.

as mothers. Radicals, as much as evangelicals, constructed the ideal of "Woman's Mission".

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have argued that evangelicalism and revivalism more generally were in the vanguard of counter-revolutionary politics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In response to the sexual radicalism of some of the supporters of revolutionary France, the revivalists, led initially by the Clapham Sect, promoted a "domestic religion" which became central to political conservatism. The ideology of "separate spheres" appealed mostly to the middling orders - the professional, commercial, manufacturing and independent farming people - and became a defining feature of a new middle-class identity, which has been detailed so richly in Davidoff and Hall's study *Family Fortunes*.³²

Davidoff and Hall contend that the ideal of "maternal influence" or "Woman's Mission" was a powerful but contradictory component of female domesticity enabling evangelicals like Hannah More to become protagonists in highly-charged political and religious debates while promoting woman's duties as a "relative creature". By the 1830s and 1840s, they argue, the ideology of "separate spheres" was more firmly entrenched within middle-class culture. Although the political and religious crises which had impelled the calls for female domesticity had abated, Davidoff and Hall suggest that the common-sense acceptance of "separate spheres" made it more difficult for women to contest notions of sexual difference. They note that even advocates of women's

³²Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Hutchinson, London, 1987. For a detailed discussion of the Clapham Sect see Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology", *White, Male and Middle-Class*, pp. 75-93.

individual rights like John Stuart Mill believed "in a natural division of labour and of spheres".³³

Claire Midgley's study of the British women's anti-slavery movements and recent investigations of white women's colonial missionary work suggests, however, that the ideal of "Woman's Mission" continued to allow women to intervene in political and religious controversies, even if under the guise of "philanthropy".³⁴ Moreover, as Barbara Taylor has claimed, women within the Owenite movements appealed to woman's "unique moral mission" to claim social and political rights. Their use of "Woman's Mission" reveals a more ambiguous and complex use of sexual difference than Davidoff and Hall have implied. As Taylor contends, Owenite feminism displayed:-

an unresolved tension between the desire to minimize sexual difference and the need to re-assert it in women's favour.³⁵

This tension was present in the politics of other radical women. Indeed, a central argument of this thesis is that the ideal of "Woman's Mission" was constructed by rationalist, liberal and republican exponents of women's rights as well as by evangelicals and Christian prescriptive writers.

³³Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 162-192 and esp. pp. 188 and 454.

³⁴Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*, Routledge, London, 1992. For women's missionary work in the early nineteenth-century see Alison Twells, "'Let us Begin Well at Home': Class, 'Race' and Christian Motherhood in the Writing of Hannah Kilham, 1774-1832", in Eileen Yeo, ed., *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Social Movements*, forthcoming, and Twells, "'So Distant and Wild a Scene': Gender and Ethnicity in Hannah Kilham's Writing from West Africa, 1822-1832", *Women's History Review*, no. 2, 1995; and Brenda Quinn, "Western Women and Imperialism: The Case of Mary Carpenter", M.A. thesis, University of York, 1992.

³⁵Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 30-1.

Tracing the diverse roots of "Woman's Mission" from the 1790s in chapter one, I go on to analyse the different forms of mission and womanhood advocated by radical women. These range from the republican Eliza Sharples preaching the gospel of Liberty; to the Chartist women of Nottingham exhorting "'Tis better to die by the sword than by famine"; to the Unitarian radical Mary Leman Grimstone urging "fire-side virtues" in place of "Monster meetings".

Barbara Taylor and Anna Clark have discussed the class specificity of Chartist appeals to domesticity. They suggest that the ideal of female domesticity and the male breadwinner was part of an attempt to reassert the legitimacy and independence of the working-class family in the context of the dislocation of traditional family and community units by economic change and legislative intervention, particularly in the shape of the New Poor Law. Where some historians like Schwartzkopf and Alexander have seen the endorsement of female domesticity as evidence of Chartist women's conservatism, Clark proposes that Chartist women constructed their own version of "militant domesticity" which allowed them to politicise motherhood and which differed from middle class and Chartist men's eulogisations of woman's role.³⁶

Clark's focus on Chartist rhetoric was influenced by recent historians who have taken the "linguistic turn" and called for attention to the language of popular movements. In his seminal article "The Language of Chartism", Gareth Stedman Jones maintained that Chartism was primarily a political rather than a social movement and

³⁶Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 268; Anna Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity", pp. 62-6 and 77-9. See as well Michelle de Larrabeiti, "'Conspicuous before the World': Radical Politics and Political Discourse in the Women's Addresses to the *Northern Star*, 1839-42" in Yeo, ed., *Radical Femininity*.

that its adherents were motivated not by pangs of hunger but by a political analysis that attributed social and economic oppression to the disenfranchisement of the people and to the monopoly over land and government by the Crown, Aristocracy and the Church.³⁷ Joan Scott has extended Stedman Jones' analysis of political language to consider how political movements produce definitions of class and gender. In response to E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* she asks:-

Can we assume a pre-existing common self-understanding on the part of women, or of all women of the same class? Was there an objectively describable working-class women's "interest" in nineteenth-century England? How did the politics and the appeals of particular movements figure in the definitions of such movements?³⁸

My thesis examines how political and intellectual traditions, especially political radicalism and freethought, enabled women to imagine individual and collective identities and experiences. This investigation has prompted further questions, however, for despite the political commitment of radical women, can we assume that their identities and their ideas derived solely from the political rhetoric of specific movements?

Both Stedman Jones and Scott have been concerned to transform the practice of social history by pointing to the discursive nature of "experience". Scott argues that the use of "experience" by social historians "establishes a realm of reality outside of discourse". She acknowledges that subjects have agency, but that they acquire their

³⁷Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Language of Chartism" in Epstein and Thompson, eds., *The Chartist Experience*, pp. 3-58. A longer version of this article is in Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832-1982*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

³⁸Joan Scott, "Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*", *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, Columbia, p. 90. For her critique of Stedman Jones see "On Language, Gender and Working-Class History" in the same volume.

identity and their "experience" through language.³⁹ While Scott has usefully problematised the category of "experience", perhaps we need to question more closely the category of "language", and in particular how different languages intersect and conflict with each other. Such questions are apposite given that radical discourse frequently ignored or marginalised the existence of women.

Paul Pickering and James Epstein have made important qualifications to Stedman Jones' argument by showing how he privileges spoken and especially written discourse over other forms of communication, particularly the symbolic.⁴⁰ Carolyn Steedman adds that Stedman Jones' focus on written language neglects the importance of psychological processes. She suggests:-

The great crowds of Chartists figured in Stedman Jones' argument clearly were psychological beings, took hold of particular forms of language, appropriated them; came to reorder what they knew through that language; came to think in different ways.

Recognising the possibility of different motivations and interests among the Chartists, Steedman's analysis is particularly useful to the study of Chartist and radical women more generally. Discussing the working-class radical autobiographer John Pearman, she cautions against the "arrogance" of assuming that ideas are always derived from established traditions and published sources. By examining the discrepancies and disjunctures in Pearman's narrative, Steedman considers how he was unable to articulate

³⁹Joan Scott, "Experience", Judith Butler and Joan Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 32 and 34.

⁴⁰Paul Pickering, "Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement", *Past and Present*, 112, 1986, pp. 144-62 and James Epstein, "Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England", *Past and Present*, 122, 1989, pp. 75-118.

secularism and republicanism.⁴¹

Stedman Jones and Scott fail to account for silences. Although my thesis is concerned with women's access to and creation of new forms of radical knowledge, it analyses the ways in which women were marginalised and silenced by radical discourse. While examining how political traditions enabled women to shape their identities and their social world, such traditions were unable to account for all their experience. In particular, radical movements rarely enabled women to analyse or integrate an analysis of their social, class and gender position. Although I shall be suggesting that many radical women did learn about, use and challenge particular intellectual traditions, I want to be careful about ascribing to them an intellectual genealogy on the basis of limited evidence. I shall be arguing that women's knowledge and radicalism derived partly from the disjunctures between their experience and did not always take the form of fully articulated, synthesised analyses. Rather, as in the case of the autobiographer Mary Smith, they might manifest themselves in an anger or defiance that was only partly understood. If we are to explore the process of politicisation, I think we still need a model that can explore the relationship between "experience" and "consciousness" that can take account of psychological as well as social processes.

I shall be exploring, therefore, the political identities of womanhood and class and the forms of radicalism that women devised through a range of political and social movements but these will be examined in relation to other experiences of work, education, religion, family, friendship and sexual relationships. I shall be considering how questions of literacy, speaking and writing were critical to women's access to the

⁴¹Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale*, pp. 66, 16 and 102.

public sphere. Close attention will be given to the forms of representation available to and created by the woman lecturer and writer and the female society to legitimise their public appearance. I shall be examining how the use of different genres, from the political address to the autobiography, structured and facilitated particular kinds of identity.

The first chapter surveys some of the political and intellectual traditions available to the women examined in this thesis by focusing on the politics of knowledge within rationalist, republican and Owenite thought from the 1790s to the 1830s. The second explores Eliza Sharples' turn from Wesleyan Methodism to political radicalism in 1832 and her invention of a "rational Christianity" that preached the "rights of woman". Although she politicised in imaginative new ways her experience of family, faith and love, she was less willing to address the political and social demands made by other women and, in particular, was critical of the collective politics of the Owenite and Chartist movements. The third chapter investigates how Chartist women in London, Nottingham and Birmingham incorporated the freethought and republican traditions of women's rights into a militant and popular politics.

My research confirms Thompson's thesis that working-class women had disappeared almost entirely from formal working-class political organisations by the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter four considers how "the political" was constructed in ways that excluded women by focusing on the debates about women's work in the needle trades. It examines how investigations of needlework prompted philanthropists, Chartists, trade unionists, and women's rights activists to rethink their politics of work and to seek new ways of relieving women workers. These rarely took account of the

needlewomen's analyses of poverty and exploitation and working women were denied agency.

As working-class women were marginalised from political organisation, middle- and upper-class women gained increasing prominence as writers in some of the popular reform journals of the 1840s and 1850s. These radical writers attempted to replace the militant politics of the Chartist mass platform by appealing to middle- and working-class reformers and by promoting rational recreation and a co-operative, consensus-based politics. The reformation of domestic and gender relations was an integral part of this new cultural politics. Chapter five examines how Unitarian radicals associated with the South Place Chapel in London in the 1830s and 1840s drew on Enlightenment rationalism, republicanism and Socialism to criticise economic and political individualism and to advocate the rights of women and the labouring classes. Chapter six discusses how some of these themes were taken up by the popular journals of the late 1840s and early 1850s. The final chapter compares the autobiographies of two working-class girls growing up in the 1830s and 1840s who became teachers and writers. It contrasts the commitment of Mary Smith to Chartism, popular liberalism and women's suffrage with the more conservative brand of Christian philanthropy of Marianne Farningham. It explores the different ways in which they created a radicalism of their own.

Chapter One

THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE IN RADICAL CULTURE, 1790-1834

While the women examined by this thesis claimed the same rights as men to education and reason they were not content with dominant forms of knowledge. Working- and middle-class radical women censured what they saw as the absence of moral considerations from the science of government and from political economy, and they sought new ways of speaking about and organising the relationships between politics, morality, economy, society and science. Public debate and politics could be rejuvenated, they frequently argued, through the "feminine" attributes of compassion, sympathy and conciliation.

In his study of three women writers of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary years, Gary Kelly suggests that Helen Maria Williams, Mary Hays and Elizabeth Hamilton extended the revolutionary ideals of reason and virtue to include a sympathy which would guard against excessive individualism and ensure more co-operative social relations. These writers held very different political loyalties. Although a Girondin supporter, Williams maintained her attachment to revolutionary ideals and later wrote in praise of Napoleon. Mary Hays, Kelly argues, downplayed civic and political rights in favour of an "erotic and intellectual equality with men". By contrast with Williams and Hays, Hamilton opposed the revolution and many "feminist" claims but promoted women's reason as part of a Christian patriotic womanhood. Yet, for Kelly, all three women participated in the "feminization" of middle-class subjectivity and culture, and



as such can be seen as "cultural revolutionaries".¹ The radical women of this thesis might also be considered "cultural revolutionaries" for their ambitions and intentions were concerned not only with specific political or social demands but with the reformation of public and private life.

This chapter concentrates on two key moments of "cultural revolution" where the figure of woman was at the heart of debates about the politics of knowledge. First I shall examine some of the arguments about the nature of commercial society and social and political change in Enlightenment thought and in British responses to the French Revolution. Particular attention will be paid to Mary Wollstonecraft who was a reference point for many republican, Chartist and middle-class radical women. Second, I shall explore the new "science of society" formulated in the 1820s and 1830s in response to the challenges of industrialism. I will focus on the models of union and knowledge conceived by working- and middle-class Owenite women. Their models of association were rejected by many political radicals but were appropriated by the radical Unitarian and liberal reformers examined in the later chapters of this thesis.

¹Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, esp. pp. 31-3, 102 and 3-8. For an introduction to Kelly's notion of cultural revolution see his article "Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism: Women, Writing and Cultural Revolution", in Keith Hanley and Raman Selden, eds., *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, St. Martin's Press, Hemel Hempstead, 1990, pp. 107-130. Nancy Armstrong has also discussed the figure of the "domestic woman" as a civilising agent, and the role of the woman writer in creating a middle-class subjectivity. See Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.

Part One: Reason, Virtue and Knowledge: Political and Moral Science in the 1790s

From its opening dedication to the French educational reformer M. Talleyrand-Périgord, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* declared itself as a treatise on female education, challenging an array of Enlightenment prescriptive and pedagogic writers from Jean Jacques Rousseau, to John Gregory, to James Fordyce.² Her educational thesis was part of a broader attempt to grapple with the opportunities and problems posed to social and moral order by the pursuit of wealth in modern, commercial societies. As Jane Rendall has argued, the *Vindication* took up Adam Smith's concern to produce "a polite and commercial people", by discussing the gender as well as class relations required by modern society. Like succeeding generations of radical women, Wollstonecraft was interested in the issue of political economy, recognised, if not by subsequent historians, at least by the radical dissenting *Analytical Review*, which listed the *Vindication* under the category "political economy".³ Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft was cautious about the social benefits of economic growth and saw the expansion of "scientific" knowledge as the key to social and political improvement. For Wollstonecraft it was knowledge that would ultimately resolve the competing claims of wealth and virtue and that formed the

²Mary Wollstonecraft, "Dedicatory letter to M. Talleyrand-Périgord", *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (1792), Dent and Sons, London, 1985, pp. 9-13. For Wollstonecraft's criticisms of Gregory see pp. 32-42 and pp. 106-110; and of Fordyce, pp. 102-6. The argument with Rousseau extends throughout the *Vindication*.

³Jane Rendall, "A Revolution in Female Manners", unpublished paper, University of York, 1992, p. 13. The *Analytical Review* was well acquainted with Wollstonecraft's preoccupations, as she was a regular contributor to the journal. Barbara Taylor also refers to Wollstonecraft's dialogue with Smith and her analogy between the position of women and the idle rich. See Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism", *History Workshop*, 33, 1992, (pp. 197-219), p. 212. The description of the English as "a polite and commercial people" is from the lawyer William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, (1765-9), cited by Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, 1727-1783*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 1.

basis of her "revolution in female manners". We shall turn now to some of the debates which prepared the ground for Wollstonecraft's revolution.

In common with a diverse range of women writers in the late eighteenth century, Wollstonecraft was inspired by the association of the domestic woman with the march of civilisation within the models of historical change promoted by the Scottish Enlightenment. For Smith and many classical political economists of the late eighteenth century, the accumulation of property was central to a progressive development of society from hunting and gathering to pastoral, agricultural and finally commercial society. However, they debated whether the pursuit of self-interest alone could guarantee civilisation. For political and economic radicals of the middling classes, the aristocracy provided a salutary example of the potentially corrupting effects of affluence. Having rejected the community of goods, the fair exchange and the just price sanctioned by Christian moral philosophy and jurisprudence, they required an alternative moral code.⁴ The classical republicanism of the small city state failed to address the problems of more complex modern commercial societies and so political science had to find new sites for virtue.⁵ While radicals like Paine continued to seek new constitutional arrangements and political institutions, *philosophes* like John Millar began to see a reformation in domestic manners as central to the improvement of public life.

⁴Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millenium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-60*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 13-14 and ch. 1, "Just Exchange, Charity and Community of Goods" pp. 1-34 for the transition from theological to historical theories of the ownership of property.

⁵For discussions of the competing claims of wealth and virtue in Smithian political economy see Rendall, "Revolution in Female Manners", pp. 7-8; Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, especially the editors' introduction; and Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review, 1802-1832*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

Sylvana Tomaselli contends that from the 1770's onwards there was an increasing interest in "the science of woman". Writers attempted to chart the relationship between men and women and tended to emphasise the similarities as much as the differences between the sexes. According to Tomaselli, Enlightenment writers frequently conceived "gender" as a continuum rather than as two separate categories. Using stadial theories of history and comparative studies of different societies, conjectural historians compared the relationship between the sexes at different "stages" in civilisation, asking whether the sexes shared the same history.⁶ This study raised the issue of power relations between the sexes. For Millar there was a critical relationship between the organisation of gender and property. The accumulation of property led to the division of rank and with it a refinement of manners and the increasing domestication and thereby modesty of women.⁷ For William Alexander the emergence of private property and the domestication of women diminished the significance of physical inequalities between the sexes thus removing the tyranny of men over women that characterised "barbaric" societies. It was precisely the companionship between the sexes which guaranteed "civilised", "modern" societies:-

it is not therefore arts, sciences, and learning, but the company of the other sex, that forms the manners and that renders the man agreeable.⁸

Writers like Alexander used such arguments to promote a male sociability based more

⁶Sylvana Tomaselli, "Reflections on the History of the Science of Woman", *History of Science*, xxix, 1991, pp. 185-205. See also her essay on "The Enlightenment Debate on Women", *History Workshop Journal*, 20, 1985, pp. 101-124.

⁷John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages" in *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, 1771, (revised 1779). This chapter is discussed more fully by Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, pp. 25-28.

⁸William Alexander, *The History of Women from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, (1782), cited by Tomaselli in "The Enlightenment Debate on Women", p. 120.

in the private, domestic and local sphere than public, court politics.⁹

The association between civilisation and the relative positions of the sexes inspired many female rationalists to assert women's "natural rights". In 1790 Catherine Macaulay argued that women's subordination to men was the result of social arrangements in savage societies and not the will of Providence. She called therefore for education to guarantee women's "natural rights" and the advancement of civilisation.¹⁰ Sympathisers with the rights of women extended the ideal of the domestic woman as an index and an agent of civilisation. As the Owenite Anna Wheeler urged in 1830:-

When I advocate the Rights of Women... I am also pleading the cause of man by showing the mighty influence Women hold over the happiness or misery of men themselves, according as they are instructed or ignorant... fettered or free... So true is it that though men make the law, it is women who mould the manners and morals of society; and according as they are enlightened or ignorant, do they spin the web of human destiny.¹¹

Wheeler gave "Woman's Mission" a radical edge by arguing that women's guardianship of the moral law necessitated their political and intellectual emancipation. Throughout the nineteenth century, rationalist and radical women invoked women's civilising agency to claim their rights and in support of these even compiled their own comparative

⁹See John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, John Donald Publishers, Edinburgh, 1987, esp. pp. 95-116. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have traced the popularisation of this sociability in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, esp. pp. 108-113 and pp. 416-29.

¹⁰Catherine Macaulay, Letter XXII, "No Characteristic Difference in the Sex", *Letters on Education*, London, 1790. pp. 206-7. Cited by Tomaselli, "The Enlightenment Debate on Women", p. 107.

¹¹Anna Wheeler, *The British Co-operator*, April 1830, cited by Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London, 1983, p. 30. See pp. 30-2 for Taylor's important discussion of "Woman's Mission".

ethnographic and historical studies.¹²

The ideal of women's civilising agency drew heavily on the moral psychology of the Scottish Enlightenment which was premised on the notion of innate moral sensibility. Conceived as more compassionate, sympathetic and nurturing, women, through their influence within the family, could foster a national, moral regeneration. But female rationalists and republicans like Hamilton and Wollstonecraft were concerned about the effects of social institutions on these "natural" qualities. Wollstonecraft feared that their confinement within the domestic sphere could render middle-class women idle and useless like their affected, vain and frivolous aristocratic counterparts. They were to be saved from such a fate by education, patriotism, modest levels of consumption and useful labour, particularly in the form of motherhood.¹³

Wollstonecraft's unease with the idea of innate moral qualities can be seen most clearly in her attack on sensibility as the dominant discourse of the *Ancien Regime*. As Barker-Benfield and others have demonstrated, her *Vindications of the Rights of Man and of Woman* rejected Burke's advocacy of "'inbred' sensibility" formulated in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* of 1790.¹⁴ She attacked sensibility as

¹²See for example Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, Saunders and Otley, New York, 1837 (2 vols.) and Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, 1838, London (3 vols.)

¹³Rendall "A Revolution in Female Manners", pp. 13-17. For Elizabeth Hamilton see Rendall, "Writing for British Women: Elizabeth Hamilton and the *Memoirs of Agrippina*", in Clarissa Campbell-Orr, ed., *Wollstonecraft's Daughters*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, forthcoming.

¹⁴G.J. Barker-Benfield, "Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50, 1989, pp. 95-115, p. 107. For a more sustained discussion of eighteenth century sensibility see his *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, University of Chicago,

enervating and corrupting. It effeminised men and rendered women frivolous and sensual, making them victims of their passions and sexual objects for men. Yet, Wollstonecraft insisted that this condition was the "effect of habit" rather than nature and appealed to reason to cultivate and discipline sensibility.¹⁵

In the early stages of the French Revolution, Barker-Benfield suggests, Wollstonecraft extended to women the "Commonwealth" traditions of independence of mind and freedom of religious conscience derived from the English Revolution and the Protestant Dissenters.¹⁶ Within Commonwealth and later Enlightenment models of the republic, the individual and citizen were constituted as masculine. In claiming the universal rights of the rational individual, Wollstonecraft urged the cultivation of masculine virtues by women:-

the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and raises females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind, all those who view them [women] with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more masculine.¹⁷

However, many revolutionaries in France and Britain rejected historical precedents

Chicago, 1992.

¹⁵Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, cited by Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism", p. 210.

¹⁶Barker-Benfield, "Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman", esp. pp. 95-7. For a discussion of the Commonwealth tradition in English radicalism see Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the age of the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass. 1979, p. 99. For Wollstonecraft and the British radical tradition see Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 1-18.

¹⁷Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, cited by Barker-Benfield, "Mary Wollstonecraft" p. 111. On masculine identification see Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism" pp. 205-6.

which they believed could not address the political and economic problems facing modern societies. To some extent, republicans like Paine dismissed the historical models of Enlightenment thinkers that have been discussed above. Instead, they devised new political constitutions and institutions. These would match political rights to "natural rights" which were derived from theoretical and idealist rather than "historical" models.¹⁸ Wollstonecraft too saw the invocation of precedent as necessarily an appeal to the tyranny of tradition. Her attack on Rousseau's strictures on female education began with a rejection of his return to the state of nature for this negated the possibility of human perfectibility willed by the Supreme Being. The appeal to a state of nature was a red herring for:-

If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim.

Wollstonecraft addressed herself instead to the future:-

Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all will *be* right.¹⁹

Although Wollstonecraft vehemently opposed Burke's use of "'inbred' sensibility", she did not reject outright the idea of innate moral sensibility but hoped that it could be trained by reason. In *Letters from Sweden* she called for sensibility as the basis for human sympathy:-

the grand actions of the heart, particularly the enlarged humanity which

¹⁸For the revolutionaries' break with the past see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Methuen, London, 1984, esp. ch. 1, "The Rhetoric of Revolution". For comparisons of Scottish Enlightenment and Paineite conceptions of the "state of nature" and the use of history see Gregory Claeys, "The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought", *History of Political Thought*, vol. xi, no. 1, Spring, 1990, pp. 68-73

¹⁹Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 17, 30 and 18.

extends to the whole human race, depend more on the understanding, I believe, than is generally imagined.²⁰

Written in 1796, her appeal to "the grand actions of the heart" may indicate a disenchantment with revolutionary rhetoric, for many of her Girondin associates had been eliminated in the Jacobin purges of 1793. Her appeal is resonant of the "virtuous discourse" that for Dwyer characterised the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. Writers like Smith and Fordyce recommended the ideals of *social* sentiment and sympathy in place of a possessive, *individualistic* sensibility. Social sympathy was to be encouraged through the "education of the heart". This was taken up by evangelicals as well as many rationalist educationalists as the basis of the education of girls. Yet even for arch evangelicals and anti-jacobins like Hannah More, the "feeling heart" had to be trained by reason as well as by Christian duty.²¹

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as Ruth Symes has argued, such diverse female educators as Wollstonecraft, the evangelical Hannah More and the Unitarian philanthropist and writer Catherine Cappe appropriated the doctrine of the association of ideas. John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* of 1690 and David Hartley's *Observations on Man* of 1749 were key contributions to this theory which argued that through the association of sensory perceptions, the mind developed more complex understandings. By guiding the child's powers of association, the teacher and, significantly, the educating mother, could nurture the child's moral sensibility. As the

²⁰*Letters from Sweden*, 63n, 64, cited by Timothy Reiss, in "Revolution in Bounds: Wollstonecraft, Women, and Reason", in Linda Kauffman, ed. *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, pp. 11-50, p. 24.

²¹See, for example, Hannah More, "Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters" in *The Works of Hannah More*, H. Fisher, R. Fisher and P. Jackson, 1837, vol VI, pp. 317-31.

child's first instructor, the mother was well placed to instil her child with patriotism. This theme was taken up by female "cultural revolutionaries" through to the mid-Victorian years whether they promoted conservatism or reform.²² There is, however, at least one important difference between Enlightenment and evangelical appeals to the "education of the heart" and those of Wollstonecraft and her descendants: For radical women insisted on women's intellectual equality with men and on women being educated in public as well as domestic virtue.

Although Wollstonecraft claimed the right to think and act like a man, Barbara Taylor shows how she also spoke for and as a woman. Against the artificial femininity produced by patriarchal society, Wollstonecraft laid claim to "an authentic womanhood". For Taylor, this "moment of feminine identification" represents a "utopian aspiration" which has run through feminism. Wollstonecraft's "authentic woman" was modelled on the patriotic mother, whose virtues were instilled by systematic education and by her identification with the public good:-

The being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and, speaking of women at large, their duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother. The rank in life which dispenses with their fulfilling this duty, necessarily degrades them by making them mere dolls.²³

For Timothy Reiss, the appeal to woman's duty as a mother undercut the claim as an individual subject to universal rights and revealed the limits of the universalist vision of the revolutionaries. It marks Wollstonecraft's absorption into Enlightenment liberalism, which relegated women as "second class participants" within dominant

²²Ruth Symes, "Educating Women: 1780-1820", D.Phil. thesis in progress, University of York. Many thanks to Ruth for sharing her research with me.

²³Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 159.

culture.²⁴ Yet, as Joan Scott has suggested in relation to Wollstonecraft's contemporary Olympe de Gouges, the articulation of women's experience, especially of sexuality and maternity, constituted a critique of the male bias of revolutionary discourse.²⁵ The radical descendants of Wollstonecraft examined in this thesis frequently claimed citizenship for women in their capacity as individuals and as mothers who possessed specialised knowledge and the power of instruction.

As Taylor has so forcefully demonstrated, if Wollstonecraft identified with masculinity and femininity, she also attempted to disrupt and transcend gender difference. She describes Wollstonecraft's "wild wish... to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour." Wollstonecraft claimed that women, like men, could occupy a non-gendered position, as universal human subjects, thus refusing Rousseau's assertion that bound by their sex, women, unlike men, could never claim universality. She argued that:-

Men are not always men in the company of women, and women would not always be women, if they were allowed to acquire greater understanding..²⁶

Education offered the utopian hope of liberating both sexes from their gender. Taylor suggests that feminism contains three "impulses...toward masculine identification; toward feminine identification; and toward the transgression/supersession of the categories,

²⁴Reiss, "Revolution in Bounds", pp. 13-15 and 24-5. See Frances Ferguson, "Wollstonecraft Our Contemporary" also in Kauffman *Gender and Theory*, pp. 51-62, for a useful criticism of Reiss's argument.

²⁵Joan Wallach Scott, "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe de Gouge's Declarations", *History Workshop Journal*, 28, 1989, pp. 1-21, esp. pp. 9-15.

²⁶Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, cited by Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism", pp. 197 and 213.

masculine/feminine".²⁷ She adds that the tensions between these are not only inherent in feminism but also in the female subject. This thesis is concerned with how the aspirations for male and female identification and the transcendence of gendered identity surfaced and were correlated in the politics of knowledge devised by radical women in the mid-nineteenth century.

Part Two: "Union is Knowledge": Political and Moral Economy in the 1820s and 1830s

As we have seen, Mary Wollstonecraft believed that political science should address questions of domestic economy and manners as well as government and commerce. The early nineteenth century witnessed the gradual fragmentation of disciplines and notably the separation of moral philosophy from both the science of government and political economy. In Britain, moderate Whigs turned increasingly from political science to political economy, fearing the consequences of political liberty and equality unleashed by the French Revolution.²⁸ Dugald Stewart, disciple of Smith argued that:-

of the two branches of political science - the theory of government and political economy - the latter is that which is most immediately connected with human happiness.²⁹

Stewart and his disciples in the 1820s admitted the importance of the connections

²⁷Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism", p. 201.

²⁸For the perceptions of Paineite republicanism by moderate Whigs see Claeys, "The French Revolution Debate".

²⁹Dugald Stewart, *Lectures on Political Economy* from the *Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, Edinburgh, 1855, vol. viii, p. 23. Cited by Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy, 1815-1848*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 37.

between government and political economy but they did not theorise the relationship between the two. Political economists were castigated by romantic, socialist, working-class radicals and some liberal middle-class radical women for their lack of attention to moral philosophy and the science of government. It was in response to such criticisms that John Stuart Mill began to reconnect these areas of enquiry, to be examined in chapter five.³⁰

One aspect of the fragmentation of eighteenth-century moral philosophy was the emergence in the 1820s of the "Science of Society" or social science. Denise Riley and Eileen Yeo have suggested that, from its inception, social science was identified as an appropriate field of female activity and that the theory and practice of social science was highly gendered.³¹ As Comte argued in 1858, women and the feminised working classes would constitute both the principal objects and practitioners of social science, while the discipline was to be constituted through the elevation of "feminine" principles:-

It is among women, therefore, and among the working classes, that the heartiest supporters of the new doctrine will be found... Having but little influence in political government, they are the more likely to appreciate the need of a moral government, the special object of which it will be to protect against the oppressive action of temporal power. It is from the feminine aspect only that human life, whether individually or collectively considered,

³⁰For Stewart's method and use by subsequent economists including McCulloch and Mill see Fontana's chapter "The Definition of Political Economy: Political Economy as a Social Science" in *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, pp. 79-111.

³¹Denise Riley, "'The Social', 'Woman', and Sociological Feminism" in *Am I That Name? The Category of Woman in History*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988; Eileen Janes Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class*, Virago, London, 1995, forthcoming. I am very grateful to Eileen Yeo for lending me a draft of this manuscript.

can really be comprehended as a whole.³²

Comte's identification of social science with the feminine epitomises for Denise Riley the location of women in the "social" rather than in the "political" in the nineteenth century. Moreover, she argues that Victorian women social scientists and feminists complied with this process by grounding their claims for public usefulness and enfranchisement in their guardianship of the social, rather than in the older democratic appeal to rights and equality. However, the radical women of my study tended to assert the interdependency of social and political rights and duties and like the female Chartists of Bethnal Green, urged that women be political as well as social.³³ The republican, Chartist and Unitarian radical women of the ensuing chapters were critical of possessive forms of political and economic individualism and intervened in a series of debates over what constituted politics, morality and science.

Yeo argues that the "contest" over social science was instrumental in the formation of class and gender relations. She points out that the term "social science" was not coined until the 1820s but that it had emerged from the "science of the poor" and scientific philanthropy that had been developed in the 1790s. These in turn were a response to famine and the shift towards the free market. The older belief that government should regulate the economy in times of crisis was shaken by Smith's advocacy of the free market, although of course it was undermined by many other factors. This marked the culmination of a gradual disentanglement of modern

³²Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 1907, cited by Riley, *Am I That Name?*, p. 48.

³³Riley, *Am I That Name*, pp. 51-66. For the Chartists of Bethnal Green see chapter three of my thesis.

commercial society from Christian moral philosophy and jurisprudence which sanctioned the community of goods, the fair exchange and the just price. For E.P. Thompson, the crisis between "political economy" and the "Moral Economy" of "traditional society" came to a head in the period after 1765, which witnessed a rise in famine and food rioting, and the repeal of much of the paternalist Tudor legislation governing the Poor Law, the regulation of the movement of grain by the magistracy and the maintenance of guild control by the Statutes of Artificers.³⁴ Thomas Malthus' *First Essay on Population*, 1798, signals for Gregory Claeys:-

the end of the effectiveness of the Christian conception of property as a relationship between rights and obligations which fulfilled, within a limited subsistence economy, the needs of all God's children..."³⁵

While local and central government began to relinquish their duties to the poor, philanthropists stepped in to assist the poor in times of need and to instruct them in the art of self-discipline and self-sufficiency. Charity rather than the state would provide the moral conditions necessary for a free market and emphasise the values of Christian duty that bound the national community. Women like the Evangelical Hannah More, the Quaker Elizabeth Fry, the Unitarian Catherine Cappe and the Methodist-Quaker Hannah Kilham sought to expand and systematise women's work with the poor to include charity, pastoral and religious care, and education. By establishing these forms of ministrations as alternatives to the political citizenship promoted by some republicans, they began to feminise aspects of social science and to separate the social from the

³⁴E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd", *Past and Present*, no. 50, 1971, reprinted in E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, Merlin Press, London, 1991, pp. 185-258. For his response to critics including Hont and Ignatieff see "The Moral Economy Reviewed" in the same volume, pp. 259-351.

³⁵Claeys, *Machinery, Men and the Millennium*, p. 21.

political, as Yeo and Riley have argued.

While all these writers emphasised women's moral and Christian duty, their projects were, nevertheless profoundly rational and systematic, deriving in part from the emphasis on the inspection of the soul and accountability to God which was at the heart of evangelical and dissenting faith in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The rational as well as moral aspects of Christian duty would be important components of Marianne Farningham's and Frances Power Cobbe's concepts of the rights and duties of women in the late nineteenth century, as will be explored in chapter seven.

Recent historiography of liberalism has tried to disinvest political economy from its longstanding reputation as "the dismal science" by pointing to the continued interest in moral and ethical questions and the legacy of Smith. Biancamaria Fontana argues that for the writers in the *Edinburgh Review* "political economy" designated an analytical approach rather than a "holistic social theory", as it was perceived by popular radical, Christian, romantic and conservative critics.³⁶ Boyd Hilton argues that the guiding principles of many of the chief exponents of political economy in and outside Parliament derived more from evangelicalism and the doctrine of atonement than classical or Utilitarian political economy.³⁷ Stephan Collini contends that by the mid-nineteenth century, liberal public moralists and intellectuals promoted the importance of character and altruism as much as individual self-interest. Even leading utilitarians, he suggests,

³⁶Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, pp. 7-9. Fontana argues that from its inception in 1814 the *Edinburgh Review* was one of the main promoters of the ideas of Hume, Smith and Dugald Stewart in England.

³⁷Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988.

were influenced by romantic criticisms of industrialism. Of particular significance were the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle and Ruskin who validated art as experience and the importance of tradition and accumulated wisdom as a check on radicalism's impulse to create institutions and constitutions anew.³⁸ Intellectual historians like Fontana are right to identify the complex trajectory of eighteenth-century conjectural history and moral science into nineteenth-century political economy. However for the inmates of the Poor Law Bastille or those who lived in its shadows, "Political Economy" was both a "dismal science" and an immoral, punitive method of government. The moral, as much as social science, was a point of contest.

Although many political and Owenite radicals used some of the premises of classical and Utilitarian political economy, they challenged many of their propositions and methods and insisted on the need to prioritise moral considerations in both the science of government and political economy. These issues were contested not just in relation to specific acts of legislation like the New Poor Law, but over the democratic control of knowledge and the emergence of "social science" in the 1820s. In general, early nineteenth-century political economists increasingly adopted an abstract deductive method, epitomised by Ricardo's theory of the "natural economy". By the early 1830s, according to Berg, they speculated less about technological change, the division of labour and labour productivity, which begged important questions about the consequences of economic organisation for working people, and more about fixed capital

³⁸The romantic influence on liberal thought is best demonstrated in Mill's review of Bentham and utilitarianism in the light of his reading of Coleridge and his engagement with the St. Simonians and Compté. See J.S. Mill, *Autobiography*, Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, London, 1873, especially pp. 132-183; the essays "Bentham" and "Coleridge" in *Dissertations and Discussions* vol. I; John Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill*, University of Toronto Press, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968. See also chapter five of this thesis.

formation.³⁹ Conservative and radical critics of political economy believed that this abstract method failed to account for the human experience of industrialism.

Yeo contends that the increasing abstraction of political economy was matched in the 1820s by a contest within social science over the idea of "experience" and the methods of investigation. She argues that socialist social science attempted to devise policy on the basis of the experience of the poor. For example, socialists collated details of wages and living standards and consulted with trade unions and working-class associations. By contrast, Utilitarians and middle class statisticians became increasingly dismissive of the "partiality" of such accounts and attempted to construct social investigation on a more "objective footing", which appealed to "facts" rather than trying to balance conflicting views.⁴⁰

Another area of contention between utilitarian political economy and socialist social science was over theories of character and character formation. Each emphasised the importance of environment rather than nature in forming character. Yeo argues that utilitarian conceptions of human psychology were based on an impulse to happiness defined primarily as the pursuit of self-interest and power. These related almost exclusively to the predominantly male public sphere of commerce and politics. By contrast socialist psychology attempted to fuse what it identified as masculine and feminine attributes thus drawing on experience of domestic and family life:-

Socialist psychology provided a model of the fully developed human potential which constituted happiness. Not only were so-called 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics of human nature reunited, but the supposedly

³⁹Berg, *The Machinery Question*, pp. 45 and 16.

⁴⁰Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, pp. 31-3.

'feminine' moral aspect, like love, mutuality and compassion were seen to be the most human for both men and women.⁴¹

In 1839 the *Scottish Chartist Circular* saw the union of the "masculine" and the "feminine" as an integral part of a new politics and science:-

By *politics* we mean the *science of human progression*; and this requires the elevation of woman as well as man in the scale of society - the increase of her happiness as well as his - the social equality of woman with man, as a man with his fellow - and the improvement of the physical, moral and intellectual condition of all individuals which compose the great human family.⁴²

Barbara Taylor has suggested that the appeal to the "feminine" virtues of sympathy and compassion was one of the major attractions of Owenism for women. I shall be arguing that radical Unitarian and liberal women attempted to inject what they saw as "feminine" principles into the politics of liberalism and reform in the mid-Victorian years.

Despite their shared concern for the importance of environment on character, education was a major area of disagreement that divided middle- and working-class radicals, utilitarians and socialist scientists. Nowhere was this more evident than in the struggles over the curriculum and management of the Mechanics' Institutes established by the Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge which saw as one of its main aims the teaching of political economy. As Richard Johnson and Eileen Yeo have discussed, working-class students battled for democratic control over the Institutes and the right to debate political and religious topics and to explore alternative political

⁴¹Yeo, "The Contest for Social Science", ch. 2, "Social Science From Below", p. 64 and pp. 27-8 and 61-67. For a discussion of feminism and the Owenite science of society see Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 19-56.

⁴²*Scottish Chartist Circular*, 9.12.1839. Cited by Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984, p. 125. For a discussion of how this article was used by a liberal advocate of women's rights see chapter six.

economies.⁴³

As Noel Thompson and Gregory Claeys have shown, one of the most significant critiques of political economy came from the working-class press, either from working-class writers, or those who supported the political or economic rights of labour.⁴⁴ Like William Thompson and John Bray, many were followers of Owen, himself one of the leading exponents of alternative political economy. Thompson suggests that William Thompson, a leading economist in this tradition, attempted "to re-establish on a more 'scientific' basis the old 'Moral Economy'", transforming the 'just prices' and 'fair wages' into 'natural price' and 'natural value'. Thompson described himself as a "moral economist" and compared political economy, which was concerned solely with accumulation and the national product, with a morally informed economy, that emphasised the use and distribution of wealth.⁴⁵ Thompson's insistence that "happiness" was conditional on distribution as well as production was shared by the Birmingham Unitarian and Owenite William Hawkes Smith who finally preferred the

⁴³Richard Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working Class Culture, 1790-1848", in J. Clark, C. Critcher and R. Johnson, eds., *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, Hutchinson, London, 1979, pp. 5-37; Eileen Yeo, "Robert Owen and Radical Culture" in *Robert Owen, Prophet of the Poor*, Macmillan, London, 1971, pp. 84-114, esp. pp. 89-90.

⁴⁴Noel Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis 1816-1834*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 8-34. By the "working-class press", Thompson is referring to papers produced by working people, or those like *The Crisis* that supported the particular interests of the working class. See also Thompson's *The Market and its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Routledge, London, 1988.

⁴⁵Noel Thompson, *People's Science*, pp. 27-8 citing William Thompson, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness*, Longman, London, 1824, p. 413

term "social science" to political economy.⁴⁶ As will be explored in chapter five, some Unitarianians, with their connections with political radicalism and Owenism, provided an important critique of political and economic individualism for men and women.

Mutuality provided the baseline of Owenite morality, particularly among the working-class exponents of general unionism. To promote the community of interests not just between workers, but also between masters and men, trade unionists frequently invoked a familial rhetoric. Calling on the Master Builders of England, James Morrison of the Operative Builders Association urged:-

We invite you to consider yourselves as members of one great family, and to make the interests of that family your primary end, and to do away with the rivalry which has hitherto produced so much discord.⁴⁷

While idealising the community of interest within the family as a model for social harmony, Morrison was also critical of the power exerted by men over women and advocated the equalisation of the sexes within the family. A major role of unions was to reconstruct masculinity, and particularly fatherhood. "Catus" recommended to the Builders' Union those traditionally "feminine" virtues of temperance and modesty, reminding his brothers that "MANNERS, not money, make the gentleman."⁴⁸

The *Pioneer* was unusual among Owenite and other radical journals in encouraging working women to contribute to its pages. The "Page for the Ladies" was altered to the "Woman's Page" for:-

⁴⁶For Hawkes Smith see Yeo, "Social Science from Below" in "The Contest for Social Science".

⁴⁷'Pioneer', [James Morrison] "To the Master Builders of England", *Pioneer*, 14.9.1833, no. 2.

⁴⁸Catus, "To the Members of the Builders' Union", *Pioneer*, 9.11.1833, pp. 77-8.

Woman is an endearing, social name; but lady has something shockingly aristocratic and unequal about it...⁴⁹

The working- and lower-middle-class women who wrote in this page extended *The Pioneer's* model of union. Gertrude, a woman from London who did not specify her occupation or status described the education she had received from the journal:-

I have been induced, by reading your paper, to seek into the causes of our degenerate condition upon society at large. I am aware my bounded capacity and attainments will not command the whole view of the question as to the best means that will lead woman to a better knowledge of herself, what is her interest, and what will place her in the position to win respect from the other sex, and love, with all good offices, from her sisters. My sentiments, humbly and sincerely given, may induce others, more highly gifted, to come forward and do justice to our cause.⁵⁰

The familial discourse of *The Pioneer's* unionism enabled Gertrude to call on the rhetoric and bonds of sisterhood.

Although acknowledging that woman's "talents and duties" best suited her for domestic life and that man's "stronger frame, can better buffet the stormy world without", Gertrude called for a reorganisation of domestic and public life:-

man might try and remain satisfied with a more domestic life, not leaving entirely its duties and concerns to be cared for only by the female sex; he calls home his rest on earth, but often feels a stranger there from his heart being away - not with his true treasures at home. Woman, on the contrary, wants greater knowledge of the world, she is so much shut out of, and a stronger feeling of general citizenship with her fellow-creatures. May they soon learn to conquer their difficulties! their common interest wants no reconcilements.⁵¹

In keeping with Paineite and rationalist arguments for women's rights, Gertrude's belief in a divinely ordained difference between men and women was compatible with a

⁴⁹Woman's Page, *The Pioneer*, 26.4.1834, p. 322.

⁵⁰Gertrude, "Woman's Page", *Pioneer*, 21.6.1834, p. 413.

⁵¹Gertrude, "Woman's Page", *Pioneer*, 21.6.1834, p. 413.

discourse of natural rights and equality:-

is there in these two several allotments of Providence any thing that degrades woman as an inferior creature to man?

She insisted that woman's faults were a result of her limited education and social confinement rather than "a part of nature!"

Like Wollstonecraft, Gertrude claimed equality in difference and yet hoped to transcend the limits of gender. Her "wild wish" was that:-

surely there are neutral grounds, if I may so express my sentiments, where both parties can meet; and will feel this truth, that there is no sex in the mind, or in conversation, instruction, advice and other operations.⁵²

Education offered a sphere in which Gertrude could realise her utopian desire that men and women could meet as equals and not as members of two different sexes. It was fitting, therefore, that the editor decided to print alongside Gertrude's letter an extract from Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* demanding female education to enable women to become patriotic mothers and to enhance the progress of knowledge. By way of acknowledgement *The Pioneer* confirmed:-

How important then the subject of female education, when woman herself is the first and the most impressive teacher of the whole human race.⁵³

Advocates of women's rights would echo this call in the course of the century.

Extending the right of union to women, *The Pioneer* briefly offered labouring women a platform to politicise their gender and class oppression. Calling for "Unions

⁵²Gertrude, "Woman's Page", *Pioneer*, 7.6.1834, p. 397. Gertrude may have borrowed the Owenite freethought lecturer Frances Wright's phrase "the mind has no sex". See Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 31 and W.R. Waterman, *Frances Wright*, New York, 1924, p. 74.

⁵³"Woman's Page", *Pioneer*, 7.6.1834, p. 397.

of females (more particularly married women)" a "London Mechanic's Wife" urged that until:-

the long-neglected and much-degraded daughters of Britain... bestir themselves for a fair distribution of the productions of labour first, and then for an equal diffusion of knowledge, there can be no hope of redemption.⁵⁴

The Bondswoman of Birmingham believed the rights of labour and the rights of women were interdependent. She questioned why woman's labour was "undervalued" and "The contemptible expression...it is made by woman, and therefore cheap", which enabled the masters to monopolise "the time and the ingenuity of the sex..." This situation arose because:-

Men, in general, tremble at the idea of a reading wife, being taught to believe it an evil by designing tyrants. Women's rights, like man's, have been withheld from motives purely political, by deep concerted plans of early oppressors. The sage priests of olden time well knew, if woman's penetrative and inquisitive mind was allowed its liberty, their well-laid schemes of bigotry and superstition would soon have come to light.⁵⁵

The Bondswoman and the Mechanic's Wife integrated a Paineite and freethinking analysis of women's oppression with the Owenite labour theory of value in order to understand the interconnectedness of women's class and gender oppression.

My research supports Barbara Taylor's argument that of the early and mid-nineteenth-century radical and labour organisations the Owenite movement alone enabled labouring women to assert their rights both as women and as workers. Nevertheless, Owenism provided an important resource for ideas about women's rights and models of association and community which were used and contested by other radical women. The

⁵⁴A Mechanic's Wife in London, "To the Editor of the Pioneer", *Pioneer*, 11.1.1834; "To the Bondswoman of Birmingham", *Pioneer*, 22.2.1834. Both reprinted in Ruth and Edmund Frow, *Political Women, 1800-1850*, Pluto Press, London, 1989, pp. 139, 143-4.

⁵⁵"To the Females of the Working Class", *Pioneer*, 8.2.1834, reprinted in eds. Frow and Frow, *Political Women*, pp. 141-2.

association and community which were used and contested by other radical women. The freethinker Eliza Sharples and many Chartist women applied the principle "Union is Knowledge" to the struggle for political reform and to their own organisation but they rarely addressed women as workers. Their conceptions of the rights of women owed more to the traditions of freethought in republicanism and Owenism than to Owenite debates about the rights of labour.

Freethought also provided an important legacy for the Unitarian radicals and liberals examined in chapters four, five and six. Some of these radicals resurrected the Owenite demands for women's employment rights and even saw co-operative models of production as a solution to the poor working conditions and pay of some middle- and working-class women workers in industries like the printing and needle trades. These middle- and upper-middle class reformers were influenced more by the philanthropic strand within Owenism, symbolised by Owen himself, than by the politics of working-class Owenites. They could not conceive that working women might form their own unions and their own knowledge, as proposed by the female unionists in *The Pioneer*. But in spite of its dangerous association with "free love" and the community of the sexes, Owenism did provide a moral discourse that envisaged a more co-operative harmonious society and the companionship and equality of the sexes. This moral discourse resurfaced in the campaigns of freethought, political radical and liberal women in their quests not only for the rights of women but to change the nature of politics itself.

Chapter Two

"THE PRAYER, THE PASSION AND THE REASON"

OF ELIZA SHARPLES:

FREETHOUGHT, WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND REPUBLICANISM, 1832-1852

In January 1832, Eliza Sharples, the twenty-eight year old daughter of a prosperous counterpane manufacturer from Bolton, arrived in London to campaign for the release from gaol of two notorious infidel lecturers: Richard Carlile imprisoned for sedition and the Rev. Robert Taylor for blasphemous libel. Soon after, she formed a "moral marriage" with Carlile, and as part of their philosophical and political alliance, was installed as lecturer at Carlile's Rotunda theatre. Between February and December 1832, Sharples attained a brief prominence as the "Editress" of her own weekly periodical *The Isis*, the first radical journal to be published by a woman. Her lectures and journalism heralded the Reform Bill; denounced the Church-State monopoly; preached her gospel of radical christianity; and sought a new place for women in religion and politics. When *The Isis* was published in a folio volume in May 1834, Sharples dedicated it "To the Young Women of England for Generations to come, or until superstition is extinct". Believing that "human society" could not be effectually improved "until women participate in an equality of knowledge", she offered herself as an example to women. She urged:-

that, after enquiry, you will participate in publicity; and that by publicity, you may establish equality with men, is both the prayer, the passion, and the reason of

THE EDITRESS¹

¹*The Isis: A London Weekly Publication Edited by a Lady*, 11th February - 15th December, 1832. Published by David France, 1 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street. The folio volume published in May 1834 was issued at 20 shillings. For biographies of Carlile see: G.J. Holyoake, *The Life and Character of Richard Carlile*, Austin and Co. London, 1849; Theophilia Campbell Carlile, *The Battle of the Press As Told in the Story of the Life of*

Our understanding of the motivations and ideas of radical women in the early and mid-nineteenth century is largely based on formal addresses published by women's societies, or brief reports in the radical press. We have scarcely any autobiographical or biographical sources that can suggest the process of individual women's politicisation.² Eliza Sharples' lectures and journalism together with her daughter's biography of Carlile, which vindicated her parents' "moral marriage", provide an insight into one intellectual and emotional journey into a particular radical culture: that of republican freethought in London in the early 1830s.³ Sharples' fleeting fame and subsequent marginalisation as a lecturer throw light on the conditions of, and obstacles to, women's public politics, from the Reform Act of 1832 to her death in 1852.

Richard Carlile, A. and H.B. Bonner, London, 1899; G.D.H. Cole, *Richard Carlile, 1790-1843*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1943. Joel Weiner's *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth Century Britain. The Life of Richard Carlile*, Greenwood Press, London, 1983, provides an excellent analysis of the place of Carlile in early nineteenth-century radical culture and discusses in detail Carlile's relationship with Sharples. Edward Royle's entry on Sharples in *The Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicalism*, 1979 has been a useful source for this chapter.

²For the biographies of Anna Wheeler, Frances Wright, Eliza Macauley, Frances Morrison, Emma Martin and Catherine Barmby see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, Virago, London, 1983, chs. 3 and 5. For the Chartist marriages of Elizabeth and Reginald Richardson, and Mary and William Lovett as well as biographical material on other Chartist women see Jutta Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, MacMillan, London, 1991, especially ch. 5. For the anti-slavery and women's suffrage campaigner Anne Knight, see Gail Malmgreen, "Anne Knight, and the Radical Subculture", *Quaker Education*, vol. 71, no. 2, 1982, pp. 100-113.

³Theophilia Campbell Carlile, *The Battle of the Press*. Theophilia realised Sharples' ambition to write a biography of her husband and Carlile's intention to publish the correspondence of their early marriage.

While Editress of *The Isis*, Sharples was a member of, and spoke on behalf of "The Female Society, The Friends of the Oppressed" which campaigned for the victims of the unstamped press. She was probably unrepresentative of this society, both in terms of her middle-class background, and the prominence of her public platform. In these respects, she had more in common with some of the Owenite women she was acquainted with in London. Nonetheless, she shared a political and freethought tradition with female republicans who were defining a role for themselves in radical culture. This chapter explores the way Sharples used this tradition to create her own radical Christianity at the centre of which was a realignment of femininity to reason. She outlined a very particular but sophisticated interpretation of what "useful knowledge" might mean for women. By identifying women's roles as teachers and learners, in the public as well as the private sphere, and by stressing the importance of self-education for women, Sharples extended the role of "men's helpmeet" that radical movements had traditionally conferred on women.

This chapter begins by examining Sharples' "moral marriage" with Carlile and her conception of a new "rational christianity". Sharples' career as a public instructor and her relationship with her audience is the subject of the second part. The third part explores Sharples' connections with other radical women in London and analyses her contribution to the debates about gender relations and women's place in radical societies. The chapter concludes by identifying the constraints on Sharples' public career following the demise of *The Isis*.

Part One: The Making of a Republican, 1827-1832

i. The Conversion

Like so many women's rights campaigners in the early and mid-nineteenth century, Eliza Sharples' entry into politics was experienced as a form of conversion and was precipitated by a religious crisis.⁴ Although she received a boarding school education until over the age of twenty, Sharples frequently asserted that her real education only began in the autumn of 1831 when she discovered Carlile's journal *The Republican*. Carlile had published *The Republican* between 1819 and 1825 and had been in gaol for much of this time.⁵ Republicanism provided an outlet for the religious anxiety that had long disturbed Sharples. Her family were devout Wesleyans, and she claimed to have been "a slave to Methodism". Her "incessant devotion" failed to quell her religious doubts, and she was haunted by the fear of infidelity:-

From the first periods of thought in my youth...I...felt such difficulties in the abstruseness or absurdity of religious language, that I had the same horror of falling into infidelity as of falling into hell; and often has my prayer been made to the Lord, that he would preserve me from the proneness of my own doubtful thoughts, and snatch me as a brand from the fire.⁶

⁴The Owenites Margaret Chappelsmith, Emma Martin and the secularist Harriet Law were Baptists before their conversion to freethought. Martin, of the strict Calvinist Particular Baptists, lectured against the Owenites in 1839 before her conversion to socialism. See Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 129-35.

⁵Sharples may have attended a college run by the Wesleyans. Her lectures indicate that she was acquainted with eighteenth century philosophy as well as Scripture and that she had received a thorough education in comparison with other middle-class girls. There is no detailed study of middle-class girls' education in the early nineteenth century. See Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism*, Macmillan, London, 1985, pp. 131-5, 140-5 for a general discussion of female education.

⁶"Second Discourse of the Lady of the Rotunda", *Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, p. 7; "The Editress to her Sister Maria", Letter II, *Isis*, no. 35, 27.10.1832, p. 545.

Sharples' fears were well founded, for the Wesleyan community in Bolton made considerable play of its opposition to religious infidelity. She recollected that the news of Carlile's lectures in Bolton in 1827 "excited... horror in my bosom". Having embarked on her freethought career, Sharples was disowned by her mother and sister and by her former minister, the Rev. Thistlethwaite who denounced her infidelity to his congregation.⁷ Sharples' many critics denounced her "moral marriage" and like other female infidels in the early nineteenth century, she was tarred by accusations of sexual as well as religious infidelity.

It is significant that Sharples' initial sympathy for freethought was remembered as a response to sexual injustice. While on an "Infidel Mission" to Liverpool in 1829, Carlile was invited to the house of a "Mr. A.", a friend of the Sharples family, who wished to prove he was not afraid to defend his religion. He did, however, think it "improper" for the "ladies" to meet Carlile. Nevertheless, the women listened to the meeting through a keyhole and this charade led Sharples to suspect that "there was something wrong in Mr. A., or not so wrong as I had thought in Mr. Carlile."⁸ Her recollections of struggling with "doubtful thoughts" and peeping through keyholes suggest that Sharples associated desire with the pursuit of knowledge. Her reconciliation of her intellectual and sexual desire were to be central to her own liberation and to her sexual politics.

The Liverpool encounter was followed by the sudden illness and death of her "kind, indulgent, attentive, and intelligent father". The failure of earnest prayer to revive him rendered Sharples "almost callous of the idea of a divine Providence" and she "lost all relish

⁷*Isis*, no. 35, p. 545; no. 13, 5.5.1832, pp. 202-3.

⁸"The Editress to Her Sister Maria", Letter II, *Isis*, no. 35, 27.10.1832, p. 546.

for life". During her bereavement, she discovered Carlile's *The Republican*, and began to read through the library of the Bolton republican newsagent, A. Hardie. In her despair, she found in *The Republican* "the ignorance and the errors of my past life were told to me as by some magician..."⁹

What attractions might *The Republican* have held for a middle-class woman undergoing a crisis of faith? Sharples never adopted the deist or atheist positions outlined in *The Republican* yet their emphasis on reason and enquiry provided an antidote to her religious doubt. Rather than being a failing, doubt provided the spur to knowledge that for Sharples was to be the core element of a new Christian practice. In stark contrast with the Wesleyan emphasis on sin, Sharples found *The Republican's* commitment to the pursuit of reason and its denunciation of religious intolerance both liberating and empowering.

Carlile's form of republicanism drew heavily on Paine's concept of popular sovereignty. In the 1820's he supported "an elective legislature, and an elective magistracy, upon the widest possible system of suffrage and representation..."¹⁰ *The Republican* contained extracts from the writings of early advocates of women's rights and sexual libertarianism, like Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Spence and Shelley. Carlile's paper "On Woman" in 1828 argued that:-

⁹"Ninth Discourse of the Editress, The Importance of Philosophical Lecturing Institutions", *Isis*, no. 8, 31.3.1832, p. 113; "The Editress to her Sister Maria", 27.10.1832, p. 546. Josephine Butler was also propelled into philanthropy and politics by the death of her child. Bolton had provided a strong centre of support for Carlile and in the 1820's had a Zetetic society whose membership included weavers. See Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1974, pp. 36-7.

¹⁰Carlile, *An Effort to Set At Rest Some Little Disputes and Misunderstandings between the Reformers of Leeds*, Richard Carlile, London, 1821, p. 5. Cited by Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, p. 103.

as women form the groundwork of society and civilisation, their presence and influence must be beneficial in the same ratio as the civilised is preferable to the savage state.

Believing that "A despotism never exists in one degree alone, it is expansive and dangerous", Carlile believed that women's "freedom and independence" would guarantee men's.¹¹ Like other advocates of women's rights he saw female citizenship as a mark of progress from savage and tyrannical to civilised and democratic society. But Carlile also saw women's enfranchisement as part of the retrieval of lost democratic rights. In 1831 he claimed that women should be included in the reformed franchise on the same terms as men, envisaging that they would sit in Parliament as they had in "ancient times in this country".¹²

Carlile's commitment to women's political rights was coupled with a critique of male tyranny within marriage and the sexual double standard. In 1825 he wrote an article "What is Love?" advocating and describing methods of birth control. Arguing that love lay in the body as well as in the heart and that desire was natural and healthy he urged "equality for the female" and her "right to make advances in all the affairs of genuine love." Marriage, he advised, should only continue as long as both partners loved and treated each other well.¹³

¹¹Carlile, "On Woman", 1828, reprinted in Campbell Carlile, *The Battle of the Press*, pp. 136-8.

¹²Carlile, "Freedom and the Franchise of Women", *The Prompter*, 1831, reprinted in *The Battle of the Press*, p. 140.

¹³Carlile, *Every Woman's Book, or, What is Love?*, 1826, pp. 2 and 5. Carlile was one of the earliest propagators of contraceptive knowledge and this pamphlet recommended the vaginal sponge and withdrawal to "the Married of both Sexes of the Working People" and "the Married of both Sexes in General". For a discussion of Carlile's theory of free love see Iain McCalman, "Females, Feminism and Free Love in an Early Nineteenth-Century Radical Movement", *Labour History*, (Canberra), 38, May 1980, pp. 1-25. For Carlile and the movements for birth control see Peter Fryer, *The Birth Controllers*, Secker and Warburg,

Sharples may also have been attracted to *The Republican* by its publication of reports and letters of the female reform societies in the aftermath of Peterloo and during the Queen Caroline affair. Carlile also promoted the action of individual volunteers, including women in the campaign for press freedom in which publishers and newsagents and their families defied the law and flouted prosecution by distributing illegal publications. Carlile acknowledged the importance to this campaign of the examples set by his wife Jane and sister Mary Ann, who were imprisoned in 1822.¹⁴ Jane pleaded "conjugal duty", when charged with libel for publishing a tract that justified tyrannicide, but was politicised in gaol by her personal experience of government tyranny:-

I was neither a politician nor theologian before my imprisonment, but a sentence for Two Years has roused feelings in me that I might never have otherwise possessed...I have been made to think it, as well as publish it.¹⁵

Participation in the battle for press freedom led some women to claim a place for themselves in the rational culture that they were defending. Jane and Mary Ann were supported by the Female Republicans of Manchester, who described themselves as "women possessed of common sense and reason" who claimed the right of "every creature living" to free discussion.¹⁶ The volunteer system also provided a sphere of activity for some politically committed women like Susannah Wright, a laceworker from Nottingham, who

London, 1965, pp. 58-86.

¹⁴Undated letter of Carlile to H.V. Holmes, Spring 1822, extract in Campbell Carlile, *Battle for the Press*, p. 86.

¹⁵*Report of the Trial of Mrs. Carlile*, Jane Carlile, 55 Fleet Street, London, 1821, p. 7. Jane pleaded her own defence although it was prepared by Carlile. See Ruth and Edmund Frow, *Political Women, 1800-1850*, Pluto Press, London, 1989, for a reprint of this and other documents relating to women's involvement in the campaign for a free press.

¹⁶"An Address To Mrs. [sic] and Mary-Ann Carlile, from the Female Republicans of Manchester", *The Republican*, 10.5.1822, pp. 589-90.

arrived in London to take over Carlile's shop following Jane's and Mary Ann's imprisonment. She conducted her own defence for blasphemy while heavily pregnant.¹⁷ These models of female political commitment may have inspired Sharples to take the road for London in 1832, to champion the cause of the imprisoned Taylor and Carlile.

ii. "Moral Marriage": A Philosophical Partnership?

At the beginning of December, 1831, Carlile received a letter from his Bolton agent advising him of the approaching arrival of a Miss Sharples who, "will call and explain her views to you...they are in the missionary line, and her *debut* will *create* a sensation, as she is a really beautiful girl."¹⁸ Carlile was imprisoned for allegedly inciting agricultural labourers to revolt during the Swing Riots of 1830. He had formalised his separation from his wife Jane, and could no longer rely on support from his family while in gaol. Weiner suggests that Carlile was also distancing himself from the new political and trade societies, viewing all "union" as a form of monopoly and exclusive interest. In 1829 he withdrew his earlier support for "elective republicanism" and was expelled from the Radical Reform Association which campaigned for universal suffrage. From 1827 Carlile was increasingly influenced by his fellow infidel lecturer, the Rev. Taylor's "physico-astronomy" which compared pagan, Eastern and Western religions as forms of sun-worship. According to Weiner this interest distanced Carlile from the political and economic concerns of many working-class radicals. Following Taylor's imprisonment, there was no one to promote Carlile's views in public, and his recently acquired Rotunda lecturing theatre risked losing

¹⁷Campbell Carlile, *The Battle of the Press*, pp. 254-6.

¹⁸"Moral Marriage", *The Gauntlet*, 22.9.1833, pp. 521-2.

its status as a centre of radicalism. At odds with other radical leaders, without a public platform, and rapidly losing his audience, Carlile was intrigued by Sharples' proposal.¹⁹

Carlile needed more than the begrudging conjugal duty that Jane had given him, and dreamed of a radical wife who might equal his intellect and public profile. He fantasised Sharples as a counterpart to Frances Wright, the celebrated freethought and Owenite lecturer. From their first exchange of letters, they expressed their political ambitions for each other in a passionate discourse of love. This political and romantic courtship was to be continued in the pages of *The Isis*. In Carlile's first letter, he addressed Sharples as "a bachelor", and pledged:-

My unabating zeal to encourage any lady that shall aim at the character of Hypatia and Frances Wright shall wait on every effort made. Such a lady shall be my daughter, my sister, my friend, my companion, my wife, my sweetheart, my everything.²⁰

Carlile offered Sharples a "moral marriage" which was to be a political and philosophical partnership. Both frequently defended this relationship in public as one based on the authority of reason rather than law. For Carlile:-

Our marriage has been a deliberately reasoned one...founded not only on personal affection, but a mutual respect for talent, and a passionate love, that arises first and chief above all other considerations from the same principles.²¹

¹⁹For Carlile's version of his separation from Jane see "A Statement of My Own Family Affairs", *A Scourge of the Littleness of "Great" Men*, 18.10.1834, pp. 17-21. Weiner, "Infidel Missionaries" and "The Rotunda" in *Radicalism and Freethought*, pp. 141-163 and 164-190.

²⁰"Moral Marriage", *The Gauntlet*, 22.9.1833, pp. 521-2. A series of lectures by Frances Wright, on freethought, many outlining women's rights, were published in *The Isis* between May and September, 1832.

²¹"A Statement...", *A Scourge*, 18.11.1834, pp. 46-7. For Sharples' vindication of the moral marriage see the Preface to *Isis*, 29.5.1834.

When Eliza's estranged sister Maria complained that Eliza's public religious and sexual infidelity had ruined Maria's chance of marriage, Eliza listed the qualities she expected in a husband:-

The man for my choice must be free, intelligent, bold, honest, if handsome, all the better... We, women, ought, by taking a right course for ourselves, to bring men, conditionally for our association, into that right course, and not consent to be slaves of their wrong direction...²²

Reason and love were to provide the foundation for a new model of marriage but how far did the Carliles' "philosophical partnership" constitute an equal partnership?

Requesting that Carlile become her "INSTRUCTOR", Sharples positioned herself as a disciple, revering his age and political and intellectual experience.²³ She performed the expected duties of a political prisoner's wife: bringing food daily and discussing business and her forthcoming lectures with Carlile. Sharples found the strain of living apart from her husband increasingly difficult to bear, especially when she became pregnant and the authorities used the cholera outbreak to ban her visits to the gaol. Contradicting her own claims for women's intellectual equality with men, she insisted she could not imitate Carlile:-

Can the ass ever inherit the strength of the horse? Can weakness ever become strength? Can woman become man?²⁴

Sharples' acknowledgement of the physical and intellectual difference between men and women, was shared by many other exponents of women's rights in her time, who like

²²"The Editress to her Sister Maria", Letter I, *Isis*, no. 34, 20.10.1832, pp. 529-31.

²³Letter, Sharples to Carlile, Bolton, 11.12.1831, published in *The Gauntlet*, 22.9.1833, p. 522.

²⁴Undated letter, Sharples to Carlile, published in Campbell Carlile, *The Battle of the Press*, pp. 176 and 168-9. See pp. 164-180 for their correspondence during this period.

her, could still envisage the intellectual equality of the sexes. Yet, she tried to imagine a new relationship between knowledge, politics and passion, that could join head and heart. When Carlile advised her to calm her loneliness by study, she challenged him:-

I want to become a scientific lover - not a philosopher... When we talk of moderate love, philosophical love, etc., it amounts to nothing. There is no such thing as a moderate true lover. Pray tell me how do you like a moderate reformer?²⁵

Carlile and Sharples were both committed to the ideal of intellectual equality within their marriage, but they often held different, or contradictory ideas of what that equality might mean. Moreover, the ideal was frequently compromised by Carlile's self-promotion and by the devotion and duties of wife and mother that Sharples was still expected to fulfil.

The intellectual division of labour in the Carlile relationship is also unclear. Carlile was to lay claim to authorship of *The Isis*: "I pride myself on that work." Carlile's and Sharples' daughter believed that:-

Carlile outlined all her lectures for her, for it would have been impossible for an inexperienced country girl with the ordinarily narrow education of her time and class to have been able to have pleased a metropolitan audience of reading and thinking men and women.²⁶

Carlile certainly directed Sharples' political education and career and participated in the preparation of her discourses. Eliza wrote to him in gaol:-

²⁵Undated letter, Sharples to Carlile published in Campbell Carlile, *ibid*, p. 175. Sharples' celebration of desire, and attempts to make politics a passionate affair, in public and private, sets her apart from most nineteenth century female advocates of women's rights. Barbara Taylor has argued that women, from Wollstonecraft onwards, were more cautious about adopting the tenets of free love, and emphasised the importance of reason in guiding the passions, rather than elevating the sex drive. See Barbara Taylor, ch. 6., "Love and the New Life", *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, esp. p. 214.

²⁶Undated letter, Carlile to Thomas Turton, 28.11.1833, cited by Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 201; and p. 159.

I want my lecture for this evening to study. When may I expect the one for Sunday?²⁷

The fact that Sharples lectured only occasionally after 1832, and often in Carlile's place, suggests that she was used to some extent as a vehicle for his views. However, the closer attention to questions of sexual politics and women's role in radical politics in *The Isis* in comparison with Carlile's other works provides evidence of Sharples' authorship. I prefer to see *The Isis* as the product of an unequal collaboration, in which Sharples was responsible for the editing, publishing and business, but to which she also brought her political theology. Sharples had her own style and emphasis as well as important political differences from Carlile, particularly over the Owenites. In a request for "editorial assistance" from "all good and talented men and women", she warned Carlile:-

be careful; for I do not court a prison. Give us facts, without making your inferences and comparisons too strong; give us all the mild reasoning you can,²⁸

A further indication of Sharples' authorship is that she instigated the relationship by offering to come to London to lecture. Her mission had its own agenda, including the conversion of the two infidels to her version of Christianity. In May 1832, *Isis* announced that her "short ministry" in the metropolis had produced the "CONVERSION OF RICHARD CARLILE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS OF OBSTINATE INFIDELITY". Carlile confessed that having thought for a year that the Scriptures might bear a "rational interpretation" he had finally been convinced by the

²⁷Undated letter, "Isis" to Richard, cited by Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 173. Weiner doubts an allegation by an informer that Taylor aided the composition of Sharples' lectures. S.S. Report, 12.3.1832, H.O. 64/12 and Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, p. 213.

²⁸"Lady of the Rotunda to the Readers of the Isis", *Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, pp. 5-6.

Editress's "First Discourse on the Bible".²⁹ With Taylor, Carlile had advocated an allegorical reading of all religions and in 1829 stated that the Christian religion was in no "way beneficial to mankind; but that it is nothing more than an emanation from the ancient pagan religion."³⁰ Sharples offered Carlile a "rational interpretation" of religion by reconstructing the meaning of Christian practice and aligning it to a radical political practice. Rather than being a form of idolatry and superstition, true Christianity was practised through the pursuit of knowledge, thus being beneficial to men and women. Just as Sharples was initiated into radical politics through her reading of Carlile's *Republican*, so Carlile's conversion was conducted through Sharples' own religious and political conversion. The following section discusses how Sharples used the concept of moral allegory to define her own moral mission, and to direct her gospel specifically at women.

iii. The Forbidden Fruit of Knowledge

Sharples developed her gospel of rational Christianity in response to a long and complex tradition of biblical criticism that had emerged in the mid-seventeenth century when some philosophers, including Hobbes, began to question the literal truth of the Bible. This criticism emerged partly in response to the different chronologies offered by classical writers from those of orthodox Christianity. Discoveries in geology and new historical information in the eighteenth century led to a questioning of the reliability of the gospel writers. The evolution of materialist doctrines, which denied the necessity of an external, intelligent power in the creation of the universe, favoured the development of rational

²⁹*Isis*, no. 13, 5.5.1832, pp. 200, 202-3.

³⁰Printed circular advertising Taylor and Carlile's "atheist mission", May 1829. Cited by Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, p. 157. See his chapter "Infidel Missionaries" pp. 141-163 for the development of Carlile's theological thought in the late 1820s.

interpretations of the Scriptures, and even encouraged scepticism, deism and atheism. Sharples rejected the refutation of the Bible on historical grounds, emphasising instead its importance as a "moral allegory". This position brought her into conflict with members of the Rotunda audience who favoured historical biblical criticism. Sharples' claims were perhaps informed by the German theologians of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who had argued for the mystical significance rather than the literal truth of the Bible.³¹

The characters in the Bible represented for Sharples "the personification of principle" rather than real, historical figures. However, the political struggle narrated in the gospel was not restricted to a historical time and place, but was an ongoing drama:-

The Gospel, in politics, is essentially a piece of republicanism; the young Reason, the hero of the Gospel drama, will not acknowledge the divine right, or any right of kings...Young Reason has ever and everywhere been a Radical Reformer.³²

Since Jesus was merely a representation of "Young Reason", woman as well as man could embody reason and become poet, scholar, philosopher or politician.

³¹For a useful introduction to the development of biblical criticism see Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, pp. 9-23. Exponents of the historical criticisms of the Bible included Thomas Chubb, in *Discourse on Miracles*, London, 1741, and Peter Annet and Anthony Collins. See L. Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Harbinger Books, London, 1962, pp. 186-277. D'Holbach's *Systeme de la Nature* was a major contribution to the development of materialism and was very influential on Carlile. For criticisms of Sharples' notion of moral allegory, see Julian Hibbert's advocacy of an "astronomical solution", *Isis*, no. 14, 12.5.1832, pp. 218-9; Lyon's support of historical criticism, no. 15, 19.5.1832, p. 235; and letter from "A", no. 16, pp. 255-6.

³²"First Discourse on the Bible", *Isis*, no. 12, 28.4.1832, pp. 177-183; "Second Discourse on the Bible", *Isis*, no. 13, 5.5.1832, pp. 193-9.

Sharples' interpretation of the Scriptures as the struggle of reason against superstition extended previous rationalist criticisms by positing a new relationship between gender and "reason". Her arguments began with a remarkable discussion of the gendered and historically specific language of the Bible. While contemporary reformers spoke of knowledge and reason in the neuter gender, the ancient writers, she argued, especially the Hebrews, had personified these principles as masculine or feminine. They had personified:-

all the principles of nature, or every perceptible quality, so as seldom or never to use the neuter gender.³³

For Sharples, the allegorical language of the Bible was ideological and therefore had to be interpreted for a nineteenth-century congregation. Like present-day feminists who trace the gendered etymology of words and attempt to devise a non-sexist language, Sharples provided a "glossary" explaining the universal human characteristics embodied by biblical characters that were not restricted to either gender.³⁴

Deborah Valenze has suggested that popular female preachers who were contemporaries of Sharples often invoked the ideal of the "mother in Israel" to legitimise an extra-familial leadership role for women. They looked especially to four Old Testament mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah who had held equality with chieftain husbands,

³³*Isis*, 28.4.1832, p. 177.

³⁴Sharples produced a "Glossary" to explain the meaning of the principal characters of the Bible, but curiously she refers to very few female characters. She described the Virgin Mary as "the second birth of Eve" but provided no interpretation of Mary Magdalen. See *Isis*, no. 22, 7.7.1832, pp. 338-40. Carlile extended Sharples' glossary, published as *A Dictionary of Some of the Names in the Sacred Scriptures Translated into the English Language...*, Thomas Paine Carlile, Manchester, and Alfred Carlile, Fleet Street, n.d.. This provided interpretations of several female characters including Abigail, Deborah, Delilah and Magdalen. Delilah represented "Consumption of Intellectual Strength and Glory, by improper attention to the sex..." while Magdalen symbolised "Magnificent Intellect...". see pp. 13, 24.

as "public counsellors, nurturing protectors, and inspired speakers".³⁵ Although Sharples offered rereadings of the Old Testament books, she did not turn to these female images, the Virgin Mary, or Mary Magdalen. Instead, like many early women's rights advocates, she returned to Genesis and the story of The Fall.³⁶ Her celebration of Eve as the bearer of wisdom and her refutation of the doctrine of original sin was the starting point for her reconceptualisation of knowledge and femininity. She contested the belief that "woman brought sin into the world and corrupted man, and with her husband, her children and descendants" arguing that the only possible sin was that "which is opposed to the welfare of human society." Sharples contended that good and evil were relative concepts and gave them a social meaning. "Positive evils" included want of food, cold and sickness; "relative evils" superstition, poverty and tyranny.³⁷ Rather than Eve being the bearer of original sin, Sharples defined her as a producer of wisdom:-

EVE, the personification of wisdom, of liberty, of resistance to tyranny; the mother of human knowledge; the proper help meet for man.

By contrast, Adam stood for:-

the first scholar that took a lesson from Eve or Divine Wisdom;... the first uninquisitive and passive recipient of knowledge;... the submissive partner, but not the parent of woman; the first subject of petticoat government; the first dupe; the first ninny; the schoolmaster; the inventor of nouns as part of speech; the first emblem of a married man; the origin of moral evil. Adam

³⁵Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Surrey, 1985, , pp. 35-7 and Rachel Adler, "A Mother in Israel: Aspects of the Mother Role in Jewish Myth", in R.M. Gross, ed., *Beyond Androcentricism*, Scholars Press, Montana, 1977, pp. 237-68.

³⁶Mary Hays, friend of Wollstonecraft, argued that the story of the Fall was allegorical and that reason and religion opposed the subjection of one sex to another. See Gary Kelly's discussion of Hays' *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, 1798, in *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 114.

³⁷Fourth Discourse, "Who Are the Sinners?", *Isis*, no. 3, 25.2.1832, pp. 34-9.

also presents a mixed character. God himself is author both of good and evil.³⁸

The deity, for Sharples, was a very ambivalent figure, for while God gave life, he also denied knowledge. As we have seen, Christ, as radical reformer, was in rebellion against the old, tyrannical God. Christ's rebellion, however, was preceded by that of Eve. The story of the Garden of Eden was an "allegory of liberty and necessity". The "tyrant God, Necessity" refused to allow "the subject man" to eat from the tree of knowledge. Liberty stepped in to offer the fruit to her husband. Isis rejoiced:-

Do you not, with one voice exclaim, well done woman! LIBERTY FOR EVER!...If that was a fall, sirs, it was a glorious fall, and such a fall as is now wanted...³⁹

By taking the fruit of knowledge, Eve had created human society and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden marked the beginnings of human progress. Her interpretation of The Fall was probably known and developed by later Owenite Infidels, like Eliza Macauley who also lectured on original sin in the summer of 1832, Margaret Chappelsmith, and Emma Martin.⁴⁰ The fusion of the biblical Eve with the republican Liberty provided all these women with a powerful model of female agency.

Sharples drew from the biblical repertoire and rhetoric of contemporary evangelical and popular millenarian groupings. However, her gospel was a direct political

³⁸"Glossary", *Isis*, 7.7.1832, pp. 338-40.

³⁹"Liberty and Necessity", *Isis*, 7.4.1832, p. 132.

⁴⁰For Macauley on original sin see her "Essay on Religious Responsibility", in *The Crisis*, June 1832, pp. 42, 64 and esp. p. 66. For Owenite interpretations of the Scriptures see Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 64-74 and 130-56. See pp. 143-9 for Richard Carlile's association with Martin.

challenge to these groups, particularly over the issues of education and the role of women.

She found:-

the most active sin of the present day, is that of the evangelicals in religion... who thrust their madness upon us in a way that is offensive and requires some resistance.⁴¹

Of critical importance was women's right to speak with reason and in public. She attacked the Irvinite sect, the Unknown Tongues, for their endorsement of speaking in tongues, which for Sharples was an affront to reason. She denounced St. Paul's strictures that women should not speak in church.⁴² Just as Owenite feminists were to apply the new social sciences to challenge contemporary social and religious conventions, so Sharples marshalled the Enlightenment tradition of comparing different societies to relate the position of women to the progress of human society:-

We have been worse conditioned than Asiatic slaves; for, with the name of liberty, we have been the slave of silly etiquette and custom. St. Paul forbade women to speak in churches, and they, who have made St. Paul an authority, have worn long hair and caps, and hats and veils, and have held their tongues in churches, until their whole power of speech has been concentrated for domestic scolding. Suppressed speech gathers into a storm; but freedom of discussion is the most wholesome exercise in which we can be engaged. It is not the mind only, but the body, that becomes expanded, and ripens into the health of full growth. It would be medicine for nearly all the ills that effect the forlorn condition of elderly maiden ladies.⁴³

The connections Sharples made between mental activity and bodily health echoed those of eighteenth century advocates of women's rights who frequently ascribed female moral and corporal frailty and corruption to the lack of female education. But she departed from the earlier tradition in seeking to reorder the relationship between mind and the body, rather

⁴¹"Who Are the Sinners?", *Isis*, 25.2.1832, p. 36.

⁴²Eighth Discourse, "The Unknown Tongues", *Isis*, no. 7, 24.3.1832, pp. 97-101. For this sect, otherwise known as the Catholic Apostolic Church see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1790's to the 1980's*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, pp. 78-81.

⁴³"Editress to Her Readers", *Isis*, no. 3, 25.2.1832, p. 39.

than subordinating sensation to reason. This relationship was also central to her theory of experience.

In an earlier lecture Isis defined herself as a theist. She observed the motions of the stars, sun and moon, attributing "everything to God as the first cause, and universal creator". However, "God" was also "incomprehensible" and "unknowable". Since people had no "experience" of God, they could only examine "the use of the word [God] in society". At present the Church, the priesthood and religious taxes were built upon the word of God. How, therefore, were people to choose between different "interpretations" of the word? Sharples drew on a Baconian theory of experience as a way of testing the "word":-

every word should relate to something known, and no ideas be encouraged but such as are pictures of real things.

Religious belief had to be authenticated by personal experience:-

My profession is that of an enquirer, a thinker, a reasoner, a speaker according to no other gospel than my own thoughts. I speak as the *spirit* within me dictates, - that is, according to the impulsions of the body. I take up no man's doctrine, unless I can make it my own, by understanding it, after referring for comparisons to things in existence.⁴⁴

The ultimate authority for Sharples was her thought. Thought was the product of the critical interrogation of the "spirit" with the "impulsions of the body". Cora Kaplan has argued that Wollstonecraft authored a form of female rationality by divorcing sense from sensibility and that generations of feminists have been troubled by female sensuality, desire and passion. Taylor has also suggested that the Owenite feminists tended to discuss marriage reform in terms of the rational ordering of human relationships, rather than the liberation of sexuality.⁴⁵ Sharples' integration of mind and matter perhaps also owed an intellectual

⁴⁴"On Words", *Isis*, no. 2, 18.2.1832, pp. 17-23.

⁴⁵Cora Kaplan, "Wild Nights: Pleasure/Sexuality/Feminism" in *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism*, Verso, London, 1986; Taylor, "Love and the New Life", *Eve and the New*

debt to the materialist investigations of science and medicine by working-class radical societies like the Zetetic societies with which Carlile had been associated.⁴⁶

Sharples' commitment to the personal relevancy of "the gospel" had important implications for her own political identity, and for her theory of women's use of knowledge. It placed the personal as the focal point of politics and theology. She frequently referred to her Wesleyan upbringing, religious crisis, and disownment by her family to emphasise the sacrifices she had made on behalf of her mission, the power of her gospel, and to provide evidence of religious intolerance. She even cited this history in a petition to the king for Taylor's release.⁴⁷

In her dedication to "To The Young Women of England..." in 1834, the Editress warned her female readers:-

Books will aid you, but you must not make an authority of books, or of what is written, - you must try the scripture by the things referred to, and thus prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.⁴⁸

She offered the volume "as a specimen of labour" that would contribute to "the slow progress of mental improvement". Women had to produce it for themselves, as an act of labour. Knowledge was the act of enquiring rather than an object to be acquired:-

I must tell you, for you should be told it, that to get knowledge you must labour. There is a labour of the mind or of the brain, as well as of the hands,

Jerusalem, especially p. 214.

⁴⁶For the Zetetic societies see Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, esp. pp. 35-9; Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, pp. 114-5; and especially Gwyn Williams, *Rowland Detrosier: A Working-Class Infidel, 1800-34*, Borthwick Papers, no. 28, St. Anthony's Press, York, 1965.

⁴⁷"Editress to Her Readers", *Isis*, no. 7, 24.3.1832, p. 101.

⁴⁸The Editress, Dedication of folio volume of *The Isis*, May 1834.

and as you cannot make the needle do its office without the motion of the fingers, so cannot knowledge be obtained without the motion of the brain. It will not come by prayer, when a superstitious use is made of the word; but it is the prayer of thought, the asking, seeking, and knocking, accompanied with all the means of knowledge-getting, that can alone procure it. It steals imperceptibly on the mind as it is toiled for; it comes sweetly, as it is strenuously, and even with pain, sought.

It is significant that Sharples legitimised a specifically female experience of knowledge by comparing it to needlework. Not only was needlework commonly perceived as "women's work", but women's right to paid labour and trade union association in the tailoring trades in London was currently under attack by male workers.⁴⁹

What is so striking and unusual about Sharples' concept of the female intellect is that she emphasised women's right to knowledge for their own sakes, more than their role as instructors to their children. However, her appeal to other women to join her mission in public instruction was undermined by her highly individualistic politics and presentation as will now be explored through her relationship with her audience.

Part Two: "The Lady of the Rotunda"

The Rotunda, where Sharples began to lecture in January 1832 had acquired a reputation for theatricality. Dressed as a bishop in the tricolour, the Rev. Taylor had delighted his audiences with sermons delivered from his "Devil's Pulpit" on sun worship, and with his staging of plays like "Raising the Devil" and "Swing! or Who Are the Incendiaries?". The auditorium was still decorated with the zodiacal symbols that illustrated

⁴⁹See Barbara Taylor's analysis of the tailoring dispute "The Men Are As Bad As Their Masters...", *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 83-117; and chapter 4 of this thesis.

his "theologico-astronomical" demonstrations.⁵⁰ As "Isis", the Egyptian Goddess of fertility and wisdom, Sharples continued this infidel display. A police informer described how she made a grand entrance through an aisle in her audience to stand on a floor of white thorn and laurel, in a "showy" dress.⁵¹

There were few precedents for women speaking in public in 1832 and so theatricality was an important component of Sharples' daring public performances. She adopted a number of personas which enabled her to enact a variety of roles. The title "The Lady of the Rotunda" emphasised Sharples' respectability while "The Editress" drew attention to the novelty of a female editor. "Isis" identified her as a philosopher and "Eve" the power of her prophesy. As "Liberty" Sharples suggested herself as a political leader. The stature of these roles underscored the uniqueness of Sharples' mission as she saw it and allowed her to disassociate herself from the plebeian popular preachers and evangelical missionaries she so disapproved.

Sharples' lectures were primarily on religious and educational themes. They considered theological questions such as the meaning of "The Word" but also referred to contemporary political and religious movements. A lecture "On the best precautions necessary to be taken in these serious and pestilential times" urged people to break the national fast day for the cholera outbreak and denounced superstition and the establishments of Church and State. Sharples delivered ten lectures on her interpretation of the Bible. Each

⁵⁰For a description of the Rotunda see Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 120. For Taylor's theatrical performances see Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, pp. 164-5.

⁵¹Informer's report, H.O. 64/12. Quoted by Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, p. 181.

lecture was reprinted in *The Isis*, and the debate that followed was sometimes summarised in a subsequent edition.⁵²

Sharples repeated the same lecture to different audiences throughout the week. Twice on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings she cultivated a "respectable audience, knowing how much the world is led by appearances." On Monday evenings admission was half-price for "those who earn their bread by industry", while on Fridays she welcomed "gratuitously... all well behaved and decently clothed people." Despite the attendance of a few wealthy supporters, the reports of informers suggest that her audiences consisted largely of "working men". *The Times* alleged, probably unfairly, that there were only twenty five persons at one lecture, three of whom were females.⁵³ By the end of March 1832, unable to maintain the rent at the Rotunda, Sharples moved to Owen's rooms at Burton Street but there found herself in competition with Owen and her audiences dwindled further.⁵⁴ A few weeks later, she moved again to Bouverie Street, which held one hundred and fifty people and where she was to lecture four nights a week. This decline in interest depressed Sharples since she admitted the need for the validation of a large audience to confirm her platform:-

I tremble before an audience that is less than a hundred, in a large theatre; but before a thousand, I feel the importance of my task, and as bold as a lion, and as confident as a parish priest, who submits nothing to criticism.⁵⁵

⁵²*Isis*, 18.2.1832 and 3.3.1832. For the Editress's Discourses on the Bible see nos. 12-21, 28.4.1832 - 30.6.1832.

⁵³*Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, p. 5; Informer's report, H.O. 64/12, quoted by Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought*, p. 181; "The "Lady" At the Rotunda", *The Times*, 14.2.1832, p. 3b.

⁵⁴"Eighth Discourse", *Isis*, 24.3.1832, p. 97.

⁵⁵"Editress to Her Readers", no. 10, 14.4.1832, p. 152.

At the end of July she announced a break from lecturing until October, but welcomed invitations to lecture. Subsequently, she was only able to lecture on invitation, mainly on behalf of the defenders of the unstamped press.⁵⁶

She chose instead to channel her energies into publishing, boasting "I range through all subjects from heaven to earth, from God to man fearing none."⁵⁷ *The Isis* ran from 11th February to the 15th December, 1832. It was printed weekly by David France, at Carlile's publishing house at 1 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street. The sixteen page journal opened with the text of Sharples' latest lecture. It provided a forum for the discourses of other freethinkers, including Frances Wright and the Rev. James Smith who was to become the editor of the Owenite journal *The Crisis*.⁵⁸ Through her editorial column the "Editress" informed "her readers" on the course of her campaign, the state of her business and on current affairs. The imprisoned Carlile had a weekly column where he addressed his letters to the "Noble Woman".⁵⁹ Lists of subscriptions for Carlile and Taylor were printed, as well as readers' letters which sometimes received an editorial reply. The Editress also reviewed books, commented on historical illustrations of religious bigotry, and made interesting use of court reports to criticise religious intolerance and injustice against women.⁶⁰

⁵⁶*Isis*, no. 24, 28.7.1832, p. 372.

⁵⁷*Isis*, 14.4.1832, p. 152; "Editress to Her Readers", no. 29, 1.9.1832, p. 449.

⁵⁸Frances Wright's fifteen lectures were printed between nos. 16-29; and the Rev. Smith's eleven lectures between nos. 32-39. In a later publication, *The Shepherd*, Smith prophesied the coming of a female messiah and the emancipation of women. See Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 167-172.

⁵⁹*Isis*, nos. 4-15.

⁶⁰For example, a comparison between two court cases that demonstrated the class and gender "system of inequality" built into the law. See *Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, pp. 14-15.

The Isis was intended as a learned, highbrow, philosophical journal, but as with her audiences, the Editress had difficulty attracting a readership that could afford the cost of six pence. Her failure to establish an audience throws light on the gulf between her class assumptions and the social constituency of infidels, but also the difficulties she faced in maintaining respectability as a public woman. By July, she confessed to her readers:-

Printing is a peculiar trade... There are not enough persons to whom the *Isis* is approachable, fond of such solid reading, to enable me to sell it cheaper.⁶¹

She defended the price of the journal:-

I do not much admire the cry for cheap publications. I pity but cannot appeal to poverty and misery for assistance.⁶²

This dismissal of cheap periodicals and working-class support, in favour of a more wealthy and "respectable" audience, can partly be explained by her own class inheritance. However, she lent her support to the campaign for the unstamped press. Her condemnation of the cheap press was directed more at the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which for her, epitomised ignorance and superstition, rather than the working-class radical press.⁶³ Furthermore, many radicals, including Carlile, relied on the support of wealthy patronage.⁶⁴ Aside from the issue of cost, philosophy provided a discourse that could disrupt and supplant the established religious discourses while the "new" Christianity demanded a serious and respectful tone. No doubt Sharples felt the weighty intellectual nature of her

⁶¹"Editress to Her Readers", *Isis*, no. 24, 28.7.1832, p. 372.

⁶²*Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, p. 5. See also no. 12, 28.4.1832, pp. 183-4.

⁶³*Isis*, no. 10, 14.4.1832, p. 152. The Editress argued that *The Penny Magazine*, published by the S.D.U.K. was set up to detract people from buying the penny political publications, which millions of people could scarce afford.

⁶⁴Carlile and Sharples' increasing poverty was accelerated by the death of one of Carlile's major benefactors, Julian Hibbert in 1834. See Carlile's journal *A Scourge of the Littleness of "Great" Men*, 21.2.1835, pp. 121-7.

discourses added authority to her extraordinary venture as a female lecturer, as well as substantiating her claims for female rationality.

By October, however, she conceded the need for a cheaper edition at two pence and appealed for subscribers.⁶⁵ It appears the attempt failed. Besides the lack of financial support, Sharples was struggling to produce the journal with only one assistant. She was also pregnant and finding it difficult to gain admittance to Carlile's gaol. By the end of 1832, *The Isis* was only published fortnightly and a second volume was never begun. On Carlile's release from gaol in 1833, their dwindling financial resources were directed into his publishing ventures. Sharples does not appear to have written for publication again.

As well as differentiating her followers by class, Sharples had different expectations of her male and female audiences. In her first discourse, she outlined a different political capacity for men and women, where men would act out the auxiliary role of financial assistants to a campaign led by Sharples and her female associates:-

Sirs, I shall seek to gather power around me in this establishment; and which of you will not accept me for your general, your leader, your guide?

Anticipating the "coming storm" with the struggle for the Reform Bill, she requested a new mode of political practice that would draw on the conventional feminine virtue of politeness, and only resort to the masculine use of force if necessary:-

I would that it should be accomplished with gentleness, with suasion, with kindness, with yielding, where yielding is required and proper, with resistance only where wrong is opposed; but if human welfare require more than this, let more come in.

⁶⁵"Editress to Her Readers", *Isis*, no. 34, 20.10.1832, p. 539. Although Sharples already had 500 subscribers, she needed to know that 250 would continue to buy the 6d copy in order to afford a 2d version. She believed the general desire for cheap publications would bankrupt nine-tenths of publishers.

She then turned to the ladies, her "sisters", to seek their approval and assistance for her public appearances. They had not only to weather the current political storm, but also to free themselves from male tyranny and to assert women's independent intellectual and political selfhood:-

Will you gather round me, and give me that countenance in virtuous society which we all seek and need, and without which life to us is wretchedness? Will you not be offended at this step of mine, original to my understanding, but, I think, not unworthy of us, nor unbecoming to me. Are you prepared to advance, as you see I have already advanced? Breathes the spirit of liberty in you? or are you content to be slaves, because your lords wish it? What say you sisters? Will you advance, and seek that equality in human society which nature has qualified us for, but which tyranny, the tyranny of our lords and masters, hath suppressed?⁶⁶

Sharples' insistence on women's rights to public and free discussion was sometimes compromised by her anxiety to defend her respectability. From her lecturing debut, her character was slurred by opponents of infidelism in the press. In a typical attack *The Times* cast aspersions on her class position by ridiculing her "new line", asking:-

Would not the place of housemaid, or servant of all work, in some decent family, serve her purpose better? She is strong enough for either, and neither of them are so laborious as the treadmill.⁶⁷

Sharples deflected such criticisms by creating a code of etiquette for herself and her audience. She retired from the room after delivering her discourses leaving leading freethinkers like John Gale Jones, to answer questions, although these speakers were often critical of her analysis. She was indignant when a man tried to question her on subjects foreign to her discourse, and warned her audience:-

I do not feel bound to hold conversation with any persons upon what I may or may not advance upon this stage, and much less shall I be disposed to put myself on a level with bad manners. I should have no objection to a conversation with ladies; nor to answer in a subsequent discourse written questions from any respectable person.

⁶⁶"First Discourse of the Lady of the Rotunda", *Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, pp. 1-5.

⁶⁷*Isis*, no. 1, 11.2.1832, pp. 11-12 and no. 3, 25.2.1832, pp. 37-8.

However, she censured other speakers who refused to submit themselves to free discussion and hoped that with the support of female lecturers she would acquire the confidence for public debate.⁶⁸

Sharples frequently called on women to join her lecturing mission and she welcomed Eliza Macauley's lectures on women's rights, freethought and political reform. Nonetheless, there was a contradiction between her desire to empower and associate with other women, and her self-presentation as a "novelty among women".⁶⁹ In March, she bragged to her readers:-

I now find a thousand [admirers], bowing like idolaters to a goddess, and keeping at that respectable distance at which all idolaters should keep from goddesses and from all things sacred. I boast of this to encourage other ladies to come out from their common prison-house of religious or fashionable society, and assist me in doing that in which I am engaged. My business is not now to be coquetting everyday for some new admirer; but to be much employed in keeping the multitude at a distance, and gently brushing them away, where they become a little too rash and intrusive.⁷⁰

Sharples' lack of self-reflexivity and disregard for the material and ideological pressures that inhibited the actions of other women is perhaps best demonstrated by her response to a letter from her younger sister Maria complaining about the effect of Eliza's infidelity on her family. Eliza responded by a public letter in *The Isis*, lecturing her sister on the wrongs of the marriage market; the importance of marriages based on reason and her good sense in choosing Carlile as a partner. Maria contested Sharples' brand of philosophy that divorced itself from the constraints of public opinion:-

⁶⁸*Isis*, 11.2.1832, p. 7; "On the Importance of Philosophical Lecturing Institutions", *Isis*, no. 8, 31.3.1832, p. 117.

⁶⁹*Isis*, no. 16, 26.5.1832, p. 246; no. 1, 11.2.1832, p. 2.

⁷⁰"The Editress To Her Readers", *Isis*, no. 5, 10.3.1832, p. 71.

But as I am no philosopher, as you profess to be, and therefore unable to judge of things as they really are, I am obliged to confine judgement to the nature of things as they appear to be, and as the judgements of society are necessarily governed by appearances, we surely claim too much from society when we expect its good opinions and its bestowal of confidence, without paying the compliment of our attention and regard to appearances.

Ignoring her sister's plea for privacy, Sharples published a further five letters to Maria in *The Isis*.⁷¹

In a letter to Isis, Helen, a supporter of co-operative association from London, welcomed the "new and rational pleasure" Isis had given the ladies, and hoped to join her soon:-

I wait the opportunity of family arrangements to join you, to rival you, to excel you, if possible; for though I do not like much of the world's competition, I like it in matters of the mind. Moral rivalry cannot be too strong.⁷²

Perhaps Helen never sorted out her domestic affairs for she did not arrive to assist Isis. Few women with family or household commitments would have had the time or resources to devote themselves to public lecturing as evidenced by Sharples' erratic lecturing career after 1832. But perhaps some women also felt inadequate to the task of acting out the female "second coming". The Editress was left musing:-

I verily believe that I stand alone in this country, as a modern Eve, daring to pluck the fruit of this tree, and to give it to timid, sheepish man. I have received kindnesses and encouragements from a few ladies since my appearance in the metropolis, but how few!⁷³

Nevertheless, Sharples did associate with other groups of women radicals in London, and her relations with them are the subject of the third part of this chapter.

⁷¹"The Editress to Her Sister Maria", Letters I-VII, *Isis*, nos. 34-39, 20.10.1832-15.12.1832; Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, pp. 181-5.

⁷²"Helen", *Isis*, no. 3, 25.2.1832, pp. 47-8.

⁷³*Isis*, no. 8, 31.3.1832, p. 128.

Part Three: "Proper Help Meets for Men": Eliza Sharples and Female Association in Metropolitan Radical Culture in the Early 1830s

In a letter published in *The Isis* the Editress informed her sister Maria that:-

In this metropolis, you may see, on a Sunday evening, five-hundred respectable women of all ages, congregated to hear a rational discourse... I mean a discourse that is submitted to the instant criticism of the audience,...⁷⁴

Although the Editress did not identify this critical audience she had established links with two groups of female radicals, each of which were concerned with the production and distribution of knowledge: the Owenites and the "Female Society, The Friends of the Oppressed", the latter campaigning primarily on behalf of the unstamped press.⁷⁵

The Friends of the Oppressed was established in July 1832, as an auxiliary to the leading union for male suffrage, the National Union of Working Classes (N.U.W.C.) and "for the purpose of affording aid to the wives and children of those persons who suffer in the people's cause."⁷⁶ It was probably set up in response to a lecture delivered "On the Rights of Woman in Society" by George Petrie, a Spencean radical and prominent member

⁷⁴*Isis*, no. 36, 3.11.1832, p. 563.

⁷⁵"The Female Society, The Friends of the Oppressed" was often referred to as "The Female Society" or "The Friends of the Oppressed". Hereafter the society will be referred to as "The Friends of the Oppressed" or "The Friends".

⁷⁶*Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 21.7.1832, pp. 469-70. For reprints of some of the press coverage of this society see Ruth and Edmund Frow, *Political Women, 1800-1850*, Pluto Press, London, 1989, pp. 64-76.

of the N.U.W.C., who moved towards Owenism in the early 1830s.⁷⁷ The Friends spent much of their time fundraising for the families of arrested newsvendors and persecuted political reformers by holding public tea parties, lectures and meetings. It was last reported in April 1834 organising a ball in support of the families of the Dorchester Labourers transported for administering illegal oaths at trade union meetings.⁷⁸

The society formalised the participation of women who already attended meetings and demonstrations as the wives of members of the N.U.W.C..⁷⁹ Many of the officers of the society were the wives or daughters of prominent male radicals, and the membership seems to have been drawn from the artisan and small business classes that formed the main constituency of male metropolitan radicalism. Few labouring women could have afforded the weekly penny subscription rate and the additional costs of attending public meetings and balls.⁸⁰

⁷⁷*Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 23.6.1832, p. 440. The following year, George Petrie advocated marital and divorce reform in *The Man*, which suggests the possibility that the Friends were acquainted with Spencean and Owenite ideas about marriage reform and free love. See *The Man*, 29.9.1833 and Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 42.

⁷⁸*Poor Man's Guardian*, III, 19.4.1834, p. 88.

⁷⁹*Poor Man's Guardian*, I, 24.3.1832, p. 321. Members wives were often admitted free to N.U.W.C. meetings as in the public meeting on the formation of the National Guard and the cholera epidemic, *Poor Man's Guardian*, I, 19.11.1831, p. 176.

⁸⁰No reliable figures exist recording the size of The Friends. Iorwerth Prothero refers to a fifty strong radical female society at the Theobald's Institution and at Kings Cross, led by William Benbow's wife. However, she is not mentioned in any of the reports on The Friends. See Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, Dawson, Folkestone, 1979, p. 294. One hundred women assembled at short notice to welcome the release of Mary Willis from imprisonment for selling copies of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, but it is unclear how far this number reflected the strength of the Society. See *Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 6.10.1832, p. 599.

As the title of the society suggests, The Friends of the Oppressed saw themselves as auxiliaries to "the people's cause", that was largely defined and led by men. Petrie told the N.U.W.C. that:-

when their wives and sisters were united with them they would assume a power and a character which would terrify their enemies out of their lives.⁸¹

However, in the course of running their own meetings, proposing resolutions, and identifying and supporting the victims of the unstamped press, The Friends began to see themselves as a part of "The People". The "associated ladies" symbolised their place in the *patrie*, when they "mustered in great force" on the N.U.W.C. procession to commemorate the second anniversary of the "Glorious Three Days" of the 1830 French Revolution. Dressed in "muslim aprons with tri-coloured borders", they presented Hetherington, the editor of *The Poor Man's Guardian* with "an elegant tri-coloured silk cap". This republican pageant played out Sharples' allegory of woman as the bearer of liberty. Reading out a "numerously signed" petition for Taylor and Carliles' release, the Editress reinforced The Friends' corollary of private and public duties, warning that these "Englishwomen, and the greater number wives and mothers", intended "to be generally active as politicians".⁸² James Epstein has shown how the female reformers of 1819 made a dramatic entrance onto the public stage by wearing radical colours and making presentations of the cap of liberty, "the pre-eminent symbol of class confrontation". Their identification with revolutionary symbolism gave their self-presentation as respectable, patriotic mothers, a militant edge.⁸³ By using the tricolour and the cap of liberty so shortly after the second French Revolution,

⁸¹*Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 21.7.1832, p. 467.

⁸²*Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 4.8.1832, pp. 482-3, 487-8; *Isis*, no. 25, 4.8.1832, pp. 385-7.

⁸³James Epstein, "Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England", *Past and Present*, 122, 1989, p. 103.

these female republicans associated themselves firmly with a British and a French militant class politics.

The Friends sought to make radical culture their own. During a legal dispute over the proprietorship of the Institution of the Working Classes, Jane Hutson, a coachmakers' wife, secretary of the society and "occasional orator", described her association with the lecturer and publisher, William Benbow. She managed "Every business if Mr. Benbow thought proper. (Laughter.) I am frequently absent from my home. We only had a pot of porter." Unlike the advocate who questioned her, she seems to have seen no conflict between her immersion in radical political and cultural life, and her family duties.⁸⁴ Hutson, along with other members of the society recommended action as well as supporting existing radical activities. When Hetherington was arrested for not paying stamp-duty on *The Poor Man's Guardian*, The Friends called a mixed public meeting. Hutson proposed that her countrywomen support Hetherington and his wife, as the struggle of the press was "their own cause". She urged the meeting to go "in a body" to the House of Commons to demand the release of the campaigners for press freedom. Seconding the resolution, Mrs. Orey called on working men to form a union to implement exclusive dealing:-

for by such means only could they take care of their order. The Church and State were combined against them, the one throwing dust in their eyes while the other picked their pockets (hear and laughter.)⁸⁵

Hutson and Orey saw themselves as the women of the industrious classes, who were exploited by the political monopoly of the idle and dissolute - the monarchy, aristocracy, pensioners and priesthood. Calling themselves "RECUSANTS" in *The Poor Man's Guardian*, a group of female reformers combined this political conception of class with the

⁸⁴"Radicals at War", *The Gauntlet*, 22.12.1833, pp. 732-733.

⁸⁵*Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 12.1.1833, pp. 11-12.

rhetoric of religious dissidence on the eve of the cholera fast. Like Sharples, they read in the Scriptures a political text and a vocabulary of class:-

Woe to the oppressor! his riches shall not save him in the hour of trial; for the day cometh when he must render his account.

In common with The Friends of the Oppressed, they sought to advise the men of their order, with whom they found common cause. They called the attention of "our brethren of the mob... to a few particulars which has caused some debate in our female cabinet, and who should we make our complaints to but our brethren..."⁸⁶

There is no evidence that The Friends discussed sexual politics, except perhaps when they met "to set an example to females, by taking the first public step towards entirely abolishing the absurd and superstitious practice of *Churching* women."⁸⁷ However, some female reformers developed a language of sisterhood to identify their interests with other women, as well as their "brethren". At a lecture delivered in 1832 on behalf of The Friends of the Oppressed at the Institution of the Working Classes, the Editress informed the assembled men that:-

Ours is in reality an improved association of sisters of charity; for there is more charity in seeking to remove a political disease from millions, than in attending the sick beds of suffering individuals.⁸⁸

Here, Sharples differentiated the association of radical women from the philanthropic and evangelical ministrings practised by wealthy women. Similarly, "M.A.B.", who wrote to *The Isis* and *The Poor Man's Guardian*, contrasted the dutiful wives of working men with Queen Adelaide's intrigues with government ministers, to influence the king against political reform:-

⁸⁶*Poor man's Guardian*, I, 3.3.1832, p. 303.

⁸⁷*Poor Man's Guardian*, II, 1.12.1832, p. 632.

⁸⁸*Isis*, no. 27, 18.8.1832, p. 422 and pp. 418-25.

nor shall the Amazons in high life, those hell-kite politicians of the present day, sneer at our ignorance and want of information; we will convince them, though we form part of the rabble, the mob, and the populace, we have heads as wise as theirs, and hearts infinitely better.⁸⁹

Cautioning Adelaide against involving herself in politics, the Editress realised she was giving contradictory advice about women's place in politics:-

It has occurred to me, as an apparent anomaly, that I should be meddling with politics, most dangerous politics, and should in my first Letter, have cautioned you against the danger.⁹⁰

For both "M.A.B." and Sharples, women's political intervention was not legitimised simply as an extension of conjugal duty, but had to be in the interest of correct political principles, for which they had to be educated. "M.A.B." advised her countrywomen, especially those who had not received a "liberal education" to read *The Poor Man's Guardian*, *Cobbett's History of the Reformation*, *The Poor Man's Book of the Church*, *The Church Examiner*, *The National Holiday*, and the writings of Mr. Paine. This "useful information" was required for the instruction of children; to influence men, for "Women have much to do in the education of men"; and for women's own sake:-

Men of sense will not love us less for having talent, provided we use it right and for their benefit.⁹¹

Sharples claimed that "general political improvement" was the aim of The Friends for:-

To get knowledge, to disseminate it, and to protect all those who may engage in that business, is our immediate purpose; its overthrow of all that is wrong, our final purpose.⁹²

⁸⁹M.A.B., "To the Women of England", *Poor Man's Guardian*, I, 26.5.1832, p. 403. See also "For the Isis" by "M.A.B. an Englishwoman", *Isis*, no. 35, 27.10.1832, p. 561, on the need for British and Irish women to support O'Connell and Irish liberty.

⁹⁰"Isis to Adelaide Queen of England", Letter II, *Isis*, no. 5, 10.3.1832, p. 73.

⁹¹M.A.B., "To the Women of England", *Poor Man's Guardian*, I, 26.5.1832, p. 403.

⁹²*Isis*, no. 27, 18.8.1832, pp. 418-25.

Through their reading of the radical press, their appropriation of republican and patriotic symbolism, and their practical engagement in radical politics, the female republicans who wrote to *The Poor Man's Guardian* and who participated in The Friends of the Oppressed developed from political radicalism a political conception of their class and gender position. They associated themselves as "women of the industrious classes, not on the basis of their own industry, but as "helpmeets" to the politically excluded men of the producing classes. They contrasted their gendered experience of class, as the relatives of artisans, mechanics and small business men, with that of aristocratic and wealthy ladies. Perhaps, in part, because of her class inheritance as the daughter of a prosperous manufacturer, Eliza Sharples rarely talked of women as part of the "industrious classes". In political radicalism she found a "language of gender" rather than a "language of class".⁹³

We have already seen how Sharples defined woman, as the bearer of knowledge and liberty, as "the proper help meet for man". Her conception of women's political and marital role as "helpmeet" departed from that of the female republicans in that she saw the family as the site of male tyranny. This tyranny could only be overthrown by women claiming political and civil equality in marriage. Just before the passing of the Reform Bill she recommended to the political unions a pamphlet called *The New Charter* which advocated the enfranchisement of women. She agreed with the author that "The mental capabilities of both sexes being equal, they shall enjoy, in every respect, the same civil rights". Women could not rely on male representatives to protect their interests when so often women required protection from their husbands. If women were "kindly treated" it

⁹³For a discussion of radicalism and the language of class see Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Language of Chartism", in J. Epstein and D. Thompson eds., *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1982, pp. 3-58 and my introduction.

was no reason to deny them "independence of mind or action". The pamphlet rehearsed many of the arguments that were to be deployed by advocates of women's suffrage throughout the century: that a woman could rule the country, but women could not vote; and that single women's interests were not represented by a husband.⁹⁴

Sharples' objection to the exclusive representation of men was part of a general antipathy to all forms of monopoly for monopoly, she believed, was necessarily tyrannical. Women's oppression at the hands of tyrannical husbands was comparable to that of the working classes by exclusive government. Therefore she appropriated the strategies of the reform movements to the cause of women's emancipation. Women had an "excellent means of resistance" by refusing to associate with men who did not acknowledge their equality:-

They may deal with men, as Volney has represented the working classes, in his "New Age" dealing with the kings, the priests, and the lords *Stand apart and live alone. Keep your liberty to yourselves; but keep away from us who are not to share it. If we cannot be your rational companions, we will not be your slaves.*

Male tyranny was not simply comparable with other forms of tyranny: It was shored up by the priesthood through the institution of marriage. Marriage provided the priesthood with an income and a function in civil society:-

The despotism of religious, perpetual, undivorceable marriage, right or wrong, sadly deteriorates the female character; and that very state on which women most pride themselves, is the state that tends wholly to their degradation. They truly hug their chains.

⁹⁴*Isis*, no. 9, 7.4.1832, p. 159. *The New Charter*, a 16 page pamphlet, was published by Strange, Paternoster Row, and addressed the King and the Houses of Parliament. For a useful discussion of similar arguments deployed by female suffragists in the mid-Victorian era, see Jane Rendall, "Citizenship, Culture and Civilization: The Languages of British Suffragists, 1866-1874", in Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley, eds., *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland University Press, Wellington, 1993.

To act as a "proper help meet", woman had to free herself first from man. For Sharples, the "moral marriage", based on true intellectual and political equality, and "unbounded" by law, was the tool that would break women's chains:-

Happiness or separation, liberty and mutual independency, must be the foundation of all true dignity of mind.

However, the "moral", or what might now be seen as a *companionate* marriage, could only be founded on men's respect for women's reason.

Men should always stand in the character of suitors, for the company and equality of women.⁹⁵

The expectation that men would act as suitors for the equality of women was perhaps based on an over-optimistic faith in men's reason. Moreover, it presented very difficult and practical problems for an effective programme of political action that could mobilise radicals. Who would re-educate people in *family values*, and where would this schooling take place? These questions raised wider questions about the relation between the *public* and *private* spheres and about social organisation, which in turn were the subject of intense and often divisive debates among radicals.

Many Owenites were particularly concerned about the relationship between social regeneration and character formation. The limitations of Sharples' gender politics, and of political radicalism, in devising an effective political programme, are highlighted by a comparison with the Owenite lecturer, Eliza Macauley who shared a platform with Sharples at the Rotunda in November 1832. Macauley had connections with Carlile's circle in 1828 when she was a Christian preacher for the Universalists, a deist society based at a chapel in Grub Street which followed the ideas of the Rev. Taylor. In the summer of 1832 Macauley lectured on religious responsibility and political reform. Like Sharples, she drew

⁹⁵The Editress's comments on *The New Charter* in *The Isis*, no. 10, 14.4.1832, p. 159.

on the traditions of freethought and republicanism. She was mistaken as a "Pupil of Carlile's" by the Lord Mayor of London who consequently attempted to ban her lecture "On the Necessity of a Popular Choice of Magistrates". This lecture asked "WHO ARE THE PEOPLE", and replied "*men and women*". Macauley argued that even if men did represent women's interests, women's political exclusion was still unjust, and that women should be able to stand as representatives, as well as vote.⁹⁶ Like many other Owenites, Macauley was interested in questions of knowledge and education. Although some Owenites continued to centre their politics on the reformation of character through education, others, like Macauley were beginning to investigate the possibilities of co-operative production and consumption, and trade unionism. Macauley was part proprietor of one of London's Equitable Exchange Banks and probably encouraged the formation of the Female Employment Association, which co-operated to raise capital for the distribution of material and the production of clothing at the Charlotte Street Labour Exchange. Barbara Taylor has explored how such women were beginning to construct a new agenda within radical culture about the place of women in new forms of production and organisations of labour. Importantly, the female co-operators were no longer relying simply on men to acknowledge women's rights and they were beginning to assert their own rights as workers and consumers.⁹⁷

⁹⁶*Isis*, no. 36, 3.11.1832; Miss Macauley's "Essay on Religious Responsibility", *The Crisis*, 16.6.1832 p. 49, and 7.7.1832, p. 66. For Macauley and the Grub Street chapel see Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 260 and 384. For her lecture "On the Necessity of a Popular Choice of Magistrates", delivered at Bouverie Street, December 2, 1832, see *The Gauntlet*, 10.2.1833, pp. 3-6.

⁹⁷Female Employment Association, *Crisis*, II, 20.4.1833, pp. 119-20. See Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, for Macauley and female co-operation, and pp. 83-117 for the wider Owenite debates about women and trade organisation.

Sharples was delighted by the rational social and recreational activities at the Owenite Social Institute at Kings Cross. However, like many radicals, she found the proposals of the Owenites too abstract and utopian, and criticised the Co-operative Congress of 1832 for failing to provide laws and guidelines for "practical co-operation for the removal of error and misery".⁹⁸ Speaking at the invitation of co-operators Sharples applied the principle of co-operation to the campaign for political reform, arguing that "the best form of co-operation is discussion". She contested that there was no monopoly, and therefore, nothing inherently wrong, in competition. While the labour exchanges might produce some good, they could not transform society as long as society was monopolised by the monarchy, aristocracy and priestcraft.⁹⁹

The different conceptions of monopoly outlined by Sharples were symptomatic of the fragmentation of the radical movement in the early 1830's. The traditional notion of the community of the industrious was undermined, not just by the enfranchisement of the £10 householders, but also by the emergence of new forms of employment relations and labour organisations. The erosion of traditional workshop practices and artisanal rights in trades like the garment industry, by the increase in piece-work and outwork, led some workers to develop new forms of co-operation and association to challenge economic as well as political monopoly. The idea of association troubled political radicals like Carlile, who saw any form of combination or "system" as inherently monopolistic and tyrannical and whose authority as a radical leader was undermined by the formation of new political and trade

⁹⁸*Isis*, no. 13, 5.5.1832, pp. 204, 206.

⁹⁹"On the Importance of Co-operation in Developing Truths most Advantageous to Society" delivered at the Philadelphian Chapel, Windmill Street, Finsbury Square, 5 September, 1832, *Isis*, no. 30, 8.9.1832, p. 465 and pp. 465-70.

union associations.¹⁰⁰ The competition between individual and social rights cut through Sharples' gender politics.

In her lecture "Liberty and Necessity" Sharples attempted to theorise the relationship of liberty, or individual will and reason, with that of necessity, by which she meant material circumstances, social organisation, or God. Her use of the terms "liberty" and "necessity" reflected a familiarity with works like Hobbes' *Leviathan* and later eighteenth-century necessitarian philosophers which, as Edward Royle has argued, had an important influence on nineteenth-century infidel and secular thought. While admitting her inability to explain "how man can be at the same time both the creature and the creator of circumstances", she argued the Owenite doctrine that "*man's character is formed for him not by him*" was overstated. Instead, she claimed there was a dialectical relationship between liberty and necessity:-

Liberty, then, is a relative principle; so also is *necessity*, and neither of the words can be made rationally the foundation of a system and a sect. They run one into the other, and no line can be drawn at which the one begins and the other ends.

Although liberty and necessity were mutually dependent principles, Sharples was deeply suspicious of the threats posed by social systems to individual freedom and therefore advocated that necessity should always be tempered by liberty:-

one should not be positive as a Libertarian, nor the other as a Necessitarian; but by taking up the spirit of liberty, in its best state, we should work it to the subduing of the ills of necessity as far as possible.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰For Carlile's criticisms of the labour exchanges see *Isis*, no. 29, 1.9.1832, p. 449, and his pamphlet, "On Co-operation". For the arguments between Carlile and Hetherington and the N.U.W.C., see *Poor Man's Guardian*, III, 1.11.1834, pp. 308-10; 15.11.1834, pp. 326-7; 6.12.1834, pp. 347-9; and *A Scourge*, 25.10.1834, p. 25. For discussions of the relations between political, trade union and co-operative societies, see Weiner, Prothero and Stedman Jones, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹"Liberty and Necessity", *Isis*, no. 9, 7.4.1832, pp. 129-134.

Yet, as we have already seen, "Liberty" and "Necessity" were gendered concepts for Sharples. Slipping between "Liberty" as "Eve" and "Eve" as "Woman", Sharples warned men that they should admit women freedom, as their own defence against the tyranny of systems. Uneasy with social systems Sharples looked to the family as a *natural* form of social organisation and as a site of liberty. Ironically, her vision was also patriarchal:-

Man is nowhere more dignified than as the moral master of his own family, surrounded by a kind wife, affectionate children, and assistants, who love and respect him for his care of their welfare...The family man is like a solar system, the sun and its planets. He may move in the space required, without clashing with any other family man; but to make a uniformity of motion in each family, appears to me as impracticable, as to make a uniformity of motion in the varied solar system.¹⁰²

While Sharples insisted on women's rights to education and full citizenship, this model reduced all political and social identities to the level of the family. Although Sharples appealed to women to join her mission, by rejecting the ideal of union she provided no collective aims, model or forum in which women could associate together, except as her disciples. The final section examines the failure of this libertarian strand of political radicalism to mobilise women after 1832, and the limitations that Sharples' "moral marriage" placed on her political career following the collapse of *The Isis*.

¹⁰²"Liberty and Necessity". For the influence of necessitarian philosophy on nineteenth-century infidel and secular thought, see Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, pp. 9-58, and especially, pp. 21-3.

Part Four: "The Poverty of Philosophy": Marriage, Widowhood, and Politics, 1833-1852

Rereading the early romantic correspondence between Eliza and himself, Carlile confessed in 1840:-

Mrs. C. is heartily sick of the poverty of philosophy. You may be sure of that. She has had her martyrdom that way, as often without money as with it.¹⁰³

The years of imprisonment, the loss of benefactors and the settlement with Jane had drained Carlile's resources and Sharples had bitter experience of the personal cost of political notoriety. While on a joint lecture tour of the North in 1833 their baby, whom they had imagined as the second coming, died of smallpox. The inscription on his coffin bore testimony to his parents' grief and the price of dissidence:-

Thou hast not wanted parental affection, but, through vicious persecution, thou hast wanted parental care.¹⁰⁴

Besides the material constraints of combining a political career with motherhood, Sharples' disaffection with philosophy is perhaps indicative of a changing and increasingly masculinised radical culture, which resisted the claims of female autonomy and reason. The effective silencing of Eliza Sharples represents one experience of the shifting gender relations within radicalism that are examined through this thesis.

Following the collapse of *The Isis*, Carlile began his own publication, *The Gauntlet*, in February 1833. In an attempt to resurrect his flagging political career he established the

¹⁰³Carlile to Thomas Turton, 1.12.1840, in Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, pp. 195-6.

¹⁰⁴*Gauntlet*, 3.11.1833, pp. 609-10; Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 194. Carlile's son's illness reaffirmed his commitment to birth control. See also *Gauntlet*, 27.10.1833, p. 592.

volunteer system, calling on his supporters to pledge themselves to evade payment of taxes in protest against monarchical and priest-ridden government. The journal paid only fleeting attention to the questions about female education and autonomy raised by *The Isis*. While subscription lists indicate female volunteers in a number of towns, notably Bristol, London, Leicester, Huddersfield and Birmingham, the volunteer system, devoted as it was to individual political action, discouraged the formation of female societies. Birmingham appears to have had the strongest support from women, indicated by a letter to Carlile from one hundred and fifty female volunteers. They argued that their business was with politics because men had neglected their duties and because "our interests are inseparably connected with the welfare of men". While subscribing to "Equal Rights and Equal Laws" and the "Rights of Man", they outlined new problems faced by working people, in particular, unemployment due to mechanisation.¹⁰⁵ Some of these women may have joined the Birmingham Women's Political Union, a Chartist society that addressed questions of unemployment and poor relief, that is examined in chapter three. The Carliles distanced themselves from popular politics, just as working-class women were beginning to mobilise in anti-poor law and political societies. Carlile remained resolutely opposed to mass organisation, and having awarded himself the title "Reverend", preached his rational Christianity in opposition to the Chartists.

I have explored how Sharples celebrated a new form of radical marriage that aimed to extend the role of woman as helpmeet beyond that of conjugal duty which was the guiding principle for many radical wives. However, her romantic model did not prevent Carlile subordinating her career to his own. When Sharples became pregnant in 1832, he

¹⁰⁵*Gauntlet*, 25.8.1833, reprinted in Frow and Frow, *Political Women, 1800-1850*, pp. 50-55.

angrily cautioned her to keep the pregnancy secret, anxious about its effect on his reputation. He urged her to keep quiet and apply herself to her studies:-

Instead of growing in philosophical improvement, you are diverging from it. You do not act up to the promise of your Bolton letters... I cannot degrade myself so far as to exhibit folly and madness about it, and to be food for the spirit of my enemies.¹⁰⁶

However, the scandal of Carlile's moral divorce and marriage did become food for a series of hostile exchanges between the Owenite Hetherington and Carlile and his former ally Taylor, who lectured on "matrimony, harlotry, moral marriage, bastards &" to an audience that included the Carlile and Sharples. As Carlile split from the collective philosophy of the N.U.W.C. and Owenite organisations, contests over the nature of democratic organisation and leadership were fought through the publication of scurrilous attacks on each others' marital affairs, and especially the sexual reputation of the women involved, revealing deep anxieties about the role of the radical wife. While Carlile asserted the equality of wives over simple conjugal duty, in practice he expected male authority to be observed. He disregarded the complaints made by some radical women against his attacks on Mrs. Hetherington:-

All these hags are annoyed and alarmed at my instance of spirited justice towards a troublesome and disagreeable wife. They know they deserve similar justice, so they decry it to frighten their unmanly husbands...And to every woman who finds fault with me in what I have done, I have to say, conduct yourself as a wife ought to conduct herself, not in slavish submission to tyrannical will, but in pure equality and respect only of what is respectable, and you have nothing to fear.¹⁰⁷

These misogynist attacks on radical women's sexual reputation were made at a time when working-class sexual and marital behaviour were increasingly the object of state

¹⁰⁶Undated letter, 1832, Carlile to Sharples, reprinted in Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁷*A Scourge for the Littleness of "Great" Men*, 29.11.1834, pp. 67-8. See also *Scourge*, 4.10.1834, pp. 2-8; 11.10.1834, pp. 9-15; 18.10.1834, pp. 17-21; 25.10.1834 p. 25, 27, 29-30; 8.11.1834, pp. 41-7; 13.12.1834, p. 87; 31.12.1834, pp. 109-10. See also *Poor Man's Guardian*, vol. III, 1.11.1834, pp. 308-10; 15.11.1834, pp. 326-7; 6.12.1834, pp. 347-9.

intervention, particularly through the New Poor Law and the Bastardy Clause. Anna Clark has argued that this legislation:-

forced radicals to defend the family uncritically instead of exploring sexual libertarianism, and to adopt a passive and sexless image of womanhood at odds with the plebeian celebration of female sexual pleasure and toleration of premarital sex.¹⁰⁸

This "conservative" response was epitomised by an editorial in *The Poor Man's Guardian* against the Bastardy Clause. Although opposing the clause as "all for the man, and all against the woman", the *Guardian* appealed to St Paul, and the doctrine of woman as "the 'weaker vessel'... who, consequently, needs more protection."¹⁰⁹ In this conservative climate, Carlile's distortion of the rhetoric of women's rights set an unfortunate precedent for "moral marriages" and for the reception of Owen's *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood*, that came out in 1835.¹¹⁰

The scandal surrounding the Carliles' marriage dogged their public engagements for the rest of their careers, as well as those of subsequent Owenite female lecturers like Emma Martin, with whom Carlile lectured shortly before his death. Theophilia recalled that in 1838, Carlile decided that Eliza should lecture under the travelling name of Mrs. Clay, to avoid "unpleasant notoriety or attention".¹¹¹ Towards the end of her life, Charles

¹⁰⁸Anna Clark, ch. IX, "Domesticity and the Working Class", in "Womanhood and Manhood in the Transition from Plebeian to Working-Class Culture: London, 1780-1845", D.Phil. thesis, Rutgers, 1987, pp. 380-1.

¹⁰⁹"The Bastardy Clause in the Poor Laws' Amendment Bill, And its Consequences of Made Law", *Poor Man's Guardian*, III, 24.5.1834, p. 124. See also 16.8.1834, p. 220.

¹¹⁰For the antagonism of evangelicals and many working-class people to the Owenite critiques of marriage see Taylor, "Love and the New Life" in *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 183-216.

¹¹¹See Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 113, for Sharples travelling as Mrs. Clay. Martin delivered Carlile's funeral service. See *A Funeral Sermon, occasioned by the death of Richard Carlile, preached at the Hall of Science, City Road, London, by Emma*

Bradlaugh, the future secularist M.P., found Sharples, "a broken woman, who had her ardour and enthusiasm cooled by suffering and poverty" and that she was "quiet and reserved" despite continual slander by Christians over her non-legalised union with Carlile.¹¹² The Carliles experienced difficulties procuring funds to enable them to lecture jointly away from their family. On the whole, Sharples seems to have lectured when Carlile was unable to meet engagements. Although Sharples' career was largely sacrificed to that of Carlile, Theophilia remembered having a happy childhood, spending much time with her father, who was often kept at home by illness. It seems the "moral marriage" was at least a happy one.¹¹³

Having no legal rights to his property, Sharples' financial circumstances deteriorated considerably when Carlile died intestate in 1843. As their marriage had no legal status, his business was taken over by Jane's son Richard, leaving Eliza only the furniture and personal property. She fell back on her Owenite friendships and moved briefly with her children to the Owenite community at Ham Common, as manageress of the sewing room.

Martin, Watson, London, 1843. Summary by Holyoake in Oracle of Reason, 22.4.1843, reprinted in Frow and Frow, Political Women, 1800-1850, p. 11.

¹¹²Hypatia Bonner [Bradlaugh], *Charles Bradlaugh: A Record of His Life And Work By His Daughter...*, Unwin, London, 5th. ed. 1902. Sharples fostered Charles Bradlaugh when he was thrown out of his home by his parents aged 17, for his infidel beliefs. Sharples educated him with her own children, and her daughters Hypatia and Theophilia maintained correspondence with the Bradlaugh family. It is likely that Bradlaugh's support for women's rights was inspired by his relationship with Sharples.

¹¹³Sharples completed a series of lectures for Carlile in aid of Rowland Detrosier's family at the Mechanics' Hall, London, where she hoped to find a room where she could lecture occasionally "as an example to other ladies". (*Scourge*, no. 12, 20.12.1834, p. 95.) She debated with the Socialists in Manchester in 1837, and on phrenology, in which she was increasingly interested, at Carlisle, Annan, Gravesend and London, in 1838. Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, p. 195, 210, 225. See pp. 236-42 for Theophilia's childhood memories.

Back in London, like so many widows and gentlewomen, she turned to needlework to support her family, undertaking their education as well. Perhaps she finally realised that it was the burdens of childcare, work and poverty that had prevented other women from joining her cause in 1832. She admitted to the Chartist secularist Thomas Cooper:-

Many have said: 'Why not devote yourself to public usefulness?' My answer is because my helpless family demanded all my attention: night and day I had to struggle for daily bread, and if the physical is weakened the mind is surely paralyzed. They are getting now beyond immediate care, and abler somewhat to assist themselves, which will leave me more able to combat the melancholy prospect before me, and I hope, perform a task, which is the first wish of my heart - to write the life of Richard Carlile. Nothing is wanting but the means of living to enable me to do this.¹¹⁴

Sharples' political career was compromised by the fact that her political identity had been bound up with her husband's and for a while she was too depressed to continue her political activity. Shortly after Richard's death, she declined Holyoake's request that she move a resolution at an Anti-Persecution Union meeting,

not because I do not duly appreciate your exertions, but because I dare not at present venture to try my feelings in a Public Meeting...The best years of my life, the bloom of my existence, the vital energies of my heart, all, yes! all have been actively engaged with one, now no more in combatting with this Monster Tyrant,... (Sharples' emphasis).¹¹⁵

However, Sharples continued her links with metropolitan freethinkers and secularists and in 1846 lectured "on the Nature and Character of Woman and her Position in Society" at the Owenite Literary and Social Institution at John Street. At the same institution in 1849, she made a few remarks at the Birthday Celebration of Paine, along with leading radicals like Hetherington, Holyoake and a Miss Dyer, who was currently lecturing on women's

¹¹⁴Campbell Carlile, *Battle of the Press*, pp. 231-2, 241-2; letter Eliza Sharples to Thomas Cooper, addressed from 13 Maidstone Street, Hackney Road, 28th, July, 1849, in the Bradlaugh Papers.

¹¹⁵Elizabeth Sharples Carlile to G.J. Holyoake, Alcott House, Ham, 13.10.1843, The Holyoake Collection, no. 99.

rights. The same year, a group of freethinkers, who were "energetic and enthusiastic disciples of Richard Carlile" invited Sharples to manage a secular Temperance Hall at Warner Place.¹¹⁶

Women in the Chartist and secular movements continued to turn to the traditions of freethought and Paineite radicalism to stake their claims to intellectual and political freedom as will be explored the following chapters. Yet despite the ideological commitment of freethinkers like the Chartist Charles Neesom, or the secularist and co-operator, George Holyoake, to women's rights, they rarely prioritised such issues over the political interests of male radicals. In 1850, Sharples wrote to Thomas Cooper of her plans for a series of lectures on the "Rights of Woman". However, these had been thwarted by "unfair play" from men connected with the Hall who laughed at the idea that "all Reform will be found to be inefficient that does not embrace the Rights of Woman", and saw her merely as a server of coffee. She resented this confinement since serving coffee was not her "sphere" and described herself as the loneliest person in the world.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶*Reasoner*, 18.11.1846, p. 304 and 3.1.1849, p. 79; Hypatia Bonner, *Charles Bradlaugh*, p. 9.

¹¹⁷Elizabeth Sharples Carlile to Thomas Cooper, Temperance Hall, 1 Warner Place, Hackney, 23.4.1850, in ed. E. Royle, *Bradlaugh Papers*, Microfilm Ltd, Wakefield, 1977, 19a. See also 18e for another letter to Cooper dated 28.7.1849. Thanks to Edward Royle for referring me to Bradlaugh's papers. When Sharples died in poverty in January 1852, the secular movement raised £20 to send her daughters to America, and to establish her son in an apprenticeship. The subscription, however, was raised in the name of Richard Carlile, as a famous freethinker and leader of the campaign for the free press. Sharples was remembered only for her role as wife and mother. Hypatia and Theophilia were entrusted to the care of Owenite freethinkers in New York who hoped to secure them with suitable employment as needlewomen. See *The Reasoner*, XII, 31.3.1852. pp. 305-6.

As Isis, Sharples had confidently proclaimed a female gospel that asserted women's rights as individuals, and the importance of female knowledge. Outlining her prospective lecture course to Cooper, she presented women's rights in more accommodating terms for men. She argued that women had power for good or evil; that "[i]f they advance not knowledge they will perpetuate ignorance"; that woman's position corresponded to the state of civilisation of a society.¹¹⁸ The use of "Woman's Mission" provides important connections between the women's rights discourses of the early 1830s and the 1850s. In 1850, Sharples still equated the intellectual emancipation of women with social and political progress. While formerly she had defied male monopoly and celebrated the female intellect and spirit, she now seems more diplomatic, choosing her words carefully to solicit the approval of a radical man. Her tone is suggestive of the tenuous position that women now held in radical movements and of the changes in the rhetoric available to them to articulate their aspirations and their dissatisfactions. These changes and are the subject of the following chapters.

¹¹⁸Sharples to Cooper, 23.4.1850.

Chapter Three

"A THINKING AND STRICTLY MORAL PEOPLE": EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

At the beginning of 1841, the Chartist movement was still recovering direction following the confrontations and subsequent imprisonment and transportation of many of its local and national leaders of 1839-40. Nonetheless, the East London Female Total Abstinence Association looked confidently to the future. Through the national Chartist newspaper, *The Northern Star*, they assured their "SISTERS AND COUNTRYWOMEN" that a new page was being turned in history. The multitude was "searching for the fountain of knowledge"; truth was dispelling superstition; they were surrounded by "almost incredible improvements in arts and sciences". This new stage in civilisation would be reached by the people abandoning intoxicating liquor and educating themselves "to become a thinking and strictly moral people, and [acquiring] sound political knowledge."¹

James Epstein suggests that in the early 1840s, the Chartists attempted to consolidate their organisation by building a "movement culture" as a supplement and an alternative to self-defensive and insurrectionary measures.² Rational educational and recreational activities would bind the movement together and prepare the people for self-government. The Chartist women believed that by "embracing every opportunity of

¹"Address of the East London Female Total Abstinence Association", *Northern Star*, 30.1.1841, p. 1a.

²James Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects of the Chartist Movement in Nottingham", in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson, eds., *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1982, p. 221.

cultivating and improving our minds" they could impart "truth and virtue" to their children and help initiate a new stage in history. The "cause of universal redemption" therefore required the intellectual emancipation of women and the combined efforts of men and women. The Association was inspired by the belief that:-

Perhaps at no former period of time has the female character exhibited so much zeal, or displayed so much brilliancy of talent, as in the present day. The press teems with valuable writings, the productions of women. Remember, if we bestir ourselves in these matters, our husbands cannot keep behind for shame: pride will stimulate them to excel us. Then how delightful it will be to see a generous strife between husband and wife, trying to excel each other in knowledge and morality!³

In common with many other female Chartist addresses, the East London Address is resonant of the rhetoric of "Woman's Mission". The emphasis on "Woman's Mission" and "Woman's Influence" has been read by some historians as evidence of an increasing aspiration for female domesticity within Chartism. Chartist women's prioritisation of men's political representation over women's, represents for Michael Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, "a self-imposed limitation on the female contribution". They identify women's religious and moral tone as a characteristic of female Chartism:-

Determination and respectability were keynotes of women's politics, and especially when they were in pursuit of righteousness.⁴

More recently, historians of women within radical culture have focused on the creation of sexual difference within radical discourse. Barbara Taylor, Sally Alexander, and Jutta Schwartzkopf have drawn attention to the patriarchal nature of Chartist

³"Address of the East London Female Total Abstinence Association".

⁴Michael Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women and Protest 1800-1850*, Croom Helm, London, 1982, p. 115.

organisation, which prevented women participating as full and equal members of the movement and the working class. They demonstrate that the Chartists constructed a different form of citizenship for men and women.⁵ According to Alexander, man's rights to citizenship lay in his property in labour, while woman's property was constructed largely in terms of the virtue of her person and her virtue as homemaker. This gendered citizenship had consequences for women's political claims and position within the movement. Few Chartists actively promoted women's independent political rights, believing that their rights as citizen could be represented through their husbands or fathers. Women were welcomed on Chartist demonstrations to defend the rights of the family and community but only men could represent the community or "the people" in any formal capacity. Although women were allowed to form their own organisations and to address the movement as wives and mothers, Chartist men retained exclusive control over the official positions within the movement.⁶

For these feminist historians, this politics marks a retreat from the more radical sexual politics of the Owenites which was more ready to challenge gender inequality and

⁵Barbara Taylor, "Sex and Class in the Post-Owenite Era", in Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London, 1983, pp. 265-75; Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History", *History Workshop Journal*, no. 17, 1984, pp. 125-149, esp. pp. 135-48; Jutta Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991, pp. 283-88. Other studies of women in Chartism are:- Caroline Martin, "Female Chartism: A Study of Women in Politics", M.A. thesis, University of Wales, (Swansea), 1973; David Jones, "Women and Chartism", *History*, 68, 1983, pp. 1-21; Jean Lowe, "Women in the Chartist Movement, 1838-52", M.A. thesis, Birmingham University, 1985; and the pioneering work of Dorothy Thompson in "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension" in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, pp. 112-138, and "The Women" in Thompson's *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*, Temple Smith, London, 1984, pp. 120-151.

⁶Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences", pp. 135-7.

to promote female autonomy. While it is important to consider why the Chartists refused to take up some of the Owenite agenda, we need to evaluate women's commitment to Chartism on their terms. Although Chartist women tended to speak for themselves and to other women as wives and mothers rather than as single women, they devised other personas which emphasised their patriotism, their political commitment and their communality with other women: "Patriotic Women of England", "female politicians", "sisters" and "countrywomen". Michelle de Larrabeiti, has drawn attention to the Chartist women's mobilisation of the rhetoric of "Woman's Influence" as a means of making themselves visible and audible. She suggests that their use of:-

a morally sanctioned rhetoric of family life was a strategic device in defending against sexual slurs and could be activated to express political envy for the status accorded the middle-class "madonna".⁷

Anna Clark's focus on the constructed and contested nature of Chartist rhetoric and the female Chartists' adoption of a "militant domesticity", discussed in my introduction, is useful, for it acknowledges Chartist women's self-reflexivity and political initiative and sophistication.⁸ In this chapter, I shall examine how Chartist women reworked established traditions of radical thought and practice in response to the insecurity and poverty facing working women and their families in the 1830s and 1840s.

The East London Female Association's commitment to educating themselves and their children to become "a thinking and strictly moral people" was a direct refusal of

⁷Michelle de Larrabeiti, "'Conspicuous before the World': Radical Politics and Political Discourse in the Women's Addresses to the *Northern Star*, 1839-42", in Eileen Yeo, ed., "Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Social Movements", forthcoming.

⁸Anna Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language and Class in the 1830s and 1840s", *Journal of British Studies*, 31, January 1992, pp. 62-6 and 77-9.

the religious morality of the established Church and State and especially of a clergy which preached "contentment and passive obedience to the toiling and care-worn hungry mechanic and labourer...". Steeped in the rhetoric of freethought, infidelity and republicanism, this highly politicised vision of motherhood asserted a morality that countered Anglican and evangelical respectability.⁹ For these Chartists, teetotalism was a means of achieving independence for the working-class family from "the garb of charity", rather than a mark of deference to middle-class morality. If in 1841 these London women focused on their contribution to a new cultural politics, as recently as 1839 they had been associated with plans to arm metropolitan radicals. This chapter explores how this association of "cultural" and "militant" strategies influenced perceptions of Chartist women as female politicians and differentiated them from other women who claimed a public role.

This chapter considers how far women were able to insert themselves into established political and intellectual traditions, focusing on female organisation in three different Chartist constituencies: Birmingham, Nottingham and London. We have only scraps of evidence to suggest the social composition of these organisations and these have been detailed elsewhere.¹⁰ Here I want to examine instead the organisational activity and rhetoric of Chartist women as evidence for the ways women represented themselves.

Established in May 1838, the Birmingham Women's Political Union was the first

⁹*Northern Star*, 30.1.1841, p. 1a.

¹⁰On the social composition of female Chartism see Martin, "Female Chartism", pp. 58-62; Thompson, "The Women", esp. pp. 128, 130; Jean Lowe, "Women in the Chartist Movement", ch. 1; Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 78-88.

and largest recorded female Chartist association, having sold between eighteen and nineteen hundred membership tickets by its first meeting. The Women's Union was called by Thomas Clutton Salt, a Council member of the Birmingham Political Union, to act as auxiliary to the "Men's Union".¹¹ The middle- and upper-class dominated Council attempted to steer the early Chartist movement in favour of "moral" tactics but when the Political Union split along class lines over issues of democratic practice, leadership and accountability in 1839, the Women's Union supported the predominantly working-class, O'Connorite leadership of Birmingham Chartism.¹²

The Nottingham Female Political Union was formed in October 1838 to cooperate with the Birmingham Women's Union. The Nottingham Union invited Salt to address them on the aims, procedures and rules of the Birmingham society.¹³ Like the B.W.P.U., the N.F.P.U. was formed during a honeymoon period of co-operation between middle-class reform, epitomised by Sutton, the editor of *The Nottingham Review*, and working-class radicals, whose main co-ordinating body was the Working Men's Association. However, as discussed below, the female Chartists helped precipitate a

¹¹"Women's Political Union", *Birmingham Journal*, 1.9.1838, p. 7bc; T. Clutton Salt, "To the Women of Birmingham", *Birmingham Journal*, 18.8.1838 and *Northern Star*, 25.8.1838, p. 8bc. For a detailed study of the B.W.P.U. see Jean Lowe, "Women in the Chartist Movement", ch. 5b. Catherine Hall compares the gender relations in the early reform societies with the Birmingham Chartists in "The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Early-Nineteenth-Century England", *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, esp. pp. 134-6.

¹²For the splits in the B.P.U. see Carlos Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain, 1830-1839*, Archon Books, Folkestone, 1978 and Clive Behagg, "An Alliance with the Birmingham Middle Class: The Birmingham Political Union and Early Chartism", in Epstein and Thompson, eds, *The Chartist Experience*, pp. 59-86.

¹³*Nottingham Review*, 26.10.1838, p. 4c; 9.5.1838, p. 3b.

rupture in this class alliance and became firm supporters of the O'Connorite wing of the movement and the National Charter Association.¹⁴

Dorothy Thompson and Jutta Schwartzkopf have found that female participation in Chartism was concentrated in the early years of the movement.¹⁵ In the wake of the mass arrests of the winter and summer of 1839, the movement in many areas faced a heavy financial burden and problems of mobilisation. In April 1840, the N.F.P.U. met to discuss the continuation of their society but the chairwoman feared that "the times were dead again 'em, and she thought for the present it was 'no go'".¹⁶ The Union reformed as a Female Charter Association in 1843 and again played an important role in the movement's cultural activities. Neither the Nottingham nor Birmingham societies appear to have reformed in 1848, the year of the final petition. By contrast, the London female Chartists were active intermittently from 1839-1848.

The published accounts suggest that the London societies discussed and prioritised women's political rights more readily than other female associations, although we cannot rely on press coverage for an accurate representation of women's views. The attention given to women's rights in London owed much to the continuation of Paineite

¹⁴On Chartism in Nottingham see, James Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects of the Chartist Movement in Nottingham", in Epstein and Thompson, *The Chartist Experience*. On Chartist women see Elizabeth Nicholson, "Working Class Women in Nineteenth Century Nottingham, 1815-1850", B.A. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1973 and Jo O'Brien, *Women's Liberation in Labour History: A Case Study from Nottingham*, Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, Nottingham, n.d.

¹⁵In the most recent survey of women in Chartism, Schwartzkopf has found that the most intensive years of female association were 1839 (118 societies) and 1842 (43). Numbers declined after 1842 and only reached 14 in 1848. See *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 199-200.

¹⁶*The Nottingham and Newark Gazette*, 24.4.1840, p. 133a.

radicalism in London Chartism. The London Working Men's Association was an exclusively male organisation but the breakaway London Democratic Association established itself in 1839 as a mass-based Chartist party with a female society.¹⁷ Men and women who had been active in the campaigns for the unstamped press, political reform and trade unionism in the early 1830s promoted female Chartist societies in the City and East End. While male Chartists spoke at female meetings, they often discussed women's educational and political rights. Like much of the metropolitan movement, the female Chartists embraced temperance and educational activities as part of a militant programme of exclusive dealing and the right of resistance as a last resort. David Goodway has argued that the London Chartists tended to back the physical force, O'Connorite wing of the movement rather than the extreme left but that there was, nevertheless, an undercurrent of insurrectionary activity.¹⁸

While other women examined in this thesis saw education as the key to social and political regeneration, the Chartist women belonged to a movement which debated the use of "physical" as well as "moral force". Until recently Chartist historians have held to the divisions made between moral and physical force Chartists by some of the movements' early historians, often participants themselves, as in the case of Gammage and William Lovett.¹⁹ However, historians are beginning to recognise that these

¹⁷David Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-1848*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 21-37. For the splits between the L.W.M.A. and the L.D.A. see Jennifer Bennett, "The London Democratic Association, 1837-1841: A Study in London Radicalism", in Epstein and Thompson, *The Chartist Experience*, pp. 87-119; and Anna Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity", pp. 70-1.

¹⁸Goodway, *London Chartism*, p. 27.

¹⁹Gammage and Lovett were anxious to vindicate the policies and leadership of the moral force men of the L.W.M.A. against the physical force men of the North and particularly the "demagoguery" of Feargus O'Connor and his "fustian jackets". See R.G.

differences have been overstated. Clive Behagg has argued that the debates about the use of force at the 1839 Convention were symptomatic of conflicting ideas of democratic organisation, participation and leadership at local and national level. James Epstein's study of the cultural life of the Nottingham movement reveals that moral and physical force strategies were often deployed together.²⁰ Indeed, most Chartists endorsed the right to self-defence and the need to educate working people for political emancipation. Nevertheless, Chartists did identify themselves by the terms "moral" and "physical force" and the rhetoric of force held great potency for supporters and opponents of the movement. Little attention has been paid, however, to how the rhetoric and practice of physical and moral force Chartism was gendered. In this chapter I explore how women attempted to carve a role for themselves in the militant and educative activities of the movement. I consider how the women's perceptions of themselves as female politicians as well as their opponents, was affected by their identification with a militant as well as an ameliorative politics.

Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement 1837-1854*, (1854 and 1894), and John Saville's useful introduction to the 1969 edition, Augustus M. Kelley, New York; and William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, (1876), G. Bell and Sons, London, 1920, 2 vols.

²⁰Behagg, "An Alliance with the Middle Class" and Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects of the Chartist Movement in Nottingham". Other contributors to *The Chartist Experience* also qualify the moral/physical force dichotomy.

Part One: Chartist Debates on Education as Politics

The role of education as a political strategy in achieving an increase in the franchise became a point of contention even before Chartism had defined itself as a movement.²¹ The most prominent working-class radical organisation in London in the years preceding Chartism was the Working Men's Association. According to one of its founder members, William Lovett, it was established in June 1836 to act "as a political school of self-instruction" to enable working men to look to themselves for leadership, rather than to the self-styled "*great men*" of higher social status.²² The L.W.M.A. included some of the leaders of the National Union of Working Classes who had been active in the campaigns for the free press and sympathetic to Owenite ideas.²³ They sought "equal political and social rights" for all classes and "to promote by all available means, the education of the rising generation".²⁴ To these ends, they published a scheme for a national system of education, devised by Lovett, who was to become the most prominent Chartist theorist of education. It envisaged the establishment of infant, preparatory, high schools and colleges that would provide schooling for both sexes and educational and recreational activities for adults. These would be nationally funded but locally accountable to school committees elected by universal female as well as male

²¹For general discussions on Chartism and education see Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1960 and Harold Silver, *English Education and the Radicals, 1780-1850*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975.

²²William Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, vol. I, p. 94.

²³For example Henry Hetherington, John Cleave, James Watson, John Gast and Charles Neesom. See Lovett *ibid.* p. 96 for a list of the most active members of the L.W.M.A.

²⁴See the objects of the Association reprinted in Lovett, *ibid.*, pp. 94-6.

suffrage.²⁵ These educational goals were central to the L.W.M.A.'s campaign for the social and political rights of the working classes at home and abroad. In the spring of 1838 the association cooperated with Francis Place and a group of Radical M.P.s to submit a People's Charter to Parliament, drafted again by Lovett. In many areas, including Nottingham, the local W.M.A. became the core of the Chartist movement.

While the L.W.M.A. was committed to universal male suffrage, it was ambivalent about whether this could be achieved by an unreformed, and in the eyes of some members, degenerate working class. Initially, it aimed to speak and act as a moral exemplar for "the multitude", rather than building a mass organisation. It hoped to unite "the *intelligent* and *influential* portion of the working classes in town and country" and sought:-

not a mere exhibition of numbers unless, indeed, they possess the attributes and characters *of men!* and little worthy of the name are those who have no aspirations beyond mere sensual enjoyments; who, forgetful of their duties as fathers, husbands, and brothers, muddle their understanding and drown their intellect amid the drunken revelry of the pot-house - whose profligacy makes them the ready tools and victims of corruption or slaves of unprincipled governors, who connive at their folly and smile while they forge for themselves the fetters of liberty by their love of drink.²⁶

For these radicals the "character *of men*", or masculinity, was defined primarily by independence. Many believed they could achieve independence through intellectual advancement. Education would enable them to remake themselves as men.

While most radicals continued to support self-improvement measures, many

²⁵See "Address of the London Working Men's Association", 1837, reprinted in Lovett, *ibid*, pp. 138-50.

²⁶"Objects of the Association", 1836 and "Address to the Working Men's Associations", 1836, Lovett, *ibid*, pp. 94-9.

worried that the emphasis on education implied that working men were responsible for their own oppression, rather than unequal social and political arrangements. Some were uncomfortable with the denunciations of "unreformed" working-class men implicit in the statement "they forge for themselves the fetters of liberty". Others were critical of a politics which relied on educating the upper classes to enfranchise the poor. As the L.W.M.A. was negotiating the draft Charter with sympathetic M.P.s, a group seceded to form the London Democratic Association. In a statement to *The Northern Star*, Julian Harney anticipated some of the main criticisms of "moral force" Chartism. He warned that their enemies "will not yield to *moral* persuasion"; that any education system that met with their enemies' approval could only perpetuate the people's slavery; and that it was "perfectly illusory" to expect amelioration from education alone.²⁷

Chartist hopes of establishing a state-funded system of education faded as many middle-class reformers withdrew their support from the movement during the events surrounding the collection of the Chartist Petition and the General Convention in 1838-9. With intensifying local and national state repression of the Chartists, ranging from prohibitions on assembly to mass arrests, more confrontational measures such as arming, exclusive dealing and the "sacred month" gained currency. Even Lovett confessed to being party to some of these provisions at the General Convention in 1839.²⁸ However, in the wake of the mass arrests of August 1839 and the subsequent demoralisation of the movement, Lovett with his fellow inmate in gaol, John Collins, revised his earlier plans for a national system of education as the basis for a new Chartist Association.

²⁷*Northern Star*, 24.3.1838, cited by Simon, *Studies in the History of Education*, p. 268.

²⁸Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, I, p. 213.

Rather than the state funding schools, each Chartist locality would establish its own school system and social missionaries, through the raising of the political levy. This "New Move" was strongly associated with the emergence of "Knowledge", "Temperance" and "Church Chartism", seen by many Chartists as rivals to the pre-existing National Charter Association. Again, many Chartists insisted on the primacy of obtaining political rights, and opposed any move that might suggest intelligence as a test for the suffrage. R. Ross from Lambeth refuted any necessary relationship between formal education and virtue:-

I cannot allow these praters about the ignorance of the masses to lay the blame of the evils, which arise chiefly out of the vicious legislation of the highly-educated and very immoral aristocracy, on the shoulders of their more virtuous, though less educated, brethren.²⁹

Although the political role of education constituted a major source of disagreement between moral and physical force Chartists, it is important not to overstate its significance. Debates about political strategy were often harnessed to leadership contests. The rivalry of Lovett and O'Connor is the best known leadership struggle and both men emphasised their political differences to define their own constituencies. Still rejecting Christian, Teetotal and Knowledge Chartism in 1843, O'Connor advocated that the N.C.A. executive and lecturers sign the total abstinence pledge, for:-

it is high time that we reform ourselves, while we are engaged in the good work of reforming others...³⁰

The previous chapter discussed how some metropolitan organisations in the 1830s, including the National Union of Working Classes, debated the need to educate women,

²⁹R. Ross, "The New "National" Move", *Northern Star*, 10.4.1841, p. 5d.

³⁰*Northern Star*, 16.9.1843, reprinted in the "New Move" *English Chartist Circular*, II, no. 139, p. 346.

if only to prevent them acting as a conservative influence on men. Similarly, there was some acknowledgement of the importance of female education and citizenship within the Chartist movement, although it was marginal to mainstream debate about the role of education in social and political transformation. William Lovett's ideas on female education provide some indication of the models available to Chartist women.

Lovett claims to have included the female franchise in the original draft of the People's Charter and that it was dropped when W.M.A. members from the provinces feared that it would alienate the support of working men. By contrast with Chartists like John Watkins who argued for the enfranchisement of widowed and single women who were not represented in the legislature through a husband, Lovett reaffirmed his commitment to a universal female franchise in the aims of the "New Move" National Association in 1841.³¹ Lovett's first argument for female enfranchisement lay in the classical liberal claim that women should *participate in the making of the laws to which* they were subject and that as taxpayers they should be represented. His second argument, however, fell back on the assumption that married women had an "*influence for good or evil*" on their husbands, and that the "political knowledge or ignorant prejudices" of single women were "equally powerful in society". Most importantly, he insisted that women were "*the chief instructors of our children*". If "deficient in knowledge and depraved in morals" women could "render nugatory all the efforts of the schoolmaster." If, conversely, "she is so well informed as to appreciate and second his exertions", she would run a "wise and well-regulated household".³² Unlike O'Connor

³¹See my "Introduction" for John Watkins. For Chartist debates on women's suffrage see Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 58-63 and 69-77.

³²William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organisation of the People*, (1840), Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1969, pp. 61-2.

who believed that the female franchise "WOULD LEAD TO FAMILY DISSENSIONS", Lovett insisted it would unite the interests of the household and confirm the authority of its male head.³³

Lovett's insistence that women should defer to male knowledge compromised his commitment to the equal educational rights of women. Although local educational committees were to be elected on a universal franchise, he did not envisage that women would be employed as the social missionaries who were to spread intellectual and political education. He contended that girls required an academic, domestic and political education but excepting domestic training and infant schooling, education would be conducted by male teachers at school and radical husbands and fathers at home.³⁴ Girls and boys were to sit on opposite sides of the classroom but with the exception of domestic training in cooking, making and mending clothes, the sexes were to be taught the same curriculum. This model was adopted by the schools of the Chartist Land Company.³⁵

If Lovett was keen to prescribe the duties of women, he and other radicals were as concerned to promote the obligations of men to their families, as evidenced by the "Address to the Working Men's Associations". Rather than dissipating their energies and earnings in the pot-house, fathers should return home to share with their families the

³³Feergus O'Connor in *The Northern Star*, 1.7.1843.

³⁴For Lovett's proposals for infant schools see *Chartism*, pp. 77-92.

³⁵*Chartism* p. 41. For Lovett's discussion of domestic training and the provision of anatomy classes for girls see also *Life and Struggles*, II, pp. 371 and 440. For the Land Plan schools see Schwartzkopf, "Women's Involvement in Working-Class Politics: The Case of the Female Chartists", D.Phil. thesis, University of Bremen, 1987, p. 316.

knowledge they had gained at their political schools and literary and scientific institutions:-

And, as our object is universal, so (consistent with justice) ought to be our means to compass it; and we know not of any means more efficient, than to enlist the sympathies and quicken the intellects of our wives and children to a knowledge of *their* rights and duties; for, as in the absence of knowledge, they are the most formidable obstacles to a man's patriotic exertions, so when imbued with it will they prove his greatest auxiliaries. Read, therefore, talk, and politically and morally instruct your wives and children; let them, as far as possible, share in your pleasures, as they must in your cares; and they will soon learn to appreciate your exertions, and be inspired with *your own feelings* against the enemies of *their country*. Thus instructed your wives will spurn instead of promoting you to accept, the base election bribe - your sons will scorn to wear the livery of the tyrants - and your daughters be doubly fortified against the thousand ills to which the children of poverty are exposed. (My emphasis)³⁶

Lovett envisaged a one-way flow of information from the father to the different members of his family who would be given guidance and instruction according to the particular perils they faced as young men, daughters or mothers. By contrast "A Woman" writing in *The London Dispatch*, published by the L.W.M.A. member Henry Hetherington, imagined an *exchange* of knowledge between husband and wife within the context of a companionate marriage. This exchange would provide the basis for a new politics. In "A Few of the Many Reasons Why Women Should Study Politics", she argued that affection in marriage could only be sustained by intelligence. Men should share their knowledge acquired from the scientific and literary societies with their wives, "to whom it would be felicity to impart knowledge, *and from whom to hear pertinent remarks*". (My emphasis.) Having engaged in "every domestic employment" and run her own business, she insisted that many wives "display intellectual conceptions of which their husbands are incapable" and that many families were dependent on the mental

³⁶Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, I, p.98.

powers exercised by women in the management of business. Their "quick perception" of the quality of goods, the character of people and their "calculations on cause and effect" proved a "competency to grapple with matters of extensive influence".³⁷ It was precisely women's experience as domestic managers and consumers that female Chartists aimed to politicise and harness to the movement, especially in relation to exclusive dealing. She also validated the recreational as well as the material benefits of education for women. Politics was her "relaxation" which she had studied for twenty out of her thirty years.³⁸

"A Woman's" business experience may have encouraged her to write a series of letters to *The London Dispatch* on currency reform. As a regular contributor on a topic rarely considered of interest to women, she felt compelled to defend Harriet Martineau's *Society in America* from an attack in *The Weekly Dispatch*. She challenged the journal's contention that Martineau wrote on subjects that only men could understand and that women "cannot with decency discuss". Like Eliza Sharples and Eliza Macauley who had lectured in the metropolis during her political lifetime, she defended the right of free enquiry, asking "In what natural law, mental, physical or organic, are women less interested than men?" She concluded, "The opinion that women should not investigate is the result of vice in men."³⁹

"A Woman" found men's monopoly of knowledge to be detrimental to the radical cause. Like Wollstonecraft, she was critical of a female sensibility undisciplined by

³⁷*London Dispatch*, 11.6.1837, p. 311 and 9.7.1837, p. 342.

³⁸*London Dispatch*, 9.7.1847, p. 342.

³⁹"Miss Martineau and the *Weekly Dispatch*", *London Dispatch*, 11.6.1837, p. 311.

sound education, which could only serve reaction. Nevertheless, women's propensity for feeling and affection, could be channelled into Reform:-

Women work by their feelings on men, and so subdue them; but they do not submit to the influence of men's feelings and intelligence... But men and women are formed to have mutual controul [*sic*]; and it is because those who are interested in supporting vicious systems of government know the power which intelligence combined with feeling in woman would have on men, and therefore dread it, that they particularly deprecate women attending to politics; which, so materially affecting them, and those dearer to them than themselves, would rouse such a mental force as would move men more than any other power can; for men do not move men, nor women move women, as each do the other.⁴⁰

These discussions indicate the continuity of a republican discourse of women's rights, articulated by political radicals like the Carliles and the Owenites. In 1837, the editor of *The London Dispatch* welcomed "A Woman's" article and recommended the recent "declaration of the rights of woman" by Mr. Bernard, president of the Central National Association campaigning for universal suffrage and the abolition of the Corn Laws and the New Poor Law. Echoing Thompson and Wheeler's *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race*, the editor cautioned,

When democrats complain, and justly complain, of the tyranny of aristocrats, they too often lose sight of the wrongs inflicted by masculine society upon females... No reason, except that founded upon the law of the strongest, can be assigned why woman (*one full half of the human race*), should be excluded from all participation in the making of the legal and social institutions by which society is governed.⁴¹

Despite this effusive declaration in favour of women's rights, the journal did not report Bernard's speech and made no further attempts to promote women's rights. The journal published no more letters from "A Woman" and scarcely any more letters by women.

⁴⁰*London Dispatch*, 9.7.1837, p. 342.

⁴¹"Rights of Woman", *London Dispatch*, 9.7.1837, p. 342.

Although female education was marginal to Chartist debates about education, it was high on the agenda of female Chartists. Education was to be an important component of female citizenship and of women's role within the Chartist movement. Moreover, women's education through the movement enabled them to participate within the debates about the relationship between physical and moral force.

Part Two: "Sound political wisdom from the lips of women": Chartist Women's Political Education

Women Chartists in Birmingham, Nottingham and London attempted to include themselves in the practice of "really useful knowledge" that Richard Johnson has seen as central to Chartist culture. When able to, they took advantage of the political education offered by the male Chartist organisations. Mrs. Lapworth, president of the Birmingham Women's Union, thanked the Council members "who took the trouble to instruct them", noting that if their mothers and grandmothers had studied politics, women would not now be in such a miserable situation.⁴² Most importantly, female societies provided the opportunity for women to learn and teach. Mary Ann Walker advertised that at the City of London Female Chartist Association, the wives and daughters of Chartists "would hear good instruction... they might hear reason and sound political wisdom from the lips of women, and even from the daughter of a working man."⁴³

⁴²*Birmingham Journal*, 1.9.1838, p. 7bc.

⁴³ "The Chartist Meeting - Miss Mary Anne Walker Again", *The Times*, 25.10.1842, p. 6a.

The education devised by Chartist women was wide-ranging and highly politicised, including formal educational classes, lectures and a training in democratic participation, to enable women to run their own organisations and involve themselves in the general activities of the movement. By examining how women sought to educate their children, their men, the movement, and themselves, we shall see that they challenged and offered an alternative to existing educational provision and developed an educational practice that was part of a collective politics for changing the world. The women participated extensively in the Chartist plans to "substitute" their own educational forms for those provided by religious, philanthropic and civic bodies, that Johnson has seen as central working class radical politics until the mid-century.⁴⁴

In London and Nottingham, female Chartists aimed to provide alternative schooling for children to that of the national schools. The East London Female Patriotic Association desired an independent, freethinking system of education "in accordance with our views and feelings" rather than the class-biased provision of the Church and State,

which is only calculated to debase the mind, and render it subservient to class interest; let us teach our offspring to do to others as they would others do unto them.⁴⁵

Mary Ann Abbott, sub-secretary of the Nottingham Female Chartist Association, supervised the Female Adult, Children's and Chartist Sunday Schools, that were partly

⁴⁴Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working Class Culture, 1790-1848", in Clark, Critcher and Johnson, eds., *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, Hutchinson, London, 1979. pp. 76-7.

⁴⁵"Address of the East London Female Total Abstinence Association", *Northern Star*, 30.1.1841, p. 1a. See also Mary Ann Walker's denunciation of the "national humbugs" in *The Times*, 25.10.1842, p. 6a.

funded by lectures delivered by herself and Eliza Blatherwick.⁴⁶

Participation in a female society, or indeed, in the general organisational and cultural activities of the movement, was seen by women as an education in itself. Although many female meetings, especially large public meetings, were chaired by men, women appear to have taken a more active role as they acquired political experience and confidence. Elizabeth Neesom displayed a notice at the L.D.A. headquarters at Shipyard, Temple Bar, stating that gentlemen would only be welcomed by invitation of a majority of members.⁴⁷ Democratic participation was enhanced by the use of a rotating chair by the Nottingham Female Union. The treasurer and secretary were accountable to the membership, who could examine the books at meetings.

The Nottingham members appear to have seen themselves as full members of the movement. Some of their resolutions were forwarded to and reported in the radical press although many may not have been published. Women comprised a third of the assembly that elected the Nottingham delegate to the National Convention in December 1839, although it is unclear whether they voted. The *Nottingham Mercury* did however deride them for sharing tobacco with the men. In 1843, they submitted seven members as nominees to the Convention, but their application seems to have been ignored, along with the only other female nominees from the Oldham Female Chartist Association.⁴⁸

⁴⁶*Northern Star*, 6.5.1843, p. 1e; 27.5.1843, p. 4f; 17.6.1843, p. 8e; 24.6.1843, p. 5f; 1.6.1844, p. 1e.

⁴⁷*Leicester Chronicle*, 18.5.1839, p. 4c.

⁴⁸*Nottingham Mercury*, 6.12.1839, p. 392e; *Northern Star*, 8.7.1843, p. 7f. For the *Northern Star*, 24.6.1843, p. 1. See Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, p. 239 for a discussion of women's exclusion from electoral participation in Chartism.

Female Chartists were rarely considered suitable occupants of official positions in the movement. One exception was the election from the Birmingham Women's Union of Miss Mary Ann Groves and Miss Birch as delegates to the Birmingham Political Union Council in 1838.⁴⁹

The female Chartists organised single and mixed-sex meetings on a range of topics designed to inform themselves, the wider movement and the local community of the social and political condition of the people. At the start of the Chartist campaigns in Nottingham, the Female Union held a meeting on the New Poor Law, and particularly the plight of an old woman forced to break stones in the workhouse.⁵⁰ A Birmingham woman requested that John Collins inform them about the position of people in Ireland on the subject of reform.⁵¹

Anyone could offer a lecture to the East London Female Patriotic Association, provided that they gave a week's notification to the committee so that it could be put before the membership. Lectures on religious subjects or the marriage laws were prohibited, however, except by invitation of a majority of members present.⁵² Similarly, in Birmingham, John Collins insisted that "the meeting was of a political character" when a woman asked permission to speak to the meeting and to quote from Scripture. These incidents indicate an unwillingness to discuss religious controversies, especially

⁴⁹*Birmingham Journal*, 10.11.1838 p. 6b and 22.12.1838, p. 6c.

⁵⁰"Nottingham Female Political Union", *Nottingham Review*, 23.11.1838, p. 3b.

⁵¹*Birmingham Journal*, 3.11.1838, p. 3a.

⁵²Rules of the society, *The Charter*, 13.10.1839, p. 640.

on the marriage subject, which had proved so contentious and divisive for the Owenites.⁵³

Susannah Inge and Mary Ann Walker lectured in London from 1842, earning notoriety as the "Hen Chartists" in *The Times*. Inge discussed such topics as "On Liberty", "the People's Charter" and "Uses of Royalty".⁵⁴ Eliza Blatherwick gave a number of addresses in 1843 and 1844, as well as performing songs and recitations at the birthday celebration of Thomas Paine in Nottingham in 1847.⁵⁵ She may have been the member who delivered a lecture on "the political rights of woman" in 1843. It appears that the female Chartists considered this an important and popular subject, for they used the lecture to promote their newly reformed female association by allowing each member to bring her friends. Although there is no record of the content of the discussion, it seems likely that these Chartists linked women's political rights to women's educational opportunities, for they launched a subscription at the meeting to purchase books for the Female Adult and Children's School.⁵⁶

Other Chartist women also held that their education through, and commitment to the movement, qualified them for their own political rights. Although the early meetings of the Birmingham Women's Union were dominated by radical men, the absence of

⁵³For these controversies, see Barbara Taylor, "Love and the New Life: The Debate over Marriage Reform", *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 183-216.

⁵⁴For Inge see *Northern star*, 5.11.1842, p. 1c; 29.7.1843, p. 2b; 2.9.1843, p. 1c. For Walker see *The Times*, 20.10.1842, p. 3e; 22.10.1842, p. 4ab; 25.10.1842, p. 6a; and *Northern Star*, 10.12.1842, p. 7abc and 26.8.1843, p. 1a.

⁵⁵*Northern Star*, 16.12.1843, p. 1f; 19.10.1844, p. 8f; 14.12.1844, p. 5f; 13.2.1847, p. 1de.

⁵⁶*Northern Star*, 6.5.1843, p. 1e.

their male supporters on lecturing tours and the resignation of others from the Political Union meant that women assumed greater responsibility for running their affairs. Mrs. Lapworth told the members:-

we have been obliged to practice the art of speaking for ourselves, for no man's mouth was open on our behalf, during the absence of our friends. (Hear.) Ladies, I am quite sure that whatever may be the strength of the female mind elsewhere, that in Birmingham we have resolved to brave all danger and defy all opposition for the acquirement of woman's title to freedom.⁵⁷

Some Chartists conceded that woman's entitlement to the vote was guaranteed by evidence of her intellectual capacities. *The Northern Star* described Inge's lecture "On Liberty" as "a very splendid lecture - a lecture which we may without flattery say, would do honour to the highest talents of man, and which proved that woman, "mentally" considered, is in every way fitted and empowered by nature for the exercise of political rights."⁵⁸

The attachment of women's political rights to their intellectual attainments contrasted with the refusal of most Chartists to accept an educational qualification as the basis of male representation. It indicates, however, the continuation of rationalist and Paineite traditions of women's rights, examined in the previous chapter, especially in the metropolis. At a female meeting in Tower Hamlets in 1839, Robert Hartwell, a W.M.A. member and the district delegate to the Convention, "combated the assertion that the mind of woman was inferior to that of man, bringing forward instances of females who had distinguished themselves in literature, science and politics..." Elizabeth Neesom, chairwoman of the London Female Radical Association had made a donation to the

⁵⁷*Northern Star*, 6.7.1839, p. 8cd.

⁵⁸*Northern Star*, 5.11.1842, p. 1c.

Friends of the Oppressed's collection for the victims of the unstamped press, while her husband Charles recommended the ladies to the N.U.W.C. for their support for the wife of George Furzey, wrongly accused of stabbing a constable.⁵⁹ Charles addressed the female Chartists on "the necessity of women understanding political science" and "commented upon the vicious education of women". Such sentiments seem to have been approved by the fifty women who enrolled as members at the meeting.⁶⁰ The Neesoms, who were at the forefront of the male and female Democratic Associations and the Chartist Total Abstinence Societies, played an important role in sustaining the commitment to women's rights of freethought radicals in the 1830's through the Chartist movement.

The freethought traditions of metropolitan radicalism also provided Miss. Susannah Inge, secretary of the City of London F.C.A. with an intellectual and political resource to advocate the rights of woman and a new radical sexual politics. She too was influenced by contemporary comparative and anthropological studies that used the social position of women as an indicator of the evolution from barbarism to the civilised society.⁶¹ She argued that man's refusal to allow woman reason was evidence of his own mental deficiencies. Chartism confirmed that man was at last "groping from darkness to light" and that the presence of women in the reform movements must bring

⁵⁹*Poor Man's Guardian*, vol. II, 20.4.1833 and 29.6.1833, p. 207.

⁶⁰*Northern Star*, 14.9.1839, p. 3d.; Mr. Mee who addressed the Friends of the Oppressed on the women of Paris of 1830 shared a platform with the Chartist lecturer Mary Ann Walker in 1843, demonstrating further links between Chartism and previous associations of female radicals. See *Northern Star*, 29.4.1843, p. 1d. Hartwell also spoke to the Birmingham Women's Political Union on the progress of the London Female Radical Associations. See *The Charter*, 6.10.1839, p. 590.

⁶¹See the discussion of comparative studies of women and society in chapter one.

a renegotiation of the reciprocal rights and duties of the sexes:-

In consequence of physical superiority, man, while in a state of ignorance, always treats woman as an inferior creature, as one who was formed to be a slave to his pleasures and his will, and not as an equal and companion; for while in a state of ignorance, man being insensible to his own mental and intellectual qualities, it very naturally follows that he cannot appreciate those of woman, and he therefore regards the kind offers, the fond attentions, and the tender endearments of woman, not as things which it is his duty to repay with kindness and protection, but as things which she has a right to give, and he only a right to expect and demand.⁶²

While claiming intellectual equality with men, Inge, in common with most other women's rights advocates, nevertheless suggested that there were "natural" differences in the way men and women expressed their reason:-

But are we, because we are woman, to be excluded from the more rational enjoyments of life? If so, why then was a woman gifted with a mind to which in point of delicacy of taste, depth of feeling, and devoted affection, even proud man himself must bow.

Woman therefore had a particular contribution to make to the movement for reform, raising "her feeble voice" and embarking "with her life boat upon the ocean of agitation, to assist in steering the shattered bark of liberty to a smooth and sheltered haven." Woman's gentleness, devotion, and sympathy were her greatest source of power. By gentle means, her "example" would "influence" and "induce" her male relatives to join the Chartist cause. While Chartist women felt able to teach each other their rights, they chose to "urge", "inspire" and "influence" rather than "instruct" men. If "knowledge" meant "power" for men, then "power" and "knowledge" were more easily available as "influence" for women.

Schwartzkopf argues that Inge's views "deviated" from most of her Chartist sisters and that with its assertion of women's intellectual equality with men and political

⁶²"To the Women of England", *Northern Star*, 2.7.1842, p. 7de.

claims, her address was "quite exceptional". My reading of the politics of Chartist women indicates that her ideas were in fact shared by women in very different Chartist constituencies and points to the continuing adherence of working-class radical women to Paineite conceptions of women's rights. Schwartzkopf compares the Chartist women unfavourably with what she sees as the more progressive feminist politics of Owenite women, regretting that

Female Chartists spoke as female members of the working class, and not as working-class members of the female sex.⁶³

Rather than seeing this as a failure of Chartist women's political vision, we should examine why they found it difficult to identify with women across class divisions.

Chartist women frequently challenged middle-class criticisms of the domestic skills and affections of labouring women and attempted to articulate and validate a working-class experience of femininity and especially motherhood. Mrs. Lapworth opened one meeting by reading some poetic verses "expressive of maternal affection". She insisted that the poor were denied the indulgence of such feelings to their children by the "bad management" of the rich and reflected on her own experience of motherhood:-

She was not at present in want of the necessaries of life, but there was a time after she had become a mother, when for days together she had suffered from want. At that time she thought there must be something wrong on the part of those over them, or she would not have been in that condition, particularly when she knew that there were hundreds around her, of her own sex, who had never laboured, and did not know how to labour, and were enjoying all the comforts of life. Had she known as much of the real cause of her distress, as she did at the present time, she would have sallied forth and forced on, as far as her present power lay, a combination of the working classes.

Chartism had provided her with an analysis of exploitation that enabled her to define the rights of poor women. The poor did not seek equality with the rich, but simply "a

⁶³Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 101-2.

sufficient quantity of food or raiment for their labour". Women often blushed when discovered serving a scanty meal but instead of being "ashamed of their poverty" they should seek its causes:-

She knew they were accustomed to make apologies, and feel as if they had been caught in some bad act. She hoped... they would openly acknowledge it, that they would make it known, and talk of it, and ask the cause of it...⁶⁴

Mrs. Lapworth's defence of working women's household skills and the need to inquire into the causes of domestic poverty is reminiscent of arguments made by female unionists during the wave of industrial protest and general unionism in 1833-4. A "London Mechanic's Wife", wrote to Frances Morrison, "Bondswoman of Birmingham" asking,

Shall the idiot-like, the stupid and usurious capitalists, tell us to look to our domestic affairs, and say, '*these we understand best?*' we will retort on them, and tell them that thousands of us have *scarce any domestic affairs to look after*... let us use all our energies to arouse our sex to consider the all-important truth that labour ought to stand paramount above all subjects.⁶⁵

In defending their domestic attachments and skills, working class radical women had to battle not only with their class opponents and the men of their own movements but sometimes with radical middle-class women. Women writers in the popular reforming press, like the Unitarian Mary Leman Grimstone examined in chapter five, or even the Birmingham Chartist Sophia we met in the introduction created a public platform for themselves by promoting the reformation of working women. Lapworth's appeal to working women's shared experience of material deprivation and maternal love contrasts

⁶⁴*Birmingham Journal*, 29.9.1838, p. 3e.

⁶⁵A London Mechanic's Wife, *The Pioneer*, 22.2.1834, p. 221. See Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 83-117 for a discussion of working women's part in Owenite general unionism. For a discussion of a fascinating dispute between the Female Political Union and an evangelical, middle or upper class woman over the issues of women's domestic and political rights and duties, see Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 107-114.

sharply with the frequently condescending, distancing tone in which middle-class radicals addressed poor women.

Part Three: Chartist Women and Moral and Physical Force

The Chartist women's understanding of their influence and rights needs to be explored in relation to their commitment to a militant class politics. On the 26th. November, 1838, the Nottingham Female Political Association passed and forwarded an Address for publication in the local reform journal *The Nottingham Review* and *The Northern Star*. They exhorted:-

Therefore, sisters and countrywomen, we say be of good cheer; the time must and will arrive when your aid and sympathies may be required in the field to fight, for be assured a great and deadly struggle must take place ere our tyrant oppressors yield to reason and justice. They mean to slay and fight the people; while ours and yours will be the solemn duty to aid the wounded to dress their wounds, and perhaps to afford the last sad solace of our affections in the hour of death. 'Tis better to die by the sword than by famine, and we shall glory in seeing every working man of England selling his coat to buy a rifle to be prepared for the event.⁶⁶

By echoing the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Rev. J.R. Stephens the Nottingham women aligned themselves firmly with the calls for the right to self defence by the "physical force" wing of the movement. Stephens was currently baiting the authorities by inciting drilling, torchlit processions and "War to the Knife for Children and Wife". The Nottingham "Address" was the first to be printed in *The Northern Star* from a female Chartist association and established a precedent for succeeding addresses which frequently replicated its format and militant tone.

It is difficult to assess how many Chartists were actively engaged in or supported

⁶⁶*Northern Star*, 8.12.1838, p. 6de.

plans for general arming. Moreover, their advocacy of the constitutional right to self-defence and to drill does not mean they endorsed insurrection. There are, however, some indications of female Chartists' support for or alleged links with armed resistance in London, Birmingham and Nottingham in 1838-9. A police raid on the headquarters of the London Democratic Association and the Female Society, of which Elizabeth Neesom was the secretary, reputedly found pikes.⁶⁷ A tea party held to celebrate the formation of the Bloomsbury Female Radical Association was broken up by police searching for arms. In response, two members went to Bow Street Magistrates to ask whether they were operating a spy system.⁶⁸ Dr. John Taylor, one of the leading Chartist lecturers and delegates to be involved in insurrectionary plans wrote to Mary Ann Groves, secretary of the Birmingham Women's Union, of preparations for a "national illumination" and "guerilla warfare" to release Frost and his co-agitators.⁶⁹ By the Easter of 1840, *The Nottingham and Newark Gazette*, sneered that the wives of physical force Chartists had sold their husbands, offensive weapons to buy treats for their families.

Women in Nottingham were also reported to have been involved in Chartist "disturbances" during the "National Holiday" of August 1839. It is difficult to assess women's actual role in such protests for anti-reform journals frequently ridiculed the legitimacy of the Chartist cause by suggesting that the men were goaded by the women. Reporting on riotous assemblies at the police station and Market Place and attempts to

⁶⁷*Leicester Chronicle*, 18.5.1839, p. 4c.

⁶⁸"Bloomsbury Female Radical Association", *The Charter*, 24.11.1839, p. 701.

⁶⁹Letter dated 8.12.1839, in the Urquhart MSS. 1E1, nos. 15-16, Balliol College Library, cited by James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1842*, Croom Helm, London, 1982, pp. 203-4.

"turn-out" the factories during the "National Holiday" of 1839, the anti-reform Whig *Nottingham Mercury* denigrated the masculinity of male Chartists in deferring to female "harpies":-

We do not hesitate to say that the men would never have met in the Market-Place or on the Forest were it not for the women; taunts and revilings at their conduct in not turning on the soldiers, and sticking up for their rights, cannot be described. Such a scene we feel assured, was never witnessed before in Nottingham, and we hope it never will.⁷⁰

Moreover, we have no evidence linking these women to the Female Political Union, although the association held an assembly on the Forest during the "National Holiday" to reinforce their plans for exclusive dealing, one of the other "ulterior measures".⁷¹

Some historians have seen women's participation in Chartist demonstrations and "disturbances" as an extension of a tradition of militant, plebeian female protest, especially food rioting. Jutta Schwartzkopf suggests that in comparison with male insurrectionary activity, women's militancy required little organisation and evolved "spontaneously" out of women's domestic, "daily routine".⁷² Sometimes Anti-Poor Law and Chartist women certainly deployed "traditional" forms of symbolic protest that often underscored their attachment to and defence of the domestic. Some women who joined a protest against the Carmarthen workhouse in 1843 declared their intention of sweeping away the workhouse by carrying brooms.⁷³ However, what is new about the female

⁷⁰"Riots in Nottingham by the Chartists", *Nottingham Mercury*, 16.8.1839, p. 263-4. By contrast, the pro-reform *Nottingham Review* ignored women's participation in the alleged riots, reporting instead an outrageous attack by a "wretch in power" on a Mrs. De Courcy at Sutton in Ashfield, while she waited the release of her arrested husband. See 23.8.1839, p. 3b.

⁷¹*Nottingham Journal*, 30.8.1839, p. 3d.

⁷²Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 182-6.

⁷³Thomis and Grimmett, *Women in Protest*, pp. 60-1.

radicals is that they combined traditional forms of protest with a highly formalised, politics that had constitutional and insurrectionary, as well as religious and secular elements. Women's protest needs to be understood in the context of the complex and forceful rhetoric deployed by female Chartists, which suggests an astute political consciousness.

Anna Clark has pointed out that the threat of physical force was frequently used as a rhetorical ploy rather than as an incitement to actual violence. Moreover, she discusses how moral and physical force Chartist men defined themselves in terms of their "manliness". While "moral force" advocates like Lovett denounced the heavy drinking, pugilistic pub culture of many working men, the "physical force" men derided the "old women" of the Birmingham Council.⁷⁴ The association of women with either physical or moral force also produced competing and conflicting models of female politicians. In a speech against the New Poor Law which received rapturous applause in January 1838, Stephens claimed the lawfulness for:-

every man to have his firelock, his cutlass, his sword, his pair of pistols, or his pike, and for every woman to have her pair of scissors, and for every child to have its paper of pins and its box of needles.⁷⁵

Like Stephens, the Nottingham address evoked a sexual division of labour in which women would nurse and console while men fight and die. In deploying this chivalric rhetoric, they appear to confirm the Chartist ideal of female domesticity which positioned women as auxiliaries to the main, male movement. However, the consolatory imagery of nursing is belied by the women's identification with the "physical force"

⁷⁴Anna Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity", p. 72.

⁷⁵Speech by J.R. Stephens, January 1838, reprinted in R.G. Gammage *History of the Chartist Movement*, 1854, pp. 64-5.

wing of the movement and the demands for general arming. As Clark has argued, Chartist women claimed a militant domesticity that was profoundly disruptive to middle-class reformers and anti-reformers and also to some Chartist men. Their evocation of force identified them strongly with a revolutionary tradition of women's politics.

Chartist women and men toyed with the gendered rhetoric of "moral" and "physical force" as a means of persuading or cajoling. To the acclamation of the Birmingham women, O'Brien asked women to:-

urge and advise their husbands to come forward - aye, even drive them to physical force if they could not succeed without. (Loud applause.)

They should employ the same "gentle influence" as the women of Paris used on their husbands "for there was not a single measure of Reform then accomplished, except what was accomplished by the women, (Hear, hear.)"⁷⁶ O'Brien's notion of "gentle influence" derived its power from its subversion of the dominant discourse of "Woman's Influence". It contrasted sharply with the wish of Donaldson, a prominent Council member that the Birmingham women would use their "influence" to restrain the men from indulging in "strong language".⁷⁷ The Chartist women also exploited the language of sexual difference for political effect. Where once Salt had courted the loyalty of the women of Birmingham, Lapworth took his resignation from the General Convention over the legality of its proposed measures, as an act of political and romantic betrayal. She attacked him as more timid and fainthearted than the women:-

She respected the man as an honest man, but she respected him as a fainthearted man, and she would never renew her faith in a man who had

⁷⁶"Birmingham Female Political Union", *Northern Star*, 1.6.1839, p. 5d.

⁷⁷*Birmingham Journal*, 9.3.1839, p. 3cd.

once deceived her.⁷⁸

The main purpose of the Nottingham women's endorsement of exclusive dealing and general arming was to compel the middle classes to support the Charter. With increasing doubts among working-class Chartists about the commitment of middle-class reformers to universal suffrage, the Union sought to force the issue by insisting on the different economic interests of the "industrious" working classes and the middle-class "shopocracy", thus shattering the older radical belief in the shared interest of the "productive classes":-

the middle classes... are now beginning to manifest their doubts and fears... In a short time they will be too late to be considered of the least importance; in fact, they must ever be considered in the light of false friends and of no moment whatever to the people, only to be closely watched to prevent them doing mischief by their treachery to the common cause; because they might be tempted to betray for the sake of the shop - to gain the smiles of the custom of the Aristocracy, the great enemies of the liberties of the people.⁷⁹

The address asserted a new conception of an independent "people" based on the working classes. Women could guarantee this independence by practising exclusive dealing against their political opponents for they had long dealt exclusively against the people.

In the autumn and winter of 1838-9, the radical alliances supporting the Charter fractured, frequently along class lines, over how long they could wait for the implementation of the Charter before deploying the "ulterior measures" and the "fixing of a date". Mrs. Lapworth and Mrs. Oxford of the Birmingham Women's Union criticised the warning of Douglas, a leading Council member, that it might take years.

⁷⁸*Birmingham Journal*, 13.4.1839, p. 3bc.

⁷⁹"Address of the Nottingham Female Political Association", *Northern Star*, 8.12.1838, p. 6de.

They pointed out that labouring women could not afford to wait another year, nor lay aside food for the coming winter in case of price rises, as John Collins advised. The women, they insisted, "would have settled affairs in a few months..."⁸⁰

The Nottingham Review welcomed the formation of the Female Political Union which showed that "the spark" of reform was lit. It described the Union's mixed-sex meeting on the New Poor Law, held three days before their address was written, as "the most enthusiastic ever held in Nottingham".⁸¹ However, middle-class reformers like Sutton, the editor of *The Nottingham Review*, were becoming increasingly anxious about the aims of working-class Chartists. One edition of *The Review* contained letters from Attwood denouncing physical force; from O'Connell rejecting the "Ultra radicalism" of universal suffrage; and from William Brookshank condemning trade unionism and the collection of the National Rent.⁸² By contrast, *The Northern Star*, in a series of discussions on moral and physical force, printed threats of violence by Attwood and O'Connell.⁸³

The Female Union's declaration that "a tooth for a tooth shall be our motto until the system undergoes a change" was an ominous threat, for in 1831 the agitation for Reform had culminated in Nottingham with the destruction of the castle by arson as well as other attacks on property and factories, and the execution of three of the rioters. *The*

⁸⁰*Birmingham Journal*, 10.11.1838, p. 3d. A woman heckler interrupted a Council meeting to insist they would achieve the Charter within a year. See 22.12.1838, p. 6c.

⁸¹"Nottingham Female Political Union", *Nottingham Review*, 26.10.1838, p. 4c and 23.11.1838, p. 3b.

⁸²*Nottingham Review*, 30.11.1838, p. 2.

⁸³*Northern Star*, 25.8.1838, p. 4c. See also 3.11.1838, p. 4ab.

Nottingham Review refused to print or discuss the Address "because it would injure rather than benefit the cause of Radicalism."⁸⁴

The Birmingham Women's Union received the Nottingham address with loud applause but Collins felt obliged to warn them that calls for general arming indicated "an exuberance of the warmth of feelings" that could lead to imprisonment and transportation.⁸⁵ The Nottingham women were aware, however, that the force of words could be wielded as powerfully as arms. In a resolution calling for the reconciliation of the different wings of the radical movement, they explained the rhetorical nature of physical-force language:-

the meeting deeply deplores the dissention which at present prevails amongst the leaders and sections of the people who profess to advocate the People's Charter, which appears to us to have originated in misconception in the language used by Messrs Stephens and O'Connor, which instead of being explained in a friendly tone has perhaps been criticised too rashly, and has again been replied to with too much asperity, and has tended to produce a state of feeling highly injurious to the cause of the oppressed millions.

They urged the Birmingham Council and leaders of the Northern Radicals to resolve their differences and condemn the prosecution of Stephens.⁸⁶ In Birmingham, conversely, the female Chartists were made painfully aware of the limitations of rhetoric. At a meeting called in November 1839 to discuss the imprisonment of John Collins and William Lovett, Lapworth recalled that when Collins had prophesied his arrest, the women had risen in a body to declare they would fetch him out. "Where were those women now!", she asked. Lapworth proposed instead, the more realistic aim of

⁸⁴*Nottingham Review*, 14.12.1838, p. 4d.

⁸⁵*Birmingham Journal*, 15.12.1838, p. 3c.

⁸⁶"Female Political Union", *Northern Star*, 19.1.1839, p. 5c.

supporting the prisoners' families.⁸⁷

Conclusion: "What Power has Woman...?"

Although Lapworth perhaps glimpsed in 1839 that the ideal of "Woman's Influence" did not correspond with the actual power of women in the movement, the rhetoric of Chartist women remained curiously static. In July 1848, four months after the delivery of what was to be the final Chartist petition and the accompanying disarray of the Kennington Park procession, the National Female Chartist Association, addressed the "Mothers, Wives and Daughters" of Bethnal Green through *The Northern Star*. Just as the East London Female Association had attempted to inspire women to rejuvenate the movement at a moment of crisis in 1841, the Bethnal Green Association urged women to defy police harassment and challenge their poverty and oppression. Like many female Chartists in the early years of the movement, they identified themselves with prominent, even notorious, female intellectuals, freethinkers, politicians and, appropriately in a year of nationalist and republican struggle in much of Europe, with patriotic heroines. They looked to "A few ornaments" who:-

have already distinguished our sex. It was Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote the 'Rights of Woman', a maid of Saragoza that redeemed Spain, and a Joan of Arc that saved France; and we still have a Miss Martineau and a Frances Wright, whose incorruptible virtues and talents might bid even the sterner sex to blush for shame.

The Bethnal Green Association urged that woman "will not only be social, but political - no longer stifle her miseries at home, but spread them abroad". A decade after

⁸⁷"Meeting of the Female Political Union of Birmingham", *Northern Star*, 9.11.1839, p. 3de.

Chartist women had first justified their place in the political sphere, however, they still felt compelled to define and justify women's power:-

But, it may be asked, what power has woman and by what means can she assist in the redemption of her species? Time shall give the solution. It is enough for us to know that woman possesses an influence, that that influence has often been exercised for her own enslavement, and seldom for the advancement of her happiness. For the future let us strive to redeem the error of the past. We are acknowledged to be the most useful apostles in the promulgation of religion - in this walk our claim has never been disputed. What, then, shall prevent us being as useful in the mission of politics, peace, virtue and humanity?⁸⁸

These women continued to find inspiration in the freethought traditions of women's rights but how effective had the rhetoric of "Woman's Mission" been in securing women power within the movement?

It seems that the Bethnal Green Association was involved in an attempt to establish a National Female Chartist Association, for they described themselves as "branch no. 2". Earlier metropolitan societies had also attempted to extend women's local activities into a national network. In May 1843 the City of London Female Chartists sought to co-ordinate a national memorial to the Queen soliciting her support for the working classes, to be signed by women only. Their secretary, Susannah Inge, had received approving letters from several localities but, despite publicity in *The Northern Star*, there is no record of further coordination or submission of the memorial.⁸⁹ The most likely explanation for such failure is that the mainstream organisation neglected to provide women with the financial resources and publicity for

⁸⁸"Address from the National Female Chartist Association (Branch no. 2) To the Women of Bethnal Green", *Northern Star*, 8.7.1848, p. 1c.

⁸⁹"An Appeal to the Women of Great Britain", *Northern Star*, 20.5.1843, p. 4a. See also Inge's request for secretaries of female associations to contact her, *Northern Star*, 6.5.1843, p. 8a.

such activities and most significantly, refused to allocate official positions within the movement to women.

Although the importance of female education was seen by so many Chartists as critical to women's duties as patriotic mothers, the rational culture of the Chartists eluded most women except those able to take advantage of the reduced rates charged for members' relatives. It is possible that the male London Chartists were inspired by the East London Female Abstinence Association's call for the intellectual enlightenment of both sexes, for they formed an affiliated male organisation. It was the men, however, who had the resources to establish a library and to supplement their title as the "East London (Male) Chartist Total Abstinence and Mutual Instruction Association".⁹⁰

Although many Chartist men echoed Salt's plea for women "to meddle with politics" they displayed great anxiety when women moved beyond the consolatory rhetoric of "Woman's Mission" into the cut and thrust world of real political debate. In 1843 *The Northern Star* refused to print a letter from Susannah Inge which questioned the "propriety or RIGHT" of O'Connor to use his platform in the journal to recommend candidates for the General Council. Despite decrying Miss Inge's idea of democracy, the *Star* again omitted a "schooling" of Susannah Inge from the Nottingham Female Chartists on the grounds that "We must not have the women "quarrelling": the men make "mess" enough."⁹¹ Nevertheless, the *Star* returned to the subject a few weeks later to denounce reports in *The Birmingham Advertiser* and *The Nottingham Journal* of a "regular split" between "THE HE AND SHE CHARTISTS", alleging that Mary Ann

⁹⁰"Temperance Record", *English Chartist Circular*, 29.1.1841, vol. 1, no. 5, p. 19.

⁹¹*Northern Star*, 8.7.1843, p. 4f and 15.7.1843, p. 4f.

Walker and Susannah Inge were leading the opposition against "The Lion of the North".

So often pretending contempt for middle class opprobrium, *The Northern Star* declared:-

*Is it any wonder that the middle-classes should have such horrible notions of Chartists and Chartism when mendacity like this is regularly served up to them.*⁹²

Discussing the near disappearance of women from working-class organisations by the mid-nineteenth century, Dorothy Thompson suggests that in the 1840s the language of some Chartists was increasingly imbued with notions of female domesticity and respectability. By example, she discusses the campaign of Abaiah Higginbotham of Sheffield to remove the struggle for the Charter from the pot-house in 1851. Higginbotham was not just concerned with female domesticity, for she appealed to her brother Chartists to exercise their "influence" inside as well as out of doors "by teaching their children a good political education." Moreover, she linked the cause of temperance to women's share of political freedom. But if domesticity was not incompatible with the exercise of a political voice, Chartist women found it easier to assert rather than to exert their influence. *The Essex Standard* mocked the Chartist women's use of "influence" in 1838:

Women may influence great possess
But on certain conditions
And one of them is - they must ne'er
Set up for politicians...⁹³

Radical men could be as fickle as their political opponents. When the middle-class leaders of the Birmingham Political Union deserted the Chartist cause in the spring of 1839, the Women's Union found itself without a meeting place or a champion. Mrs.

⁹²"How to Tell a Tale", *Northern Star*, 29.7.1843, p. 4d.

⁹³*Essex Standard*, 21.12.1838, cited by D. Thompson "The Women", p. 147.

Lapworth noted how quickly men's opinions of female politicians could change once women expressed political independence:-

For the first time, women are obliged to sue for countenance to men, and our great trumpet the *Journal*, no longer sound[s] the note of female fame, but laughs at female virtue and female politicians. (Hear, hear).⁹⁴

By 1848, it is possible that the rhetoric of "Woman's Influence" was wearing thin for many working women.

As Alexander and Schwartzkopf have discussed, Chartism enabled women to speak as working class or labouring women but it did not give them a language for speaking of themselves as workers outside the home. In December 1840, some female lacerunners in Nottingham formed a union and struck against the exploitative practices of the "mistresses", or middlewomen, who put work out to women in the home. Using the conventions of radical discourse, the lacerunners appealed to the whole community, including the warehouse owners, to recognise a "fair price" and to end the system of truck. Although they met at the Chartist Democratic Chapel, their cause was largely ignored by the national Chartist press. Moreover, there is no evidence of any link between the lacerunners and the female Chartists, who in their recorded activities at least, never acknowledged the specific conditions of working women in Nottingham.⁹⁵

Mary Ann Walker of London declared that:-

it was shameful that while Englishwomen were receiving but 5d. the pair for the making of policemen's trousers, a German woman was receiving 100 000*l.* a year, wrung in taxes from the earnings of the hardworking men of England.⁹⁶

⁹⁴*Northern Star* 6.7.1839, p. 8.

⁹⁵For references to this strike see Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, Virago, London, 1981, pp. 213-4.

⁹⁶*The Times*, 25.10.1842, p. 6a.

In common with many other radicals, Walker evoked the female sweat-worker as the victim of a corrupt political institution that was financed at the expense of *working men* rather than women. She did not seek to identify herself with women workers, or to politicise the conditions of women's work. As craft identity became increasingly central to radical working-class politics, women were marginalised from organised trade and political activity. That marginalisation will be discussed in the following chapter on the politics of women's work in the London needle trades.⁹⁷

Alexander's discussion of sexual difference within radical culture provides important insights into women's exclusion from organised politics by the mid-century. I find it less useful, however, for understanding women's commitment and contribution to Chartism. She argues that the Chartist women "acquiesced in their exclusion... because they shared the social visions of their men" and deployed an identical rhetoric.⁹⁸ Schwartzkopf allows that the women articulated a "gender-specific" language of class but identified "their social position as one defined by that of their male kinfolk". This identification, she claims, prohibited Chartist women from acting "as political agents in their own right with needs and aspirations specific to them as women."⁹⁹

These assessments fail to account, however, for the complexity and ingenuity of Chartist women's politics in a movement which perceived them as auxiliaries. Chartist women did not simply mimic male rhetoric but rather helped to create Chartist politics

⁹⁷For the importance of trade to Chartist membership in London see Goodway, *London Chartism*, pp. 153-220.

⁹⁸*ibid*, pp. 140-1.

⁹⁹Schwartzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, p. 99 and 89.

and culture. In pointing to the claims made for intellectual and even political equality by women in Birmingham, Nottingham and London, I am not suggesting that Chartist women were incipient feminists. However, these claims were an important part of their political identity. In presenting themselves as rational and moral female politicians they drew from the same freethinking political traditions as Eliza Sharples and the Unitarian radicals Mary Leman Grimstone and Harriet Taylor. Yet their reason and morality were to be the foundation for a militant class politics. It was precisely against this politics that the female reformers examined in the following chapters defined their "influence" and their "mission".

Chapter Four

"The Good Are Not Always Powerful, Nor The Powerful Always Good":

THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S WORK IN THE LONDON NEEDLE TRADES, 1841-1864

Living in poverty in Hackney in July 1849, Eliza Sharples appealed to the Chartist Thomas Cooper for support for her children. She alluded to the plight of women, including her daughter, driven to needlework:-

Hypatia is the eldest girl... a delicate girl of thirteen, only fit for needlework; she works from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. collar stitching for 2s. per week... is just treading in the steps of womanhood to the same extent of helplessness in which all are placed when they arrive there, who have only sorrow and labour as their portion. Hypatia is prematurely a woman, subdued in spirit by a too early knowledge of care and anxiety; my desire is to be able to maintain her for a few months until she has a knowledge of the millinery business, and so command a little trade herself; plain work is destroying both soul and body.¹

Sharples' understanding of her daughter's helplessness derived not just from the extremely exploitative conditions of sweated labour in the needle trades but from a commonly-held view that women reduced to the needle were powerless to change their condition. Needlework was the archetypal "women's work" and as such was beset by "the sorrow and labour" of "womanhood". Five months later the "helplessness" of female needlewomen was an implicit assumption in Henry Mayhew's *Morning Chronicle* reports of destitution in the London sweated trades. His revelations placed the issue of sweated labour at the centre of public debate and stimulated a number of projects to rescue the needlewomen from their plight but few commentators suggested that women might help themselves.

¹Elizabeth Sharples Carlile to Thomas Cooper, 28.7.1849, in Edward Royle, ed., Bradlaugh Papers, Microfilm Ltd., Wakefield, 1977, "Additional Papers", 18e.

Work or trade identity played an increasingly important role in working-class radical politics in the mid-nineteenth century yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, Chartists largely omitted to appeal to women as paid workers. In this chapter I will discuss how women's work in the needle trades was constructed by very different reformers primarily as a moral problem and only indirectly a political problem. Consequently women workers were seen as objects of moral rescue rather than as workers capable of exercising their rights. By contrast, working-class radical men in London were moving to a more "social" or "labour" politics based increasingly around trade union and co-operative association.

Having argued that access to forms and ways of organising knowledge is integral to political participation, in this chapter I shall analyse how knowledge about work was constructed in ways which disempowered and silenced working women. The first part of the chapter examines the production of this knowledge in three major investigations of women's work in the needle trades. These are Grainger's report of 1843 and Lord's report of 1864 for the Children's Employment Commission and Mayhew's survey of *London Labour for The Morning Chronicle*, 1849-50. Despite their commitment to scientific investigation, these surveys drew heavily on literary and moral discourses about women's work, thus abstracting women workers from a discourse of labour. Then I will examine how philanthropists, radicals and women's rights campaigners used the knowledge produced by these reports and sought to relieve working women's distress. Throughout I shall consider how far needlewomen were allowed to speak for themselves and the process by which they were silenced. First I shall refer briefly to the organisation of the London needle trades.

Part One: Conditions of the Needle Trades

Women were employed in a variety of needle trades in the mid-nineteenth century ranging from the high fashion dressmaking, millinery and mantuamaking trades to gloving, staymaking, and even bookbinding. As Sally Alexander has shown, it is difficult to assess the numbers employed in these trades for women's work, especially casual labour and married women's work, was frequently ignored by the census-makers and statisticians.² The 1841 Census recorded 20 780 dressmakers and milliners in London, a figure that had risen to 54 870 by 1864.³ However, many of these dressmakers would have been employed as outworkers in the slop or "dishonourable trades" rather than in the "honourable" private dressmaking establishments. In 1850, Mayhew estimated that at least 10 000 dressmakers worked in the "dishonourable" sector.⁴ The 1841 Census noted a further 12 849 females working in other needle trades including seaming, shirt and corsetmaking.⁵ The terms "dressmaker", "sempstress" and "needlewoman" incorporated therefore a range of occupations employing women from different social classes.

²Sally Alexander, "Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century London: A Study of the Years 1820-50", in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, esp. pp. 72-4 on the census as a source and pp. 84-9 on the dressmaking trades. On the problems of the census as a source see also Edward Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth Century", *History Workshop Journal*, 23, Spring 1987, pp. 59-80.

³Henry Mayhew, Letter LXXV, 24.10.1850, in Edward Thompson and Eileen Yeo, eds. *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the 'Morning Chronicle' 1849-50*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 518 and Children's Employment Commission, vol. 14, Session 1864, p. 69.

⁴Mayhew, Letter LXXVI, 31.10.1850, *Unknown Mayhew*, p. 527.

⁵Mayhew, quoting *The Occupational Abstract of the Government Report on the Population of Great Britain*, Letter XI, 23.11.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 194-6.

While women were excluded from the men's bespoke tailoring trade, the fashionable dressmaking, millinery and mantuamaking trades offered highly skilled work and business opportunities for women. In the eighteenth century, Pinchbeck has found, a five to seven year apprenticeship could cost between forty and fifty pounds, employing women from professional, clerical or trading families. The costly indenture system denoted the "honourable" and "genteel" status of the trade although this was not reflected in the low wages of the journeywomen.⁶ A place in one of the residential fashionable establishments was still generally considered a "respectable" form of employment for single women in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Mayhew, these were divided into first rate houses which made up the Court dresses for the aristocracy, second rate houses serving the middle classes, and third and fourth rate establishments catering for the "wives of tradesmen and mechanics". The latter dealt mainly in cotton rather than silk, and unlike the superior houses, put out skirtmaking to outworkers. In addition, there were the West and East End wholesalers or "show shops", divided by similar ratings.⁷ Unlike the private establishments, these shops "showed" or displayed their work. They were the first to use sewing machines in the 1860's and employed dayworkers.

A typical West End private house employed between eight and sixteen residents, although one in 1864 had more than seventy. Apprenticeships lasted two to three years, beginning at the age of fourteen. Three quarters of the residents came from outside London and many only completed six months of their indentures or returned to London

⁶Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, Virago Press, London, 1981, pp. 287-90.

⁷Mayhew, Letter LXXVI, 31.10.1850, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 528-9.

for a season to update their knowledge of the fashions. Wages were pitifully low. In 1864 a second hand could earn £15-20 in an "ordinary" dressmaking establishment or £25 in the court business. However, many were expected to wear silk dresses at work which could eat up half their earnings. The second hand dressmaker earned less than half that of "a fair average of the fully employed tailor" interviewed by Mayhew who despite having the second choice of work in the shop, made on average £1 2s per week.⁸

A major concern of the 1843 Commission and subsequent investigations was the living and working conditions of resident dressmakers and whether statutory regulations would be appropriate and effective. In 1864 the average cubic feet of air per head was less than that required for common lodging houses. Combined with poor diets and long hours bent over close work, these conditions meant that sempstresses were susceptible to respiratory, digestive, rheumatic and eye complaints. The dictates of the "Seasons" which ran from April to July and October to Christmas led to excessive hours which were especially onerous before large social occasions. On the occasion of William IV's funeral Harriet Baker insisted she had worked from 4 a.m. on Thursday till 10.30 a.m. on Sunday without a break.⁹ The seasonality of the work also caused periodic unemployment when women without relatives or friends were sometimes left homeless and compelled to take work from a sweater. Sweaters, piece-mistresses or sub-contractors supplied work to domestic workers in return for the payment of a security. A

⁸For dressmakers' wages see Lord's 'Report', *Children's Employment Commission*, vol., xiv, Session 1864, p. 70. For this tailor see Mayhew Letter XVI, 11.12.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 226-9 and pp. 217-259 for wage rates throughout the honourable and dishonourable tailoring trades.

⁹Children's Employment Commission, 1843, "Dressmakers and Milliners", no. 525.

major concern of Mayhew's survey was to demonstrate how respectable dressmakers could be reduced to slopworkers and, more widely, how the honourable trade was affected by the growth of sweated practices. A brief history of the growth of the "dishonourable" garment trade is required in order to show how slop labour jeopardised the fitness of needlework as "women's work".

Before the Napoleonic Wars women had been formally excluded from the tailoring trade although some wives and relatives of tailors and shoemakers were involved in the preparatory stages of work. Artisan tailors maintained their wages and work practices by controlling entry into the trade through the all-male "houses of call". With their roots in guild and journeymen traditions, these convivial work associations were to form the basis of the tailoring trade unions before the mid-nineteenth century. Encouraged by government contracts, some employers began to employ non-unionised women workers in "sweat shops" or as outworkers during the Napoleonic Wars. This laid the foundations of the "show shops" which increased after the wars, displaying their ready-to-wear garments, produced on or off the premises in sweated conditions. Non-unionised women were employed first on waistcoats and gradually in most branches of the cheap tailoring trade, especially military or prison contracts.¹⁰

The artisan tailors resisted the erosion of wages and craft authority in a series of strikes culminating in the Tailors' Turnout of 1834. Barbara Taylor has shown how in the course of this strike some trade unionists and women workers argued that the equalisation of wages and the unionisation of women was the only way to maintain the

¹⁰For the history of sweated labour see James Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor: The London Clothing Trades 1860-1914*, Croom Helm, London, 1984, esp. pp. 7-23 and Duncan Bythell, *The Sweated Trades: Outwork in Nineteenth-century Britain*, Batsford Academic, London, esp. pp. 65-79.

wages and conditions of all workers. George Petrie, a tailor who, as we have seen, called for the formation of the Female Society - The Friends of the Oppressed, advised his brother unionists, "be not unjust to our sisters. - Remember, Equality is the order of the day..."¹¹ Encouraged especially by the Owenite journal *The Pioneer*, some women were able to articulate their rights as workers in public. A tailoress exhorted male tailors:-

Surely, while they loudly complain of oppression, they will not turn oppressors themselves. Surely, they will not give their enemies cause to say, when a woman and her offspring are seen begging in the streets, - This is the work of union;...this is the remedy proposed by the *men* of Great Britain to relieve them from their present distress!¹²

The strike and the union collapsed with the issue of equality unresolved. Grainger's 1843 *Report* and Mayhew's survey reveal the material and ideological consequences of this political failure for needlewomen.

The material details of wages, hours and conditions supplied by these investigations only partly account for women's experience of work and poverty in the needle trades. The Parliamentary Commissioners and Mayhew brought their own agendas to the question of women's work, replete with assumptions about poverty, class, gender and sexuality. Their questions were shaped by and contributed to the debates about "The Condition of England" and "The Woman Question". The following two sections consider how their investigations constructed the needlewoman as a "social problem".

¹¹For the history of the Tailors' strike see Barbara Taylor, "'The Men are as Bad as their Masters...': Working Women and the Owenite Economic Offensive, 1828-34", *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London, 1983, pp. 83-117. For Petrie see *The Man*, 20.10.1833, cited by Taylor, p. 113.

¹²*The Pioneer*, 3.5.1834, quoted by Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 108.

Part Two: Social Investigation and the Needlewomen

i) The Parliamentary Commissions and the Dressmakers

The first major survey of women's work in the needle trades was conducted by Richard Dugard Grainger for the Children's Employment Commission, which had been set up to investigate child labour in industries excluded from factory legislation. He was responsible for the inquiries into the metal ware, lace, hosiery and needle trades. These trades combined some factory production covered by legislation, and a larger amount of workshop and outwork production.

The Commission had been established to mediate the demands of the factory movements for the regulation and improvement of working conditions of the 1830s and early 1840s and was conducted during the politically tense years between the first and second Chartist petitions. Far from being a "neutral" enquiry, the Commission played a crucial role in reassessing the administrative and legislative function of government in industry. It worked on the assumption that government *did* have a role to play in the supervision and regulation of industry, even if it was not going to intervene directly in industry through legislation. Sub-Commissioners, like Grainger, were required to seek the opinions of employers, workers, professional and parochial experts on regulation, with particular attention to "the evils which result from...partial legislation."¹³ The sub-Commissioners did however have the autonomy to pursue their own questions.

¹³Children's Employment Commission, 1843, IX, Second Report of the Commissioners, "Appendix: Instructions from the Central Board...", pp 208-9.

Grainger was characteristic of the government investigators and officials who undertook in the 1840s what has been described as a "revolution in government".¹⁴ As an eminent anatomist and physiologist he was, like Chadwick, an early specialist on public health. He seems to have been interested in a number of Benthamite reforms, especially in relation to dissection.¹⁵ Like other Benthamite reformers he was sympathetic to legislative intervention, even in respect of domestic industry. In his introduction to his report on dressmaking, Grainger made the issue of regulation central. He noted that "several competent witnesses" favoured "proper regulation" and that their opinions were validated by the improvements already made by some dressmaking establishments.¹⁶ His approval for regulative strategies is shown by his support for the Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and the Society for the Relief of Distressed Needlewomen which responded to his report by campaigning for the self-regulation of the industry and for the statutory regulation of hours.

Summarising his report, Grainger concluded that the "protracted labour" of the dressmakers was "quite unparalleled in the history of the manufacturing processes" and agreed with a dressmaker he interviewed, that "no slavery is worse than that of the dressmaker's life in London." Grainger's perception of dressmaking as slavery relied not only on the exceptionally long hours, low wages and unhealthy working and living

¹⁴For discussions of the "revolution in government" see: Oliver MacDonagh, *Early Victorian Government 1830-1870*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1977; Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, "'The Working-Class Question': 'Society' and society", *The Great Arch: State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1985, pp. 114-165; Paul Richards, "State Formation and Class Struggle, 1832-48", in Phillip Corrigan, ed., *Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory*, Quartet, London, 1980.

¹⁵See entry on Grainger in Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee eds., *Dictionary of National Biography*, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1908, vol. viii.

¹⁶Children's Employment Commission, 1843, X, F33.

conditions he encountered, but on his assumptions about the vulnerability and powerlessness of dressmakers as women: "They are in a peculiar degree, unprotected and helpless;..."¹⁷ The perceived vulnerability of dressmakers reflected a wider infantilisation of women by the 1843 Commission. Angela John and Jane Humphries have shown how the Commissioners to the mines extended their remit to enquire into and recommend the exclusion of adult women from underground work.¹⁸ Similarly, Grainger investigated the condition of all women working in the dressmaking industries in which very few children were employed. Girls usually began work between fourteen to sixteen years old, considerably older than in many other industries. Grainger noted that this coincided with the "change in the female constitution" and worried that their health never recovered.¹⁹ Mayhew estimated that more than three-quarters of the dressmakers and slop-needlewomen in London were under twenty.²⁰ Significantly, Grainger paid little attention to the slopworkers although it is likely that they were considerably younger than the dressmakers. Grainger's perceptions about vulnerability and helplessness were bound up with class assumptions, a point we shall return to.

¹⁷R.D. Grainger, "Report on the Manufactures and Trades of Nottingham, Derby, Leicester, Birmingham and London" London- Dressmaking and Shirtmaking, Children's Employment Commission, 1843 [431] vol. XIV, F 29-34.

¹⁸Angela John, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984, pp. 36-65 and Jane Humphries, "Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State and Working Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act", *Feminist Review*, 7, Spring 1981, pp. 1-34. See also J. Mark-Lawson and A. Witz, "Women's Labour in Nineteenth-Century Coalmining", *Social History*, (Hull), 13, 2, May 1988, pp. 151-74; Sophie Hamilton, "The Construction of Women by the Royal Commissions of the 1830s and 1840s", in Eileen Yeo, *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Social Movements*, forthcoming.

¹⁹Grainger, "Report on Dressmaking", Children's Employment Commission, 1843, vol. X, F 32.

²⁰Mayhew, Letter X, 20.11.1949, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 195-6.

H.W. Lord who conducted the 1864 Report on dressmaking argued that most of the industry's problems arose from bad management by "unsystematic persons".²¹ He reported that many employers would support statutory regulation as the only way of reducing hours and concluded that inspections would not harm good employers if carried out judiciously. He believed that it was possible to do as much work in ten hours as eighteen provided premises were properly managed and to that end recommended employing more workwomen in larger premises. In common with many employers and workers interviewed in both reports, Lord concluded that customers contributed substantially to long hours by giving short notice for orders and taking long credit. Appeals to female customers were to be a major focus of the attempts to relieve the dressmakers.

By supporting the extension of factory legislation to cover large and small workshops, Lord was in line with the findings of the 1864 Commissioners. They recommended that all trades be subject to the Factory Acts although small workshops should be administered by local authorities. The Commission led to the passing of the Factory Act and the Workshops Regulation Act of 1867. Under the latter, young persons and women could be employed no longer than twelve hours, with one and a half hours deducted for meals. While containing many anomalies these Acts brought homework

²¹Children's Employment Commission, 1864, XIV, pp. 72-3. I have been unable to trace any biographical detail on H.W. Lord. He may have been the barrister Henry William Lord (1834-1893), a fellow of Trinity College Cambridge and a registrar of the chief probate registry, Somerset House, 1891-3. See entry in Frederick Boase, *Modern English Biography*, vol. II, (1897), Frank Cass, London, 1965.

under statutory regulation for the first time, although it was monitored with less stringency than factory work.²²

The debates over the relative merits of statutory and self-regulation in both Commissions were elided with discussions about the moral regulation of needlewomen. Studying the debates about women workers, especially in the garment trades, in French political economy between 1840 and 1860, Joan Scott has pointed to the frequent elision between the woman worker and the prostitute. Indeed, the term "*femme isolée*" referred equally to the single woman worker and the prostitute. The desire to regulate women's work, which was seen as a primary cause of family and social dislocation, became inseparable from the aim of controlling female sexuality. Scott argues:-

The ambivalent causality (poverty or bad morals?) was less important than the association itself because there was only one cure for sexual licence and that was control.²³

This association was fundamental to the Commissions' assessments of women's work. The Commissioners who visited the mines between 1840 and 1842 were horrified by the prospect of women working alongside men and likened underground working conditions to the brothel. They saw the domestication of miners' wives as a main way of bringing the traditionally independent and unruly mining communities back into the fold

²²For this legislation see B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, King and Son, Westminster, 1903, pp. 150-172 and Bythell, *Sweated Trades*, p. 241.

²³Joan Scott, "'L'ouvrière! Mot impie, sordide...': Women Workers in the Discourse of French Political Economy, 1840-1860", *Gender and the Politics of History*, 1988, (pp. 139-163) p. 143.

of civilised society.²⁴ By contrast, no one suggested that women should be excluded from needlework but the regulation of women's work was to be achieved in part by the surveillance and supervision of women's moral and sexual behaviour.

The major threat to the genteel worker's morals, according to her advocates, consisted of the city itself, and especially the temptations to vice offered by its male inhabitants and the loose morals of other working women. It was believed that the rural and provincial social origins of many of the dressmakers and their removal from family and friends, made them particularly vulnerable to the dangerous pleasures of the city and the wages of sin. This rhetoric was part of contemporary discourses about the manufactured, alienating and polluting environment of the city that was juxtaposed to the country as the location of nature, community and virtue.²⁵

The workplace, which for resident dressmakers was also a home, was a particularly dangerous place, requiring strict supervision by the employer. Many believed that the luxury goods the women handled gave them vanities and desires that could not be satisfied by the wages of needlework. Whereas aspirations for independence and social betterment were strongly encouraged in working men by working-class radicals and middle- and upper-class reformers, such ambitions were condemned as vanity in women. Joseph Pitter, the secretary of the London Early Closing Association told the 1864 Commission that:-

²⁴Angela John, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*; pp. 43-46 and Hamilton, "The Construction of Women".

²⁵On this theme see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1973, esp. pp. 153-164 and pp. 165-181.

The love of liberty and the idea of gentility lie at the root of the mania among young women for becoming dress-makers and milliners.²⁶

Miss Bramwell, manager of the Great Marlborough Street Home and author of *Have Faith in God*, also commented on "the sense of pollution" that many of the girls felt having to sleep with women of bad character. She found the morals of the dayworkers in the City warehouses were very low, and their conversation "most shocking".²⁷ Lord felt quite confident about the lower-class dayworkers' lack of virtue. While he found it impossible to find "accurate information on the question of morals" relating to the dressmakers, he believed that dayworkers were more exposed to "the temptation of the streets" than residents.²⁸

In common with many of the 1843 Commissioners, Lord's moral judgements seem to have been heavily influenced by the "expert" evidence of philanthropists and doctors and was not qualified by the more measured statements of some of the dressmakers.²⁹ One employer, Madame Levilly, believed she would never have to discharge any girl on grounds of immorality, and suggested forms of collective moral self-regulation among her workers:-

I am quite sure that if any girl, who was not respectable got in among them, she would be made to leave without being turned away by us.³⁰

²⁶Children's Employment Commission, 1864, p 117-8, no. 81.

²⁷Children's Employment Commission, 1864, no 82, pp 118-9.

²⁸Children's Employment Commission, 1864, p. 79.

²⁹For a discussion of the selective use of evidence in the reports of the Commissioners to the mines see Hamilton, "The Construction of Women".

³⁰Children's Employment Commission, 1864, no 17, p 99.

A first hand in one of the fashionable houses noted that day-workers were of a lower social class but she had rarely seen any who were "objectionable on any moral ground".

Grainger did enquire into the condition of the 1200-1400 women shirtmakers employed as outworkers by Messers. Silver and Co. of Portsea. Their wages had been driven down to as little as three shillings a week by competition from the workhouses.³¹ Grainger's recommendation that workhouses and prisons should not undercut the prices of private operators was one of the few of his recommendations to be acted upon. However, Grainger's and Lord's report were weighted heavily towards the condition of the high-class dressmakers. Indeed as we have seen, dayworkers and outworkers featured in their reports as one of the chief pollutants of respectable needlewomen. Mayhew's survey of the slopwomen and the dressmakers challenged this class distinction by showing how women of all social classes could be reduced to prostitution by the conditions of slop labour, rather than by inferior morals.

ii) Henry Mayhew and the Slopwomen

Mayhew, a bohemian journalist, was increasingly radicalised by his investigations of "London Labour and the London Poor", serialised between 1849 and 1850 in *The Morning Chronicle*, the second largest newspaper after *The Times*. As E.P. Thompson has argued, Mayhew's survey placed the issue of slopwork at the top of reforming and radical agendas, coming as it did in the wake of the final Chartist Petition and the

³¹"Evidence", Children's Employment Commission, 1843, nos. 738 and 743.

cholera epidemic.³² Mayhew was part of an army of social investigators which in the early nineteenth century was invading working-class areas to define, locate and quantify the poor. By developing statistical analysis and the interview as documentary evidence and by asserting the meticulous, objective basis of their methods and observations, investigators established social science as a discipline.³³ Nevertheless, the investigators were heavily influenced by cultural representations of needlewomen within literature and art.

The frequently orphaned distressed needlewoman was a commonplace of eighteenth century fiction and drama for she could embody for different social classes anxieties about the social position of single women, women's work and sexuality. By the mid-nineteenth century she had become a cultural icon although one which was profoundly unstable. As Edelstein suggested in relation to the Victorian iconography of the seamstress, the solitary needlewoman encapsulated feminine saintliness and martyrdom which implied a critique of the corrupt city, masculine vice, the avaricious employer and the indifference and vanity of wealthy women. The power of such representations rested however on the sempstress's temptation and resistance to the wages of prostitution and consequently the figures of the needlewoman and the whore

³² E.P. Thompson, "Mayhew and the 'Morning Chronicle'", *Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the 'Morning Chronicle' 1849-50*, pp. 9-55. On Mayhew's scientific method see Yeo, "Mayhew as a Social Investigator", pp. 56-109.

³³ For the gendered construction of Victorian social science see Anita Levy, *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender, 1832-1898*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991, pp. 20-47 and Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class*, Virago, London, 1995, (forthcoming).

were bound together in the Victorian imagination.³⁴ The exchange between literary, artistic and social scientific representations of the needlewomen formed a key part of reforming propaganda. Grainger's report provided the source material for Charlotte Tonna's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1844), while reports in *The Times* of the prosecution of a needlewoman for pawning material she was working on inspired Thomas Hood's poem "Song of the Shirt" (1843) that became an anthem for reformers. Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) was but the most famous literary response to Mayhew's survey and aimed to encourage Christian Socialist solutions to the proletarianisation of the London tailoring trades.

Mayhew framed the needlewomen's experiences as a "tale" or a "story", or "a tragic and touching romance" as he introduced one "poor Magdalen".³⁵ His romantic readings were informed by melodramatic and gothic genres which frequently characterised the single woman worker as an orphan figure, the prey of aristocratic male licence.³⁶ By reading the needlewomen's experiences as romance, Mayhew and other investigators and reformers drew from them a cautionary moral tale that presented the

³⁴T.J. Edelstein. "They Sang 'The Song of the Shirt': The Visual Iconography of the Seamstress", *Victorian Studies*, Winter, 1980, pp. 183-210. For two illuminating discussions of the place of the needlewoman in Victorian literary narratives of social reform see Catherine Gallagher, "Family and Society: Tropes of Reconciliation in Popular Industrial Narratives" in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1985, especially pp. 128-137; and Joseph Kestner, *Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women*, Methuen, London, 1985, pp. 142-92.

³⁵ Letter IX, 16.11.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, p. 177-81.

³⁶ For a useful discussion of the deployment of melodrama in political rhetoric see Anna Clark, "The Politics of Seduction in English Popular Culture, 1748-1848" in Jean Radford, ed., *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1986, pp. 42-72.

narrative resolution as moral rescue. They failed to hear the needlewomen's evidence as a forms of political analysis and so were unable to imagine any political action by needlewomen to redress their situation.

Mayhew's survey of "London Labour" tested Malthusian and Utilitarian definitions of pauperism by examining the structural as well as the behavioural causes of poverty. He identified those who "can't" as well as those that "will" and "won't" work and was sympathetic to women whom he believed had been forced into prostitution by poverty.³⁷ Although he was increasingly impressed by schemes that enabled working men to help themselves, he saw the needlewomen as helpless victims.³⁸ Mayhew sought the political views of male workers, arranging meetings with trade unionists and Chartists who supported universal male suffrage. Introducing himself as a Chartist, one tailor told Mayhew that the Government impoverished working tailors by contracting out army and police clothing to prisons, which he saw as an aspect of class legislation which denied the working man a fair remuneration for his labour. He was convinced that the Charter would improve the tailors' conditions:-

by giving us a voice in the choice of our representatives, who might be so selected as thoroughly to understand the wants of the working man, and to sympathize with his endeavours for a better education and a better lot altogether.³⁹

At a meeting of East End tailors, Mayhew insisted on the need for "nothing but facts" but nevertheless asked them for their explanations for low prices and practical remedies.

³⁷ Letter I, "The Task", 19.10.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, p. 120-1.

³⁸ For example, *The Northern Star*, 2.11.1850, p. 8 for Mayhew's denunciation of the ameliorative schemes of "namby-pamby reformers" and support for trade unionism at a meeting with operative tailors.

³⁹ Letter XVI, 11.12.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 234-5.

Speaker after speaker argued that the introduction of female labour had cheapened the trade.⁴⁰

By contrast, Mayhew never enquired about the political views of women workers but instead tested the wages of female slopworkers by calling a "meeting of needlewomen forced to take to the streets." Presuming that women would be afraid to share their shameful secrets, he took precautions to ensure "the strict privacy of the assembly". Journalists had to sit behind a screen; other men were excluded; lights were dimmed and cards of admission given to slopwomen. The event encaptured the atmosphere of the confessional or the theatre and the "stage" was eagerly taken by twenty five women "intent upon making known [their] sorrows and sufferings". The one other gentleman present, who had taken a "deep interest" in the plight of the needlewomen for many years, assumed the role of stage master and priest, asking the women "to speak without fear" and that:-

the only way to obtain deliverance from their present condition was, that they should speak for themselves, tell their own tale, simply, and without exaggeration, with the most scrupulous regard to truth.⁴¹

While men were seen to have political accounts and solutions, women possessed only their "stories" which were frequently woven into reforming propaganda. However, if the audience had listened, they might have heard that these stories told of survival and the operation of power in women's lives.⁴²

⁴⁰ Letter XVII 14.12.1849, pp. 238-48, *Unknown Mayhew*.

⁴¹ Letter XI, 23.11.1849, pp. 200-1.

⁴² My reading of Mayhew's interviews with the slopwomen has been inspired in part by Carolyn Steedman's analysis of Mayhew's encounter with an eight year old watercress seller in the same survey. Steedman suggests the ways in which the poor have been able to tell a version of their histories through the agency of social investigators but the very different meanings of these narratives for the narrator and interlocutor. Steedman,

This is the story of "the most eloquent" woman at the meeting who spoke for half an hour. Mayhew heard her story as a truthful, but unreflective account of her life: "I never listened to such a gush of words and emotion, and perhaps never shall again." Like the other women present, she deployed the literary to captivate her audience who sobbed with her throughout the narrative and, at its close, were silent for a few minutes, "pondering upon the tale". Julia Swindells has argued that working women autobiographers made use of the literary and especially romantic and melodramatic devices to speak about "women's issues" and sexuality."⁴³ The literary was the only language made available to the slopwomen by Mayhew but to an extent they were able to use it to their advantage.

As with many of his witnesses, Mayhew's interlocutor's problems had begun when the family economy collapsed on the death of her husband. Unable to support her family by shirtmaking, owing to the cost of security and the cut taken by the piece-mistress, she struggled against entering the workhouse. This resistance was shared by many interviewees who preferred starvation wages to the ignominy of the "Bastille". Her narrative broke down as she attempted to express her pain at being separated from her children when they were eventually forced into the workhouse: "A mother's feelings are better felt than described...what I felt no tongue can tell." Her tears suggest not just her personal grief but the absence of a social narrative that could articulate this mother's anger and pain. After one child died she obtained outdoor relief, but as this did not sufficiently supplement her wages she agreed to live with a fellow lodger. Her feelings for this *common-law marriage* were ambivalent. She confessed "her character was

Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives, Virago, London, 1986, pp. 125-139.

⁴³ Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 137-153 and pp. 163-171.

gone", yet she did not see herself as a "common prostitute".⁴⁴ She tried several times to live with the man, but sent him away when he was unable to support her family. She had married two years ago, and finally given up slop work for washing and charring.

While the woman had resisted her entitlement to the punitive assistance of the Poor Laws, she expressed the rights of slop workers to be protected by legislation:-

But I hope better things are coming at last; and God bless the gentlemen, I say, who have set this inquiry a-going to help the poor slop-workers, and I hope that public attention being now called to these matters, the oppressed will be oppressed no longer, and that Parliament House even will interpose to protect them. But I am sorry to say the good are not always the powerful, nor the powerful always good.⁴⁵

Her statement suggests that the language of popular radicalism had permeated the female outworkers, with its faith in the political resolution of economic and social oppression. Popular radicalism had often urged members of all classes to restore a just, moral order, but this woman had learned from experience to doubt Mayhew's faith in the power of public opinion to effect change in the face of unequal power relations.

Although Mayhew did not expect these women to account for their low wages, many did analyse the changes in the employment relations in their industry, attributing their impoverishment to subcontracting, sweating and competition. Two staystitchers described how two employers had prompted "the downfall of the staybusiness" by

⁴⁴Many of Mayhew's witnesses insisted that their downfall was the combination of starvation wages, and the loss of family or marital ties. Often these were common law marriages that had ended in desertion, and only then became defined as prostitution. Françoise Barret-Ducrocq refers to many such cases, often among needlewomen, in her study of applicants to the London Foundling Hospital. See *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality and Desire Among Working-Class Men and Women in Nineteenth-Century London*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992.

⁴⁵ Letter XI, 23.11.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 205-11.

putting out work in the country at lower rates, and by extracting security from their workers. The staystitchers survived by sharing their meagre resources - a neighbourly generosity that they contrasted with the hypocrisy of the rich:-

Ah, sir, the poor is generally very kind to the poor. If we wasn't to help one another whatever would become of us. None of the gentlefolks ever came to us. They knows a great deal more about the slaves of Jamaica than they does about us.⁴⁶

Some female Chartists and other working class radicals compared the concern of middle-class abolitionists for the oppression of slaves with their seeming indifference to the exploitation of waged labourers in Britain. They insisted on the value of working-class self-reliance and this rhetoric may have influenced the staystitcher's assertion of the importance of "self-help".⁴⁷

Although many resorted to slopwork when they lost a male bread-winner, others took in work because their husbands refused to support them adequately. Two shoebinders described their problems living with drunken husbands. One was regularly beaten physically and verbally by her husband who was drunk three or four times a week:-

I can assure you I have been obliged to live upon my two shillings. It is not living - it's only just enough to say you keep life together. I have, indeed, sir, a very hard time of it. I'm ready to run away, and leave it very often. If it wasn't for my children I should do it.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Letter IX, 16.11.1849, *The Morning Chronicle Survey of Labour and the Poor: The Metropolitan Districts*, Caliban Books, Horsham, 1982, vol. VI, p. 171-3.

⁴⁷ For radical criticism and support for the anti-slavery movements see Betty Fladeland, "'Our Cause being One and the Same': Abolitionists and Chartism" in James Walvin, ed. *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846*, Macmillan, London, 1982, pp. 69-99. On the problematic use of abolitionist and emancipationist discourses by British white women see Vron Ware, part 2, "An Abhorrence of Slavery", *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*, Verso, London, 1992, pp. 47-116.

⁴⁸ Letter IX, 16.11.1849, *Morning Chronicle Survey*, pp. 175-8.

Some upper- and middle-class reformers pointed to male drunkenness, neglectfulness of fatherly duties and violence as explanations for the distress of needlewomen. In attempting to show how improvident behaviour was mostly a result rather than a cause of poverty, Mayhew and male radicals left out of their political accounts the experience and arguments of women like these shoebinders.

Grainger's and Mayhew's reports produced a moral outcry which was sustained by further shocking revelations of needlewomen's conditions in the media. The response to these reports helped to shape Victorian reforming culture. I shall focus now on the politics of this response and discuss how three different groups analysed and proposed to solve the needlewomen's distress. These were Tory and evangelical philanthropy; Chartism, trade unionism and Christian Socialism; and the women's rights movement.

Part Three: The Politics of Needlework

i) Tory Philanthropy

Grainger's report prompted the formation of two societies both presided over by Lord Ashley, a leading evangelical Tory paternalist who had spearheaded the Parliamentary campaign to abolish women's underground work in the mines. The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners aimed to induce the principal establishments to limit working hours to twelve a day and to abolish Sunday work. It established a registry for dayworkers seeking employment in high-class establishments which would help relieve the workload on resident dressmakers. The Society for the Relief of Distressed Needlewomen aimed to introduce fairer wages into the slop trade by encouraging workhouse institutions and government contractors to

adopt standard prices. It also established an employment register and assisted needlewomen to pay for securities on material. It aimed to create work by making up clothes for the poor.⁴⁹ By promoting "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work" these societies worked within a well-established framework of Tory paternalism which countered economic individualism by insisting on the obligations of the rich to provide subsistence to the poor. Their defence of needlewomen rested primarily however on their vulnerability as women rather than their rights as workers. Comparing needlewomen to the Scottish women colliers, Ashley demanded protection for women because:-

The very docility of woman's nature induced her to act under orders, and the obedience and toil that no man would submit to.⁵⁰

Evangelicals were prominent in both societies and their annual meetings were held at Exeter Hall, the centre of evangelical organisation in the city. They received the support of leading social paternalists and politicians like Alderman Farebrother and Grainger himself. Although their public functions were dominated by men, the Ladies' committees organised relief, providing a philanthropic outlet for royal and aristocratic women such as the Duchesses of Sutherland and Argyll, the Countesses of Shaftesbury and Ellesmere, Lady Jocelyn and Miss. Burdett Coutts who all sat on the Dressmakers' committee.⁵¹

A first hand told Mayhew that the Dressmakers' Association had led to some improvement in the treatment of the women and that the manager and committee

⁴⁹Reports of these societies meetings and fundraising activities were printed in *The Times* which strongly endorsed the philanthropic schemes for relieving the needlewomen.

⁵⁰*The Times*, 21.7.1845, p. 5d.

⁵¹ On the philanthropic response to the needlewomen see Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass* pp. 92-107.

negotiated disputes between employers and workers but held that prices and profits had fallen due to the slowness of customers in paying for orders.⁵² Mayhew noted that the Association had succeeded in bringing dayworkers into the high-class industry. Despite their concern for the labourers' rights however, the societies responded to the Commission's call for the moral regulation of workers. A superintendent of one of the needlewomen's homes in 1864, had set an example to her residents by dismissing several girls who had received notes from gentlemen.⁵³ Philanthropists predicted dire consequences if employers failed to monitor and supervise their residents' meagre leisure time. In 1864, Miss Bramwell, the manageress of the philanthropic needlewomen's Home in Great Marlborough Street and author of a pamphlet on dressmakers, entitled *Have Faith in God*, insisted on the need to provide meals and devotional and recreational activities for women on Sundays. She knew of one woman whose employers left her to wander the streets on Sundays and to make her own acquaintances, and provided this ominous warning:-

[She] was taken by some of her companions to a room where infidel doctrines were discussed, and was led away by them. She is dead now.

Lord relied very much on the evidence of evangelical philanthropists, like one lady manager of a charitable home, who had long been engaged in improving the condition of young women workers. She was involved in the evangelical midnight meetings movement, which from 1850 was one of the first organisations to "rescue" prostitutes in London.⁵⁴ She saw the music halls as dens of vice:-

⁵²Mayhew, Letter LXXV, 24.10.1850, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 524-5.

⁵³Children's Employment Commission, 1864, no 84, pp 119-20.

⁵⁴This was probably set up by Theophilus Smith, Secretary of the Female Aid Society in 1850 - F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-century England*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, pp. 194-6.

They are just the places for vain and dressy girls to be led away, hence the misery of the girls, who come to our midnight meetings movement.

The link in the public imagination between needlewomen and prostitution meant that much of the "rescue" work of the 1840's and 1850's extended from attempts to relieve the needlewomen.

For Mayhew, the poverty of dressmakers and slopwomen was part of a wider crisis in economic and labour organisation but for middle and upper class philanthropists it was related to the condition of women rather than of labour. Unlike the "factory lass" who had exercised the public imagination in the 1830's, the distressed needlewoman evoked anxieties about the status of all single, independent, working women rather than a specific group of workers. In spite of appalling wages, needlework remained one of the few "respectable" employments open to women of all classes. Asserting that needlework was *the* universal female employment a *Times* editorial explained that over-production and competition were caused by the ubiquity of needlework as women's work. Its status as women's work meant that it could not be defined as "a trade, or a craft, or a calling". The editorial concluded:-

it is strictly impossible to raise the class as a class. Indeed, strictly speaking, it is no class at all. All women are needlewomen. The competition embraces the whole sex... It is not, then, so much a supposed class of needlewomen as the whole sex that is to be assisted.⁵⁵

For many reformers, the needlewoman epitomised the problem of the "redundant woman" which could only be removed by the exodus of this "surplus population". In response to Mayhew's investigation, Sidney Herbert, a government minister and close associate of Ashley's, argued that the needlewomen's low wages resulted from the fact

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 8.12.1849, p. 4; 7.12.1849, p. 4.

that the number of needlewomen in London far exceeded the demand for labour. He proposed aiding women's passage to the colonies, where they might find husbands, as well as gainful employment, particularly in domestic service. Supported by much of fashionable London society, Herbert's plan was inspired by Caroline Chisholm's Family Colonization Loan Society, which had emphasised the importance of male emigration to be accompanied by female, and especially family emigration, to ensure the establishment of civilised society in the colonies. However, Herbert's Society for Promoting Female Emigration was the first organisation to promote the emigration of single women. To ensure that these women would fulfil a domestic and civilising mission in the colonies, a Home was established to screen the applicants' domestic skills and moral character prior to embarkation.⁵⁶ The case of the needlewomen was instrumental therefore in fuelling ideas about the "redundant woman problem" and in inspiring a number of Victorian charitable and reforming schemes from rescue work to emigration.

ii) Chartism, Trade Unionism and Christian Socialism

Although the Tailors' Union had collapsed at the end of the 1834 strike, the tradition of association had been sustained especially by the work culture of the honourable tailors. The workshop itself, and the houses of call, which usually met in taverns, served as forums for convivial and political discussion, and the tailors were renowned for their strong political views. As the metropolitan Chartist movements embraced the work culture of skilled workers, tailors established work-based Chartist

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the role of this society in preparing the grounds for the emigration of middle class women see A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration*, Croom Helm, London, 1979, pp. 92-123.

associations, and fed their grievances into the wider movement. In his study of London Chartism, David Goodway argued that there was a strong correlation between political or industrial radicalism and proletarianisation within a given trade. He found that tailoring amounted to 8.46% of Chartist occupations in the metropolis and concluded that the trade was "markedly Chartist".⁵⁷

In the early 1840's there had been some support for the unionisation of women among Chartist tailors. A Metropolitan Tailors' Protection Society was formed between 1842 and 1843 which revived the Owenite claims for general unionisation. John Whittaker Parker, the union secretary, argued for women's inclusion. He noted in *The Northern Star* that women had become unfortunately "our greatest competitors":-

for, where is the use of our attempting to bring wages up to the original standard, while there are thousands of females who are compelled to make waistcoats from fourpence each and trousers from 6d, per pair. Indeed, justice demands that they shall be protected as well as ourselves.⁵⁸

Whittaker called upon women to establish their own co-operative company on the same principal as the Operative Tailors' Association and Joint Stock Clothing Companies and appealed to men to take out shares in such a venture. However, the male domination of radical culture undermined this commitment to justice for women. The Society solicited membership at meetings of the exclusively male houses of call and addressed its statements to working men. By aiming to eradicate sweating through the abolition of outwork, the Society sought to remove a major source of female employment. The interests of women were further undermined by the London Tailors' Society embracing

⁵⁷David Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-1848*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1982, pp. 15-18 and 170-5.

⁵⁸"Co-operation - Union is Strength - To the Journeymen Tailors and Others", *Northern Star*, 25.11.1843, p. 4ab.

the interests of the skilled, well paid and employed journeymen, rather than those of unskilled and casual labour.⁵⁹

Mayhew's reports on the male and female slopworkers sounded a rallying call to the London tailors who began to hold large meetings, supported by Mayhew, on the politics of the slop trade. This provided a new focus for Chartist discussions of work which hitherto had centred largely on the problems of factory labour. Chartists and trade associations were quick to refute the explanations of Malthusians and other political economists for distress among slopworkers, especially the doctrine of surplus-population. However, their solutions hinged on the removal of women from paid employment rather than the ideal of the male breadwinner.

Although many of the tailors interviewed by Mayhew insisted that competition, not surplus population was the cause of low wages, they believed that competition was caused by the existence of female labour, and for some, Irish and foreign labour as well. Like the captain of one workshop, they were convinced that:-

these evils do not arise from over-population, but rather from over-competition...I know myself, that owing to the reduction of prices, many wives who formerly attended solely to their domestic duties and their family are now obliged to labour with the husband, and still the earnings of the two are less than he alone formerly obtained.⁶⁰

At a meeting at Exeter Hall, supported by the Chartists, Mr. Goodfellow put forward a resolution on behalf of the Journeymen Tailors' to petition Parliament calling for price

⁵⁹For criticisms of the Society's exclusiveness see *Northern Star*, 10.8.1844 and Goodway, *London Chartism*, pp. 174-5.

⁶⁰*Unknown Mayhew*, Letter XVI, 11.12.49, p 226. This view was shared by many at a meeting of East End tailors called by Mayhew. See Letter XVII, 14.12.1849, pp. 238-48.

fixing and the abolition of Sunday work. Urging the removal of domestic work he claimed:-

that ten shillings a-week for work done on the premises would be better than one pound a week for labour done at home, which was the total destruction of all domestic comfort, as well as the source of most unnatural labour and unhealthy confinement to women.⁶¹

In response to a meeting of more than a thousand female slopworkers in Shadwell called by Ashley and Herbert to announce their emigration proposals, the Chartist Julian Harney argued that the competition between employers and between the workers proved the need for "Socialism". Writing as "L'Ami du Peuple" in *The Northern Star* he noted that most women had attributed their low wages to the fact that the masters undercut each other, rather than women undercutting each other's work. He used their evidence to argue for a broadening of the Chartist agenda, to include "social" as well as "political" revolution. He called for a return to the exclusionary practices of the union shops prior to the Tailors' Strike of 1834, rather than addressing how pay differentials between men and women had driven down wages. His vision of socialism was of a union of capital, labour and land for the benefit of workers that envisaged the same domestic role for women mapped out by the earlier Chartist Land Plan. If husbands, fathers and sons were employed on the land, they:-

would soon draw [the needlewomen] from the spider nets of the Jew slop-sellers to assist their male connexions in more natural, more healthful, and toil-rewarding labours. Then might the tailoring trade be restored to its original channel,- men working at it instead of women; for I protest that women abandoning their household duties, is an unnatural and accursed system, which must be put and end to, ere comfort and happiness can be the reward of the sons and daughters of labour.⁶²

⁶¹"Case of the Journeymen Tailors", *Reynolds's Political Instructor*, 2.2.1850.

⁶²*Northern Star*, 8.12.49, p. 5cd.

The ideal of the male breadwinner failed to address the evidence of Mayhew's survey that the majority of slopworkers were women under twenty, widows, or the wives of ill or unemployed men. A day-worker in dressmaking pointed out that "a young person like me who depends on her needle for a living" was disadvantaged by the daughters of "respectable tradesmen" who "earn nice pocket-money or dress-money by day-work".⁶³ There is scarcely any evidence of attempts to unionise needlewomen, although the Men's Bookbinders' Union "nobly [threw] the shield of their protection" over 156 female binders who struck in the autumn of 1849 against Miss Watkins, who contracted the bible-binding for the British and Foreign Bible Society and paid her workers less than 7 shillings a week.⁶⁴

A North London Needlewomen's Association was also established at 31 Red Lion Square. It was one of several producer co-operatives set up in response to Mayhew's survey, forming associations of tailors, shoemakers, printers, bakers and builders. These were organised by an uneasy alliance of Owenites like Lloyd Jones, Chartists like Gerald Massey and Walter Cooper, both working tailors, and the Christian Socialists, namely Maurice, Kingsley, Ludlow and Neale. They sought inspiration from the associations formed in Paris in 1848, as well as the Rochdale Mill.⁶⁵ Despite

⁶³*Morning Chronicle*, Letter LXXV, 24.10.50, p 525.

⁶⁴*Northern Star*, 10.11.49, p. 5bcd.

⁶⁵For references to the Needlewomen's Association see *The Friend of the People*, vol. II, 21.12.1850, p. 16 and 5.4.1851, p. 136. For the aims of the Associative Tailors see Walter Cooper, "Address of the Associative Tailors To Their Brother Toilers of All Trades", *Reynolds's Political Instructor*, 31.3.1850, p. 168. For discussions of the links between trade unionism, co-operation and Christian Socialism in London in the late 1840s and 1850s see J.M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress of the Working Class, 1832-1867*, (1867), Augustus M. Kelley, Clifton, 1973; T. Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism*, Universitetsforlaget 1 Aarhus, 1962; R.B. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation*

quarrels among the Christian Socialists about forms of organisation, participation and leadership, this era of co-operation continued until 1860, developing links with northern co-operators, and carrying some of the ideals of Owenite co-operation into the mid-Victorian labour movement. However, there was no discussion of the Needlewomen's Association in the radical press. In the only reference I have found to this Association, Mastermann argues that Ludlow established the society in co-operation with Lord Shaftesbury (formerly Ashley) admitting "that autocratic methods were necessary, as the poor women were incapable of self-government."⁶⁶

In "A Warning to the Needlewomen and Slopworkers", the only direct Chartist appeal to the needlewomen that I have found, the Chartist editor Reynolds argued that Herbert's Society was a "pseudo-philanthropic scheme" that induced "poor women to become voluntary candidates for transportation". He condemned as "indelicate" the suggestion that women could find husbands in the colonies and that emigration did not meet the needs of the slopworkers, since most were unsuited to domestic service "by previous habits or experience".⁶⁷ Reynolds may have been right, for few needlewomen either chose, or were admitted onto the scheme. Herbert soon realised that there was little employment for needlewomen who had no experience in service or nursing. Of 409 assisted emigrants in 1850, only 167 were needlewomen. By 1853 the aims of the

in Victorian England, Croom Helm, London, 1975.

⁶⁶N.C. Mastermann *John Malcolm Ludlow. The Builder of Christian Socialism*, CUP, 1963. p 96. Taken from Ludlow's unpublished autobiography XXIV p. 7 in Ludlow's papers University Cambridge Lib, Ref. Add 7348. Shaftesbury rebuked Carlyle, both at the meeting, for advocating "Ship 'em [the needlewomen] to Californy, they will all get married there."

⁶⁷*Reynolds's Political Instructor*, 5.1.1850, pp. 66-7, 69 and the supplement to this addition, pp. 74-5.

Society had changed from the problem of surplus female labour, to the problem of "redundant" women and promoted exclusively the emigration of middle-class women.⁶⁸

Reynolds believed it was scandalous that members of the community should be told there was no room for them in their own country and measures should be sought instead to relieve women in their own country where they were among their friends. He denounced the doctrine of surplus population as "a base, wicked, wilful lie" and advocated wealth distribution and creation through the abolition of land-monopoly and the laws of primogeniture and entail; the effective management of crown lands; and the cultivation of waste land. While Reynolds' article was addressed specifically to needlewomen and he included women as members of the industrious classes, he used their case to promote male suffrage and the radical critique of aristocratic government. His message was addressed in fact to the men of England: if needlewomen were driven abroad, the tailors and shoemakers would next face "transportation". The needlewomen were used as an example of a wider class oppression to stimulate male workers rather than the women themselves to action.⁶⁹

One of Mayhew's slopwomen told him how she had been deserted by her lover while pregnant. She insisted on the material causes of her fall and the gulf of incomprehension that existed between the slop workers and the respectable classes:-

⁶⁸Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 107.

⁶⁹*Reynolds' Political Instructor*, vol. I, 5.1.50, pp. 66-7 and also Supplement, 5.1.1850, p. 74. For similar arguments see "Female Slavery" in the *English Chartist Circular*, vol. II, no. 143 p. 361 which contended that women's was the most oppressed form of labour and appealed for "a thorough radical change" in place of an appeal to public opinion.

But no one knows the temptations of us poor girls in want. Gentlefolks can never understand it. If I had been born a lady it wouldn't have been very hard to have acted like one.⁷⁰

Harney used her words to indict unrepresentative government and to call working men to action:-

A father who, to save his daughter from being brought to such shame, should stab her to the heart, might be tried, and even hanged for *murder*, in virtue of Parliament-made laws; but by no moral law, he would be acquitted - nay honoured as another VIRGINIUS. Brother Proletarians, let the words of the poor girl above quoted, sink deep into your hearts:- "If I had been born a lady, it wouldn't have been hard to have acted like one."⁷¹

For Reynolds, Harney and many other radical men, the suffering of the needlewomen permitted a moral condemnation of exclusive government and capitalist enterprise. By representing working women as sexual prey to aristocratic vice or corrupt middlemen they elided a melodramatic script of sex exploitation with class exploitation. As Catherine Gallagher and Anna Clark have suggested, radicals evoked the fraternity of working men by calling for the protection and domestication of working women.⁷² Reynolds' story "The Sempstress" was to be the first in a series on "The Slaves of England" but despite its popularity he did not write a second series. Perhaps Reynolds was reluctant to write of British men as slaves and found the rhetoric of enslavement incompatible with the idea of agency.⁷³

⁷⁰ Letter VIII, 13.11.1849, *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 175-7.

⁷¹L'Ami du Peuple, "Thanksgiving Day", *Northern Star*, 17.11.1849, p. 5cde.

⁷²Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, pp. 128-37 and Clark, "Politics of Seduction". Reynolds's "The Slaves of England, No. 1: The Sempstress"

⁷³G.W.M. Reynolds, "The Slaves of England, No. 1: The Sempstress", *Reynolds's Miscellany*, serialised 23.3.1850-22.6.1850. The rhetoric of slavery was integral to Reynolds's depiction of women's labour. See especially *Reynolds's Political Instructor*, vol. I, 10.12.1849, pp. 30-1. Robert Gray argued that in the campaigns for factory legislation in the mid-nineteenth century, male trade unionists and radicals defined their independence

Carolyn Steedman has argued that the figure of the woman and especially the poor woman has been used as a cultural device since classical times to embody suffering.⁷⁴ In "Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman" the sempstress Jemima tells Mary Wollstonecraft's heroine her history of poverty, sexual betrayal and rape and in return elicited Mary's own story. As Steedman has suggested, Wollstonecraft narrated a middle-class female subjectivity through the fictionalisation of a poor woman's story. The stories of the dressmakers and the slopwomen allowed some advocates of women's rights to speak of the suffering of all women. But middle- and upper-class women distanced themselves from, at the same time as they claimed sisterhood with, poor working women. The story of Wollstonecraft's Jemima was marginal to that of the bourgeois heroine and was, after all, Wollstonecraft's fiction.⁷⁵

iii) Women's Rights

As we have seen, philanthropic reformers appealed to women as customers to help the needlewomen by allowing time to make up orders and to support the charitable organisations. A new generation of women's rights advocates also took up the question of the needlewomen, linking their plight to the lack of educational and employment

through their ability to protect dependent wives and children. They too constructed the free male citizen as the antithesis to the slave. See Robert Gray, "Factory Legislation and the Gendering of Jobs in the North of England, 1830-1860, *Gender and History*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1993, pp. 57 and 63.

⁷⁴Carolyn Steedman, "Class-consciousness", paper delivered at the History Workshop conference on Edward Thompson, London, July 1994.

⁷⁵Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction*, (1978), published as *Mary and the Wrongs of Woman*, (Gary Kelly, ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987; Carolyn Steedman, "Class-consciousness". See also Steedman, "Bimbos from Hell", *Social History*, (Hull), vol. 19, no. 1, January, 1994, pp. 57-67.

opportunities for all women. In 1860 Ellen Barlee who established a home for needlewomen, reminded the readers of the *English Woman's Journal* that most English women of all social classes knew of a friend or relative reduced to dependency on slop wages.⁷⁶ We shall examine how women's rights exponents drew on and criticised the proposals of philanthropists and radicals by examining the discussions of the needlewomen's plight in *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849-53) and the *English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864).

As will be discussed in chapter six, *Eliza Cook's Journal* was a popular family magazine aimed at a middle class and respectable artisan, reform-minded readership, edited by the immensely popular poet, Eliza Cook. It included fiction, poetry and journalism by reformers of both sexes. By promoting women's rights and duties as writers, reformers, and workers, these writers formed a bridge between the middle-class supporters of Owenism, Unitarianism, early social science and the mid-Victorian liberal women's rights embodied by the *English Woman's Journal*.⁷⁷

Eliza Cook's Journal refused to address the contentious issue of political rights for women, but sought to extend women's rights in employment and education. A few months before Mayhew's survey, the writer Eliza Meteyard recommended the plight of

⁷⁶L.N., "Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen", *English Women's Journal*, vol. V, pp. 255-9.

⁷⁷ On the links between early and mid nineteenth century women's rights see Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1985. For the Langham Place circle and the *English Woman's Journal* see Jane Rendall "'A Moral Engine': Feminism, Liberalism and the *English Woman's Journal*" in Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987 and Candida Lacey, ed., *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987.

the milliners and dressmakers to the Early Closing Association and appealed especially to the wives and mothers of London to aid the needlewomen:-

Let it be a WILL having birth from these pages; and let it be said in the times to come, when a new Macaulay writes the progress of our national history, that, in a JOURNAL edited and conducted by women, a good and great movement was materially assisted, in one of its most pitiable and needful points, by assisting to free a most oppressed and useful class from a pernicious system of slavery, and a slow process of death, which in the whole circumference of British labour, had then no parallel.

Throughout the journal women writers frequently legitimised their public stance through their commitment to the plight of working women, thus writing their place in the national history. While Meteyard contended that needlewomen were treated like slaves she validated them as workers, describing them as a "useful class" of "British labour". She agreed with John Stuart Mill that legislative interference in the needle trade would be "indefensible and mischievous", but hoped that the Early Closing Association would petition the Queen and the ladies of the country for a reduction of hours.⁷⁸

The writer of an article on "The Employment of Young Women" in 1850 countered the theory of the surplus female population by pleading for wider employment opportunities for women. Although agreeing that "the proper sphere of woman is the Home", the writer pointed out that for many women "this is but a beautiful theory, and yet very far from being realised in practice". In reality, the writer suggested, working- and middle-class women often needed to work to support themselves or their families.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Silverpen [Meteyard] "The Early Closing Movement - Milliners and Dressmakers", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, vol. I, 7.7.1849, pp. 154-6. Meteyard's class and gender politics are discussed more fully in chapter six.

⁷⁹ Unattributed leading article, "Employment of Young Women", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, vol. II, 5.1.1850, pp. 145-7.

One response to Mayhew's survey insisted that the cause of their poverty was not idleness, drunkenness, or extravagance, but the middle and gentry classes who "all combine to sustain and preserve the monopoly of manufactures, in food, in trade." Charity was "worse than useless". The writer conferred the rights of labour upon the needlewomen, arguing that they asked "only the simple right of mankind, that of being rewarded for their hours of patient toil by adequate remuneration". However, she held back from the notion that needlewomen could exercise that right. Instead, she sought to systematise and extend the existing role of the ladies, often aristocratic, who managed the relief committees of the established charitable societies for distressed needlewomen. Anticipating Anna Jameson's call to Protestant women to adopt the charitable activities of the Catholic sisterhoods, the writer appealed for women "who will go forth as sisters of charity" to "seek out these poor needlewomen":-

Some must boldly step forward and defy prejudice, and sneers, and ridicule, and penetrate into close alleys and confined rooms, and search out the poor needlewomen; they must employ them, they must pay them, they must raise them from their hopes of despair with kind words and gentle encouragement, they must make them feel at last that there is humanity and pity upon earth. They must be taught by this means that they are regarded as women - that their rights to the happy title of wives and mothers are acknowledged...⁸⁰

Middle-class women would return the needlewomen's humanity by granting them the status of mothers. The journal's insistence on the need for well-to-do women to protect and act for needlewomen contrasts sharply with its encouragement for the Working Tailors' Association and other co-operative ventures that would instill, it hoped, self-reliance and independence among working men.

⁸⁰ Unattributed, "On the Best Means of Relieving the Needlewomen", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 19.7.1851, vol. V, pp. 189-191; Anna Jameson, *Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant and The Communion of Labour*, Ticknor and Fields, (Boston, 1855 and 1856), reprint, Hyperion, U.S.A, 1976. For a critical discussion of the class assumptions implicit in Jameson's call see Eileen Yeo, "Social Motherhood and the Communion of Labour in British Social Science, 1850-1950", *Women's History Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1992, pp. 63-87.

Ellen Barlee was one of the women to take up the call to seek and rescue the poor needlewomen. Alerted by letters in *The Times* in the winter of 1859, she visited the Field-Lane Refuge for Women and resolved to investigate and write on the causes and remedies of distress. Like other philanthropists, she believed the life histories or "romances" of the poor could be used to cement the "Christian bond of love" between rich and poor and their stories formed the basis of her books and journalism.⁸¹ Researching her book, *Our Homeless Poor; and What We Can Do to Help Them*, (1860) she was alerted to the lack of employment for women and consequent impoverishment, especially among needlewomen. Quoting from Scripture that there should be profit in all labour, she called on the Government and private trade either to "open a larger field of paid *social* labour to its women - a thing most desirable" or to support an emporium in London by government contracts. By cutting out the middle agents the emporium would enable needlewomen "the *full measure* of hire."⁸²

Barlee incorporated the rhetoric and practice of social investigation, evangelicalism and the rights of labour into a form of female activism. "A few 'Florence Nightingales' alone" were wanted to establish an emporium. By acting in "union" the "Women of England" could "guard their sisters' rights."⁸³ With the patronage of aristocratic ladies like the Duchess of Cambridge and Lady Eastlake, the novelist Mrs. S.C. Hall and the M.P.s' wives Mrs. Cave and Mrs. Gurney, the Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen was established at Lamb's Conduit Street, under the superintendence of Barlee. Barlee was assisted by Sidney Herbert and the Earl of

⁸¹Ellen Barlee, *Our Homeless Poor; and What We Can Do to Help Them*, James Nisbet and Co., London, 1860, p. 3-4.

⁸²ibid. pp 79-80.

⁸³ibid. pp. 85, 10.

Shaftesbury who presided over the Institution but she also had the support of prominent women's rights activists. Mrs. Boucherett, probably Jessie Boucherett's mother, was one of the Institution's guarantors while Emily Faithfull printed its reports and Barlee's 1863 collection *Friendless and Helpless*.⁸⁴

In a report on the Institution in the *English Woman's Journal* in 1860, Barlee attacked the role of middlemen in reducing wages, dismissing them as "small capitalists and uneducated people". The Institute provided an alternative to capitalist enterprise and co-operation which achieved "no permanent good because it places their labor [*sic*] on a false basis, and must end in disappointment when the funds fail..."⁸⁵

Barlee's philanthropic concerns were shared by a number of women in the Langham Place circle connected with the Social Science Association.⁸⁶ The Association brought together a wide range of reformers from Shaftesbury to Maurice, to the liberal

⁸⁴*Report of the Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen*, 1 May, 1863-4, Emily Faithful, Victoria Press, London, 1864; *English Woman's Journal*, IX, July 1862, pp. 352-3. Ellen Barlee continued to work on evangelical campaigns with Shaftesbury and in 1884 dedicated to Shaftesbury a call for the abolition of children working in music halls and circuses, *Pantomime Waifs, Or a Plea for Our City Children*, S.W. Partridge and Co., London, 1884. Barlee's appeal to women was successful for Prochaska found that 75% of subscribers in 1864 were women, contributing 72% of subscriptions. F. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England*, O.U.P., Oxford, 1980, pp. 237, 247. The Institution was reported by Dickens' periodical *All The Year Round*, vol. III, 11.8.1860, pp. 427-8.

⁸⁵L.N. "Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen", pp. 255-9. Barlee promoted the plight of the dressmakers in the *English Woman's Journal* through a series called "Annals of the Needlewomen" which were based on the stories of applicants to the Institute. *English Woman's Journal*, vol. IX, April 1862, pp. 73-80; June 1862, pp. 217-226.

⁸⁶For women and the Social Science Association see Kathleen McCrone, "The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science and the Advancement of Victorian Women", *Atlantis*, vol. 8, no. 1, Autumn 1982, pp. 44-66.

suffragists Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett, to working-class activists like the co-operator George Jacob Holyoake. This dialogue with paternalists and working class activists led some liberals like John Stuart Mill and Bessie Rayner Parkes, to criticise the doctrine of *laissez-faire* and to review their understanding of political economy particularly in relation to women's work. There was no unanimity in the *English Woman's Journal* over the causes or solutions of the distress of the needlewomen, reflecting the difficulties liberal thinkers had in confronting questions about the regulation of industry. An article on "Industrial Association Amongst Workwomen" suggests however how some women were trying to take liberalism in new directions. It was published in the *English Woman's Journal* in 1860, probably by Bessie Rayner Parkes, who was currently discussing J.S. Mill's views on co-operation in the *Journal* and was strongly influenced by the model laid by Barlee's Institution.⁸⁷

The plan for "Industrial Association" advocated that workers become "at the same time both labourer and capitalist" through the establishment of *ateliers*. This view of co-operation was counterpoised to that of the socialists who cause "discontent and disorder" by "inciting the labouring population against their employer" and who had no conception of the "true principles on which trade ought to be conducted". The article suggests that some of the women connected with the Langham Place group participated in the liberal co-option of the language of association.

⁸⁷"Outline of a Plan for the Formation of Industrial Associations Amongst Workwomen", *English Woman's Journal*, vol. VI, 1.10.1860, pp. 72-7. This plan was sandwiched between Parkes' discussion of "The Opinions of John Stuart Mill", *English Woman's Journal*, 1.9.1860, pp. 1-11 and 1.10.1860, pp. 193-202, which focused on his study of co-operation in *Principles of Political Economy*, probably in the 1857 edition. See chapter five for a more detailed discussion of Mill's *Political Economy*.

The author of the plan for industrial associations among women argued that dressmaking was particularly suited to co-operation, since it required little capital outlay. The object of the association would be to render women independent of charity by making their labour sufficiently remunerative. It would also:-

elevate the character of the working classes, and... enable the young women when they marry to become useful members of society, and the means of still further improving and refining the manners and morals of the generation which is to succeed them.

The young women would be placed under the supervision of a middle aged woman "who should be considered their mistress, who would regulate the household affairs, and keep order amongst the workwomen." They would be trained in housewifery skills by performing their own domestic work. Since "the recreations enjoyed by girls of the working classes generally lead to evil", the mistress was to organise a rigorous programme of education and improvement including group outings to the park or country, galleries and museums; reading in the evenings; and moral and religious instruction.⁸⁸

This was a very different notion of co-operation from that of the London Association of Working Tailors whose "purely democratic principles" had been praised in 1851 by *Eliza Cook's Journal*.⁸⁹ The Langham Place women were committed to extending the employment and educational opportunities to working women beyond moral and domestic training. Yet as Eileen Yeo has argued, middle-class women's rights campaigners throughout the nineteenth century tended to treat working class women as

⁸⁸ Similar plans were put into practice by Mary Merryweather, also associated with the *English Woman's Journal*, at the Courtaulds silk works at Halstead. See Judy Lown, *Women and Industrialization: Gender and Work in Nineteenth-Century England*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990.

⁸⁹ *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 29.3.1851, vol. IV, pp. 341-2.

"deficient or defenceless daughter(s)" and positioned themselves more often as "disciplining" or "protecting" rather than "empowering mother(s)".⁹⁰

However, in 1863 Jane Le Plastrier, a first hand who had already corresponded with *The Times* in 1853, wrote a series for the *English Woman's Journal* entitled "A Season with the Dressmakers, or the Experience of a First Hand".⁹¹ She proposed a series of measures by which needlewomen could work with reformers to improve conditions in the trade and was interviewed by the 1864 Children's Employment Commission. Her views on needlework as a form of women's employment provide an interesting contrast between someone engaged in the industry as a worker, and for a time an enlightened employer, and the patronizing pronouncements of many who spoke from outside the industry.

Jane Le Plastrier insisted that dressmaking was a form of slavery for which she had almost sacrificed her life. The inequity between the needlewomen's conditions and those of male workers was further evidence of slavery and the denial of the young women's humanity. She noted that no man, whether professional, trade or labourer, was expected to work for sixteen or eighteen hours a day as women were "commanded" to do:-

No man could do it - no horse could do it - no oxen could do it, and yet frail delicate girls are obliged to do it.⁹²

⁹⁰ Yeo, "Social Motherhood and the Communion of Labour", p. 77.

⁹¹ *English Woman's Journal*, vol. XII, 1.8.1863, pp. 407-9; 1.9.1863, pp. 7-24; 1.10.1863, pp. 104-112; 1.11.1863, pp. 181-7; 1.12.1863, pp. 267-76. See 1.9.1863, pp. 7-24 for reprints of her correspondence with *The Times*, 30.3.1853 (editorial); 18.5.1853 and August 1853.

⁹² *English Woman's Journal*, 1.10.1863, pp. 10-11.

Her discussion of needlework as slavery in *The Times* in 1853 was reprinted in leading journals in America and France. This prompted an exchange between Le Plastrier and Harriet Beecher Stowe, abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe refuted the "First hand's" "facts" in her record of her visit to England, *Sunny Memories*, which denied that dressmaking was a form of slavery. Like many working-class radicals, Le Plastrier saw the concern for black slaves and the unwillingness to condemn the oppression of English workers as hypocritical, and alleged that Mrs. Beecher Stowe had purchased a dress made up by some of these "white slaves".

Le Plastrier appealed to ladies to support the dressmakers by allowing adequate time for orders to be completed, and also to support the charitable associations established to relieve the dressmakers' conditions. Like Stowe, she invoked the bonds of Christian sisterhood. She defended the dressmakers' reputations as a class generally spoken of with contempt and reminded "good christians" of the circumstances that made dressmakers vulnerable to temptation. She exhorted the condemnation of the oppressor and not the fallen. Asking for charity, she noted that the dressmaker's plight might become the destiny of any woman overtaken by misfortune. She urged them to remember

your sisters - sisters in Adam, sisters in Christ... they do not require your money, but they want your thoughts and your influence.⁹³

Le Plastrier claimed more from women than charity: they had a role to play in campaigning for and monitoring improvements in the industry. The "task" of the Ladies of England was to "help" and "protect" needlewomen in a "helpless and dependent state" and to accomplish "the work of emancipation".⁹⁴

⁹³ *English Woman's Journal*, 1.10.1863, pp. 24, 12.

⁹⁴ *English Woman's Journal*, 1.12.1863, pp. 275-6.

Although Le Plastrier examined the material conditions of the industry which rendered its employees vulnerable and in need of protection, unlike other philanthropists and radicals who deployed the rhetoric of slavery, she did not see needlewomen as completely helpless. She believed that Parliament, regulatory bodies, employers, customers and workers all had a role to play in regulating the honourable dressmaking industry. As a skilled worker in a supervisory role, Le Plastrier can be seen to share some of the values of many male craft workers and their unions in the 1850s and 1860s. Keith McClelland has argued that in the mid-Victorian period, skilled workers began to see the primary purpose of collective action as regulating "the trade". While workers had started to accept the premises of capitalism and the market, they remained committed to the "moral dimension" of the popular political economy of the 1820s and 1830s, especially reciprocity between employers and workers.⁹⁵ Le Plastrier envisaged the dressmaking and millinery establishments as:-

"Miniature Kingdoms;" the principals as sovereigns, the "first-hands" as representing the ministry, and the assistants as the community.⁹⁶

First hands had a duty both to employers and assistants to remove evils from the trade, and by acting in union, could provide the Dressmakers' and Milliners' Association with the exact details of hours of work each month, ensuring that the Association performed a regulatory as well as a supervisory role. On the principal that "Union is strength" the Association should also assist any first hand who might be penalised for such actions. She was prepared to endorse strike action, even though she had "a great horror of strikes

⁹⁵Keith McClelland, "Time to Work, Time to Live: Some Aspects of Work and the Reformation of Class in Britain, 1850-1880", in Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 180-209, esp. pp. 185-190.

⁹⁶ *English Woman's Journal*, 1.12.1863, pp. 271-2.

generally". She cautioned, however, that for a strike to be effective, the dressmakers would have to be housed and fed.⁹⁷

It is possible that Le Plastrier's arguments encouraged Bessie Parkes to view sympathetically the formation of a Women's Union in New York among needlewomen in 1864. Parkes admitted that if the girls combined "in a respectable and intelligent manner", a union might encourage co-operation, emigration and rescue women from "the temptation of selling their labour for next to nothing". In defence of the union she noted that the laws of Political Economy did not cover "half the problems in which living beings are concerned". However, Parkes considered the London needleworkers too abject to improve their condition.⁹⁸ Despite her pessimism, two to three hundred women outworkers did join a strike in London in 1867 and some tried to form a Ladies' Branch of the London Tailors' Society. Some of Jane Le Plastrier's and Bessie Parkes's ideas may have found their way into the Society of Dressmakers, Milliners and Mantlemakers, founded in 1875, and other women's garment unions that joined the Women's Trade Union League and the campaigns over sweated labour in the mid 1870s.⁹⁹

The figure of the "distressed needlewoman" pricked the conscience of Victorian England. She challenged reformers to bring moral questions to bear on political and economic debate. In coming to her rescue philanthropists laid the foundations of mid-

⁹⁷*English Woman's Journal*, 1.11.1863, pp. 181-2.

⁹⁸ Bessie Raynor Parkes, "Needlewomen at New York", *English Woman's Journal*, vol. XII, pp. 318-25.

⁹⁹ On these attempts at unionisation see James Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor: The London Clothing Trades 1860-1914*, Croom Helm, London, 1984, pp. 82-7.

Victorian institutional reform. By aiding the helpless victims of the needle, liberals felt able to appropriate and reconstitute the rhetoric of working class association and Tory paternalism. According to the Society for the Distressed Needlewoman the labourer *was* worthy of her hire but her rights would be achieved for her not by her. Chartists, trade unionists, philanthropists, social investigators and even women's rights advocates disempowered working women as they mapped out the terrain of politics and reform over the body of the needlewoman.

Chapter Five

FROM "MONSTER MEETINGS" TO "FIRE-SIDE VIRTUES":

DOMESTICATING POLITICS

Shame on the world! In madness, or in pride,
Has woman's mental birthright been denied.
Be she the weaker, kindly give her might;
Be she man's equal, then it is her right:
Whether or not, 'tis policy to dower
Woman with wisdom since she must have power-
The power to sear or soothe, to blight or bless,
To mar or make all moral happiness.¹

The Unitarian radical Mary Leman Grimstone, author of the verse above, attempted to bring together the themes of woman's reason and woman's influence. Karen Offen, Jane Rendall and Joan Scott among many recent historians of the early women's movements have debated the extent to which women presented their claims to citizenship on the basis of their "equality" or "difference" from men.² For Grimstone, woman's claim to reason

¹Mary Leman Grimstone, title and date unknown. It was cited by the Owenite Catherine Barmby in her demand for women's inclusion in the People's Charter - "The Demand for the Emancipation of Woman, Politically and Socially", *New Tracts for the Times*, vol. 1, no. 3, reprinted in Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London, 1983.

²Karen Offen argues strongly for two different traditions within nineteenth century feminism which she labels "individual" and "relational" feminism. These correspond largely to the categories "equal" and "different". See her article "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach", *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1988, pp. 118-157. The studies in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1987, demonstrate the complex association of equal and different strategies within a range of women's politics in the period. Joan Scott problematizes the dichotomy of equal and different within feminist historiography in *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, Columbia, 1988, especially Part IV, pp. 167-198.

could be made on both accounts, for reason was a "birthright", whether she was "equal" to or "weaker" than man. Either way, she contended it was "policy" to grant woman education because of her "power...To mar or make all moral happiness." Grimstone's appeal to woman's equality with and difference from men formed part of her rhetorical armoury, enabling her to make a two fold claim for women's intellectual emancipation. Her conception of woman's rights and duties were intimately connected. The fulfilment of those rights and duties affected not just the position of women but the moral happiness of the whole nation. The recognition of woman's rights would redeem a shameful world.

In this chapter I will explore the debates about woman's reason and influence within the metropolitan radical Unitarian circles to which Grimstone belonged in the 1830s and 1840s. While historians like Rendall have noted the prominence of Unitarians in the early women's rights movements in Britain and the United States, we still know very little about their conceptions of the rights of women, how they related these rights to other forms of theological or social progress, or their links with other advocates of women's rights.

This chapter focuses on the work of Mary Leman Grimstone and Harriet Taylor both of whom were members of the Unitarian South Place Chapel in London, and Taylor's intellectual partner, John Stuart Mill. I will examine how Grimstone and Taylor updated eighteenth-century social science to develop a new cultural politics that aimed to regenerate "the people". But if their politics looked back to the moral philosophy and psychology of the Enlightenment they also appropriated ideas from working-class association and utopian

socialism. In so doing they drew up a new agenda for radical reform and played a largely unacknowledged role in the formation of liberal culture and ideology in the mid-nineteenth century.

Mary Leman Grimstone produced a wide range of literature, including domestic fiction, sentimental poetry, children's fiction, and social and political polemic. With the exception of her periodical literature, little has survived and she was scarcely mentioned by her contemporary radical friends who left memoirs or autobiographies.³ Much more is known of Harriet Taylor (1807-1858), largely because of her intellectual and romantic partnership with John Stuart Mill, the leading liberal intellectual of the mid-Victorian years and author of *The Subjection of Women* of 1869. She wrote one of the most salient statements of women's rights in the nineteenth century - the "Enfranchisement of Women" published in the *Westminster Review* in 1851.⁴ Mary Leman Grimstone seems to have been acquainted with Taylor and corresponded with her over a publisher in 1832.⁵ There is no further evidence to suggest the extent of their association. There are, however, strong similarities in the two writers' class and gender politics which stemmed in part from the

³The British Library hold copies of five novels by Grimstone, four of which were published between 1830-4. They include *Cleone, A tale of Married Life*, 1834 and *Woman's Love. A novel*, 1832. Many thanks to Joe Bristow and Barbara Taylor for advice on tracking down Grimstone and the South Place radicals.

⁴Harriet Taylor, "Enfranchisement of Women", *Westminster Review*, July 1851. Reprinted in Alice Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality. John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, University of Chicago Press, London, 1970, pp. 91-121.

⁵Grimstone to Mrs. Taylor, letter dated 25.7.1832, *Mill-Taylor Collection*, London School of Economics, vol. XXVII, no. 77.

Unitarian circle of Foxite radicals in the 1830s and 1840s. Before discussing each writer, I begin therefore with a brief survey of the metropolitan Unitarian radicals.

Part One: Unitarian Radicalism in the 1830s

The Unitarians replaced the doctrine of atonement and the Trinity with a belief in the humanity of Christ. They held a rational interpretation of the bible as their sole authority. The intense rationalism of the sect encouraged a more intellectual following than many contemporary millenarian, evangelical and dissenting sects. The Unitarians' renunciation of the divinity of Christ set them beyond the pale of much dissenting as well as orthodox tolerance and they faced considerable persecution, especially in the 1790s when they were identified with Jacobinism. Dr. Priestley, victim of the Church and King riots in Birmingham in 1791, described them as "a sect everywhere spoken against".⁶

Persecution encouraged the sect's links with political radicalism. Most Unitarians supported the removal of civil disabilities from dissenters and some extension of the suffrage. The rationalism of the Unitarian doctrine had much in common with the philosophic radicalism of Utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, father of John Stuart. Founded in 1806, *The Monthly Repository* became the main journal for Unitarian

⁶Joseph Priestley, *The Use of Christianity, Especially in Difficult Times. Farewell Discourse to His Congregation*, 2nd. ed. London, 1794, p. 7. Quoted by Francis Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838*, University of North Carolina Press, U.S.A., 1944, p. 3. See Mineka pp. 3-26 for the early history and doctrine of the Unitarians.

theological and political debate, as well as devotional literature, poetry and reviews. Critical of government interference, it argued that most moral and social improvements "have been effected by private activity and benevolence, and commonly in opposition to political power."⁷

The *Repository* was radicalised in the 1830s under the editorship of William Fox, minister of the South Place Chapel. Fox, a middle-class radical of lowly farming stock, was involved in a series of alliances between middle- and working-class radicals in the 1830s and 1840s including the London Working Men's Association and Lovett's National Association and the Anti-Corn Law movement. In 1847 he was elected M.P. for Oldham and was a prime mover for national, secular education.⁸

As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's portrait of the Birmingham Unitarian James Luckcock demonstrates, many Unitarians firmly endorsed the ideology of separate spheres that is usually associated with evangelicalism.⁹ Nonetheless, the rationalism of the Unitarian creed seems to have fostered among the more radical congregations and individuals a commitment to the rights of women. Mary Wollstonecraft's education in politics and freethought had been nurtured by the metropolitan Unitarian circle surrounding Dr. Richard Price and two of her contemporaries who also advocated female education, Catherine Cappe and Anna Letitia Barbauld, contributed to the *Repository* in its early years.

⁷*Monthly Repository*, XVI, Old Series, 1821, pp. 25-6. Cited by Mineka, *Dissidence of Dissent*, p. 147. See pp. 144-67 for the journal's politics.

⁸Richard Garnett, *The Life of W.J. Fox, Public Teacher and Social Reformer, 1786-1864*, Bodley Head, London, 1908.

⁹Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, pp. 13-18.

Contributions by women increased from five to fourteen per cent under Fox's editorship, according to Ann Robson, and Grimstone started submitting poetry in 1833.¹⁰

By the early 1830s, *The Monthly Repository* had become an important forum for the discussion of women's rights. Harriet Martineau began her literary and political career in the journal, writing as "Discipulus" from 1822 onwards. She promoted improvements in female education to provide women with an understanding of Sacred History, General History, the Elements of the Philosophy of Nature and the Human Mind as well as living languages. This would enable married women to be rational companions of men and preserve single women from the faults of ignorance.¹¹ William Fox, Sarah Flower and her husband William Bridges Adams developed a critique of civil marriage which condemned women to perpetual domestic slavery. They recommended female education and the inclusion of women in the suffrage, so that as Adams argued, women might "*be regarded as the equals of men, in order to work the improvement of man himself.*"¹² To the

¹⁰On Wollstonecraft and the Unitarians see Eleanor Flexnor, *Mary Wollstonecraft, A Biography*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, 1973, pp. 47-8 and 117-8. For women writers in *The Monthly repository* see Ann Robson, "The Noble Sphere of Feminism", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Fall, 1987, p. 104, (pp. 102-7); Mineka, "The Emancipation of Women", *Dissidence of Dissent*, pp. 284-96, and appendix pp. 394-428 for the identification of authors. For a full list of Grimstone's contributions to the *Repository* see Mineka's appendices. Other early women writers in the *Repository* included Emily Taylor, the children's writer, Mary Hughes.

¹¹Discipulus, (Harriet Martineau), "On Female Education", *Monthly Repository*, Old Series, XVIII, 1822, pp. 77-81. For Martineau and the Foxite circle see Martineau, *An Autobiography*, vol. 1; Mineka, pp. 234-46; Garnett, pp. 75-93, 167-71 and 307-311; R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960, especially chapters IV and VI.

¹²Junius Redivivus, (William Bridges Adams), "On the Condition of Women in England", *Monthly Repository*, vol VII, 1833, pp. 217-31. (Adams also wrote on women's rights in *The Westminster Review*. Richard Carlile was acquainted with his work and reprinted an extract from the *Westminster Review* on "The Importance of Female

consternation of many Unitarians, they advocated the legalisation of divorce. Harriet Martineau had no time for such proposals which shared much in common with the "free love" advocated by the likes of Wollstonecraft, Godwin and Shelley. Following Fox's union with Eliza Flower, Martineau ceased to write for *The Repository*.

Davidoff and Hall have found that women were largely excluded from the formal government of Unitarian chapel life but suggest that female subscribers, especially wealthy ones, could often wield considerable influence over a congregation through gossip and patronage.¹³ I want to suggest that women also played an important role in creating the cultural and political friendship networks that lay behind *The Monthly Repository* and Fox's ministry of the South Place Chapel in London.

At the heart of these networks were the composer and close friend of Harriet Taylor, Eliza Flower and her sister Sarah, a writer. They had received a thorough education from their father Benjamin Flower, a prominent Unitarian radical and publisher and from their minister Fox. Fox separated from his wife and set up house with Eliza in 1832 which led to his expulsion from the London Presbyterian council of ministers. The South Place Chapel became increasingly secular and in 1888 changed into the Ethical Society.¹⁴ The Fox-Flower house at Craven Hill, Bayswater became a cultural centre for middle-class literati

Cultivation" in *The Gauntlet*, 14.4.1833, p. 150.) W.J. Fox, "The Dissenting Marriage Question", *Monthly Repository*, vol. VII, 1833, pp. 145-153. For a more detailed discussion of these articles see Mineka, *Dissidence of Dissent*, pp. 284-96. For Sarah Flower's discussion of marriage and divorce reform see *Monthly Repository*, IX, 1835, pp. 795-802.

¹³Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 134-7.

¹⁴For the links between the South Place Chapel and the Ethical Society see Moncure D. Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols., Cassell and Co., London, MCMIV.

and liberal reformers. It was at one of Eliza's dinner parties that she introduced her close friend Harriet Taylor to John Stuart Mill.¹⁵

The sisters Margaret and Mary Gillies, the former a miniaturist and water-colour painter and the latter a children's writer, held another *salon* at Hillside. Although their father William was a merchant in London, they were educated in Edinburgh under the care of their uncle, Lord Adam Gillies, a court of sessions judge. Other relatives included the classical scholar and historian John Gillies and the autobiographer Richard Pearse Gillies, who had studied under Dugald Stewart. It is probable therefore that the sisters were educated in some of the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. Despite their elevated social background, they insisted on moving to London to support themselves by artistic work. Margaret was involved in the Society of Female Artists formed in 1856 that was closely linked with the *English Woman's Journal*.¹⁶ By 1837 their father had become Mary Leman Grimstone's second husband and she had changed her name to Gillies.¹⁷

¹⁵For the Fox-Flower association see Garnett, *Life of W.J. Fox*, especially pp. 61-75 and pp. 156-171 for the effects of their alliance on the Unitarian community. For their correspondence and friendship with Mill and Taylor see, F.A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951.

¹⁶For a brief but intriguing discussion of this group of women artists see the catalogue by Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*, Rochdale Art Gallery, 1987, pp. 8-9 that accompanied the exhibition of the same name. This group of women artists also had connections with the Howitt and Cook circles discussed in chapter six. Margaret Gillies painted a series of miniatures and portraits of the radicals in the Fox and Howitt circles.

¹⁷For the Flower and Gillies salons see ed. Margaret Howitt, *Mary Howitt: An Autobiography*; Carl Ray Woodring, *Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt*, University of Kansas Press, Kansas, 1952; Ann Blainey, *The Farthing Poet: A Biography of Richard Hengist Horne, 1802-84. A Lesser Literary Lion*, Longmans, London, 1968, pp. 57-69.

This group of women were identified as "Blue-Stockings" in the *Repository* by the reviewer Leigh Hunt and as staunch advocates of women's rights by other contemporaries.¹⁸ W.J.Linton, the young engraver and later a republican and Chartist who firmly supported the female franchise and divorce reform, received his early religious and political education in these circles. He remembered these women as disciples of Mary Wollstonecraft and "such women in their purity, intelligence... as Shelley might have sung as fitted to redeem a world."¹⁹ Thomas Carlyle probably reflected the opinions of polite metropolitan society however in his strong disapproval of John Stuart Mill's connections with Harriet Taylor and the Unitarian radicals. Denouncing the circle's "singular creed" he quipped:-

Most of these people are very indignant at marriage and the like; and frequently indeed are obliged to divorce their own wives or be divorced; for though the world is already blooming (or is one day to do it) in everlasting "happiness of the greatest number" these people's own houses (I always find) are little Hells of improvidence, discord, unreason. Mill is far above all that and I think will not sink in it; however, I do wish him fairly far from it.²⁰

The Flower and Gillies sisters brought together and facilitated a dialogue between a diverse range of literary, freethinking, social and political reformers, from philosophic radicals to republican Chartists. Their guests included Thomas Southwood Smith, the philosophic radical and sanitary reformer and his literary daughter Caroline Southwood Hill, mother of Octavia Hill; Richard Hengist Horne, literary critic and Factory Commissioner

¹⁸Leigh Hunt, "Blue-Stocking Revels; or, The Feast of the Violets", *Monthly Repository*, Enlarged Series, July 1837. Reprinted in ed. Thornton Hunt, *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*, Routledge, Warne and Routledge, London, 1860.

¹⁹W.J.Linton, *Memories*, London, 1895, p. 26. Cited by F.B.Smith, *Radical Artisan: William James Linton, 1812-97*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1973, p. 14.

²⁰Carlyle to Dr. John Carlyle, 28.10.1834, manuscript letter in National Library of Scotland. Cited by Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 82.

under the Children's Employment Commission of 1840-43; the poet Robert Browning who established connections between the Fox circle and Elizabeth Barrett; John and Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill. The Quaker radicals Mary and William Howitt, also visitors, entertained the same circle at their home in Lower Clapton from 1844 onwards, inviting them to contribute to *The People's Journal* in the mid- to late 1840s. Among the Howitts' guests were the Leigh Smiths and Barbara Leigh Smith was later to turn to her old acquaintance Mary Howitt for support in establishing the *English Woman's Journal*.²¹

While this circle of Unitarian women and their friends were able to use their social skills and connections to promote artistic and political discussion, much of their work did not receive formal recognition, which may account for Grimstone's disappearance from the historical record. It is likely that they exercised an importance beyond the role of hostess and amanuensis that Garnett attributes to Eliza Flower.²² Ann Blainey has suggested that there may have been a romantic involvement between Mary Gillies and Richard Hengist Horne and that she encouraged his interest in children's education, leading him to put forward his name for the Children's Employment Commission. Gillies edited and corrected his writings, dealt with some of his correspondence and researched his biographies. She was joint editor of the *Repository* with Horne and Fox from July 1836, but this partnership was not publicly recognised; nor was her authorship of the chapters on Mary Howitt, Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age*, 1844.²³

The importance of these women lies not only in their attempts to develop cultural

²¹See Margaret Howitt, *Mary Howitt* and Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, and Blainey, *The Farthing Poet* for further details on these salons.

²²Garnett, *Life of W.J. Fox*, pp. 61-75.

²³Blainey, *Farthing Poet*, pp. 62-7, 109, and 154-6.

roles for women, but also in their efforts to bring together people from a variety of backgrounds to consider social questions and especially to develop alternative models of political economy, a project in which many Unitarians were engaged.²⁴ In an important article on the Unitarians and political economy, John Seed has drawn attention to the complexity of middle-class formation and liberal culture in Manchester in the period 1830-50. There the congregations drew on a mixed constituency of middle-class traders, professionals and skilled artisans but also large capitalist merchants and manufacturers, often from well-established wealthy families. Seed argues that the fragile economy of the 1820s and 1830s, with its recurrent trade cycles, unemployment and poverty, pressurized and opened divisions among Manchester's liberal elite, many of whom were Unitarians. In particular, the emergence of a newer generation of small capitalists challenged the monopolies of the older manufacturing concerns, as well as fuelling poverty and social crises. The large scale capitalists were often prepared to support working people's attempts to secure the government regulation of industry. Their support for educational and cultural institutions like the Mechanics' Institutes and the Domestic Missions helped "construct the institutional bases of an alternative liberal order" that emphasised the "Christian *duty* of public service". Seed argues that liberal culture was not guided simply by the principles and relationships of the free-market, but also by the family which emphasised relationships of dependence and obligation:-

²⁴Mary Gillies, Mary Howitt and Mary Leman Gillies played an important role in the development of children's literature. In addition to her own fiction, Howitt was the first translator of Hans Christian Andersen's stories into English. A more detailed study is needed to explore the connections between changing religious attitudes to childhood, the sentimentalisation of childhood, and these women's critical assessments of Political Economy, suggested by Mary Gillies' interest in the provision of education for factory children. Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*, Avon Books, New York, 1977, provides a useful comparative thesis that argues for the sentimentalisation and domestication of Victorian creed and culture especially through a shift in power from ministers to mothers, and through the increasing significance of fiction over dogma.

the Sunday School teacher, the home visitor, the Unitarian minister, the Domestic Missionary, among others- derived their models of social relationship not from the sphere of exchange but from this alternative sphere of the private and personal. No less than the family, the religious community stood in opposition to the public sphere as an 'emotional fortress' - the 'heart of a heartless world' to quote Marx - a place transcending social class.

Manchester, with its large factory population and the pre-eminence of the Manchester School, was a very different world from the London of Mary Leman Grimstone and her friends in the Foxite circle. Yet, as we will explore, Grimstone had her own vision of a liberal civil society that used, as Seed has claimed, "the private discourse of home and church" to critique "the scientific discourse of political economy".²⁵

Part Two: "Perfecting men and women": The "practical morality" of Mary Leman Grimstone

In her polemical, poetic and fictional writing in *The Monthly Repository* from 1833-7 and in *The People's Journal* from 1846-7, Mary Leman Grimstone outlined her plans for political and social improvement. We will focus largely on her polemical writing. Some of the articles in the *Repository* were reprinted in the Owenite *New Moral World* in 1835 and the "moral force" *English Chartist Circular* in 1841. As will be discussed in the following

²⁵John Seed, "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50", *Social History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1982, pp. 1-25. Quotations from pp. 5, 20 and 25. Seed's work provides probably the most useful analysis of the social base and the cultural influence of the Unitarians. See his thesis, *The Role of Unitarianism in the Formation of Liberal Culture 1775-1851: A Social History*, Ph.D., University of Hull, 1981, and his article "Theologies of power: Unitarianism and the social relations of religious discourse, 1800-50" in R.J. Morris, ed., *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns*, Leicester University Press, 1986, pp. 107-156. It is probable that the Unitarian Domestic Missions aimed to construct the cultural space through which the kind of class and gender conciliation envisaged by Mary Leman Grimstone was attempted. A study of Mrs. Gaskell's work with the Manchester mission and her fictional accounts of class and gender co-operation might provide an important comparison with Grimstone's work.

chapter, *The People's Journal* aimed for a more popular readership than the *Repository* and was directed at social reformers of the middling and artisan classes. The range of these journals reflects Grimstone's desire to foster a dialogue and alliances between different kinds of reformers and to unite them behind the regeneration of "the People".

Mary Leman Grimstone's concern with women's rights began with a contempt for the conventions of female education. In 1834, in one of her earliest polemics in *The Monthly Repository*, she argued that in denying women reason, men had made them a "kind of *acephala*, that is an animal without a head." Her defense of female reason was prompted by her revulsion with prescriptive literature which saw female education merely as a preparation for marriage. Like her contemporary Eliza Sharples and her predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft, she found this literature reduced women in marriage to a state of slavery and she roundly condemned the double standard whereby:-

Her education is never considered otherwise than with reference to him; though his education is never considered with reference to her.²⁶

Grimstone's commitment to female reason was influenced by the criticisms of a sensual, vain, frivolous and untutored aristocratic femininity that were enunciated by republican and rationalist writers on female education from the Enlightenment onwards.²⁷ She was careful to reassure her readers that she was not "so unwise to undervalue beauty - so unsexed as to deny the yet greater value of modesty - so cold as to be insensible to the charm of tenderness". Nevertheless, in common with educational writers like Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Hamilton and Maria Edgeworth and Harriet Martineau, she submitted that these aspects of female virtue had to be underpinned by reason. Without reason, female

²⁶M.L.G. "Acephala", *Monthly Repository*, VIII, 1834, pp. 771-7.

²⁷See introduction.

instruction encouraged the passions, vanity and coquetterie, leaving women vulnerable to the "arts of seduction" that men had perfected.²⁸

While Grimstone acknowledged a specifically female conception of virtue, she was keen to minimise the effect of innate differences. Here she added a gendered dimension to the necessitarian or materialist traditions of thought in the Enlightenment and Owenism which examined the effects of environment and education on the production of character. She argued that the gendered behaviour of men and women was a product of culture which could be modified or transformed by education. By way of example, she noted, "It is discipline that makes the soldier, not the soldier discipline."²⁹

Grimstone's understanding of the social construction of gender, and therefore the possibility of changing the relations between the sexes, was due in part to changes in the division of labour, especially the sexual division of labour, effected by mechanisation. Where Enlightenment historians like Millar and Alexander had argued that commercial society permitted the domestication of women, Grimstone believed that technology could diminish the significance of sexual difference. Like the Owenites, she believed optimistically that the transference of human to machine-driven labour power meant that mental power was superseding the importance of physical power, and, in particular, men's physical superiority over women. However, she insisted that measures would be needed to elevate the social and moral condition of the people in order to reap the benefits of

²⁸M.L.G., "Female Education", *Monthly Repository*, IX, pp. 106-12. Reprinted in *New Moral World*, 21.2.1835, pp. 132-5.

²⁹M.L.G., "Quaker Women", *Monthly Repository*, IX, 1835, pp. 30-7. Reprinted in *New Moral World*, 24.1.1835, pp. 100-3.

technological innovation.³⁰

In "An Appeal to the Better Order of Men On Behalf of the Women of the Factory Districts" in 1846, she suggested that mechanisation required a "moral progress" and that men should carry out some domestic duties. Contesting the prevalent attacks on the moral virtues of factory women, she applauded their domestic affections. Instead, she criticised the working man who:-

would deem himself more disgraced in doing the work, from which circumstances had removed his wife, than in beating and bruising the poor helpless being.

That men now made shoes in workshops which previously had been manufactured by women in the home was evidence that the sexual division of labour was subject to custom and change, rather than being fixed. She reflected "how little has the equalizing spirit of Christianity effected, but how easily can fashion settle the question."³¹

Like many of the Enlightenment writers discussed in the introduction, Mary Leman Grimstone promoted sympathy, domesticity and sociability for men and women and saw the companionate marriage as the foundation of polite society. By contrast, she held that the ideal of the companionate marriage could only be achieved by the eradication of male power and the equalisation of the sexes within marriage. This emphasis on men's subjection of women suggests that she was probably influenced more by Owenites like William

³⁰M.L.G., "Quaker Women". For early nineteenth century debates about the effects of mechanisation see Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy, 1815-1848*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980; Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millenium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-60*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987.

³¹Mary Leman Gillies, "An Appeal to the Better Order of Men On Behalf of the Women of the Factory Districts", *The People's Journal*, II, 5.9.1846, pp. 131-4.

Thompson and Anna Wheeler than Enlightenment writers.

Another important difference between Grimstone and many earlier rationalist writers lies in her dismissal of the "equalizing spirit of Christianity". Rendall has suggested that the rationalist writer, Elizabeth Hamilton, rejected ancient and modern conceptions of republican motherhood in favour of a Christian model of female patriotism which fostered the improvement of nations and the human race through the elevation of the female mind and influence.³² Where Christianity had failed, Grimstone set about creating a secular politics which would reorder and "equalise" domestic relations within the working as well as the middle classes.³³ To do this, Grimstone interwove Christian and republican conceptions of virtue, rights and duty.

Women had a particular role to play in this new politics. At present they possessed a largely untapped "mental and moral power" which remained dormant "with dowagers at fire-sides", or was directed solely at bringing "polish and grace to social life". Drawing on the example of the Quaker philanthropist, Elizabeth Fry, she urged that this power:-

should be extended to school-rooms, lecture-rooms, workhouse-rooms, cottage-rooms, and prison-rooms, and *then*, if the world were not the better for this accession of power from female hearts and minds, *then* let woman bear the brand of inferiority, upon proof and not upon presumption.³⁴

Philanthropy, especially visiting the poor and sick, had already been mapped out as a useful field of female activity by other Unitarian writers like Catherine Cappe, a former contributor

³²Jane Rendall, "Writing History for British Women: Elizabeth Hamilton and the *Memoirs of Agrippina*", in Clarina Campbell-Orr, ed., *Wollstonecraft's Daughters*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, forthcoming. See especially her discussion of Hamilton's *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*, of 1810.

³³Mary Leman Gillies, "An Appeal to the Better Order of Men...".

³⁴M.L.G., "Quaker Women".

to *The Repository*.³⁵ By arguing for women's special moral qualities and the need to approximate men and women's mental and moral powers, Grimstone anticipated many of the Victorian advocates of women's rights who argued for different but complementary roles for men and women. However, her notion of complementarity was grounded in equality and was derived in part from the Unitarian rejection of the doctrine of original sin, which was shared with contemporary freethought advocates of women's rights like Eliza Sharples:-

But let her not cling from a principle of mercenary dependence, growing out of man's monopoly of the means of existence; nor from a faith in the presumptuous axiom, that woman was made for man - *not more than he was made for her*. There can be no contract between two parties; the first who violates the conditions of the contract renders it void, and each party is then justly free, whatever they may be politically...³⁶

Grimstone here is perhaps questioning not just the marriage contract but also the "sexual contract" which feminist philosophers like Carole Pateman have seen as implicit in the liberal theory of social contract.³⁷

In 1836 Grimstone made a bold claim for women's inclusion in political life in response to Anna Maria Hall's letter in *The Times* that argued, with reference to Ireland, that women should not attach themselves to any party. While others asserted that women's "gentleness" and "softness" made them unfit for politics, Grimstone defined these qualities as the "animating principles of patriotism".³⁸ Linda Colley has argued that during the

³⁵See Ruth Symes, "The Educative 'I'. Catherine Cappe of York (1822)", unpublished paper, University of York, 1994.

³⁶M.L.G., "Female Education".

³⁷Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988.

³⁸M.L.G. "On Woman of No Party", *Monthly Repository*, X, 1836, pp. 78-80. See *The Times*, 5.1.1836 re Hall's original letter.

French and Napoleonic Wars, loyalists appropriated the previously radical language of patriotism and created a loyalist model of patriotic femininity, in opposition to jacobin models of republican motherhood expounded by the likes of Wollstonecraft.³⁹ Grimstone attempted to reassert a female patriotism which was aligned with reason. Confined to the domestic sphere, women would encourage the consideration of private rather than universal interests and therefore women needed to be included in national public life:-

Unfortunately for this country, and in fact for all countries, women are mostly conservatives, and lie like manure at the root of many a political plant which breathes pestilence upon nations, keeping institutions in a vitality which they would otherwise not retain. God grant that every woman was a rational revolutionist, which are only other words for radical reformers - then would be asserted the right and power which they hold in common with their copartners in life - the right of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting in behalf of national and universal interests - mighty trunks, but intimately and indissolubly connected with the small capillaries of individual power and exertion.⁴⁰

Like the female republicans examined in chapter two, Grimstone was able to invoke confidently a revolutionary rhetoric so shortly after the 1830 French Revolution. In taking up the issue of women's conservatism she echoed the fears of many contemporary working-class radical men. But where these radicals stressed the importance of men educating their wives to become patriotic mothers, Grimstone urged instead that women be educated as citizens, capable of acting on behalf of universal interests. She tentatively suggested that women might speak in Parliament, or within a reformed legislative body based on a meritocracy: "in a nobler assembly still, that of the enlightened classes of her country people?"⁴¹

³⁹Linda Colley, "Woman Power", *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, Yale University Press, London, 1992, pp. 237-81.

⁴⁰M.L.G. "On Woman of No Party".

⁴¹"Quaker Women". See also "Female Education".

Nevertheless, she was deeply ambivalent about the nature of politics and saw women's inclusion within politics as a means to moralise and transform political ideologies and the public sphere. The Owenite model of co-operation offered a moral alternative to the class and gender antagonism inherent in contemporary social and political relations. She looked forward to the end of "political strife" and war, hoping that "the irrational spirit among men, which necessitated the exclusion of women, is yielding to the rational spirit which will admit their co-operation."³⁹ Her distrust of politics was partly derived from a tradition within political radicalism which was deeply suspicious of the monopolising tendencies of power. Oppression was evidence of:-

power, whether physical or political, when uncombined with benevolence, intelligence, and knowledge, ever effects; against *such* power all who think rationally, or feel kindly, must prosecute a crusade.⁴²

Although she turned to politics in the face of the failure of Christianity to effect social progress, she nevertheless recuperated a religious rhetoric in order to moralise politics.

Her demand for the systematic education of women was part of a general vision of education as "the grand mover" in the improvement of human happiness. Rather than reinforcing social division, education should aim at equalisation, universality and human perfection. Like many Owenites she argued that:-

Education ought to aim at perfecting men and women; instead of which it aims at making ladies, gentlemen, professional people, commercial people, mechanical people, and so on; and with all this there is such an utter absence of general harmony, that it is as possible for them to blend and to associate as it is to make a circle out of a triangle.⁴³

One area of politics which particularly required the spirit of benevolence and

⁴²M.L.G., "Female Education".

⁴³M.L.G., "Acephela",

intelligence was that of political economy. Whereas some Unitarians, including Martineau, were staunch supporters of Benthamite and even Malthusian political economy, Grimstone insisted on the necessity of introducing morality into politics, and of erasing class antagonism:-

The division of labour, and all the other principles of the science of political economy, have aimed at the increase of wealth, and the aim has been accomplished; but the practical morality, that ought to make a primary part of this and every science, is left out of view.⁴⁴

Grimstone's disaffection with political economy was intensified by the New Poor Law regulations. Particularly repugnant was the workhouse as a centre for raising children. In 1846, she asked the readers of *The People's Journal*:-

Are the stony palaces which political economy has produced fit nurseries for germinating being?⁴⁵

Grimstone welcomed the benefits of the division of labour and the market economy but believed that to achieve a meritocratic society, both society and the market had to be protected from privilege, monopoly and private vice. Richard Bellamy argues this concern was shared by many Victorian liberals who were "haunted by this ethos of egotistic, possessive individualism and strenuously battled against it."⁴⁶ How to guard against possessive individualism was a major source of liberal debate, prompting such varied responses as the need for state intervention, to the role of charitable and educational bodies

⁴⁴M.L.G., "Rich and Poor", *Monthly Repository*, IX, 1835, pp. 342-7. Reprinted in *New Moral World* 23.5.1835, pp. 238-40.

⁴⁵Mary Leman Gillies, "A Happy New year To The People", *People's Journal*, I, 17.1.1846, pp. 38-9.

⁴⁶Richard Bellamy, "Introduction", *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 2. In the same volume, John Robertson, "The Legacy of Adam Smith: Government and Economic Development in *The Wealth of Nations*", pp. 15-41. See also Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, especially the introduction.

in promoting public virtue and service. To this debate, Grimstone brought an argument about the reform of domestic and public life.

Where political economy had prompted the breakdown of the home by divorcing politics from moral considerations, Grimstone saw a remodelled family and home as the site of a reformed moral and political order. She set about dispensing a "practical morality" in a series of articles that undertook to educate "the people" in agriculture, horticulture, medicine, domestic-economy and household education. Her practical morality was reminiscent of the "Cottage Economy" of that notable anti-political economist, William Cobbett. This education would qualify "the people" for a new form of citizenship based on their familial and household duties, for she claimed, "The patriot's duty is interwoven with the parents".⁴⁷ "Practical morality" was elevated to the status of a religion that combined the old Utilitarian commitment to rationality with the moral psychology of the Enlightenment. This "practical morality" seems to presuppose the idea of innate moral sensibility expounded by Dugald Stewart and the "common sense philosophy" of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:-

Religion has its preachers, science and politics their lecturers, but there seems a dearth of moral teachers - Apostles of the Religion of the Home, who would show warmly and eloquently the assembled congregations the beauty and benefits of the home and affections...⁴⁸

Grimstone's reworking of religion and morality was part of broader changes in Christian belief and practice, and of women's spiritual role. From the late eighteenth century, evangelical women had been justifying philanthropic and educational work in terms of their moral influence. Grimstone can be seen to be laying the ground for the model of

⁴⁷M.L.G., "A Happy New Year to the People".

⁴⁸Mary Leman Gillies, "Fireside Attractions", *People's Journal*, I, 14.3.1846, pp. 147-8.

the "sisters of charity" employed by mid-nineteenth century Protestant advocates of women's rights to justify their intrusion into the public sphere.⁴⁹

Grimstone's reconstruction of politics, religion and morality provided her with an educative mission that emphasised the advancement of "the matron" as well as of man. However, by the mid-forties, she seems to have become increasingly antipathetic to organised politics and especially popular politics. Her critique of political culture was aimed as much, if not more, at "the people" that she sought to reform, than the political structures which excluded "the people". While offering a progressive gender politics, her class politics would have been an anathema to many working-class radicals of both sexes. In her first address in *The People's Journal* in 1846, she challenged the dominant form of working-class politics by arguing, "It is not 'monster meetings,' but fire-side virtues that will best show and establish the people's power." She reminded them that many thought that there had been few intellectual advances and improvements among "the people" and:-

that many among the mechanic artists, who form the most striking intellectual strata that the heavings of the times have thrown up, carry the dogmatism of political debate home, and domineer at the fire-side: that the women evince even less real improvement; that some showy acquirements have superseded qualities of a homely, but holy virtue. It rests with the people themselves to contradict this,...⁵⁰

This attack on the domestic virtues of working men and women echoed the hostile

⁴⁹See especially Anna Jameson, *Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant, Abroad and at Home*, 1855 and *The Communion of Labour*, 1856. On women's use of this model see especially Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*, Virago, London, 1985; Eileen Yeo, "Social Motherhood and the Communion of Labour in British Social Science", *Women's History Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 63-87 and "Protestant Feminists and Catholic Saints in Mid-Victorian England" in Yeo ed., *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Social Movements*, forthcoming.

⁵⁰M.L.G., "A Happy New Year to the People".

criticisms of working-class political and home life that female Chartists especially had laboured to contest. In a story about electoral corruption entitled "The Bride and the Bridal: A True Tale of an Election", Grimstone's authorial voice warned of the need for Mechanic's Institutes, for women's lack of power had meant that their "interference" in the world's affairs had been "of a most unhealthy character". By the elevation of woman, and consequently of the people, "a moral people... might lead a march in which those watchwords of party, aristocrat and radical, conservative and confucianist, should be unknown".⁵¹ Thus Gillies allied working-class political culture to the oppressive and partisan political structures that it sought to overthrow. While in 1836, she had defended women's place in party politics, by the mid-forties she looked forward to the abolition of party and politics.

In denouncing "monster meetings" Gillies was attacking the militant Chartist "mass platform" which, as we have seen, was mobilising whole communities behind the demand for the male suffrage in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Like many Owenites, Grimstone placed her faith in education as "the great equalizer: as far as human kind *can* be equalified, THAT will do it."⁵² While this could be an emancipatory doctrine, it could also be profoundly anti-democratic. Although Grimstone frequently referred to women's eventual enfranchisement, this was posed as the outcome of an intelligence-based and meritocratic franchise. She advocated a state-funded, national system of education, by which means women might "deserve" to be enfranchised.⁵³ To qualify for such status, working women and men would have to observe a domestic model approved by middle-class moralists like

⁵¹Mary Leman Gillies, *People's Journal*, IV, 3.7.1847, pp. 7-11.

⁵²M.L.G., "Rich and Poor".

⁵³Mary Leman Gillies, "National Education", *People's Journal*, II, 24.10.1846, pp. 227-9.

Grimstone. In a similar vein, Harriet Taylor urged William Fox that if all "uneducated" men were enfranchised before propertied women, the question of woman's suffrage would become a "party question" thus closing the door on women's equality, possibly for centuries.⁵⁴ To the disgust of many working-class radicals, John Stuart Mill was to advocate an intelligence-based franchise in the 1850s and 1860s. This suggests the links between the politics of the Unitarian radicals in the thirties and forties and liberalism in the prelude to the 1867 Reform Act.

While Grimstone's politics were sensitive to the needs of working women, her vision of a regenerated people depended on the co-operation of middle-class men and women with respectable artisan men. But like most mid-Victorian women's rights activists of the middle and upper classes, she saw women of the lower classes primarily as wives and mothers. In 1850, *The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor*, a journal aimed at the lower middle and artisan classes, published her poem "Song of the Humble", eulogising the poor woman's role as mother and wife:-

Though lowly my cottage, and frugal its fare,
Affection, and truth, and devotion are there;
And when evening arrives, and the day's toil is o'er,
My husband comes home, and I bar up the door.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Taylor to Fox, 12.5.1848, reprinted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 123-4. For the debates about an intelligence-based franchise within the early suffrage movement see Jane Rendall, "Citizenship, Culture and Civilisation: The Languages of British Suffragists 1866-74", in Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley, eds., *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland University Press, Wellington, 1994, forthcoming.

⁵⁵*Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor*, II, 11.5.1850, p. 165.

Part Three: An Alliance of "Science" and "Sentiment"? Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill's discussion in his *Autobiography* of his intellectual companionship and marriage with Harriet Taylor provides insights into the shifts and continuities in the politics of women's rights in the mid-century years. Mill met Taylor in 1830 when she was married to the Unitarian John Taylor, with three children. Taylor formed an intensely romantic but platonic friendship with Mill that finally resulted in marriage in 1851. Mill's *Autobiography*, drafted over a number of years and completed in 1870 is a testimony to their intellectual partnership and to Taylor's continuing influence over his work, even after her death in 1858. His reflections hint at the challenge presented to philosophic radicals, utilitarians and political economists by the exponents of women's rights. They also suggest that the claims of radical middle-class women were prompted in part by the challenge of working-class radicalism and utopian socialism to middle-class reform. The *Autobiography* illuminates the politics of knowledge, citizenship and political economy that inspired and troubled radical women like Mary Leman Grimstone and Harriet Taylor and their attempts to transform these in the period 1830-1860.⁵⁶

Mill insisted that most of his writings were effectively "joint productions" with Harriet Taylor. With remarkable modesty, he claimed that when two people:-

set out from the same principles, and arrive at their conclusions by processes pursued jointly, it is of little consequence in respect to the question of originality, which of them holds the pen;...⁵⁷

He suggested that Taylor's influence did not revolutionise his mental progress, but rather

⁵⁶John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, Longmans, London, 1873.

⁵⁷Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 241.

"made me move forward more boldly", and was somewhat vague about the precise nature of Taylor's contribution. He did, however, credit her with his move to "a qualified Socialism" and specifically, that the chapter on the future of the labouring classes in the 1849 edition of *Principles of Political Economy* was written at her instigation.⁵⁸

The extent of Taylor's influence on Mill has puzzled many of his scholars.⁵⁹ Most agree that Taylor lent a more artistic and subjective quality to Mill's work but did not contribute substantially to his major theoretical and scientific insights. As Francis Mineka concludes, Mill fails "to convince us that she was the originating mind behind his work, but no one can doubt her importance in Mill's inner life...".⁶⁰ While not denying the significance of identifying the specific contribution of Taylor to Mill's work, I want to suggest that Mill's estimation of their intellectual partnership was integral to his philosophy and politics. It stemmed from the ideal of the rational companionate marriage as a means to sex equality that Mill and Taylor shared with other contemporary women's rights exponents.

⁵⁸Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 190-1 and 245. John Taylor had objected to Mill dedicating *Political Economy* to Taylor on the grounds that it would lead to scandal about the relationship between the Taylors and Mill. See letter from John to Harriet Taylor, in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 121.

⁵⁹Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*; Michael Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1954; H. O. Pappé, *John Stuart Mill and the Harriet Taylor Myth*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1960; Francis Mineka, "The *Autobiography* and the Lady", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 32, 1963, pp. 301-6; Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Two Mills", *The New Leader*, 10. May, 1965, pp. 26-9; John M. Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, pp. 50-68; Alice Rossi, "Sentiment and Intellect. The Story of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill" in *Essays on Sex Equality*, pp. 1-63.

⁶⁰Mineka, "The *Autobiography* and the Lady", p. 306.

What did Mill seek in Harriet Taylor? They met as he was recovering from a severe and sustained "mental crisis" that had begun in the autumn of 1826. Trained from infancy by James Mill and Jeremy Bentham to carry on their philosophical work and practical reform, Mill suddenly realised that the utilitarian goal of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" failed to provide for his own happiness. He asked himself:-

'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down.⁶¹

His life began to take on meaning again through his rediscovery of the romantic poets, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge. The romantic invocation of beauty in nature and validation of art and poetry as experience provided one of the major critiques of political economy and in particular, utilitarianism and industrialism. Coleridge's appeal to the value of tradition and accumulated wisdom questioned radicalism's impulse to create institutions and constitutions anew, and encouraged Mill and other liberals to favour the notion of "checks and balances" in government. With their commitment to social and political reform and literary and artistic interests, the Foxite circle of Unitarian radicals provided a congenial and sympathetic atmosphere in which Mill could review his attachment to utilitarian philosophy. Within this circle, as I have suggested, women were important facilitators of the discussions between science and art, literature and politics.

The "poet" in Taylor complemented the "scientist" in Mill:-

What was abstract and purely scientific was generally mine; the properly human element came from her: in all that concerned the exigencies of human society and progress, I was her pupil, alike in boldness of speculation and

⁶¹Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 133-4.

cautiousness of practical judgement.⁶²

By aligning the feminine with poetry and intuition and the masculine with science and systematic analysis, Mill drew on the fusion of female sensibility and male intellect within the rational companionate marriage idealised by rationalist, liberal and republican traditions of women's rights. Taylor's intellect was conceived as a gift rather than the product of sustained study:-

Her intellectual gifts did but minister to a moral character at once the noblest and the best which I have ever met with in life. Her unselfishness was not that of a taught system of duties, but of a heart which thoroughly identified itself with the feelings of others, and often went to excess in consideration for them by imaginatively investing their feelings with the intensity of its own.⁶³

Here was the "feeling heart" of "Woman's Mission" adapted to the radical reform of society.

We need to consider, however, whether Taylor would have recognised and approved Mill's retrospective depiction of her intellectual and moral qualities. While many advocates of women's rights like Grimstone appealed to women's moral influence, in the "Enfranchisement of Women" Taylor firmly rejected the "common opinion" that women exercised a "moral influence over men". She cautioned that "the influence of the position tends eminently to promote selfishness." Dismissing the view that women promoted public virtue through the cultivation of private "social or sympathetic influences", she departed from the idealisation of domesticity by prescriptive writers since the late eighteenth century. She insisted on the need for "public spirit" among men and women and "a sense of personal honour connected with any public duty." In common with Grimstone, however, she contended that women's public spirit and political inclusion was an essential component of

⁶²Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 247.

⁶³Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 187.

progress for:-

In England, the wife's influence is usually on the illiberal and anti-popular side: this is generally the gaining side for personal interest and vanity; and what to her is the democracy or liberalism in which she has no part - which leaves her the Pariah it found her?

She chastised contemporary advocates of women's rights who celebrated women's influence and in particular the resolution of the Women's Rights Convention at Worcester, Massachusetts that women form a "social and spiritual union" and "a medium of expressing the highest moral and spiritual views of justice". Instead, she claimed:-

What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Taylor herself deployed the rhetoric of sentiment and sexual difference when it suited her. Criticising the Chartists' dismissal of women's suffrage in a letter to William Fox, she contended "society requires the infusion of the new life of the female element". Like Mill she identified the practicality of women:-

The great practical ability of women which is now wasted on worthless trifles or sunk in the stupidities called *love* would tell with the most 'productive' effect on the business of life, while their emancipation would relieve the character of men from the deadening & degrading influences of life passed in intimacy with inferiors.⁶⁵

There are strong similarities between Mill and Taylor's critical and contradictory use of the language of sentiment with the ambivalent ways female rationalists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Hamilton and Helen Maria Williams deployed the language of

⁶⁴Taylor, "Enfranchisement of Women", pp. 113-16 and 120.

⁶⁵Harriet Taylor to W.J. Fox, Kent Terrace, 10.5.1848, in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 122-3.

sensibility during the era of the French Revolution.⁶⁶ While emphasising that the companionate marriage must be based on the social and political equality of women, the rhetoric of sentiment and sympathy continued to offer mid-century women's rights advocates a new language for conceptualising science and politics.⁶⁷ For Mill, Taylor's qualities of compassion and empathy were precisely those which could admit new insights for political science and usher in new forms of social relations:-

The purely scientific part of the Political Economy I did not learn from her; but it was chiefly her influence that gave to the book that general tone by which it is distinguished from all previous expositions of Political Economy that had any pretension to being scientific, and which has made it so useful in conciliatory minds which those previous expositions had repelled. This tone consisted chiefly in making the proper distinction between the laws of the Production of Wealth, which are real laws of nature, dependent on the properties of objects, and the modes of its Distribution, which, subject to certain conditions, depend on human will. The common run of political economists confuse these together, under the designation of economic laws, which they deem incapable of being defeated or modified by human effort...⁶⁸

In describing Taylor's "influence" here, Mill imputes a sexual division of intellectual labour that was frequently advocated by radical women. Her contribution lay in her "tone", her sentiment and her practicality.

Taylor's "tone" enabled Mill to see the limitations of existing scientific models of the operation of economic laws. The fusion of science and sentiment expanded the field of science by uniting theory with practice. This in turn helped to harness scientific investigation to practical efforts at reform. The unity of science and sentiment offered Mill

⁶⁶See Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution 1790-1827*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

⁶⁷For the eighteenth century discourse of sensibility see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Cult of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 1992.

⁶⁸Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 246.

the possibility of fulfilling the utilitarian aspiration for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" for it offered "useful" guidance to "conciliatory minds".

Taylor's contribution to *The Principles of Political Economy* can be best traced in her responses to Mill's draft of the second edition in February 1849.⁶⁹ Mill had great difficulty redrafting the edition by correspondence and contemplated delaying the new edition to allow time for verbal exchange.⁷⁰ Much of their discussion and disagreement centred on their evaluations of the socialist writings and experiments of the 1848 French Revolution, which they believed cast doubt upon Mill's initial dismissal of communism.⁷¹ Mill was even prepared to jettison his remaining criticisms of communism since he invariably agreed with Taylor in the end.⁷² By March 1849, Mill was convinced that "Socialism has become *inextinguishable*."⁷³

Taylor encouraged Mill to see economic laws not simply as abstract principles but as subject to human activity. Her proposition that the "laws of Distribution", unlike those of Production, were "partly of human institution" was incorporated in Mill's "Preliminary Remarks" that opened the *Political Economy*. This encouraged him to recover the moral philosophy of Adam Smith for political economy as a science, as outlined in the preface.

⁶⁹This correspondence, written between 19.2.1849 and 31.3.1849 is reprinted by Hayek in, *John Stuart Mill to Harriet Taylor*, pp. 134-151.

⁷⁰Mill to Taylor, 19.2.1849. Reprinted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 134-6.

⁷¹The first draft which had been written between autumn 1845 and the end of 1847. Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 234-5.

⁷²Mill to Taylor, 21.2.1849, Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 136-9.

⁷³Taylor to Mill, 31.3.1849. From Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 147-150.

Mill claimed that is so far as the causes of "economical conditions" were:-

moral or psychological, dependent on institutions and social relations, or on the principles of human nature, their investigation belongs not to physical, but to moral and social science, and is the object of what is called Political Economy.⁷⁴

Mill adds that these ideas derived partly from the Saint Simonians, "but it was made a living principle pervading and animating the book by my wife's prompting".⁷⁵ Taylor's ability to empathise enabled her to allow for human agency, and especially, how the labouring classes might be agents of their own future.

One of Taylor's insights to be incorporated into *Political Economy* was the identification of two conflicting theories of how to organise the relationship of the labouring classes to the higher classes:-

The one may be called the theory of dependence and protection, the other that of self-dependence.⁷⁶

For Taylor and Mill, as for Mary Leman Grimstone, class dependence was analogous to the oppressive dependence of women on men. However it might masquerade as paternalism, the theory of dependence and protection concealed the degradation of women and the labouring classes by privilege and power. Although sympathetic to socialist theories of economic organisation, the analysis of power in *Political Economy* was rooted in

⁷⁴Mill, *Political Economy*, "Preface" [To all editions], pp. xci-ii and "Preliminary Remarks", p. 20-1 . For Taylor's advocacy of "perfect distributive justice" and a "society entirely communist in practice and spirit", see Mill to Louis Blanc, in a letter written 3.11.1858, shortly after Taylor's death, reprinted in F. Mineka and D. Lindley, eds., *The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1849-1873*, in the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, pp. 600-1.

⁷⁵Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 247.

⁷⁶Mill, *Political Economy*, p. 759 and *Autobiography*, pp. 246.

radicalism.⁷⁷ The key to the self-dependence of the labouring classes and of women was "their own mental cultivation". The prospects for the whole society depended on the labouring classes being treated "as equals" and being "made rational beings".⁷⁸ While Taylor encouraged Mill's return to the moral philosophy of Adam Smith, her hopes for intellectual and moral cultivation were derived as much from contemporary utopian socialist movements. Mill was more sceptical of this move and doubted the utopian faith in human perfectibility. Suggesting that Taylor overrated the ease of making people unselfish, he asked who would educate the educators.⁷⁹ In presenting the classic liberal case against the "social engineering" of utopian socialism, Mill, perhaps unwittingly, highlighted some of the democratic shortfalls in Taylor's politics.

Taylor questioned the appropriateness of the old radical axiom that "who would be free themselves must strike the blow" especially in relation to women. As she reminded William Fox, "[d]omestic slaves cannot organize themselves..."⁸⁰ Comparing the submissive and servile habits of women with the inhabitants of Asia, she argued in the "Enfranchisement" that the lack of interest in gaining political liberty did not prove that it was "undesirable for them, or that they will not, at some future time, enjoy it."⁸¹ The extension of political liberty formed part of a civilising and colonialist mission which as Vron Ware has shown was implicit in the politics of many Victorian women's rights

⁷⁷Mill, *Political Economy*, p. 759-60.

⁷⁸Mill, *Political Economy*, p. 763.

⁷⁹Mill to Taylor, 21.3.1849. From Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 144-147.

⁸⁰Taylor to Fox, 10.5.1848, in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 122-123.

⁸¹Taylor, "Enfranchisement of Women" in Rossi, *Essays in Sex Equality*, p. 117.

advocates.⁸² This colonial gaze was turned on working people and women and although acknowledging their agency, Taylor could only envisage reform carried out under the guidance of middle-class reformers.

Nonetheless, Mill's *Political Economy* appealed to many working-class and women's rights activists. The chapter on the futurity of the labouring classes, which according to Mill was probably the most influential of the book, did establish a dialogue between Mill and some working class movements and activists. Subsequent editions were to incorporate sympathetic discussions of the associative experiments of the 1848 French Revolution and of the Co-operative movement in Britain.⁸³ As we saw in chapter four, Mill's ideas on co-operation were taken up by writers in the *English Woman's Journal* as a potential solution to the low wages and lack of capital of women working in occupations like the needle trades.

⁸²Taylor was probably influenced here by the eighteenth-century conjectural history discussed in chapter one. Mill used James Millar's comparisons of women's submission in European and Asian feudal societies. See his essay of 1826 "Modern French Historical Works", in ed. John Robson, *Essays on French History and Historians*, vol. xx of the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1885, pp. 46-7. On feminism and colonialism see Vron Ware's discussion of Taylor and Mill and other early mid-nineteenth century feminists and anti-slavers in "An Abhorrence of Slavery", *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*, Verso, London, 1992, pp. 47-116 and esp. pp. 102-9.

⁸³On French Association see 1852 and subsequent editions; on British Co-operation see his discussion of George Holyoake's *Self-Help*, see 1862 and subsequent editions. On the problematic relationship between middle-class reformers and co-operators, including Mill and Holyoake, see Peter Gurney, "The Middle-Class Embrace: Language, Representation and the Contest over Co-operative Forms in Britain, c. 1860-1914", *Victorian Studies*, Fall, 1994.

Conclusion

Recent intellectual historians of radicalism and liberalism such as Gregory Claeys and Stefan Collini have argued that by the mid-nineteenth century radicalism was becoming increasingly "social" rather than narrowly "political". Attention was paid by working-class activists and middle- and upper-class social reformers to extra-parliamentary institutions like trade unions, co-operatives and even the family. Elements from Owenite social science were developed by the Christian Socialists, the Positivists, liberal social scientists and the followers of the Italian nationalist Mazzini, all of whom valued altruism, public duty and character as much as self-interest.⁸⁴ Historians have not discussed how these ideals were gendered, nor the role of women in promoting them.

In this chapter I have explored how Grimstone, Taylor and Mill saw the recognition of the rights of woman and of labour as essential components of a new social and political order. Class and sex conflict would be removed by making the conventionally feminine attributes of compassion, nurture and sympathy the basis of new political science. But these values were not simply promoted in order to feminise a pre-existing masculine politics. Rather, the alliance of science and sentiment would elevate political discourse. It would allow the development of a conciliatory politics, where both men and women could see beyond the confines of their particular class, gender, religious or political interests. It would

⁸⁴On social radicalism see Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, esp. pp. 285-318. See as well Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993. On liberalism see Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991. See also Richard Bellamy, *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice*, Routledge, London, 1990 and Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow, *The Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

facilitate a practical politics where people could take responsibility for their own improvement and co-operate in the advancement of others. To us there may be inconsistencies and contradictions in this politics, most notably in relation to the position of working-class women. Nevertheless, it allowed middle-class radical women to disrupt what they saw as the conventional and gendered categories of public and private and enabled Harriet Taylor to assert with confidence in her *Enfranchisement of Women*:-

We deny the right of any portion of the species to decide for another portion, or any individual for another, what is and what is not their "proper sphere." The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Harriet Taylor, "The Enfranchisement of Women", *Westminster Review*, 1851, in Rossi, p. 120.

Chapter Six
WRITING FOR THE PEOPLE:
RADICAL WOMEN AND CULTURAL POLITICS
IN THE 1840s AND 1850s.

Mary Leman Gillies' efforts to win "the people" from "monster meetings" to "fire-side virtues" were shared by other writers in the popular, reform journals of the late 1840s and 1850s. For a number of largely middle-class reformers, writing played a key part in the creation of a rational cultural practice which sought to replace the militant politics of the Chartist mass platform. This chapter examines how women writers hoped to forge a new cultural politics through three periodicals aimed at artisan and middle-class readers and reformers of all classes. These were *The People's Journal* (January 1846 - June 1849), its successor *The People's and Howitt's Journal* (July 1849 - June 1851) and *Eliza Cook's Journal* (May 1849 - November 1854).

Many writers in these journals contended that the regeneration of the people and the reformation of domestic and public spheres were dependent on a new relationship between the sexes. Reformulating the rights and duties of men and women, they promoted the companionate marriage but also insisted on the need for female education and respectable employment especially for single women. The women writers in the popular journals anticipated some of the concerns of the women associated with the *English Woman's Journal* and the campaigns for women's marriage and property rights in the 1850's and 1860's. Indeed, by recasting the republican and Owenite debates about the rights and wrongs of women, some writers in the popular journals, I will suggest, laid the foundations of a liberal tradition of women's rights and provided an impetus for the Langham Place circle. The chapter explores the journals' reflections on the "Woman

Question", female citizenship and education. It concludes by analysing Eliza Meteyard's utopian vision of a co-operative commonwealth that would unite middle- and working-class reformers in a project of class-conciliation and gender reformation.

Part One: The Popular Journals: "A combination of utility and amusement"

In referring to the "popular journals" I am using Brian Maidment's classification of the reform-minded, self-improving periodicals identified by Charles Kingsley in *Alton Locke* as the "popular journals of the Howitt and Eliza Cook school".¹ The *Peoples*, *Howitt's* and *Cook* journals formed part of the proliferation of family-orientated magazines at the mid-century, that aimed to instruct and amuse the "middling sorts". While not as commercially successful as the *Family Herald*, *London Journal* and *Reynolds's Miscellany*, the most popular family periodicals of the mid-century, their circulations were comparable with much of the Chartist press and with less politically-orientated magazines such as Dickens' *Household Words*.²

¹C. Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography*, (1850), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, pp. 220; and Brian Maidment, "Magazines of Popular Progress and the Artisans", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 17, Fall 1984, p. 83.

²Circulation figures were as follows:- *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849) 50 000 - 60 000; and *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress*, (forerunner of *The People's and Howitt's Journal*, January 1847-June 1848) 30 000 in 1847. These compare with the Chartist *Northern Star* with reported circulation figures of 35 00, 48 000 and 60 000 in 1838-9; Dickens's *Household Words*, (1850-9) which averaged 40 000; and the more popular periodicals: *The Family Herald* (300 000) *London Journal* (450 000) and *Reynolds's Miscellany*, 200 000 in 1855. For these figures see Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*, Phoenix Books, University of Chicago, London, 1963, pp. 393-4.

The journals' appeals to "the People" sustained that old, inclusive radical identification with the community of the "industrious classes". This identity denied class difference and established the consensus politics of the journals. As Gillies told her readers, most of the improvements in England "for the people had been done by themselves, or, which is the same thing, by those who have risen from them."³ The journals were broadly in support of progressive social and political reform and tended to be non-aligned, unlike the Chartist press. The *People's* and *Howitt's* journals listed the activities of political societies and organisations like the Peace Society but did not associate themselves with any one faction or movement. The non-partizan class and political spirit of these journals is summed up by John Saunders' editorial intention that *The People's Journal* would "express a nation, and not a class" and his hope that "Are we not, or ought we not all to be - working men?"⁴

The popular journals sought to combine the progressive outlook of the radical press with the array of "useful knowledge" literature pioneered since 1832 by *The Penny Magazine* and Brougham's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and by *Chamber's Journal*. In providing an alternative source of "useful knowledge", the Chartist papers had expanded their review sections to include literary as well as social, economic and political book reviews.⁵ Since the 1830s, the radical and Chartist press had made

³Mary Leman Gillies, "An Appeal to the Better Order of Men on Behalf of the Women of the Factory Districts", *People's Journal*, II, 5.9.1846, pp. 131-4.

⁴John Saunders, (1st. editorial), *People's Journal*, I, 3.1.1846, p. 1.

⁵For an analysis of the development of the periodical and newspaper press in the nineteenth-century see Altick, *The English Common Reader*, pp. 318-64. On the popular magazines see Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991. For studies of the radical and Chartist press see R.K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader, 1790-1848*, Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1971 and James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the*

increasing use of crime reports to lure readers and by the late 1840s some radical publishers were developing a market for melodrama, sensation and the penny dreadful in periodicals like *Reynolds's Miscellany*. The popular journals rejected this appeal to sensation and, like Eliza Cook, offered instead "a combination of utility and amusement".⁶

While the popular journals addressed themselves to the "People" they identified different constituents within that community. Although writers called on working people to help themselves, their tone was frequently condescending and hectoring, underscoring the social distance between working people and their middle-class champions. Serialised in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, Eliza Meteyard's story "Mrs Duple's Cooking School" was directed at poor women and their middle-class helpers. An alderman, who had risen "shoeless and friendless from the straw of a country wain" to be "an honest and prosperous man", persuaded Mrs Duple, an innkeeper's widow, to set up a cooking school to teach "the probable wives of labourers, journeymen, and little shopkeepers." The story instructed "wives of labourers, journeymen and little shopkeepers" in making Irish stew, roasting beef and organising a kitchen but ascribed the active business of reform to middle-class do-gooders.⁷

Chartist Movement, Croom Helm, London, 1982.

⁶Eliza Cook, "A Word to My Readers", (1st. editorial), *Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, 5.1.1849, p. 1.

⁷Eliza Meteyard, "Mrs. Duple's Cooking School", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, III, 8.6.1850, pp. 86-9; 15.6.1850, pp. 101-4; 22.6.1850, pp. 124-7; 29.6.1850, pp. 131-6.

Despite their condescension to working-class readers, the writers often used an idealised construction of artisan family formation and values to measure and criticise middle-class pretensions. The stereotype of the hardworking artisan and his loving, thrifty and frequently industrious wife provided a model of rational companionship. Harriet Martineau's "Household Education", published in *The People's Journal* in 1846, argued that:-

the condition which appears to me to be the meeting point of the greatest number of good influences is that of the best order of artisans.⁸

Eliza Cook's Journal delineated a form of respectability that was unaffected and family-orientated, illustrated by Cook's editorial on "Best Rooms" which criticised the social pretensions of the middle-class "lady of the house" who preferred a "parlour" over a "family sitting room".⁹ The idealisation and appropriation of artisan values betrayed a deep anxiety about middle-class culture yet artisans were rarely positioned as equals.

The journals' inclusive definition of "the People" was reflected in their attempts to bring together political opinions ranging from the Manchester School to Chartism and to provide a forum for working-class and women writers. Under the editorship of John Saunders and William and Mary Howitt *The People's Journal*, *Howitt's Journal* (1847-9), and *The People's and Howitt's Journals* reunited many of the writers of *The Monthly Repository* of the 1830s. These included William Fox, Richard Hengist Horne, Harriet Martineau, Ebenezer Elliot and Thornton Hunt who were joined by a new generation of liberals and freethinkers: Samuel Smiles; William Linton, Chartist and republican, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American Unitarian; Elihu Burritt, anti-slaver and

⁸Harriet Martineau, "Household Education", no. V, "The Golden Mean", *People's Journal*, II, 14.11.1846, p. 275 and pp. 274-6.

⁹Cook, "Best Rooms", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, II, 1.12.1849, pp. 73-4.

leader of the League of Brotherhood; Hugh Doherty the trade unionist; and Goodwyn Barmby of the Communist Church. The journals provided a platform for a now largely forgotten group of women writers: Caroline Hill and Mary Leman Gillies (previously Grimstone) from the *Repository* days, Caroline White, Camilla Toulmin, Mrs Vincent Novello, Mrs. Percy Sinnett, Julia Kavanagh, Mrs Wentworth and Eliza Meteyard. Smiles, Kavanagh, White and Meteyard also wrote extensively for *Eliza Cook's Journal*.¹⁰

There was a marked sexual division of labour in the popular journals. Women contributed mainly fiction and poetry, while men preferred journalism and polemic. In her study of four Victorian writers, Felicia Hemans, Maria Jane and Geraldine Jewsbury, and Jane Carlyle, Norma Clarke argues that women writers felt compelled to please men and consequently were prominent as writers of letters, sentimental poetry, domestic fiction and prescriptive literature. Yet Maria Jane Jewsbury, a leader writer for the *Athenaeum* in the early 1830s welcomed the emancipatory potential of writing. She suggested the woman writer:-

fancies herself veiled, and often enunciates important truths; the fear of man somewhat departs from her mind, and she becomes (by comparison) free, natural and unconventional.¹¹

With their commitment to social comment and reform, the popular journals encouraged women writers to develop social realism within fiction. Many of the women's

¹⁰See Carl Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, pp. 115-153 for a discussion of the *People's* and *Howitt's* journals and the politics of the 1840's. For Southwood Hill, White, Toulmin, Kavanagh, Meteyard and Cook, see Joseph Kestner, *Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women, 1827-1867*, Methuen, London, 1985.

¹¹(Maria Jane Jewsbury), *Athenaeum*, no. 236. 5.5.1832, quoted by Clarke p. 37. On writing and pleasing see Norma Clarke, *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love: The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans and Jane Carlyle*, Routledge, London, 1990. esp. p. 96.

compositions propagated values developed concurrently in the male writers' more overtly political writing.¹²

Eliza Cook (1817-1889), the daughter of a tinman and brazier, launched her *Eliza Cook's Journal* on the basis of her early-won fame as a poet, having published her first volume of poetry *Lays of the Wild Harp* in 1835, at the age of seventeen. Most of the lead articles in her journal were unattributed but Cook probably wrote editorials on issues like women's work, the Mechanics' Institutes and women's rights, as well as poetry and wry social observations on such topics as railway excursions and "old maids".¹³

As editor, Cook provided an encouraging environment for women writers which must have contrasted starkly with the opposition Eliza Meteyard and Mary Howitt had faced from Saunders, editor of *The Popular Journal*. Howitt had urged Meteyard "to

¹²The sexual division of labour in the journals was paralleled by the marginalised position of working-class writers. In a sensitive exploration of the class relationships within the popular journals, Brian Maidment has suggested that middle-class editors like the Howitts often included poor poetry thus undermining working-class aspirations for inclusion on the basis of merit. By "explaining" the meaning of poems to middle-class readers they mediated and moderated the tone of the poem and reinforced the relation of patronage between editor and writer. Moreover, the journals privileged polemic and reportage over autobiography and poetry, which were the dominant working-class genres of the 1840's. See Maidment, "Magazines of Popular Progress and the Artisans", and Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987.

¹³Cook published some of her lead articles in *Jottings from My Journal* but did not include any editorials on political or industrial questions. See Cook, *Jottings from My Journal*, Warne and Routledge, London, 1860. A number of social and industrial reformers wrote anonymously for her journal including Samuel Smiles, Travers claims that Smiles contributed up to 580 articles for the journal. See T. Travers, "The Problem of Identification of Articles: Samuel Smiles and *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 1849-1854", *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, no. 20, June 1973, pp. 41-5.

write on the Protection of Women question - but that little sneak (John Saunders) will be frightened out of his wits, I know."¹⁴ Unperturbed by convention, Cook adopted a masculine appearance and allowed her writers to discuss the contentious issue of women's rights.¹⁵ During the years preceding the formation of her journal, Cook was the "romantic friend" of the American Charlotte Cushman, the most celebrated actress of her day, known particularly for playing male roles.¹⁶

Like the editors of other popular journals, Cook pitched her journal as part of "the gigantic struggle for intellectual elevation now going on." However she differentiated her brand of "useful knowledge" from that pedalled by evangelicals, the S.D.U.K. and the Mechanics' Institutes. She insisted she was no "mental Joan of Arc" intent on delivering the people from "Ignorance and Wrong":-

Let it not be imagined I am appointing any *particular* right to lead or teach the "people." Let it not be said that I am striving to become a moral "Mrs. Trimmer" to the million; rather let me confess that I have a distaste for the fashion so violently adopted of talking to "the people," as though

¹⁴A.L.S., Harvard University Library. Quoted by Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, p. 128.

¹⁵Cook, "A Word to My Readers", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, 5.1.1849, p. 1.; Margaret Howitt ed., *Mary Howitt, An Autobiography*, II, William Isbister Ltd, London, 1889, p.37. Eliza Cook was brought up on a small farm near Horsham, where her father had retired from business. She was "almost entirely self-educated" and began to contribute poems to periodicals and newspapers from 1835 onwards. In 1837 she received a regular engagement for *The Weekly Dispatch*. See her entry in Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *National Dictionary of Biography*, XXII, Oxford University Press, London, 1921-2, pp. 478-9.

¹⁶Thanks to Denise Quinn and Lisa Merrill of Hofstra University for sharing their findings on Cook and Cushman with me. Cushman provides a loose connection between Eliza Cook and the *English Woman's Journal*. Later Cushman formed a relationship with Matilda Hays of the *English Woman's Journal* and both women joined the community of women artists in Italy in the 1850s that included Howitt's daughter Anna Mary who also wrote for the *English Woman's Journal*.

they needed an army of self-sacrificing champions to do battle for them, and rescue them from the "Slough of Despond".¹⁷

Evangelical tract writers of the early nineteenth century like Trimmer and More had opened up a popular market for female writers. Cook rejected their style, preferring a more democratic and less patronising relationship between writer and reader. The political identification of the women journalists studied in this chapter with "the people" differentiates them from the earlier tract writers and from contemporary evangelical writers like the Tory Charlotte Tonna who edited the *Christian Ladies' Magazine*. Nevertheless, the "distaste" of Cook and her fellow writers for talking down to "the people" was undercut by their desire to "elevate the people".¹⁸

The popular journals promoted the profile and professionalisation of the woman writer. The Howitts encouraged Mrs Gaskell "to use her pen for the public benefit" and published her series "Life in Manchester" under her pseudonym "Cotton Mather Mills, Esq." William helped her to secure publication for *Mary Barton* suggesting that she published under her own name.¹⁹ The journals also provided a regular outlet for women like Eliza Meteyard who supported herself and an elder aunt on her earnings as a journalist and serial writer.²⁰ Cook, Meteyard, Gillies, Martineau and Howitt were avid supporters of the Whittington Club which had been set up at the Crown and Anchor by

¹⁷Eliza Cook, "A Word to My Readers", (1st. editorial), *Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, 5.1.1849, p. 1.

¹⁸Hannah More makes an interesting comparison with Cook. See Susan Pedersen, "Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1986.

¹⁹Howitt, ed., *Mary Howitt. An Autobiography*, II, pp. 28-9; Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, pp. 141-3.

²⁰William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*, G. Bell and Sons, London, 1920, II, p. 429.

the publisher Douglas Jerrold and which encouraged the membership of literary ladies. This created some institutional support for the friendship networks, which as Norma Clarke has observed, were important in sustaining many female writers.²¹ The establishment of a Ladies' Committee was a recognition of the increasing prominence and professionalisation of women writers. Mary Howitt and Eliza Meteyard did much of the behind-the-scenes organisation for the club, while Eliza Cook was requested to be the treasurer of a fund to raise a monument to Thomas Hood at Kensal Green Cemetery.²²

The Whittington Club provides an illuminating example of how the liberal reformers of the popular journals envisaged cultural and political practice. Through the principle of association, bohemian radicals like Douglas Jerrold and William Howitt sought to extend the recreational facilities of the West End clubs to the lower-middle-class shop assistants and clerks as well as struggling writers. The club hoped to provide collective dining facilities, a library and lecture rooms. Christopher Kent has argued that the Whittington club self-consciously experimented with co-operative principles as a means of improving the social and domestic life of the lower-middle classes and the Owenite Goodwyn Barmby described the club idea as the first and most "imperfect" stage of community.²³

²¹On the membership of Howitt, Gillies and Martineau, see *People's Journal*, II, 24.10.1846, pp. 236-8. Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, pp. 25-6. On the professionalisation of the woman writer see Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of the Silence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, especially pp. 13-113.

²²Meteyard Collection, II, p. 77, Harvard University Library. Quoted by Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, p. 123; *Eliza Cook's Journal*, VII, 23.10.1852, p. 400.

²³For a fascinating account of this middle-class experiment in association see Christopher Kent, "The Whittington Club: A Bohemian Experiment in Middle-Class Social Reform", *Victorian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1974, pp. 31-55. For Barmby see W.H.G.

The men and women who managed the club, came chiefly from London's literary and radical circles and, as Kent has found, were older and socially superior to the membership, the majority of which was under twenty.²⁴ The reconstruction of gender relations was very much part of the rational recreation they hoped to create. They anticipated that the presence of women would connect male recreational activities to the virtues and imperatives of the domestic sphere, and have a moralising influence on male participants, thus providing a prototype for a respectable, cross-class cultural forum. Welcoming the formation of the Whittington Club, William Howitt insisted that the introduction of women would not lead to immorality but would rather make the atmosphere of the club more like a home.²⁵ However, women's moralising influence had to be closely regulated. Women who frequently attended public dancing were barred entrance and Eliza Meteyard scrutinised female applications for respectability. As we shall see, female domesticity was an important component of Meteyard's co-operative ideal.²⁶ The Whittington Club's domestic emphasis marked a new beginning for the Crown and Anchor which, as the old Jacobin and Radical centre, had seen a much more abrasive and masculine radical manhood.

Armytage, *Heavens Below*, Routledge, London, 1961, p. 198.

²⁴Members of the club council included Francis Place, W.H. Ashurst, Southwood Smith, Charles Milner Gibson and Peter Taylor and their wives and "political hostesses" Sarah Milner Gibson and Clementia Taylor. The membership included some Owenites including Lloyd Jones and George Jacob Holyoake. See Kent, "The Whittington Club", pp. 38 and 43.

²⁵William Howitt, "Observations on the Proposed Whittington Club", *People's Journal*, II, 24.10.1846, pp. 236-8; J.M.W., "My Aunt's Visit to the Whittington Club", *People's Journal*, IV, 14.8.1847, pp. 87-90. The Whittington Club still held political meetings. See G.J. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1906, p. 238.

²⁶Kent, "The Whittington Club", pp. 45 and 46.

The popular journals differentiated their readership by gender as well as by class. *The People's Journal* and its successor *The People's and Howitt's* incorporated a four page supplement entitled *The Annals of Progress*. This contained notices and descriptions of political and educational meetings around the country; annual reports of philanthropic organisations like the anti-slavery League of Brotherhood, the Peace Society and the Anti-Corn Law League. It also included advertisements for books and journals and the correspondence column, which was primarily concerned with social and political questions. It is significant that the supplement dealt with the public politics of meetings and societies rather than the main body of the journal which was more female and family-orientated.²⁷

The division between political and domestic literature reinforced the separate spheres ideology that was expounded by many contributors. The content and layout of the periodicals may have encouraged men and women to read different sections, and for

²⁷This separation may have been a consequence of the stamp duties which placed a premium on political journalism. Reynolds negotiated these duties by publishing his *Miscellany* as a penny family periodical, and restricting political information to *Reynolds's Weekly*, a more serious and campaigning journal in the tradition of *The Northern Star*, and priced at 3d., was aimed predominantly at working men. For a useful examination of Reynolds and the connections between popular literature and politics see Anne Humpherys, "G.W.M. Reynolds: Popular Literature and Popular Politics", in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 16, Fall and Winter, 1983, pp. 79-89, especially p. 84. For another radical publisher who capitalised on the market for family-orientated magazines see Sally Mitchell's discussion of "Shepherd" Smith, former editor of the Owenite *Crisis* and publisher of *The Family Herald* in "Woman's Place: Penny Weekly Family Magazines of the 1840's and 1850's", *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880*, Bowling Green University Press, Ohio, 1981, pp. 1-21. For the female readership of the penny magazines see Mitchell above and Patricia Anderson, "'Factory Girl, Apprentice and Clerk' - The Readership of the Mass-Market Magazines, 1830-60", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 25, Summer 1992, pp. 64-72.

different purposes: the man for political information; the woman for household advice and leisure. One reader recommended a gendered consumption of the journal:-

For three-halfpence he ["the working man"] can take his *Journal* to his home: Mrs. Gillies tells a pleasing tale to his wife; Burritt talks to him about peace; and as he throws his arm around Nanny's neck, he assures her that *he* never will go for a soldier - a good word that, for Nanny has her fears... Miss Martineau advises Nanny on household education, and she begins to perceive the great purposes of Being, and the means to their fulfilment.

The father would bridge the public world of clubs, mutual instruction and political societies, and the private world of the mother and children, building there:-

A *household* Institute, where father is the lecturer, mother presides, and a group of rosy children form the audience.²⁸

Part Two: "The Rights and Wrongs of Women"

The popular journals did not give clear editorial support for women's rights but nonetheless opened up a forum for discussing "The Woman Question". The debate itself acknowledged the existence of the advocates of the rights of women and even hostile reviewers were compelled to respond to their claims. Reviewing Georgina Bennet's *Woman and Her Duties* in *Eliza Cook's Journal* in 1853, an anonymous critic insisted that women be excluded from political, religious and ethical controversies as well as involvement in government. Although it was difficult to answer the claims of the "ladies'" for inclusion, the reviewer confessed:-

the why is answered more through our sympathies than through our reason. We can imagine the softer sex governing wisely, discoursing philosophically, nay, even fighting bravely in amazonian fashion as well as men, but we know that we should not like them so well as we do now. They seem to have a world of their own, proper to them, where they are

²⁸"R", "Every Home an Institute", *People's Journal: Annals of Progress*, IV, 3.7.1847, p. 1.

in no danger of being rivalled or pulled from their thrones by man, - a world of gentleness rather than force, of sympathy rather than intellect, and in that world seems to be their highest opportunity for both happiness and usefulness.²⁹

Writers expressed a wide variety of opinions ranging from the endorsement of female domesticity and separate spheres to the assertion of female independence and denunciation of male tyranny.

The debates about "Woman's Position" centred on the nature of the private sphere, the "home" and "the family" as well as woman's sphere. Writers sympathetic and hostile to women's rights compared the home as a social and political unit with the government or the nation. An anonymous writer on "Home Power" in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, declared that:-

It is really the Home which governs the world...The Home is the crystal of society; it is the school of civilization; it is the centre round which the moral and social world revolves.

Those who managed the nursery wielded a greater power than government, but although this "power" was given by nature, instinct had to be trained and educated and this required the systematic education of women.³⁰ The need for mothers to be trained paralleled the liberal argument that government had to be regulated by checks and balances.

²⁹"Sign of the Times", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, VIII, 5.2.1853, pp. 234-5. Georgina Bennet, *Woman and Her Duties*, Longman and Co. According to the reviewer, Bennet advocated female education and recommended how to take care of a husband.

³⁰Leading article, "Treatment of Women", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, V, 9.8.1851, pp. 225-7. The article claimed that legal injustice was a result of "the low sense which is yet entertained of the character and position of woman" and opposed her "forced subordination to man".

The integral relationship between the government of the home and the government of the nation was a central theme of the educationalist Louis Aimé-Martin. His *Education des mères de famille ou de la civilisation du genre humain par les femmes* of 1834 had argued that "maternal influence" could "regenerate the world" and advocated a programme of primary education for girls to make "a school out of every house!" His tract was widely read throughout Europe and America and inspired Sarah Lewis, the arch exponent of female domesticity.³¹ The ideal of maternal influence could be deeply conservative. In *Woman's Mission* Lewis lambasted the "fiery champions of womanhood" with their "exalted notions of its dignity" and their claims for political rights. She granted:-

Yet women have a mission! aye, even a political mission of immense importance! which they will best fulfil by moving in the sphere assigned them by Providence; not comet-like, wandering in irregular orbits, dazzling indeed by their brilliancy, but terrifying by their eccentric movements and doubtful utility.³²

A writer in *Eliza Cook's Journal* also firmly located women's influence within the private sphere and ridiculed the calls for women's enfranchisement by the Women's Rights Convention at Syracuse in 1853:-

Women possess no power indeed!... they who hold the leading-strings of children are the veritable rulers of the world.³³

³¹Louis Aimé-Martin, *Education des meres de famille ou de la civilisation du genre humain par les femmes*, 1834. For a discussion of the influence of this text see Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, London, pp. 123-4.

³²Sarah Lewis, *Woman's Mission*, 4th ed., John Parker, West Strand, 1839, pp. 11 and 46-7.

³³"Women's Rights Convention", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, X, 19.11.1853, p. 63.

Yet, as Lewis has conceded, the rhetoric of "Woman's Mission" was exceedingly malleable. As we have seen the association of national and domestic government was a recurrent motif within Chartist rhetoric and was increasingly used by contemporary European nationalist movements which were firmly supported by the popular journals.³⁴ Aimé-Martin's concept of female citizenship was taken up by a writer in *The Scottish Chartist Circular* in 1839, which was reprinted by *Eliza Cook's Journal*. The article was strongly influenced by the Owenite association of civilisation with the rights of woman. The writer celebrated woman's influence, which was "universal and irresistible", unlike political systems which rose and fell:-

The slavery of woman in her household is always the exact counterpart of the governmental slavery of a people. Thence, if a man would elevate himself and his species, he must elevate the condition of woman; for, when he does so, he elevates himself. Women, indeed, are yet destined to be the greatest reformers of our race; the chief agents in the political emancipation of mankind. We say "political," in its widest acceptance; for we conceive that but a narrow meaning which is generally attached to this word. By "politics" we mean the *Science of human progress*; and this requires the elevation of woman as well as man in the scale of society, - the increase of her happiness as well as his - the social equality of woman with man, as of man with his fellow, - and the improvement of the individuals which compose the great human family.³⁵

The above writer found the analogy of home and government useful in that it enabled an analysis of tyranny to be brought to domestic relations. Similarly, another writer in *Eliza Cook's Journal* responded warmly to Harriet Taylor's "remarkably able" article on the "Enfranchisement of Women" published in *The Westminster Review* in

³⁴Margot Finn discusses the importance of support for European nationalist movements to working- and middle-class radical politics in this period. See *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

³⁵"Woman and Society", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, IV, 19.4.1851, pp. 396-7. Reprinted from *The Scottish Chartist Circular*, 9.12.1839, quoted by Dorothy Thompson in *The Chartists*, Temple Smith, London, 1984, p. 125.

1851. Drawing heavily on the critique of male tyranny within Owenite women's rights, the writer asked:-

Does it seem at all right and proper that one-half of the human race should pass through life in forced subordination to the other, - that woman's existence and social position should be regarded merely ancillary to man's, - that the rule of her life should be self-sacrifice, and of his self-assertion, - that her will should in all things be subject, and his supreme, - that her legal existence should be ignored wherever *he* comes, - that her judgement should be ignored, though her mate be a fool, that her education should be conducted entirely with a view to him, rather than to herself;- ought these things to be so? Is it not most probable, that, as in all things else, the despotic power thus given to man is injurious to himself as well as to woman; that while it makes her weak it makes him selfish, - corrupts both, - destroys affection, - provokes retaliation, - and entails great injury upon society at large.³⁶

The debates on the position of women relative to the progress of civilisation continued to inform the "Woman Question" in the popular journals at the mid-century, especially in reference to education. Harriet Martineau's anthropological and sociological studies of America and Anna Jameson's of Canada and Europe, were particularly influential.³⁷ A leading article on the legal position of women in *Eliza Cook's Journal* in 1850 argued that woman's position was an index of civilisation and criticised Blackstone's contention that women were favoured by English law. It compared the heavier penalties meted out in former times to women than men for crimes like treason and murder, with the present lack of educational and employment opportunities for women of all classes.³⁸

³⁶Leading article, "Treatment of Women", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, V, 9.8.1851, pp. 225-7.

³⁷See Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, Saunders and Otley, New York, 1837 (2 vols.) and Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, London, 1838 (3 vols.).

³⁸"Wrongs of Englishwomen", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, III, 5.10.1850, pp. 353-5. See also, anon., "Industrial Schools for Young Women", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 9.6.1849, pp. 81-2; and anon., "Women; Their Social Position and Culture", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, VII, 25.9.1852,

Other writers were uncomfortable with the rhetoric of the "wrongs of woman" which was too closely associated with the more confrontational politics of Paineite and Jacobin radicalism and communism. For some writers, the "wrongs of woman" smacked of special pleading. In an article in *The People's Journal* in 1847 on "The Rights and Wrongs of Women" Mrs. Percy Sinnett criticised the tone and partiality of the claimants for the "Emancipation of Women", especially their anger:-

it is to be feared that no very stout battle will ever be made with forces so disaffected, whose sympathies are often more on the enemy's side than their own.³⁹

The disputes between the Owenites and their evangelical opponents over marriage had underlined the association between women's rights and free love and increased popular hostility to women's rights supporters, as Eliza Sharples and some Owenite women found to their cost.⁴⁰ Sinnett and her fellow contributor, Harriet Martineau, advocated instead a dispassionate politics. In her *Autobiography*, Martineau dismissed Mary Wollstonecraft as "a poor victim of passion" and criticised "some of the most conspicuous denouncers of the wrongs of women at this day" saying:-

that their advocacy of Woman's cause becomes mere detriment, precisely in proportion to their personal reasons for unhappiness, unless they have fortitude enough... to get their own troubles under their feet, and leave them wholly out of the account in stating the state of their sex.⁴¹

pp. 337-9.

³⁹Mrs. Percy Sinnett, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women", *People's Journal*, IV, 31.7.1847, pp. 59-61.

⁴⁰See chapter two and Barbara Taylor, "Love and the New Life: The Debate over Marriage Reform", in *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London, 1983, pp. 183-216.

⁴¹Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, (1877), 1983, p. 400. Cited by Barbara Taylor, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism", *History Workshop*

Mrs. Sinnett objected to the category "*woman*" which suggested an inevitable difference and antagonism between the sexes, and to the term "*wrongs*", which implied not only:-

disadvantages...or evils perhaps temporary and inevitable in the progress of the race; but encroachments and inflictions of wilful and deliberate injustice...
...The "*wrongs of women*" have not originated in any conspiracy among men of any age, class, or country, to subject them to what they knew to be injustice.⁴²

The danger of the "floods of well-meaning nonsense" on the subject of women, for Sinnett, was that people would grow weary of the discussion and begin to doubt "whether the "*wrongs of women*" are not, after all, purely imaginary." Nevertheless, Sinnett was not oblivious to women's actual wrongs, principally that:-

wherever male and female labour are brought into competition, the woman has scarcely ever an equal chance of that grand desideratum - "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work."

The solution to this problem lay in the expansion of employment for women and the improved education and training of women to render them self-supporting.⁴³

The prioritisation of women's social over political rights by many writers suggests a degree of caution. Some seem to have deliberately laid aside the question of political rights so that their discussions of women's legal and economic rights would be taken more seriously. The writer on "*The Treatment of Women*" who vigorously attacked women's legal subordination to men nevertheless refused to be drawn into a discussion of women's political exclusion. Indeed the early Victorian women's rights

Journal, 33, 1992, p. 203.

⁴²Sinnett, "*Rights and Wrongs of Women*".

⁴³Sinnett, "*Rights and Wrongs of Women*".

movements concentrated on women's social rather than political position. Mary Howitt was secretary of the committee to change the laws governing married women's property rights that was set up by Barbara Leigh Smith in 1855. Howitt coordinated a petition with Anna Jameson calling for the legal protection of married women's earnings.⁴⁴ Yet Howitt shocked Anne Thackeray by announcing "her opinion that women should sit in Parliament" in 1854.⁴⁵ Bessie Rayner Parkes invited Howitt and Meteyard as members of an earlier generation of women's rights activists to a consultation meeting on the *English Woman's Journal* in 1863.⁴⁶ Statements in favour of women's enfranchisement by Howitt and Meteyard were published in *Opinions of Women on Women's Suffrage* - a pamphlet by the National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1879.⁴⁷

If the popular journalists were timid in declaring their support for women's suffrage, they appear to have been more willing to attack inequality and men's oppression of women in their discussions of female education. We shall now compare their analyses of and plans for female education.

⁴⁴Jane Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, pp. 228-9 and Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, pp. 176-7.

⁴⁵*Letters of Anne Thackeray Ritchie*, London, 1889, p. 66. Cited by Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, p. 180.

⁴⁶Letter, June 1863, Bessie Rayner Parkes to Howitt, in Howitt-Meteyard collection, bound in two volumes with R.H. Horne, *A Spirit of the Age*, Harvard University Library, vol. II, no. 43.

⁴⁷*Opinions of Women on Women's Suffrage*, Issued by the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, 64 Berners Street, London, 1879, pp. 20 and 23.

Part Three: "Intellect Manifests itself in Action"

Feminist historians, like Sally Alexander, have argued that the language of the individual subject is a precondition of feminism, and that Protestantism's focus on the soul's individual mediation with God, enabled the emergence of early "feminist" voices.⁴⁸ An article on "Woman" in *Eliza Cook's Journal* in 1849 asked "Is not the mind superior to all circumstances of sex or station? Hath not woman a soul, of an origin as noble as that of man...?" Before "hastily concluding that woman is inferior" the writer suggested that there were different standards from which to judge "mental greatness". Women were invested with moral power, by which was meant "the voice of conscience, or duty speaking within us." This was a form of intellect, for:-

Intellect manifests itself in action, as well as in preaching; and while it has been the mission of man to *preach* the precepts of moral philosophy, it has been that of woman to *realize* them.⁴⁹

Unusually, the writer identified moral mission with men but like John Stuart Mill, idealised the practicality of women.

In common with other nineteenth-century advocates of women's rights, writers often reflected on innate and cultural differences between the male and female intellect. This did not prohibit them, however, from advocating an equalisation of educational opportunities. The writer on "The Education of the Sexes" quoted Mrs. Jamieson's [*sic*] argument that it should not be "supposed that we would have the woman educated as a

⁴⁸Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History", *History Workshop Journal*, 17, 1984, p. 130.

⁴⁹Anon., "Woman", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, 16.6.1849, pp. 107-8.

man, or the man educated as a woman... Each has a distinct sphere of life and action, and yet they must act together also in harmony and union." Echoing Mary Leman Gillies, s/he denounced the fact that "While woman is educated almost exclusively in reference to man, he, on the other hand, is never educated in reference to her, but only to himself." Conversely, woman was taught to be "self-sacrificing", which was damaging both to the individual and society. The education of the sexes had to be more equivalent so that women developed their intellectual powers and self-reliance, and men subscribed to the same standard of morality as women. Rather than choosing between sexual difference and equality, the writer suggested that men and women should be educated both for complementary relationships between the sexes and for independence.⁵⁰

The popular journals saw themselves as organs for progressive educational reforms. Most writers supported W.J. Fox's parliamentary campaign for the establishment of a national, secular system of education. They endorsed the creation of secular schools, People's Colleges and Working Men's Colleges through the co-operation of working- and middle-class radicals. They also gave qualified support to the Mechanics' Institutes. Eliza Meteyard was among those who believed that the Mechanics' Institutes had lost sight of their original aim of providing instruction for the working man in catering primarily for the middle classes. She argued that working men wanted to have control over their education and the opportunity to debate political and religious questions, rather than the "sugared" instruction offered by the Institutes.⁵¹

⁵⁰Anon., "Men and Women. - Education of the Sexes", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 14.12.1850, pp. 97-9.

⁵¹Silverpen, (Meteyard), "The People's College, Sheffield", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, II, 15.12.1849, pp. 100-1.

Many of the writers in the popular journals supported attempts to open up the Mechanics Institutes and the Working Men's Colleges to women. Where this happened, June Purvis has found that classes were usually sex-segregated and offered a gendered education. Although the students frequently opted for academic classes, the institutions saw the provision of household instruction as an important function of female education.⁵² While the popular journals advocated domestic training for girls and women in pauper and industrial schools and adult female classes, they saw the academic instruction of women as equally important. An article in *Eliza Cook's Journal* criticised the emphasis on needlework in middle-class girls' boarding schools in comparison with the academic training of working-class girls in the normal schools.⁵³ Another writer recommended the classes for women pioneered by the Huddersfield and Keighley Mechanics' Institutes which offered intellectual as well as domestic instruction. These classes would also provide useful and rational activity for middle-class women. The writer appealed to educated women to enrol as teachers in the classes suggesting that teaching was a more suitable occupation than shopping, novel-reading and gossiping. Even the "intelligent working woman" with "leisure time at her disposal" could "co-operate with others in this labour of love and usefulness."⁵⁴ This cooperation of women between different classes would facilitate social cohesion and as Meteyard hoped, create

⁵²June Purvis examines the gendered curricula of the Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Men's Colleges in Part III "Educating Working-Class Women", *Hard Lessons: The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 97-219.

⁵³Anon., "The "Young Idea" - Female Education", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, VI, 21.2.1852, pp. 270-1.

⁵⁴Anon., "Industrial Schools for Young Women", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, 9.6.189, pp. 81-2.

"a new culture of women" that might "wipe away the thousand infant tragedies begot of Godfrey's cordial, neglect, and ignorance."⁵⁵

Eliza Meteyard conducted a series of reports for *Eliza Cook's Journal* on the provision of female education at the people's colleges. Reporting on the Sheffield People's College she recommended that more classes be provided on "the progress of domestic life". However, domestic education should be part of, not separate from, the academic curriculum for girls.⁵⁶ She visited and applauded William Lovett's anatomy class for girls aged eight to fourteen at the secular National School at High Holborn. She argued that physiology, social economy and geometry were the "essentials of primary education". Using a scientific approach and diagrams of the human body, the class explained the processes of digestion and the effects of diet, pure air and cleanliness on the human body. She approved Lovett's use of diagram and observation as particularly conducive to "the female mind" noting that the girls "comprehension and answers" were clear.⁵⁷

Writers were also keen to outline the possibilities for education within the home, part of which might be conducted through the popular journals. The "domestic" could be the subject of intellectual enquiry. W. Bernard's series "Chemistry in the Kitchen" in *Eliza Cook's Journal* was an early exploration of domestic science.⁵⁸ "Household

⁵⁵Silverpen, (Meteyard), "William Lovett's Lessons on Physiology", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, III, 7.9.1850, pp. 291-3.

⁵⁶Silverpen, (Meteyard), "The People's College, Sheffield".

⁵⁷Silverpen, "William Lovett's Lessons on Physiology".

⁵⁸For W. Bernard's series "Chemistry in the Kitchen", see *Eliza Cook's Journal*, vol. I.

Education" by Harriet Martineau, which was serialised in *The People's Journal* in 1846 before publication in book form, recommended that all members of the family, including children, servants and apprentices consult together to share a "family plan". This process of rational discussion and organisation would itself be an education: a "domestic school of mutual instruction." Martineau described an ideal artisan family, dignified by labour and independence, as the model for a reformed middle-class family formation. Children would learn the habits of usefulness by girls helping their mothers with domestic work and child rearing, and by boys doing chores and helping the father in the workshop.⁵⁹ *The People's and Howitt's Journal* carried another idealised model of the possibilities of "home education" in John Tomlinson's fictional account of "The Family Circle". This envisaged the sexes of one household discoursing equally on subjects like mental philosophy:-

Our object in these papers is to embody by examples the pleasures and advantages of "home education;" in carrying out which we shall not attempt to bring down our standard to the level of ordinary parlours and drawing-rooms, but to strive to elevate the family and social circle of the masses upon a higher model.⁶⁰

Although the popular journals and the Mechanics' Institutes and Working Men's Colleges tied women's academic education to domestic training, it is important not to underestimate the commitment many felt to the development of the female intellect. Their advocacy of women's intellectual rights challenged a deluge of prescriptive material from the 1830s and 1840s that had prioritised domestic over academic training for girls. Despite their shared view that women should manage a house rationally, there

⁵⁹Harriet Martineau, "Household Education", serialised in *People's Journal*, II, beginning 18.7.1846. See this issue, pp. 36-8 for the "family plan" and "domestic school" and 14.11.1846, pp. 274-6 for learning through labour.

⁶⁰John Tomlinson, "The Family Circle. Conversations on Mental Philosophy", Part I, *People's and Howitt's Journal*, II, pp. 40-2.

was a world of difference between the form of educational citizenship and self-reliance that Mary Gillies and Eliza Meteyard recommended for women and Mrs. Ellis's earlier contention that the object of female education was "disinterested kindness". This "disinterested kindness" was threatened by the practice of intellectual competition at school, and for Ellis, the "improvement of the *heart*" should always take priority over academic accomplishments.⁶¹

It is difficult to assess how far the popular journals' recommendations that working men encourage women to participate in rational culture or pass on their useful knowledge to their wives at the fireside, were taken up. However, the "Annals of Industry" did record the activities of mutual instruction classes that sometimes mention the inclusion of women or provision of separate classes for women. Believing that "Knowledge is Power and Union is Strength", a London shoemaker set up an "Institute" in one room that comprised his work, living and reading space. Here he led discussions on Combe's *Constitution of Man* and Channing's *Self-Culture*. He recalled from his diary:-

I am delighted to see the old dames love toddling to my room of a Monday evening, hanging on the arms of their husbands. I do all I can to encourage their presence, for I cannot understand why women should not have the advantages derivable from good information as well as men. Some bring their knitting - some needlework; some mending stockings, whilst others have children to mind. All are attentive. There are some young wives present too.⁶²

⁶¹Mrs. Ellis, (Sarah Strickney Ellis), *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*, 11th. ed. Fisher, Son and Co., London, 1839, pp. 67-8 and 75 and ch. 3 "Modern Education".

⁶²"B-", (letter from London), *People's Journal. Annals of Industry*, II, 4.7.1846, p. 2.

The young men of the Bolton Essay and Discussion Club discussed the subjects of female education and women's rights and concluded that "woman was endowed with faculties capable of elevating her to that state of intelligence, upon which the benefits and happiness of society so much depends". Nevertheless, it is unclear whether they included women in their society.⁶³

The popular journals were able to draw on a long, if marginalised, tradition of support for female education among the freethinkers and secularists, especially in London. In 1849 the secular periodical *The Reasoner* edited by George Jacob Holyoake advertised the Ellis's Academy, run by the husband and wife, at George Street; the Girl's School conducted by Miss Sunter at the National Hall; another taught by a Lady at Mr. Robinson's Secular School in George Street. Mrs. Napier Bailey established a Girls' Secular School at the Owenite John Street Institution in 1850, which included women on reduced rates in its other rational activities.⁶⁴ Holyoake expressly welcomed women to his Eclectic Class held at the John Street Institution in 1849 "admitting the capability of informed women to usefully influence public affairs."⁶⁵

The views of working-class women on the form of class and gender improvement advocated by the journals is even more difficult to ascertain. An exchange between two female students in *The London Working Men's College Magazine* suggests that working women had different educational needs and ambitions. The College practised the

⁶³*People's Journal. Annals of Progress*, 19.6.1847.

⁶⁴*Reasoner*, vol. VII, 3.10.1849, p. 233; 28.11.1849, p. 350; vol. VIII, 10.4.1850, p. 11.

⁶⁵*Reasoner*, vol. VII, 28.11.1849, p. 342. Holyoake also encouraged women to attend his classes on Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric but in a letter from his class, only 2 out of 24 members appear to have been women. *Reasoner*, vol. III, 1847, p. 470, and vol. IV, p. 168.

educational principles lauded by the *People's*, *Howitt's* and *Eliza Cook's Journals* and Octavia Hill and Helen Taylor, daughters of Caroline and Harriet, were teachers of the women's classes. Elizabeth Rossiter, probably the wife of William Rossiter, a portmanteau worker involved in establishing the South London College could not understand initially how her husband's education in algebra and Shakespeare was to make him a better husband. She was convinced by her attendance at the women's afternoon classes which enabled her husband and herself to appreciate their duties to each other. She argued however that women could benefit only from the music and drawing classes since they simply required a training for their home environment, while their husbands needed to be educated for the "battle of the outer world". Rather than extending more classes to women the male students should teach their wives and:-

Show us, in your own lives at home with us, that you rightly understand the College teaching. Show us that it *does* teach you to value your homes; that it does give you a better understanding of your position in your families; that you do the better comprehend the duties of a parent.

"A Working Woman" scoffed at the idea of "Music and Drawing", exclaiming, "why crowns and coronets seem scarcely more beyond our reach than these ladylike accomplishments." She defended women's right to learn Algebra and Trigonometry to enable them to compete in the job market and to fulfil their duties in life, whether married or single. The two students different understanding of women's duties and educational needs correspond to the debates about the purpose of female education in the journals.⁶⁶

⁶⁶For this debate see "A Student Wife's Notion of College and Classes", Elizabeth Rossiter, *Working Men's College Magazine*, vol. I, 1.10.1859, pp. 153-4; Student's Wife, "Will College Night Classes be of Use to Women?" vol. II, 1.1.1860; "A Working Woman on Women's Classes", vol. II, 1.3.1860; vol. II, 1.4.1860, pp. 65-66. See June Purvis, pp. 178-80 for a discussion of this exchange. Their discussion was occasioned by a female teacher who advocated afternoon and evening classes comprising academic and vocational training for working women, including housewives. See "Afternoon Classes for Women", vol. 1, July 1859, pp. 118-9 and August 1859, pp. 123-7. For Octavia Hill's teaching aims

The prescriptions of the popular journals may have struck a chord with some working women who had emphasised the importance of female reason in the Chartist movement and other radical campaigns. Holyoake decided to give Martineau's *Household Education* to his wife to review anonymously for *The Reasoner*, because as "the head of a household" she was better placed to recommend it. Holyoake was one of the most persistent male radical supporters of female suffrage, moving its adoption at Chartist meetings. Nonetheless, he apparently saw no need to equip his own wife for a public role, although she occasionally attended radical celebrations at her husband's side. He informed his readers that:-

Incessantly occupied with domestic cares, the writer has found no opportunity of cultivating the arts of composition. But it seemed to me that the homeliness and digressiveness of expression is atoned for by the justness and earnestness of womanly thought which pervades the notice.

While recommending the "facts" in *Household Education* that were proved by "every-day experience", Mrs Holyoake used her appearance in print to reflect on the happiness she had lost through the want of education in her parents; the role of mothers as "the principal instructors"; and the importance of female education in enabling women to assume "a thoughtful and acting position." Although Martineau disclaimed the wrongs of woman, *Household Education* drew Mrs. Holyoake's attention to women's inequality and lead her to consider women's political as well as intellectual enslavement:-

I think woman is a slave because she has seldom a voice in altering her position, and because her information is not sufficient to support her in claiming a voice on the question of her own wrongs. If woman is not bought and sold, the manner she is dealt with is very much like it.⁶⁷

see O.H., "Hints on Few Principles of Instruction of Working Women, Suggested by a Teacher", vol. I, October 1859, pp. 162-4.

⁶⁷"E", "Miss Martineau's "Household Education", *Reasoner*, VI, 13.6.1849, pp. 378-80. Joseph McCabe says this is Eleanor Holyoake in *Holyoake's Letters*, I, p. 286. G.J. Holyoake reviewed a cheaper edition of *Household Education* in a review article entitled

Despite their concerns about the education of working-class women, the writers in the popular journals had difficulty envisaging an active role for working women in the creation of the rational cultural life that they were so keen to establish. I turn finally to Eliza Meteyard to examine how she positioned women in her vision of a society regenerated by co-operation.

Part Four: Serving the Cause of Labour

Raymond Williams has indicated the role of middle-class writers, particularly of industrial and domestic fiction in the 1840s and 1850s, in transforming ideas about culture and society.⁶⁸ As we have seen, there were important connections and similarities between the writers in the popular journals like the Howitts and some industrial novelists, like Gaskell, who also promoted more conciliatory class and gender relations through a reformed political and literary culture. Williams did not pursue the role of the woman writer in developing new literary genres in the mid-nineteenth century, nor the gendered nature of middle-class conceptions of culture and society. Gary Kelly's theory of women writers as cultural revolutionaries, discussed in chapter one, provides a useful model for interpreting the radicalism of women writers in the popular journals, whose politics was bound up with writing.⁶⁹

"Fireside Culture - Its Relation to the Rationalists". Holyoake recommended Martineau's advice book as a useful guide to "the importance of government in the families of the Rationalists".

⁶⁸Raymond Williams, "The Industrial Novels", *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1963, pp. 99-119.

⁶⁹Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, esp. pp. 3-8 and 31-3.

The final part of this chapter explores how Eliza Meteyard, advocate of women's rights and industrial association, attempted to bring together writing and politics. Where Kelly analysed the "feminization" of culture and especially revolutionary rhetoric, I prefer to focus on the "domestication" of politics, for like Mary Leman Gillies, Meteyard hoped to extend the domestic virtues of sympathy, compassion and harmony to public politics.

Eliza Meteyard (1816-1879) was a prolific writer of fiction and social journalism in the popular journals, often using the pseudonym "Silverpen".⁷⁰ The daughter of a surgeon in the Shropshire Militia, she lived from 1829 to 1842 at Thorpe, near Norwich, where she may have known Harriet Martineau and the Unitarian community. In 1833, she assisted her eldest brother, a tithe commissioner, to compile his reports on the Eastern counties. This grounding in social investigation informed her journalism and fiction which responded to investigations and reports like Mayhew's letters on the needlewomen or the debates around the 1851 census and the "redundant woman", as discussed in chapter four.⁷¹

Meteyard's literary career was similar to that of a number of professional woman writers who struggled to support themselves and relatives by the pen. In the 1840s and

⁷⁰For the use of the pseudonym by Victorian women writers see Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, pp. 26, 52-3; and Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, p. 102.

⁷¹Unless stated otherwise, biographical detail on Meteyard is taken from Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *National Dictionary of Biography*, Oxford University Press, London, 1921-2, XIII, pp. 308-9. Meteyard may have known Charlotte Tonna, another writer from Norwich, who also based a number of novels on parliamentary reports, notably *Helen Fleetwood* and *The Wrongs of Woman*. For a discussion of the mixing of novel and documentary genres in social reform fiction especially by women, see Kestner, *Protest and Reform*.

1850s she maintained herself and her aunt by writing for among others *Eliza Cook's Journal*, *The People's Journal*, *Tait's Magazine*, *Chamber's Journal*, *Household World*, *The Working Man's Friend and Instructor* and several popular novels. On one occasion Mary Howitt invited her to dinner "that you may have something substantial to keep up the physical frame."⁷² In 1851 she applied to the Royal Literary Fund for support as a distressed writer.⁷³ Her experience as a working woman writer no doubt led her to discuss, with greater sensitivity than most opinion-makers, the economic imperatives that compelled women to work and the need to improve their conditions of labour rather than depriving them of their livelihoods.

Meteyard was connected with a number of different radical networks, including, as we have seen, the mid-century women's rights movement. Meteyard's Chartist friend William Lovett praised her as "a keen politician, as well as a clever biographer and imaginative writer" and "one of the most worthy, industrious and persevering of women."⁷⁴ A strong interest in industry and design led her to write Josiah Wedgwood's biography and a catalogue of the Wedgwood industry. She was a firm supporter of popular liberalism and for her services to the Liberal Party was placed on Gladstone's Civil List in 1869, with an annual pension of £60 rising to £100 in 1874.⁷⁵

⁷²William Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, II, p. 429; Unpublished letter Howitt to Meteyard, bound in two volumes with R.H. Horne, *A Spirit of the Age*, Harvard University Library, vol. II, no. 11. Cited by Woodring, *Victorian Samplers*, p. 150.

⁷³Meteyard was awarded a total of two hundred and eighty pounds in separate grants. Royal Literary Fund at the London County Hall, (Box 35, Case 1269), cited by Kent, "The Whittington Club", p. 7, note 17.

⁷⁴Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, II, p. 429.

⁷⁵*National Dictionary of Biography*.

Throughout her working life she was deeply committed to the social progress of the working classes through self-improvement and co-operation. Reprinting some of her most popular stories from *Eliza Cook's Journal* in support of the Nine Hours' Movement in 1872 she described her political shift from a former interest in utopian co-operation to Liberalism:-

In those days, when my heart burnt literally within me as I wrote, when my enthusiasm was such that I seemed to have energy and courage sufficient in myself to war with every human ill, I confess I believed in social and industrial communities, and I was even solicited to join and head a community in the western states of North America. But if I have given up communistic opinions, and the belief in human equality apart from social rights I still more strongly believe in the power of individual savings, used co-operatively as the means whereby the industrial classes of all countries will obtain power of higher culture, individual independence, lessened amount and ameliorated forms of labour, emigration, better dwellings, clubs, and social and individual benefits of many kind...⁷⁶

Her solution was industrial co-partnership, a system favoured by many middle-class and intellectual liberals. Peter Gurney has argued that in the second half of the nineteenth century middle-class liberals and intellectuals attempted to detach the Co-operative movement from its communistic, Owenite inheritance and its opposition to capitalist production and distribution. Many members of the Social Science Association, like Henry Fawcett, hoped to transform co-operation through co-partnership schemes into a form of capitalist organisation. This built on the co-operators' idea that association would enable the labourers to become capitalists. Working-class co-operators conducted a dialogue with liberal intellectuals and politicians through bodies like the Social Science Association.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Eliza Meteyard, *The Nine Hours' Movement. Industrial and Household Tales*, Green and Co., London, 1872, p. xi.

⁷⁷Peter Gurney, "The Middle-Class Embrace: Language, Representation and the Contest Over Co-operative Forms in Britain, c. 1860-1914", forthcoming article in *Victorian Studies*, Fall, 1994 and *The Making of Co-operative Culture in England, 1870-1918*, D.Phil.,

The moral rhetoric of co-operation was shared and contested by working class co-operators and their middle-class advocates. The ex-Owenite Lloyd Jones and the Christian Socialist John Ludlow promoted co-operative production and co-partnership because they "create(s) new ties between man and man, suggest(s) new forms of fellowship, till there grows up a sort of family feeling..."⁷⁸ This moral rhetoric was profoundly gendered and reflected the gendered access to the movement. Until the formation of the Women's Guild, the "co-operator" was generally represented as a sober, industrious, rational, family man, even though it was women as consumers who largely sustained the prosperity of the movement.⁷⁹ As I discussed in the introduction, the

University of Sussex, 1989. The Christian Socialist, the Positivists and the Social Science Association played an important role in mediating between working class co-operators and liberal reformers. For discussions of these dialogues see T. Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism, 1848-1854*, Universitetsforlaget 1 Aarhus, 1962; P. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation in Victorian England*, Croom Helm, London, 1974; Sidney Pollard, "Nineteenth-Century Co-operation: From Community Building to Shopkeeping" and Royden Harrison, "Professor Beesly and the Working-Class Movement, both in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History*, Macmillan, London, 1960, pp. 74-112 and 205-241; Lawrence Goldman, "The Social Science Association, 1857-1886: A Context for Mid-Victorian Liberalism", *English Historical Review*, January 1986, pp. 95-134 and "A Peculiarity of the English? The Social Science Association and the Absence of Sociology in Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Past and Present*, no. 114, February 1987, pp. 133-171. My understanding of women's attachment to co-operative principles has been greatly helped by long discussions on the co-operative movement with Peter Gurney, for which I am very thankful.

⁷⁸J.M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress of the Working Classes, 1832-1867*, (1867), New York, 1973, pp. 142-3. Cited by Gurney, "The Middle-Class Embrace", p. 8.

⁷⁹For the history of women's participation in the co-operative movement see Margaret Llewlyn Davies, ed., *Life as We Have Known It, The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1883-1904*, Virago, London, 1977; Gillian Scott, "Working-Class Feminism? Margaret Llewelyn Davies and the Women's Co-operative Guild in the Late Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Centuries, in Eileen Yeo, ed. *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Social Movements*, forthcoming.

conciliatory politics of co-operation had been depicted in domestic, familial terms since the 1830s, allowing points of contact for Owenites and Chartists from different class backgrounds and for reformers who were hostile to the levelling tendencies of some forms of co-operation. I want to suggest that some of the female writers in the popular press played an important role in re-presenting to a mixed-class readership new models of co-operation that drew from political economists as well as Owenism and Fourierism. In "John Ashmore" Eliza Meteyard severed co-operation from its subversive past by incorporating it within a domestic fiction.

"John Ashmore of Birmingham" was serialised in *Eliza Cook's Journal* in 1849.⁸⁰ Meteyard later claimed the story was so popular that crowds gathered waiting for the latest instalment.⁸¹ The story traced the fortunes of John Ashmore, a pauper child, who through industrious labour, thrift and self-help, organised an "accumulative fund" to establish a joint-stock company based on co-operative production among the iron workers of Birmingham. According to Ashmore the accumulative fund provided a securer basis for reform than the model lodging houses, suburban villages or emigration schemes advocated by contemporary philanthropists. Moreover, this form of co-operation was to be a substitute for the "political panaceas" favoured by many working-class reformers:-

We shall be simply traders with our capital, not demagogues or revolutionists; our standing motto will be, *the improvement of the laws of property and accumulation - not their subversion.*⁸²

⁸⁰Eliza Meteyard, "John Ashmore of Birmingham", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, serialised from 18.8.1849, pp. 243-247; 265-9; 283-7; 297-302; 313-7.

⁸¹Meteyard, *The Nine Hours' Movement*, p. ix.

⁸²"John Ashmore", p. 297.

Revisiting Birmingham at ten-yearly intervals, Meteyard unfolded, with the meticulous detail of a social scientist, a blueprint for a liberal utopia of co-partnership. The 1879 episode included a balance sheet on the finances of the company and a breakdown of the 3000 investors according to age and deposit.⁸³ The principles of co-operation were extended to the provision of model lodging houses and educational and recreational provision for male and female workers, many supervised under the gaze of Ashmore's middle-class, philanthropic wife.⁸⁴ Plans were being laid for an International Senate House in London for the discussion of "the common objects" of commerce and industry, art, science and invention, which would advance the spirit of liberty among the people, rather than power being wielded by kings and ministers.⁸⁵

The location of Meteyard's story is significant, for as we have seen, Birmingham was a major centre of working-class-led Owenite co-operation in the 1830s and of James Morrison's *The Pioneer*. Meteyard's attachment to "communistic opinions" and "human equality" may have been influenced by such projects but *The Pioneer* promoted a very different vision of co-operation founded on a commitment to working-class autonomy. Its endorsement of trade unionism and strike action threatened Meteyard's model of

⁸³"John Ashmore", pp. 301 and 314.

⁸⁴"John Ashmore", pp. 268-9. See the review of James Buckingham Silk's *National Evils and Practical Remedies* in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, II, 12.1.1850, pp. 171-5 and 26.1.1850, pp. 203-6 for similar proposals for government-supported, profit-sharing joint stock companies, model lodging homes and temperance as an alternative to laissez-faire economics, Chartism and Communism. Middle-class reformers subsequently promoted associated homes to single men and women of the middle classes. See Harriet Martineau, *Eliza Cook's Journal*, IV, 14.12.1850, pp. 109-110; "Associated Homes for Poor Ladies"; and 11.1.1851, "Associated Homes", pp. 172-3. Mary Leman Gillies had also promoted "Associated Homes for the Middle Class", in *Howitt's Journal*, vol. 1, 15.5.1847, pp. 270-3.

⁸⁵"John Ashmore", p. 314.

harmonious industrial relations.⁸⁶ The co-operative principle was advocated as part of the strategy of exclusive dealing by the Birmingham Women's Political Union among others. Birmingham, as we have seen, had also been at the centre of debates between "moral" and "physical force" Chartists and working- and middle-class reformers. No doubt the Bull Ring Riots of 1839 epitomised for Meteyard the "political panaceas" and demagoguery that she warned against. "John Ashmore", written the year after the Kennington Common demonstration, was very much influenced by fears of revolution. But Birmingham had also been the birthplace of Lovett's New Move with which Meteyard was sympathetic.⁸⁷ Birmingham, moreover, employed a large number of women in domestic and workshop production, especially in the metal trades. The effects of women's work on family life was a central theme of "John Ashmore".⁸⁸

Meteyard aimed to make questions about forms of production the subject of domestic reading while also alerting political economists to the effects of women's work, poverty and improvident behaviour on the family. To this end, she fused the language of political and social science with the domestic narrative of the serial novel. Each episode began with a number of quotations from leading political economists on the division of labour, co-operative production and the relationship between capital and labour. These included Bentham's *Works*, W.J. Fox's *Lectures to the Working Classes*, Babbage's *Economy of Machinery* and Quetelet's *Theory of Probabilities*. The purpose

⁸⁶For the links between co-operation, unionism, moral regeneration and the equality of the sexes see especially the letters from James Morrison and "Concord" to the Operative Builders in the first four editions of *The Pioneer*, 7.9.1833, 14.9.1833, 21.9.1833 and 28.9.1833.

⁸⁷For Chartism in Birmingham see chapter three.

⁸⁸On women's work in the Birmingham metal trades see Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, Virago, London, 1981, pp. 270-81.

of quoting these "profound and great men", she informed her readers at the end of the story, was to convince them that the Joint-Stock principle applied to capital and labour was "no mere theory or speculation" of the author and that "the great facts, the nerves and sinews of this industrial tale are true".⁸⁹ Meteyard explained her use of these male political and economic scientists in terms of the need to validate her incursion, as a female writer, into political debate. However, by using political economy within a domestic narrative, Meteyard widened the scope and rhetoric of political economy itself.

Meteyard opened the series with a passage from John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* where Mill denounced the "theory of dependence" and argued that modern nations must allow the labouring classes independence and equality.⁹⁰ In designing her own blueprint for co-operation, Meteyard, like Mill, was attracted by Harriet Taylor's "theory of dependence" which, as suggested in the previous chapter, was one of Taylor's major contributions to Mill's *Political Economy*. The first episode of "John Ashmore", which focused on the working people of Birmingham, stressed the need of "our class", as Ashmore put it, to act for itself. Yet although the series was inspired by the co-operative experiments under way in Paris and London, Meteyard's liberal utopia depended primarily on the leadership of John Ashmore rather than collective action and responsibility.

⁸⁹*Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, p. 317. For contemporary discussions of Political Economy see Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy, 1815-1848*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980.

⁹⁰"John Ashmore", p. 243. The citation from Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* was from vol. II, p. 318. Meteyard was probably referring to the 2nd edition, 1849. See chapter five for a more detailed discussion of Mill's work.

Like many contemporary industrial tales by middle-class writers, "John Ashmore" explored social and political questions through the life history of the eponymous character. Joseph Kestner has argued that women fiction writers of the 1840s and 1850s were particularly concerned with the relationship of the entrepreneur to his workers, his family, and genteel and professional society.⁹¹ Meteyard seems to have been influenced by the autobiographical writing of working-class men, made available to a middle-class readership through the efforts of publishers and editors like the Howitts.⁹² Meteyard praised the poetry and co-operative activities of Gerald Massey, the tailor and poet of the early 1850s and probably knew of Massey at the time of writing "John Ashmore".⁹³ While contemporary working-class biographers and historians, especially in the radical

⁹¹Joseph Kestner has argued that the theme of "assimilation" was central to the social fiction by women in the 1840s and 1850s. Unfortunately he does not define what he means by assimilation but it seems to concern the adaptation of the working and entrepreneurial classes to an industrialising society and the question of class conciliation. The themes of social and romantic conciliation and the position of the entrepreneur were central to Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord*, 1842, Geraldine Jewsbury's *Marion Withers*, 1850/1, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, 1855, and Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax Gentleman*, 1856. Interestingly, Kestner argues that Julia Kavanagh, who as we have seen wrote for the popular journals, wrote one of the few novels based on the failure to assimilate, in *Rachel Gray*, 1856. See Kestner, *Protest and Reform*, especially on "The Eighteen Forties" and "The Eighteen Fifties", pp. 142-92.

⁹²The Howitts helped to publish David Love's *The Life of David Love*, Nottingham 1823. It is probable that Charles Kingsley had read "John Ashmore" before writing *Alton Locke* in 1850 which epitomises the fictionalisation of working-class autobiographies by middle-class novelists, for both Kingsley and Meteyard were associated with the working tailors' organisations in London. The best introduction to the links between working-class autobiography and organisation is David Vincent's *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography*, Methuen, London, 1981. For a comparison between nonworking-class writers' representations of the working classes and working-class autobiography and self-representation see Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, chapters 3 and 4, pp. 99-170.

⁹³See the review on "Gerald Massey", *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 12.4.1851, IV, pp. 372-5 and 29.3.1851, pp. 341-2 for his involvement with the Working Tailors' Association.

press, were concerned to show how individual progress was affected through collective action, Ashmore was the sole instigator and agent of Meteyard's co-operative future, thus aligning co-operation to an individualist ethics and politics.

Although Ashmore single-handedly organised the formation of a Joint-Stock Iron Company, the expansion of the full co-operative vision required the services of female love and care, a theme we have already detected in John Stuart Mill's writing. Like other industrial fictions, "John Ashmore" projected class conciliation through a family romance, in this case, through Ashmore's marriage to the daughter of his former benevolent employer. Ashmore solicits her to marry him and to complete his mission to raise his class:-

You will comprehend me, Juliet; you will help me to show kindness and not patronage to those we serve, to soften what is stern within my heart, and be gentle where my rude nature cannot; you love me, do you?⁹⁴

Mrs. Ashmore was given the task of completing her husband's paternalistic mission. She became the benefactor of a Young Women's Home, established by Ashmore for the Company's single women and a teacher at the company's school of design. On Ashmore's advice that social evils derived from working women's lack of household skills, the women were taught domestic economy and household management. One week in five they carried out domestic chores in the Young Men's and Young Women's Homes. The importance of domestic training was incorporated, as we have seen, into the plans for Industrial Associations of women in *The English Woman's Journal*. "John Ashmore" promoted co-operation as a means of enabling working men to support their wives at home. Twice a week the women received instruction in the 3 R's:- none being allowed to be thus far ignorant; but beyond this, there is no

⁹⁴"John Ashmore" p. 286.

vain attempt to make them accomplished, but rather serviceable in their probable future homes as the wives of mechanics. Few have ambition beyond this sound common sense point; but there are exceptions.⁹⁵

Musical and reading facilities and, most importantly, classes at the company's School of Design, were offered for these exceptional cases. The provision of professional and craft training for women was, as we have seen, one of Meteyard's major concerns.

Working women themselves were given no active role in Meteyard's plan for co-operation, beyond that of contributing passively to the accumulative fund. Like so many other philanthropists, Meteyard saw working women as dependents rather than equals.

Mrs. Ashmore spoke to the women:-

with no air of the Lady Bountiful, but just as a mother to children less instructed than herself... There is respect without familiarity.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the character of Mrs. Ashmore was also under-developed. Although the success of Meteyard's co-operative experiment was ostensibly predicated on the marriage of the artisan hero to the bourgeois wife, the story was more a romance between the middle-class writer and a male, working-class movement, embodied by John Ashmore. Describing the Ashmores' engagement as a sign of a new form of companionate marriage, Meteyard slipped into a discussion of the woman writer and her fictional romances:-

Yes! the time is coming, when the worship natural to the heart of woman will find its most magnificent purpose here, to soothe, to lessen, to counteract those little frailties by which so often genius mars its otherwise grand humanity. But then such masculine genius *must* educate its soul up to and beyond its point of time; education, as regards woman's love for man, is a more sovereign and alluring motive than a certain French writer,

⁹⁵"John Ashmore", p. 298. Find story on design school "Art in Spitalfields

⁹⁶"John Ashmore", p. 298.

who makes matches for her fictitious *mesdames les comtesses*, and *bourgeoisie* or *paysans*, would willingly admit.⁹⁷

This is very probably a reference to George Sand, who through her association with the French revolutionaries of 1848 and with sexual libertarianism, represented precisely the militant politics from which Meteyard hoped to disassociate herself.

At the close of her story Meteyard pledged her devoted services as a teacher to her working-class readers:-

I shall be well contented, if living to place maturer and more thoughtful work before you, some of the enthusiasm, which has burnt in my heart since I was a little child, serves to good purpose in your sacred cause of right, and order, and labour, and you give me the last of this character; "Here was one who served us and considered our interests, and this in a spirit of unselfish love."⁹⁸

"John Ashmore" marked the beginnings of a new round of joint activities between working-class co-operators and their middle-class supporters, especially under the auspices of the Christian Socialists. Among these were the working tailors' associations discussed in chapter five. *Eliza Cook's Journal* was subsequently to claim that the Working Tailors' Joint Stock Company, founded in 1851, of which Massey was the secretary, had been inspired by "John Ashmore"!⁹⁹ Yet there was no place in this romance between working-class activism and reform for working-class women.

⁹⁷"John Ashmore". p. 286.

⁹⁸*Eliza Cook's Journal*, I, p. 317.

⁹⁹*Eliza Cook's Journal*, IV, p. 341-2.

Conclusion

Just as working-class women were being pushed out of the political sphere the popular journals provided a forum for middle-class women writers and reformers. Writing became a key component of a new cultural politics through which these women advocated class and gender conciliation. While the journals also opened their columns to working-class male activists and writers they made no explicit attempts to include working-class women. One of the few exceptions was the teacher, radical and writer, Mary Smith, who published a couple of poems in *The People's and Howitt's Journal* in 1850 under the pseudonym "Mary Osborn".¹⁰⁰ Despite her interest in many of the social, political and cultural reforms promoted by the journals, Smith received little encouragement from middle-class writers and radicals. The following chapter examines her attempts to forge a new cultural and political practice and compares her struggles and aspirations with those of Marianne Farningham, another writer, teacher and working woman, who was prominent in the Baptist community.

¹⁰⁰Mary Osborne, "Look Up", and "Thoughts", *People's and Howitt's Journal*, II, 1850, pp. 165 and 304.

Chapter Seven

"I HAVE A PAST TO THINK OF, TOO...":

EDUCATION, WRITING AND IDENTITY

IN THE LIVES OF MARY SMITH AND MARIANNE FARNINGHAM

In 1876 William Lovett, cabinet-maker, teacher and Chartist, published his autobiography chronicling the *Life and Struggles of William Lovett In His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom With Some Account of the Different Associations He Belonged to and of the Opinions He Entertained*. Explaining his use of political addresses and records to recount his individual history, Lovett asserted that the personal and collective struggles for emancipation were part of the same history:-

I think that those who desire to know anything of me, would like to know what my opinions and sentiments were - (as well as great numbers who thought with me) - regarding the great questions of human right, social progress, and political reform; and these, in fact, constitute a great part of my own history.¹

Lovett wrote his autobiography as a contribution to the continuing struggle for the emancipation of the working classes and to establish a democratic historical record. He believed the "working classes of a future day" would need to know of earlier struggles for the political and social rights that they might then enjoy. He countered Tory and Whig misrepresentations of working-class life by seeking to document accurately the diversity of working-class culture and the efforts of working people to create new forms of social life.

¹William Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, vol. 1, (1876), G. Bell and Sons, London, 1920, p. xxx.

If working people failed to write their histories:-

the historians and writers of a future day will have only garbled tales to guide them - as those of past history have and hence a caricature is oftener given of the industrious millions than a truthful portrait.²

Historians have accepted Lovett's cue and used his autobiography as a key source for radical, Chartist and post-Chartist politics and of the relationship between radical and working-class culture. More recently, it has been an important text in the studies of nineteenth-century working-class representation and subjectivity, particularly with reference to working-class genres of autobiography and history.³

Julia Swindells has problematised the closeness of the fit that Lovett so confidently asserted between individual and collective experience, suggesting that autobiography produces as well as reflects consciousness:-

The individual neither constitutes nor is constituted by the social group, but is in tension with it, and autobiography the genre, and working-class autobiography in particular, displays and produces meaning from and through this tension.

The ability of the writer to represent the relationship between his or her own life and a wider social experience in ways that are meaningful to the reader(s) depends upon the

²Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, Preface, p. xxxi.

³See especially David Vincent's excellent study of predominantly male working class autobiography which borrows Lovett's title, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography*, Methuen, London, 1982. For a more recent study which attempts to locate working class autobiography within a wider discussion of forms of self-representation in the nineteenth century, see Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation, 1832-1920*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.

cultural capital of the author. For Swindells, this raises political issues about access to knowledge and written culture and "about what kinds of knowledge most easily legitimate themselves as experience". She argues that the relationship between experience and knowledge is inflected by relations of gender as well class.⁴

As an apprentice in the 1830s, Lovett found radical culture, especially the London Working Men's Association, receptive to his material and intellectual aspirations. It offered him a "language of class" that enabled him to articulate personal and collective emancipation as part of the same political project. By endowing him with political rights, this culture also empowered him to redefine and develop that political project. When radical movements in the 1830s and 1840s included women as part of the "industrious classes", it was, as previous chapters have argued, invariably through their duties as dependent wives and mothers, rather than through rights they shared with working-class men derived from their "property in labour". By the mid-century radical movements were increasingly impervious to the self-representation of working women. This chapter turns to the autobiographies of two working women to explore the consequences of this closure for the political identities of working women and to consider alternative cultural resources available to women to understand their relationship to the social world.

Mary Smith (1822-1889) and Marianne Farningham (1834-1909) shared a voracious

⁴ J. Swindells, "Working Women Autobiographers", *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, pp. 122-3.

thirst for knowledge with many radical men but their education was shaped as much by gendered ideologies and practices of knowledge and the sexual division of labour, as by class restrictions.⁵ In common with many radical men, they devised a role of public usefulness for themselves as teachers and writers. Their work took them into the world of philanthropy and reform, and for Mary Smith, into women's suffrage. Although limited, the social advancement of Smith and Farningham, distanced them geographically and socially from the communities into which they were born and especially from other working women. Their experience contrasts starkly with that of men who found employment within radical culture as journalists, lecturers and teachers, who, as Richard Johnson claims, maintained a close relationship with their class.⁶

Since Smith's and Farningham's class and social position cannot be embraced by any single definition, I shall explore how they constructed their own identities through their education, work, religious and cultural practice. Smith and Farningham found several routes to identity but these journeys took them in many directions and were never completed. Identity will be explored as a process that is fluid, problematic and only partially achieved. - Nevertheless, in writing their autobiographies in their closing years, Smith and Farningham attempted to give coherence and social relevance to their fragmented lives. They attributed

⁵Mary Smith, *The Autobiography of Mary Smith, Schoolmistress and Nonconformist. A Fragment of a Life. With Letters from Jane Welsh Carlyle and Thomas Carlyle*, Bemrose and Sons, London and The Wordsworth Press, Carlisle, 1892; and Marianne Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life: An Autobiography*, James Clarke and Co, London, 1907.

⁶Johnson, "'Really useful knowledge'", p. 95.

meaning to their lives by recalling their struggles as working women for learning and for labour and in the improvements that had been made in women's position. These were very different lives and struggles from those of William Lovett.

Part One: "A Child's Education Begins Early...: Childhood, Education and Identity

Carolyn Steedman has criticised working-class autobiography and people's history for concentrating on the development of class-consciousness at the workplace and ignoring other experiences and places where class is learned. She contends that:-

as forms of analysis and writing, people's history and working class autobiography are relatively innocent of psychological theory, and there has been little space within them to discuss the *development* of class-consciousness (as opposed to its expression) nor for understanding it as a *learned* position, learned in childhood, and often through the exigencies of difficult and lonely lives.⁷

Steedman argues that childhood conceptions of class may prefigure an adult consciousness of class. In its emphasis on exclusion, political radicalism might address the psychic development of children, the experience of loss and desire, in ways that other languages of class, particularly marxism and labourism, have failed to do. She proposes that:-

to deal with the felt injuries of a social system through the experience of women and girls suggests that beneath the voices of class-consciousness may perhaps lie another language, that might be heard to express the feelings of those outside the gate, the propertyless and the dispossessed.⁸

⁷Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, Virago, London 1986, p. 13.

⁸Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p. 114 and pp. 114-121 for her discussion of political radicalism. The relationship between child and adult consciousness is a recurrent

Political radicalism provided Mary Smith with an analysis of injustice and inequality, and Marianne Farningham subscribed to some of its tenets, but it was unable to account for all their experience. Their radicalism had many different roots and was, in part, of their own making, as we shall begin to explore through their recollections of their childhood.

Mary Smith opened her autobiography by locating her social origins:-

I was born in an English nonconformist household, of simple country habits, of the order of the common people, without any pretension whatever to wealth or rank, at Cropedy, a village in the north of Oxfordshire, on February 7th, 1822.⁹

Although relatively comfortable, her family's position was precarious like that of many of the middling to lower sorts. From small trading and farming families, Smith's father was a shoemaker while her mother ensured the prosperity of the household by running a grocer's shop which made £50 a year. Her mother's death with the loss of her "superior business skill" initiated "long years of trouble" and the family never regained their former prosperity. They moved eventually to "a comfortable residence, with a large garden and orchard, and two or three cottages attached" but life was still "an honourable struggle with poverty".¹⁰

Smith's identification with "the common people" derived as much from dissent and

theme in Steedman's work. See her collected essays, *Past Tenses: Essays in Writing Autobiography and History*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1992.

⁹Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 1.

¹⁰Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 4-5 and 21.

the history of the Commonwealth as her membership of a small trading family. Her father converted to the Independents, one of the oldest nonconformist sects, when she was a small child and as she recalled, "old things passed away, and all things became new."¹¹ She mapped out the village by contours of wealth, poverty and religion, comparing the privilege and property, describing the "great style and state" of the vicarage, enclosed by high walls and trees and surrounded by the farmers' and tradesmens' houses. Beyond these "the labouring population lived in poor tumble-down thatched cottages, with dunghills in front of them, at the back of all."¹²

Dissent provided her with a language of religious and social dissidence. Her earliest acts of rebellion were against the vicar, the symbol of Anglican privilege and exclusive power. She recalled the vicar's attempts to convince her father to have his children baptised:-

My poor father looked tired and put out on these occasions; but I as a child witnessing such haughtiness and passion on the part of a minister of religion, felt all my young spirit in revolt against a church, whose minister came to the people in the name of pride and passion and custom, rather than in the spirit of Christ; striving as a pope to overbear and overawe, rather than as a christian minister to instruct and enlighten.¹³

While non-conformity identified Smith's family with the common people and the powerless, it also set them apart. They were persecuted as the "Meetings" or "Dissenters"

¹¹Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 5-6.

¹²Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 2.

¹³Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 48.

and regarded as "queer folk". She and her father were taunted on the streets by "the wickedest and worst of the young men and boys of the parish". By contrast with these men, her father was "at all times, a sober, sensible, gentle and patient man..." and she learned quickly that "my father was not like other men".¹⁴ His sensitivity and thoughtfulness provided Smith with a model of respectable, rational masculinity that would play an important part in her attempts to reform gender relations in Carlisle.

As a child, however, Smith was unable to adopt the forbearing patience of her father. She recalled with relish her defiance of Anglican ladies who visited her school, in comparison with the subservience of other village children:-

I was looked upon as an alien. They never condescended to speak to me whenever they came; and I on my part was, I fear, too reserved in the matter of behaviour, taking a delight in omitting the profound curtsies which the village children never dared to miss giving, when any of the vicar's family came into the school, or appeared anywhere in the street. I did not learn this from my father, who ever spoke in the most respectful and conciliating manner to any of them.¹⁵

If Smith did not learn such rebellious behaviour from her father, where did it come from? The answer may lie partly in her different experience from her father and her anger with the inequalities and deprivations she suffered as a girl.

Unlike many working-class girls, Smith's education was encouraged by her father. From the age of two she listened to her father's workmen discussing "abstruse matters of

¹⁴Smith, *Autobiography*, p.6-7.

¹⁵Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 25-6.

theology" and doctrine, or their opinions of popular preachers.¹⁶ In his workshop she "soon learned the difference between men and men." Later, she discussed her school work with her father, holding a candle over him while he cut the leather and he in return was "full of instruction...speaking to me rather as a woman than as a girl; quite aware of all my odd ways."¹⁷ Her father provided her with an education in non-conformity and she accompanied him to chapel and missionary meetings, public breakfasts and soirées. Her first encounter with emancipatory politics may have been when she heard the "great missionary" William Knibb speak on the freeing of the slaves in Jamaica.¹⁸

Smith extended the scant literary resources available to her by borrowing the villagers' tattered books and listening to their stories. By contrast with the hostility of many dissenters towards Catholics, she relished the legends of monks, nuns and abbots told to her by an old Catholic woman as she made up pasteboard bonnets.¹⁹ Smith maintained this eclecticism and open-mindedness throughout her life.

While Smith was initiated into a lifetime's interest in doctrinal debate in her father's

¹⁶Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁷Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 15 and 41.

¹⁸Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 42. For Knibbs' missionary and anti-slavery work see Catherine Hall, "White Visions, Black Lives: The Free Villages of Jamaica", *History Workshop Journal*, no. 36, 1993, pp. 100-132.

¹⁹Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 34. Smith later put one of the woman's sayings into verse, indicating her respect for popular wisdom.

workshop, she derived another education from the female work space. Against her father's wishes, she listened to the washerwoman's popular songs like "The Gallant Hussar" and "Sweet Jenny Jones":-

she was one of my early teachers in the matter of verse, which, whether in hymn or song, from early childhood always fascinated me.²⁰

Her father's interdiction may have indicated to Smith the unequal status of male and female knowledge. This early defiance of paternal authority was repeated when she attended the Chartist Henry Vincent's election speech at Banbury despite her father's disapproval of radical politics:-

Happening to be with a cousin of mine - in spite of her remonstrances - I would stop and hear him answer George Harris, on the steps of the "Flying Horse" yard, although I dare not tell my father. Vincent was a Chartist, which at the time was a name of terror to many people.²¹

Like many working-class children growing up before local authorities were compelled to enforce compulsory school attendance in 1880, Mary Smith's formal education was fragmented and haphazard, dependent on the availability and frequent ephemerality of educational provision. Although Smith attended dame schools at the age of four and seven and a "higher grade school" when she was nine or ten, she did not specify whether this schooling was continuous, nor when her formal education ended. The absence of such detail from Smith's narrative reflects the lack of significance she attributed to her formal schooling in the acquisition of her real education. She believed:-

²⁰Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 24.

²¹Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 148.

A child's education begins early. We might say with its first breath, but certainly long before it goes to school.²²

Smith's formal education played, nevertheless, an important part in confirming her class and gender identity. She remembered her dame teachers as ancient and infirm gothic figures from whom she learnt "nothing or next to nothing".²³ At eight years she graduated to a "higher grade school...of some pretensions" which catered for farmers' and trademen's daughters from the surrounding villages. The "lady-like" mistresses ran a "very good school; thoroughness being the aim in the few things that were professed to be taught". Her father supported Mary's scholarly ambitions and she was given individual lessons in long division and compound addition which was "quite as much as it was thought necessary then for girls to know." Smith recalled bitterly the time wasted on needlework and particularly on one piece of canvas work:-

What long months I worked at it - and how I hated it - but it was all in vain!
For long years Englishwomen's souls were almost as sorely crippled and cramped by the devices of the school room, as the Chinese women's feet by their shoes... I never remember to have been praised for any work I did,

²²Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 14.

²³Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 15-17 and pp. 24-6 for her dame schooling. Although Smith's early education may have been very poor, her recollections may have been coloured by the derogatory propaganda against working-class private schools promoted by Victorian advocates of a national, state-run system of education. In his study of the lost elementary schools that were labelled disparagingly as "dame schools" by educational reformers, Philip Gardner has suggested that private education was often academically superior to that offered by the British and National schools and that teachers were often valued and respected by their fellow working-class clients. See Gardner's fascinating study, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England: The People's Education*, Croom Helm, London, 1984.

though I did a great deal.²⁴

Smith's frustrated intellectual ambitions brought her in adult life to an understanding of the systematic oppression of all women. But her resentment for her limited education also confirmed her sense of difference from other girls and women. She remembered having few friends and while her school mates played, she reread the class books. The fault of her schooling lay in its refusal to recognise her individuality: "we all travelled through one groove, however our tastes might be."²⁵ Although reading was an individualising experience it linked her to a wider humanity. *The Pleasing Instructor*, with poetry by Addison, Steele, Dryden and Pope, made her feel "that my pondering heart was akin to that of the whole human race".²⁶ Throughout her life, Smith used the pursuit of learning to mark her uniqueness and difference, especially from other women, and to understand and identify with the experience of others.

In common with other working-class girls whose formal education was interrupted so they could support the family through paid or domestic work, Mary's formal schooling

²⁴Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 30-1. For discussions of gender and the curriculum in the nineteenth century, see June Purvis, *Hard Lessons* and *A History of Women's Education in England*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1991; A. Digby and P. Searby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth Century England*, Croom Helm, London, 1978; Felicity Hunt, ed., *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850-1950*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987; and Meg Gomersall, "Ideas and Realities: The Education of Working Class Girls, 1800-1850", *History of Education*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1988, pp. 37-53.

²⁵Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 32.

²⁶Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 33.

ended abruptly when her father's business began to fail and she was required to run the shop and home.²⁷ Work initiated her into the adult world and the sharing of family troubles: "My woman's life in reality commenced from then". She asserted and validated herself by insisting on the virtue of useful work, especially necessary for some one who daydreamed of intellectual and social escape. Nonetheless, she could neither reconcile, nor express the contradictions between desire and duty:-

This work was good for me. I felt that I was useful and helpful; too much engaged for harbouring idle thoughts or vain dreams, yet still cherishing aspirations after something beyond the limits of my power of definition, or the depth of my dreams. But this did not make me unhappy. It kept me silent, reserved, shy, and without any desire for intimacies with thoughtless, gay girls.²⁸

Marianne Farningham began writing her autobiography of "A Working Woman's Life" in March 1900. When many people were reflecting on their lives in response to a new century and the death of Victoria, Farningham insisted on the validity and significance of the memories of ordinary lives:-

I have a past to think of, too, and though there is nothing very remarkable to make it worth the telling, every life is interesting, and perhaps I may have a few friends in different parts of the country who will care to read the simple story of a worker's life.²⁹

She was born Marianne Hearne in the village of Farningham, Kent, December 17th. 1834 into a working family. Like Smith, her father was a shoemaker who never owned any land.

²⁷For a detailed discussion of the effects of domestic work on working-class girls' education see, Meg Gomersall, "Ideals and Realities", pp. 37-53.

²⁸Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 50-2.

²⁹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 11.

Her mother was the daughter of "a working paper maker" and "preacher of great force and originality". Farningham did not mention whether her mother contributed to the family business but its fortunes deteriorated following her death. Her childhood, like Smith's, ended abruptly with her mother's death. She took over the housework and, as her father frequently commented, "never had a girlhood but grew at once from a child into a woman." She assisted her father as village postmaster by sorting envelopes and bound shoes for him to pay for her board, lodging and schooling.³⁰

Farningham defined herself as a "working woman" not only through her membership of a working family and her profession as a self-supporting teacher and writer, but also as a worker for Christ. This lifetime's work was identified in the foreword:-

through all my working years my favourite was, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me."

While Smith identified herself with the "common people" of Dissent, Farningham deployed the more evangelistic notion of the Christian worker. Her family belonged, however, to the strict Calvinist Particular Baptist Church which had been founded in Eynsford in 1775 and her autobiography recorded her transition from Calvinist to evangelical Baptism. Initially, the congregation faced persecution and Marianne's grandmother had been stoned and seriously injured by a mob after being baptised in the river.³¹ Marianne recalled no discrimination herself. Her recollections of childhood are not marked by the sense of

³⁰Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 43, 46 and 50.

³¹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 15 and 33.

exclusion and opposition of Smith, who was the daughter of a first generation dissenter. By the 1830s, the Baptists in Eynsford were perhaps more established and integrated into village life.

Marianne's education was strongly nonconformist. She was unable to attend the National School on sectarian grounds and so until a British and Foreign School was built in the village when she was nine or ten years old, she had no formal schooling. Like Smith, she learned her social position partly through her education. Her family could not afford the "young ladies' boarding establishment, to which... I turned my eyes longingly".³² She was taught to read from the Bible by the age of six by her grandmother who wrote poetry and whose "prayers always seemed to take me into heaven". Farningham's grandmother and her sister "were both strong, sweet women of considerable culture and striking mental powers, both women of unflinching principles and strong convictions."³³ She recalled how the family was ruled by the father under the axiom of "Spare the rod and spoil the child". However:-

we got better than most, because our mother was our minister, and the lessons we had on Sunday evenings were those of love".³⁴

Marianne's desire to write and her ministering and teaching vocation were probably inspired by the spiritual influence of the women of her family.

³²Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 17.

³³Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 13 and 15.

³⁴Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 34. She was taught by her parents, mainly her mother, who read to them from the Bible - "children's library", Jane Taylor's "Moral Songs" and nursery rhymes although never fairy tales. See p. 20.

Farningham found her "ignorance... a constant burden" and strove hard to overcome it. She was taught to write by the minister's daughter after pleading with her parents for lessons. Farningham even set fire to her room when reading by candlelight in "my desperate pursuit of knowledge".³⁵ She strongly approved the introduction of compulsory schooling, for despite her endeavours she had found it "exceedingly difficult to follow the various pursuits of my life without any learning worth the name."³⁶ Although her parents were not unsympathetic to her intellectual ambitions, they prioritised spiritual and domestic training over academic pursuits. Her mother reproved her daydreaming:-

Dear mother! she did not like my always having a book in my hand or pocket, and would have been better pleased if I had been equally fond of the brush, or the needle; but she did her best to keep me at work all day, only letting me have books and magazines when my tasks were done. She took care, however, to give us all a very good time. She loved to see us play and to play with us.³⁷

Her father discouraged her desire to learn geography thinking such knowledge would be of little use to her and responded to her lessons at the British and Foreign school by repeating "I do not think you are learning anything whatever, only they are managing to make you intelligent". While Marianne saw this as "the best way of educating me", intelligence was seldom prized in working-class girls in the 1830s and 1840s.³⁸

Farningham's reading derived mostly from religious periodicals and she was able

³⁵Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 46, 23 and 48.

³⁶Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 46.

³⁷Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 22-3.

³⁸Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 28.

to base much of her own magazine and tract writing on this familiarity with devotional literature. Like many Victorian female writers she was influenced by the evangelical poet Felicia Hemans whose poem "The Better Land" transported her "into a wonderful world of vivid imagination and unutterable joy".³⁹ Although Heman's poetry validated the domestic influence of women which would become a central theme in Farningham's work, many other religious writers ignored the experience and fantasy of girls. She recalled her frustration with the Sunday School Union monthly magazines, *The Teacher's Offering* and *The Child's Companion*:-

In one of these was a series of descriptive articles on men who had been poor boys, and risen to be rich and great. Every month I hoped to find the story of some poor ignorant *girl*, who, beginning life as handicapped as I, had yet been able by her own efforts and the blessing of God upon them to live a life of usefulness, if not of greatness. But I believe there was not a woman in the whole series. I was very bitter and naughty at that time. I did not pray, and was not anxious to be good.⁴⁰

She was rescued from this fury by the love of her teacher at the British and Foreign school and at Sunday School. Her teacher took her hand one Sunday when "my head was throbbing and my heart was burning with indignation and anger... My first impulse was to draw it back, for I was in antagonism with the whole world, but there was a look of infinite compassion in her eyes that drew me to her."⁴¹ Another Sunday School teacher, Mary

³⁹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 21. For a discussion of Heman's influence on an earlier generation of women writers see Norma Clarke, *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love - The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans and Jane Carlyle*, Routledge, London, 1990.

⁴⁰Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 44.

⁴¹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 44-5.

Thorpe, who was a "refined Christian gentlewomen" although she worked in a paper-mill, was an important influence on Marianne, enabling her to become the first member of her Church to be baptised as early as fourteen or fifteen years old.⁴² These two women offered Marianne examples of a "life of usefulness" for which she craved. Ministering Christ's love, as a teacher and a writer, provided her with an authoritative vocation as an alternative to motherhood and household drudgery.

While radicals continued to make their own education in the second half of the nineteenth century, they increasingly sought an extension and democratisation of state educational provision.⁴³ As teachers, Smith and Farningham were to devise an alternative pedagogy as a critical response to the inadequacies of their own education and both advocated progressive educational reforms. Their teaching practice led Smith into the suffrage movement and Farningham into local government.

Part Two: "A Woman can be a Lady without Money"

The defining feature of the working lives of Mary Smith and Marianne Farningham was that they were unmarried, single women. Their careers began in the late 1840s and early 1850s just as the problem of the "redundant" single woman of the middle classes was

⁴²Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 50.

⁴³Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790-1848", pp. 76-77.

beginning to exercise the public imagination.⁴⁴ Signifying, like the distressed needlewoman, the problems of women's social and economic independence and vulnerability, the woman teacher and especially the governess also embodied anxieties about women's intellectual capacity. Smith and Farningham identified their work with reforms proposed by progressive educationalists and women's rights advocates for the professionalisation of teaching and improvements in female education. Nevertheless, in validating teaching as an alternative to marriage they had to vie, in both their work and autobiographies, with misogynist claims that female education and pedagogy were debilitating and defeminising.

Diminutive and marked by smallpox, Marianne Farningham was brought up to believe herself destined for spinsterhood. Her father singled her out for special prayers "because I was so much more plain-looking and uninteresting than my brothers and sisters, and that my future prospect was a gloomy one,..."⁴⁵ She was engaged for a while when first teaching in Northampton but "I was made to know that the sheltered life of a married woman was not God's will concerning me." Reconciled to "His decision", she "soon began to learn something of the law of compensation", and found love and companionship among fellow teachers, pupils and co-religionists.⁴⁶

⁴⁴On the question of "redundancy" see esp. Martha Vicinus, "The Revolt against Redundancy" in *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*, Virago, London, 1985, pp. 10-45.

⁴⁵Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 34.

⁴⁶Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 92-3.

If in turning to writing and teaching Marianne Farningham made a virtue out of necessity, Mary Smith decided early in life that marriage would conflict with her desire for autonomy, intellectual pursuits and the freedom to write. She was anxious to counter prevailing representations of women educationalists and writers as "redundant women" by insisting that she had chosen to live as a spinster, recording her rejection of four proposals of marriage.

Her first romantic experience was at the age of seventeen when she was managing her father's shop yet she found:-

even here I was hardly like the rest. I objected then, as all my life long, to women lowering themselves to coarse jesting, loud laughing, and especially to the objectionable rudeness of village youths and maidens... I thought then, as I have taught ever since, that a woman can be a lady without money, and that parents and teachers should prompt her to be this truly in the interest of morality and virtue.⁴⁷

In her teaching and politics, Smith promoted a model of respectable femininity based on female economic independence, to prove the case that a woman could indeed be "a lady without money". This model rested, however, on an assumption of chastity and a repudiation of popular sexual behaviour and especially female sexual pleasure that was shared by many Victorian advocates of women's rights.⁴⁸ Yet despite this disavowal of

⁴⁷Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 56.

⁴⁸The unease of women's rights exponents with the idea of sexual pleasure has been discussed most fully in relation to the sexuality debates of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See for example, Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992 and her chapter on the Men and Women's Club in *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Virago, London, 1992, pp. 135-171; and Sheila Jeffreys, *The*

sexuality, Smith felt compelled to reassure her readers that she was single by choice and that she had been a desirable woman. This inconsistency indicates her internalisation of competing and contradictory ideologies of female sexuality, respectability and work.⁴⁹

Although harbouring no regrets, Smith found the life of the single woman harder than she had anticipated:-

I had higher visions than matrimony; literature, poetry, and religion gleamed fair before me. Had I been a young man, how gladly should I have gone into the Nonconformist ministry, and should probably have accepted. But as a woman I had to struggle with all sorts of difficulties, hardships, and insults; being in the world, but not of it, nor aspiring after any of its flimsy gewjaws.⁵⁰

Smith saw preaching as an appropriate channel for imagination and intellect and was frustrated that these talents were scorned in women yet revered in men. The female ministry had provided a public role for some women in the generation preceding Smith and Farningham, as Deborah Valenze has shown in her study of popular Methodist and nonconformist preachers like Mary Porteus and George Eliot's aunt, Elizabeth Evans. Valenze suggests that by the 1850's female popular preaching had all but died out.⁵¹ However, Smith encountered a female ministry in Cumbria in the early 1840's and 1850's.

Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930, Pandora Press, London, 1985.

⁴⁹For example see Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 101-4.

⁵⁰Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 196-7. See also p. 57.

⁵¹Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Surrey, 1985 and "Cottage Religion and the Politics of Survival", in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 31-56.

At the village of Brough in 1848, the Baptists believed that women as well as men should "use their gifts" and lead oral prayer. After initial timidity Mary Smith was frequently called to speak and she attributed her later ability to give public lectures to these prayer meetings. On one occasion at least she went to hear a woman preach at the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Brough.⁵² Teaching offered Smith and Farningham an alternative vehicle for their intellectual and pastoral interests.

Teaching attracted women from different class backgrounds. Philip Gardner has shown that many private schools were run by working-class men and women, often those who through debility or old age were unable to continue in manual labour.⁵³ The implementation of a government funded pupil-teacher training system in 1846 and further initiatives in elementary teacher training began the slow move towards the professionalisation of teaching at the time that Smith and Farningham were embarking on their careers. Frances Widdowson suggests that teaching offered some upper-working-class and lower-middle-class women upward mobility enabling them to "go up to the next class".⁵⁴ But, as Swindells has noted, teaching marked a loss of "caste" for many genteel women and Smith, in common with other elementary teachers and governesses, was rarely accepted as an equal by genteel, polite society.⁵⁵ Moreover, as Steedman has argued, the

⁵²Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 92 and 101.

⁵³Gardner, *Lost Elementary Schools*, chapter four.

⁵⁴Frances Widdowson, *Going up into the Next Class: Women and Elementary Teacher Training, 1840-1914*, Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, London, 1980.

⁵⁵For this point, see Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, p. 127.

female teacher, usually worked alone. If she did not run her own school, she invariably performed the lower status teaching of infants and was subservient to male teachers and management. Women teachers were liminal figures, occupying an uneasy position between classes and denied the support offered other workers by professional, craft, union or community networks.⁵⁶

Teaching frequently resembled service rather than the "congenial labour" that Smith sought, and indeed, her identification as a schoolmistress concealed a range of occupations from companion, to housekeeper, to governess and often an amalgam of them all.⁵⁷ She left home aged twenty in 1842 to travel as the companion of her Baptist preacher, the Rev. Osborn and his wife to his new ministry in Brough, a lead-mining town in Westmorland.⁵⁸ This marked the beginning of a difficult and fractious relationship. The Osborns failed to pay Smith her full wages or to return money she lent them yet she returned periodically to their employment out of grudging loyalty.⁵⁹

Smith was asked by the church members to establish a girls' school and accepted

⁵⁶Carolyn Steedman, *The Tidy House: Little Girls' Writing*, Virago, London, 1982; *Childhood Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931*, Virago, London, 1990; "Prisonhouses" in *Past Tenses: Essays in Writing, Autobiography and History*, Rivers Oram, London, 1992, pp. 51-62.

⁵⁷Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 122. Swindells finds that women autobiographers frequently compressed the variety of their occupations under one occupation. See, *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, p. 174.

⁵⁸Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 72.

⁵⁹Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 112.

reluctantly because the girls had been deprived of a mistress for so long. However she warmed to her pupils.-

Blithe, sonsie lasses they were for the most part, willing and obedient, and rendering me an amount of respect which I seemed almost ashamed to take.

Her feelings about work were dominated by a sense of duty rather than her rights as a worker. She had taken on the job out of a concern for the girls' welfare and due to the poverty of the community felt obliged by conscience to charge only the lowest rates. She was therefore "often reduced to the most straitened circumstances."⁶⁰

After working as an unpaid housekeeper for the Osborns in Carlisle, Smith became a governess for the Suttons, a Quaker family who owned a leather works at Scotby, a small village outside Carlisle. Like many governesses, her status was closer to that of servant and she spent most of her time minding babies and mending children's clothes. She prudently concealed her knowledge and her experience as a teacher from Mrs. Sutton. Although they frequently discussed Quaker history, Smith made sure that she did not exceed her inferior status as a lower class woman:-

I was first of all careful and anxious to perform the duties of my situation, with care and exactness, and in a proper spirit. I was *shrewd enough to know* (as every young person should know), that whatever incidents of knowledge of reading I might display, would rather tell against than for me. In a word, I knew my conduct would be the final test of my doings there, and my endeavour as a sensible woman was to live as unrepachable as possible.⁶¹

⁶⁰Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 97-8.

⁶¹Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 128.

Smith returned to the Rev. Osborn when his grant was withdrawn by the Baptists because of his heterodox views. They opened a school in Carlisle, Smith managing the girls' school and evening classes. The school attracted the well-to-do of the city and Smith frequently took charge of the whole school. Osborn was jealous and critical of her teaching ability and her intelligence. After a year he let her go without paying her £15 salary, only to repeat the episode in 1851. Smith's disgruntled loyalty to the Osborns reveals much about the limited opportunities open to self-supporting women and the difficulties in contesting exploitative relationships but it is also suggestive of Smith's subjectivity. She constructed her self around being needed and yet being other-worldly:-

A less shy and timorous person would have contrived at once to "better herself." Alas for me! I thought little in those days either of money or the ordinary affairs of the world... I toiled on, perceiving that the prosperity of the school could not possibly last long, unless more arduous and methodical methods were adopted.⁶²

Her refusal to dwell on the practicalities of money was perhaps related to her belief that a woman could be a lady without money: to complain about money in public or in private would be incompatible with her ideal of female respectability.

In response to the inadequacies of her own schooling Smith offered her pupils an intellectually rigorous and stimulating education. She endeavoured to impress on parents and pupils:-

that a young woman without an education had been sadly wronged and injured, but that with it she had opportunities of rising higher than by other

⁶²Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 187-8.

means.⁶³

Like many male radicals, Smith's faith in the beneficent and improving power of education was not diminished by her chequered career and frequently precarious living. She insisted on the importance of children learning to understand as well as to read and the necessity of enthusiasm and praise from the teacher: "Approach them the right way, children like to learn, though you may have failed to learn what."⁶⁴ She earned a reputation as "one who took much pains with dunces and the neglected..." and her pupils were struck by her "lack of tuitional hauteur".⁶⁵

As many female practitioners of "child-centred" teaching methods, Mary Smith modelled herself on the good mother, turning the natural world around the children into a learning environment. She sought to give her pupils, and through them their parents, an education that combined rational, scientific and moral training by teaching them "about animal and plant life, or why we should have the windows open and our skins quite clean."⁶⁶ Although Smith identified this as a new method, she was probably influenced by the rationalist debates about education from the preceding century. The acquisition of a moral sensibility through the investigation and understanding of the physical world derived much from the associationist theory of developmental learning advocated by the

⁶³Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 210.

⁶⁴Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 220-1.

⁶⁵Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 210.

⁶⁶Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 210.

rational philosopher David Hartley. Ruth Symes has suggested that many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century female educational writers applied associationist theory to new models of the pedagogical mother and the mothering teacher.⁶⁷

Smith's location of morality in science and nature as much as religious doctrine drew more from rational than evangelical theories of learning, and also reflected her reading of transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson:-

The old methods were never altogether mine. I believed with deep reverence in the Bible of Nature, as well as that of Moses and the Prophets.⁶⁸

Smith's "child-centred" pedagogy was also similar to those of other working class autodidacts, scientists and educators who stimulated their students through observation, activity, and experimentation.

Smith's commitment finally began to reap rewards. The school she established in Dacre Street for poorer children so as not to compete with Osborn, was so successful that she moved to larger premises in West Tower Street and then Finkle Street where she attracted wealthier farmers' daughters.⁶⁹ Teaching, however, was only a secondary interest: a means of enabling her first desire to be a writer. Tragically, her commitment to education

⁶⁷Ruth Symes, "Educating Women: 1780-1820", D.Phil. thesis in progress, University of York.

⁶⁸Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 220-1.

⁶⁹She was able to save gradually and despite losing £300 when the City of Glasgow Bank broke was able to leave legacies to three religious institutions. She retired from teaching in her sixties'. See *Autobiography*, p. 305.

and work proved the greatest obstacle to her literary ambition. She composed much of her poetry while engaged in housework and had to guard against her "passion" interfering with "the duties of my station, and the moral responsibilities connected therewith."⁷⁰

Radical culture enabled some working class autodidacts to bring together personal, pedagogic, political and literary aspirations. Lovett integrated the reading system he invented into his plans for a national system of secular schools, while Thomas Cooper turned his Shakespearean classes into a Chartist society.⁷¹ Their intellectual aspirations were constrained but not destroyed by either material deprivation or imprisonment. Unlike her male counterparts, Smith was unable to reconcile work with her literary ambition and consequently felt divided against herself and forced to be her own gaoler:-

Poetry indeed was through all the hard periods of my life, my joy and strength, the uplifter of my soul in trouble. Now it was that every prospect of a literary career - always the cherished ideal of my soul - seemed forever blocked out of my prospects and hopes. I, who would cheerfully have gone ragged and barefoot to have had the meanest place in the temple of lofty learning, was now, by my very success as a teacher, and with my own hand, bolting the door on my own soul.⁷²

Although initially Marianne Farningham was compelled to work as a teacher out of necessity rather than choice, in accepting providential will and throwing herself into

⁷⁰Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 140, 142 and 288.

⁷¹William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organisation of the People*, 1840, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1969. See chapter 3 for a discussion of Lovett's educational politics. For Cooper and the Chartist Shakespearians see his *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, (1872), Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1971.

⁷²Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 242.

evangelical Baptist culture, she pursued a much more successful career than Smith and was able to combine her passion for teaching and writing. While Smith was rarely accepted as an equal by nonconformist reformers and radicals in Carlisle, Farningham derived support from fellow believers, female friends, especially other teachers, and from her students.

In 1852 Marianne Farningham was appointed as an assistant school mistress at Durdham Down School in Bristol which was managed mostly by the Society of Friends and where her former teacher at the British school in Eynsford was the mistress. She found town life "a wonderful education", making friends among the Baptists, Quakers and teachers of Bristol. Among the "sacred aristocracy of Nonconformists" she was introduced to leading missionaries, philanthropists and reformers including Mary Carpenter and Clara Lucas Balfour.⁷³ Such women presented a different model of female ministry based on public "rescue" work to that of women's spiritual influence in the congregation, Sunday School and home that Farningham had experienced at Eynsford.

Returning to Eynsford to nurse her consumptive sister, Farningham's social life revolved around the chapel and she was persuaded by the girls to teach the Bible Class. She was anxious about her lack of knowledge but, as in all her teaching was prepared to learn from her students:-

We were a class without a teacher, but everyone contributed something, and whether or not we learned much, we carried away from that corner pew

⁷³Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 62-5. For Mary Carpenter see Jo Manton, *Mary Carpenter and the Children of the Streets*, London, 1976. As a prominent temperance lecturer, Clara Lucas Balfour moved in different reforming circles and had connections with radicals interested in rational recreation. She lectured at the Whittington Club and the Working Men's College referred to in the previous chapters on famous women as well as temperance. For examples of her work see Clara Lucas Balfour, *Women and the Temperance Reformation*, London, 1849 and *Working Women of the Last Half Century: The Lesson of their Lives*, London, 1854.

many happy memories.⁷⁴

She was encouraged to read more widely by her minister, Mr. Whittemore, who lent her copies of *Jane Eyre* and Shakespeare, to the disapproval of members of the congregation.⁷⁵

Whittemore, a temperance leader who was involved in the London nonconformist literary scene, persuaded her to publish hymns and stories in the nonconformist press. Farningham became a regular contributor to Whittemore's periodical *The Christian World* established in 1857 as:-

a cheap family newspaper conducted on pure principles, and pervaded by a Catholic spirit...In politics it would advocate Reform, Retrenchment, and Peace. It would be the friend of Progress, but the foe of Revolution. In Religion it would be decidedly evangelical, but wholly unsectarian.

She was loathe to publish her verses, at first believing publication to be presumptuous for "only a poor village girl". She probably owed her exposure as a religious writer to Whittemore who persuaded her to adopt the pseudonym "Farningham" after her birthplace.⁷⁶

In the same year Farningham began teaching in Gravesend to help support her father. She established another lifelong and sustaining friendship with a headmistress, Miss Gordge. In 1859 she moved with Gordge to Northampton to become the head of the infant department of the British School. She found the work difficult for she was responsible for training pupil teachers but had received no training and relied on the support and companionship of Miss Gordge and the two Quaker friends.⁷⁷ In 1860 she published her first volume of poetry, *Lays and Lyrics of the Blessed Life* and also began to contribute to

⁷⁴Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 69-70.

⁷⁵Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 70.

⁷⁶Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 77 and 75.

⁷⁷Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 88-93.

The Sunday School Times and Home Educator, the first Sunday School magazine, that was aimed at the "very poorest". In 1867 Farningham became a full-time writer for *The Christian World* and in 1885 editor of *The Sunday School Times* as well as producing many volumes of verses, moral tales and advice books for Christian families. She continued to relate her writing to teaching and in the 1867 also formed a Bible Class for young women which inspired much of her writing.⁷⁸

Farningham associated with the educational reformers of Northampton and anxiously followed the passing of the 1870 Education Bill and the move towards compulsory school attendance. She was asked by the Liberals to stand for the first School Board but they withdrew their support when she opposed the removal of religious instruction from the curriculum. Northampton, a strong radical constituency, had elected as M.P. the atheist Charles Bradlaugh, Eliza Sharples' former lodger.⁷⁹ Farningham was broadly in support of the radicals' principles with the exception of their religious policies. She was asked to stand again in 1885 by teachers, especially women who were keen to get a woman elected to the Board. However she decided to stand as an Independent and was elected on a large majority:-

My difficulty was as far as I knew the Radical members were in the same mind in regard to religious instruction as they had been at first, and as most of them were my personal friends, and as I was for the most part with them in my opinions, I scarcely liked to seem to go against them.

She enjoyed her six years on the Board although she faced some opposition as a woman:-

I was not at all sure that all the members of the Board were glad to have me there - I fancy that most women who occupy public positions with men have the same doubt - but they were all courteous, and we worked together

⁷⁸Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 82, 100-3, 93 and 111.

⁷⁹For the secular movement in Northampton see Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980.

harmoniously.

Farningham's commitment to educational reform was recognised in 1902 when she was co-opted onto the council's education committee. She was unable to do very much "in comparison with what I felt a woman member ought to do" and so resigned after two years.⁸⁰

Evangelical Baptist culture provided Marianne Farningham with a career in education and writing that gave her public recognition and authority and material advancement. She was able to travel to Rome and Palestine and towards the end of her life rented a holiday cottage in Barmouth where she took her Bible students for weekend breaks.⁸¹ While Farningham was an exceptional case, the support she derived from religious culture contrasts starkly with the difficulties Mary Smith faced as a woman in gaining entrance to secular radical and literary circles.

Part Three: "Helpers of Women": Politics and Community in the Lives of Smith and Farningham

Mary Smith and Marianne Farningham entered into the public debate about the position of women in the 1860s and 1870s respectively. Smith formed a branch of the Women's Suffrage Society at Carlisle in 1868 while Farningham lectured on the "Women of Today" in 1877 and in 1890 was associated with the National Union of Women Workers. Their conceptions of women's roles were inspired partly by their educational experience but also developed from their philanthropic work. Although Smith and Farningham shared some

⁸⁰Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 97-9.

⁸¹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 230-240 and p. 179.

ideas, especially about female duty, their understandings of women's social and political position were radically different. Smith's philanthropic work was integral to her politics of reform and her endorsement of women's rights was an extension and partly a critique of her experience of radical politics. By contrast with Smith's secular vision of women's rights, Farningham followed a well-established tradition of female Christian philanthropy.⁸² While this tradition often prioritised duty over rights, it had supported female agency and community throughout the nineteenth century. Both these traditions of female activism could be empowering and problematic for women.

Smith gained access to the radical-liberal circles in Scotby and Carlisle through her reform-minded employers, Sutton and Osborn. She was allowed to use Sutton's library where she discovered William Howitt's *History of Civilisation*.⁸³ Sutton entertained visiting lecturers, through whom in the late 1840s Smith met James Silk-Buckingham, advocate of profit-sharing and model towns.⁸⁴ Although Smith's access to this radical middle-class milieu was dependent on her employers, she made some input, advising Sutton to invite the Chartist Henry Vincent who had "fascinated" her since first hearing him at Banbury.⁸⁵ Vincent "captivated" his audiences in Carlisle and gave many lectures in 1848 on education, Chartism, the duties of electors and Smith's hero Oliver Cromwell. He spoke with Charles Gilpin to the Carlisle Society for Promoting the Abolition of the Punishment of Death of

⁸²For this tradition see F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England*, especially the Introduction, "Woman's 'Nature and Mission'", pp. 1-18.

⁸³Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 132-3.

⁸⁴Silk-Buckingham was author of the pamphlet "National Evils and Practical Remedies", Peter Jackson, London, 1849.

⁸⁵Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 148-9.

which Sutton and Osborn were leading members.⁸⁶ Smith took up the abolition of capital punishment in a series of letters to the local press in the early 1850s.⁸⁷ Smith was part of a committed and informed radical community embracing a range of reforming projects and internationalist in outlook:-

We had...much interesting talk on politics. I was at Scotby through the year 1848, and we shared all the excitement of the great world in that small northern village, rejoicing with the best when unkingly kings were uncrowned.⁸⁸

Smith endeavoured to find a place for herself as a radical and a writer within the new cultural politics that radicals like the Howitts were attempting to establish in place of the militant mass platform. With the encouragement of her friends, Smith forwarded verses to the local press and a small number of lyric poems were published by *The People's Journal* and *Cassell's Magazine*. Her educational, political and literary activities in Carlisle echo Mary Leman Gillies' call for the replacement of "Monster meetings" with "fire-side virtues".⁸⁹ In 1857 she began writing for *The Carlisle Examiner* under the editorship of Wilks who had previously worked on the London radical and democratic journal *The Morning Star*. Protesting at the strong and scandalous language deployed at elections and town councils, Smith and Wilks circulated their own tracts and "conciliatory verses" advocating the "use of more courteous speech and...more christian feeling in... political agitations." Smith believed that their efforts bore some fruit especially among the "elite of

⁸⁶*Carlisle Journal*, 14.1.1848 p. 2 and subsequent reports of that year.

⁸⁷Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 198.

⁸⁸Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 148. For the support for European nationalist and republican among British radicals see Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

⁸⁹See chapters five and six.

the working men" whose acquaintance she made through Wilks.⁹⁰

By the age of forty Smith realised that she did not possess the means to pursue a successful literary career and that she "must follow patiently the harder and narrower fortunes of meaner women". Consequently she channelled her "longing to do some good" into evening classes that she set up for girls at the Carr's factory and for the poor Irish girls from the Damside who worked mostly as vendors of yellow clay.⁹¹ This work taught her of the:-

helplessness of women in the great battle of life, especially in large towns, where they are left so much to their own immature guidance, with often neither good habits nor influences nor education to help them. At once I saw that the inequality of the sexes in privilege and power, was a great cause of the dreadful hardships which women, especially of the lower classes, had to suffer.⁹²

Smith placed education at the forefront of the woman's suffrage question. She entered into correspondence with Becker in 1868 about forming a society. Becker suggested that she contact Miss. Graham of the Temperance Hotel and other members of the Alliance and temperance movements who would be sympathetic to women's suffrage because of the effects of men's drinking on women, especially in the lower classes.⁹³ Smith spoke at a lecture by Becker in Carlisle in 1869 and announced the formation of a local committee for women's suffrage. She linked the cause of women's political rights with labouring women's education by advocating night schools for women in Carlisle, but later found that no one

⁹⁰Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 204-8.

⁹¹Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 222-5.

⁹²Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 257.

⁹³Lydia Becker letter book for 1868, Manchester Central Library, MF 2675 ff, 138-9, To Miss Smith, May 30 (1868).

had responded to these proposals.⁹⁴

The women's suffrage committee provided a welcome release for Smith who thus far had been confined to writing anonymously in the press in support of reform. She described her endorsement of a temperance campaign for more coffee houses:-

I could not take part on committees, nor help in the practical work of furthering the scheme. The one thing I could do I did, and that was to try to inspire others with the importance and useful nature of the work.⁹⁵

Smith wrote and lectured at every opportunity on the Married Women's Property Bill and on "that disgrace to humanity, the "Contagious Diseases Acts" against which she raised petitions to Parliament. Although the Women's Suffrage Society was "not very successful" she reflected proudly on her "humble part in this cause", and how, in the 1880's, she still tried to "help with the helpers of women."⁹⁶

While arguing for the rights of all women, Smith found it easier to apply these to herself than to married and especially working-class women, as can be seen in the content of her lectures to working women in Carlisle. To the dismay of the religious communities, she gave a series of six Sunday lectures at the Temperance Hall, without prayer or singing. Smith aimed to attract "many of the slovenly women, who stand hour after hour at their door posts, satisfying their inane spirits, by watching the ever varying incidents of the streets." They were to address "practical matters" such as the moral and physical training of children, and "the duty and advantages of thrift, cleanliness, good manners, purity of spirit, cheerfulness and goodwill". She urged them that "a good housewife is as holily

⁹⁴*Carlisle Journal*, 6.4.1869.

⁹⁵Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 261.

⁹⁶Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 258.

employed" in making her family's clothes as in attending prayer meetings. Working-class mothers were not even acknowledged spiritual equality here: their duty was located in the needs of the household rather than their own spirituality. Smith was surprised to find that:-

No great number came to hear me, but those who did were poor women, though not all of the class intended. One of the things I insisted on was the worth of trifles, and the spirit in which things are done.⁹⁷

Eileen Yeo has argued that female philanthropists and social scientists, many of whom were single, like Mary Carpenter, and women's rights activists, like Josephine Butler, invented the role of "social mother" to legitimise a public, authoritative role for upper- and middle-class women. Yeo's "social mothers" came from predominantly wealthy families with a history of philanthropic or political activism. Their form of mothering tended to patronise rather than empower working-class women. Yeo's analysis does not account, however, for women with different experiences of class who also adopted the role of "social mother".⁹⁸ Smith certainly sought to educate and protect working-class women, often from themselves, and seems to have adopted the condescending tone of philanthropy, yet she was committed throughout her life to the intellectual achievement of women as well as their domestic training. Moreover, she was never fully assimilated by the world of middle-class reform and was torn between an identification with poor, labouring women and with the middle-class women.

⁹⁷Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 269-71.

⁹⁸Eileen Yeo, "Social Motherhood and the Communion of Labour in British Social Science, 1850-1950", *Women's History Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1992, pp. 75-7. See the discussion of this article in chapter four. One labouring woman who turned to philanthropy who might provide another useful comparison to Yeo's "social mothers" was Sarah Martin, the prison visitor. See Martin's autobiography, *A Brief Sketch of the Late Sarah Martin, of Great Yarmouth; With Extracts From her Writings and Prison Journals*, Yarmouth, n.p., 1844 reprint, Religious Tract Society, London, 1847. For discussions of Martin see Jane Rendall, "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life'", and Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 163-75.

Yeo argues that the protective face of social motherhood was prominent in the campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts which initially had been drafted to tackle sexual diseases in military ports. Opposition to the Acts was part of an on-going campaign by Smith against certain forms of popular culture and sexual behaviour. In the late 1860s she had instigated a campaign anonymously in *The Carlisle Journal* about the demoralising effects of a standing army on the community, aimed especially at the mixing of soldiers and "rough girls" who congregated and behaved "shamelessly" near her school in Finkle Street. To her consternation, her identity was surmised by some factory girls but to her relief they did not confront her. While this incident highlights the different moral codes held by many working women, Smith's concern to clean up popular culture was reminiscent of the efforts of Chartist men and women to reform and make respectable working-class culture.

Some Chartist women had also been keen to instruct their sisters in household skills and virtues. Although a single, self-supporting woman, Smith believed she could speak on behalf of working-class women. She recalled an election paper she wrote in support of the Liberal Club, which evoked a model of the female politician similar to that deployed by earlier generations of radical women:-

Under the assumed character of Mrs. Susan Trueman, the wife of John Trueman, the mother of a large family, I - as a woman who could hold the pen - rattled away on behalf of my class against the Tories and taxation, when the younger children were asleep, and the eldest boy read the papers to me while rocking the cradle.⁹⁹

In seeking to influence working men, Smith, a single woman, chose to author herself as a married woman, the main public role available to working-class women in the early-nineteenth century. But in the post-Chartist years of popular liberalism, the working-class woman politician was little more than a rhetorical figure: a political fiction.

⁹⁹Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 260.

If Smith's identification with working women was more imaginative than actual, middle- and upper-class women did not always recognise her as an equal. Julia Swindells has described how Smith solicited Jane Carlyle's advice on the development of her literary career in the 1850s. In her correspondence, Carlyle divulged domestic intimacies about Thomas Carlyle but dismissed summarily Smith's ambitions. "Clear ideas" and "broad knowledge" were no more to be found in literary society than in Smith's school, Carlyle asserted. Carlyle's remark was partly ironic, but Smith was not allowed to test the assertion for herself. In sharing her confidences with Smith as a fellow woman, Swindells points out that Carlyle maintained the patronising posture of the genteel lady to the working woman with aspirations beyond her status.¹⁰⁰

In 1851, frustrated by her treatment at the Rev. Osborn's hands, Smith sought the advice of J.A. Langford, the Secretary of the Birmingham Co-operative League and fellow contributor to *The People's Journal*. He suggested she seek a position with Mrs. George Dawson, wife of the prominent Birmingham freethinker and preacher of the "civic gospel" whom she had heard lecture in Carlisle. It is probable that she knew of Dawson's support for women's equality and especially for the legal and property rights of married women, which had been reported in *The People's and Howitt's Journal*.⁹³ In the early 1850's Susan Dawson and her sister Sarah Crompton pioneered evening classes for working-class wives in Birmingham that were given national publicity by Harriet Martineau in *Household Words*.

¹⁰⁰Jane Welsh Carlyle to Smith, n.d., Appendix, Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 308. Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, pp. 168-171.

⁹³See lecture by George Dawson on "Social Reformation, its Apostles and Systems" abridged version reprinted in *The People's and Howitt's Journal*, January 1850, pp. 24-5.

Smith could communicate with Langford "a working man... on the ground of common equality". By contrast, she felt embarrassed and tongue-tied before Mrs. Dawson, despite their shared interests. She paced nervously up and down the street before summoning the courage to knock on Dawson's door, only to be overcome with nerves:-

The lady's sudden presence, however, almost deprived me of speech, but fortunately she, in her great volubility, made up for my silence.

Having corresponded with Osborn over Smith's position, Dawson determined Smith should go back to her former employer and provided her with paper to inform Osborn of the decision. Smith returned miserably to Carlisle and to another exploitative engagement with Osborn.⁹⁴ Writing her autobiography after years of commitment to the movements for popular reform and women's rights, Smith was unable to make sense of her dismissal by Mrs. Dawson. None of these movements addressed her ambiguous and uncertain position caught between the worlds of labour and polite society. In the absence of a political language that could explain such a rejection, the episode was recalled obliquely yet with barely suppressed anger.

Smith's marginality shaped her radicalism and lent its self-righteous and resentful tone. She was always an outsider, a loner. The only close female friendship she remembered was with Mrs. Fisher, the widow of a thriftless working man, who struggled like Smith to be a writer.⁹⁵ By contrast, Marianne Farningham was supported by the Baptist community. These networks enabled her to move into the overlapping worlds of female philanthropy and women's rights organisations.

⁹⁴Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 183-5. For George and Susan Dawson see Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, pp. 169 and 182.

⁹⁵Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 265-9.

In 1877 when "there was much talk throughout the country on "Women's Rights", Marianne Farningham was drawn into the debates. She capitalised on the public interest in the "Woman Question" by including a discussion on "The Women of Today" in a lecture tour conducted under the auspices of bodies like the Sunday School Unions and the Young Men's Christian Association. She was invited to speak in most large towns by committees of nonconformists, staying in the homes of eminent nonconformists like the Cadburys of Birmingham.⁹⁶ Despite her prominence as a writer she:-

never felt at home in the pulpit, and did not speak from one unless in response to a very strong wish on the part of the people themselves. Perhaps conscience and St. Paul had a little to do with that!⁹⁷

While the demands of the women's rights movements permitted Farningham's discussion of women's rights and duties, she placed these firmly within the patriarchal, Christian family. Published in 1869, *Homelife* urged wives and daughters to stay at home and minister to the comfort of the father, noting that:-

We hear a great deal about women's rights, but there are some men's rights which fare worse still, among which are too many fathers.⁹⁸

She outlined the gendered rights of the members of the family. "The father's rights" should be "first in the house", although the mother, sister and servants had rights to assistance and to some relief from serving others.⁹⁹ Women's rights were constructed negatively. Echoing Mrs. Ellis, Farningham advocated that to become "good, earnest Christian wives and mothers":-

⁹⁶Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, 154, 7 and 8.

⁹⁷Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 165. Nevertheless, in Whitehaven she lectured before two thousand people. See p. 168.

⁹⁸Marianne Farningham, *Homelife*, James Clarke & Co., 1869, p. 13.

⁹⁹Farningham, *Homelife*, pp. 104-7.

Let our girls be trained not to shine in society, but to be blessings at home; not so much sparkling, and attractive, and fascinating, as to be kind-hearted, tender and true.¹⁰⁰

Farningham's prescriptive teaching, which reinforced the dominant ideology of separate spheres and female subservience, needs to be placed in the context of a lively friendship network she developed for young women through her Bible Class. By contrast with the absence of attempts by radical culture in Northampton to provide a forum for working women, Farningham established a Bible Class in 1867. Its membership reached two hundred comprising mainly young women working in the shoe factories, domestic service, millinery, shops or schools. In addition to religious and moral education the class established a thrift society and a sick and poor fund in response to hardship faced by many girls during a strike and lockout. The girls also enjoyed recreation and weekend holidays for which Farningham rented a cottage in Barmouth.¹⁰¹

The class enabled Farningham to establish a maternal relationship with the adolescent girls. She described a photograph in which she resembled "a poor widow with a huge family". Her students referred affectionately to her as "the little teacher" but this respect and love had to be earned. She was unprepared for her first class and was interrogated and contradicted by a servant who knew far more on the subject. From then on she planned lessons carefully, recognising her students as "very intelligent and bright young persons". Much of her writing emerged from ideas discussed in the class including

¹⁰⁰Farningham, *Homelife*, pp. 28 and 26.

¹⁰¹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 115-122. See also pp. 125-130 for a tribute to Farningham from a former class member.

her most successful book *Girlhood* which by 1869 was in its fourth edition.¹⁰² In her willingness to listen to and learn from her students her relationship with them was perhaps closer to that of an elder sister than the domineering mother described by Yeo.

Farningham's endorsement of separate spheres did not preclude her attention to the wrongs of women and in this she can be compared to Frances Power Cobbe, whose friendship she made. Farningham listed approvingly Cobbe's work with Mrs. Fawcett to secure the Married Women's Property Act, university education for women and especially Cobbe's campaigns against wife assault. Farningham was delighted by Cobbe's address to the National Union of Women Workers at Birmingham in 1890 on "Woman's Duty to Women".¹⁰³

The National Union of Women Workers was founded in 1874 and was associated with the Women's Protective and Provident League established by Emma Paterson to promote trade unionism among women. The Union also had connections with the suffrage movement and Millicent Fawcett was one of its trustees. The Union's concern to monitor legislation regulating women's employment and to establish benefit funds as well as trade unions drew on some of Farningham's own interests. Writing on the census of 1871, she asked what progress had been made in the previous decade, noting that thousands continued to "live by other people's labour". She called for women half-starving on low wages "to be

¹⁰²Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 115, 126, 113 and 114.

¹⁰³Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 236-9. Farningham became one of the trustees of the library Cobbe bequeathed to Barmouth. In the light of the importance of friendship in Farningham's life, it is significant that she mentioned Cobbe's "lifelong friend", Miss Lloyd, who has been seen by some feminist historians as Cobbe's "romantic friend". Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 148.

shown a better and a fairer way of living".¹⁰⁴ According to Levine, by the late 1890s the Union had become a forum for predominantly middle- and upper-class philanthropists. It included "ladies'" associations which cared for girls and promoted the "social, moral and religious welfare of women in general".¹⁰⁵ The extension of the Union's remit to include philanthropy may have provided Farningham's route into the organisation. A detailed study of the Union might reveal connections between the commitments to women's rights and philanthropy, for as in Farningham's case, they were not always mutually exclusive.

Farningham's identification with Frances Power Cobbe may throw light on the ways she conceived women's rights and duties. As Barbara Caine has argued, Frances Power Cobbe accepted the premises of separate spheres but insisted on the "moral autonomy" of women and developed a "'woman-centred' view of the world". This was always predicated on the legal, political and intellectual equality of women. Farningham's achievement was to provide a space in which working women could promote their duties not just to God and their families but to each other as well.

¹⁰⁴Farningham, "The Census", *Life Sketches and Echoes from the Valley*, James Clarke and Co., London, 1871, pp. 235-6.

¹⁰⁵*Women Workers. The Official Report on the Conference held at Manchester, 1896, arranged by the National Union of Working Women*, cited by Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, pp. 90-1. This organisation has only been referred to cursorily by historians of women and trade unionism, philanthropy and women's rights.

Conclusion: "The Good Time Coming": Autobiography, History and Progress

The first poem by Mary Smith to be published in *The Carlisle Journal* was entitled "The Good Time Coming". It was based on a popular song by Charles Mackay of the same title which did not contain enough "wisdom" for Smith's "practical mind". She hoped her verse would illustrate that "if deficient in music and beauty" it had at least "back-bone":-

It's a good time now for all to strive,
And effort maketh stronger:
Oh, let us up - man maketh the times -
Let us up and wait no longer.¹⁰⁶

The verse is typical of Smith's poetry in its earnest and high-minded tone and in its call to action. Marianne Farningham also borrowed Mackay's title for the first chapter of her book *The Sunday Schools of the Future* published in 1871. Her book gave thanksgiving for the passing of the National Education Act. After long years "in the darkness of ignorance, the cries of the masses have been heard" and at last elementary education would be "the birthright of every English child." Free elementary education meant that finally Sunday Schools could concentrate on spiritual instruction.¹⁰⁷ In anticipating "the good time coming" Farningham and Smith identified strongly with both religious and social progress.

Regenia Gagnier has argued that the autobiographies of radical working-class men subverted the "classic realist autobiography". Where the bourgeois autobiography was based on a "progressive developmental narrative of self culminating in material well-being and "fame"...", the autobiographies of radicals like Lovett and Cooper rejected the emphasis on individual effort in favour of a dynamic relationship between individual and collective

¹⁰⁶Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 141-2.

¹⁰⁷Marianne Farningham, *The Sunday Schools of the Future*, James Clarke and Co., London, 1871, pp. 1-5.

improvement.¹⁰⁸ But as Swindells has argued, collective identities based on work and politics were not as readily available to working women as to radical men. She suggests that in the absence of identities of craft and trade, working women autobiographers often adopted a literary subjectivity:-

The heroine, the victim, the martyr are the only means of representing an experience unprecedented in discourse (the working woman by the working woman),...¹⁰⁹

Smith, in particular, appealed to the literary, notably in relating her romantic encounters. However, Smith and Farningham also provided a social account of their lives. They validated their personal struggles by associating them with religious and educational progress and the movements for women's rights.

"The glad time coming" contained heavy religious overtones for Smith and Farningham. In her study of working-class women's autobiographies written between 1775 and 1845, Jane Rendall has found that the spiritual conversion, with its emphasis on salvation through trial, provided some women with a powerful sense of selfhood and a progressive framework for the narrative. But in spite of the transforming experience of conversion, women autobiographers continued to relate their history to the family economy and the life-cycle.¹¹⁰ These autobiographers had much in common with their contemporary female preachers like Mary Porteous and Elizabeth Evans, who, as Deborah Valenze has

¹⁰⁸Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, pp. 43 and 159-60.

¹⁰⁹Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, pp. 140, 153 and 165.

¹¹⁰Rendall, "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life': The Autobiographies of Working-Class Women in Britain, 1780-1840", in Linda Anderson and Treva Broughton, eds., *Women's Lives/Women's Times*, State University of New York Press, Binghamton, New York, 1995, forthcoming. On eighteenth-century spiritual autobiographies by women see Felicity Nussbaum, "'Of Woman's Seed': Women's Spiritual Autobiographies", in her *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1989, pp. 154-177.

argued, used their conversion experience and prophetic powers to preach the moral economy of the proto-industrial labouring communities as well as the Testaments. Like the autobiographers, their sense of self was grounded in their family and neighbourly obligations as well as their duty to God. As we have seen, Farningham's conception of self and of a spiritual and pastoral community was very much based on mutuality and reciprocal obligation. However, Farningham and Smith connected their religious journeys to changes in doctrinal and devotional practices and to secular progress. This wider social vision may distinguish them from earlier working women autobiographers.

Marianne Farningham's autobiography is similar to those of male radicals in that she related her career to the formation of *The Christian World*, successive devotional journals and the evangelisation of the Baptist Church. Her autobiography was influenced by the church and chapel histories which were becoming increasingly popular among nonconformists. Mary Smith identified herself with an older tradition of religious and political dissent. Offering in 1873 her volume of poetry entitled *Progress, and Other Poems...* to "common toiling men and women", she found:-

the real roots of modern Progress in the exalted Piety and heroic Devotion of our Puritan ancestors; the marvel and miracle of much that we are now boasting of, being the result of the irresistible impetus which the intellect received from the action of the courage, resolution, and profound thoughtfulness which the religious life of the truest sects of three centuries ago produced.¹¹¹

As for many middle- as well as working-class radicals who supported nationalist and republican struggles, Oliver Cromwell was one of Smith's heroes, who, "if a tyrant, 'twas

¹¹¹M.S. (Smith), *Progress, and Other Poems; The Latter Including Poems on the Social Affections and Poems on Life and Labour*, John Russell Smith, London and G. & T. Coward, Carlisle, 1873, p. vi.

as law / Of God, most kind when most severe."¹¹² Smith's reverence for her Puritan ancestors was rooted in her commitment to freedom of enquiry and religious practice. In comparison with many nonconformists she became increasingly eclectic and tolerant in her spiritual and intellectual tastes. She dissuaded her Quaker employer Mrs. Sutton from converting a Catholic servant and recalled:-

As I have grown older, I have come to see and feel that creeds are less than life. The latter may be true, when the former is far from it. The force of creeds, however, is very great.¹¹³

Like the other freethinkers discussed in this thesis, Mary Smith found spirituality in the pursuit of reason. Emerson, the American transcendentalist "was one of the moulders of my life" teaching her that spiritual life was "a fertile source of intellectual vigour".¹¹⁴ Transcendentalism was an offshoot from Unitarianism and emphasised the religion of the heart. Smith was attracted by Emerson's emphasis on spiritual and intellectual endeavour and commitment to social action and may have inspired some of her own reforms. The American transcendentalists were strongly associated with communitarian and family reforms and with abolitionism. Some, including Margaret Fuller, were supporters of women's rights.¹¹⁵ Carlyle, the other "great master" in Smith's life was another source of

¹¹²M.S. (Smith), "Oliver Cromwell", *Poems*, Arthur Hall Virtue & Co. 26, Paternoster Row, 1860, pp 141-3.

¹¹³Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 130.

¹¹⁴Smith, *Autobiography*, pp. 94-5. Late in life, Smith attended the Unitarian Church because the congregation had been attacked for their theological views, even though she did not share their opinions on the Atonement.

¹¹⁵For an interesting discussion of the gendered construction of Emerson's politics see David Leverenz, "The Politics of Emerson's Man-Making Words", in Elaine Showalter, ed., *Speaking of Gender*, Routledge, Chapman and Hall, London, 1989, pp. 134-62. On American Transcendentalism see Anne Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850*, Yale University Press, London, 1981.

inspiration, appealing to her puritan work ethic:-

Carlyle's gospel of Work and exposure of Shams, and his universal onslaught on the nothings and appearances of society, gave strength and life to my vague but true enthusiasm. They proved a new Bible of blessedness to my eager soul...¹¹⁶

Marianne Farningham was intellectually and doctrinally more timid and cautious. She was startled by the debate on eternal punishment that waged in the pages of *The Christian World* and among many nonconformists in the early 1870s. *The Christian World* supported the call of new the Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland for a "broader outlook" and "more generous theology". The editorial condemned the "hard, un-Christian-like tenets of the theology of blood, and brimstone, and fire" and noted that many regarded as heretics were in fact "Christ's dearest children".¹¹⁷ She was deeply troubled by this statement and nothing in her life made her "more sorry, or more full of anxiety". She decided to leave the problems to "stronger brains" and concentrate instead on her work. Nonetheless, she was strongly criticised by friends and advisors for associating herself with a "paper of such strong views".¹¹⁸

While Farningham avoided theological controversy, her pedagogy and ministry practised the evangelical theology advocated by *The Christian World*. She rejoiced that "only the happier side of Christian life and theology is presented to the children of today" in comparison with the "sombre" religious teaching of her childhood.¹¹⁹ Ann Douglas has

¹¹⁶Smith, *Autobiography*, p. 133.

¹¹⁷Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 136-7 and *Christian World*, 3.5.1873.

¹¹⁸Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, pp. 138-9. See also pp. 209-10 for the liberal religious convictions of Farningham's friend James Clarke, editor of *Christian World* and his debate with Spurgeon.

¹¹⁹Farningham, *A Working Woman's Life*, p. 29.

argued that in nineteenth-century America, revivalism was accompanied by a feminisation of religious culture, with increasing importance attributed to domestic morality over high theological debate.¹²⁰ Farningham might be seen as "feminising" Baptist culture in her emphasis on domestic morality and the nurturing of children, but also in providing a supportive network for working-class girls.

For both Farningham and Smith their individual and social progress related to the changing position of women. Looking back on their lives, they still bitterly resented their educational deprivation as lower-class girls and their early introduction into the bonds of womanhood. The two women responded in starkly different ways to this sense of loss even though they both endeavoured to allow children their childhood and to instill especially in girls the importance and pleasure of learning.

Farningham found a powerful vehicle for her spiritual and literary aspirations through the Baptist Sunday School movement. Christ's love became a form of consolation and her success as a writer and lecturer perhaps softened the frustration and anger she felt as a child. As a working woman, she was sympathetic to, and occasionally deployed, a radical analysis of society but the traditions of radicalism played little part in her identity. The Baptist community allowed her to develop her own form of ministry and a supportive network for young working women: something that radical culture singularly failed to do in the mid-Victorian years.

By contrast, Mary Smith found in the interlocking traditions of dissent and radicalism a religious and political language to express her exclusion from privilege and

¹²⁰Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Avon Books, New York, 1977.

power, as a dissenter, as a lower-class girl and as a woman. Yet the radical movements did not offer her a position or a community from which to speak to other women or men about her experience as a working woman. Although the women's rights movements permitted Smith a more active and leading role than the radical and liberal circles of Carlisle, she spoke to other women as a teacher and writer rather than as a lower-class woman. None of these movements allowed her to establish a political community with working-class women. Smith's radicalism did not derive solely from intellectual traditions, therefore, but from her sense of marginality and displacement. She was, as she wrote, "in the world, but not of it".

Conclusion

"Woman's Rights" are not her's only, they are all
the world's beside

Mary Smith

Recently historians, including Gareth Stedman Jones, Patrick Joyce and Eugenio Biagini, have pointed to the continuation in popular liberalism of the rhetoric and organisational forms of political radicalism.¹ Both traditions appealed to an oppressed but virtuous people who had been denied their constitutional liberties by exclusive government. This thesis has explored women's attachment to different political radicalisms and also how some middle-class women radicals adapted aspects of radical politics to the creation of a new liberal culture at the mid-century years. As part of her support for the Liberal Party, the former Chartist, Mary Smith, composed in honour of the celebrated liberal politician William Gladstone a poem entitled "Gladstone's Axe". It began:-

Hewer strong, and brave, and bold,
Cut the rotten from the old,
Dead unfruitful privilege
With thy axe of proven edge,
Overreaching Tyranny.
Cut it down! Where'er it be,

¹Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832-1982*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991; Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; and Biagini and Alastair Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

Neither flower will grow nor blade
In its desolating shade.²

In depicting Gladstone as a wood-cutter, Smith drew on perhaps the most popular image of the politician. As Joyce has argued, Gladstone built up his reputation as a "man of the people" by promoting his hobby of tree-felling, an occupation which identified him with the working man and with the ideal of the return to the land that was so tenacious within popular politics.³ In common with other lower-class supporters of Liberalism, Smith invested her own aspirations in Gladstone and his party. Like her other nonconformist hero, the regicide Oliver Cromwell, Smith depicted Gladstone as a leveller, cutting down prejudice and privilege, hatred and pride and urged him: "Let there be room/For the poor man's hope to bloom."

Published in 1873 in Smith's collection of poetry *Progress, and other Poems*, "Gladstone's Axe" was probably composed in the run up to, or the wake of, the Liberal Party's 1868 landslide electoral victory. It would have been written, therefore, in the years of Smith's participation in the Women's Suffrage Society yet the poem refers to the hopes of "the poor man" rather than "the poor woman" and *does not mention the cause of* women's emancipation. Women's rights were the subject of a separate poem in the same volume: "Woman's Claims".⁴ The existence of these two poems suggests Smith's own

²M.S., [Smith], "Gladstone's Axe", in *Progress, and other Poems, the latter including Poems on the Social Affections and Poems on Life and Labour*, John Russell Smith, London, 1873, pp. 159-160.

³Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 49-50.

⁴M.S., "Woman's Claims", in *Progress, and Other Poems*, pp. 156-9.

marginalisation within political organisations and the difficulty, in fact the near impossibility, of incorporating women's rights within popular liberalism. Some of the most prominent advocates of women's rights in the 1860s and 1870s were associated with the Liberal Party - the Fawcetts, the Brights, the Taylors, Helen Taylor and John Stuart Mill - but campaigners like Lydia Becker and Mary Smith found it necessary to establish their own organisations to press the claims of women. The absence of women from the formal organisation of popular liberalism reveals an important discontinuity between popular liberalism and the popular radical movements of the early nineteenth-century with their female societies and their appeal to the whole community of the industrious.

Studies of the labour, political and cultural organisations of the skilled working men or the "labour aristocrats" in the 1850s and 1860s, including most recently that by James Vernon, have noted their gendered appeal to the industrious, sober and independent working man who could maintain his wife and children as dependents.⁵ Beyond these observations there is little discussion within the historiography either of the participation within or support for popular liberalism by women, or of the gendered formation of Victorian popular politics and liberalism. Jane Rendall has begun to trace the debates about citizenship that informed the early women's suffrage movements but otherwise there has been little work comparing the campaigns for the social and political rights of women and for working men

⁵James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

in the mid-Victorian years.⁶

My study of the politics of needlework suggests that in asserting women's rights as workers, some advocates of women's rights referred to a range of British and continental debates about the "rights of labour" and forms of association ranging from Owenism and Christian Socialism to the political economy of J.S. Mill. Mary Leman Grimstone, Harriet Taylor and Eliza Meteyard attempted to intervene directly into working-class politics to recast ideas about labour and politics and also to place the rights of women at the centre of social and political reform. To recover the contribution of middle-class women radicals to the formation of Victorian conceptions of citizenship and labour, we will have to go beyond the confines of formal political organisation. An investigation of the Social Science Association, like that of the popular journals in this thesis, might reveal more about the exchange between middle-class women's rights radicals and Victorian labour and political organisations. Such a study might also help explain why some freethinkers like Grimstone and Taylor became dissatisfied with utilitarianism and turned to socialism in their search for a new liberal agenda, while others, like Martineau, supported economic individualism.

Although women had largely disappeared from the formal organisations of popular politics, some of the concerns of earlier republican and freethinking claimants of women's

⁶Jane Rendall, "Citizenship, Culture and Civilisation: The Languages of British Suffragists 1866-74", in Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley, eds., *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland University Press, Wellington, 1994, forthcoming.

rights, with their appeals to reason and freedom, resurfaced in the early women's suffrage movements, as well as in some of the popular journals of the 1840s and 1850s. My research suggests the importance of the South Place Chapel and other Unitarians in bridging the world of republican, freethought and Owenite women's rights and the "liberal feminism" of the *English Woman's Journal* and the early suffrage movements. Further research is needed to establish the extent of Unitarian support for women's rights and indeed why this sect seems to have fostered a commitment to the rights of women.

Smith's poem "Woman's Claims" echoes the freethought and republican rhetoric of slavery and oppression of Eliza Sharples, the East London Female Total Abstinence Association and Mary Leman Grimstone:-

Ignorance has been her master, ignorance and
slavish fear;
Science no fair star has lighted in her dark and
narrow sphere,
She has heard the cry of wisdom, it is true, with
yearning heart,
But convention's tongue malignant still has bade
her "stand apart."
"Stand apart" still in her blindness - "stand apart,"
e'en though she be
Priestess at home's holy altars, and the Mother of
the Free.⁷

Political radicalism provided all these women with a language for articulating oppression and exclusion yet they required other voices in order to make themselves heard in public. Like Mary Smith in this verse, they frequently mixed the republican tradition of the

⁷M.S., "Woman's Claims".

patriotic mother with the ideal of "Woman's Mission". Yet most of the women we have studied qualified their use of the ideology of "separate spheres" by appealing to women's equal rights, especially to knowledge, and by validating their place in public politics.

While all the women examined in this thesis at some moments called on the "feminine" qualities of sympathy and nurturance they did so not just to assert what they saw as woman's experience and knowledge but also as a way of transforming private and public life in ways that would minimise rather than emphasise sexual difference. Their complex and often ambivalent use of the rhetoric of sexual difference can be compared with the place of "class" within popular radical and liberal rhetoric. Although radicals and liberals continued to use a language of class to condemn the inequalities between rich and poor, Joyce suggests that many saw political reform as a key to eliminating class difference rather than seeing class itself as the basis of their politics.⁸ Similarly, Mary Smith believed that the rights of the whole community depended on the recognition of women's rights. The eradication of inequality between the sexes was part of establishing more harmonious, co-operative social relations and would help to bridge the gulf between classes and generations:-

"Woman's Rights" are not her's only, they are all
the world's beside,
And the whole world faints and suffers, while these
are scorn'd, denied.
Childhood, with its mighty questions, Manhood
with its restless heart,
Life in all its varied phases, standing class from

⁸Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 22-55.

class apart,
Need the voice, the thought of woman, woman wise
as she shall be.
When at last the erring ages shall in all things make
her Free.⁹

Although there are striking similarities in the rhetoric of women from very different radical communities, we should be cautious about the existence of an unbroken tradition. As we have seen, Mary Smith's commitment to women's education emerged in part from her individual experience of growing up, learning and labouring in a dissenting household and from the material and educational deprivation of her childhood. The women we have studied subscribed, moreover, to particular and sometimes conflicting political and social programmes, which held very different ideas about individual and collective forms of action. Through their endorsement of physical force and exclusive dealing the Chartist women identified themselves with a militant and mass class politics. By placing the reformation of gender relations at the heart of a more consensual politics, Mary Leman Grimstone devised a very different conception of "Woman's Mission" and female citizenship, even though she shared with the Chartist women a faith in women's education.

This thesis has examined the attempts of radical women to speak for all women and has suggested that all too often this led to other women being silenced. Those who had undergone, like Sharples, a political "conversion" were frequently impatient and condescending towards those who, they thought, had accepted their lot. In seeking to

⁹M.S. "Woman's Claims".

emancipate themselves, radical women of all classes tended to see other women as victims. Chartist women authorised their public appearance partly in terms of their duty to protect the young single women of their class from the preying gaze of the factory owner or overseer. By contrast, middle-class reformers, often single women, sought to train working-class women for housewifery and motherhood, while rejecting domestic confinement for themselves.

Because women's efforts to speak on behalf of other women, both in contemporary feminist movements and in the past, have so often silenced women with other experiences of class, 'race', religion, age, and sexuality, feminist historians like Joan Scott, Denise Riley and Carolyn Steedman are becoming increasingly suspicious of the uncritical use of the category "woman".¹⁰ Indeed, many of us accept that as individuals and collectivities, women have many selves, which are often fragmented, contradictory and conflicted. Joan Scott has challenged the idea that the narration of the "experience" of oppression is necessarily political but rather seeks to examine how identity and experience are socially constructed.

Scott's important arguments derive in part from recent post-structuralist and post-

¹⁰Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, pp. 28-50 and "Experience", in Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 22-40; Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? The Category of Woman in History*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988; Carolyn Steedman, "Bimbos from Hell", *Social History*, (Hull), vol. 19, no. 1, 1994, pp. 57-67.

colonial work which has vigorously censured the universalist claims of liberalism. Yet perhaps we should not be too harsh on the claims of women like Mary Smith to speak for all women. Smith had to battle all through her life not just to be heard but to think. She could only envisage independence for herself by refusing to marry and lectured to "less respectable" women on their duties to home and family. Yet she aspired to something more for herself and all women. The radical women we have examined in this study took issue with a society which refused women legal and political equality on the basis of their sex and which largely dismissed their intellectual capacity. For women denied a political identity and agency the act of making women visible, making women audible could be empowering. Writing in public, speaking in public might, in this context, be a form of liberation. It was in her poetry, in the freedom it gave her to write both as a woman and not as a woman, that Mary Smith found her own emancipation. It was as a poet that she could acknowledge and speak for the experience of all women:-

It is coming! It is coming! Far and wide the signs
are seen,
Freedom speedily on woman shall place her crown
serene;
In the workshop, at the hearthstone, toiling oft with
hope o'erthrown;
In the college, on whose threshold she now stands
weak and lone;
She shall feel the touch of freedom as the valleys
feel the morn,
And the world shall reap new harvests from her
nature's wastes forlorn.¹¹

¹¹M.S., "Woman's Claims".

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