

**Nineteenth-Century Dissenting Women Writers: Literary Communities,
Conviction and Genre**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis reconstructs the dissenting religious communities of five nineteenth-century women writers: Hannah More, Catherine and Susanna Winkworth, Elizabeth Gaskell and Josephine Butler. The case study approach locates each woman within an active, religious environment, arguing that community played a significant role in her spiritual and literary development. A recent trend in Romantic Studies has examined creativity in collaborations, in order to dismiss once and for all the myth of an individual genius. This thesis extends the preoccupation to consider the presence of sociability and creative communities in the lives of nineteenth-century religious women.

Religiosity is an essential identification for all five women, helping to shape their social agenda, but more importantly to inform their textual choices. Diverse political and theological positions were encouraged and contested within each community, using novels, biographies, poetry, hymns, and speeches to disseminate conviction: they addressed the Abolition of the Slave Trade, German Higher Criticism's threat to the Christian faith, class unrest and the 'problem' of the fallen woman. One of this thesis's innovations has been to view Evangelicals alongside more recognisable dissenting bodies such as the Unitarians. Evangelicalism's problematic position within the Anglican Church caused it to be ostracised and distrusted, an experience familiar to the dissenter. The close alliances that existed between orthodox convictions, often assumed in childhood, and a dissenting belief owned and experienced in adulthood have blurred the dividing lines between orthodoxy and dissent.

Gendered assumptions about female religious community are dismantled and re-imagined, allowing space for female-male collaborations to emerge. Any conclusions about female religiosity are to be understood relationally, with masculine identity crucial for determining a *Christian* experience. The nineteenth-century emergence of a feminised Christ (simultaneously a radicalised and conservative representation) is a central figure in which to draw conclusions about the dissenting and gendered practices of these communities. Simplistic conclusions about literary communities are avoided, and instead the case studies represent the diversity of religious convictions, the differences in communal activities, and the varying textual products of collaboration. Community proved both enabling and challenging to the development of these five women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	1
INTRODUCTION	3
Nineteenth-Century Dissenting Women Writers	
<i>Dissenting Religion</i>	7
<i>Literary Communities</i>	13
<i>Female Experience</i>	20
<i>Genre</i>	25
CHAPTER 1	31
Hannah More, Abolition and the Evangelicals	
<i>Evangelical Writings and the Abolition of the Slave Trade</i>	33
<i>Cœlebs in Search of a Wife: A Fictional Evangelical Community</i>	57
<i>Conclusion</i>	72
CHAPTER 2	75
Catherine and Susanna Winkworth: German Translations, Higher Criticism and Male Mentorship	
<i>Literary Circle</i>	77
<i>Catherine Winkworth and German Hymnody</i>	87
<i>Susanna Winkworth and Fourteenth-Century German Theological Writings</i>	105
<i>Conclusion</i>	119
CHAPTER 3	123
Elizabeth Gaskell and the Manchester Unitarians	
<i>The Manchester Unitarian Community: Chapel, Sermons and Mary Barton</i>	125
<i>Ruth: The Fallen Woman</i>	140
<i>Conclusion</i>	165
CHAPTER 4	169
Josephine Butler, the Campaign Community and the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts	
<i>'Vital' Christianity and Butler's Prophetic Call</i>	172
<i>The Campaign Community: Print Culture, Literary Writings and Dissemination</i> ..	198
<i>Conclusion</i>	217
CONCLUSION	219
BIBLIOGRAPHY	225

Abbreviations

- C Hannah More, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*, ed. by Patricia Demers (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2007)
- CB *The Chorale Book for England*, collected and translated by Catherine Winkworth, tunes compiled and ed. by William Sterndale Bennett and Otto Goldschmidt (London: Longman Green, 1863)
- CS Josephine Butler, *Catharine of Siena: A Biography* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1885)
- CY John Keble, *The Christian Year: Thoughts in Verse for the Sunday and Holidays Throughout the Year* (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1827)
- (I) (II) William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. H. More*, 2 vols (New York, 1834)
- L Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Mandolin, 1997)
- LG *Lyra Germanica: Hymns for the Sundays and Chief Festivals of the Christian Year*, translated by Catherine Winkworth (New York: Thomas N. Stanford, 1856)
- LG 2nd *Lyra Germanica Second Series: The Christian Life*, translated by Catherine Winkworth (London: Longman, 1858)
- M Margaret J. Shaen, ed., *Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* (London: Longmans Green, 1908)
- MB Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed., Edgar Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998),
- R Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. by Alan Shelston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- S Hannah More, ‘Slavery, A Poem’ (London: Cadell, 1788)
- TG *Theologia Germanica*, translated by Susanna Winkworth (London: Longman, 1854)

Introduction

Nineteenth-Century Dissenting Women Writers

This thesis examines the impact of religious dissent upon the lives of five women writers: Hannah More, Catherine and Susanna Winkworth, Elizabeth Gaskell and Josephine Butler. What unites these five women across more than a century, and provides the framework for the thesis as a whole, is the presence of a community which directly informed each woman's individual conviction of faith, her choice of literary work or subject and her social agenda. This Introduction will take the key terms of my title – women (gender), dissent, literary communities, conviction and genre – and will define and explore how these concepts have been used in recent research and within the thesis. There has been a critical trend, particularly in Romantic Studies, towards the theorisation of creativity produced in collaborative settings, undermining once and for all the idea of the individual, isolated genius that has been associated with the Romantic writer. This critical shift has significance for my own study as I am interested in taking this methodological framework – observing individual writers in community – and asking how community and creativity were shaped in a longer nineteenth-century context. I argue, along with Joshua King, that print culture, which expanded exponentially throughout the nineteenth century, became increasingly important as a 'medium for imagining and participating' in a collective, religious community.¹

By adopting a case studies approach, I am able to move between the individual and the community (whether imagined or not), providing a framework in which to assess the experience of many. This also allows me to negotiate the supposed methodological problem of reducing historical experience to either the perspective of the particularised ('replacing history with biography') or the totalized ('hiding grand narratives within only seemingly random stories'), as defined by Jeffrey Cox. He argues that it is plausible to locate a method somewhere in the middle of these two positions, and I suggest that the community model offers a useful starting point.² The myriad of forms examined in this thesis act as evidence that women writers were innovative and practical in their textual choices, manipulating form

¹ Dr. Joshua King, of Baylor University, has generously sent me a copy of his book manuscript, currently at Ohio State University Press: *Imagined Spiritual Communities in Britain's Age of Print*, p 1, 4. He also explores similar ideas of an imagined, cross-denominational community of believers in the context of John Keble: 'John Keble's 'The Christian Year': Private Reading and Imagined National Religious Community', *VLC*, 40.2 (2012), 297-420.

² Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 8-9.

to fit their purpose. The boundary between literary and religious text, as I will show, was fluid and dynamic but so too was the line between literary form and social agenda. The dissemination of conviction was subtly or explicitly expressed through poetry, tracts, hymns, biographies, essays and novels. Generic identifications are important insofar as they provide a platform from which to examine the fluidity of textual choice.

Dissent, as I will argue, had a closer affiliation to the Anglican faith than previously thought, with the case studies revealing complicated relationships existing between the two. The Winkworths' faith, as we shall see in Chapter Two, was buffeted between an Anglican faith established in childhood and an adult experience of the Manchester Unitarian community. The 'problem' of Evangelicalism and how it should be classified is also a crucial consideration in this thesis, for I have deliberately chosen to locate its followers within the dissenting tradition.³ In recent years, religious belief has received much attention from literary and feminist critics, taking seriously its presence in the lives of many female writers.⁴ However, the complexity of dissenting belief should be examined further, providing a stronger, more convincing and comprehensive understanding of the role of religion in the nineteenth-century female experience. As the thesis developed the importance of gender as a categorisation became increasingly apparent, for it was impossible to ignore the binary classification between men and women that unavoidably occurred by prioritising the female experience. And yet I want to contest a simple separation as I agree with Sean Gill and Sue Morgan that gender can only be understood relationally.⁵ Therefore, my female case studies are examined alongside the religious experience of men, revealing the important relationships that existed in community.

³ To distinguish between a historical movement of Evangelicals, as epitomised by Hannah More's community, and a broader doctrinal position, which does not require an affiliation with a body of believers (e.g. an evangelical understanding of salvation), I will only capitalise the former. Similarly, I have only capitalised 'Established' when used in conjunction with 'Church'.

⁴ A select few are cited here; many more will be referred to throughout the thesis: Rebecca Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth-Century* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); *Companion to Women's Historical Writing*, ed. by Mary Spongberg, Barbara Caine, Anne Curthoys (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005); *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of their Fathers*, ed. by Julie Melnyk (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, ed. by Sue Morgan (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Christine Krueger *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

⁵ Sean Gill, 'Ecce Homo: Representations of Christ as the Model of Masculinity in Victorian Art and Lives of Jesus', in *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*, ed. by Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan and Sue Morgan (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 164-178 (p. 166). 'Introduction', in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain 1800-1940*, ed. by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1-10 (p. 8).

The decision to include these five women in the thesis was not arbitrarily made, or without consideration for the tricky questions of exclusion that would inevitably occur: Why Josephine Butler and not Florence Nightingale? Why Elizabeth Gaskell and not Harriet Martineau? Why Hannah More and not Anna Letitia Barbauld? For every writer that I have chosen, there would be more than one compatible woman to take her place. However, there were several preoccupations guiding my choice that helped to justify the union of these five women. Firstly, I wanted canonical and less well known writers to sit side by side in order to engage with the reality that canonisation, although a ‘process of creation’, is also a ‘process of loss’. Tricia Lootens argues that the canon is a place of ‘containment; its content is almost inevitably defined by exclusion and shaped through competition’. Consequently, the inclusion in this study of forgotten writers speaks to those ‘absences’ or ‘silences’ which canonisation has produced.⁶ For example, the relatively unknown hymn translator Catherine Winkworth is recovered as a collaborative author when viewed through the wider network of ‘successful’ nineteenth-century writers, thinkers and theologians that she participated with. To study female collaboration, as Bette London points out, is to acknowledge and uncover its erasure, for it often took place in ways not ‘visible’.⁷ This is particularly true of the Winkworths’ circle that was reconstructed through the medium of letters.

The decision to span the century was also a priority in this thesis because I desired to track and record the changing formation of community that I expected to occur over a long period. The Evangelical movement, print culture, societies and clubs, the emerging public sphere, expanding educational and work opportunities were all diverse cultural phenomena that impacted and changed the nature of religious life, and women’s role within it. Hannah More’s community, as we shall see, looked very different from the experience of Josephine Butler, with advances in print culture opening up grand possibilities for dissemination not available in More’s day. It is only through such a direct comparison that the developments and changes of literary communities can be established, as well as offering a potential model. The transformation of literary forms and their appropriation by religious women also modified as the century passed. The generic choice differed for each woman, depending on her confidence, the appropriateness of certain forms, the limitations of influence or the environment that she was writing in. Again, the hundred year period allows these different preoccupations to be contextualised in a specific time and place. I intend each chapter to strengthen, challenge, complicate or confirm the previous model of community

⁶ Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), pp. 7-9.

⁷ Bette London, *Writing Double: Women’s Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 9, 18.

until recognisable commonalities are achieved. Finally, the breadth of this study allows my conclusions to have relevance for the fields of eighteenth and nineteenth-century studies, engaging with the recent proliferation of Romanticist research about collaboration, whilst asking the question of what this view of creativity means for Victorianists.

As already noted, complicated relationships existed between dissenters and the Anglican faith. One of my opening gambits is that the distinction between dissenting and orthodox faith was not so clear cut and that easy glib definitions should be avoided. Consequently, my case studies not only cover a breadth of dissenting belief (Evangelicalism, Unitarianism, Quakerism, and Methodism) but explore how these convictions coincided and interacted with an orthodox Anglicanism. Despite the complexities of faith, definitions are crucial to help achieve a coherent understanding of what constitutes dissent, orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. Part of the agenda of this thesis is to help strengthen a reader's understanding of the differing theological positions held by nineteenth-century dissenting writers. This will allow for a more precise assessment of religious conviction (both of writers and fictional characters), one that is not based on ill-conceived preconceptions.

The women considered in these case studies have comparable experiences that allow for closer connections to be made between chapters. For example, the inclusion of the Winkworth sisters makes sense when they are viewed as an extension of Elizabeth Gaskell's influence and community. It gave me the opportunity to explore the Unitarian faith in Chapters Two and Three in very different contexts: firstly alongside German Higher Criticism and secondly in a localised way among the Manchester Liberals. German Higher Criticism offered itself as a direct challenge to the traditional reading of the Biblical canon, threatening the very heart of orthodox belief. It was into this German-inspired debate that the Winkworths chose to enter with non-contemporary, mystical and orthodox German texts: *Lyra Germanica* (1855), *Lyra Germanica Second Series* (1858), *The Chorale Book for England* (1862), *Theologia Germanica* (1854) and *The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler of Strasbourg, with Twenty-five of his Sermons* (1857). Chapter Three reconstructs the Manchester community, and despite its reputation for liberal culture and philanthropic activities, I explore the difficulties of achieving consensus, particularly when a contested issue such as prostitution was considered. Gaskell and Butler both address the problem of prostitution, albeit in very diverse textual modes and motivated by a different theological understanding of Christ's role in the world. This specific social problem allows me to examine and unify what on paper appeared to be two separate and distinct female experiences. Finally, an assessment of Hannah More and Josephine Butler throws wide open

the spectrum of evangelical belief, demonstrating that a religious conviction can be morphed and reshaped over a century, finding not only a new articulation but a new social agenda. And despite a world of difference (both theologically and culturally) between the two, they could be united through their identification as Abolitionists, concerned with the wavering reputation of the nation.

Dissenting Religion

One of the key reasons for exploring dissenting faith is to get a clearer understanding of the presence of Christianity in the nineteenth century. According to Mark Knight and Emma Mason, the so-called secularisation of the late nineteenth century is best understood as the ‘diminution of the power and reach of the Established Church, rather than the decline of Christian ideas and culture’.⁸ The allegiance to Anglicanism may have been wavering but dissenting religious bodies, particularly Unitarianism, flourished and stabilised as the century progressed. Before examining dissent’s growth and its practices, I firstly want to state the critical reasons for prioritising dissent as an area of literary interest.⁹ Knight and Mason offer an excellent introduction to the religious climate of the nineteenth century, demonstrating the rich and varied texts, events and beliefs that contributed to religious life. Their study is committed to a literary approach and so they analyse religious culture through a series of close readings: a methodology that I am indebted to.¹⁰ They do not prioritise the dissenting experience, but value its significance within the wider context of religion; it is this commitment to terminology and distinction that makes their study a valuable resource. Valentine Cunningham’s monograph *Everywhere Spoken Against*, published in 1975, continues to be the leading authority on dissenting characters within literature. He identifies the broad definitions of dissenting belief, as well as ‘scrutinizing the actual bases of the Victorian novelists’ acquaintance with dissent’, before applying these newfound parameters to literary texts, particularly to canonical writers such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. He argues that there has been a misreading of religious characters which has skewed and misunderstood the purpose of such literary portrayals: ‘the relation of fiction to Dissent is a zone where, quite simply, misunderstanding and misinformation have for too long

⁸ I am indebted to this study for providing detailed description and definitions: Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), p. 7.

⁹ James Munson’s study *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture* (London: SPCK, 1991) is a historical survey of English nonconformity and its impact on English Society (1890-1914). Interestingly, he claims that the four largest denominations – Congregationalists, Baptists, Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists – had their heyday in this period and were a powerful and influential force in national life. Despite this study standing outside my period of interest, Munson demonstrates the importance of examining the dissenting life as a distinct culture (pp. 2-5).

¹⁰ Knight and Mason, p. 9.

abounded'.¹¹ Cunningham's monograph was also a defence against the grain, in his opinion, of New Criticism which delineated the importance of using the Victorian novel to detail society. Instead, Cunningham commendably wanted to root Victorian novels back into the messy, unpredictable, cluttered context of Victorian society.¹²

According to Jane Shaw, through the act of dissenting, Christians 'made a statement', whether they wanted to or not, about the Established Church, about its role in society and the importance of individual conviction.¹³ W. R. Ward suggests that an Anglican spokesman today would still maintain that the 'the outward form of the Church should declare visibly the continuity of its faith and life'.¹⁴ And yet it can be argued that the Church not only laid the foundations for dissent to flourish but became a victim of its own division. Inwardly the Church's authority was being challenged and contested; first by the Methodists and Evangelicals, and then later in the nineteenth century by the Tractarians and Ritualists.¹⁵ By the end of the century, Nigel Yates argues, the Church of England could be more accurately referred to as an 'alliance of separate sects'.¹⁶ As David Hempton notes, the Church had laid the 'foundations of religious knowledge', coupled with evangelical zeal; it was this combination that fuelled dissenting practices.¹⁷ Through the act of dissension, therefore, a group was effectively making a statement about the Established Church – that it was not only failing as a representative of true Christian belief but was stifling individual conviction. Shaw notes that the alliance between Church and State restricted the ability of believers to dictate and choose their own 'forms of worship' and statements of faith; belief had become institutionalised. Dissenters were often forced to stand apart in culture because they were excluded from other forms of establishment: politics, government, and universities.¹⁸ I will examine the particulars of dissenting belief, but right now I want to state

¹¹ Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 4, 5-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 7.

¹³ 'Introduction: *Why Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition?*', in *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition*, ed. by Jane Shaw and Alan Kreider (Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 1-6 (p. 2).

¹⁴ W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1972), p. 8.

¹⁵ Ironically, the Tractarians were faithful to the concept of the Church of England, seeing it as the 'one true Church', but in the act of recovering its Catholic roots they strayed too close to the Roman doctrine. See Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 25.

¹⁶ Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 379.

¹⁷ David Hempton, 'Established Churches and the Growth of Religious Pluralism: A Case Study of Christianisation and Secularisation in England Since 1700', in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750-2000*, ed. by Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 81-98 (p. 85).

¹⁸ Shaw, 'Introduction', p. 2.

that it is this capacity for rejecting the established religious practice that makes the dissenters a dynamic group worthy of study. They demonstrated in the very act of preferring a different religious expression the capacity for autonomy and mobility, and this had political implications, associating them with radical social agendas. They succeeded in undermining the most powerful embodiment of Protestant Christianity in Britain – the Established Church –, reducing its influence; it could no longer dominate or dictate social policy.¹⁹ Knight and Mason helpfully explain that the dissenting space also granted women ‘opportunities for self-expression, equality with men, female solidarity, and even economic power’.²⁰ Kathryn Gleadle argues that the Unitarians, particularly those that were radicalised, were essential in laying the groundwork for later feminist movements.²¹ The education of women was actively encouraged in Unitarian communities and so they found a congenial environment in which to explore their conviction of faith, all the while aware of its social and political potential. This perhaps, more than anything else, is the fundamental reason why dissent is explored in this thesis: it holds fascinating possibilities of what women in these communities could achieve both spiritually and vocationally.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a dissenter is anyone who separates himself from any specified church or religious communion, especially from that which is historically the national church or regarded as the orthodox body. A nonconformist is similarly defined as anyone who does not assent to the doctrines or usages of an established church. It is clear, therefore, from the dictionary definitions that the two terms are interchangeable and refer broadly to a person unable to conform to the practice or beliefs of the dominant church.²² Most definitions of dissent will sit comfortably under the heading of Protestant dissent to distinguish it from other departures from Anglicanism such as Catholicism. And yet the varieties within Protestant dissent were astonishing, with John Briggs offering a broad ‘spectrum of beliefs’, ranging from the evangelical Arminianism of the Methodists through to the moderate Calvinism of the majority, to the Rationalist Unitarians.²³ Cunningham considers dissent as a ‘portmanteau term, covering, but not

¹⁹ David Hempton, p. 91.

²⁰ Knight and Mason, p. 33.

²¹ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement 1831-51* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 1.

²² ‘dissenter’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) < <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/55414?redirectedFrom=dissenter#eid> > [accessed 24.03.2014].

‘nonconformist’, *Oxford English Dictionary*

< <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/127875?redirectedFrom=nonconformist#eid> > [accessed 24.03.2014].

²³ ‘Introduction’, in *Victorian Nonconformity*, ed. by John Briggs and Ian Sellers (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

masking, kaleidoscopic shifts and varieties'.²⁴ Knight and Mason track the development of dissent which they identify as 'Old' and 'New': the former referring to the traditional dissenting stance (including Congregationalists, Baptists, Independents and Quakers) of rejecting a Tudor model of Anglicanism, implemented by the Church of England, with the latter covering the emergence of an evangelical, emotionally-conceived dissent (Methodism) through to a Unitarian, rationalist response. 'Old' dissent originated in opposition to the Tudor model where legislation imposed by Charles II's Act of Uniformity (1662) made it an offence to worship or gather together outside the Established Church.²⁵ Traditionally, dissenters were those that, because of an act of conscience, could not sign the Thirty Nine Articles, and/or wished not to be bound by the Creeds and the *Book of Common Prayer*. The Articles were put together in the sixteenth century by Thomas Cranmer to distinguish the emerging Anglican Church from Catholicism; by outlining the Church's core beliefs, they in effect became a statement of faith.²⁶ Most objections to the Articles by dissenters were those relating to the Trinitarian nature of God (1 and 2), the belief in original sin (9), election (17) and the authority of the Church (20). Anglican worship, because it was rooted in a liturgical tradition, became increasingly distasteful to dissenters, who, generally speaking, preferred a plain, stripped-back service that revolved around scriptural reading and allowed prayer that was 'intimate, spontaneous, particular, and direct'.²⁷ The Articles also had to be signed by anyone wishing to enter Oxford or Cambridge University or take up a parliamentary position; hence the decision to dissent not only affected your place of worship, but in some cases your professional and public reputation. The Test and Corporation Act in 1828 did remove the 'official imposition against Dissenters holding public office', but other injustices (such as the payment of church rates) continued well into the 1850s.²⁸

²⁴ Cunningham, p. 25.

²⁵ Knight and Mason, pp. 19-20.

²⁶ The Articles went through 'two recensions', the earlier appearing at the end of Edward VI's reign (1553) and the later one at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign (English version 1571, Latin 1563). Oliver O'Donovan argues that Cranmer's 'conception' and 'distinctive character' survived the revisions; hence, he is often considered as the 'author' of the Articles. *On the Thirty Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), pp. 10-11.

²⁷ Knight and Mason, p. 18.

Timothy Rosendale argues that the Common Book of Prayer was devised as a unifying tool to help 'stabilize a historical movement in which inspiration threatened to run amok'. He is here referring to the Reformation that encouraged an individual experience of faith. The Prayer book established a 'permanent dialectic in which the authority and thus the identity of nation and individual are mutually constituting'. What is interesting is that the Church became divided once the dissenters took an assault against the official dogma of the Church. In one sense, therefore, the articles and Common Book of Prayer had succeeded in its initial purpose of creating a cohesive community. *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp 5, 19.

²⁸ Blair, *Form and Faith*, p. 125.

Knight and Mason make the observation that the ‘religion of the heart’, established by John Wesley and George Whitefield, and which came to be labelled as Methodism, was the belief system that finally divided the Evangelicals from rational dissent and pushed many to take up Unitarianism.²⁹ Methodism started within Anglicanism and it departed from the establishment not because of an incompatible theological viewpoint – many Methodists would have signed the Thirty Nine Articles –, but because it mobilised into a movement that prioritised a personal conversion of the heart. Christ became the central figure through which salvation, justification and atonement could be sought. Methodism proved incredibly successful among the poor and working classes, for it presented a simple, humble faith that could be personally owned without theological knowledge or hierarchical mediators.³⁰ According to Kirstie Blair, the ‘individual’s felt experience of God’s presence in his or her heart could not be easily challenged’ and so offered a ‘bulwark against doubt’; a crucial position for a faith reliant on conversion.³¹ The Unitarians, however, craved a rationalistic approach to faith, convinced that Methodism caused dissenters to be aligned with emotionalism, ‘mystical experience’ and rural preoccupations. Instead, Unitarians wanted to establish themselves as an important force within society and so desired a faith that engaged with liberalism, political economy and encouraged compatibility between religious and professional life.³² There was a commitment to discovering the principles of God’s laws at work in the Universe, which made Unitarians particularly responsive to scientific exploration, as well as valuing an individual’s pursuit of truth.³³ This made the Unitarians dismissive of sect, embracing a church which would encourage rational enquiry in order to achieve individually-owned beliefs.³⁴ As we shall see in Chapter Three, the spectrum of Unitarian belief was broad and changeable, with Gaskell seeking to realign rationalist faith with a spiritual experience.

There was one branch of the Evangelical movement, as epitomised by the Clapham Sect and Hannah More’s personal faith, which chose to stay aligned to the Anglican Church and work change from within. Elisabeth Jay, in her comprehensive study of nineteenth-century Anglican Evangelicalism, argues that these Evangelicals should be considered as a ‘sufficiently heterogeneous’ group to be separated out from their dissenting brethren. To Jay,

²⁹ Knight and Mason, p. 30.

³⁰ Hempton argues that the Methodists took advantage of the improved ‘religious literacy’ of the working classes, implemented by the Church of England (p. 87).

³¹ *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 148.

³² Knight and Mason, p. 52.

³³ Gleadle, p. 11; R. K. Webb, ‘The Gaskells as Unitarians’, in *Dickens and Other Victorians: Essays in Honour of Philip Collins*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Hampshire: The Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 44-171 (p. 148).

³⁴ Cunningham, p. 140; Knight and Mason, p. 53.

it has been an ‘erroneous’ practice by both historians and literary critics alike to assume that dissenters and Evangelicals ‘shared not only doctrinal sympathies but a common spiritual parentage’.³⁵ Cunningham, too, believes that dissent has never, not even in a ‘recondite sense’, signified ‘Evangelicalism’. Though much of it was evangelical in theology, dissent, Cunningham argues, has always been quite ‘distinct’ from Anglican Evangelicalism.³⁶ According to Owen Chadwick, the Evangelicals saw themselves as nothing but the ‘reformed doctrine of the Church of England’.³⁷ However, in this thesis I want to show that it is not unreasonable to classify Evangelicals alongside the dissenters precisely because they did share doctrinal sympathies, and, more importantly, because contemporary perceptions (whether accurate or not) treated them as part of the dissenting tradition.³⁸ Desmond Brown rightly notes that no dissenting group ever tried to overthrow the establishment with a ‘national substitute’, but I would argue that dissenters, along with the Evangelicals, did share a desire to re-imagine the universal body of believers and to question its national representation.³⁹ Elizabeth Clapp and Julie Jeffrey, in the context of anti-slavery, suggest that women did ‘not all speak with one voice. One of the major differences between women was their religious affiliation’.⁴⁰ Consequently, the representation of dissenting belief in the lives of these five women will look slightly different, depending on the strand of affiliation and the issue at hand. For example, the Evangelicals believed that the Established Church could be reformed into a universal model, whilst others, like Susanna Winkworth, thought that the Unitarians could offer a more inclusive, less dogmatic form.

Josephine Butler’s faith also questions the boundaries between Evangelicalism, dissent and orthodoxy. She did not regard herself as a Churchwoman (even though her husband was an ordained vicar) but defined her Christianity as ‘vital’; her definition closely resembled an evangelical position, valuing a personal conviction of the heart and allowing faith to permeate all aspects of life.⁴¹ Butler closely affiliated herself with the Quakers, drawing on the resources of this community; they were a body of believers who from their conception in the 1650s had campaigned for equality, solidarity and individual feeling,

³⁵ Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 16-17.

³⁶ Cunningham, p. 6.

³⁷ *The Victorian Church: Part One* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), p. 449.

³⁸ They, like the Tractarians, alienated their Anglican brethren through dissenting impulses; they challenged the authority of the Church from within.

³⁹ *The Idea of the Victorian Church* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), p. 377.

⁴⁰ ‘Introduction’, in *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865*, ed. by Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-19 (p. 3).

⁴¹ According to Knight and Mason, rational and evangelical dissenters alike accepted that the ‘heart and affections’ were the ‘guides of the will’. The necessity of emotion to precipitate action was something that was common to all five women (p. 22).

believing that the Spirit of God ‘recognized no difference between the sexes’.⁴² The Quakers proved a useful ally for Butler as she brushed against the dominant ideology of the time that belittled female political activity. In fact, it was Butler’s tolerance that was a key to her success; her ‘vital’ Christianity embraced all convictions of faith, seeking to create common ground. Butler’s life demonstrates the difficulty of establishing a clear cut definition of someone’s religious position. Butler was neither an Anglican nor a Quaker, nor would her evangelical beliefs compare to Hannah More’s (for a start, Butler did not believe in eternal damnation), and yet she embodied the evangelical and dissenting spirit that prioritised an individual conviction of faith. The Anglican Church could not completely distance itself from its dissenting cousins by relying on its liturgical traditions: ‘from public hymn-singing to private devotional texts, Anglican religious practice habitually drew on Dissenting writers’.⁴³ Similarly, as Blair notes, those outside of the Church were still ‘obliged to define themselves in relation to its hold on cultural life’.⁴⁴ Therefore, because complicated relationships existed between orthodox and dissenting positions, I want my terminologies to open up those contested spaces, rather than close them down.

Literary Communities

As Felicity James points out in *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* there has been a recent critical move, particularly in studies of the Romantic period, to examine the ‘collaborations and networks – literary, social, political, religious, emotional – which characterised the period’. She recognises that ‘urban spaces – the bookshops, theatre, tavern – are as important’ to the creative landscape as the Lakes or Quantocks.⁴⁵ This shift to locate and value different spaces of collaboration has been significant in opening up new critical avenues to examine the role of family, conversable relationships, religious cultures, clubs, and societies in the formation of literary texts. For example, Michelle Levy, starting from a premise that ‘original genius is a construct’, argues for the ‘sociable nature of much Romantic authorship’ and identifies the family unit as an essential site for creativity, particularly for female participation.⁴⁶ David Higgins and John Whale seek to complicate, in a special edition of the *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, the notion that there is any ‘simple straightforward shift from eighteenth-century sociability

⁴² Knight and Mason, p. 60.

⁴³ Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 293.

⁴⁴ Blair, *Form and Faith*, p. 122.

⁴⁵ *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 5.

⁴⁶ Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 2, 5, 10.

to Romantic Individualism’, and instead suggest that ‘creativity is at once individual and social’.⁴⁷ This dynamic understanding of the intersection between an individual and the collective process is crucial for this thesis: I conceptualise not only the communal environment but the woman writer’s place within it. It is also important to ask what happened to community and the individual genius as the nineteenth century progressed: was sociability contested or embraced?

There has been some recent critical engagement dealing with nineteenth-century collaborative or creative partnerships, but often these studies only vicariously touch upon nineteenth-century authors. For example, Jack Stillinger flags up the ‘importance of historical authorship to our reading, understanding and appreciation of a literary text’; or in other words there is a need to discover the ‘circumstances of composition’. He considers ‘collaboration’ as a representative practice of literary production across time, so consequently his case studies discuss the Romantic poet and nineteenth and twentieth-century writers. The broad scope of his study, however, does suggest the continuing importance throughout the nineteenth century of observing writers in community.⁴⁸ Bette London, too, is concerned with the broad spectrum of literary production, asking the question whether ‘collaborative authorship...[is] an anomalous occurrence of interest primarily for its exceptionality, or is it, as Jack Stillinger argued, a common feature of most if not all authorship that passes as singular?’ She concludes that partnerships, mostly drawn from the twentieth century (‘acts of assistance and inspiration; acts of mentoring or mutual influence; acts of revision or editorial input’), were ‘distinct, recognizable and meaningful’ acts for women. London notes the challenges of establishing a female tradition of collaboration, for it was often hidden and ‘susceptible to hierarchical ordering’. She models, therefore, a methodological approach that is located away from canonical writers within a ‘motley group, with varied and uncertain literary reputations’. It is through these ‘unambiguous’ partnerships that authorial practices can be read in their ‘full and rich complexity’, away from practices that have been inherited.⁴⁹ Significantly, through such a method, London creates a divergence not only between female and male but visible and invisible collaborations; distinctions that I am wary to uphold in this thesis. The collaborations that I examine include men and women, hidden and self-conscious, empowering and oppressive partnerships. However, the most fruitful area of research

⁴⁷ David Higgins and John Whale, ‘Introduction’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34.2 (2011), pp. 1-3 (p. 1).

⁴⁸ *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 22.

⁴⁹ London, pp. 3-4, 20-21.

undertaken by nineteenth-century scholars, which I will examine shortly, has been to consider the role of print culture in creating a ‘definable, textual community’.⁵⁰ In order to help define the parameters of the literary community, I will now engage with the critical studies theorising community, both from the Romantic and nineteenth-century fields of study, paying particular attention to how they have informed my approach.

Jeffrey Cox offers some useful synonyms to help establish what he terms as ‘group’ (and he, like James and Levy, is once again theorising a particular Romantic model of community), associating it with circle, coterie, clique, and association, but he is adamant that it is not a corporation, organisation or establishment. In this sense, the group is removed from a position of authority or state control. Instead, the group is constructed by those who are ‘affiliated’ with it, ‘self-fashioning’ its final embodiment. Interestingly, the group is also ‘defined by those excluded’ or who temporarily pass through, and by the ‘project’ that the group may embody; community is both ‘imagined and lived beyond’ the given collective. Cox argues, and this is where he becomes important for this thesis, that the study of groups is a useful method for overcoming the problem of ‘abstraction’. He quotes Alan Liu who posits that the ‘local’ is the ‘underexplored zone between the discretely individual and the massively collective’, and in Cox’s mind the group is the best way into this zone. It stands in for abstraction in order to allow us ‘to stand beyond it’, and see its significance.⁵¹ This is also supported by Callum Brown who promotes the critical practice of providing a ‘collage of the cultural representations and experiences of men and women in the past’.⁵² He argues that it is possible to reconstruct a Christian discourse by paying close attention to an individual’s conception of religious belief, with a particular focus upon *how* they talk about their faith.⁵³ By taking individual studies and placing them alongside each other, it is hoped that a broader principle can be extracted, which can help to clarify and understand more fully the communal experience of dissenting women.

A historical survey of the different formations of community and culture (particularly clubs and societies) that emerged in the eighteenth century will help draw

⁵⁰ ‘Introduction’, in *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

⁵¹ Alan Liu, ‘Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail’, *Representations*, 32 (1990), p. 94. Qtd. Cox, pp. 5-6, 8-9.

⁵² Callum Brown, ‘Religion’, in *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, ed. by Lynn Abrams, Eleanor Gordon, Deborah Simonton and Eileen Yeo (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 98. Qtd. Jacqueline de Vries, ‘More than Paradoxes to Offer: Feminism, History and Religious Cultures’, in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain 1800-1940*, pp. 188-210 (p.191).

⁵³ If it is possible to reconstruct a religious discourse, then it should be possible to observe that discourse in community. See Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001, 2009), p. 13.

parallels between these early models and the literary communities of my case studies. Peter Clark in *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800* helpfully describes the ‘phenomena’, as eighteenth-century commentators coined it, of the proliferation of clubs and societies in Britain. The ‘changing role of state and church’ created a space for voluntary associations to rise up with a hesitant and loose aim to ‘promote trade and friendship’. Their growth also mimicked the rise in urbanisation with members almost exclusively male and professional, contributing to a ‘public discourse’ as posited by Habermas: the sociable act of drinking was combined with conversation of a public or social nature. Societies formed around a variety of subjects including art, books, debating, medicine, horticulture, ethics, sport, and science.⁵⁴ As an early example, Habermas argues that the club or coffee house allowed private people to come together in a public setting to regulate civil society (‘the realm of commodity exchange’). This accessible space increased the opportunity for the middle class to emerge as a ‘stable group of discussants’.⁵⁵ Jon Mee’s monograph *Conversable Worlds* highlights conversation as an important ‘domain’ in which power, anxiety, contention, as well as dialogue, could be played out. Conversation was a crucial terrain for figuring out, establishing or undermining a community’s values. What is significant about Mee’s research is that conversation can be found in the drawing room, in the club or at the theatre, hence breaking down the perceived barriers between public and private space. The club, as Habermas suggested, was an important setting for dialogue to take place, but Mee rescues conversation from being viewed as either politically explosive or privately retrenched. He offers conversation as a dynamic lens through which community can be observed.⁵⁶

Another significant subcategory of the eighteenth-century club movement was the social control or surveillance associations that looked to guard morality through philanthropic activities. A typical example of this was William Wilberforce’s Proclamation Society that sought to advance reform for the working classes. They appealed to Local Magistrates to ‘suppress moral disorder, while also promoting legislation for Sunday observance’. The Sunday School movement, in which Hannah More played a leading part, also sought to improve the working classes through education and surveillance.⁵⁷ For the religious believer, his or her relation to the predominant culture was a contentious issue and often in flux. The question was how to participate in culture and yet stand apart from it? The anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines culture as a ‘web of meanings in which the human is

⁵⁴ Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 2, 6, 10.

⁵⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 27, 30, 37, 52.

⁵⁶ *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 4-5, 8, 32.

⁵⁷ Clarke, pp. 102-104.

suspended and which she or he continues to weave'. Jane Shaw responds to this definition with the following summarisation: 'It suggests that culture is everything about a particular people, and how they make sense of the world'.⁵⁸ And yet as Tim Harris points out, cultures are 'seldom monolithic', with individuals understanding or internalising their culture in different ways, according to social and economic status.⁵⁹ In a slightly different sociological context, Alan Macfarlane argues that social and economic historians have pointed to a cohesive, community-based society that is believed to have predated the urbanised and industrial society. The 'myth' that a 'tightly-knit' community has existed in its pure form is detrimental in Macfarlane's mind because it limits the definition of community, rendering it inadequate or unsuitable for examining contemporary society.⁶⁰ Therefore, the search for a unified or homogenising model of community should be avoided. Instead, the individual set of circumstances surrounding the community – geography, membership, class, gender – all contribute towards its identification, and so should be taken into account before any model of community is offered.

Benedict Anderson's influential study *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991) conceived the nation as an act of imagination, owing its existence to national sentiments fostered by print culture and capitalism.⁶¹ The implication of Anderson's approach is that all nations are 'mental constructs' because no individual can know every person or every place in his/her society. Instead, they must 'inevitably imagine the national community'.⁶² Print culture was an essential factor in helping to do this, creating a virtual community through the act of reading, particularly newspapers. This activity, rooted in everyday life, allowed one newspaper reader to observe another and hence make conclusions about a national identity.⁶³ In Chapter One, I will engage with the question of national identity through a close reading of the Clapham community's literature – More's poem 'Slavery, A Poem' (1788), John

⁵⁸ Shaw, 'Introduction', pp. 2-4.

⁵⁹ 'Problematising Popular Culture', in *Popular Culture in England 1500-1850*, ed. by Tim Harris (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1995), pp. 1-27 (p. 11).

⁶⁰ Alan Macfarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 1-2.

⁶¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983, 1991), pp. 6, 44.

⁶² Anne Frey, *British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency and Bureaucratic Nationalism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 10.

⁶³ Benedict Anderson, p. 35.

For studies dealing with nationalism, see Anne Frey, *British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency and Bureaucratic Nationalism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003); Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

For an anthropological engagement with Benedict Anderson's ideas, see Robert J. Thornton, *Unimagined Community: Sex, Networks and AIDS in Uganda and South Africa* (California: California University Press, 2008).

Newton's *Thoughts on the African Slave Trade* (1788) and William Wilberforce's Parliamentary Speeches. This literature conceived a nation governed by an Evangelical God that modelled benevolence and would be the leading proponent against the trans-Atlantic slave trade. To be otherwise was to risk and lose the favour of God and to forfeit the nation's international status.

Geoffrey Cubitt discusses Anderson's ideas in his edited collection *Imagining Nations* and concludes that to imagine a nation is 'to imagine something that is generic as well as distinctive', particularised but also collective.⁶⁴ This conception of the nation closely resembles Cox's assumptions about groups, which suggests that the act of imagination can be applied to all stages of community. In recent years, the investigation of print culture has become an expanding area of interest in nineteenth-century studies with Laurel Brake, among others, interested in the ways that print 'mediates a social consciousness', replacing the salon or club as the 'public space for discourses'.⁶⁵ An emphasis has been placed upon the types of 'encounters' that have occurred within the press, as the reader, for the very first time, became a visible entity and was able to fully participate (through letters and correspondents) in Victorian debates.⁶⁶ A new textual and yet imaginative space is created by print, holding immense possibility for the spiritual communities examined in this thesis. Joshua King, in his forthcoming book *Imagined Spiritualities in Britain's Age of Print*, demonstrates how Anderson's understanding of the nation and the development of print culture can directly inform a study of communal religiosity within the nineteenth century. He considers how and to what degree the printed press acted as a medium for 'imagining and participating in competing versions of a British Christian community'. He is particularly interested in resisting Anderson's implication that a national identity is an 'essentially secular activity', choosing to argue that authors like S. T. Coleridge, F. D. Maurice, and

⁶⁴ 'Introduction', in *Imagining Nations*, ed. by Geoffrey Cubitt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 1-20 (p. 13).

⁶⁵ Brake, Bell and Finkelstein, 'Introduction', p. 3; 'Introduction: Encountering the Press', in *Encounters in the Victorian Press*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 1-7 (p. 2).

⁶⁶ Brake and Codell, 'Introduction', p. 1.

Richard Altick's important monograph *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1957) plots the history of the mass reading audience, considering how and why the common reader came into being. The development of the printing press helped to facilitate the spread of reading and in Altick's view contributed to the emerging democratic society (pp. 3, 12).

Beth Palmer and Adeline Buckland attempt to individualise and complicate the Victorian 'common reader', paying attention to the categories of gender and class which would contribute to 'different kinds of [reading] experience'. 'Introduction', in *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-6 (p. 3).

Alfred Lord Tennyson understood their nationality in the light of religious belonging.⁶⁷ I, like King, consider the role that print culture played in allowing a community like Josephine Butler's to not only disseminate its values but through an act of imagination conceive a communal identity beyond its known members.

I am committed to the case study approach, echoing Callum Brown's call to create a 'collage of the cultural representation' that will enable the particular to speak to the collective. The decision to prefix community with 'literary' was to draw attention to the dominant mode of expression that these communities took, particularly in articulating their conviction and social agenda.⁶⁸ In some cases, the label of 'campaigning' community has felt more appropriate, particularly in Chapter Four where the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, and 1869) is the central focus of Butler's community. This final chapter seeks to reconstruct the community that emerged around the dynamic leadership of Butler, recognising that she front-led a political campaign through the union of diverse religious backgrounds. In Chapter Three, the very existence of a literary community is called into question, as Gaskell struggles to write and work within the parameters laid down by the Manchester Liberals. Gaskell entered into an ideological debate concerning fallenness, through her novel *Ruth* (1853), and this caused her to stand apart from her community, receiving the greatest disapprobation from her husband's Unitarian congregation. I will use *Ruth* to identify the particulars of Gaskell's agenda regarding the causes and effects of prostitution, prioritising the importance of community in this ameliorative process.

Most of my case studies had a desire for collaboration, despite obstacles or the domination of a particular individual. The thesis title's linguistic identification with literature was also deliberately chosen to anticipate the role that print culture played in the community's effectiveness, both in terms of communicating values and allowing collaborative projects to be undertaken. I have avoided where possible making reductive generalisations about community as a whole. For example, the geographical location of the community was of vital importance to More and Gaskell, but of little relevance to the experience of the Winkworths and Butler. In the case of the Winkworths, the term circle will

⁶⁷ Joshua King, *Imagined Spiritualities*, pp 1, 4; Benedict Anderson, p. 22.

⁶⁸ Pauline Nestor uses the term 'literary community' to describe the space newly available to women that 'male writers had long enjoyed at court and in the coffee-house, club and university'. Interestingly, Nestor genders the literary community and aligns it with Habermas' public space where civil regulation takes place. As we have seen, this was characterised by discussion and conversation. Unlike Nestor, as discussed in the gender section of the Introduction, I do not consider the literary community's significance to be equated with its gendered potential. *Friendship and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 1-2.

be used to reflect the insignificance of a physical location in the community's existence, relying instead on lettered communication and arranged visits. Male mentors played a vital role in the lives of More and the Winkworths, which suggests that any examination of the female writer should take into account the presence of men within her community.⁶⁹ However, there are certain characteristics that permeate all the case studies, particularly the reliance on correspondence to articulate and test a conviction of faith. Despite the differences in religious conviction, there was, largely speaking, a commitment to establish a religious culture within a secular world. For Butler, this involved, in language reminiscent of Anderson, an act of imagination. Despite Anderson's assessment that nationalism emerged out of the power vacuum caused by the diminution of traditional power structures, such as the monarchy and Christianity, there is evidence that religious communities re-staked a claim in society by proposing a nation, even a world (kingdom) ruled by God.⁷⁰ Such a belief required an act of imagination, not only from individuals but by the collective Christian community. In fact, the faith and deeds of the community were essential to the realisation of this imagined kingdom. Community, therefore, was responsible for imagining its present and future, its localised and (inter) national state, using literary discourse to establish itself.

Female Experience

There have been two valuable collections, both edited by Sue Morgan, in the last ten years that have sought to take seriously religion's place in a female historiography. In *Women, Religion and Feminism* (2002), the agenda is not to establish a correct set of feminist credentials but to reposition religion within an existing understanding of feminism. What does it look like for a woman to be religious and a feminist? Religion, Morgan argues, has tended to be harnessed in service of the separate spheres ideology and yet the presentation of the religious lives in her collection (for instance, Hannah More and Josephine Butler) should contribute to its dissipation.⁷¹ Morgan's next project, edited with Jacqueline de Vries, *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain* (2010), engages with a new set of questions about *how* women contributed to nineteenth-century faith, both influencing and

⁶⁹ For studies focused on the female experience of writing, see Nestor, *Friendship and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell*; Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas: And What Men Have Done To Them* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, however, does clarify his position, stating that it would be 'short-sighted' to think that the 'imagined communities of nations' grew out of and simply replaced 'religious communities and dynastic realms'. Instead, 'nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being' (p. 22, 12).

⁷¹ 'Introduction', in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain*, pp. 1-19 (p. 4).

absorbing religious culture. This collection is more sensitive to the gendered set of assumptions that result from a female-based study, acknowledging that any account of women's spirituality must pay attention to men's religious experience. In doing so, the 'clichéd historical binary of feminised piety and masculine doubt' can be dismantled once and for all. Instead, a relational understanding of male and female experience of faith will emerge that challenges the 'privatisation and domestication of faith'.⁷² I am indebted to both these collections for providing a theoretical framework in which to position my own work, and for setting the groundwork for why female religious studies are valid and necessary.

At the same time, I am deeply aware that it is naïve to suggest that a female tradition can be discovered by simply delving into the past. Instead, as Linda Peterson argues, this desire to define a tradition actually results not in a discovery but in a 'construction'.⁷³ As I reconstruct literary communities, therefore, I intend to keep in mind this artificiality so as not to exaggerate the importance of gender. This self-consciousness should allow the communal experience, both male and female, to take priority. I am committed, like Marlon Ross, to recovering a woman writer's place in history whilst not succumbing to an examination of them in isolation.⁷⁴ If gender *is* a construction and not an essentialist feature of the biological body then any configuration of gender should be treated as unstable, with particular attention paid to its contributing factors. Nancy Chodorow, psychoanalyst and feminist critic, argues that the 'feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and in connection to other people'; so female identity formation takes place, in Carol Gilligan's words, in the 'context of ongoing relationships'.⁷⁵ Therefore, it seems apparent that any study of female experience must take into account the role of relationships. Pauline Nestor's study of female friendship and community, revolving around the lives of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, was a reaction to the continuing examination of the female writer in 'relation to men'. She seeks instead to champion the necessity of female-only communal studies to expose men's deep distrust of female independence.⁷⁶ Sharon Marcus suggests that female friendship, outside of institutions, was an important construct in

⁷² Morgan and de Vries, 'Introduction', in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, pp. 3, 8.

⁷³ Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Virginia: University of Virginia, 1999), pp. 2, 21.

⁷⁴ Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 6. Qtd. Beth Lau, 'Introduction', in *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers 1790-1835*, ed. by Beth Lau (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1-15 (pp. 2-3).

⁷⁵ Nancy Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. by M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 43-44. Qtd. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁷⁶ Nestor, p. 5.

challenging the Victorian gender system: ‘it could temporarily confer a new shape on femininity without altering its basic structure’. In other words, female friendship offered women a space in which to explore desire, affection and identity without unsettling the normative roles of marriage and family life.⁷⁷ Without undermining these important studies, I want to suggest that despite the presence of female friendships within these case studies, we cannot ignore the evidence that female identity (particularly in the dissenting community) continued to construct itself (positively and to its detriment) alongside male experience.⁷⁸

In a review from the 1970s, examining recent critical work on female authors, Gina Luria makes a significant remark that I believe has yet to be fully realised by literary critics: she suggests that there has been a ‘discovery of yet another tradition within the community of women, the presence of generous men’. She continues by saying that the discovery of ‘an intellectual passion’ (the words of George Eliot) was often the result of ‘agency’ through ‘one or more learned men’ with women carefully chronicling their response to male mentors. This ‘honourable alliance’, as Luria coins it, offers a new perspective from which to trace the work of women writers.⁷⁹ Mentoring, as explored in Chapter One and Two, considers, specifically, the role of male mentors in supporting the faith of women in their communities. They were often advising and encouraging from a position of superior knowledge or experience, largely the result of wider exposure to spiritual truths. The Winkworths accepted that these men had a spiritual authority unavailable to them and so gratefully slotted into their role as mentees. By submitting to this subordination, paradoxically, they hoped to eventually acquire the education and spiritual growth needed to achieve equality with their fellow male worshippers. However, male mentors not only encouraged the religious life but influenced the textual choices undertaken by the female

⁷⁷ *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 4, 8.

⁷⁸ For an extensive study into the role that Anglican sisterhoods played in the ‘Victorian outpouring of philanthropy as well as in the first wave of British feminist practice’, see Susan Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhood in Victorian Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. xiii.

⁷⁹ Luria makes this observation in reference to the work by Helen Moglen (*Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived* [1976]). Luria summarises Moglen’s reading of *Jane Eyre* as Charlotte Brontë’s resistance to male interference, seeking ‘to create a new feminist mode of life and art’. Luria does not disagree with Moglen that Brontë, like many female writers, struggled against privation and male patriarchy, but she does not want to reduce women’s writing to the ‘mechanics of stimulus-response’. Instead, Luria posits that there is evidence that male mentors were the thrust women needed to launch into a ‘universe of aspiration and imagination’. ‘Review’, *Signs*, 4:2 (1978), pp. 374-380 (pp. 375-377). Patricia Menon’s monograph considers the figure of the ‘mentor-lover’ and argues that canonical novelists, such as Austen and Eliot, used such a figure to morally justify the novel. Combining the conduct book with the novel created heroes who were worthy educators and suitable lovers. *Austen, Eliot and Charlotte Brontë and the Mentor-Lover* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 6.

writer. The Winkworths' choice to translate German theology and hymns was the result not only of early exposure to the German language through education, but the consequence of Chevalier Bunsen pushing his personal agenda. His desire for his own work to reach a wider audience caused him to ask the Winkworths to translate his material. Nancy Cho suggests that hymnody and its development can be used to 'offer literary sight', particularly into the 'subtle histories' surrounding female authority. Female textual choices can be deferential or antagonistic to the male tradition.⁸⁰ Interestingly, it was this dynamic and often fractious relationship between the sisters and their mentor that actually caused them to find autonomy as translators.

There was another type of relationship existing between men and women, particularly seen in the opening chapter, which required a deeper level of confession and openness. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'accountability' is defined as 'the quality of being accountable; liability to account for and answer for one's conduct, performance and duties'.⁸¹ The word is most likely to be used in a parliamentary, corporate or financial setting, with the public or shareholders able to insist and/or expect an honest account of the company's actions. I believe, however, that it is possible to take this definition and widen it to include the private, often intimate relationships taking place between individuals in a religious community. In this context, accountability is about 'proving' conversion, requiring an honest and open communication between members to help overcome sinful habits or encourage virtuous living. Each participant will be monitoring progress and encouraging perseverance and solidarity through identification of common faults. This relationship, because of the level of intimacy and trust it requires, should in practice be on an equal footing. However, there are also possibly disturbing connotations to consider with friendships of accountability for they involve the surveillance of a person's behaviour that could lead to exploitation and control. In Chapter One, I suggest that the need to 'prove' conversion motivated philanthropy but also dictated the methods of social engagement. For example, the physical freedom sought for the slave was vicariously mixed up with the Evangelicals' desire to set the slave's soul free. As a consequence, the surveillance of the slave's condition, as recorded in poetry, essays and speeches, was a messy assortment of sympathy, judgment and self-interest. Susan David Bernstein explores the discourse of 'confession' (particularly in the Catholic tradition) as a site of power, with the repressed acting as the spectacle, and yet paradoxically silenced. Bernstein asks the question whether

⁸⁰ 'Gender and Authority in British Women Hymn-Writers: Use of Metre, 1760-1900', *Literature Compass*, 6.2 (2009), 540-548 (p. 546).

⁸¹ 'accountability', *Oxford English Dictionary*
 < <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/1197?redirectedFrom=accountability#eid> >
 [accessed 26.03.2014].

confession can ever be empowering, proposing ‘testimony’ as an alternative mode; women can bear ‘witness’ to, rather than reveal transgressive acts. However, there is still the sense that in confessional discourse, women (or slaves) were under the voyeuristic and powerful gaze of the white man of authority.⁸²

The study of religion is of particular interest for challenging the binaries set up between male and female experience because, as Morgan argues, religion had the ‘capacity to cross fixed spatial boundaries’. It was experienced as a private, personal source of empowerment and yet it intersected with the political and social world. Morgan also wants to disrupt what she considers a stubborn historical narrative: that privatisation and domestication of faith during the nineteenth century led to a ‘feminisation of religion’.⁸³ I suggest that Christ became a contested figure in this century, simultaneously (depending on the depiction) assuming a femininity and an aggressive masculinity.⁸⁴ This battle for Christ’s gender was not to weaken his position overall, but instead was evidence that his figure was central to a religious encounter, and part of an individual’s ownership of faith. In More’s only novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), I argue, the text works as a blueprint for Evangelical living, using the marriage of the two protagonists to blur the gendered responsibility of who influences and communicates religious conviction; all have a part to play in representing and embodying the Evangelical vision for the world. Butler, particularly, drew enormous strength from identification with a feminine Christ, giving her the confidence needed to lead a national campaign and to become a prophetic voice. Therefore, like Morgan, I would dismiss suggestions that religion was feminised in a way that depowered it but instead the acknowledgment that the virtues of Christianity were ‘peculiarly feminine’ was a dynamic realisation for many.⁸⁵ All Christians, male or female,

⁸² *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 7, 27, 36.

⁸³ ‘Introduction’, in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, p. 15; ‘Introduction’, in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, p. 8.

Callum Brown is an example of a historian who assesses nineteenth-century piety as feminised. He blames this construction on the Evangelical movement which caused piety and femininity to be inextricably linked, to be the ‘discursive “space of exteriority” for the other’ (p. 59).

⁸⁴ Sean Gill and Julie Melnyk record the increased anxiety shown towards the feminisation of Christ (in literature, theology and art), an image emphasising the virtues and roles usually allotted to women, according to “separate spheres” gender ideology. Gill, pp. 166-167; Julie Melnyk, “‘Mighty Victims’: Women Writers and the Feminization of Christ”, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2003), 131-157 (p. 131).

⁸⁵ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to equate strangeness or oddness with ‘peculiarity’ was a mid to late nineteenth-century development. Therefore, when it is used in *Cælebs*, More is referring to the distinctiveness of Christianity in promoting the feminine virtues. ‘peculiarity’, *Oxford English Dictionary*

< <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/139498?redirectedFrom=peculiarly#eid>>

[accessed 08.04.2014].

were to embody traditionally feminine characteristics and to exercise them in the political or domestic, public or private space. It is also important to consider Emma Major's view that 'the Christian Church, feminised in its role as the bride of Christ, has a long tradition of being described as female'. She explores the implications of what such a personification meant for female identification, particularly for Anglican women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century: 'not only were women generally held to be more religious than men, but the ideal Anglican woman could on occasion embody the Church of England'.⁸⁶ Major's observation here has significance for this thesis as she suggests that the feminisation of religion was not necessarily a new phenomenon nor a dissenting position, but was at the heart of an orthodox understanding of the church. Women were also considered essential to the wellbeing of the Christian church in other Protestant dissenting traditions (Quakerism and Methodism), complicating the assumption that female influence was a conservative, orthodox impulse or reinforced by patriarchal men.⁸⁷ Therefore, I will pay particular attention to the gendering and representation of both Christ and the church throughout this thesis, in both dissenting and orthodox traditions, to present a coherent picture of exactly how feminine influence was conceived and to what extent it was radicalised. It must also be remembered, as Harriet Guest writes, that gender difference is the 'basis of sociable exchange'. Femininity may 'seem a small significance in some of the major transactions of cultural change, but it is always a part of what gives those transactions current value'. In other words, differences in gender should not be ignored, but it can be within those differences that femininity can find empowerment and the space for manoeuvre.⁸⁸

Genre

Gavin Dowd highlights the theoretical problems of talking about 'genre' in a literary critical context because of its very function: the classification of texts. Michel Foucault aligns genre, in Dowd's words, with the human 'tendency towards classification'; this need to impose order on all things can be seen throughout history. It is in the act of distinguishing and

Hannah More, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*, ed. by Patricia Demers (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2007), p. 297.

⁸⁶ Major is primarily concerned with national identity and how the female figure of Britannia dominated eighteenth-century depictions of Britain. She argues that both Church and State used women as an 'index' to indicate the 'degree of civilisation and progress'. I am less concerned with Major's study of Britannia but I am interested in how her assessment of the female Church complicates this study of dissenting femininity. Once again, the boundaries between orthodox and dissenting faith are made a little less clear (pp. 7, 30, 37).

⁸⁷ Major, p. 290.

⁸⁸ Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), p. 2.

finding like kinds that identity can be understood.⁸⁹ However, there are numerous problems with this approach to literature, which Foucault analyses, beginning with the power discourse that is evident in this definition. Generic designations are often ‘imposed retrospectively’, and the agenda of the cataloguer or anthologist cannot be ignored or quietly put to one side.⁹⁰ Instead, texts are forced to conform to an existing set of parameters, narrowing their capabilities to transcend or overcome universals. There is an ongoing tension between ‘singularity and form’, which the rigorous enforcement of genre appears to conflate.⁹¹ However, despite critical distrust of genre, Dowd does make the convincing argument that genre as a literary device should be defended because, without generic indicators, a text sits uncomfortably alone; without some kind of referential framework in which to approach the text, a reader is left to interpret in the dark. The homogenising tendencies within an individual genre are lessened as we compare one genre to another.⁹² It is this potential overlap between genres that has particular appeal for this thesis. I would argue that the boundaries between literary and religious texts were blurred in the hands of these women, with generic forms manipulated and (re)formed to suit a religious agenda. In order to observe these textual changes, an engagement with generic classifications is, therefore, essential.

Bianca Tredennick’s edited collection *Victorian Transformations* explores what she terms the ‘transformation’ of literary forms within the nineteenth century. The collection is concerned with how the Victorians ‘adopted, adapted, revised and rejected their literary and cultural heritage’. She acknowledges that the act of ‘transformation’ is an issue in itself, as writers sought not only to respond to inherited forms by creating new ones, but also to self-consciously understand the process of change and how it was conceived.⁹³ This is a careful and intelligent response to the problem of genre, using classification of texts to open up questions of how and to what extent writers wrote in an existing tradition. Two classifications of texts that the writers of my case studies appear to have blurred are theology and literature, whether that was the novel, biography or hymn. Rebecca Styler argues that women used ‘literature as a means to engage in theological discourse, through which they reinterpreted Christianity to meet deeply felt personal and political needs’. This resulted in

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science* (London Tavistock, 1970), p. xxiv. Qtd. Section helpfully informed by Gavin Dowd, ‘Introduction: Genre Matters in Theory and Criticism’, in *Genre Matters: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Gavin Dowd, Lesley Stevenson and Jeremy Strong (Bristol: Intellect, 2006), pp. 11-27 (p. 11).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 15.

⁹³ Bianca Tredennick, ‘Introduction’, in *Victorian Transformations: Genre, Nationalism and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by Bianca Tredennick (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-6 (pp. 2-3).

many female writers creating a ‘literary theology’, which used literary forms to disguise and circulate religious ideas.⁹⁴ According to Julie Melnyk, such original ideas about God, despite the non-traditional format, should identify Victorian women writers with the theologian. They had limited access to traditional forms (the sermon) and so appropriated those that were available to them: theological ideas appeared in ‘non-traditional genres, in letters, novels, pamphlets, devotional manuals, and in the increasingly influential periodical press, disguised as uncontroversial religious writings’. In doing so, they did not propose ‘overarching, self-consistent theological systems’, but they reinterpreted Scripture, the nature of God, and man’s place in the world.⁹⁵ In Butler’s case, she maximised the biographical form, and Biblical studies of character, to offer original ideas about Christ and his relationship with women, in particular. In Catherine Winkworth’s hymn translations, she demonstrates a commitment to a universal church, in which Christ’s humanity is centralised. As Blair explains, in the context of poetry, dissenting poets were at ‘least in part forced to define themselves in relation to Anglican norms’.⁹⁶ Once again, dissenting and orthodox traditions are closely interconnected, with formal features within denominations shared. Gaskell’s novels, as we shall see, appropriated the form of the sermon, choosing to supersede the usual platform (the chapel) for communicating Unitarian values.

Mark Knight observes that the importance of story within the Biblical narrative encouraged individual Christians to ‘assimilate their own personal stories in the great meta-narrative of salvation and conversion’.⁹⁷ Consequently, as these case studies will demonstrate, there was a proliferation of the biographical genre (with all its interconnected subgenres: memoirs, lives of the saints, autobiography and life writing) used in a ‘self-reflexive manner’. According to Juliette Atkinson, there was a new trend in the nineteenth century to write about the ‘obscure’ subject or the hidden life. Biographies of unknown missionaries, clergymen, schoolmasters or the lives of the saints became prolific, ‘explicitly defined against the contemporary fashion for biographies of “Great”, or famous, men’.⁹⁸ Biographies of hidden lives allowed Butler to fix her own, potentially controversial, life in a Christian tradition, drawing affirmation from past, godly lives. This identification, however, did not end with her own individual life, but instead she offered the saints’ lives as

⁹⁴ Styler, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Julie Melnyk, ‘Introduction’, in *Women’s Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of their Fathers*, ed. by Julie Melnyk (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), xi-xviii (pp. xi-xii).

⁹⁶ Blair, *Form and Faith*, p. 18.

⁹⁷ ‘The Word in the Word: An Introduction’, in *Biblical Religion and the Novel 1700-2000*, ed. by Mark Knight and Thomas Woodman (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 1-12 (p. 5).

⁹⁸ *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century ‘Hidden’ Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 30-31.

blueprints for her campaign community. Great faith was placed in the ‘emulative power of biography’ and in its ability to ‘modify the way in which lives were lived’.⁹⁹ Family biography, consequently, became an important mode in which the female writer assumed authority as a writer. As David Amigoni points out, Victorian identity was a ‘complex compound derived from multiple sources’, with women buffeted between family on one side and literary professionalism on the other. I would suggest that a woman’s religious community also added another layer to this identification. Therefore, life writing was premised restlessly on ‘the boundaries between print and private [...] masculine and feminine, notability and obscurity, the centre and the margin, conformity and dissidence’.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Amigoni’s assessment can be used to suggest that a woman’s choice of generic form was not only religiously motivated but tactical, negotiating the difficult terrain of self-identification. The problematic gendered classification of biography should also not be ignored, for it has often been perceived that biographical memoirs were the acceptable domain of women.¹⁰¹ Despite this assumption, I would argue that a woman like Butler took such a prescriptive ‘safe’ form and reconstituted it to fit her personal agenda as a political campaigner.

Each chapter is committed to a reconstruction of the literary community, identifying key members and literary forms, whilst paying close attention to the social agenda or theological position that resulted from this collaborative environment. I will take the case studies in chronological order, allowing the changes to be tracked across the century. The subject of the first chapter, therefore, is Hannah More and her involvement with the Evangelical Abolitionists.

⁹⁹ Atkinson, pp. 25, 29.

¹⁰⁰ David Amigoni, ‘Introduction: Victorian Life Writing: Genres, Print, Constituencies’, in *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, ed. by David Amigoni (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1-19 (pp. 15-17).

¹⁰¹ Linda H. Peterson is deeply distrustful of critical studies that have tended to read women’s text as if gendered, denigrating biography as simply a female tradition. Instead, Peterson demonstrates that women have always used this generic form in interesting and dynamic ways (pp. 2, 16). Trev Lynn Broughton, on the other hand, wants to complicate the assumption that life writing became dominated by a masculine individualism, arguing that a deep anxiety was felt by men writing about themselves. Both Broughton and Peterson, in their distinct ways, upset simplistic assumptions that a particular genre is gender dominated. *Men of Letters, Writings Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography in the Late Victorian Period* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 10.

Chapter One

Hannah More, Abolition and the Evangelical Community

Hannah More's literary career spanned over sixty years producing numerous pamphlets, religious tracts, conduct books, poetry and a single novel. She was a keen participant in high society and literary culture in the 1770s, contributing to the Bluestocking circle and producing theatrical pieces worthy of David Garrick's notice (*Percy*, [1777]). However, what cannot be ignored in a study of More's literary works is the significance of her Evangelical awakening in the late 1780s. Writing in the 'Preface' to her collected works in 1801, she reflects that 'of the latter productions, usefulness has been more invariably the object: whereas in many of the earlier, amusement was more obviously proposed'. She continues: 'life and manners have been the objects of my unwearied observation' for this world is a 'scene of much action' in which 'the concerns of eternity' are to be outworked.¹ From this point onwards More's entire attitude towards her literary talents changed: her writing was seen as a tool for expressing an inward conviction of faith. The impetus now lay with representing a belief system that not only explained an individual's destiny but could change the course of mankind's. The Evangelicals considered the world as a 'theatre of action', with action the heartbeat of a virtuous life.² This chapter is, therefore, interested in the symbiotic relationship existing between More's Evangelical faith and the literary works she subsequently wrote.

Anne Stott concludes that More's 'remarkable achievements and her multiple contradictions mean that [she] will always elude precise terminology, easy labels, and glib simplifications'.³ The critical attention that More has received, therefore, has often been mixed. This is partly the result of More's Evangelicalism, as it involved her in both subversive political campaigns, such as the Abolition movement, and in the continuation of certain conservative attitudes regarding class and nationhood. Another difficulty of categorising More's work is the problematic relationship Evangelicalism had with the Established Church. Despite More's fervent verbal support of the Church of England, Evangelicalism cast her allegiances in doubt. This strain of Christianity had more in common with its dissenting cousins than More would have liked to admit, because it prioritised the individual conviction of faith, diminishing the authority of the priest-figure. More may have held private misgivings regarding the dissenting Methodists but, whether she liked it or not, she was often labelled alongside them as an enthusiast. Clapp and

¹ 'Preface', in *The Works of Hannah More in Eight Volumes*, 8 vols (London: 1801), I, pp. xi, xv-xvi.

² *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (London, 1791), p. 68.

³ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. xi.

Jeffrey's important, recent collection on women, dissent and anti-slavery examines the 'multiple ways' in which dissenting women involved themselves in the abolition movement. They are right to note that although women influenced policy, values and ideas, they failed to speak as one collective voice; this, they argue, was due to the different 'religious affiliation[s]' that women belonged to. One way that these differences can be observed is by examining the motivation behind the Evangelicals' and rational dissenters' involvement: the former position viewed slavery as another form of human bondage to sin, whilst the latter group saw abolition as an 'extension of religious liberty'.⁴ However, the collection fails to examine, in any great detail, the Evangelical position as embodied by the Clapham Sect. It will become evident that More's understanding of abolition, and the place that women found within it, complicated simple binary categorisations of orthodox and dissenting approaches to Abolition.

This chapter will be divided into two sections: the first will identify the key members of More's Evangelical community and establish the role that they played, particularly John Newton and William Wilberforce, in nurturing a conviction of faith. A defining characteristic of the Evangelicals was the need to prove a genuine conversion experience through self-examination, overcoming the sinful nature. This in turn informed their benevolent activities; a virtuous life must display itself in good deeds. I will use textual sociability (texts produced in a collaborative process) to compare More's poem 'Slavery, A Poem' (1788) with Evangelical writings in order to examine the Abolitionists' approaches to the problem of slavery.⁵ By doing so, I will show the commonalities in their thinking and in their desire to provide physical and spiritual freedom for the slave. They were all preoccupied, to a lesser or greater degree, with evoking a sympathetic response that would mobilise support for Abolition. This latter concern was intrinsically linked, and uncomfortably so, to the Evangelical understanding of the nation. As Linda Colley argues, Protestantism lay at the core of eighteenth-century British national identity and through religion the nation had established itself as the 'arbiters of the civilised and the uncivilised world'.⁶ As a providentially chosen nation, the Evangelicals believed it was imperative that Britain ruled benevolently; in the case of the slave trade, the nation was failing. This authoritative position of challenging national behaviour, particularly if it was assumed by a female writer, was problematic in several ways: for instance, feminine influence was expected to be invisible and unassuming, so any public role it undertook had to be

⁴ 'Introduction', in *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865*, pp. 2-3, 7.

⁵ See 'Introducing Romantic Sociability', in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840*, ed. by Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-23 (p. 4).

⁶ *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 359.

justifiable. Here and in the later section, it will be argued that Christian virtues were responsible for complicating normative gender roles, extending feminine influence to engage directly with politics. In the second section, through a close reading of More's only novel, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), I will argue that the fictional community acts as a blueprint for Evangelical living. The marriage of the two protagonists purposely blurs the gendered responsibility of who influences and communicates religious principle; all have a part to play in representing and embodying the Evangelical vision for the world.

Evangelical Writings and the Abolition of the Slave Trade

My very soul is sick of religious controversy. How I hate the little narrowing names of Arminian and Calvinist! Christianity is a broad basis. Bible Christianity is what I love; that does not insist on opinions indifferent in themselves; — a Christianity practical and pure, which teaches holiness, humility, repentance, and faith in Christ; and which after summing up all the evangelical graces, declares that the greatest of these is charity.⁷

This diary entry of Hannah More's written in 1803 is the perfect starting point for establishing and yet making problematic the nature of her religious convictions. More spent her entire life (over eighty years) worshipping at and subscribing to the Anglican Church, while a large contingent of her close friends were clerically employed. She and Bishop Porteus, highly respected in the Established Church, were in regular contact, offering spiritual guidance and support. She describes her own attachment to the Church in 1801 in the strongest of terms, as 'entire, cordial, inviolable, and, until now, unquestioned' (II, p. 74). Despite More's own assurance in the strength of her allegiance to the Church, she found herself having to state explicitly her 'zealous attachment' to Anglicanism, puzzled and perplexed that it had not been 'inferred from a multitude of incidental passages' in her writings (II, p. 70). The Blagdon Controversy (1799-1803) was an example of a high profile situation in which More's reputation as a Churchwoman was publically attacked. The incident resulted from a disagreement between Blagdon's clergyman, Mr. Bere, and More over the decision to employ a Methodist layman, Mr. Henry Young, to teach at her Sunday school. She was accused of undermining the authority of the Church by using the school to encourage and foster enthusiasm among the working classes. Her accusers also pounced on the evidence that More had attended 'outside the hours of Anglican worship' a dissenting chapel, ministered by William Jay.⁸ More publically maintained a 'resolution to return no answer' but in her private letters and diary accounts she lamented the necessity and result of

⁷ William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. H. More*, 2 vols (New York, 1834), II, pp. 105-106.

⁸ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 170.

keeping quiet. She recognised that the ‘defenceless state’ of her sex contributed to the ‘long and unmitigated persecution’ (II, p. 67). She was unable to refute the accusations and, instead, had to trust to time for the furore to die down. Anne Stott describes the impossible situation gender conventions had placed her in for they ‘damned a woman if she kept silent’ (for the accusations would go unchallenged), and yet ‘damned her still more if she defended herself’.⁹ More’s options were either to become a victim of passivity or to brave the charge of unfeminine behaviour. More publically took the former option but was able to vent some of her frustrations in a written defence to the senior cleric overseeing Blagdon, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr. Beadon. Her earliest biographer, William Roberts (*Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. H. More* [1834]), takes a hyperbolic pleasure in reproducing this fifteen page letter, writing that ‘the biographer, in carrying her through this stormy period, has only to fling around her a mantle taken from the rich fabrics of her own wardrobe’ (II, p. 64). This striking metaphor confidently presents More as the steadfast Churchwoman whose own writing and convictions will silence all critics. However, what is fascinating about the Blagdon Controversy is that regardless of More’s private conviction, her public persona as a writer, moralist and philanthropist came to be perceived in a way unimaginable and unprepared for. This, I would argue, was the result of her Evangelical faith, and whether she liked it or not, it placed her in the uncomfortable category of dissent. Acquiring a reputation as a dissenter, although dependent on an intrinsic quality or conviction, was often decided through public observation and judgment. A contemporary review of More’s novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* judged its intentions to ‘render and enforce the doctrines and practices of those, whom the world called Methodists’, with another agreeing that More belonged to a ‘trumpering gospel faction’.¹⁰ The criteria of judgment may have been inaccurate but what mattered, and is of relevance when discussing More, is that religious identification had an inescapable public dimension.

As stated in the Introduction, Elisabeth Jay argues that the Evangelicals should be considered as a ‘sufficiently heterogeneous’ group to be separated out from their dissenting brethren.¹¹ However, I want to show that it is not unreasonable to class Evangelicals with dissenters precisely because they did share doctrinal sympathies, and, more importantly, because contemporary perceptions treated them as part of the dissenting tradition. The opening quotation, for all of its emphasis upon universal inclusiveness — Christianity as a ‘broad basis’ — actually narrows into an avowal of More’s Evangelical convictions: ‘a

⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁰ G. W. Crowe, *The London Review* (2 February, 1809), and Sydney Smith, *The Edinburgh Review* (14 April, 1809), in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, pp. 402- 405 (p. 404) and pp. 406- 407 (p. 407).

¹¹ Jay, pp. 16-17.

Christianity practical and pure, which teaches holiness, humility, repentance, and faith in Christ'. There is something beyond church attendance, liturgical practice or dogmatic allegiance which identifies a Christian. More writes in *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1791) that 'religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a sentiment, so neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance; but it is a disposition, a habit, a temper: it is not a name but a nature'.¹² David Bebbington's definition of Evangelicalism identifies four key components: conversion, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.¹³ More's understanding of Evangelicalism fits Bebbington's criteria perfectly for, as we have seen from the opening quotation, she describes conversion as the transformation of a person's nature, leading to an active and pietistic life. Christ, as revealed in the Bible, is the catalyst of such an experience. It was this 'seriousness of spirit', as John Whitaker (a 'mainstay of both the *British Critic* and the *Anti-Jacobin Review*') described it in 1825, which identified the Evangelicals with Protestant dissenters. They, like the Methodists, emphasised a conversion experience, taking place in the heart, and resulting in a 'devoutness of life'.¹⁴ Dogma and doctrinal labelling were less important than individual godliness (More regarded such arguments over the classification of one's doctrine as Calvinistic or Arminian as counter-productive) and, therefore, More could justify worshipping under William Jay's authority because he had proved himself a 'serious' minister of the gospel.¹⁵ Indeed, dissenting movements were often initiated and maintained by individual characters rather than from the laying down of a vigorous systematic theology, and Evangelicalism was no exception in this regard.¹⁶ Similarly to Methodism, it began from within the Established Church but, unlike the Methodists, the Evangelicals decided to remain within the Church and work change from a position of influence. According to Owen Chadwick, the Evangelicals 'denied that their orthodoxy was narrow and said that it was nothing but the reformed doctrine of the Church of England'.¹⁷ However, such an opinion of the Church caused the periodical *Anti-Jacobin* to fear an infiltration, 'bringing that Establishment into discredit'.¹⁸ As Mitzi Myers phrases it, the Evangelicals were 'half in,

¹² Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), pp. 19-20; *An Estimate of the Religion*, p. 58.

¹³ *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁴ 'Whitaker to Polwhele, November 13, 1799'. Qtd. James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 208.

¹⁵ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 246.

¹⁶ M. G. Jones, *Hannah More* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 97.

¹⁷ Chadwick, p. 449.

¹⁸ *Anti-Jacobin*, 9 (1801). Qtd. Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 245.

half out of the Established Church' and so distrusted for their lack of allegiance.¹⁹ Interestingly, William Wilberforce, an embodiment of Evangelical principle, placed little importance in distinguishing between a dissenter and a Churchman. D. Newsome summarised Wilberforce's sentiments to his son in the following way: 'the differences between Churchmen and dissenters were in his eyes of very small consequence [...] He nowhere found in Scripture that it would be asked at the last day 'Were you Churchman or dissenter?' but 'What were your works?'²⁰ And yet in practice Wilberforce experienced first-hand the mistrust shown to one considered as a dissenter. He was acutely self-aware of the wider negative response to his beliefs, writing in a letter to the Reverend Venn that 'there is a prejudice against the Evangelical doctrines themselves; and therefore the greater reason for taking all honest means for avoiding offences'.²¹ It is for this and the above reasons why I consider the Evangelicals alongside the dissenters: their relationship with the establishment was complex, problematic, and merged (uncomfortably for many) the distinctions between orthodox Anglicanism and its dissenting enemies.²²

G.W.E. Russell's posthumous summarisation of the Evangelicals in the early nineteenth century highlighted two significant characteristics: the 'perpetual call to seriousness' and the 'sense of personal responsibility; taking the form of an appeal to be like Christ, to trust Christ, to be near Christ'.²³ This suggests that the Evangelical sought to take responsibility for one's own spiritual growth and to encourage the spread of the gospel in the world. Although the responsibility for spiritual growth lay with the individual, there is evidence that the Evangelicals and dissenting groups looked to support each other in their endeavour towards living a godly life. The spread of the gospel would also be best served if a people represented Christ together; they understood this to be the traditional mandate of the Church. Therefore, when examining More's relationship with the Evangelicals, I want to consider how she developed her spirituality in a community through mentoring and what I

¹⁹ Mitzi Myers, "'A Peculiar Protection': Hannah More and the Cultural Politics of the Blagdon Controversy', in *History, Gender and Eighteenth Century Literature*, ed. by Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens and Land: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 227-257 (p. 236).

²⁰ D. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends* (1966), p. 52. Qtd. Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 58. From Wilberforce's letters, it is clear, however, that he did view the dissenters as a separate entity to the Evangelicals, damaging the 'interests of religion in the long run'. Without the support of the Church, 'dissenters could do nothing'. Despite these remarks, I would argue that the Evangelicals occupied a similar space to that of the dissenters, with Wilberforce unable or unwilling to recognise that by wishing to reform the Church, he chose to pass judgment, like the dissenters, on the orthodox faith. Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols (London: John Murray, 1839), I, pp. 248-249.

²¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, ed. *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1840), I, p. 153.

²² See Sack, pp. 210-211.

²³ G. W. E Russell, *Lady Victoria Buxton* (1919), p. 73. Qtd. Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 18.

will come to define as friendships of accountability. She wrote that ‘action is the life of virtue and the world is the theatre of action’.²⁴ More’s ‘life of virtue’ manifested itself through her literary works, which performed as her mouth-piece in the theatre that she saw as the world. Paradoxically, this was a world that the Evangelicals saw themselves in but were not a part of, separated out from those who did not know, recognise or were obedient to God. As Jane Shaw explains, they strove to stand and immerse themselves within culture whilst creating their own distinct subculture. It was a precarious balancing act as they attempted to impact the dominating culture without losing their own distinctiveness.²⁵ I am particularly interested in the two social causes that More and the Evangelicals, especially the Clapham Sect, became involved with, in order to see the transformation of their culture: these were the Abolition of the slave trade and the reformation of religious belief amongst the ruling class. In More’s opinion, her class, with its privileged position, was failing in its moral responsibility to act as a religious role model to the working classes.

M. G. Jones helpfully summarises More’s introduction to the Evangelical individuals that retrospectively became known as the Clapham Sect, and we begin to get a sense of how this community defined itself through the social mission of abolition:

The campaign against the slave trade brought Hannah More, when she was at the height of her literary and social fame, into contact with men and women whose interest lay not in literature and conversation but in philanthropy based on a deep and vital sense of religion.²⁶

It is significant that Jones draws attention to the non-literary function of the community, and yet there is much evidence that this group influenced and supported the subsequent works that More published. It seems that the Evangelical vision of being Christ to the world had a political and a literary spectrum, with More finding support within this community to engage with politics through literature. The Clapham Sect, as John Wolffe describes them, were ‘not only a group of spiritual and moral reformers’ (professional, parliamentary and clerical men made up their numbers), but they also ‘sought to live out among themselves an ideal of

²⁴ Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 30; *An Estimate of the Religion*, p. 68.

²⁵ Shaw, ‘Introduction’, pp. 2, 4.

²⁶ M. G. Jones, p. 86.

In fact another geographical location predated Clapham Common and that was Teston in Kent. It was in the Middleton household that the initial ‘anti-slave trade circle’ formed, including Wilberforce, James Ramsay, Thomas Clarkson and Beilby Porteus. More notes in 1788, before Wilberforce’s first address to parliament in 1789, that Wilberforce and his cohorts were up ‘slaving till two o’clock every morning’ in Teston (I. p. 311). It was the Evangelicals’ decision to live in close proximity that resulted in the Clapham name. Anne Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 33.

evangelical family and community life in which Christianity was deep seated but not austere'.²⁷ It was in Henry Thornton's household that More was first acquainted with what she called this 'religion of the home'.²⁸ This desire to live in close proximity and to model the life that they wished to promote led to the naming of the group, as they all geographically located around Clapham Common. Henry Thornton, who owned Battersea Rise and the surrounding land, built two new houses, Glenelg and Broomfield, to be occupied by fellow members, with the latter later lived in by Wilberforce.²⁹ This close-knit community was often criticised by outsiders who saw this apparent exclusiveness as another sign of dissenting practice. In a letter to Wilberforce, Charles Daubeny promised to fight on behalf of 'the friends of the Church' against 'false friends', among whom he included Wilberforce. This shows the type of suspicion that the Clapham Sect were subjected to, as their allegiance to the establishment was often disputed.³⁰ Once again, whether they liked it or not, public perception and opinion defined them as a dissenting community. However, by having a common geographical location they were able, during the Abolition campaign, to keep late hours and eschew the negative connotations of shared living arrangements. Instead, they monopolised the advantages for a social cause: they gathered, analysed and formulated the evidence needed for presenting the Bill to the Houses of Parliament.

It was within this pious community that More absorbed the Evangelical preoccupation with evidencing conversion. A conversion of the heart could be determined outwardly through a change in behaviour in which good deeds and virtuous living were prioritised. William Morgan, a friend of Patrick Brontë, in 1841 affirmed that 'the question, therefore, as to the *means* by which any soul is converted, is not of that importance as the *evidence* of it, in the subsequent life of a good man'.³¹ More, over a twenty year period, corresponded with John Newton, a significant figure in the Evangelical movement, whose presence and influence will later be explored, and in a particular letter to him, she voiced her struggle with a sinful nature: 'Pray for me, my good Sir, that I may be enabled to obtain more firmness of mind, a more submissive spirit, and more preparedness, not only for death itself, but for the common evils of life'.³² This request for prayer demonstrates the process Evangelicals routinely took of assessing their character and behaviour, often concluding that

²⁷ John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Nottingham: Inter-varsity Press, 2006), p. 12-13.

²⁸ M. G. Jones, p. 96.

²⁹ Michael Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), p. 172.

³⁰ 'Daubeny to Wilberforce, 22 Apr. 1797'. Qtd. Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 204.

³¹ *The Parish Priest, Portrayed in the Life, Character, and Ministry of the Rev. John Crosse* (1841), pp. 2-3. Qtd. Jay, p. 60.

³² William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, I, p. 264.

their spiritual growth was in need of prayerful support. Diaries and journal entries also record this self-conscious, often painful examination, for this was a way of tracking and ‘proving’ spiritual conversion. Without the fruit of conversion, an individual’s salvation was cast in doubt. Roberts took full advantage of such passages in More’s diaries, painting her in a sobering and pietistic manner: ‘this year, 1798, was solemnized to her soul by much spiritual communion, and much self-examination’ (II, p. 30). This representation is lamented by Anne Stott for its lasting damage in emphasising a two-dimensional perspective of More’s faith.³³ Yet this continuous, personal self-examination did lead, as Roberts suggests, to the formation of important friendships of accountability and mentoring relationships between Evangelicals. As argued in the Introduction, there is a subtle but significant difference in the definitions of accountability and mentoring in the context of a believer supporting the spiritual faith of another. Firstly, I will explore these mentoring and accountability relationships in the context of the Evangelical obsession with examining sinful habits, and secondly, and more thoroughly, with the Clapham Sect’s involvement in the Abolition of the slave trade. For through this campaign, evidence of conversion and conviction could be played out.

The two most influential figures in More’s life, particularly those who shared in the fervency of an Evangelical faith, were Newton and Wilberforce. There is evidence in her correspondence that both a mentoring and friendship of accountability relationship took place with both men. In writing to Newton in 1790, regarding the death of his wife, she states ‘in writing to you I feel my heart open’ (I, p. 357). More quite frequently made Newton acquainted with her spiritual failings, asking for support in prayer, with Newton responding empathically: ‘what you are pleased to say, my dear Madam, of the state of your mind, I understand perfectly well’ (I, p. 277). She seemed to find a safety in the intimacy of sharing spiritual failings through letters, creating an emotional and demonstrative bond with Newton that superseded a marital affiliation. It did not occur to More to question in any way the appropriateness of this relationship and so it appears that within a religious community certain interactions between the sexes were permissible which perhaps in other contexts would be questionable. This same openness is observed between More and Wilberforce, with Wilberforce offering his prayers as a sign of his spiritual support: he writes in 1801 that he is praying ‘earnestly for strength, for wisdom, for meekness, and that love which suffer

³³ Stott, *Hannah More*, pp. viii-ix. The importance of self-examination was not limited to More’s community but was a characteristic act of various expressions of Evangelicalism, including Methodism.

long, and yet be kind, without dissimulation'.³⁴ Significantly, as I will explore later, Wilberforce is here prioritising those virtues which were normally associated with female domestic ideology: passivity, suffering, transparency and meekness. In actuality, these virtues became appropriated by Evangelicals as the behaviour worthy of all Christians, regardless of gender or position.³⁵ Wilberforce also assumed the role of financial patron; he was a life-long financial contributor to More's social schemes, such as the Sunday schools. He writes in 1804 that 'if you are in occasional want of a little more at present I could supply it, which I tell you frankly, meaning of course, that you should treat me frankly'.³⁶ It was not unusual for one in More's position to have benefactors, but what is striking in this situation was Wilberforce's insistence that their financial understanding should not create a power dimension in which More found herself obligated or voiceless. The frankness he encouraged with More, similarly to that which she experienced with Newton, although in a slightly different context, dismissed gender conventions; their commitment to the same Evangelical principles and worthy cause allowed an openness normally distrusted. Wilberforce, in fact, refused to apologise for 'pouring forth to you all this common-place stuff. In truth it is these common-place positions that are one's daily bread – one's support and comfort'.³⁷ He recognised that the conversation shared with More, whether deemed of worldly importance or not, was, in the light of their Christian faith, overwhelmingly significant. Their friendship of accountability helped them, as Wilberforce phrased it, to be 'reminded and awakened to seriousness'.³⁸

Newton, writing to More in 1787, considers the Christian life as a 'warfare' with much that is 'within' and 'without' us to be 'resisted', 'impeded' and overcome. He continues:

In such a world as this, and with such a nature as *ours*, there will be a call for habitual self-denial. We must learn to cease from depending upon our own supposed wisdom, power, and goodness, and from self-complacence and self-seeking, that we may rely upon Him whose wisdom and power are infinite (I, pp. 278-279).

³⁴ *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, p. 236.

³⁵ Galatians 3. 28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus', *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Edinburgh: Collins, 1991), p. 1069.

³⁶ *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, p. 300.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

This rhetoric of resistance points to the Evangelical principle of separating oneself out from the rest of the world and this is accomplished through a denial of sin and selfish desires.³⁹ Newton started the letter, quoted above, by creating a mutual sympathy between More and himself, for Evangelical accountability was successful when each person shared a common understanding that all were liable to sin. However, as we see here, Newton slips into his clerical role as Churchman and advises and mentors More into the best way of dealing with her 'state of mind', because he has already experienced and overcome it:

I have stood upon that ground myself. I see what you yet want, to set you quite at ease, and though I cannot give it you, I trust that He who has already taught you what to desire will in his own best time do every thing for you (I, p. 277).

This is a good example of how the two different relationships can exist simultaneously: moving from a friendship of accountability, unconcerned with regulating normative female/male interaction, to a hierarchical arrangement where Newton coaches More from his superior knowledge and experience, and patriarchal roles are resumed. Beth Kowaleski-Wallace reads More's acceptance of male authority, particularly of literary men, as a series of 'paternal seductions', in which she is searching to surrender her heart to 'the ultimate benevolent Patriarch, the Evangelical Christ'.⁴⁰ This is a useful reading because it identifies the Evangelical acceptance of hierarchy as determined by God: Christ stands as the head of the Church, and so this divine ordering filters through to the approaches taken towards the education of the working classes and the acquisition of freedom for the slave. More never seems to challenge male authority, but instead gladly accepts Newton's role in nurturing her potential and purpose in life. He enabled More to see that she had a '*consecrated pen*' and that it was a privilege to be able to 'devote' talents to the 'cause of God and religion' (I, p. 274). And yet this private confession with Newton did, however, complicate her feelings towards her public persona of moralist for she was burdened with the sense of her own hypocrisy. She published *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* anonymously, fearing that she was 'unfit to presume to set up for a teacher of others' and

³⁹ In a complex argument dealing with the contradictions that Andrew Heisel believes are apparent in More's denial and celebration of the self, he argues that the 'individual characteristics' are 'meaningless distractions from universal truths'. Consequently, the pleasures and pitfalls of human nature must be carefully controlled, in order not to distract from the 'straight gate to heaven'. This suggests another motivation for the mutual confession evident among the Evangelicals. 'Hannah More's Art of Reduction', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 25 (Spring, 2013), 557- 588 (pp. 565, 588).

⁴⁰ Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, 'Milton's Daughters: The Education of Eighteenth-Century Women Writers', *Feminist Studies*, 12 (Summer, 1986), 275-293 (p. 284).

that neither ‘my sex, my abilities, nor my conduct is such as fully to justify me in my own eyes for the things which I attempt’ (I, p. 366).

More’s awareness of the slave trade seems to date from the early 1780s when she relates an ‘old quarrel’ she had with Lord Monboddo over his persistence in vindicating such an ‘enormity’ (I, p. 147). However, More’s active participation in Abolition did not materialise until the close of the decade when she became more intimately connected with the Middleton family. It must be noted from the outset that when examining the Evangelical/Clapham community, in the context of More’s Abolition writings, we are dealing with a relatively new formation. The relationships were in an embryonic stage and yet they quickly developed around a common cause. Sir Charles Middleton, as an ex-Naval officer, had first-hand experience and knowledge of the Atlantic slave trade and in their household More writes of the ‘magnificent *bas bleu*’ taking place at dinner, ‘assisting’ educationally all those taking part (I, p. 229). This talk, coupled with Lady Middleton’s ‘feeling’, ‘compassion’ and ‘kindness’, not only for the ‘negroes’ but for the ‘suffering of every animal’, created an environment in which intellectual argument and sentimental feeling could be united around a social cause (I, p. 242). M. G. Jones credited Lady Middleton with the responsibility of persuading key people to be involved, and important texts to be written, crucial to the cause of Abolition. She encouraged James Ramsay to record his experiences of service as a clergyman in the plantations, resulting in the publication of *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784). She was also given credit for prevailing on her friends and husband to find a ‘fit and willing protagonist to lead a crusade against the Trade in the House’, which as we know led to the appointment of Wilberforce.⁴¹ More discovered that discussions cultivated in communal living resulted in social enterprises, in which gendered constraints, such as the supposed inability of women to combine feeling and intellect, were overthrown.

The second significant encounter that resulted from More’s connection with the Middletons was with Wilberforce in 1788: ‘we had four or five hours of most confidential and instructive conversation, in which we discussed all the great objects of reform which they had in view’ (I, p. 286). Anne Stott notes that More and Wilberforce’s friendship was firmly established in 1789, after he visited her home in Somerset for the first time.⁴² Wilberforce prioritised this friendship, even to the extent of requesting and permitting her presence during bouts of ill health. More found herself in the privileged position of

⁴¹ M. G. Jones, p. 82.

⁴² Stott, *Wilberforce*, p. 38.

confidant, participating in conversations which had the potential to shape the Abolitionists' agenda. This model of conversing to persuade and promote a cause was learnt in community with More eager to replicate this stratagem in other friendship circles. As Jon Mee observes, in the case of More, 'conversation is valuable precisely because it takes the potentially barbaric stuff of learning and turns it into something socially useful'.⁴³ For example, More records a conversation where such learning is monopolised: 'the other day I was at Mr. Langton's; our subject was Abolition, we fell to it with great eagerness, and paid no attention to the wits who were round us' (I, p. 290). In another scene, she humorously recalls an incident in which she was showing to a large party a copy of Thomas Clarkson's plan of an African slave ship when Mr Tarleton, a Liverpool delegate and a defender of the slave trade, walked into the room. She quickly 'popped the book out of sight, snapped the string of my eloquence, and was mute at once' (I, p. 310). This little anecdote reveals both the extent of More's fervour in promoting the cause of Abolition amongst her class and yet the continuing unpopularity of it, for many of the elite's livelihoods depended on the trade. It also suggests the hesitation that More on occasion felt about the appropriateness of the subject matter to be discussed by women in the company of learned men. For all her fervency in being involved in a cause, and the freedom she experienced in voicing her opinion in private, she never completely forgot the rules of propriety operating in a public setting.

In order for the Abolition movement to get off the ground, and to have an impact in parliament, it required a centralising figure: a leader who could present the evidence and arguments, speaking on behalf of the growing populace. This post, as already noted, fell to Wilberforce. Abolition, as a wider movement, gathered followers from all sorts of religious and non-religious backgrounds with Anne Stott giving credit to the Quakers, Granville Sharp, Lady Middleton and James Ramsay for 'turning an aspiration into a parliamentary pressure group'.⁴⁴ However, because Wilberforce became the mouth-piece for the movement, the Evangelicals, and more specifically the Clapham Sect, unavoidably led from the front. They were the 'first of the great middle-class pressure groups' that were to become so prolific in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ St. James Stephen recalled how a proliferation of organisations had occurred in the half century since his father had gathered at Clapham in the 1790s:

⁴³ Mee, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Stott, *Wilberforce*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 89.

Ours is the age of societies. For the redress of every oppression that is done under the sun, there is a public meeting. For the cure of every sorrow by which our land or our race can be visited, there are patrons, vice-presidents and secretaries. For the diffusion of every blessing of which mankind can partake in common, there is a committee.⁴⁶

More and Newton's correspondence, whether conducted in the early 1790s at the beginning of the campaign, or in the 1820s, when the cause had shifted to the release of slaves still held in plantations, attributed importance to Wilberforce as the head of the Abolition movement. Their rhetoric was unmistakably Evangelical, casting Wilberforce in the role of 'servant', 'agent', and 'instrument' of God's purposes.⁴⁷ They saw Wilberforce as providentially assigned by God to lead the cause of Abolition, with the community helping to make this burden easier to bear. Newton, as the mature Christian and significant advisor in Wilberforce's spiritual awakening, often took upon himself the role of spiritual encourager. His influential book *Cardiphonia* (1780), which was written in the epistolary form, established the 'centrality of his role as a key spiritual director'.⁴⁸ He refers to Wilberforce as the 'public person' and 'spectacle' 'raised' up for the good of the Church and the nation.⁴⁹ To be reminded of the call of God was to diminish the cost of being a 'spectacle', for Newton was aware of the difficulties experienced by Wilberforce who struggled with ill-health from the longevity of the campaign. Newton reminds Wilberforce that as he is spear-heading the movement he will have to absorb most of the ill-will directed towards the cause; his reputation, along with that of the Evangelicals, has to be given over to public scrutiny. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, in her 'Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. On the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade' (1791), gives a pragmatic and rather cutting assessment of Wilberforce's efforts regarding Abolition. She writes:

Your merit stands, no greater and no less,
Without or with the varnish of success;
But seek no more to break a nation's fall,
For ye have saved yourselves, and that is all.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ James Stephen, 'The Clapham Sect', *The Edinburgh Review*, 80, pp. 306-307. Qtd. Wolffe, p. 154.

⁴⁷ *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, p. 130; Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, ed., *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, II, p. 448.

⁴⁸ Kerry Sinanan, 'Too Good to be True? Hannah More, Authenticity, Sincerity and Evangelical Abolitionism', in *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*, ed. by Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 137-161 (p. 146).

⁴⁹ *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, pp. 56, 157.

⁵⁰ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. On the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade', in *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology 1764-1865*, ed. by Marcus Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 181-184 (pp. 183-184, ll. 114-117).

She suggests that what may appear to be a failure on behalf of the African slaves was not a failure for the Evangelical leader.⁵¹ The Evangelical desire to prove and establish conversion requires only the attempt and not the success of philanthropic endeavours. Barbauld's rather sceptical assessment of Wilberforce's motivation is another example of the type of judgements he and fellow Evangelicals had to negotiate.

It was also potentially damaging to the cause of Abolition to be assigned, uncontested, the label of dissenter. Samuel Hoare warns Wilberforce in 1792, after the Insurrection had taken place in the slave plantation of St. Domingo, that members of the Church of England had adopted a dangerous idea concerning the Abolitionists: 'the Dissenters wish for a revolution and that the Abolition of the Slave Trade is somewhat connected with it'.⁵² This slur on the Abolition movement resulted from the Established Church's mistrust and dislike of Evangelicalism. If the Evangelicals were aligned with the dissenters and accused of sedition, which was a very real threat in the light of the French Revolution, then they could undermine and collapse the infiltration that they felt the Church was suffering under. This calculated attack speaks volumes about the potential cost and difficulties surrounding those labelled as dissenters. However, Wilberforce's behaviour as an exemplary politician helped to dispel much of the negativity directed towards the wider Evangelical movement. More, commenting on his achievements and political career in 1824, wrote that 'few persons, if any, have been so distinguished as yourself both in the political and religious world – a union very rare and almost new'.⁵³ The Evangelicals embraced the cause of Abolition, insisting that religion and politics could, and more importantly, should work hand in hand. Private, individual faiths, as represented by the Clapham Sect, were determined to shape and transform a cultural institution, as ingrained into the societal and economic make-up of the country as the Atlantic slave trade was, and seemingly found measurable success.

By unpacking some of the key friendships and relationships within the Clapham Sect, I have shown how they mobilised into a pressure group effective for abolition. However, I now want to move on to show how their sociability and writings, produced for the cause of Abolition, influenced the literary output of More. Gillian Russell and Cara Tuite, writing in the 'Introduction' to *Romantic Sociability*, consider the significance of treating 'sociability, as a kind of text' as it can become a 'form of cultural work' in its own

⁵¹ Wood, p. 180.

⁵² *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, pp. 89-90.

⁵³ *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, II, p. 490.

right.⁵⁴ I want to invert this idea, in a similar way to Cox in his *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, and consider the text as a type of sociability, produced in a collaborative process.⁵⁵ It should be clarified that More took single ownership of her works but it is worth exploring the hypothesis that texts written by Clapham members, and other contemporary Evangelical and Abolitionist writers, were an expression of a mutual sociability, with More's own writings both contributing to and being shaped alongside these texts.⁵⁶ There is evidence, for example, that she read James Ramsey's pamphlet (for she enclosed it in a letter to a sister with the charge 'let all the flesh and blood merchants in the world answer it if they can' [I, p. 272]) and subscribed to Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative*. She reflects that the weight of evidence produced by Wilberforce and the 'whole junto of abolitionists' was the 'thickest folio' that she had ever seen (I, p. 311). Such close, physical proximity to the arguments used by Wilberforce in his first address to Parliament in 1789 cannot help but have seeped into More's creative works. By examining More's slave poetry alongside these texts, I hope to show a shared, characteristic literary approach to Abolition.

The following quotation reveals several ideas about More's approach to her poem 'Slavery, A Poem', published in February 1788:

I am busily engaged on a poem, to be called 'slavery'. I grieve I did not set about it sooner; as it must now be done in such a hurry as no poem should ever be written in, to be properly correct; but, good or bad, if it does not come out at the particular moment when the discussion comes on in Parliament, it will not be worth a straw [...] I would on no account bring out so slight and so hasty a thing on any less pressing occasion, but here time is everything (I, pp. 281-282).

Firstly, she wanted to produce a text that could contribute to the flurry of activity surrounding Wilberforce's first notice of the Abolition motion given to parliament in 1788, which was then followed by the presentation of the Abolition bill in May 1789. She was unapologetic in her hopes that 'Slavery, A Poem' would be part of the dissemination of the Abolitionist cause. Secondly, she was willing to compromise on form and technique in order for it to be available during the moment when all eyes, political or otherwise, were focused on the subject of Abolition. The poem's significance was dependent, in More's mind, on taking up this narrow window of opportunity. Such support was sought in a variety of ways, with female participation '*becoming visible*'; they abstained from using plantation-produced

⁵⁴ Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, 'Introducing Romantic Sociability', p. 4.

⁵⁵ Cox, p. 13.

⁵⁶ 'sociability' as a 'sociable act or expression', *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/183735?redirectedFrom=sociability#eid>> [Accessed 27.03.2014].

sugar in tea and wore Wedgewood designed cameos depicting a kneeling black slave with the slogan ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’⁵⁷ The poetic form, with its appeal to the heart, was increasingly dominated by female writers and it was in this ‘field of imaginative literature that women made one of their most significant contributions’ to the campaign.⁵⁸ As Marcus Wood notes, in his edited anthology of Anglo-American slave poetry, ‘women exploited a unique opportunity’ to put their slavery poetry out into a public arena with a political agenda, for whoever would listen.⁵⁹ For More, who conformed to the literary conventions of her gender, it made perfect sense to write anti-slavery poetry.⁶⁰ By closely examining More’s poetry alongside her fellow Evangelicals’ works, we will get a better understanding of the content, shape and form of the Abolitionists’ political agenda.

In the ‘Preface’ to More’s *Complete Works* in 1801, she speaks of a ‘coalition of interests, something of a partnership’ that she believes has to exist between the writer and the reader in order to fully enjoy works of ‘superlative ability’. The reader may be unequally yoked in capital or class but they must be ‘accustomed to drink at the same spring from which the writer draws’.⁶¹ This suggests that for a complex piece of literature to be fully appreciated, the reader’s sympathy has to be aligned with that of the writer’s. This can only be accomplished through the willingness of the reader to be educated and for the writer to lead them to the appropriate ‘spring’. I argue that the works of the Abolitionists acted as sign posts, leading a relatively ignorant reader to the facts of slavery for the very first time. Through an examination of how they presented these facts of slavery (considering content and sentiment), I will show that the Evangelical writers, More included, didactically controlled and restricted the reader’s exposure to the slave trade. I will begin with what seemed to be so easily embodied in *Lady Middleton* and yet caused the writers so much anxiety: how to compose a text that successfully combined reason with sentiment.

Marcus Wood argues that slavery, within late eighteenth-century literature, was ‘manifested as a set of fictive, literary constructs’, with slaves sentimentally drawn; their

⁵⁷ See, Lilla Maria Crisafulli, ‘Women and Abolitionism: Hannah More’s and Ann Yearsley’s Poetry of Freedom’, in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. by Cora Kaplan and John Oldfield (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 110-124 (p. 112); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 37.

⁵⁸ Midgley, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Marcus Wood, ‘English and North American Slavery: Key Notes on Cultural and Historical Difference’, in *The Poetry of Slavery*, pp. xxxv- li (p. xliii).

⁶⁰ Crisafulli argues that the decision to write slave poetry was a ‘daring political act’ and it ‘constituted a remarkable step towards that process of self-awareness that eventually led women to appeal for full social, economic and legal rights of their own’ (p. 111).

⁶¹ ‘Preface’, p. xxiii.

‘passivity and victimhood, abstraction, animalisation and Christianization’ foregrounded.⁶² Aphra Behn’s poem *Oroonoko* (1688) has all the elements for which abolitionist poetry would become recognisable: it has the noble savage, the European hero, the heart-rending tale of young lovers torn apart by slavery, and the tragic end of suicide. It was reclaimed by the Abolitionists when they discovered a play version of the poem, dramatised by Thomas Southerne in 1696. They added an anti-slavery prologue and performed it in Manchester and London in 1789.⁶³ More pays homage to the text in ‘Slavery, A Poem’, addressing ‘O, plaintive Southerne!’ whose ‘impassion’d strain’ has often waked her ‘Muse in vain!’⁶⁴ By referencing Southerne and consequently Behn’s original text, More is suggesting that there is a literary tradition of anti-slavery poetry that she would like to place her own work within. She is quick to note, however, that Behn’s inspiration cannot be replicated in her own poetry: ‘[s]he shares thy feelings, not partakes thy fires’ (S, p. 3. l. 42) and, instead, recognises that the ‘sweet Bard’ will not favour her, so she looks to ‘Fair Truth’ to be a ‘hallow’d guide!’ (S, p. 4. ll. 49-50). This guiding hand of ‘Truth’ legitimises in More’s own mind, and to her readers, firstly the rightfulness of the cause of Abolition and secondly her own involvement and place within it. More has to tread carefully because of her gender. If she wants the poem to find success as a persuasive tool for Abolition then she has to conceal any display of a self-indulgent literary ambition. As Kate Davies argues, ‘femininity must only ever be visible outside the “boundaries” of the familial or domestic space if that visibility is dictated by the necessity of exerting those sympathetic and humane qualities’.⁶⁵ Marcus Wood notes that the ‘Christian, sentimental and philanthropic justification of Abolition made it a movement to which women were invited to contribute at both an organizational and artistic level’.⁶⁶ Therefore, it was paramount that women’s poetry reflected these motivations. Mary Robinson, actress and celebrated beauty, took a keen interest in the disenfranchised and her poetry became typical of how sentiment and the elements of emotional excess were used to promote Abolition. In ‘The Negro Girl’ (1806), ‘Nature’ and its willing conspirator, the sea, ‘roars’ its discontent and anger towards the ‘barb’rous toil’ of men who trample their own ‘kind’.⁶⁷ Nature’s revenge is to cause a shipwreck and the untimely death and suicide of separated Africans, Draco and Zelma.

⁶² Marcus Wood, ‘Abolition Poetry: A Literary Introduction’, in *The Poetry of Slavery*, pp. xi- xxxiv (p. xvii).

⁶³ Midgley, p. 30.

⁶⁴ ‘Slavery, A Poem’ (London: Cadell, 1788), p. 3, ll. 37-38.

⁶⁵ ‘A Moral Purchase: Femininity, Commerce and Abolition, 1788-1792’, in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere: 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clóna ó Gallchoir, and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 133-159 (p. 133).

⁶⁶ Wood, p. xliii.

⁶⁷ ‘The Negro Girl’, in *The Poetry of Slavery*, pp. 49-53 (p. 51. ll. 63, 64, 62).

Robinson depicts a Nature appalled with slavery, reacting with passionate fervency; the Africans' deaths are viewed as an act of mercy, as they escape the worst excesses of slavery. An emotional response, followed by decisive action, is what is sought from her reader. More, despite the same tendency to demonstrate sentimentalism, justifies her writing as a prophetic vision of God's Apocalyptic response to slavery. In 'Slavery, A Poem', she conjures up a heavenly creature, the Cherub Mercy, to be the agent of God's justice. The sense of perspective and the great transition between the Cherub's home in heaven and its earthly destination is created in the polysyllabic '[d]escending softly' as she 'quits the sphere of love!' (S, p. 18. l. 264). There is a clear mandate to silence the sound and sights of slavery, with the alliteration of 'clank of chains' and 'sheathe the sword' representing the sounds to be stilled (S, p. 19. l. 272). The final rhyming couplet in this stanza indicates that ultimately the Cherub is here to rescue the Christian's 'name' and 'fame' (S, p. 19. ll. 275-276). In part, More's poem sees itself as a crucial element in the Cherub's mission, for she was concerned with not only promoting Abolition but in defending the Christian reputation.

Despite More and her fellow Evangelicals' security in the worthiness of their cause and the need for literature to embody it, there was an anxiety concerning the appropriateness of the subject matter for art.⁶⁸ Writers dealing directly with the inhumanity and horror of the trade struggled with the gratuitous detail, often withdrawing at the very moment of impact. As we consider different approaches, it will become apparent that the writer-reader pact so important to More is largely responsible for the hesitation in descriptions. In 1782, More retold a story given by a naval friend of Sir Charles Middleton about the heroic death of a negro slave. He sacrifices his life to save the master's children who are threatened with drowning after the shipwreck of their vessel. She comments that Middleton 'wants me to make an elegy of it, but it is above poetry' (I, p. 147-148). However, in 'Slavery, A Poem' she does record the remarkable but tragic history of Qua-shi, a negro slave who cuts his own throat rather than bear the shame of being whipped by his master. This incident, as footnoted by More, is found in Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment of the African Slave*. Ramsay, an Anglican clergyman, who had lived and worked in St. Kitts, had first-hand experience of plantation work and produced the first thorough account of the conditions of slavery in British colonies. He argues on several accounts for the abolition of the trade – moral, economic, human – but his key point is that without the application of religion in the lives of those involved, in whatever capacity, the dehumanisation of man would continue. He

⁶⁸ William Cowper questions the fitness of the theme for poetry: 'For my own part I cannot contemplate the subject very nearly without a degree of abhorrence that affects my spirits and sinks them below the pitch requisite for success in verse'. *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, ed. by James King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), III, p. 172. Qtd. Wood, p. 81.

appeals to the reader to go beyond the initial pang of sympathy that the ‘imagination’ may have produced, acknowledging that ‘[w]e are exceedingly ready, it is the turn of the age, to express ourselves sorrowfully, when any act of oppression, or unjust suffering is related before us. But whom shall we find willing to sacrifice his amusement or his pleasure, to obey the call of humanity?’⁶⁹

The dilemma facing Ramsay, More and Newton, to name just a few, was how to arouse, through writing, sympathy that would sustain itself long enough to be transformed into action and vocal support of Abolition. However, this needed to be achieved without betraying the trust between writer and reader by a bombardment of gratuitous detail. As Stott comments, ‘the abolitionist cause would always need better weapons than cheap pity or transient emotions’.⁷⁰ Newton writes in his *Thoughts on the African Slave Trade* that ‘[f]or my reader’s sake, I suppress the recital of particulars’. At the moment of referring to the rape of slave women he stops: ‘I forbear – This is not a subject for declamation’.⁷¹ He notes in a letter to More the disappointment expressed by friends for the lack of detail, but concludes that ‘[t]hey who (admitting that my testimony is worthy of credit) are not convinced by what I have offered, would hardly be persuaded by a folio filled with particular details of misery and oppression’ (I, p. 274). Kerry Sinanan argues that it is important for Newton’s ‘account of the slave trade’ to be ‘credited as authentic’.⁷² Sympathy will not be manufactured from the melodramatic, but instead the honesty of confession and description is what is persuasive and what Newton owes his readers. More, in a similar fashion, only refers indirectly to the scenes of violence, when necessary, for a particular purpose and effect. For example, More uses the tragic story of Qua-shi to make a broader point about the nature and characteristics of so-called savages and the need to honour their behaviour. She argues that his deeds of valour and ‘heroic’ virtue are excluded from history’s ‘recording page’ because no-one of Qua-shi’s racial identity is ever considered capable of embodying such characteristics (S, p. 7. ll. 90, 87). According to Stott, More is ‘engaging in an Enlightenment debate about the nature of humankind’, forcing the reader to ‘turn’ and observe the ‘social life’ and ‘feeling Nature’ of the Africans (S, pp. 7-8. ll. 95, 99, 108).⁷³ The purpose of her rhetoric is not to ‘whet sensations, but define’; for her verses faithfully depict, rather than create, the slave’s sensations (S, p. 12. l. 166). She expects this transition to be uncomfortable, which is

⁶⁹ James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: James Phillips, 1784), pp. 104-105.

⁷⁰ Stott, *Wilberforce*, p. 37.

⁷¹ John Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (London: J. Buckland and J. Johnson, 1788), pp. 17, 20.

⁷² Sinanan, p. 152.

⁷³ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 93.

suggested in the alliterative and increasing vowel length of ‘deepest, deadliest’. It accentuates the sense of guilt one feels for gazing powerlessly on this scene, but she mollifies what could be a tone of accusation by participating in the gaze, using the personal pronoun ‘I’: ‘Whene’er to Afric’s shores I turn my eyes, / Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise’ (S, p.7. l. 95).

The success of Wilberforce’s Bill relied heavily on the reception of his speeches by fellow members of parliament. Despite the fact that his first speech in May 1789 has not survived in a complete form, the various versions that were recorded do demonstrate that Wilberforce was a proficient orator. It is a master class in rhetoric, working many of Ramsay’s arguments and research into a succinct case for Abolition. What is of interest, in regards to More and her work, is that it contains the same concern with appealing to the sympathy of the reader or in this case the listener. For Wilberforce, sympathy is the ‘spring of humanity’ and without it there is cruelty between one man and the next.⁷⁴ He argues that ‘this man looking down upon his Slaves as a set of Beings of another nature from himself, can have no sympathy for them’.⁷⁵ Therefore, the starting point towards Abolition is to accept that the African slave has the same common feeling as his master. If this identification can take place, then sympathy cannot fail to follow. Wilberforce concludes his speech using the plural pronoun ‘we’ to unite parliament in a collective responsibility: we cannot ‘turn aside so as to avoid feeling it’.⁷⁶ He returns to the necessity of experiencing an emotional response to the trade, in order for people to act for change. Significantly, the immediate public response, as seen in the *Gazetteer* and *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, took issue with Wilberforce’s insistence that sympathy was humanity’s natural bedfellow and to be against Abolition was to deny common humanity. One anonymous critic, who supported the slave trade for commercial reasons, chose to close his commentary with the following signature: ‘An Englishman and a man of Humanity’. By hoping that the ‘good sense of the nation’ will prevail and Wilberforce’s motion will fail, he refuses to accept that his standpoint denies human feeling.⁷⁷ Wilberforce always addressed the economic concerns of

⁷⁴ *The Speech of William Wilberforce, Esq. Representative for the County of York, on Wednesday the 13th May, 1789, on the Question of the Abolition of the Slave Trade: to which are Added, the Resolutions that Moved, and a Short Sketch of the Speeches of Other Members* (London: Printed at the Logographic Press, and sold by J. Walter, 1789), p. 22.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷⁷ Anonymous, *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal* (April 11, 1789).

his opposition but his rhetoric continued to prioritise the need to see and to feel the slave's condition.⁷⁸

It seems an obvious but important point to note that the Evangelical Abolitionists argued for the end of the trade primarily from a religious conviction that all men were created equal in the eyes of God and should not be subjected to cruel enslavement by another human being. Newton wrote that his concerns rested with the 'feelings of humanity', convinced that 'human nature is much the same in every place'.⁷⁹ More echoes his sentiments in 'Slavery, A Poem', with a strong imperative to the slave masters ('Barbarians') to 'Respect *his* sacred image which they bear' (S, p. 10. ll. 135-136). The italicised 'his' draws the reader's attention once again to the religious convictions governing More's plea. Their darkness of skin does not disqualify Africans from the 'common privilege of kind' or from representing the image of God (S, p.10. l. 138). In an unpublished letter, dated 1819, More describes a visit from 'two Persians of dark dress in the magnificent costume of their country'. Her assessment of their character and religious position is illuminating for it indicates a link between virtuous living and religious faith: 'they are very agreeable, sensible, wise, informed and pleasing men and I believe more than half Christians'.⁸⁰ More and her Evangelical community differed from a purely Enlightenment view of humanity because they insisted that social responsibilities between one man and the next could only be created and sustained through an acceptance of religious belief. Ramsay argued that within the jurisdiction of the plantations 'neither is law animated by religion, nor is religion supported by the law', and, so consequently, a 'wretched race of mortals' are considered as 'mere machines' and 'instruments' of profit.⁸¹ For a man to experience autonomy and be responsive to religion, he must be endowed with the 'rights and privileges of a man; we must teach him to feel his weight in society'. This is where the Evangelical faith came into play, with Ramsay arguing that 'religion has a two-fold purpose: man's ultimate fate as an individual, and his conduct as a member of society'.⁸²

Olaudah Equiano, an ex-slave and Evangelical convert, published his extraordinary story *The Interesting Narrative* in 1789, with Hannah More, Sir Charles and Lady

⁷⁸ Stott argues that Wilberforce's rhetoric 'owes a considerable debt to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*'. Feeling or 'sentiment' was the basis for moral judgment and without the use of imagination a person was incapable of understanding or experiencing another person's feelings. This type of identification was absolutely crucial in changing attitudes (parliament, public or merchant) towards the trade. *Wilberforce*, p. 36.

⁷⁹ Newton, pp. 41, 29.

⁸⁰ 'Letter from Hannah More to Buchanan, 11 Feb 1819', Bristol, Bristol Record Office, Ref No. 12252.

⁸¹ Ramsay, pp. 107-108.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 151.

Middleton, James Ramsay and Thomas Clarkson all subscribing to the work. During a stay in London, when his sea-faring Master took respite, Equiano was introduced to the Guerin family who ‘took much notice and great care’ of him.⁸³ The sisters, Misses Guerins (whom Equiano describes as ‘patronesses’) demonstrated that kindness, education and religious knowledge went hand in hand. They not only taught Equiano ‘to read’ but also ‘took great pains to instruct’ him in ‘the principles of religion, and the knowledge of God’.⁸⁴ Equiano sought improvement, both spiritually and educationally, in order to ‘resemble’ and ‘imitate’ the ‘superior’ white men.⁸⁵ He was given the opportunity to learn, as long as it was coupled with religious instruction. This, however, was a problematic combination, as we shall see, for it reaffirmed Britain’s right to survey and judge another nation’s morality. It also suggests an uncomfortable, religious conversion motivation for social justice.

Anne Stott, using Linda Colley’s phrasing, argues that Abolition ‘legitimized Britain’s claim to be the arbiter of the civilised and uncivilised world, and gave the government elite a painless way of claiming moral superiority’.⁸⁶ There is a problematic, divinely ordained mandate recognisable in the letters and writings of the Evangelicals when they touched upon the international importance of Britain’s responsibility in bringing Abolition into fruition. Newton viewed the slave trade as a weighty ‘stain’ and a ‘millstone, sufficient, of itself sufficient, to sink such an enlightened and highly favoured nation as ours to the bottom of the sea’.⁸⁷ For Newton, the continuation of the trade risked the wrath of God who had ‘favoured’ Britain with civilisation, enlightenment, industry, and the right to sovereignty over other nations. Using similar language to that of Newton, More describes the nation as blessed with ‘freedom’ in order for it to be wisely stewarded for the benefit of others:

Shall Britain, where the soul of Freedom reigns,
Forge chains for others she herself disdains?
Forbid it, Heaven! O let the nations know
The liberty she loves she will bestow;
Not to herself the glorious gift confin’d,
She spreads the blessing wide as humankind (S, p. 18. ll. 251-256).

⁸³ *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 71.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸⁶ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 94.

⁸⁷ Newton, p. 1; *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, p. 302.

Newton and More do not debate the moral implications of expansion, but instead only challenge the oppression of those under British jurisdiction. Wilberforce's 1789 *Speech* draws out the guilt that the nation, particularly parliament, should be feeling for allowing the trade to be carried out 'under their authority'.⁸⁸ This abuse of power has put the national character and reputation of the country at stake, with the only solution available being to 'make such amends as we can for the mischiefs we have done to that unhappy continent'.⁸⁹ It is by taking the first step towards Abolition that the nation can once again be an 'object of emulation'.⁹⁰

The above discussion has shown that the Evangelicals considered Britain's right to rule over other nations as the mandate given to them by God. What was up for discussion, however, was how this authority should be exercised; they were appalled at the reputation the slave trade was giving to the nation and to Christianity. Ann Yearsley, a working-class protégée of More's, before they parted company over the control of Yearsley's published earnings, produced 'Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade' in 1788. Unlike More, Yearsley was not afraid to make a ferocious 'assault on the hypocrisy of the state religion', unwilling to separate out Christianity from the perpetrators of the trade.⁹¹ More is insistent that 'They are *not* Christians who infest thy shore' (S, p. 14, l. 188), whereas Yearsley does not make the same distinction: she scorns with a curse 'the toils spread by a Christian hand' and could forcibly 'sweep them from the earth'.⁹² She expresses a rather undeveloped but recognisable humanistic attitude towards Abolition, personifying 'social love!' as the 'God-like power' which should promote freedom and order.⁹³ Yearsley seems unaware or stubbornly dismissive of the literary conventions expected of female writers, particularly those using poetry to engage with political issues. Contrary to the fashion, she demonstrates a bold, fractious and anti-religious approach to the topic. This may have been the result of her working-class origins, being unfamiliar with the literary tradition, or more interestingly it could be that her work embodies the displacement that she, as a working-class woman writer, and her subject, the slave, jointly represented.⁹⁴ Rather than passively lamenting their

⁸⁸ *The Speech of William Wilberforce*, p. 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹⁰ Ramsay, p. 293.

⁹¹ 'A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade Humbly Inscribed to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend Frederic Earl of Bristol Bishop of Derry', in *The Poetry of Slavery*, pp. 120-130 (p. 120).

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 128. ll. 63, 303.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 129. ll. 342, 348.

⁹⁴ Alan Richardson suggests that Yearsley's 'representation of the slave has been found refreshingly particularised as opposed to More's dehumanising abstraction, based on a conscious "class" identifications'. 'Darkness Visible? Race and Representation in Bristol Abolitionist Poetry, 1770-

exclusion, she aggressively confirms their identity. She alludes to her domestic heritage by referring to her poetic voice as ‘Lactilla’, the Latin name for a milkmaid. She will not allow her ‘rustic’ or ‘crude’ ideas to remain ‘panting’, ineffective and weakened, but instead demands that they be energised to take flight.⁹⁵ There is a sense that her disenfranchised position, which enabled her more easily to understand the Africans’ plight, is the authority needed to ‘summon’ her reader to approach the scene of sorrow.⁹⁶ ‘Heart-felt sympathy’ should readdress the balance of power, for Yearsley’s surveillance of the slave was not taken from a position of superiority but from equality.⁹⁷

More, on the other hand, separates out the unfeeling owners from benevolent authority figures, and writes of the destructive force of Britain’s slave traders, concluding that their view of ‘conquest’ was just ‘pillage with a nobler name’ (S, p. 16. l. 226). She laments the loss of the spirit of exploration embodied by Cook – his ‘gentle mind’, his ‘love of arts’ and ‘humankind – which has been replaced with a colonisation that has been a ‘curse to man!’ (S, p. 17. ll. 235-238) In More’s mind, colonised nations were in need of benevolent masters because it was in this capacity that Britain as a nation was failing.⁹⁸ As already noted, the Evangelicals accepted the hierarchical structuring of society (which extended to the governing of nations) but they expected a certain code of conduct and practice from those in authority, and this was informed by a Biblical understanding of the Patriarchal God and the role his son, Christ, came to take in the world. Ramsay, when arguing for the end of the trade, petitioned for gradual abolition because without a steady change to the system, the plantations would descend into anarchy. He suggests that the negro slaves ‘need a master to provide and care for them. The plan, proposed to advance and instruct them, must be gentle, slow in its progress, keeping pace with the opening of their minds and looking forward for its completion to a distant period’.⁹⁹ Encouraging the benevolence of the master was the first change that Ramsay looked for, recognising that much of the slave’s experience would improve with this one small but significant change. Newton agreed that the condition of the ‘unhappy slaves’ was a continual progression from

1810’, in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 129-147 (p. 140).

⁹⁵ Wood, p. 121. ll. 10-12.

⁹⁶ Wood, p. 121. l. 38.

⁹⁷ Wood, p. 130. l. 375.

⁹⁸ Crisafulli suggests that More anticipates the ‘re-feminisation’ of Britannia (a representation touched upon by Emma Major) by appealing to a ‘mother-centred Christian community’; it will apply maternal care to the slave, recognising that the slave has been torn from his or her ‘native motherland’ (p. 122). As we shall see in section two, More also asserts that feminine *Christian* virtues are essential for reforming the British nation.

⁹⁹ Ramsay, p. 118.

bad to worse because they were at the hands of the capricious and unfeeling ‘Overseer’.¹⁰⁰ What is interesting about Newton’s choice of noun is that it has biblical allusions to the description of Christ in I Peter 2. 25: ‘For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls’.¹⁰¹ An exegetical examination of these verses reveals that Peter is addressing first-century household slaves, petitioning his reader to return to Christ, the Bishop or Overseer of their souls. Christ takes on the quality of a shepherd, providing protection, provision, and shelter necessary for the welfare of his sheep. The Shepherd’s provision is extended beyond the physical to the wellbeing of the slave’s soul. The Evangelicals’ response to this model of Christ was, as we have seen, to be Christ in the world, and to re-establish benevolence in the master/slave relationship.

The promise of protection and provision, however, was only available to those who complied with and accepted the Overseer’s jurisdiction and right to shepherd. In other words, a conversion experience was required in order to fully enjoy the benefits, and this attitude seeped into the Evangelicals’ policies concerning Abolition. Problematically, their vision of Abolition did appear to include conditions, under which freedom was offered alongside the preaching of the Gospel. As we have already seen, Ramsay could not separate the progress of society from the presence of religion. The Evangelicals were expecting the slaves to swap one kind of slavery for another, albeit a cruel, physical oppression for a spiritual bondage to Christ. Equiano wrote on the occasion of his conversion that ‘[w]hen I considered my poor wretched state, I wept, seeing what a great debtor I was to sovereign free grace’.¹⁰² The adjective ‘free’ is rendered redundant here as grace in itself means receiving the love and forgiveness of God freely, but this emphasis of freedom sits strikingly and uncomfortably alongside Equiano’s previous assertion that he is in debt for it. More ends ‘Slavery, A Poem’ with the embodiment of Mercy using ‘FAITH and FREEDOM’ to burst open the ‘two-fold bands’ of oppression and slavery (S, p. 20. ll. 294, 293). Spiritual freedom is equally prized alongside the physical and should be received as a complete exchange. In a later poem, ‘The Feast of Freedom’ (1816), which supported the wider trans-Atlantic movement for the end of plantation slavery, there is a more overt reference to the freedom received if the Evangelical faith is adopted, with an exchange taking place: the slave is spiritually free and Britain is economically blessed. She writes: ‘[t]his is the boon

¹⁰⁰ Newton, p. 37.

¹⁰¹ I Peter 2. 25, p. 1116.

¹⁰² *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 190. In the Explanatory notes, Vincent Carretta notes that ‘the phrase is somewhat redundant because *grace* means God’s love and protection freely given to the sinner’ (p. 290).

which England sends, / It breaks the chains of sin; / O blest exchange for fragrant groves!’¹⁰³ Britain not only fulfils its role as benevolent Overseer, but, as More predicts, the country will benefit financially because it has obeyed the divine call to govern well. Therefore, the Evangelical’s awareness of his/her own need for spiritual conversion led to a zealous preoccupation with national morality, sanctioning women, particularly, to exercise a moral influence, through the ‘support of missions and anti-slavery’.¹⁰⁴ The consequence of demonstrating God’s relationship with Christ and Christ’s role within the Church was not to challenge the patriarchal structuring of society, but by ending the trade there could be a transference of the slave from a cruel oppressor to a benevolent ‘Overseer’.

Cælebs in Search of a Wife: A Fictional Evangelical Community

More’s only novel, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife; Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*, was anonymously published in 1809 and met, surprisingly to a twenty-first century reader, with instant success. According to her biographer Roberts, in less than a fortnight from its first appearance, it was out of print with ‘booksellers all over the country [...] clamorous for copies’ (II, p. 147). In the subsequent nine months, twelve editions were circulated and it found equal popularity in America, where it was estimated that 30 editions of 1,000 copies were printed during More’s lifetime (II, p. 148). As Cheryl Turner points out, More took the unusual step of retaining the copyright for *Cælebs*, choosing to forfeit the easiest means of obtaining income from her work. Turner interprets this act of More’s as being ‘confident of both her entitlement to literary property, and the demand for her material.’¹⁰⁵ However, in private More reveals a less than confident assessment of her work, confirming to Wilberforce that her motives for writing were mixed and not necessarily achieved:

‘Cælebs’ is mine; harshly (much too harshly) written to amuse the languor of disease. That it will do good I am not sanguine; that I wished to introduce principles into the Circulating Library, which though quite common-places to the religious, are new to the novel reader, is certain.¹⁰⁶

She is quick to admit the deficiencies in its literary merits, perhaps to deflect Wilberforce from judging it on those terms, for she did not write it with the exercise of literary talents in mind. She would not allow herself to indulge in the novelistic form for its own sake but

¹⁰³ ‘The Feast of Freedom’, in *The Poetry of Slavery*, pp. 116- 119 (p. 118. ll. 65-67).

¹⁰⁴ David Turley, ‘Complicating the Story: Religion and Gender in Historical Writing on British and American Anti-Slavery’, in *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (pp 20-43), p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 113.

¹⁰⁶ *The Correspondence of W. Wilberforce*, II, p. 152.

instead she reveals two separate but interlinking motivations: to overcome the ‘languor of disease’ and to promote the religious novel. More often suffered from bouts of ill-health, particularly low spirits, and it appears that she used the act of creating an Evangelical utopia in *Cælebs* as a healing balm. The above quotation unashamedly defines *Cælebs* as an extended conduct book that will place religious principles in the hands of those whose reading material was confined to the novel. It has been evidenced from More’s interactions with the Abolition movement that her literary choices were connected to her Evangelical convictions, seeking to promote her beliefs for the benefit of society. This suggests that reaping a financial return for her work was far less important than having direct control over the production of future editions. Taking into account More’s hopes for the novel, this section will explore how a fictionalised Evangelical community offers itself as a blueprint for successful marriages, charitable living and religious conversion.¹⁰⁷ I have already suggested that unconventional interactions between the sexes were permissible when communication of conviction was concerned, but on this occasion More complicates further the traditional gendered roles, showing how Christian principles blurred the distinction between normative feminine and masculine modes of influence. I am particularly interested in More’s use of the male narrator, the characterisation of the heroine Lucilla and her consequential marriage to Charles.

Cælebs has proved problematic or of little interest to literary critics, with Emily Rena-Dozier conceding that it ‘seems safe to say that Hannah More will never again be the household name she was at the turn of the nineteenth century’.¹⁰⁸ Eileen Cleere acknowledges that set against Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park* – its worthier incarnation – *Cælebs*’ ‘narrative certainly suffers from overly didactic content and uneventful plot’.¹⁰⁹ Charles (Cœlebs being a variant of celibate), the bachelor protagonist of the novel, follows the titled directive almost word for word, observing the ‘domestic habits and manners, religions and morals’ of his acquaintances in search of a suitable wife. There is very little opposition standing between Charles’ union with his chosen woman, Lucilla Stanley, who from the very first observation proves to be the suitable wife. Charles’ description of Lucilla, overflowing with feminine virtue, proves accurate upon further acquaintance. He writes:

¹⁰⁷ According to Charlotte Young, as quoted by Patricia Demers, Stanley Grove was ‘modelled’ on the household of More’s Evangelical friends, Zachary Macaulay and his wife Selina, a former pupil at the Mores’ school. As we shall see, the novel received an unfavourable review from Zachary Macaulay, editor of *Christian Observer*, providing a fascinating and unforeseen response to More’s decision to eternalise these family friends. ‘Introduction’, in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, pp. 8-30 (p. 27).

¹⁰⁸ Emily Rena-Dozier, ‘Hannah More and the Invention of Narrative Authority’, *ELH*, 71 (2004), 209-227 (p. 209).

¹⁰⁹ Eileen Cleere, ‘Homeland Security: Political and Domestic Economy in Hannah More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*’, *ELH*, 74 (2007), 1-25 (p. 1).

Her conversation, like her countenance, is compounded of liveliness, sensibility, and delicacy. She does not say things to be quoted, but the effect of her conversation is that it leaves an impression of pleasure on the mind, and a love of goodness on the heart. She enlivens without dazzling, and entertains without overpowering. Contented to please, she has no ambition to shine. There is nothing like effort in her expression, or vanity in her manner [. . .] Taste is indeed the predominating quality of her mind; and she may rather be said to be a nice judge of the genius of others, than to be a genius herself. She has a quick perception of whatever is beautiful or defective, in composition or in character. The same true taste pervades her writing, her conversation, her dress, her domestic arrangements, and her gardening, for which last she has both a passion and a talent (C, p. 122).

The significance of this description regarding the Evangelical's surveillance of character will be explored in further detail, but for now I will draw attention to Cleere's assessment that most critics have taken this type of female gendering, voiced through the masculine narrator, as More's perpetuation or compliance with patriarchal discourse.¹¹⁰ This narratorial and authorial device has also proved problematic for critics as they attempt to make sense of More's decision to offer advice on female behaviour through the distancing lens of a masculine persona.¹¹¹ In a letter dated 1809, Dr. Randolph congratulates More on her novel, confessing that 'though I do not in general admire women in mens' [sic] clothes, you have my full permission to wear them, and would that any of my sex made so good a use of the manly privilege' (II, p. 154). This metaphor of male clothing demonstrates the complexities of More's position as novelist, only gaining 'permission' to exercise an authorial voice if it is in a male guise. Lisa Wood suggests that More's use of a male narrator is a strategy with which to reconcile 'narrative acts with conservative models of feminine virtue'; it is an attempt to negotiate successfully the incompatible union of gender and authority. Rena-Dozier locates More's authority not within her gender but within the parameters of 'self-examination and religious study': More wanted women to be able to 'speak from a position unmarked by passion, sentiment, or sensibility, and thus from a position of greater abstract authority'.¹¹² Although More did subscribe to patriarchal conventions regarding the novelistic form, by finding security in a male narrator, this did not stop her from reimagining female authority in other ways: she allows feminine influence to engage with a public setting of religious conversion.

¹¹⁰ Cleere is referring here to Kowaleski-Wallace who suggests that *Cælebs* 'ends up perpetuating "aspects of the very misogyny it is designed to contradict"' (p. 23).

¹¹¹ Lisa Wood notes that 'the adoption of the narrative authority necessary to the construction of a fictional text entails a subversion of the acquiescent ideal'. 'Bachelors and "Old Maids": Antirevolutionary British Women Writers and Narrative Authority after the French Revolution', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22.1 (Spring, 2003), 81-98 (p. 84).

¹¹² Lisa Wood, p.84; Rena-Dozier, p. 225.

Kerry Sinanan's essay 'Too Good to be True?' explores More's motivation to write, seeking to rescue her reputation from the liberal and secularist literary critic; she places her works within the context of the Evangelicals' sincere and authentic desire not only to reform the self but carry out benevolent acts.¹¹³ For example, Sinanan would take issue with the reading of More that I have engaged with, that would assess her involvement in Abolition as "re-colonising" slaves with an Anglocentric, Christian ideology'. Instead, she accepts, like Patricia Demers, the abolitionists' intentions to do good, recognising that More did not 'utilize religion cynically in order to prevent social change', but valued it as a "necessary corollary" to freedom, not a limiting contingency'.¹¹⁴ Sincerity of purpose had to originate within the believer. The supernatural power needed to transform society could only be achieved through the surveillance of the self, overcoming its natural and sinful inclinations.¹¹⁵ As already noted, More, through friendships of accountability, exercised an acute self-reflection and this communal practice seeped into her fictional creation. Sinanan takes seriously More's Evangelical convictions as the driving force behind her novelistic and social activities, and I build upon this approach, suggesting that they shaped not only her view of community but its interactions with the outside world. *Cælebs'* world in many ways is a fictionalised version of the society that she had enjoyed in the Clapham Sect. It was in this dynamic setting that successful surveillance and transformative behaviour could be nurtured.

However, More's idealised portrayal of community in fiction is also able to reveal the deficiencies in her own life: in a letter written in 1808, More is unable to conceal her anxiety from Wilberforce when reflecting on the lack of community she has experienced in recent years. She blames her persistent ill health as the main obstacle from seeing friends and attending church. She writes that 'a vague rumour had reached us that you were coming to Clifton; to be sure it would have been more profitable to us'; for she had suffered nearly two years of confinement. She concludes the letter with another anxious aside on the loss of community, this time focusing on Wilberforce's decision to leave Clapham: 'I did feel for you on leaving Bloomfield, but still more, I confess, for those you left. Clapham seems coming to nothing' (II, pp. 133-134). More's anxiety reveals two areas of concern that I believe *Cælebs* seeks to fictionalise: the necessity of community to cultivate and protect personal conviction, and as the model for effectively engaging in social action. More directly connects community with a flourishing faith, writing in 1804 that her 'greatest loss' in being

¹¹³ Sinanan, p. 153.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 60. Qtd. Sinanan, pp. 141, 144-145.

¹¹⁵ Sinanan, p. 158.

removed from friends was that she had ‘fewer to stimulate’ her to the ‘love of God’ (II, p.114). Abolition had preoccupied the Clapham community during the early 1790s but now that the 1807 Abolition Act had been passed there was a sense in More’s letter that a communal project was wanting. Both More and Wilberforce in their respective writings – *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* and *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797) – had already attempted to embark on a new campaign: reforming the so-called religious elite and rescuing Christianity’s reputation from those who did not faithfully represent it. But as we shall come to see, More’s *Cælebs* is the ultimate expression of a thriving, purposeful Evangelical community.

The private and collective surveillance of the self, particularly in regulating its sinful nature, was a defining feature of the Clapham literary community, and it is exemplified in the characters of *Cælebs*. Before Charles embarks on his quest for a wife, his mother offers advice about the type of character he should be searching for. She states that ‘if it be absurd to expect perfection, it is not unreasonable to expect *consistency*’ (C, p. 47). As Sinanan explains, Evangelicals had to stay alert to the potential ‘snare’ of the self which was ready to overthrow its best intentions at any moment.¹¹⁶ Therefore, they sought reinforcement, relying on fellow believers to help observe their behaviour. The evidence of consistency in a person’s character suggested considerable success in reigning in the sinful self, allowing virtue to excel. Charles’ first impression of Lucilla, as already quoted at length, surveys her character with the detection of consistency in mind. As Miriam Elizabeth Burstein explains, More ‘dissociated feminine virtues from the bodily charms that had animated older models’ of eighteenth-century influence.¹¹⁷ Instead, Charles concludes that ‘taste’ was the ‘predominating quality’ of her mind, affecting her speech, dress, and choice of activities, equipping her with a ‘quick perception of whatever is beautiful or defective, in composition or in character’ (C, p. 122). Dr. Barlow, a family friend, is quizzed further by Charles in his quest to understand Lucilla’s disposition, knowing that he has in ‘some measure contributed to [its] form’ (C, p. 238). Dr. Barlow openly admits that she ‘practises self-examination, that she may learn to watch against the first rising of bad dispositions, and to detect every latent evil in her heart’ (C, p. 239). However, Lucilla’s consistency has been gained at the expense of making wrong choices regarding the appropriateness of when and to whom confession should be made. She has learned the indiscretion of speaking about one’s state of mind to someone who ‘so little understood the nature of this inward corruption’ (C, p. 265). Lucilla’s

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹¹⁷ *Narrating Women’s History in Britain 1700-1902* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 54.

potential fault, in the hands of unsympathetic, irreligious listeners, became the subject of gossip, labelling her as a ‘great sinner’ (C, p. 265). Susan David Bernstein is concerned with the power discourse associated with confession, and is unsure that the act can ever be empowering for women.¹¹⁸ However, in the Evangelical mindset, as demonstrated in the friendship of More and Newton, the confession of sin should be treated with reverential awe and equality, recognising that all are liable to sin. Therefore, to limit the painful, judgmental experience of Lucilla’s confession, it becomes important to situate oneself in a community that is united in the pursuit of Evangelical consistency. More’s anxiety, as expressed in the letter to Wilberforce, in which she is reflecting on her own lack of community, is not only a lament of loneliness but a concern for her spiritual growth: a diary entry from 1803 indicates her increasing isolation, writing that she found it ‘hard to keep up near views of eternity when alone’ (II, p. 102).

The Stanley household is presented as the Utopian environment in which Evangelical consistency can be cultivated. Mr Stanley, the patriarchal father of Stanley Grove, is recognised as the ‘most faithful and most disinterested of counsellor[s]’, used by More as mentor and a mouthpiece for exhorting Evangelical principles (C, p. 50). He is able to relate all manner of practical life to religious principle, conversing on female education, management of the estate, gardening, charity, the imagination, literature and music. In doing so, he provides a blueprint for achieving Christian consistency in every eventuality. For example, he takes poetry’s potential snare – the excess of passion and imagination – and moderates it by its duty to ‘render service’ (C, p. 233). This utopia, however, is not void of reflection on the personal misrepresentation faced by Evangelicals, particularly as experienced in More’s own life. Stanley acknowledges that the Evangelical lifestyle – regular church attendance, keeping the Sabbath, rejoicing in the Abolition of the slave trade, promoting religious instruction of the poor and the foreigner – will ‘infallibly fix on him the charge of methodism’ and ‘will not fail absolutely to stigmatize him’ (C, p. 331). He continues: ‘the most devoted attachment to the establishment will avail him nothing’ (C, p. 331). More’s personal grievances come across most clearly in Stanley’s last admission that in the face of ‘such determined assailants no prudence can protect his character, no private integrity can defend it, no public service rescue it’ (C, p. 332). What More does promote, however, is the defence of a single principle if it is being abused by an opponent. Stanley heavily prioritises the part that work plays in man’s salvation when faced with Mr. Tyrrel’s misunderstanding of grace. In fact, it is Stanley’s personal belief that both elements are essential but, as Dr. Barlow expresses it, there are occasions when the principle should be

¹¹⁸ Bernstein, p. 27.

rescued from its enemies: ‘He should redeem it from the enthusiasm which misconceives, and from the ignorance or malignity which misrepresents it’ (C, p. 335).

More found her own novel misjudged, most painfully within the *Christian Observer* – the publication which had originated from within the Clapham community in 1802.¹¹⁹ The reviewer charged the character Charles with vulgarity, but more interestingly his severest criticism extended to the mix of the two generic forms: the religious tract and the novel. Cautioning others from entering on a similar project, the reviewer simply writes: ‘Divinity is an odd ingredient in a work of imagination’.¹²⁰ In fact, he would rather not label it as a novel at all: ‘it is merely a frame-work for better things’.¹²¹ In its fictional ‘Preface’, spoken in the narratorial voice, Charles hands over the novel’s fate (whether it should be published or not) to a ‘confidential’ friend (C, p. 37). He was to decide whether it was successful in its purpose: ‘religion may be brought to mix with the concerns of ordinary life’ (C, p. 39). The narratorial device, once again, appears to remove More from direct responsibility for her text; she finds some security in hiding behind the endorsement offered by a trusted, male authorial voice. However, as Anne Stott reports, in reality More was so stung by the review from a supposedly sympathetic source that she replied to the criticism, directing her bitterness towards Zachary Macaulay, the unfortunate editor: ‘This sort of sneer I expect from a Scotch but not from a Christian critic’.¹²² More’s reaction shows her sensitivity towards the possibility that her one clear motive for the novel, to combine successfully religion with the imagination, had failed. She, like her character Stanley, believed in the moral worth of literature, that it had been God-ordained: ‘works of imagination have in many countries been a chief instrument of civilization’.¹²³ It also highlights the distancing effect More felt to be occurring between herself and her fellow Evangelicals, no longer being able to guarantee their support. Similarly to Charles’ reliance on his friend’s judgment, More expected her Evangelical friends to support and promote her work. Her reaction to an unknown or unacquainted critic was, on the other hand, measured and diplomatic. She received a torrent of hostility penned by the Roman Catholic priest, Joseph Berington who charged a small passage of *Cælebs* with anti-Catholicism. He wrote that ‘nothing is more surprising than that you Protestants should be so utterly ignorant, as you really are, or seem to be, of our tenets’ (II, p. 149). More calmly replies to his accusations reassuring him that it was not her intention to offend, and offers to alter the punctuation in future editions to

¹¹⁹ Jay, p. 23.

¹²⁰ *Christian Observer* (8 Feb, 1809). Qtd. Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 279.

¹²¹ *Christian Observer* (8 Feb, 1809), in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, pp. 399-402 (p. 399).

¹²² *Letters of Hannah More to Zachary Macaulay, Esq., containing Notices of Lord Macaulay’s Youth*, ed. by A. Roberts (London, 1860), 29-30. Qtd. Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 280.

¹²³ *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995). Qtd. Major, p. 282.

remove ambiguity. Not completely satisfied with this palliative, Berington replies with a reworking of the text: ‘now, why may not the passage, in future, stand thus?’ (II, p. 153) Berington’s textual interference is fascinating not only for what it reveals about this reader’s insistent right to textual input but for also gauging More’s response to criticism. She may in private have resented Berington’s interference but in her public role as author she tolerated it in a way that she was unable to when it came from fellow Evangelicals.¹²⁴ The *Christian Observer* incident epitomised in More’s mind the inappropriate and ineffective example of surveillance within a community; such critique should be offered in private conversation.

Charles commends community as the perfect strategy for creating an environment in which correction and consistency could be achieved, arguing that a type of osmosis would occur through conversation.¹²⁵ He states:

I only wish as people live so much together, that is, when out of the multitude of topics which arise in conversation, an unlucky wight happens to start a serious thought, I could see a cordial recognition of its importance; I wish I could see a disposition to pursue it, instead of a chilling silence which obliges him to draw in, as if he had dropped something dangerous to the state, or inimical to the general cheerfulness, or derogatory to his own understanding (C, p. 287).

This communal living would demand an honest acceptance of outspokenness, allowing serious matters of religion to be discussed in the hope that it would affect behaviour via the heart. It is sincerely held that ‘communication is a great strengthener of any principle’ for ‘thoughts that are never to be produced, in time seldom present themselves, while mutual interchange almost creates as well as cultivates them’ (C, p. 288). The success of this plan is seen in the transformation of the generous but worldly couple, the Belfields, who spend a considerable amount of time in the Stanley household. Sir John ends his visit with this assessment:

I observe with regret, that the time assigned for our visit is more than elapsed. We have prolonged it beyond our intention, beyond our convenience: but we have, I trust, been imbibing principles, stealing habits, and borrowing plans, which will ever make us consider this visit as an important æra in our lives (C, p. 362).

¹²⁴ In private, More sardonically writes about Berington: ‘I am sure it must be Bonner’s Ghost for which they owe me a spite - the offence of *Cælebs* was so slight’. ‘More to Anne Kennicott, 20 Feb 1810’. Qtd. Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 278.

¹²⁵ Sydney Smith’s review of the novel took issue with this insistence that conversation should include religious topics. He strongly disagreed, arguing that ‘conversation must and ought to grow out of materials on which men can agree, not upon subjects which try the passions’ (p. 406).

The implication is that the Belfields will return home and steward their estate using the principles learnt in the Stanley household. This is the ultimate aim of the Evangelical, to replicate one's conviction of faith and to see it embodied in another; this is exemplified in the bringing together of Charles and Lucilla through marriage.

The surveillance of behaviour with a specific purpose in mind is perfected in the pact made between Charles' father and Mr. Stanley: 'educating our children for each other' (C, p. 348). In a spectacular piece of patriarchal control from beyond the grave, letters written by Charles' father reveal his intentions to 'perpetuate our friendship by the future union of our children' (C, p. 348). They had set out to inspire their children with 'corresponding tastes, similar inclinations, and especially with an exact conformity in their religious views' (C, p. 348). And yet through an observation of the 'perverse and wayward' nature of the heart, the two Fathers were determined to keep the plan to themselves, so that the happiness could be set upon in 'its own way' (C, p. 349). This juxtaposition of fatherly provision with freedom of choice echoes the Evangelical vision of salvation, where providence and freewill mysteriously intermingle. The necessity of communal observation continues to be supported for good choices can only be made if the character is formed under watchful eyes. Charles is given the textual evidence of his father's surveillance: 'I could shew you, I believe, near a hundred letters on each side, of which you were the unconscious subject', and in return Stanley offers his own textual reading of Lucilla: 'You will read the history of her mind; you will mark the unfolding of faculties and the progress of her education' (C, p. 350). The authenticity of conversion is taken to a whole new extreme with physical records confirming individual observation. It seems as if Charles' judgment of his own character and of Lucilla's can only be verified once the documented proof is given by the Patriarchs. As Lisa Wood explains, More's 'narrative is controlled, guided, and ultimately legitimized by the narrator's submission to the voices and influence of the fathers'.¹²⁶ Mentorship, as observed through the narratorial device, is prioritised and made essential to the development of spirituality.

One possible explanation for the extraordinary lengths taken to legitimise Charles and Lucilla's character and conversion is to consider More's metaphorical purpose for their marriage within the context of Evangelicalism. At the beginning of the novel, Charles surmises that there are three 'grand inducements' in the choice of a wife: firstly that a man may have a directress for his family; secondly a preceptress for his children; and thirdly as companion for himself (C, p. 73). These criteria place importance on the wife's function to lead by example and prioritise the spiritual and moral wellbeing of the family. According to

¹²⁶ Lisa Wood, p. 89.

Burstein, influence of this sort, in an eighteenth-century context, was considered to be ‘feminine, private, ‘mild’ and exerted for long-term refining goals’.¹²⁷ However, More’s surprising conviction, as argued by Kathryn Sutherland, that ‘the Christian is Christian first and gendered second’ suggests a complication of this simplistic dichotomy between feminine and masculine virtues, particularly in the transmission of religious influence.¹²⁸ In her later works, More, as noted by several critics, became braver in adopting a neutral voice, writing as a ‘Christian who must die soon, to Christians who must certainly die’.¹²⁹ I agree with Emma Major that More’s promotion of a transparent ‘public faith’ collapsed public and private faith, offering a ‘tantalising space where gender is eventually irrelevant’.¹³⁰ To identify as a Christian is to prioritise faith and its community above the gendered expectations of what it means to be a man or woman.

For example, Thomas Gisborne, an associate of the Clapham Society, writing in his essay *Enquiry into the Duties of Men* (1794), describes the perfect family set up and endorses the husband’s conduct as an important influence upon his wife’s behaviour: ‘to win her by his counsel, by his encouragement, and above all by his attractive example, to continual advances in every virtuous habit and pursuit’.¹³¹ He continues by emphasising the sacrificial love of the husband for his wife, comparing it to Christ’s love for the church.¹³² Therefore, Gisborne’s description of a successful Christian marriage is neither solely restricted to the woman’s virtuous conduct, nor reliant on the patriarchal dominance of the man.¹³³ It is difficult, nigh impossible, to argue that More did not view women as the moral compass of the family home, but the distinctions between feminine and masculine norms are blurred here if we consider Charles and Lucilla’s marriage as a unified representation of Evangelical life. It is not too far a leap in our critical assessment to relate the family unit,

¹²⁷ Burstein, p. 55.

¹²⁸ Kathryn Sutherland, ‘Hannah More’s Counter-Revolutionary Feminism’, in *Revolution in Writing British Responses to the French Revolution*, ed. by Kelvin Everest (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), pp. 50-51. Qtd. Wolffe, p. 132.

¹²⁹ Emma Major suggests that *Practical Piety* (1811) is the ‘first of her works directly to articulate an authorial position that places the character of the Christian above that of the woman writer, and throughout the text she generally uses a universalising ‘he’ rather than developing gender-specific piety’ (p. 303).

¹³⁰ Major, p. 272.

¹³¹ Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (London, J. White, 1794), pp. 603-604.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 603.

¹³³ Gisborne followed up his enquiry with an essay on the duties of women in 1796. Predictably, he endorsed the traditional ‘influence’ that a married woman enjoys, expounding the ‘power which a married woman possesses of influencing the dispositions of her husband, and the consequent duty of rightly employing it for the improvement of his moral and religious character’. It is clear that although Gisborne can make allowances for the feminine nature of certain Christian virtues, he cannot, unlike More, consider the possibility of female influence operating outside of the home. *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell, 1823), pp. 167, 206.

particularly the feminine virtues embodied in the wife, to the Evangelical community. The language used between fellow Evangelicals continually drew upon the value of the family nurturer, recognising that this relationship bound them together. Newton describes himself as the Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon's courts on the occasion of his first visit to More's home, Cowslip Green in 1794: all that he 'saw and found exceeded' what he had imagined.¹³⁴ Newton has subverted the traditional gendered roles, allowing More to bask in his reverential awe as he is impressed with her home, schools and instructive conversation, enough to compare it to the splendour of Solomon's wisdom and court. When referring to the Christian virtues within *Cælebs*, the community acknowledges that those 'meek and passive virtues' are 'peculiarly feminine' (C, p. 297). Mitzi Myers argues that this 'ideology mobilized women's culture for service in domestic and social reform movements'.¹³⁵ However, I would like to suggest that this ideology encouraged Evangelicals, regardless of gender, to embody those qualities traditionally reserved for the woman in her capacity as family nurturer.

The confusion of gender roles is most apparent in the benevolent activities undertaken by the Evangelicals; women, particularly, crossed over into the authoritative space often reserved for the priest or parliamentary, public man. For example, Wilberforce affectionately refers to More's sisters as the 'lady knights', with all sorts of 'monsters to cope withal'. He is characterising their philanthropic work in the microcosm of their home ground, Somerset, where they had set up Sunday Schools for the education of the working classes.¹³⁶ 'Lady Knights' is a subversion of the masculine duty to protect and rescue by demonstrating courageous bravery and chivalrous action on behalf of the blighted princess or damsel in distress. The role of protector, reformer and restorer is embodied in the feminine form of the sisters. It is for these reasons that John Wolffe describes More as the 'childless matriarch of English Evangelicalism'.¹³⁷ In *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, Mathew McCormack argues that parliamentary men often located their manliness in relation to women, children and other dependents, through their chivalric behaviour. They had reached a 'peak of civilisation in their refined attentiveness towards their womenfolk'. Emotive moral values that were conventionally gendered as masculine, such as 'openness, selflessness and civic duty', became associated within the public domain

¹³⁴ *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, I, p. 113.

¹³⁵ Myer, p. 245.

¹³⁶ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 119; *The Life of William Wilberforce*, I, p. 249.

¹³⁷ Wolffe, p.129.

of man.¹³⁸ Thomas Clarkson refers to the spirit of ‘brotherhood’ as the defining feature of the Christian Abolitionists, writing:

To Christianity alone we are indebted for the new and sublime spectacle of seeing men going beyond the bounds of individual usefulness to each other [...] and of seeing them carry their charity, as a united brotherhood, into distant lands.¹³⁹

What is significant about all these characteristics is that we can see their embodiment within the Evangelical world, and not exclusively in the male body. However, for later Anglican Evangelicals, such as Charles Kingsley (who I will explore in greater detail in Chapter Four), there was a concern that traditional representations of manliness were devalued as male believers were taught to accept a feminised Christianity.¹⁴⁰ A ‘muscular Christianity’ sought to redefine itself through military and conflict rhetoric, prioritising the need to engage in spiritual warfare.¹⁴¹ Through the unification of Charles and Lucilla, however, More is not seeking to undermine representations of masculinity, but instead exploring how the virtues of Christianity make problematic such traditional categorisations of gender. By creatively portraying the stages and key components of Evangelical life, she shows that where the communication of faith is concerned normative gendered roles have to be extended.

Firstly, the Evangelicals should take it upon themselves to represent Christianity faithfully, to accept the position of directress. At the heart of their concern for religion, as always, is the state of the nation. Emma Major argues that religious writers from very different traditions were equally concerned about national conduct: ‘for Cowper, More, Wollstonecraft, and Barbauld, the fallen Britannia at the end of the century was one who had succumbed to the temptations of fashionable consumption and become a symptom of a society infected by luxury’.¹⁴² What singles out the Evangelical concern, however, was the overriding assumption that the nation and church (or religiosity) should be conflated, based on the premise that a nation governed by God is the ‘design of the Almighty’.¹⁴³ This relationship was complex and difficult, with the Evangelicals well aware of the

¹³⁸ ‘Introduction’, in *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. by Matthew McCormack (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 1-12 (pp. 5, 8, 2).

¹³⁹ *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishments of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 3 vols (London, 1808), I, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Chapter Four will explore more thoroughly the significance and consequences of a feminised Christianity, particularly with how Josephine Butler evoked a radicalised, feminine Christ.

¹⁴¹ Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan and Sue Morgan, ‘Introduction’, in *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*, pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

¹⁴² Major, p. 281.

¹⁴³ *An Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of Saint Paul* (London: 1815), p. 331.

contradictions involved in upholding and critiquing the nation.¹⁴⁴ Wilberforce had to justify his own involvement in writing about religious matters, stating that:

Religion is the business of everyone, but that its advancement or decline in any country is so intimately connected with the temporal interests of society, as to render it the peculiar concern of a political man.¹⁴⁵

He sees it as the prerogative of the political man, with his public persona, to ‘point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians to contrast their defective scheme with a representation of what the author apprehends to be *real* Christianity’.¹⁴⁶ Gisborne also recognises that it is the duty of a Member of Parliament to ‘influence’ the formation of ‘national character’, through ‘public exertions and private example’.¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Montague, writing to More on the success of her *Strictures on Female Education* (1799), concludes that More’s work will be of great service, for ‘if our women lose their domestic virtues, all *the charities* will be dissolved, *for which our country is a home so dear*, the men will be profligate, the public will be betrayed, and whatever has blessed or distinguished the English nation above our neighbours on the Continent will disappear’ (II, p. 47). Much is considered to be riding on the good conduct and moralistic example of women within the home, and yet the above examples, from Gisborne and Wilberforce, show that feminine and Christian virtues are beginning to converge, with the exercise of moral influence in and outside the home an Evangelical responsibility.

More also offers a judgment on the state of religion in society through *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* and *An Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of Saint Paul* (1815), writing that ‘religion is at present in no very flourishing state among those whose examples, from the high ground on which they stand, guides and governs the rest of mankind’.¹⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the authority to judge a nation’s morality is assumed from the Evangelical’s transition from his/her own weakness to a moral consistency.¹⁴⁹ She proceeds systematically, in a similar manner to Wilberforce, contrasting a true representation of Christianity with that which is often portrayed. For instance, she questions whether the fashion is now rather to consider ‘benevolence as a substitute for

¹⁴⁴ Major, p. 284.

¹⁴⁵ *A Practical View, of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797), p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Gisborne, pp. 125, 127.

¹⁴⁸ *An Estimate of the Religion*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ See David Turley, p.36.

Christianity, than as evidence of it?’¹⁵⁰ In More’s text concerning St. Paul, she strays dangerously close to assuming a theological position, but is careful to foreground her intentions to be ‘practical’ not ‘critical.’¹⁵¹ Consequently, the character of St. Paul is considered ‘as a model for our general imitation, and his practical writings as a storehouse for our general instruction’.¹⁵² In the case of the nation, she is concerned with improvement and evidence of change: ‘has the design of the Almighty, in visiting us with the calamities of a protracted war, been answered by a renunciation of the sins for which it was sent?’¹⁵³ More, along with Wilberforce, casts judgment on her society, without the need to hide behind feminine influence or the political justifications that Wilberforce deemed necessary for his own involvement. Instead, she assumes the authority of the biblical text, applying it to her nineteenth-century context of ‘protracted wars’ and ‘calamities’.¹⁵⁴ More, like many of her contemporaries, saw ‘women as central to the fate of the nation’ but significantly, in these two texts, she assumes an authority outside of traditional feminine roles.¹⁵⁵ Similarly to the acceptance of confessing sin between Evangelicals of different sexes, the ability to publically represent Christianity appears to transcend gender boundaries. By taking on the function of directress, feminine virtues are assumed by both men and women to be voiced in the public space.

Another way of fulfilling the wifely role, this time acting as the preceptress to the family or nation, was to encourage a true representation of Christianity amongst the Anglican Church. The Evangelicals attempted this infiltration through the education of young men who were entering the clergy. The characterisation of Tyrrel and his purposes for his nephew Edward reveal the concerns More had about the Church’s choice of clergy. From observation, Charles confirms that Tyrrel’s religious conversion has altered nothing but his language. His security in religion has derived from the adoption of a party position rather than from the ‘implantation of a new principle’ (C, p. 168). Lacking a genuine conversion experience, Tyrrel’s motives for preparing his nephew for holy orders are flawed. He sees the profession as financially viable, not requiring much monetary input from himself and yet providing the opportunity for disseminating his own views. He also places little importance on a well-rounded education for the clergy, which forces Stanley to regret the general uneducated state of the clergy. He clarifies that it is not necessary for every ‘village curate to

¹⁵⁰ *An Estimate of the Religion*, p. 50.

¹⁵¹ *An Essay on the Character*, p. iv; See Wolffe, p. 132.

¹⁵² *An Essay on the Character*, p. vii.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹⁵⁵ Emma Major suggests that More’s *Practical Piety* (1811) is one of her first works ‘directly to articulate an authorial position that places the character of the Christian above that of the woman writer’ (pp. 289, 303).

be a profound scholar, but as he may not always remain in obscurity, there is no necessity for his being a contemptible one' (C, p. 169). However, the Evangelicals' aims for the clergy went much further than merely offering education. As Ian Bradley explains, the Evangelicals were 'determined to put things right in the Church of England by filling it with "serious" clergymen'. The process of 'Advowson' ('the right to present a clergyman to a particular living') meant that to secure livings for Evangelicals they had to obtain ecclesiastical patronage or sponsorship.¹⁵⁶ In a manuscript letter written in 1810, Wilberforce, writing to More, reveals his intentions to support financially the education of Evangelical recruits through Oxford and Cambridge University. He is expectant that an 'unspeakable spiritual good' will arise as a consequence, laying the foundation for the 'whole national edifice'.¹⁵⁷ Newton is equally optimistic in a letter to More about the impact of educating young Evangelicals, hoping that they will 'prove faithful and able in the established Church' (II, p. 26). Without Evangelical input, it was feared that clergymen exemplified by Tyrrel's nephew, without a true conversion of faith, would saturate the Church and continue to misrepresent it.

Stanley congratulates the couple that a 'rational scene of felicity' awaits them (C, p. 398) as they come together in marriage. The final inducement of a wife is that she will be a good companion, who can engage intellectually and religiously with her husband. Charles rhetorically explores the joy of having a companion who has drawn from the 'same rich sources', who can 'relish the beauty' quoted and can 'trace the allusion' hinted at (C, p. 318). He unpacks further the deficiencies of an ignorant wife:

But a man of taste who has an ignorant wife, cannot in her company, think his own thoughts, nor speak his own language; his thoughts he will suppress; his language he will debase – the one from hopelessness, the other from compassion. He must be continually lowering and diluting his meaning, in order to make himself intelligible (C, pp. 318-319).

The grand hope for the Evangelical literary community is that it will produce companions who share similar intellectual capabilities and religious sympathies. Jon Mee suggests that *Cælebs* is preoccupied with the parameters of godly discourse and how conversation should effectively interact with an outside world.¹⁵⁸ As seen in the earlier section, dealing with accountability and mentorship, More found Newton and Wilberforce indispensable for her spiritual growth. Her community, largely experienced through written conversations, provided the parameters for the Christian life to be lived out successfully. Stanley spends a

¹⁵⁶ Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 60; Jay, pp. 40-41.

¹⁵⁷ 'Letter from William Wilberforce to Hannah More, 1810', Bristol, Bristol Record Office, Ref No. 28048/C/1/2.

¹⁵⁸ Mee, p. 266.

considerable amount of time conversing with Tyrrel about Christian duty and the consequences of salvation. He uses slave imagery to illustrate that a man's transition from the bondage of evil to the freedom of Christ does not mean inactivity. He explains that 'Religion is not an unproductive theory; nor charity an unnecessary, an incidental consequence, nor a contingent left to our choice' (C, p. 316). The method and content of Stanley's conversation exemplifies exactly what More wants for the Christian community – confession and action –, whilst justifying her conviction that she was a Christian first, and gendered second. Christian charity bypassed normative gendered roles, allowing both men and women to use feminine influence to represent Christ in the world in the best way.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the interlocking relationship between Hannah More's literary works and the Evangelical community that supported her spiritual awakening. The changing nature of her literary output, choosing a didactic voice over literary creativity, cannot be separated out from her realisation that she now held a 'consecrated pen'. It was not enough to confess Christ, but instead the believer was to embody the principles that Christ came to live. More's literary community strove to be like Christ through the monitoring of each other's spiritual growth; the confession of sin would free the self from its selfish inclinations. This embodiment of Christ was not to stop with the transformation of the individual but should impact the world, with Mr. Stanley noting in *Cælebs* that charity was not to be an 'incidental consequence'. The Evangelicals' involvement with Abolition was a response to this conviction of faith and the desire to prove conversion through benevolent acts. Religious intent permeated every aspect of their movement, from the promotion of man's equality in the sight of God to the ideological understanding of the nation as God's arbiter and judge. The surveillance of the slave, as depicted to a middle-class audience through Evangelical writings, was to evoke sympathy into action; the slave was relocated from an oppressive environment to the protection of benevolent Overseers. However, as Sinanan suggests, the Abolitionists' intent should not necessarily be treated cynically, but, rather, religion should be understood as a "necessary corollary" to freedom.¹⁵⁹ Progress in society was judged by the inward transformation of individuals; hence, freedom for the slave had to involve a physical and spiritual freedom.

The Evangelical obsession with monitoring the sinful self did have some unexpected consequences, extending the normative gendered roles of who assumes authority and

¹⁵⁹ Sinanan, pp. 144-145.

influence. Traditional feminine influence, as embodied in the dutiful wife, extended outwards, from within the drawing room to the public arena, where the nation's reputation could be debated. All Evangelicals were encouraged to embody the 'peculiarly feminine' virtues of Christianity and vanguard these principles in society. As explored in *Cælebs*, the unification of Charles and Lucilla through marriage epitomises how normative gendered roles are blurred by Christian convictions. All Christians are to take responsibility for the nation's wellbeing. Together, through successful surveillance of each other's character and aided by the textual input of the patriarchal fathers, Charles and Lucilla can replicate their education and build a new household on Evangelical foundations. A successful model of Christian living in the family home, therefore, could be transferred to the hierarchical relationships existing between the ruling elite and the working class or between the Overseer and the slave. More, like Wilberforce, called for an overhaul of irreligious behaviour from those in a privileged position, particularly from those in authority. In More's mind, this problem resulted from the severance that had occurred between benevolence and Christianity. Surveillance of the self should not only unearth the individual's failures but should also illuminate national weakness. The Evangelicals, particularly, tread a fine line between national support and national criticism; a position which was paralleled in their relationship to the Church. The sad irony is that the Evangelicals in their zeal for reformation, both within and outside the Church, actually ended up contributing to the weakening of the establishment, with Bradley suggesting that the 'enduring legacy of Evangelicalism in the Church of England was to be a spirit of divisiveness and party feeling'.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 59.

Chapter Two

Catherine and Susanna Winkworth: German Translations and Male Mentorship

The sisters, Catherine and Susanna Winkworth, are largely unknown figures in nineteenth-century literary criticism, often only cited as the acquaintances of more prominent writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Kingsley. However, it is exactly through a reconstruction of these literary friendships, depicted most thoroughly in the sisters' correspondence, collected in *Memorial of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* (1908), that their critical significance can be established. Through the encouragement of literary and spiritual mentors, the Winkworths were directed towards the translation of German texts, with Catherine concentrating on German hymnody – *Lyra Germanica* (1855), *Lyra Germanica Second Series* (1858), *The Chorale Book for England* (1862) – and Susanna working on German theology and sermons from the fourteenth-century, *Theologia Germanica* (1854) and *The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler of Strasbourg, with Twenty-five of his Sermons* (1857).

At first glance, the obscurity of these German translations seems to warrant their neglect by literary history, but if time is taken to consider the wider mid-nineteenth-century context of the expanding influx of German texts into an English literary market, then their critical possibilities begin to take shape. According to Rosemary Ashton, the English public's reception of German philosophical and literary texts was critical and sceptical. An aversion to Goethe and German Romantic drama, on the grounds of immorality and coarseness of expression, had been softened through the personal and public promotion by writers such as Coleridge and Carlyle, and this allowed later writers, such as George Eliot and G. H. Lewes, a more confident, self-assured avowal of German critical thinking.¹ With the translation of key texts by David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, Eliot presented Higher Criticism as a direct challenge to the traditional reading of the Biblical canon and ultimately as a threat to the heart of an orthodox belief. It is within this context that the sisters' choice of hymnody and theology suddenly gains interest as they chose to respond to a German-inspired debate with non-contemporary, orthodox, German texts.

This chapter will be split into three sections. Firstly, I will be defining the literary circle which the Winkworth sisters were a part of, specifically identifying the key persons

¹ Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860* (London: Libris, 1994), pp. 1, 4, 8.

who played a significant mentorship role, both in regards to their spirituality and to their craft as translators. This section will challenge the assumption that female-only communities were essential for female autonomy, and instead will consider the significance of male mentors in the intellectual, spiritual and literary development of the Winkworth sisters. The next two sections will take each sister in turn, starting with Catherine, and through detailed textual analysis of the hymn and theological writings will draw conclusions about the inner workings of their literary partnerships, and more importantly draw out the significance of an ownership of religious belief, achieved over the course of a lifetime.

Despite the sisters' upbringing in an Anglican household, it should not be assumed that they had a simple allegiance with the established faith. Susanna's description of her mother's faith reveals the dissenting elements apparent in the family home: she was 'not altogether so strict and logical a Calvinist as many of her religious friends thought she ought to be, and sometimes she got into disgrace in consequence'.² Susanna's faith, particularly, was in a constant state of flux, responding and adapting to the theological debates of her time. F. D. Maurice advised her to embrace her half-formed thoughts and 'wait and see' what would come of them (M, p. 184). She confessed a Unitarian faith for a large proportion of her adult life with no clear declaration of orthodoxy given until 1882; she had by then moved from a position that denied the divinity of Christ (a Unitarian belief) to the orthodox realisation that 'the more I study the subject, the more I am impressed with the idea that Christ does stand in a closer relation to the whole human race than He could do if simply a man like other men' (M, p. 198). And yet the sisters were influenced by what Catherine light-heartedly called their 'heretical associations' – the Unitarians – and were very much taken with the Unitarian pursuit of truth, in which the 'individual conscience' had 'paramount authority' in determining what truth is (M, p. 175). In this way, the sisters demonstrated and embodied the dissenting spirit: they valued a truth that was individually sought and claimed, rejected a 'gloomy' evangelical understanding of sin, and desired a national church (superseding the Anglican model) that would unify and reflect diversity (M, p. 244). The boundary line between literary and religious texts, as explored in the Introduction, was fluid and permeable, allowing women to engage with the 'masculine discourse' of theology. Therefore, I hope to reveal, in the words of Julie Melnyk, the 'power

² Margaret J. Shaen, ed., *Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* (London: Longmans Green, 1908), p. 9.

to judge' – an authority assumed by women to offer a theological position –, 'disguised as uncontroversial religious writings'.³

Literary Circle

A textual reconstruction of the Winkworths' literary circle will be used to engage critically with the sisters' translation work. This circle was not self-consciously conceived or limited to a specific time or place, although Manchester, Heidelberg and Clifton did act as centres for meetings. The Winkworth sisters (two of seven) were born in the 1820s to a silk merchant, Henry Winkworth, and Susanna Dickenson. In 1829, their father's business took them to Manchester where they lived until family illness forced them to relocate to Clifton, Bristol in 1862.⁴ This chapter will largely focus on the time spent in Manchester, where the educational input, friendships and faith of the Unitarians directly shaped the literary and spiritual lives of the sisters. However, evidence for this circle should also be looked for in textual space, in the dialogues and correspondence taking place between key individuals who lived further afield. The spiritual and literary development of the sisters will be considered in relation to the circle's input – to what extent were their religious and textual choices dictated by mentors? Male mentorship, particularly, was a vital component of this support, and as stated in the Introduction, I will explore the gendered implications of these relationships. I will primarily be using the literary works and letters of the mentors to understand how these men (Charles Kingsley, F.D Maurice and Chevalier Bunsen) influenced and aided the sisters, particularly in their capacity as religious thinkers and translators.

Sue Morgan notes in the introductory chapter to *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain: 1750-1900* that religious nonconformity often created an autonomous social space for women's culture to be formed, providing opportunities for social networking. Consequently, a shared religious practice resulted in close-knit communities.⁵ Susanna, narrating the first part of *Memorials*, writes that their 'intellectual nourishment', despite an upbringing in the Anglican Church, did not proceed from 'members of the Church of England' (M, p. 25). In fact, it was the Gaskells' household which became a 'centre for every notable person who came into the neighbourhood, an advantage of which we often reaped the benefit' (M, p. 25), for the 'Unitarians in Manchester were, as a body, far away

³ Melnyk, 'Introduction', *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. xi, xii, xiv.

⁴ Susan Drain, 'Catherine and Susanna Winkworth', *Oxford Dictionary National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

< <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/29744> > [accessed 14.04.2014].

⁵ 'Introduction', in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain 1750-1900*, pp. 10-11.

superior to any other in intellect, culture, and refinement of manners' (M, p. 26). It was in the late 1840s that Catherine's intimacy with the Gaskells commenced, an 'intimacy which proved one of the great sources of happiness in her life' (M, p. 23). At first, Elizabeth Gaskell understood this relationship in domestic terms, writing that she meant to take the Winkworths as 'sisters and daughters at once'.⁶ Yet Gaskell came to share with Catherine her literary interests, revealing, for example, the sex of Curren Bell and delighting in a rare positive review of her novel *Ruth* (1853) (L, pp. 93, 222). More significantly, it was through this friendship that the sisters came into contact with a variety of religious and intellectual thinkers, many of whom had a part to play, to a lesser or greater degree, in their spiritual and literary development: James Martineau, Charles Kingsley, F.D Maurice, and Archbishop Hale. Susanna also records the wider influence that this household played in allowing them to meet with the thriving Unitarian community and the literary celebrities of the day:

At the Gaskells' we had first met our dear and honoured friends, Mr J. J. Tayler and Mr. Martineau, in the early days of our acquaintance with them, in 1843. In later times, it was there also that we met Miss Brontë, Miss Bremer, Adelaide Procter, Mrs. Jameson, Mrs. Carlyle, &c., and it was through Mrs. Gaskell that we came to know Chevalier Bunsen (M, p. 25).

However, what is intriguing, particularly in the way it extends Morgan's assessment, is that the Winkworths' autonomous space was nurtured not in a shared community with other women, but through intellectual discussions with men who clearly came to be perceived as mentors. Pauline Nestor, as noted in the Introduction, expresses a frustration with the continuing 'definition of women and women's friendship in relation to men' and yet the evidence suggests that female development, whether positively or not, was shaped in reference to men.⁷ Susanna described, in great depth and enthusiasm, a dinner party scene in which the following topics of conversation took place around her: 'Grote and Muir and Herodotus'; 'Oken and Feuerbach and Baur'; 'Coleridge's papers' and his 'comprehensive system of philosophy'; and '*absolute* truthfulness' (M, pp. 108-109). The guest list was made up of men of letters, Unitarian and Anglican clergy, and German politicians and diplomats; it is not surprising, therefore, that the sisters were exposed to a variety of religious positions and had first-hand participation in German modes of thinking, and that these discussions in turn influenced their textual choices.

⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Mandolin, 1997), p 62.

⁷ Nestor, p. 5.

The sisters' early education in Manchester was assumed under the guidance of William Gaskell and James Martineau, with the former teaching them German and the latter Logic. Catherine, especially, referred to Martineau's teaching as an 'epoch' (M, p. 15) in her life as she grappled with German philosophy and with the writings of Goethe that had taken 'possession' of her mind (M, p. 162). She found in this early stage of her mental development that it was her religious orthodoxy which struggled under the weight of new philosophical ideas. Susanna accredited Catherine's 'deliverance' (M, p. 20) from a dangerous state of mind to Martineau's teaching, which provided the intellectual tools needed to negotiate the various schools of speculation she came into contact with, and for fixing the 'intellectual foundations' of her faith (M, p. 21). Catherine continued to appreciate Goethe's work and read Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* with interest, offering this useful insight into the effects his words had upon her:

[I]t takes hold of me as almost nothing else ever does. All that he says is so deep and significant that it keeps growing in one's mind, and the whole gives one an impression of life so rich and varied, and a range of perception so infinitely beyond anything you ever conceive of, that you feel dwarfed into nothing before it, and as if no power of self-assertion were left you (M, p. 70).

Catherine seemed to be deeply affected by the depth of intellectual perceptions and life offered in Goethe's work, using a metaphor of growth to try and articulate the expansion of ideas taking place in her mind. This is an example of how the type of education, channelled through male mentors such as Martineau, gave the sisters a working knowledge of German ideas with which to develop their own personal convictions. Paradoxically, however, Catherine was overwhelmed with the 'impressions of [a] life so rich' to the extent of incapacity, with the 'power of self-assertion' lost. There is the sense that it is a costly endeavour to be immersed in an intellectual life, particularly if the mental faculty is not adequately prepared or strong. Catherine suffered from extended bouts of ill health which seemed to be caused by severe mental exertion. She had to balance the will and desire to translate, with the bodily weakness that accompanied it. The intellectual life, with its rich impressions, therefore, proved challenging, calling into question the robustness of the female mind.

It was also noted by Susanna that although Catherine owed much to Martineau for the intellectual foundations of her faith, she never adopted his views 'with regard to Christian doctrine or the teachings of Scripture', which strictly lay with an Unitarian interpretation. In fact, when her 'notions of theology grew clearer and firmer, they rather crystallized into forms of thought, more or less resembling those held by such men as

Maurice, Hare, Kingsley' (M, p. 21).⁸ Susanna established a friendship with Maurice and Kingsley whilst staying with the Bunsens in London (1853). Kingsley and Maurice became acquainted in 1844 and from this time a steady friendship developed, which led to their joint involvement in a group eventually labelled the Christian Socialists, with Maurice as their spiritual leader (formed in 1850).⁹ What is of interest, in regard to the sisters' spiritual development, is the obvious mentorship relationship existing between these two men. Kingsley's letters reflected a reverential and respectful tone towards Maurice, referring to him as 'my dear Master', whilst humbling his own understanding before Maurice's seemingly superior wisdom and knowledge: 'Now I want to sit down and become a learner, and not a teacher, for I am chiefly impressed with my own profound ignorance'.¹⁰ Martineau, from personal observation living in the Kingsleys' household as a pupil for nearly a year, wrote of Kingsley's regard for Maurice in the following way: 'As his "Master" as he affectionately and humbly called Mr. Maurice, and, in its original sense, a "Prophet", so Mr. Kingsley, as Priest and Poet, gloried in interpreting, expanding, applying him'.¹¹ Martineau's religious language, depicting Maurice as Prophet and Kingsley as Priest, suggests Kingsley's subservient role, using his own work to elaborate and unpack the teaching he had received. This willingness to be taught by spiritual 'elders' and to acknowledge a debt was a key component of this literary circle and its absorption can be witnessed in the rhetoric used by both sisters towards these mentors: 'I found what it was to read with a real man (Kingsley) of genius' (M, p. 110); 'how his (Maurice) words went into one's heart and conscience like arrows' (M, p. 286). The sisters clearly perceived the beneficial effects, both to the mind and to the heart, of the mentors' input into their lives, which discarded gendered assumptions of female inadequacy, and promoted rigorous thinking and contemplation. Mentoring appeared to be a natural extension for all concerned in this circle: firstly as an aid for spiritual growth and secondly for encouraging literary interests.

⁸It is difficult to label Maurice and Kingsley as orthodox Anglican men. The Christian Socialists stood outside the mainstream of Anglican belief as they, uncomfortably for many, mixed Christianity with the politics of Chartism. Maurice was dismissed from his professorship of theology after the publication of his *Theological Essays* in 1853. He was accused of promoting universalism and the rejection of eternal punishment; both were considered to be abhorrent heresies by the Evangelicals. Bernard Reardon suggests that in actuality Maurice 'could not bring himself to believe that impenitence at death necessarily meant the soul's damnation and consignment to everlasting torment'. Bernard Reardon, 'Frederick Denison Maurice', in *Oxford Dictionary National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/18384?docPos=2>> [accessed 31.03.2014].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mary Kingsley, ed., *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life* (London: Macmillan, 1908), pp. 168, 216.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 126.

It might be assumed that this creation of mentorship roles within the circle led to a hierarchical structure in which mentees had to subscribe to all opinions of the leading men. However, this was not the case and what was dynamic about the literary circle was the space it provided for debate, with disagreements willingly and openly discussed. For the sisters, this was both an astonishing and liberating situation to be a part of, but it took the deepening of friendships for their confidence and outspokenness to be expressed. In 1838, Maurice wrote *The Kingdom of Christ*, an extended dialogue with a hypothetical Quaker, in order to demonstrate that there was a 'Kingdom of Christ which bypasses the sect spirit'.¹² He believed in the embodiment of a universal church and felt that the Church of England, with its *Book of Common Prayer*, represented this model more successfully than any other dissenting bodies, because of its grounding in a Christian tradition. Timothy Rosendale confirms that the *Book of Common Prayer* was designed to 'stabilize a historical movement in which individual divine inspiration threatened to unhinge the authority of the Church'.¹³ By unifying worship and devotion, it strove to serve 'at all times and in all places' without prioritising the individual voice; the authority of the Church was, therefore, secured.¹⁴ Joshua King also notes that Maurice believed that the Anglican Church had the 'best chance of realising within Britain [...] the desired balance between universal Christian society and its distinct national expressions'.¹⁵ According to Desmond Brown, Maurice's theology revolved around the 'Incarnate Son', the divine revelation that God had given to the world.¹⁶ Maurice's letters reveal a man who was 'haunted' by the 'desire for unity', but believed it was only attainable if the universal church united around the orthodox position of Christ's divinity.¹⁷ No dissenting body had ever tried to 'establish itself as a national substitute for the Church' and yet there continued to be an uneasiness surrounding the strength and capabilities of the Anglican model.¹⁸ Maurice, therefore, placed great importance on the reinvigoration of the Church, so that it would be better able to reflect a national and religious consciousness, a position and role that the sisters wanted to challenge. The sisters desired a unified church but did not want a belief in Christ's divinity to be the binding doctrine.

¹² *The Kingdom of Christ or Hints on the Principles, Ordinances and Constitution of the Catholic Church. In Letters to a Member of the Society of Friends*, 3 vols, (London: J M Dent, 1837), I, p. 41.

¹³ Rosendale, p. 5.

¹⁴ Kenneth Stevenson, 'The Prayer Book as 'Sacred Text'' and Judith Maltby, 'The Prayer Book and the Parish Church: From the Elizabethan Settlement to the Restoration', in *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, ed. by Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 133-139 (p. 136), pp. 79-92 (p. 92).

¹⁵ Joshua King, *Imagined Spiritualities*, p. 79.

¹⁶ *The Idea of the Victorian Church* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), pp. 317, 323.

¹⁷ Sir John Frederick Maurice, *Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, II, p. 137. Qtd. Desmond Brown, p. 321.

¹⁸ Brown, p. 377.

Instead, they sought a church that would transcend the boundaries of an Anglican conception.

At first, Catherine and Susanna expressed between themselves their uncertainty regarding specific elements of Maurice's doctrinal beliefs. Catherine was perplexed when she considered the ambiguities of Maurice's thought:

I wish I could more clearly understand the intellectual position of such men as he and Mr. Kingsley; so much of what they say about the Church and about our Lord I like, but I do not see how it all fits together [...] He seems to take such pains to guard what he says, and to say it in the simplest language, that I am always expecting a very clear statement, and am surprized, when I come to the end of the sentence, to find it not so clear as I thought it was (M, p. 56-57).

Catherine's observations relating to the lack of clarity in his form and language correspond to a widely-held critical opinion of all Maurice's work, with his biographer Bernard Reardon stating 'lucidity, it has to be conceded, was not the prime virtue of his literary style'.¹⁹ Catherine was a lifelong member of the Church of England, yet she was concerned with the status and acceptance of dissenting communities; consequently, she was troubled by the ambiguities of Maurice's work that seemed to suggest the exclusion of dissenters from the universal church if certain rites, like baptism, became an imperative sign of belonging. This question was personally motivated as her sister Emily, married to William Shaen, was a Unitarian and flatly refused to have their daughter baptized in the Church of England. Surely Maurice must consider such good dissenters, like her family members, as 'belonging to Christ's Church'? (M, p. 56) The uncertainty of Maurice's response makes Catherine anxious but she is unwilling or unable to direct the question to him, writing that she found it difficult to argue, 'especially if I fancy it jars on any one' (M, p. 168). Therefore, it was often left to Susanna to voice their differences of opinions, and she found the medium of the letter conducive for this type of discussion.

In 1856, a series of letters passed back and forth between Susanna and Maurice, initiated by comments of Maurice, after receiving from the former a newly translated copy of Chevalier Bunsen's *Signs of the Times* (1856). Maurice was critical of the 'elective habit of mind which characterizes the Germans', with any attempt at emulation 'fatal to all the reformation of Unity which we are in search of' (M, p. 140). Susanna was troubled by this attempt to differentiate between a German and English 'habit of mind' and in order to understand it, she tries to infer Maurice's meaning. She hypothesises that for the German

¹⁹ 'Frederick Denison Maurice', in *Oxford Dictionary National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/18384?docPos=2>> [accessed 31.03.2014].

mind truth is individually sought, created and absorbed, whereas the English mind is in search of *the* truth and once discovered or found it is revered for its ‘supreme *authority*’ (M, p. 142). In order to understand Maurice’s thoughts further, she read his *Kingdom of Christ* with a ‘deeper interest than I have read anything except Tauler’ (M, p. 143). From such readings, Susanna suspects that Maurice’s criticism of the German state of mind (‘to shape out truth for ourselves’ [M, p. 142]) actually has more to do with the church’s (particularly the Anglican model) unique position of possessing divine truth: ‘our different sects do, in one shape or other, believe, and are right in believing, that a certain ecclesiastical organization and a certain body of dogma are of divine origin, and have a right to claim our submission’ (M, pp. 142-143). If this was the crux of Maurice’s argument then Susanna, as a Unitarian (at this stage in her life), could not concur and she could not have Maurice mistaken in thinking this was her belief. Despite an ‘intense *wish*’ for a unified church, she regarded such cravings with mistrust: ‘because it brings with it a temptation to sacrifice truth to the satisfaction of feeling’ (M, p. 148). She was convinced that the Spirit worked outside the visible church. It is striking that although she recognised the ‘superiority’ of Maurice in ‘all ways’ (M, p. 144), she ‘cannot come to any teacher as believing him to have authority over’ (M, p. 143) her faith: in fact it was her own personal responsibility to ‘exercise’ the ‘intellect such as God has given’ and she ‘*dare* not yield it over into the keeping of another’ (M, p. 144). This reveals a striking ownership of faith that not only needed to be exercised, but, through a comparison with others, allowed any ‘variance’ to be bravely examined (M, p. 144). Susanna’s convictions, as revealed here, did alter over time, for her faith was not a fixed entity, and she allowed the mentoring relationships and her translation works to move her towards a position of orthodoxy (a clear declaration of orthodoxy came in 1882). However, this correspondence is vital for revealing Susanna’s capacity to reason, discuss, and take satisfaction in the formation of a theological position.

Chevalier Bunsen, Prussian Minister and Ambassador to St. James’s Court (1841-54), perhaps more than any other figure in the Winkworths’ literary circle, suggested, nurtured and encouraged the sisters’ literary endeavours to translate. It was in 1849 that Susanna hesitantly attempted a translation of the German monk Niebuhr and it was a chance mention of this fact by Elizabeth Gaskell to Bunsen that led to his involvement in Susanna’s life: if ‘she proved capable of the task, he should be able and willing to put original matter into her hands’ (M, p. 33). It was evident from Susanna’s deprecating assessment of her own ability (‘I cannot tell yet from the little I have done whether I should ever make really good translations’ [M, p. 37]) that she and Catherine were in need of a mentor with the expertise to pass literary judgments, as well as provide a sound knowledge of German history and

culture. Interestingly, Elizabeth Gaskell's letters make it clear that in the early stages of Susanna's career, when she was working on her first publication, she relied heavily on William Gaskell as proof reader. There is a slight playfulness, and possible jealousy detected in Gaskell's comments that Susanna kept William 'busy at work correcting her proofs'. Writing to Eliza Fox, Gaskell continues to tease Susanna's devotion to her husband: 'I wish you could see S.W. she is so funny and cock a hoop about Niebuhr, she snubs me so, and make such love to William he says "my life is the only protection he has – else he knows she would marry him"' (L, pp. 172, 190). Despite the tongue-in-cheek tone of this letter, it suggests that Susanna's reliance (and indeed her pleasure) could not be concealed from her mentor and those in his immediate circle. His role and Bunsen's subsequent involvement were essential in shaping Susanna as a confident and competent translator.

In Susanna's first encounter with Bunsen, he demonstrated exactly how this mentoring relationship would work: 'Bunsen took me into the library, catechized me as to my notions of how the original German work should be treated, what should be retained, omitted, &c., then expounded to me his views' (M, p. 50). His conversation is described as a 'rapid pouring forth of facts, ideas, and feelings' (M, p. 51), recommending 'lots' (M, p. 50) of books to read and constantly proposing educational overseas travel to Bonn and Heidelberg, and although there is a sense of bewilderment in Susanna's prose, the immense possibility of intellectual stimulus and opportunity provided by such an acquaintance was not contemplated lightly. In 1851, armed with 'introductions' from J. J. Tayler (the minister at one of the two Unitarian chapels in Manchester), Susanna travelled to Germany and received 'important assistance' in her work (M, p. 66). It was through her study of German Mysticism, after reading Bunsen's *Hippolytus and His Age* (1852), that she became interested in the text *Theologia Germanica*, researching into its various editions with the intent of translating it. Bunsen whole-heartedly supported Susanna's interest and helped to nurture it by sending the biography and sermons of Tauler. Bunsen also created opportunities for public recognition and discussion of Susanna's work by allowing space at dinner parties for her to read aloud extracts from *Theologia Germanica*. Susanna's narration of these events reveals her timidity and fear of exposure, but there was also a sense of achievement in demanding, almost against her will, an audience. She wrote: 'Max Müller crept up behind me and sat at my elbow listening to it all' (M, p. 110). Catherine's introduction to German hymnody, similarly to Susanna's experience, also coincided with her meeting of Bunsen during a London visit (April, 1853) to see their sister Emily; although the prospect of Catherine personally translating hymns was conceived the year later, when

Bunsen's encouraging letters 'brought her floating ideas to the crystallizing point' (M, p. 119).

However, it can be perceived from Susanna's first impressions of Bunsen that this mentoring relationship could be problematic in terms of allowing the sisters to achieve and establish an autonomous identity as translators. She wrote, 'he speaks too [...] as one accustomed to command', but she tried to soften and justify the 'strongest inclination to obey' as a result of his 'extreme kindness' and 'unmistakable signs of feeling' (M, p. 52). Susanna did have the greatest respect for her mentor as the inclusion of a footnote describing Dr. Arnold's 'enthusiastic love' for Bunsen shows, commenting that from her own 'frequent and intimate intercourse' with Bunsen, she too could 'echo' Arnold's words:

I have seen men as holy, as amiable, as able; but I never knew one who was all three in so extraordinary a degree, and combined with a knowledge of things, new and old, sacred and profane, so rich, so accurate, so profound (M, p. 51).

It was Bunsen's unique combination of the sacred and profane that recommended him as a suitable advisor for the sisters' task of re-introducing German hymns and theology, precisely because he understood the German critical climate and more importantly how to engage with it. As will be shown in greater detail in sections two and three, Bunsen had ambitious plans 'to study and then set forth the consciousness of God in the mind of man' through a 'revivification of practical Christianity' and a 'common form of worship'.²⁰ Both sisters shared in this vision, but there was evidence that Bunsen's agenda dictated the choice of texts proposed for translation, prioritising his ambitions for the exposure of German literature into England, particularly of his own work.

He admitted to Susanna that 'the books that are the work of my life, and meant to live, have all been conceived in German, and therefore must be brought forth in German by all the laws of Mind' (M, p. 99). Consequently, in order for the English to benefit from his German mind he had to cajole and convince his '*Töchterlein*' (Little daughter) to be his translator: 'She would do it quite to my mind, and she *would* do it, would she not?' (M, p. 100) This kind of persuasive rhetoric from someone the sisters obviously admired was difficult to ignore, especially when they reaped the financial rewards ('we agreed to spend part of our gains from it [*Signs of the Times*] in a little trip together to Ambleside' [M, p. 135]) and had the personal satisfaction of seeing their work published. However, the strain

²⁰ *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. by John Julian (London: John Murray, 1892), pp. 192-193.

and disappointment of postponing Susanna's own translation projects to satisfy Bunsen's whims could not be kept from her own narration in *Memorials*:

I had hoped at length to return to my studies [...] But these were destined to be once more postponed; for in August, Bunsen began sending me a series of pamphlets of his which had been called forth by the ecclesiastical disputes then pending between Prussia, or indeed Germany, and the Vatican, in consequence of the constantly aggressive policy of the latter (M, p. 131).

Susanna, helped by Catherine, for it was desirable that the work be translated quickly, was drawn into a project solely connected with German nationalism and Bunsen's personal role as Ambassador. She was sidetracked from her real interest in the naturalisation of German theology into England.

There reached a point in their mentoring relationship, however, where Susanna found it necessary to question the choices of Bunsen's proposed texts. He wrote to Susanna asking her to translate Dr. Kuno Fischer's work on Bacon's philosophy. Fischer was a friend of David Strauss and a neo-Kantian philosopher who was dismissed in 1853 from Heidelberg University because of his 'alleged pantheism'.²¹ Susanna's objections lay in two quarters: the 'desirableness' of Fischer's work, and secondly, if it was desirable, should it be prioritised over Tauler (M, p. 137). In defence of rejecting Fischer and in favour of continuing with Tauler, Susanna revealed several personally-held convictions about her role as translator: firstly that she believed her calling to be 'to work for religion' by translating those texts 'calculated' to promote its truth (M, p. 137); this, therefore, required a critical judgment of the texts she was presented with. Secondly, she was aware of the personal alignment expected to be made between her own faith and the '*general tendencies*' of any book translated (M, p. 137). To make a 'false step' (M, p. 137) in this capacity would be an '*irreparable injury*', not to her personally but to her '*usefulness*' (M, p. 138). She asks Bunsen to be quite satisfied with Fischer's philosophy before embarking both of them in the 'same boat with him' (M, p. 138). Susanna's frequent use of italicisation clearly demonstrates the strength of feeling she (nervously but firmly) felt in allowing her opinion to be heard, and it had the desired effect: Bunsen replied with a 'very kind answer, giving up the idea' (M, p. 138).

²¹ Frederick Gregory, *Nature Lost?: Natural Science and the German Theological Traditions of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 107.

Catherine Winkworth and German Hymnody

Catherine's interactions with her literary circle, specifically encouraged by Chevalier Bunsen, resulted in her skills as translator being directed towards the naturalisation of German hymns into the devotional and communal life of the church through three volumes: *Lyra Germanica* (1855), *Lyra Germanica Second Series* (1858) and *The Chorale Book for England* (1862). The hymn has often been regarded as a 'second rate poetic form', highly neglected by the literary critic, hindered by misconceptions of its technical simplicity and its pietistic content.²² However, these two features of the hymn, in fact, aid our understanding of Catherine's craftsmanship as translator and editor, precisely because the form has the ability to embody a theological position. By exploring the development of nineteenth-century hymnody and critically assessing Catherine's contribution to its growth, judgments can be made on several key themes: her personal theological bias, her methods as translator, the significance of promoting German writers and Reformation theology, particularly in the context of German Higher Criticism's threat to Christian orthodoxy (including Protestant dissent), and most importantly the literary circle's involvement in defining Catherine as translator and amateur theologian. I will begin with a historical overview and assessment of the hymn's adoption as a legitimate mode of worship in an English Christian service (drawing attention to the different denominational strands), whilst contrasting it to the much earlier established hymnody of Germany.

The Church of England, in contrast to the Lutheran Church, had a closer affinity to the theology of Calvin and this doctrinal preference was represented in their mode of worship, preferring metrical psalmody in which a front-led Precentor conducted the congregation in the chanting of scripture.²³ However, in Germany, as we will discover, the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century communicated its central message of justification by faith through the medium of hymns, convinced that an ownership of faith should take expression in a communal display of singing. These doctrinal differences resulted in a rich accumulation of German hymns from writers such as Martin Luther, Paul Gerhardt, Angelus and the communities of the Bohemian Brethren, whilst the Church of England persisted for two hundred and fifty years in an unchanging psalmody until hymn singing was officially sanctioned in the early nineteenth century, largely as a response to the

²² Tennyson wrote that 'the moment you cease to be commonplace and put in any expression at all out of the common, it ceases to be a hymn'. Hallam Tennyson, *Tennyson: A Memoir* (London, 1899), p. 754. Qtd. J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 1.

²³ Ian Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (London: SCM Press, 1997), pp. 1-2.

form's growing popularity amongst dissenting communities.²⁴ Hymn singing, according to the critic Louis F. Benson, was recognised as the 'badge of dissent', with this style of worship becoming the Christian dissenters' form of choice since the 1760s. Dissenters valued their individual participation in the reception of faith, and singing in community was an outward sign of this. Leaders of dissenting movements such as John and Charles Wesley recognised the hymn's capacity to express difficult doctrinal truths in a simple, compact way that could be understood by the layman. Enthusiasm, often associated with Methodist meetings, could be channelled more easily into this innovative form rather than through the existing and restricting method of scriptural chanting.²⁵ The Church of England experienced a diminution of its power and reach within society as it faced a wider national secularisation, but the Church also had to acknowledge that the decline in its attendances was not the trend found in flourishing dissenting communities, where a revival of faith appeared to be underway.²⁶ Methodism, with the itinerant preaching of John Wesley and the hymnal output (6500) of Charles Wesley, building upon the earlier hymns of Isaac Watts, collectively reached an astonishing audience of over half a million people between 1740 and 1840.²⁷ This led many members of the clergy, particularly amongst the fervent Evangelicals such as John Venn, rector of Clapham, to re-evaluate hymnody:

I am persuaded that the singing has been a great instrument in the Dissenter's hands of drawing away persons from the Church, and why should not we take that instrument out of their hands?²⁸

However, it took until 1820 for hymns to be sanctioned by the Church of England. An unlicensed hymn book compiled by a Sheffield vicar, Thomas Cotterill, was contested, prompting a decision by the Archbishop of York: he banned Cotterill's edition, but instead personally approved and gave permission for a smaller collection of 146 hymns. Ian Bradley describes this 'classic piece of Anglican compromise' as the official authorisation of hymn singing in the Church of England, but it required several key compilers and writers throughout the nineteenth century – James Martineau, John Keble, John Henry Newman, the editors of *Ancient and Modern*, and of course Catherine Winkworth – to popularise this form of worship across the spectrum of Protestant belief.²⁹

²⁴ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, pp. 2, 6.

²⁵ See Watson, *The English Hymn*, p. 337; Cunningham, p. 42; Knight and Mason, pp. 7-8.

²⁶ See Knight and Mason, p. 7.

²⁷ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 7; Knight and Mason, p. 31.

²⁸ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Since the liturgical expression of singing hymns now had authoritative backing from those within the Church of England, the activity of compilers increased, sourcing appropriate hymns. The ‘first major denominational hymnbook’ had been produced by the Wesleys in their *Collection of Hymns for the Use of People called Methodists* (1780) and although it contained examples from the Latin and German traditions, its emphasis lay with introducing fresh contemporary writings.³⁰ However, compilers who sought to cater for a breadth of Protestant doctrinal beliefs found it necessary to associate hymn singing with an existing religious tradition and so the use of Latin or German hymns provided this historical legitimacy. The *Hymns Ancient and Modern* published in 1861 attained, on the whole successfully, a ‘moderate, definite and popular character’ by including Latin, German, and English hymns, whilst avoiding an outright denominational association.³¹ Its publication success was ‘unparalleled in the history of hymnology’ and it accomplished this by never becoming the official Anglican hymnbook; instead, it lent itself to more than one tradition.³² John Julian’s *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (1892), a clergyman’s research over forty years, however, looked less than favourably on the middling, often compromised vision of the compilation, stating:

Nothing in the arrangement of the book was new, and the doctrinal standpoint was below several of the hymn-books which preceded it [...] [t]hat a collection of hymns, thus constituted, should have been so much lauded, is as astounding as that it should have been so much abused.³³

This hymnbook, in its attempt to be universally Protestant, had to negotiate a minefield of doctrinal differences and Julian’s quotation suggests the difficulty of pleasing all representatives. What was produced in practice was a collection that failed not only to satisfy individual perspectives but was underwhelming in content. This negotiation, however, was continually attempted, to a lesser or greater degree, by different compilers and writers, choosing to favour the Latin or German tradition. There was still a nervous association for many Anglicans regarding public singing; hence, early hymnbooks tended to stress their devotional intent.³⁴ For example, John Keble anonymously published his original, Latin-inspired collection *The Christian Year* in 1827, and stated in the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³¹ Julian, p. 338.

³² Julian, p. 339.

The hymnbook’s attempt to have official status in the Anglican Church failed in 1893, although it was often bound with the *Book of Common Prayer*. Stephen Wilson, ‘Religious and Social Attitudes in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1889)’, *Social Compass*, 22 (1975), 211-236 (p. 213).

³³ Julian, p. 339.

³⁴ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 21.

‘Advertisement’ that his purpose was to exhibit a ‘soothing tendency’ and to assist in bringing his ‘own thoughts and feelings into more entire unison with those recommended and exemplified in the Prayer Book’.³⁵ By structuring the hymns around the Christian calendar and drawing attention to a textual dialogue taking place between prayer book and poetic verse, Keble was able to side track the thorny issue of the public use of his hymns, and promote its devotional intent.³⁶ The collection also, as Joshua King notes, attempted to imagine a collective religious consciousness through the act of reading. Individual, private acts of reading, multiplied ten times over, could be controlled through the ‘devotional routines’ initiated by the collection.³⁷ Blair makes the important observation that Keble’s personal life – his ‘activities, socializing, parish work’ – modelled a community that was Anglican in ‘miniature’.³⁸ In a similar way, hymnody could help establish a Christian consciousness among the unknown masses. Catherine acknowledged that ‘common liturgy is one of the strongest bonds of a common religious life’.³⁹ And, indeed, *The Christian Year* proved exceptionally popular, going through more than 170 editions by the end of the century, selling over half a million copies, whilst simultaneously raising the literary standard now expected from future writers.⁴⁰ Keble’s collection, along with the Latin translations produced by John Henry Newman (*Lyra Apostolica*, 1836), also had a more significant, primary intent in Catholicising Anglican worship. The Tractarians had discovered through antiquarian research that Latin hymns had played an integral part in the medieval Catholic Church’s worship, particularly in Mass, and they longed to reinstate a pre-Reformation orthodoxy.⁴¹ In many ways, this earlier formation of the Church was considered ‘purer than its confused and divided contemporary counterpart’.⁴²

Catherine, despite sharing a belief in the purity of the past embodiment of the church, was at the forefront of a counter-movement to the Tractarians by reintroducing the Reformation hymns of Germany.⁴³ John Wesley had translated several hymns from the

³⁵ ‘Advertisement’, in *The Christian Year: Thoughts in Verse for the Sunday and Holidays Throughout the Year* (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1827), pp. i-ii (p. ii).

³⁶ Blair suggests that Keble was not interested in encouraging communal worship, but instead wanted to ‘keep the reader’s engagement with Anglican forms alive and active outside church services’. *Form and Faith*, pp. 42-43.

³⁷ Joshua King, ‘John Keble’s ‘The Christian Year’’, pp. 398, 401.

³⁸ ‘Introduction’, in *John Keble in Context*, ed. by Kirstie Blair (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 1-16 (p. 4).

³⁹ *Christian Singers of Germany* (Macmillan and Co, 1869), p. 8.

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 21; Julian, p. 337.

⁴¹ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 22.

⁴² J. R. Watson, ‘Ancient or Modern, ‘Ancient and Modern’: The Victorian Hymn and the Nineteenth Century’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36:2 (2006) 1-16 (p. 7).

⁴³ Although Catherine differed to the Tractarians by sourcing her hymns from the German tradition, the hymns’ theological content closely mirrored the Latin examples. As we shall see, Catherine, like

Herrnhut Gesang-Buch of the Moravians, but it was Catherine's *Lyra Germanica* and to a lesser extent Frances Cox's *Sacred Hymns from the German* (1841) (also a protégée of Bunsen) which made German hymns plentifully available to an English audience.⁴⁴ Julian's *Dictionary* records that the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* included ten German examples, and it is apparent from the hymnbook's 'Preface' that Catherine was responsible for half of them.⁴⁵ For Catherine, it was clear that the Reformation of the sixteenth century and not a Catholic-inspired movement stood as the pinnacle event in restoring the purity and orthodoxy of Christianity. In the 'Preface' to *The Chorale Book for England*, Catherine articulated her belief that a universal church was in need of aids similar to the *Book of Common Prayer* that could 'swallow up all diversity of natural origin'.⁴⁶ She continued:

In truth, any embodiment of Christian experience and devotion, whether in the form of hymn or prayer or meditation, or whatever shape art may give it, if it do but go to the heart of our common faith, becomes at once the rightful and most precious inheritance of the whole Christian Church ('Translator's Preface', CB, p. vii).

There is a certain hope, perhaps even ambition, in Catherine's vision of presenting these German hymns as a liturgical blueprint, the 'heart' of a common faith, essential for moulding a church without schism, becoming the 'precious inheritance' of all Protestant Christians.

Catherine was not alone in this Utopian dream but was encouraged, directed and informed by the opinions of Bunsen. It is apparent, however, that their definition of 'common' faith was not centralised solely around the Anglican Church, nor broad enough to incorporate the Catholic Church. Bunsen wrote to Dr Arnold in 1835, defining the essential difference between the two modes of Christian advancement:

I consider our Protestant countries to be precisely in this respect distinguished from the Catholic, that we can advance by reform and they only try to begin by revolution.⁴⁷

the Tractarians, valued the liturgical form's ability to fuse 'feeling and thought', whilst prioritising the Incarnation of Christ. Knight and Mason, pp. 87, 93, 95.

⁴⁴ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p. 408.

⁴⁵ Julian, p. 338; 'Preface', in *Hymns Ancient and Modern: For Use in the Services of the Church with Accompanying Tunes*, ed. by William Henry Monk (London Sacred Music. 1861), pp. iii-vi (p. iii).

⁴⁶ 'Translator's Preface', in *The Chorale Book for England*, collected and translated by Catherine Winkworth, tunes compiled and ed. by William Sterndale Bennett and Otto Goldschmidt (London: Longman Green, 1863), pp. v-vii (p. vii).

⁴⁷ Frances Baroness Bunsen, ed., *A Memoir of Baron Bunsen*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1868), I, p. 415.

Bunsen believed that there were fundamental differences – too polarised to be overcome – in the ideology of the Protestant and Catholic traditions, both in terms of advancing their own development and in the influence that they wished to exert nationally. It is, therefore, important to remember that when Bunsen and Catherine were promoting a universal church, they were in fact envisioning a Protestant unification. Bunsen lamented that ‘long has it been clear to me that in Protestant Germany no church exists’, and it was only to be united through a theological expression of the points of faith, a congregational discipline and by a common form of worship.⁴⁸ Bunsen felt his contribution lay with this third criterion, producing *Versuch Eines Allgermanen Gesang und Gebetbuchs* (literally translated as ‘An Attempt at an all-German Hymn Prayer Book’, 1833), which was a densely packed hymnbook ‘reverting’ back to the ‘spirit of other times [...] to the original fountain in its purity’.⁴⁹ This ‘purity’ of the past appears to be aligned, wrongly or rightly, with the supposition that the Reformation ushered in a new, successful embodiment of the people of God.

As already noted, the ‘outward form of the Church should declare visibly the continuity of its faith and life’.⁵⁰ This symbolic view of the church was commonly associated with the Anglican faith, but it is interesting that to Bunsen and Catherine the German believers of the sixteenth century represented this ‘faith and life’ most comprehensively and were worthy of emulation. Catherine acknowledged that the Anglican model had ‘all the necessary elements of a Church’ but it was in need of ‘reforms’ (M, p. 189). She had a desire that Susanna would eventually join the Church of England but her reasons for encouraging Susanna to join was so that the Church could benefit from her dissenting values:

I think your calling would be to show them ... that you have found it necessary, and a great blessing to believe more than they do [...] to protest in the Church against that spirit of exclusiveness and uncharitableness which is too common among the orthodox of all kinds’ (M, p. 197).

Catherine’s conception of a universal church may have been grounded in an Anglican model, but she looked beyond it to ‘Christ’s Church’, which would embrace all dissenters as ‘fellow-Christian[s]’ (M, p. 56). The Reformation was, in part, about the overhaul of church practices, exposing the corruption of the papacy. Therefore, it could be argued that Catherine considered the nineteenth-century church in need of a similar or new reformation, using

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵⁰ Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850*, p. 8.

German hymns to point to that historical movement. Stephen Wilson argues that *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was also preoccupied with the unification of the Church in the face of increasing secularisation. He notices ‘marked sectarian tendencies’ within the collection, as it attempted to reclaim the Church’s ‘monopolistic status’.⁵¹ However, as Bradley notes, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* suffered as a collection because it tried to incorporate all traditions and in fact failed to please any: it was attacked for being ‘too evangelical, too Catholic, too sentimental, too populist, too highbrow’.⁵² Watson suggests that the inclusion of Catherine’s translations were its ‘best’ feature; German hymnody was ‘majestic, rich and varied’ without being contentious.⁵³ The German heritage allowed Catherine to satisfy both Protestant orthodoxy and dissent, whilst using the event of the Reformation as a unifying moment in history. Despite *The Chorale Book for England* being structured around the services and festivals of the Anglican Church, I would argue that it was conceived as a ‘hymn-book for general English Church use’, eschewing unification around the exclusiveness of the Anglican model (M, p. 135).⁵⁴ The Chorale book was absorbed by the establishment but, as I will demonstrate, its carefully-chosen, diverse theological perspectives encouraged a wider Christian endorsement and spared it from sectarianism.

German literature, as already noted, appeared to an English readership to be controversial in content, challenging an orthodox belief, yet Catherine’s translations appeared to stand against such a sweeping generalisation. Catherine followed up her collection of German hymnbooks with a piece of original writing, the *Christian Singers of Germany* (1869) – a historical survey of the key contributors to German hymnody. Within this meticulously researched history, great emphasis is placed upon the impact of Martin Luther’s overhaul of the liturgical and doctrinal markers of the German church. Luther wrote to his friend Spalatin:

It is my intention after the examples of the prophets and the ancient fathers, to make German psalms for the people; that is, spiritual songs, whereby the Word of God may be kept alive among them by singing.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Wilson, pp. 214-215.

⁵² Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 63.

⁵³ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p. 408.

⁵⁴ The possible disestablishment of the Church was a contentious debate throughout the nineteenth century, with the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (1829) weakening the Church’s national domination. S. A. Skinner discusses the effects of this on the religious views of John Keble, arguing that contrary to popular assumption Keble was not simply in favour of disestablishment. This ambivalence was mirrored in the Tractarians’ dubious position within the Anglican Church as a whole. This chapter, however, is concerned with models of church life, rather than interrogating the Winkworths’ political views of how the Church should relate to the State. S. A. Skinner, ‘“The Duty of the State”: Keble, the Tractarians and Establishment’, in *Keble in Context*, pp. 33-46.

⁵⁵ *Christian Singers of Germany*, p. 107.

Catherine explains that through public worship Luther was able to give people a short, clear confession of faith in an easily remembered form. Luther's gift to the church was to take the Latin Bible and liturgy and translate it into the vernacular language. By using the common language, Luther's doctrinal vision could be effectively communicated. In the hymn 'The Word of God', Luther draws an antithesis between 'God's own true word' and 'false teachings now spread abroad' (CB, 101, ll. 10, 8). The former 'shall be the poor man's strength and shield', outlasting all his trials, to finally 'shine forth', whereas the latter can only spread 'dissension', rendering the 'Church asunder' (CB, 101, ll: 20, 31, 11, 14). It is through this hymnal form, which as one Catholic commented, the 'whole people [...] is singing itself into this Lutheran doctrine', a doctrine which prioritised the word of God and allowed itself to be in the possession of the 'poor man'.⁵⁶ Therefore, by championing German hymnody, Catherine is not only taking up a specific theological position – challenging German Higher Criticism in its attempt to undermine the authority of the Bible – but she is also contradicting sceptical opinion that a German text cannot be orthodox or beneficial to the Protestant dissenter.

Catherine's choice of German hymnody also allows an exploration into the craft of translation and the part it played in the promotion of a vernacular language. The craftsmanship of translating German hymns not only required an exceptional grasp of the structure and nuances of language, but also an adequate knowledge of the theological doctrines and the musical and poetical characteristics of the hymnal form. This process of naturalisation was fraught with difficulties, with Catherine having to negotiate the differences in metre, expression, length and rhyming schemes between the two languages. George Eliot, in a mock-despairing tone, writes in her essay 'Translations and Translators' (1855) that it was the 'reviewer's duty to insist again and again on the inadequacy of poetic translations'. Her purpose was to emphasise the difficulty of the translator's task, so that those with an 'object of ambition to real ability' were left with the task.⁵⁷ Despite having 'gossiped on this subject long enough', Eliot's essay raises a serious question about the translator's ability and whether he/she (as Eliot doubts) has the necessary finesse required for naturalising a foreign language, especially in the poetic form.⁵⁸ Eliot's remarks were pointedly addressed to 'all young ladies and some middle-aged gentleman, who consider a very imperfect acquaintance with their own language, and an anticipatory acquaintance with

⁵⁶ *Christian Singers of Germany*, p. 109.

⁵⁷ 'Translations and Translators', in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. by Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 207-11 (pp. 209, 211).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

the foreign language, quite a sufficient equipment for the office of translator' [my italics].⁵⁹ The inclusion of the quantifiable 'all' suggests Eliot associated a large proportion of badly translated German literature with women who were not sufficiently educated for the undertaking. It is of interest that the German rather than the Latin hymnal tradition attracted far more women translators (Frances Cox, Henrietta Joan Fry, Jane Montgomery Campbell, and the sisters, Jan Barthwick and Sarah Findlater), with the critic Watson reasoning that this was because the languages of Latin and Greek belonged to cultivated men.⁶⁰ Catherine recognised her own deficiencies in this area, responding positively to a friend's suggestion to learn Latin: 'It agrees with what I came to some time ago myself, that it would be a very good thing to acquire at least a certain amount of knowledge of it' (M, p. 157). However, she simultaneously held two opposing beliefs that it was an 'uncommon piece of ignorance *not* to have studied Latin', whilst admitting that the 'value of study' could never be a primary one, 'at least to women' (M, p. 158). The lack of prioritisation and the difficulty of learning in isolation – 'it is very uphill work to begin such an undertaking quite alone' (M, p. 157) – help to clarify why Latin hymns remained primarily the source material for male translators. In the case of Catherine, visits to Germany (she visited Dresden as a teenager in 1845) and early education in the language made her a natural candidate for German translations. However, she was well aware of the challenges, responding to Susanna's suggestion to translate hymns with a self-deprecating assessment of her skills: it was 'quite beyond her powers' (M, p. 119). The practice of the craft ('I am doing them at the rate of one a day, when I can get a day to myself' [M, p. 127]) and the endorsement of mentors like Bunsen, who 'strongly approved' of her ability, eventually resulted in a confidence ready to advise fellow-translators (M, p. 119).

Robert Massie, compiler of *Lyra Domestica* (1860), and considered by Watson to be an inferior translator in practice, theorised on the craft, comparing it to the portrait painter's dilemma: both have the same object to attain, the same difficulties to surmount. The object is not only to make a true and fruitful but a lively and expressive copy of the original.⁶¹ As Catherine's experience increased, the attention to detail in 'the original' became increasingly important. In 1858, she discussed in a letter to Richard Massie the editorial responsibilities of translators, concluding: 'the more I have read and translated, the more I see the inward adaptation of thought and metre in good poems, and the less licence I am inclined to take' (M, p. 181). Catherine, as we shall see, did make editorial changes where necessary,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 208.

⁶⁰ Watson, 'Ancient or Modern, 'Ancient and Modern', p. 12.

⁶¹ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p. 41; 'Translator's Preface', in *Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs*, collected and translated by Richard Massie (London: Hatchard, 1854), pp. iii-xvi (p. xii).

particularly to help the English singer adapt to the variation in metre, but this quotation highlights a translator who is mastering her art. She looked past the outward form and sympathised with the ‘inward adaptation of thought’; she sought, wherever possible, to preserve the writer’s prioritisation of religious sentiment over and above the modern preference for accuracy in form.⁶²

Catherine, however, was resigned to the fact that hymns did ‘suffer under the disadvantage of being all translations’, yet it was only through this medium that they could become the ‘common property’ of both Germany and England, and here lay Catherine’s motivation.⁶³ Bunsen enthused over Catherine’s achievement in a letter to Susanna: ‘her really wonderful translations seem to promise to effect what hitherto has proved impossible – namely, to *naturalize* in England the German Hymns, the most immortal literary fruit of the Reformation’ (M, pp. 138-139). Bunsen’s use of the adjective ‘immortal’ makes allusions to the divinely inspired nature and longevity of German hymnody, precisely because they originated in the Reformation. Luther was motivated to translate the scriptures into the vernacular language largely from a conviction of the priesthood of all believers.⁶⁴ Every Christian, regardless of status or intellectual capacity, should have the right to communicate with God and interpret scripture; this was only possible if the texts were freely available in the common language.⁶⁵ Hymn writing became the natural extension of this vision, with Luther scouring the old stores of Latin Chorale music, as well as taking sacred and secular examples from the German, to translate them into an accessible mode.⁶⁶ Catherine’s translations followed in Luther’s footsteps as Watson states:

As Luther with the Latin writers, so Winkworth with Luther: her translations made available that which was formerly unknown, except to German speakers. And since Luther was the great hero of the Reformation, making his work available in English was a contribution to the Protestant cause.⁶⁷

Catherine concluded her ‘Preface’ to *The Chorale Book for England* with the ‘hope’ that Germany’s ‘gift’ will ‘find a welcome and a home’ amongst an English church, and by using

⁶² Blair argues that ‘religious practitioners [...] knew what was at stake in formal choices and were highly self-conscious about them’. In Catherine’s context, her formal choices were based on achieving coherency, whilst staying faithful to the original’s intentions. *Form and Faith*, p. 10.

⁶³ ‘Preface’, in *Christian Singers of Germany*, pp. iii-iv.

⁶⁴ I Peter 2. 9: ‘But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (p. 1116).

⁶⁵ Scott Hendrix, ‘Luther’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. by David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 39-56 (pp. 46-47).

⁶⁶ *Christian Singers of Germany*, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p. 414.

the possessive pronoun ‘our’ she stressed the collective responsibility for ownership: it is ‘our privilege and our duty to appropriate all that she can bestow on us’.⁶⁸ The title of the Chorale Book is also significant as she pre-empts its completed naturalisation by claiming the book as England’s own.

J. R. Watson takes Stanley Fish’s critical theory of meaning transmitted through interpretive communities and applies it to the study of hymnody. Fish defines an interpretive community as the ‘interpretive strategies’ that are shared in the process of writing. These strategies ‘exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read’. He acknowledges that a writer’s community is in flux, growing large and then declining, with members moving from one to another; the community’s stability or self-definition is constantly denied.⁶⁹ Watson hypothesises that hymns are ‘hermeneutical acts’ in which they simultaneously represent an interpretation of scripture from a particular historical period (for example the Reformation), whilst being reassessed from a contemporary perspective. Hymn compilers, to a certain extent, control this process by the simple act of choosing which hymns to include in a compilation or through specific conscious editorial changes that can alter the doctrinal emphasis. There is, however, a further dimension to a hymn’s interpretative possibilities, drawing on Fish’s conception, which suggests that the hymn’s meaning can be further communicated through a discursive community with other hymns.⁷⁰ The variety in tone, content and form of German hymnody shows the enormous potential for extrapolating meaning from a side-by-side comparison, and by opening up the discursive community to include different denominational traditions the experience can be intensified.

Textual analysis of this literary form will now be used to provide evidence of editorial involvement in the representation of different doctrinal viewpoints, to open up the discursive community, and to consider the intellectual ownership of the hymn. What is not in doubt, however, is the compiler’s conviction that he/she played a didactic purpose in disseminating a theological viewpoint. James Martineau published a collection of *Hymns for the Christian Church and Home* in 1840 specifically adapted for his Unitarian congregation in Liverpool. He defended his decision to alter the content of hymns for doctrinal purposes, insisting it was the only way to allow a past tradition to be known by a new audience:

⁶⁸ ‘Translator’s Preface’, CB, p. vii.

⁶⁹ Stanley Fish, ‘Interpreting the Variorum’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton and Company, 2001), pp. 2071-2089 (pp. 2087-2088).

⁷⁰ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p.18.

It is simply to remove an obstruction, which the author himself cannot remove, to his influence and appreciation in spiritual regions foreign to his own; and to introduce him to the veneration of thousands, to whom otherwise he must appear as a repulsive stranger.⁷¹

He makes an even bolder claim for his task: to ‘demonstrate the sentiment which he conceives the poet actually wished to express’.⁷² The ‘dogmatic phraseology’ may have been adapted but the ‘piety and poetry’ have been preserved.⁷³ As already noted in relation to Catherine, this act of perceiving and communicating the intent of the hymn was a difficult task. John Henry Newman’s hymn, devotional in purpose, ‘Lead, Kindly Light’ (1833) is a classic example of doctrinal ambiguities leading to troubling editorial decisions. The last line was the catalyst for controversy: ‘And with the morn those angel faces smile / which I have loved long since and lost awhile’.⁷⁴ Opinions on what had been ‘lost’ ranged from Newman’s conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism to a more disturbing lapse of belief in the promise of eternal life. For some compilers, this uncertainty was unsettling and difficult to negotiate when used in a communal setting of worship, so they chose to clarify and/or remove the ambiguities.⁷⁵ Edward Bickersteth added, without permission, a concluding verse from a ‘sense of need and from a deep conviction that the heart of the belated pilgrim can only find rest in the Light of Light’. The imperative ‘Lead’ remains but the ‘Light’ is personified into the figure of the ‘Saviour’; therefore, the source of salvation and the hope of ‘everlasting life’ can no longer be in doubt.⁷⁶ Newman, referring to the incident in a letter to a friend, Dr. Greenhill, stated ‘I am not bound to remember my own meaning, whatever it was, at the end of almost fifty years’.⁷⁷ Newman’s unwillingness to explain away the ambiguities suggests he was at ease with the interpretive possibilities of the hymn, unlike his unofficial editor Bickersteth.

The above incident is proof that hymns, depending on the theological bias of the reader/hearer, were subject to a variety of interpretations. However, it is also true that the responses could be minimised or controlled through a careful selective process by the book’s compiler. As we shall see, Catherine’s knowledge of the German tradition and its

⁷¹ ‘Preface’, in *Hymns for the Christian Church and Home*, ed. by James Martineau (London: John Green, 1840), pp. v-xii (p. x).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. x, xi.

⁷⁴ John Henry Newman, ‘Lead, Kindly Light’ (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), ll. 17-18.

⁷⁵ According to Blair, John Keble believed that such an ‘unsettling of the reader’ at the close of a poem could not be justified, as it would ‘fail to give the appropriate sense of complete trust in and submission to God’s shaping laws’. Blair argues that Keble’s poetry with its liturgical form was purposeful, reflecting the ‘law, regularity, and calmness’ that comes from submitting to the ‘will of God’. *Form and Faith*, pp. 50, 41.

⁷⁶ Julian, pp. 667-669.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 667.

development over a period of two hundred and fifty years proved useful in her desire for promoting a universal church. She selected examples with a theological content that would be beneficial to the widest possible audience, encompassing a variety of Protestant and dissenting belief. James Martineau had a particular ‘delight’ in not being forgotten by former ‘pupils and friends’, welcoming the gift of Catherine’s newly published *Lyra Germanica*. In response to receiving the collection, he wrote to Catherine offering his assessment. It is worth quoting at some length because Martineau refers to the technical and theological challenges facing naturalisation:

Many delightful hours have I spent with the originals of these hymns; and it is easy to see at once that your translation introduces them to the English reader with the least possible drawback from passing out of their own language. The difficulty of really naturalizing them among us arises, I think, less from the mere interposition of a foreign medium of expression, than from a fundamental difference of national feeling in regard to religion: the extreme *inwardness* of the German Christian sentiment appearing to the English a little sickly and unreal; and the more descriptive or historical hymns of our country seeming to Germans often painfully anthropomorphic, and usually deficient in close personal appropriation of the life and death of the Redeemer. A better service cannot be rendered than such a mediation between the two as your volume tends to effect (M, pp. 130-131).

Martineau praises Catherine’s effort to bring about a mediation between what he defines as two opposing national feelings in regards to religion: the ‘historical’ versus the ‘sentimental’. The English portrayal of God is considered too human (‘anthropomorphic’), stripped of divinity, with the hymns lacking an emotional appeal. Catherine’s collection, however, seeks to satisfy both positions precisely because she believes it to be possible; the evolving shape of German hymnody acts as her evidence. *Christian Singers of Germany* tracks hymnody’s content and formulaic changes in chronological order, making connections between the historical and theological transitions. Catherine explores the faith championed by the Reformers, the Medieval Latin influence of the Bohemian Brethren, the renunciation of earthly desires for those living and writing through the destructive Thirty Years War (1618-1650), and the more personal, intimate dialogue between man and God offered by Paul Gerhardt and Angelus. To illustrate the breadth of German hymnody, I will take the virgin birth of Christ and his earthly ministry and through Catherine’s examples explore the various responses to these pivotal moments in Protestant (and dissenting) belief. The representation of Christ, as considered in the Introduction and Chapter One, is a contested figure within the nineteenth century. Depending on the agenda of the portrayer, his gender, whether depicted in art, literature or theology, assumed a femininity or aggressive

masculinity. His representation within these hymns, therefore, will contribute to this wider gender debate, revealing not only the Reformation view of Christ, but, through Catherine's editorial choices, her theological understanding of Christ's role.

Luther's 'Christmas Song', found in *The Chorale Book for England*, has a simple quatrain (abab) iambic stanza form that juxtaposes the grandeur and glory of a heaven left behind with the present primitive conditions of Jesus' birth. The images used are unsophisticated, imitating the simple rhyme scheme by drawing basic comparisons between 'gold and jewels', 'hay and straw', as if appealing to the intellect of a child (CB, 30, ll. 42, 46). Luther's hymn is a narrative piece drawing the singer into this central event, using the worshipful response of angels, shepherds and wise men as models to emulate. They should 'draw near' and allow Jesus to rest 'within' their hearts, and 'raise with joyful tongue / That sweetest, ancient cradle-song' (CB, 30, ll. 22, 51, 55-56). Singing about God's deeds is considered a heavenly, eternal activity ('angels sing with pious mirth' [CB, 30, l. 59]) which humanity is encouraged to join. Hymn-singing, therefore, is legitimised and perpetuated, becoming a circular experience as one hymn leads to another.

Paul Gerhardt, writing several decades after Luther, was ranked alongside him as one of the 'most gifted and popular hymn-writer of the Lutheran Church', yet the presentation and interpretation of those shared doctrinal beliefs in the hymnal form varied in tone and intensity.⁷⁸ Gervinus, a well-known nineteenth-century historian of German literature, describes Gerhardt's approach to his subject:

With Gerhardt the merciful Righteous One is a gentle loving man [...] with a firm grasp of the objective realities of the Christian Faith and a loyal adherence to the doctrinal standpoint of the Lutheran Church, Gerhardt is yet genuinely human; he takes a fresh, healthful view both of nature and of mankind. In his hymns we see the transition to the modern subjective tone of religious poetry.⁷⁹

This appreciation of Christ's humanity is a central theme of Gerhardt's hymns, with his portrayal of Christ's birth contrasting sharply to that of Luther's. In the hymn 'God with Us', similarly to Luther, Gerhardt juxtaposes the two natures of God: the divine and human; but, unlike Luther, the force of the contrast is powerfully evoked. A God 'whose mighty sway / The winds and seas obey' has submitted to 'serve' and 'bear the mortal load / of earth and dust'.⁸⁰ There is a bewildering wonderment, as the opening exclamatory 'O Blessed Jesus!'

⁷⁸ Julian, p. 409.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 409.

⁸⁰ *Lyra Germanica Second Series: The Christian Life*, translated by Catherine Winkworth (London: Longman, 1858), p. 18, ll. 7-12.

implies, in a God who ‘clothed’ himself with man’s flesh and enters into the ‘brotherhood’ of humanity (LG 2nd, p. 18, ll. 1, 6, 17). This portrayal of Jesus, rooted in the grittiness and dirt of the earth, of which he is creator, allows a closer, intimate identification between the singer and her/his saviour; he is ‘like us and all our kin’ (LG 2nd, p.18, l. 12). It was important to both Luther and Gerhardt, and consequently to Catherine, to show how the decisive event of God’s incarnation could be rooted in its Biblical narrative, whilst taking a historical leap to allow its relevancy to be felt by the contemporary individual.

The compilers of hymn books representing different denominational traditions treated the birth or incarnation of Christ somewhat differently, emphasising either the Virgin’s role or the intrinsic humanity of Christ. James Martineau’s Unitarian faith denied the divinity of Christ, believing him to be the son of God but only as a perfect model of humanity. This fundamental departure from orthodox faith is subtly adhered to in hymns such as ‘The Example of Christ’, where Christ’s role as penal substitute is replaced with exemplary characteristics. He is not the bearer of sin, but only (as the subheading of Hymn 233 suggests) ‘touched with a feeling of infirmities’ in order to be man’s ‘pattern’ and ‘guide’ in overcoming sin.⁸¹ The verb ‘touched’ lacks the density or weight of sin that Gerhardt’s water imagery suggests that Christ carried for humanity: ‘floods of woe [...] that now Thy dying soul o’er flow’ (LG 2nd, p. 29, ll. 22-23). Catherine parted company with Martineau over the denial of Christ’s divinity, writing that ‘he does not seem to feel how absolutely essential a divine revelation in history is, to give principles any power to touch the soul; that we must feel that something has been actually done for us before we can do anything’ (M, p. 163). For her, Gerhardt’s hymns presented most effectively man’s utter dependence upon Christ’s actions.

The event of Christ’s suffering on the cross has centre stage in numerous hymnal collections, particularly those following the Christian calendar. What is of interest in these hymns is how the figure of Christ is presented and how his gender is adapted to fit the writer’s or compiler’s vision of a passive sufferer or conquering hero. For example, Keble’s ‘Good Friday’ hymn dramatises the concern of how a supposedly ‘weak’ Christ, ‘tenderer than a lamb’, can be fit enough to suffer on a cross which is ‘sharp’ (CY, p. 109, ll. 3-4). However, Keble challenges the assumption that passivity equate to spiritual weakness, arguing that ‘Love masters agony’; Christ’s divine love empowers and overcomes physical suffering (CY, p. 109, l. 78). Paul Gerhardt, as already noted, values the humanity of Christ and so highlights the physical costs of the cross: ‘the Mighty One is weak [...] Strength and

⁸¹ *Hymns for the Christian Church and Home*, 230, l. 21 and Hymn 233.

beauty fade away'.⁸² This weakness creates an identification that man can draw on in his time of need: 'And gazing on Thy cross can I / calmly my spirit yield' (LG, p. 82, ll. 75-76). As discussed in the Introduction, it was a nineteenth-century trend to equate female spirituality with the passiveness and suffering of Christ, but whether this was an empowering or oppressive representation continues to be debated; indeed, I will consider throughout the course of this thesis whether it was a dissenting tradition to radicalise a feminine Christ. Here, we see Reformation writers taking Christ's suffering and his consequent weakness as the moment of power, where 'all true delights lies hidden' (LG, p. 81, l. 43). In fact, Luther takes Christ's act on the cross and repackages it in the rhetoric of a military advance. The speaker of Luther's hymn is a collective voice who recounts the fundamental flaw in man – 'our might is nought but weakness' –, admitting the need for a rescuer. Luther conceives the world as a war in which 'God by His Spirit and His gifts', and, more crucially, through his son ('the rightful Man') will fight for humanity (LG, pp. 173-174, ll. 10, 30, 12). This suggests that the gendering of Christ had a complex history, with his suffering, for example, simultaneously aligned with a feminine and masculine portrayal. It is significant, therefore, that Catherine, in the spirit of diversity, allows both representations to sit within her collections.

Catherine also took advantage of Germany's innovative writers, like Gerhardt and Angelus, to prove to an English audience that hymns containing the 'modern subjective tone of religious poetry' did not have to be exaggerated with false sentiment.⁸³ Angelus' hymn 'The exceedingly great love of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ' establishes an intimate tone from the outset, beginning every verse with the vocative 'O Love' to address his saviour (LG 2nd, p. 96, l. 1). This designation of God with the language and sentiment of a lover is a striking and persistent image, with Angelus unwilling to shy away from the strength of God's union: 'Love, who hast conquer'd me at last / and rapt away this heart of mine' (LG 2nd, p. 97, ll. 27-28). The hymn does cover the conventional thematic interests of its contemporaries such as the incarnation of Christ, the passion of Christ, and the promise of a resurrected life, but it differs in viewing these events through the eyes of one who places all importance on the relational nature of God. It is through the repetitive rhyming couplet,

⁸² *Lyra Germanica: Hymns for the Sundays and Chief Festivals of the Christian Year*, translated by Catherine Winkworth (New York: Thomas N. Stanford, 1856), p. 80, ll. 20, 23.

⁸³ Wilson also suggests that the relationship between God and man, 'frequently presented in erotic and masochistic terms', was a major theme of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. In fact, Catherine's translation of Angelus' hymn was chosen for the first edition. The discursive community is evident here as hymnbooks (regardless of denominational stance) rely and source from previous compilations. There is a unity in purpose in exploring the mystical relationship that Christ offered the church, complicating the assumption that the feminisation of Christ was simply a dissenting impulse. Wilson, p. 214.

almost incantatory refrain, ‘O Love, I give myself to Thee / Thine ever, only Thine to be’ that Angelus models man’s response, which needs to be a wholehearted surrendering and forgetfulness of self (LG 2nd, p. 96, ll. 5-6). In another hymn, Angelus understands Christ’s sufferings as the act of a bridegroom: ‘O Love, through sorrows manifold / Hast Thou betroth’d me as a bride’ (LG, p. 84, ll. 32-33). Gerhardt, too, pledges to ‘cherish’ Christ’s sacrifice, which implies a committed, gentle and tender regard (LG 2nd, p. 31, l. 54). This mystical union of Christ causes gender boundaries to be blurred as all Christians are called to be a collective bride. Despite the strength of affection expressed in these hymns, and the potential problematic representation of Christ, Catherine had conviction in the genuineness of their sentiment, trusting her ability to discern the ‘inward adaptation of thought’, and having faith in an English audience to receive it. She advises a sickly friend struggling with faith to read the ‘lives, sermons, hymns, accounts of practical efforts to do good, and their results, and so make yourself acquainted with the actual facts of religious thought and life’ (M, p. 239): such was the strength of Catherine’s belief in the benefits of a personally experienced faith, as voiced in Angelus’ and Gerhardt’s hymns.

Luther’s hymn for the ‘Fifth Sunday in Lent’ (1524) can be found in both *Lyra Germanica* and *The Chorale Book for England*, but in the latter volume its form has been significantly altered. The structure of the rhyme scheme remains the same (ababccdd), but alternative rhyming words are used with the inclusion of disyllable rhymes (‘aboundeth’, ‘foundeth’), a frequent trait of German hymnody (CB, 40, ll. 30, 32). Catherine, in the ‘Preface’ to *Lyra Germanica*, admits the difficulty of naturalising this metre into an English translation, and, consequently, because of the devotional intent of *Lyra Germanica*, was able to replace them, on the whole, with single rhymes.⁸⁴ However, for *The Chorale Book for England*, Catherine states: ‘As a rule, the hymn and tune have been considered as one and indivisible, and the original metre therefore strictly preserved for the sake of the tunes, which would not admit of any deviation without detriment to their characteristic beauty’.⁸⁵ The printing of the Chorale’s words and music together, side by side, was a relatively new phenomenon and an exciting development in the integration of hymnal singing. Mike Sanders notes that prior to the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1861, ‘congregations possessed a repertoire of tunes from which they would select one appropriate to the metrical form of a given hymn’.⁸⁶ The unusual metre of the German hymns made this adaptability impossible, so Catherine grasped the opportunity to ‘enrich’ the nation’s

⁸⁴ ‘Preface’, LG, p. xvii.

⁸⁵ ‘Translator’s Preface’, CB, p. vi.

⁸⁶ “‘God is our guide! Our cause is just!’ The National Chartist Hymn Book and Victorian Hymnody”, *Victorian Studies*, 54:1 (2012), 679-705 (p. 681).

hymnody with original tunes. *The Saturday Review*, quoted in *The Chorale Book for England*, welcomed this ‘variety’ of metre after the ‘stiffness’ of the English tunes.

However, as observed in Catherine’s letters, there were teething-problems when it came to introducing new music.⁸⁷ She expressed to Susanna an underlying frustration with the prioritisation of the tunes by the musical editor Goldschmidt. She wrote:

The truth is, there is a fundamental difference in our conceptions of the work which cannot entirely be got over. I am always thinking of the practical and devotional use of the work among English people, who knew nothing of its contents beforehand; he, of its scientific value among a learned musical class [...] On some points they have yielded to me, but on a good many I must follow them; and what I am a little anxious about, and can do *nothing* to prevent, is the general tone of the music, which I fear will be too severe (M, p. 224).

Nancy Cho suggests that the negotiations which took place in hymn metre reveal certain ‘subtle histories’ relating to the ‘interplay of gender, power and authority’, particularly relevant for women hymn writers. The choice to break away or mimic traditional metre demonstrated an exertion of confidence or a desire to receive male approval.⁸⁸ In her situation as translator, Catherine not only championed an unfamiliar form but sourced from a nation with a dubious textual reputation. She did, however, find herself in a difficult working relationship, trying to reconcile opposing intentions for the work. Despite having to compromise over the formal aspects of the hymns by accepting the consequently clumsy expression of inverted sentence structures (‘our works could ne’er our guilt remove’ [CB, 40, l. 10]), Catherine’s ‘practical and devotional’ use of the hymnbook was still recognisable in the final product. The chorale example of Luther’s hymn for the ‘Fifth Sunday in Lent’ is a perfect embodiment of Reformation theology, giving a clear endorsement of justification by faith. There is a persistent, almost relentless insistence on the futility of men’s efforts to achieve his own salvation: ‘our pardon is Thy gift’, ‘the strictest life must fail us’, ‘not in mine own merit’, and in ‘his help I wait’ (CB, 40, ll. 8, 11, 16, 21). It is in the final verse that the crux of the whole piece is revealed, with ‘grace’ (CB, 40, l. 30) (in *Lyra Germanica* the word has been translated as ‘mercy’ [LG, p. 66, l. 30]) defined as the source of man’s rescue. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘grace’ as the ‘free and unmerited favour of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners’, but more interestingly it can be defined as the

⁸⁷ Julian, p. 338.

⁸⁸ ‘Gender and Authority in British Women Hymn-Writers: Use of Metre, 1760-1900’, *Literature Compass*, 6.2 (2009), 540-548 (pp. 546, 542).

‘divine influence which operates in men to regenerate and sanctify’.⁸⁹ The Eucharist was traditionally considered a ‘means of grace’, particularly in Catholicism, and Luther never looked to supersede the sacrament’s purpose, yet it is interesting that a hymn like this one has the potential to ‘regenerate and sanctify’ through the act of singing.

Susanna Winkworth and Fourteenth-Century German Theological Writings

Susanna’s choice of translations *Theologia Germanica* (1854) and *The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler; with Twenty-five of his Sermons* (1857) are fascinating for what they reveal about her literary circle, the development of her theological views, and the challenges facing Protestant orthodoxy. Catherine’s hymnody simply championed Reformation theology but Susanna’s texts enquired deeper into the nature and origins of their orthodoxy, which was formed before the Reformation in a deeply Catholic environment. These mystical, fourteenth-century theological writings and sermons, rich in a spiritual understanding of the relationship between God and man, stand as a direct challenge to the rationalising and mythologising of Christianity, represented by the Higher Critical writers and thinkers such as David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach. Susanna’s own spiritual journey was aided by the sermons of Tauler which she considered as her ‘dearest work’ (M, p. 164), but her endorsement of its relevancy expanded beyond the personal to a collective intent: the text, along with *Theologia*, had the potential to give Christian believers a legitimate basis on which to face contemporary criticism. Firstly, I will introduce the Higher Critical works most useful for understanding the textual choices made by Susanna.

Susanna translated texts which contained a mix of spiritual insight, mystical experience and practical advice, and it is significant, therefore, that she challenged her contemporaries’ Higher Critical framework with such sacred writings of fourteenth-century monks, collectively known as The Rhineland Mystics. Unlike Susanna, George Eliot tirelessly promoted her German contemporaries, translating David Strauss’s *Leben Jesu* [*Life of Jesus*] (1839) and Ludwig Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), making them readily available for an English reader. Eliot, alongside her partner and fellow essayist G.H. Lewes, saw it as their duty to give the English public an introduction to the metaphysical systems proceeding from Germany before an outright rejection could be justified. In fact, as Rosemary Ashton explains, Eliot believed ‘no British philosopher, historian or theologian

⁸⁹ ‘grace’, *Oxford English Dictionary*

<<http://www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/80373?rskey=dmeOki&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 08.04.2014].

dared call himself an expert until he had read the German contributions to his subject'.⁹⁰ Susanna, despite sitting at the opposite end of the critical debate, would have wholeheartedly agreed with Eliot's sentiments regarding ill-informed judgements. When referring to Liddon's 'University Sermons' in a letter to a friend, she wrote:

It is refreshing to see how evidently, whether he is right or wrong, he has formed his belief with full acquaintance with all the arguments of various sceptical schools against it (M, p. 245).

As Ashton notes, Germany was the leading contributor to philosophical and theological ideas in the mid-nineteenth century and so those wishing to defend a specific standpoint could not afford to ignore German thinkers.⁹¹ In fact, Susanna viewed the 'artificial means' (M, p. 219) with which the Church tried to preserve its fixed shape as detrimental to Christianity, and consequently '[o]utspoken doubts and objections' were far 'less dangerous than passive latent unbelief' (M, p. 223). Eliot helped to circulate German thinking through her own essays, 'The Progression of the Intellect' (1851), 'The Future of German Philosophy' (1855) and 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856).

In the early nineteenth century, it was the philosopher Hegel who provided the 'incentive for the historical study of the origin and development of Christianity', which started from the premise that whatever was 'real was also rational'.⁹² Frederick Gregory considers Hegel's argument in *Phenomenology of Mind/Spirit* (1807) to be about bringing religion and philosophy closer together, inferring that they contained the same content, but the 'former needed to express the content in symbolic form while the latter did not'. The logical end of this thought process (which few grasped at the time) was that as both religion and philosophy pointed to the same truth – the participation of 'humanity in divinity' – there was 'no need to claim or substantiate a literal interpretation of the miraculous aspects' of the New Testament's accounts.⁹³ Miracles were simply regarded as a symbolic carrier of the universal truths that related to humanity; it became the role of the philosopher to uncover them. In the years following Hegel's death in 1831, there was a move from Lower Criticism, in which the purpose had been to achieve a correct reading of the Bible, to Higher Criticism where the Bible was given the same level of scrutiny as any other secular text.⁹⁴ This also

⁹⁰ Ashton, p. 24.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹² Gregory, p. 42.

⁹³ William Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). Qtd. Gregory, p. 72.

⁹⁴ Gregory, p. 44.

encouraged a long tradition of critically engaging with the historical accuracy of the Gospels, with the life of Christ as the focal point. Reimarus initiated this trend, with Strauss's *Life of Jesus* following in its critical footsteps and becoming the 'most notorious application of Hegel's thought'.⁹⁵

The first volume of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* was published in Germany in 1835 and within two weeks the text, which had 'exploded like a bombshell', had resulted in Strauss leaving his post at Tübingen University.⁹⁶ Valerie Dodd claims in 'Strauss's English Propagandists and the Politics of Unitarianism' that if 'one book was seen as representative of the German school of speculation', it was this one: a work which 'split the century into two theological eras – before and after 1835'.⁹⁷ James Martineau, however, failed to be shocked by its content, suggesting it 'did but disappoint, by anticipating, many a like project already floating through the German brain'.⁹⁸ Ferdinand Christian Baur, a pivotal figure in Tübingen's school of Higher Criticism and previous teacher of Strauss, also expressed similar sentiments to a friend: 'In a certain sense one can rightly say that the work actually contains nothing new, it simply pursues a path long ago struck out and followed to its natural end'.⁹⁹ Yet, it was precisely this arrival at the logical end that did make it so dangerous to an orthodox faith and gave the book its notoriety. The majority of Higher Critical thinkers applied a rationalist approach to the Gospel accounts in which they provided a 'plausible naturalistic explanation' for every miraculous event. However, Strauss was not content with this approach, convinced that the rationalist's explanation tended to be just as unfeasible as the supernaturalist's claim of divine interaction.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Strauss arrived at a single principle to be applied consistently to the entire Biblical Canon. He wrote in his 'Preface' to the first volume that it was time 'to substitute a new mode of considering the life of Jesus, in the place of the antiquated systems of supernaturalism and naturalism [...] [t]he new point of view, which must take the place of the above, is the mythical'.¹⁰¹

Eliot offered her debt of gratitude to the Germans for replacing the 'antiquated systems of supernaturalism and naturalism' with a 'truly philosophic spirit into the study of

⁹⁵ W. R. Ward, 'Faith and Fallacy: English and German Perspective in the Nineteenth Century', in *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief*, ed. by Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 39-67 (p. 51); Gregory, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Gregory, p. 74.

⁹⁷ 'Strauss's English Propagandists and the Politics of Unitarianism, 1841-5', *Church History*, 5:4 (1981), 415-435 (p. 418).

⁹⁸ James Martineau, 'Strauss and Parker', *XLVII* (April, 1874). Qtd. Ashton, pp. 154-155.

⁹⁹ Horton Harris, *The Tübingen School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Qtd. Gregory, p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory, p. 77.

¹⁰¹ David Friedrich Strauss, 'Preface', in *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, 6th ed: in one volume, translated from the 4th ed. by G. Eliot (London: George Allen, 1913), pp. xxix- xxxi (p. xxix).

mythology'.¹⁰² Strauss, at a basic level, argued that the Gospel writers had taken the mythical legends of the Old Testament and combined them with the personal character, actions, and fate of Jesus. The writers modified and fulfilled the Messianic expectations already existing in the Jewish mind.¹⁰³ This myth was absorbed into a communal consciousness to be passed onto the next generation, resulting in a self-formed and self-perpetuating religious history.¹⁰⁴ Strauss breaks down this history systematically, taking each stage of Jesus' ministry and debunking, simultaneously, the supernaturalist and rationalist understanding of the text, concluding with his own mythical application. For example, in the account of Jesus' transfiguration, it is recorded that he was joined by Moses and the prophet Elijah, when a voice (God's) from heaven affirmed Jesus' authority. Strauss dismissed a supernaturalist approach, simply stating the historical impossibility of verifying the miraculous nature of the event, but he was also scathing of a rationalistic explanation that whittled it down to an 'accidental, optical phenomenon'.¹⁰⁵ This removed any significance or wider motivation for the inclusion of the passage, which Strauss was always willing to explore: 'I yet retain a sense, a purpose in the narrative'.¹⁰⁶ In this case, he suggests:

We have a mythus, the tendency of which is twofold: first, to exhibit in the life of Jesus an enhanced repetition of the glorification of Moses; and secondly, to bring Jesus as the Messiah into contact with his two forerunners – by this appearance of the lawgiver and the prophet.¹⁰⁷

Strauss is, therefore, able to extract a possible symbolic explanation of Christ's transfiguration, using the 'mythus' approach to disregard a divine but nonetheless Messianic understanding of Christ.

Eliot's essays reflected on the rapid developments taking place in German philosophy and by quoting Professor Gruppe she anticipated its future: 'it must renounce metaphysics: it must renounce the ambitious attempt to form a theory of the universe [...] [but] in its function of determining logic or method, it is still the centre and heart of human knowledge'.¹⁰⁸ Philosophy should no longer devote all its energies to theorising about the existence of God or the universe, but instead use its strength of determining logic to unravel knowledge of the self. In 'The Progress of the Intellect', she expressed frustration with the

¹⁰² 'The Progress of the Intellect', in *Essays of George Eliot*, pp. 27-45 (p. 36).

¹⁰³ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁴ Professor Otto Pfliegerer, 'Introduction to the Present Edition', in *The Life of Jesus*, pp. v-xxvi (pp. xv, xxiii).

¹⁰⁵ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, p. 546.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Future of German Philosophy', in *Essays of George Eliot*, pp. 148-153, (p. 153).

stubbornness of theologians who persisted in ‘footing’ themselves on the ‘crumbling structure of dogmatic interpretation’ and who are, as a consequence, missing an opportunity of understanding the ‘moral nature’ of those ‘new forms of social life to which we are tending’.¹⁰⁹ Eliot was fully convinced that the adoption of a mythical interpretation of the Bible, which may be detrimental to faith in a divine being, was paramount to an appreciation of humanity. Therefore, it is not surprising that Eliot translated Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*, which is often credited as an early exposition of Humanism. Feuerbach took each aspect of Christian doctrine, including the Sacraments, to show that the essence of Christianity was really the essence of ‘human feeling and imagination’.¹¹⁰ Christianity was further charged with being a mythical, wish-fulfilment paradigm that transposed the best attributes of humanity onto a divine being. He considered religion to be a marker of the childlike condition of humanity in its path towards self-knowledge. Man began with seeing his nature outside of himself, projecting it onto a divine being, before recognising that those very attributes of reverence were within him. A greater knowledge of ‘God’ was actually a more complete knowledge of self.¹¹¹

These texts, therefore, provided a wealth of evidence and strategy for doubting the historical legitimacy of the Biblical Canon, and, by doing so, they rocked the stability of an orthodox faith that relied on an historical Jesus living, dying and being miraculously resurrected. Strauss tried to reassure his readers of Christianity’s survival, stating ‘the author is aware that the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of his criticism [...] [they] remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts’.¹¹² As already observed, Eliot shared this perspective and appealed to theologians to reject their dogmatic position and, instead, through a mythological framework, access those ‘eternal truths’ of the Bible useful for man’s moral development. However, the dangerous implications for orthodoxy could not be so easily ignored, especially when Feuerbach’s rejection of a divine presence was taken to its natural conclusions. Strauss may have failed to provoke a strong reaction in James Martineau, but this was not the case with Feuerbach’s *Essence*. He was especially hostile to Feuerbach’s conclusion of man’s projection of God, responding with a scathing attack on Eliot’s decision to translate it. Interestingly, he attempts to undermine its importance by disparaging the quality of philosophical thought contained within it:

¹⁰⁹ ‘The Progress of the Intellect’, p. 42.

¹¹⁰ Ashton, p. 152.

¹¹¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989), pp. 12-13.

¹¹² Strauss, ‘Preface’, p.xxx.

She has executed her task even better than before: we are only surprised that, if she wished to exhibit the new Hegelian Atheism to English readers, she should select a work of the year 1840, and of quite secondary philosophical repute in its own country. Its system is nothing but an inverse reading of the principle that “God has made man in his own image” – a long homily on the text that “Man makes God in his own image”.¹¹³

Catherine recalled, in a letter to her sister Emily Shaen, Martineau’s ‘horror’ of this ‘unpersonal mode of conception, “substituting a mere blank for a living object of reverence, affection, and communion, under the idea of getting rid of limitations”’ (M, p. 189). For Martineau and the Winkworths, whose personal experience of faith drove much of their thinking, this line of criticism had to be refuted with an overwhelming endorsement of God’s reality as a divine being, as well as its necessity in a Protestant (and dissenting) faith. However, as we start to consider Susanna’s translations, it will become apparent that this is not an apologetic exercise, defending the reasoning behind a supernaturalist approach, but is fundamentally about confirming, through examples of individual experiences of faith, the requirements of a God in communicating and understanding ‘eternal truths’. She began her own spiritual journey dismissive of the Spirit’s workings through a ‘visible Catholic Church’ (M, p. 147), but several years later her thinking had developed and the ‘building up of a personal religion’ was bound to the ‘idea and the need of a *Church*’ (M, p. 178). Interestingly, she confesses that her first ‘glimpses and flashings of the idea of a *Church*’ came to her when listening to Mozart’s Twelfth Mass in a Roman Catholic chapel (M, p. 218). She fails to explain this experience but it does suggest that Susanna was susceptible to spiritual and inter-denominational experiences. Writing to Bunsen, she reveals that she had been searching for texts, whether ‘Unitarian, Anglican, and Romish’, to help formulate her thinking concerning the church. She expresses a wish that the leading ‘Unitarians would write their notions of a Church, but Mr. Tayler and Mr. Martineau seem too busy’ (M, p. 179). Consequently, her textual choices became the primary medium through which Susanna explored her views of a universal church. Similarly to Catherine’s hymns, the texts reflected the richness of Germany’s Christian tradition, including pre-Reformation writers, and through such an exposition of their theology, which was full of tried and tested wisdom, ‘would furnish the best antidote to what mischief English readers may have derived from German theology, falsely so called’.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ James Martineau, ‘Contemporary Literature, Theology and Philosophy’, *Westminster Review*, VI (October, 1854). Qtd. Ashton, p. 161.

¹¹⁴ Susanna Winkworth, ‘Historical Introduction’, *Theologia Germanica*, translated by Susanna Winkworth (London: Longman, 1854), pp. xv-li (p.li).

Susanna, however, was not naive and anticipated the enormity of her task in promoting German theology to a diverse readership, which would not only be helpful to her own peers (the educated middle-class female), but could also deal with the concerns of a sceptical English reader and address Higher Criticism's ultimate charge of God's extinction. Peter Skine, lecturing on the Winkworths' achievements, considers their choice of texts to be 'ambitious', making 'accessible to mid-century English readers two of the outstanding monuments of German mystical theology, at a time when English religious circles were torn between evangelical plainness and tractarian ritualism'.¹¹⁵ Susanna's tactic was to be proactive and anticipate the type of objections and fears a reader may have against *Theologia*. She also decided not to face this possible obloquy alone but maximised her mentors' support, realising that their established reputations and authority were less easily denied than her own unknown status. She included within *Theologia* a 'Preface' written by Charles Kingsley, a personal letter received from Chevalier Bunsen and her own original piece of writing, a 'Historical Introduction'. The unknown Teutonic Knight is considered to be the author of *Theologia* and he belonged to a group of Christian clergy and laity who assumed the appellation of Gottes freunde (Friends of God) ('Historical Introduction', TG, xlii).¹¹⁶ Ursula King describes this community, based in Basle, as a 'movement that emphasized mystical, visionary and prophetic experience over mere head and book knowledge'.¹¹⁷ This fourteenth-century organisation produced significant theologians such as Meister Eckhart and Tauler, both Dominican monks, and hence it is safe to assume that the author of *Theologia* and Tauler, the subject of *The History and Life*, were contemporaries and so can be considered side by side. In fact, Susanna aligns the two writers, concluding the 'Historical Introduction' to *Theologia* with a proposal to 'follow up the present volume with an account of Tauler' ('Historical Introduction', TG, p. li).

It was important to Susanna to establish the orthodoxy of what could justifiably be conceived as Catholic-informed theology – another stumbling block to an English Protestant sceptic. Charles Kingsley affirmed its orthodoxy by referring in his 'Preface' to the iconic Reformed theologian, Martin Luther. In fact all three contributors evoked the endorsement of Luther, who apparently 'owed more to this book than any other saving the Bible and Saint Augustine' and published his own edition of the text in 1516.¹¹⁸ Ursula King notes that

¹¹⁵ 'Susanna and Catherine Winkworth: Clifton, Manchester and the German Connection', *The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (June, 1992), 1-13 (p. 3).

¹¹⁶ Catherine identifies the Knight as Nicolas of Basle in *Christian Singers of Germany* (p.74). The later date of this publication (1869) suggests that this biographical information was not available when Susanna was preparing her translation.

¹¹⁷ *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages* (London: Routledge, 2001, 2004), p. 115.

¹¹⁸ 'Preface', TG, pp. v-xiii (p. vii).

Luther appreciated Tauler's 'spiritual advice on practical matters' but disregarded much of his mysticism.¹¹⁹ And yet Luther's 'own words', according to Kingsley, 'ought to be sufficient warrant' of the text's orthodoxy ('Preface', TG, pp. vii). Susanna aided this assertion by quoting directly Luther's sentiments:

I thank God that I have heard and found my God in the German tongue, as neither I nor they have yet found in the Latin, Greek or Hebrew tongue. God grant that this book may be spread abroad, then we shall find that the German theologians are without doubt the best theologians ('Historical Introduction', TG, p. xvii).

This quotation places Susanna's translation as a commission not just from Bunsen but from Luther, the champion of Protestant orthodoxy itself. There is a sense that Susanna saw herself as a prophetic fulfilment of Luther's prayer, to 'spread abroad' this text.

The potential to influence a wider community beyond family or friends was a daunting but persistent urge in both sisters and it was this impulse which carried them through those times of anxious uncertainty, when they felt so 'sure of failure' (M, p. 66). In a similar fashion, Joshua King suggests that John Keble's *The Christian Year*, through the act of reading, contributed to the establishment of an imagined religious community. As already noted, it was the devotional intent of the piece that drew readers imaginatively together in the private, domestic space.¹²⁰ The Winkworths' choices, although devotional in spirit, did seek to influence public worship and faith. In the hymn 'The Unity of the Spirit', the form of the piece fulfils its commission: the church filled with 'life and power divine' is asked to 'spread Thy knowledge like the boundless sea, / To Christ's great praise', and through the communal, repetitive act of singing, it is accomplished – Christ's name is made known (LG 2nd, p. 58, ll. 20-21). The hymn acknowledges that though 'one member knoweth not another here [...] yet their fellowship is true and near' (LG 2nd, p. 58, ll. 7-8). This speaks perfectly to the imagined reality of a Christian community that finds unification in the 'Spirit' of God and, as already suggested, through the form of the hymn (LG 2nd, p. 58, l. 10). Therefore, when considering the Winkworths' imagined community, it is important to recognise that it had dual origins: it established itself in the private, intimate space of the home, but also in the communal space of public singing, whether in the church or chapel.

¹¹⁹ Ursula King, p. 116.

¹²⁰ Joshua King, 'John Keble's 'The Christian Year'', p. 398.

It is also significant that Luther's endorsement was in part a celebration of the discovery of theology in the vernacular language of German. This reflects, as we have seen, a greater interest in communicating spiritual truths to a larger, less exclusive audience. The community can only imagine or conceive of itself if it has access to the same language. In this period, Medieval theology was taught in Latin and restricted to the learned, in this case the clergy. In Tauler's *The History and Life*, Susanna includes a lengthy footnote quoting Professor Schmidt (a vital source in providing much of the factual content), who argued that Tauler's sermons were taught initially, not in the Latin, but in the German form. He explains his reasoning:

The language itself of Tauler's sermons and writings is, besides, a sufficient proof that they were composed in German; for they exhibit the most complete adoption of the thought to the form in which it is conveyed; a form, moreover, that Tauler had to a considerable extent to create for himself. Up to his day, the German language had been little used for theological and metaphysical subjects [...] so that the writers of his school (in bringing the higher and more spiritual truths of religion down to the level of popular apprehension) had to frame for themselves a terminology of their own [...] Tauler and his school have, however, the merit of having given to their nation a philosophical language.¹²¹

According to Schmidt, the form of these sermons indicated an early example of the innovative, highly experiential development of the German vernacular as a philosophical language. The language of the learned had obvious advantages in terms of the weight of its authority, and its ability to draw upon a rich historical tradition of sacred and scholastic endeavours. Those pioneering the German language, however, had to discover their own authorial models, often having to present a complex, self-conscious defence of their writing within the text.¹²² Schmidt describes Tauler's terminology as a mixture of Latin-inspired phrases paired with a figurative, mostly biblical form of speech.¹²³ But, unlike the Latin, it had a greater potential in reaching 'any person, male or female, high or low', which was of paramount importance to the later Reformers.¹²⁴ For Susanna, here lay its attractiveness – its

¹²¹ Susanna Winkworth, 'Introductory Notice Respecting Tauler's Life and Times', in *The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler of Strasbourg; with Twenty-Five of his Sermons*, translated by Susanna Winkworth (London: Smith and Elder, 1857), pp. 73-178 (pp. 142-143).

¹²² Bernard McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', *Church History*, 65:2 (1996), 197-219 (pp. 208-209).

¹²³ 'Introductory Notice', in *The History and Life*, p. 143; Ursula King suggests that Tauler's decision to write in the German language may not have been a deliberate choice but a result of his less than formal training. Unlike Eckhart, Tauler was not 'singled out for advanced studies. Thus he was not sent to the *studium generale*' – a branch of the Dominican order set aside for high achievers (pp. 106, 115).

¹²⁴ McGinn, p. 210.

inclusiveness and accessibility –, with the proof she needed to bind this medieval theology to an acceptable orthodoxy.

Susanna was deeply aware of the Catholic environment, particularly the Dominican order, in which much of this theology was formed, and yet she was reluctant to detach it from this tradition through the omission of passages relating to Romish ritual and disciplines. In the ‘Translator’s Preface’ to *The History and Life*, Susanna writes that it seemed ‘scarcely honest’ in the interest of reconciling historical truthfulness with practical usefulness to ‘eliminate from sermons whose general scope is rich in Christian instructions, all such passages as might contain passing allusions to purgatory, transubstantiation, invocation of the saints &c’.¹²⁵ She was, however, susceptible to the fear of a negative public reception and so during the preparation of Tauler’s sermons, she showed the prospective selection to her mentors, hopeful of receiving an affirmation of her inclusions. Bunsen and Kingsley, however, failed to offer their support and ‘strongly advised’ her to omit every passage relating to Catholicism, claiming it would only give offence and ‘detract from the usefulness of the book to Protestants’ (M, p. 123). This view did not rest easily with Susanna, so instead she sought further advice from Archdeacon Hare and Maurice. She expressed her ‘extreme delight’ in a letter to Catherine that they both ‘quite differ[ed]’ from Bunsen and Kingsley in their views. Maurice considered it a point of conscience to retain them, whilst Hare declared it would be a ‘thousand pities’ to leave out such ‘favourite’ passages (M, pp. 123-124). In this regard, Susanna was much more liberal-minded and perhaps braver than Catherine, willing to stretch the definitions of orthodoxy in order to incorporate a richer Christian tradition.

Despite a unifying commitment to the orthodoxy of *Theologia*, there is evidence within the introductions that Kingsley and Bunsen disagreed over the general usefulness of viewing it as a philosophical prototype for promoting the Christian faith. Kingsley encouraged readers to ‘forget all popular modern dogmas and systems, all popular philosophers and be true to the letter of his Bible’ (‘Preface’, TG, p. xii). This implies Kingsley’s hostile position towards Higher Criticism, which had questioned the authority of the Bible and consequently undermined its rightful place as the definitive worldview. The worth and value of any theological text should only be judged by its ability to reflect and represent the Bible faithfully. Bunsen, on the other hand, championed *Theologia* as a key text in influencing and developing a philosophical way of thinking that was beneficial in ushering in the Reformation. He noted in a personal letter to Dr. Arnold (1835) that

¹²⁵ ‘Translator’s Preface’, in *The History and Life*, pp. xi-xx (pp. xii, xiii-v).

‘Strauss’s criticism, a product of unbelief and Hegelianism, has produced a great sensation in Germany; and I do not see how he can be refuted on all points by the old system’.¹²⁶ It is clear from Bunsen’s own correspondence that his views, particularly of Christ, were not strictly orthodox, leaning towards a Unitarian understanding of Christ’s role in the world. Writing to a friend in 1847, Bunsen is perplexed that his ‘axiom’ – ‘Christ is deified by His unique and unapproached sanctity’ – is considered ‘heretical’. He asks the following question: is it ‘less Divine, to reveal the essential nature of God, in the purest, most universally intelligible form of human reality, that in a (supposed) supernatural mode of appearance?’¹²⁷ Bunsen wanted to challenge the assumption that to believe in Christ’s divinity was to support a supernatural reality; he infers Christ’s humanity (the highest example of human goodness) as the *substance* of the divine. He is straying dangerously close here to Strauss’ view of the mythical but he, unlike Strauss, never questioned the spiritual relevance of Christ’s life. Instead, like the Unitarians, Bunsen views Christ as an exemplary model rather than the *actual* son of God.

Bunsen was aware that the ‘old system’, based on a rigid defence of supernaturalism, was not open to any kind of philosophical engagement and so Bunsen looked to a new type of scholar who was both a ‘critic and believer’.¹²⁸ The Theologians, Eckhart and Tauler, were considered to be the forerunners of this ‘spiritual philosophy’, with Bunsen writing that:

By teaching that this faith has its philosophy, as fully able to carry conviction to the understanding, as faith is to give peace to the troubled conscience, they paved the way for that spiritual philosophy of the mind.¹²⁹

Although Bunsen valued the Monks’ efforts to bring ‘people back from hollow profession and real despair, to the blessings of gospel religion’, it was the ‘intellectual element’ of the Reformation that Bunsen importantly ascribed to the theologians.¹³⁰ Susanna was happy to present both Kingsley’s doubts of philosophy’s worth alongside Bunsen’s support, as long as the central connection of morality sourced from a divine God was not lost in the midst of the discussion. Susanna agreed with Bunsen in viewing *Theologia* and Tauler’s sermons as prototypes of ‘spiritual philosophy’, for she supported Schmidt’s assessment that these early theologians had successfully pioneered an authorial voice in the German language.

¹²⁶ Bunsen, *A Memoir of Baron Bunsen*, I, p. 419.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 223.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

¹²⁹ ‘Letter from Chevalier Bunsen to the Translator (11th May, 1854)’, TG, pp. liii-lxv (pp. lviii-lix).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. lviii.

Susanna clearly valued the theology for its practical usefulness but she did not fail to appreciate its mystical origins, choosing to reject claims that mystics were only concerned with worldly withdrawal or simply portraying a pantheistic union between God and man. Mysticism had a complex relationship with both dissenting and Anglican traditions, with Ursula King suggesting that the Rhineland Mystics had and continued to be subject to ‘divergent interpretations’: some supporters claiming them as the ‘forerunner of Luther’s emphasis on faith’ and others distrustful of their Hegelian pantheism.¹³¹ Susanna was happy to tread the middle ground, acknowledging that mystical writers such as Eckhart did not ‘escape the danger of merging created existence in the one uncreated Essence’, but, on the other hand, God did remain for him an ‘actual and working reality’.¹³² Susanna was willing to negotiate these unorthodox ideas in order to promote the theology’s supernatural insistence on the possibility of communion with God, setting it up as a universal principle to emulate. Susanna disliked the evangelical tendency to present God as ‘*naturally* hostile’ unless ‘reconciled by Christ’, and so she sought a theology that celebrated the approachability of God (M, p. 245). Kingsley considered Tauler’s sermons to be the most accessible body of work from this period, dealing with the ‘very deepest and most universal grounds of theology and of metaphysics – a human endeavour [...] the same craving after the Absolute and the Eternal, the same attempt to express in words that union between man and God which transcends all words’.¹³³ McGinn outlines the historical development of mysticism, pinpointing a shift from a separatist, spiritual elite to an active community promoting a union with God that could be ‘found directly, decisively, anywhere and by anyone’. This occurred in the early decades of the fourteenth century, pioneered by thinkers such as Eckhart who enjoyed an ‘immediate consciousness’ of God and believed it could be found in the secular world.¹³⁴ As Kingsley’s statement suggests, they were attempting to communicate a universal truth that had been and continued to be in his own time a ‘human endeavour’. Grace Jantzen offers a twentieth-century interpretation of the mystic who is said to have undergone an ‘altered consciousness’ in which a ‘private, intense and ineffable experience, usually of a religious nature’, ensued.¹³⁵ But she is quick to disagree with a definition that limits mysticism to a ‘single type of experience’, and which would seek to domesticate medieval mystics to a privatised spirituality, irrelevant either for the education of Christian laymen or for challenging a rational viewpoint. Jantzen counts the ‘cost’ of the Enlightenment, which by ‘making the human subject the centre and foundation of all

¹³¹ Ursula King, p. 108.

¹³² ‘Introductory Notice’, in *The History and Life*, pp. 79-80.

¹³³ Charles Kingsley, ‘Preface’, in *The History and Life*, pp. xxi-xi (pp. xxiv-xxv).

¹³⁴ McGinn, pp. 198-199.

¹³⁵ ‘Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics’, *Hypatia*, 9:4 (1994), 186-206 (p. 187).

knowledge' had forever foreclosed the possibility of a transcendent reality.¹³⁶ This is exactly the challenge Susanna wished to face with the reintroduction of these texts into her contemporary society – the mystical was reclaimed as a legitimate experience.

Nicolas Basle, a possible author of *Theologia*, fell into the hands of the Inquisitors at Vienna and was burnt for confessing that Christ lived in him and he in Christ.¹³⁷ This partaking of the 'divine life' was a crucial characteristic of the mystical experience and he sought to justify its attainability for all men. Both *Theologia* and Tauler's sermons contain numerous synonyms for the name and nature of God, choosing abstract nouns to designate his characteristics, often pre-fixed with the qualifier 'True' or 'Eternal'. They include: Good; Essence; Substance; Perfect; Light; and Will. The necessary starting point for communing with God was recognising that he was the provider and complete source of all these eternal truths, but most importantly, as Tauler preached, 'it is part of His very essence that He should be nigh and present to me'.¹³⁸ Tauler is implying here that it is in God's essence to make himself known. The writer of *Theologia* confirms that the overriding virtue encouraging this union is love, for 'Love so maketh a man one with God' (TG, p. 145), with Tauler quoting Dionysius (a first-century mystic): 'Love is the noblest of all virtues, for it makes man divine, and makes God man.'¹³⁹ Immediately, Feuerbach's arguments can be laid alongside these assumptions. He disagrees with religion's understanding of love that denies its profoundly human relation and instead gives it a divine origin. Human attributes are transferred onto a divine being, with man's capacity to love removed from his moral nature and perceived as a gift from God.¹⁴⁰ Even Jesus' humanity is appropriated to the outworking of love. The mystics, however, justified this removal by perceiving a fundamental fault in the heart of humanity: the presence of sin. Bunsen writes that the 'fundamental truth of *Theologia*' is that there is 'no sin but selfishness and that all selfishness is sin'.¹⁴¹ This sin, therefore, is only overcome by a denial of self and a union with God.

The antithesis between the divine and the human was what Feuerbach was determined to present as illusionary. He viewed the religious principle of self-denial as a mechanism to enrich God: 'man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing'. What man withdrew and renounced from himself could then be enjoyed in an 'incomparably higher and fuller measure in God'.¹⁴² In an early eighteenth-century hymn by

¹³⁶ Jantzen, pp. 197, 202, 194.

¹³⁷ 'Introductory Notice', in *The History and Life*, p. 177.

¹³⁸ 'Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent', in *The History and Life*, p.188.

¹³⁹ 'Sermon for Christmas Day', *The History and Life*, p. 209.

¹⁴⁰ Feuerbach, 'Preface', p. xvi.

¹⁴¹ 'Letter from Chevalier Bunsen', TG, p. lxiv.

¹⁴² Feuerbach, pp. 14, 26.

Winkler, included in *Lyra Germanica*, the need for man to be 'stripp'd of self' had persisted (LG, p. 198, ll. 5). The feminine soul ('she'), once conquered, lies 'still' and silent before God, resting in the knowledge that the fight against 'pain and wrong' is over (LG, p. 199, ll. 26, 32, 33). This conquest is explored in the context of the Annunciation, allowing for a fascinating metaphor of the union between God and the soul: the emptying of the soul is aligned with Mary's commission to be filled, to be the vessel for God himself. Chapter two of *Theologia* defined sin as the turning 'away from the unchangeable God' towards the 'changeable [...] most often to itself'. Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden was attributed to the 'setting up of a claim' of an 'I and Me and Mine, these were his going astray, and his fall' (TG, pp. 6-7). In short, man 'dreameth itself to be God' (TG, p. 131). In his 'Sermon for Whit Sunday', Tauler argued from a case study of Jesus' disciples that surrendering to the divine will did not mean the perishing of man's own nature but an exaltation of his true nature when 'brought into rightful order'.¹⁴³ The mystics took the Biblical evidence and gave it its supernatural application, whilst Feuerbach's conclusions were its mythical alternative. For Feuerbach, the recognition that man's worship of divinity was illusionary should result in a freedom to accept humanity's worth. In the theology of the Mystics, such a realisation was the root of all sin.

Therefore, the importance of allowing fourteenth-century theology to stand alongside Feuerbach's mythical framework, in Susanna's mind, is not to dogmatically prove the Mystics' theology, but to 'recognize the true ground of Christian union to be spirit and sentiment, not doctrine, and to uphold the duty as well as right of free search after truth and intellectual veracity' (M, p. 199). Susanna supported independent enquiry into the complexities of religious belief, but ultimately valued the experiential above dogmatic arguments. She acknowledged a time when the 'whole fabric' of her 'faith was knocked over' and it had to go through a 'constant slow process of reconstruction' (M, p. 178). Notions took time to 'crystallize' as she considered the importance of a personal ownership of faith and the role of the 'historical phenomenon of the Christian Church' (M, pp. 178, 317). For Susanna, it was Tauler's work which 'taught and guided' her more than any other text, leading her towards an understanding of the 'higher life'; Christ was 'embodied in a human form to reveal to us what God is, what man should be' (M, pp. 164, 315). She was 'impressed with the idea that Christ does stand in a closer relation to the whole human race than He could do if simply a man like other men, however good' (M, p. 198). Significantly, it seems that it was Susanna's own mystical encounter which convinced her of Christ's divinity and his redemptive purpose through vicarious suffering:

¹⁴³ 'Sermon for Whit Sunday', in *The History and Life*, p. 337.

All my life my strongest emotions had been in the habit of embodying themselves spontaneously [...] in some imaginary personage, whose life experiences I felt through, rather than witnessed, and whenever I was under the influence of strong feeling, I fell into their life, as it were, instead of my own. In one of these imaginary lives the hero's forgiveness of, and prayer for, his enemy, while suffering the last pangs of a crushing torture, became, by natural development, the germ of that enemy's restoration (M, p. 315).

The outcome of Susanna's mystical encounter was that she promoted Tauler's work, giving it her own personal endorsement, and consequently fulfilled Grace Jantzen's hope for the mystical. Jantzen argues that mysticism should not be reduced to a single experience but should have an impact beyond the individual self. Susanna and Catherine took the texts that had influenced their spirituality and sought to give them a collective projection. Susanna, particularly, had come to realise that an individually owned faith had to find its expression in a body of believers – the church –, with what was learnt in private devotions beneficial for the wider community. Susanna understood and respected the challenges of Higher Criticism, but instead of deferring to greater intellectual speculation, she took what seemed to be outdated, irrelevant fourteenth-century theology and presented it to the church as a credible defence.

Conclusion

Catherine wrote to a friend of troubled faith that she should make a 'practical trial of the great verities of religion' (M, p. 238). Catherine's conviction that 'one can but live by the truth that is shown to one' had grown out of Susanna's and her own pursuit of religious truth (M, p. 238). This position moved them to a greater appreciation of the union of Christians as the church. There was much disagreement over the identity, purpose and authoritative limits of this institution, but the church, as sung about in hymns, was the 'divine' life [LG 2nd, p. 58, l. 18]. The Winkworths' dissenting impulses – their desire for inclusivity, doctrinal freedom, individual confession, and mystical experience – culminated in a vision of a 'true Communion of Saints', made up of the 'children of God in different churches and lands' [LG, p. xviii]. Although orthodox in many respects, it was the promotion of a universal community beyond the Anglican model that complicated their allegiance to orthodoxy. In fact, Susanna's views leaned very close to Universalism, rejecting a narrow evangelical conception of salvation – 'you *have* come and by Christ' – and envisioning, instead, a communion not 'only with Christians, but also with all pious Theists – Jews, Brahmo-somaj, Hindoos, and Mahometans' (M, pp. 214, 258). Susanna's remarks, which were made in 1868

to her brother-in-law William Shaen, were a response to the news that James Martineau and J. J. Tayler had started a society called the 'Free Christian Union'. She was concerned that this desire for a church free from 'dogmatic conditions' would in fact create a narrower understanding of Christian belief by not allowing for existing allegiances. In part, Shaen agreed, similarly hoping for a time when the 'real Church' would appear and people would 'cease to say, "I am of Mahomet, and I of Christ, and I of Krishna, and I of Zoroaster," but all prophets will lay down their official robes of authority, and God shall be all in all' (M, pp. 259-260).

What is apparent is that the boundary line between an orthodox and a dissenting position was fluid, with Susanna, like many of her mentors, adopting contradictory beliefs. For example, Maurice was uncertain that hell was a permanent place of punishment, but he was convinced that the church would only ever be unified if it reclaimed the 'unity of the Father and the Son' – the 'foundation' constantly denied by dissenters (M, p. 152). Bunsen championed German Reformation hymns even though his personal convictions were far from Luther's (he denied Christ's divinity). What superseded such partisan affiliations was the desire for a national embodiment of Christianity that could tackle secularisation. Catherine felt that mentors like James Martineau were more qualified to 'show the philosophical bases of religion and morals in a way to help the numerous people whose faith is shaken and bewildered by the speculations rationalistic, scientific' (M, p. 303). The sisters did not want to disregard an educational and intellectual engagement with the theological challenges of their time – recognising the dangers of an ill-informed dismissal of Higher Criticism's threat to orthodoxy – but instead championed German texts which represented an experiential understanding of Christianity. German hymnody embodied a rich Reformation tradition of communal singing, teaching the inclusiveness of justification by faith, whilst fourteenth-century mystical theology pioneered an authorial and authentic spiritual philosophy in the vernacular language. This devotional intent, coupled with a communal form, allowed the Winkworths to envision a Christian community beyond their immediate circle, influencing the theological practices of unknown worshippers. Susanna commented that in the weeks after *Lyra Germanica* was published, Catherine started to receive 'applications' from clergymen and compilers requesting the use of her hymns for public worship. The *Chorale Book for England* even crossed the Atlantic and was adopted by a Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania (M, p. 243). Catherine found contentment knowing that her work was to be a 'gain to the whole Church', an entity, which although divided in practice, could be united in imagination (M, p. 131). It was through the diversity of literary partnerships (supported by mentors of varying religious beliefs) that the sisters' textual

choices were established. For the sisters, this unification of faith, whether imagined or realised, had the potential to stem the severest critical assaults against Christian truth.

Chapter Three

Elizabeth Gaskell and the Manchester Unitarians

Elizabeth Gaskell's dissenting faith and her involvement in the Manchester Unitarian community has been well documented by critics such as Jenny Uglow, Angus Easson and R. K. Webb.¹ Susanna Winkworth recognised the philanthropic tendencies of this Manchester community, stating that they were

as a body, faraway superior to any other in intellect, culture and refinement of manners, and certainly did not come behind any other in active philanthropy and earnest efforts for the social improvement of those around them (M, p. 26).

What is of interest, and has not been considered in great depth, is Gaskell's problematic position within this community as philanthropist and writer. There is a negativity that creeps into her correspondence when describing Manchester life; there are persistent references to ill-health and over-work that have a direct correlation to her position as Minister's wife and novelist. She attempted to absolve responsibility through relocation, travelling extensively in and around Britain, hoping to stem an underlying dissatisfaction with her daily life. There was an apparent cost to assuming the role of Minister's wife, and it did not seem to be lessened or eased by gaining congregational support for her literary work. In fact, Gaskell was attacked most strongly for her novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *Ruth* (1853) by those attending either her husband William's or J. J. Tayler's Unitarian chapel; she angered numerous Manufacturers and offended female sensibilities. It is this disparity between her Unitarian conviction, often explored subtly within her novels, and the Unitarian community's disapproval that I wish to explore in this chapter. The lack of dogmatic faith that was encouraged in Unitarianism actually caused its own internal disagreements, with a

¹ Jenny Uglow's comprehensive biography of Gaskell has a chapter exclusively devoted to 'love, marriage and Manchester' and lays down the early foundations of the Gaskells' life in the city, including the Unitarian community and their philanthropic activities. *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), pp. 87-92.

Angus Easson and R. K. Webb both give a useful overview of the development of Unitarianism, defining the Gaskells' conviction of faith. Easson suggests that they belonged to the newer school of thought, as pioneered by James Martineau, which brought a greater emphasis to spirituality rather than to hard, rationalistic doctrine. He goes on to say that Unitarianism acts as a 'presence rather than a force' within her novels. *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 4-11, 17; R. K. Webb, 'The Gaskells as Unitarians', in *Dickens and Other Victorians: Essays in Honour of Philip Collins*, pp. 144-171.

Valentine Cunningham makes the important observation that some of 'Gaskell's fiercest opposition [to her novels] came precisely from this bourgeois Dissenting quarter' (p. 133).

consensus of faith often difficult to achieve. In this thesis, the case studies reconstruct and explore *how* religious communities intersected with, shaped and formed the development of the female writer. In Gaskell's case, her novels will be assessed in relation to the problematic nature of her community and the independence she assumed within it. Out of disagreement and fear of exposure Gaskell's conviction of faith was strengthened.

The first section of this chapter will give an overview of the Manchester Unitarian community, highlighting the campaigns and key contributors – William Gaskell, J. J. Tayler, W. R. Greg, Salis Schwabe and James Kay – that helped to shape the middle class into 'spiritual directors' and 'agencies of social and cultural life'.² A dominating feature of Manchester life was the Institute, which covered a wide range of intellectual interests and social concerns, and sought to influence middle-class culture. Such Institutes defined themselves through direct interaction with the working poor. Through statistical observation of poverty, such as James Kay's *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes* (1832), the middle class was able to acknowledge the problems of Industry, offering advice and cultivating sympathy, whilst simultaneously assuming cultural difference; the middle class stood apart and claimed authority as agents, observers and relievers of the working-class condition. In order to contain the scope of this historical survey, I will be using the form of the sermon as a way of pinpointing and understanding the Unitarians' social practice, for the pulpit offered itself as an effective means of communicating values. I will also be able to assess attitudes towards this religious genre (which drew on the literary form) and provide parallels with Gaskell's decision to tackle social injustices through the medium of the novel. Finally, the different spaces (physical and textual) that the sermon and the novel inhabited provide a useful framework in which to explore the authoritative positions assumed by the Unitarians and Gaskell.

The second part of this chapter will explore the difficulties of achieving consensus within the Manchester Unitarian community when a particularly volatile social problem – prostitution – was debated. Disagreement broke out following the publication of Gaskell's novel *Ruth* in 1853 and her letters reveal the disapprobation that she endured during this time. By examining mid-century attitudes towards prostitution and the 'problem' of the fallen woman, I will demonstrate that Gaskell's contribution to this debate departed quite considerably, not only from Congregational writers such as Ralph Wardlaw, but also, more troublingly, from her fellow Unitarians and social commentators such as W. R. Greg. Her

² Simon Gunn, 'The Ministry, the Middle Class and the "Civilising Mission" in Manchester 1850-80', *Social History*, 21.1 (1996), 22-36 (p. 23); John Seed, 'Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester 1830-50', *Social History*, 7:1 (1982), 1-25 (p.3).

personal experience of the difficulties of reintegrating a fallen woman back into society also directly intersected with her textual example. Gaskell used *Ruth* to dismiss the contemporary myth(s) of fallenness, prioritising, instead, the importance of community in this ameliorative process. Gaskell's vocabulary within her letters, where she refers to the novel's subject as "unfit" and herself as "improper", identifies her own unsupported novelistic position with that of the prostitute, revealing a fascinating understanding of what it means and feels to be isolated by community (L, p. 220, 223).

The Manchester Unitarian Community: Chapel, Sermons and *Mary Barton*

This section will characterise the Unitarian involvement in Manchester's formation, both in terms of class and cultural expression. Simon Gunn argues that the historian has been in danger of perpetuating a generalised myth of the mid-nineteenth-century Manchester middle class based around liberal values. However, he does believe it possible to locate a 'developed, vigorous religious culture' that contributes significantly to our understanding of the middle class.³ Despite being socially marginalised in national terms, the Unitarian community in Manchester included some of the wealthiest 'entrepreneurial giants' operating within the city.⁴ There was a proliferation of Societies and Institutes at this time, with the Unitarian believer heavily involved in their formation. For example, the following Institutes all benefitted from substantial Unitarian engagement, whether financial or otherwise: The Literary and Philosophical Society (1781), The Manchester Guardian (1833), Manchester Mechanics Institution (1834) and The Manchester Statistical Society (1883).⁵ Through the collection and analysis of social statistics, the subscriber to such institutions could feel like he was taking part in the cultural life of Manchester. As the *Athenaeum Gazette* argued in 1852, 'if Manchester is now celebrated for its numerous seats of productive industry, why should it not also become distinguished for its centre of mental development and of "true intellectual enjoyment"'.⁶ It is evident that liberal values were motivating this increased institutional involvement, as individuals wished to excel in and exercise their intellectual capabilities. In this period, the term liberal was 'extraordinarily elastic', with William Lubenow arguing that although it was 'conceptualised and contested', it was 'not

³ Gunn, p. 23.

⁴ Alan J. Kidd, 'Introduction', in *City Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester*, ed. by Alan J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 1-25 (p. 10).

⁵ Howard M. Wach, "'A Still Small Voice" from the Pulpit: Religion and the Creation of Social Morality in Manchester, 1820-1850', *The Journal of Modern History*, 63:3 (1991), 425-456 (p. 427).

⁶ *Athenaeum Gazette*, 20 Jan. 1852. Qtd. Michael Rose, 'Culture, Philanthropy and the Manchester Middle Classes', in *City Class and Culture*, pp. 103-117 (p. 109).

necessarily' limited to "ideas".⁷ Instead, it 'constituted a moral mindset' that intersected with public life. Of course, liberalism did express itself in political policies, promoting, to name just a few, 'toleration, retrenchment, franchise reform and especially free trade'.⁸ An assessment of the Unitarians' relationship to liberal ideas will be established through an analysis of the sermon: I will use this mode of preaching, alongside three Unitarian-led middle-class activities – statistical surveying, social housing, and the Domestic Mission –, to explore the relationship between religious conviction and the formation of class and culture.

William Gaskell was the minister at the larger of the two Unitarian chapels in Manchester, Cross Street (1828-1884), which was in the 'very middle of Manchester', whilst J. J. Tayler took charge of Mosley (later renamed Brook Street). Between them, the chapels attracted prominent and wealthy manufacturers, capitalists, members of the commercial and industrial elite, including the Heywoods, Potters, Gregs, Schwabes, Kays and Murrays. John Seed argues that the Unitarian Minister, with such a middle-class demographic sitting in his pews, had to address the tension of public and private practice; he must negotiate the impersonal, competitive 'cash nexus and profit' with the 'paternalistic, co-operative, personal and emotional' life.⁹ The pulpit, as Simon Gunn points out, could be used as a 'focal point' for promoting a 'spiritual culture'.¹⁰ Tayler acknowledges in a sermon supporting the Manchester New College that the 'pulpit does not yet know all its power. An immense field of influence lies open to it, which it has yet to fill'.¹¹ He continues: 'The living voice can never be superseded by the press. The press speaks coldly to intellect – the voice goes direct to the heart'.¹² Tayler sets the sermon up as a superior form to that of the written word, allowing its immediacy to move the hearer in ways not available to the textual. However, he also aligns the sermon more closely with the written text, acknowledging that the sermon, in a similar way, can 'move' the hearer emotionally. This provides a compelling comparison with Gaskell's own intentions for the novel, in which she looked to unite action

⁷ Jane Rendall, 'John Stuart Mill, Liberal Politics, and the Movements for Women's Suffrage, 1865-1873', in *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, ed. by Amanda Vickery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp.168-200 (p. 179).

William Lubenow, *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), p. 2.

⁸ Lubenow, p. 5.

⁹ Seed, p. 21.

¹⁰ Gunn, p. 30.

¹¹ The college was set up in 1757 to provide education for divinity students from dissenting backgrounds. The college had several homes, flitting between York and Manchester, before finally settling in London. Gaskell trained and worked at the college; he had active roles throughout his lifetime as secretary and as a teacher of literature. Uglow, p. 129.

¹² J. J. Tayler, *English Nonconformity, its Principle and Justification: a Sermon Preached at Upper Brook Street Chapel, Manchester, on Sunday, December 12th, 1858, in Support of Manchester New College* (London: E.T Whitfield, 1859), p. 16.

with emotion: to give ‘spur to inactive thought, and languid conscience’ (L, p. 119). In his survey of nineteenth-century American Unitarian preaching, Lawrence Buell seeks to understand the sermon as an art form, concluding that its kinship with literature lay in the self-consciousness of the preacher; he devoted time not only to the content, but to *how* the message should be conveyed. This ‘view of pulpit oratory as an instrument and not an end did not change essentially during the next century’, but the Unitarians did recognise that the privileged status of the preacher was no longer assumed and he had to earn his position as spiritual director.¹³ Therefore, Tayler could encourage the next generation of Unitarian ministers to perfect the sermon’s rhetorical practices and techniques, using theological seminaries as the training ground.

The Unitarian sermon, particularly, had the potential to develop in a direction that its orthodox counterpart could not follow. The Unitarian preacher viewed the sermon as a platform for encouraging a ‘moral impression’, stimulating the ‘growth of moral character’, rather than as a tool for berating the sinner.¹⁴ This transformed the sermon from an evangelical exercise to a literary form, embodying and promoting man’s capacity to excel. As a consequence, the scope and content of the sermon widened; for the preacher was not restricted to a doctrinal or gospel agenda. The Unitarians’ dislike of a dogmatic faith actually left them with the problem of what to include in the sermon. This was complicated further by the lack of a liturgy and the changing authority of the scriptures.¹⁵ According to historian James Munson, the Nonconformists were adept at absorbing liberal culture into their way of thinking, and this naturally articulated itself through the sermon.¹⁶ Seed concludes from an assessment of William Gaskell’s, Tayler’s, and Robberd’s sermons that they were ‘protagonists of liberal culture’.¹⁷ He identifies within the Manchester Unitarians ‘the language of organic ties and patriarchal authority, the gestures of paternalist philanthropy’.¹⁸ Before examining how the Unitarians and, particularly, the sermon interacted with liberal culture, I want to give textual examples of the Unitarian sermon functioning as a literary form and how it was carefully constructed to prioritise ‘intellectual rationality’ with

¹³ Buell’s essay deals specifically with the development of the art of preaching within the American Unitarian movement. However, I would argue that his conclusions have relevancy for the Manchester Unitarians because they did not isolate themselves from the wider, trans-Atlantic movement. Both Channing and Tuckerman preached in Britain, and, as the textual evidence will demonstrate, the Manchester preacher embodied the same preoccupations with eloquence and rationality that Buell explores. ‘The Unitarian Movement and the Art of Preaching in Nineteenth-Century America’, *American Quarterly*, 24.2 (1972), 166-190 (pp. 168-172).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 177; Munson, p. 114.

¹⁶ Munson, p. 118.

¹⁷ Seed, p. 21.

¹⁸ Seed, p. 25. Qtd. Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, p. 22.

‘religious inspiration’.¹⁹ However, in order to avoid the isolation of the listener, the desire for ‘heart-stirring eloquence’ could not be at the ‘expense of dignity and reason’.²⁰

The American preachers, Channing, Dewey and Tuckerman, who were recognised by orthodox Christians and Unitarians as the ‘foremost liberals preachers’ between 1820 and 1845, ‘owed their eminence [...] not so much to their power as theologians or verbal craftsmen, which were limited – especially Dewey’s – as to their ability to fuse reasoning with deep feeling in the articulation of fundamental principles’.²¹ The Gaskells, according to Jenny Uglow, welcomed this more spiritual strand of preaching, getting caught up in the religious fervour that Tuckerman brought with him to Manchester in the 1840s.²² In fact, Gaskell was to write in 1859: ‘oh! for some really spiritual devotional preaching instead of controversy about doctrines, - about whh [sic] I am more and more certain *we can never be certain* in this world’ (L, p. 537). In an earlier letter (1854) to her daughter, Marianne, Gaskell does discuss the differences between chapel and church attendance, highlighting the pitfalls of experiencing fellowship with the Anglicans. She admits that the church service, with its emphasis on devotion and prayer, does have an attractive appeal. However, she also acknowledges that the liturgy, which offends ‘one’s sense of *truth*’, would ‘deaden my sense of it’s serious error [sic]’ if it was heard too often. She encourages Marianne not to lose her convictions in the Unitarian truth – ‘that Jesus Christ was not equal to His father; that however divine a being he was *not* God’ – by participating in a liturgy that declares the divinity of Christ. This letter gives a clearer picture of the significance of the chapel in creating a space in which the Unitarian ‘*truth*’ could be openly declared, absorbed and encouraged (L, p. 860). However, as we shall see, chapel became a problematic space, promoting a paternalistic relationship between the middle and working classes. Although Gaskell challenged this discourse within her novels, chapel, despite its weaknesses, was still seen as a locus of community; it was essential in the strengthening of values and beliefs that were rejected or challenged by an orthodox Christianity.

William Gaskell, commemorating his predecessor John Robberds, confirmed that Robberds had desired to render his preaching practical and devotional: [what] ‘he was most deeply concerned about, was the inculcation, not of theological correctness, but of a pure,

¹⁹ Gunn, p. 30.

²⁰ Buell, p. 188.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²² Uglow, p. 130.

religious spirit'.²³ This devotion to practicality and reason, captured in rhetorical flourishes, can be seen in William Gaskell's own sermons. He proposes a holistic attitude towards the religious life: 'our life must be a life of reason – a life of virtue and piety – a life of the spirit as well as the body'.²⁴ The repetitive syntactical structure would resonate in the ears of the listener, confirming the necessity of each component for a healthy, religious life. William Gaskell was also able to take a spiritual ideal – love in the domestic home – and transfer it to a public space. This transition is carefully handled, however, allowing the domestic setting to dictate and initiate the manoeuvre:

Out of the domestic relation it is, remember, that human love, in its best and noblest forms, may be made to grow [...] it began, as was right, at the centre of the circle, but it stopped not, as is too often the case, there; it radiated freely towards the circumference.²⁵

William Gaskell does not deny 'love' its central place within the home, but tempts the hearer with the possibility that it may 'grow' and 'radiate' towards the circumference. This is not allowed to be viewed as unnatural or dangerous, but as the legitimate consequence of nurturing a domestic life. There is just a hint of radicalism concealed in this notion; for what does it mean for love to gather at the periphery? It gives permission for love, or values synonymous with the home and femininity, to engage with a public space. The Unitarians, as we shall see, sought to stem the worst excesses of a capitalistic society with benevolent activities.²⁶

John Stuart Mill, the father and developer of mid-nineteenth-century liberal thought, meticulously defined in *On Liberty* (1859) what he considered liberty of the individual to look like: 'The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their effort to obtain it'.²⁷ Such great weight was placed on the individual right to think, act and speak that any interference by the state or government should be seriously questioned. However,

²³ *A Sermon on Occasion of the Death of the Rev. John Gooch Robberds: Preached at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, April 30th, 1854, with the Services at the Interment, April 26th, 1854* (London: E.T. Whitfield, 1854), p. 14.

²⁴ William Gaskell, *Christian Views of Life and Death: A Sermon Preached in Cross-Street Chapel. On the Occasion of the Death of John Ashton Nicholls, Esq F. R. A. S. With a Sketch of his Life* (September, 1859), p. 20.

²⁵ William Gaskell, *The Duties of the Individual to Society: A Sermon on the Occasion of the Death of Sir John Potter, M.P., Preached at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, October 31st, 1858 with the Address at the Interment, on the Day Preceding* (London: E. T. Whitfield, 1858), p. 12.

²⁶ There are echoes here of Hannah More's understanding of the religious life. She took 'feminine' virtues (nurtured in the home) and relocated them within the public discourse of politics. However, William Gaskell's motivation depended on his understanding that man was essentially good; More's on the assumption that man was fundamentally flawed.

²⁷ *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker, 1859), p. 27.

Mill understood the need to promote and support individuals in their pursuit of freedom, writing that ‘there is always need of persons not only to discover new truths, and point out when what were truths are true no longer, but also to commence new practices, and set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life’.²⁸ He believed that there should be an increase (not decrease) of ‘disinterested exertion to promote the good of others’.²⁹ Benevolent behaviour, mixed with mild paternalism, would help to guide society or an individual away from harmful practice. For example, Mill had no difficulty in justifying the use of ‘compulsory labour’ to force a drunk to ‘fulfil’ his ‘obligation’ to his family; he does not view this as a type of ‘tyranny’.³⁰ Behaviour which has ‘been tried and condemned from the beginning of the world until now’ should be legislated against.³¹ In another example, Mill promotes education as the best way in which to foster individuality and independence of thought. As Lubenow notes, liberal values were about ‘free processes, about autonomy and independence’ and yet in order for such freedoms to flourish, as Mill suggests, a supportive and collective identity was necessary. For the Unitarian, religion provided this need, for although the state representative (Anglican Church) was diminishing (and thankfully in Mill’s mind), dissenting groups provided the space for a collective identity to form that prioritised the individual voice. William Gaskell imagines a spirituality that is autonomous, intellectually vigorous, communal, but, more importantly, socially-minded.³² He closely aligns community (and public) life with a healthy religious individual: to ‘eradicate the social feelings and the religious sentiments with which they are so closely entwined’ will result in a ‘poor, attenuated, miserable self’.³³

The Unitarian Minister, as Tayler suggested, used the sermon, alongside his practical involvement in philanthropic activities, as the most direct way to communicate ideas about community and middle-class responsibilities. And yet as the Unitarian involvement in philanthropic schemes proved, this was a liberalism that prioritised the religious conscience and exercised a mild paternalism. James Kay, although not a professing Unitarian, was educated in the tradition of dissenting academies, and wrote in *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes* (1832) that

²⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

³¹ Ibid., p. 145.

³² Lubenow, pp. 15-17.

³³ William Gaskell, *The Duties of the Individual to Society*, p. 6.

[p]olitical economy, though its object be to ascertain the means of increasing the wealth of nations, cannot accomplish its design, without at the same time regarding their happiness, and as its largest ingredient the cultivation of religion and morality.³⁴

Kay does not simply praise industrialisation and capitalism, although he recognises that its object is to increase the wealth of the nation, but acknowledges its weakness, particularly its failure to cultivate morality among its working men. Tayler's ministry also grappled with the need to respond to perceived irreconcilable responsibilities: 'to explain and justify the new order and to find a means of correcting the undeniable suffering it had produced'.³⁵ Friedrich Engels's rhetoric, when describing the great towns of England, was particularly damning, blaming political economy for the evidence of 'social warfare':

What is true of London, is true of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, is true of all great towns. Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand, and nameless misery on the other, everywhere social warfare, every man's house in a stage of siege, everywhere reciprocal plundering under the protection of the law, and all so shameless, so openly avowed that one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together.³⁶

Unlike Engels, Tayler and his fellow Unitarians believed such 'social warfare' could be alleviated if those in a position of political authority acted as social mediators. This called for the middle class to acknowledge and take ownership of its privileged position and act as stewards, mediating the suffering of the poor. Tayler preached to his congregation the necessity of being the incarnation of Christ in the world, emulating 'the paternity of God and the fraternity of man'.³⁷ Community among men could best be sustained if God's benevolence, through the conduit of middle-class influence, was communicated.

As the following textual examples will show, the funeral sermon, with its focus upon commemoration and comfort, is a fitting and useful context in which to reflect on man's impact on society. William Gaskell, preaching on the occasion of Sir John Potter (MP)'s death in 1858, chose to stress man's obligation to society. He uses the metaphor of a forest tree and its interlacing boughs to illustrate that 'none of us move in the world without making a larger or a smaller current there. We are every one parts of the community, and

³⁴ *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: James Ridgway, 1832), p. 39.

³⁵ Wach, p. 453.

³⁶ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 37.

³⁷ Wach, pp. 453-455.

bound to do something for its welfare'.³⁸ William Gaskell's rhetoric is inclusive as he does not quantify influence but celebrates even the smallest ripple in society. He conceives of this relationship maternally, with an image of the country as a 'great mother'; she has nourished the people in her 'bosom' and consequently deserves the people's faithfulness.³⁹ Numerous are man's obligations to society:

It helps to unfold our capacities, to develop our faculties, to educate and improve us. It labours to supply our wants, to multiply our comforts, to shield our weakness, to find scope and reward for our industry. To it we are indebted for our arts, our sciences, our literature, and all our civilization.⁴⁰

Therefore, fidelity to such societal care should demonstrate itself as a 'deep and lively interest in whatever concerns the general weal'. Despite the inclusiveness of William Gaskell's call, he does recognise that the 'public' man (and this is a specifically gendered role), with his position of authority, has the greater opportunity to shape culture. He continues:

What we want is an enlightened regard to the good of the community, intelligence, public spirit, patriotism, and philanthropy. We want men of calm minds, of firm purpose, of true discrimination, of zeal mixed with prudence, to interest themselves in plans of improvement, and bring into operation beneficial and ennobling agencies.⁴¹

William Gaskell makes specific references to Potter's life and the 'exertions' that he undertook for the public good in civic business. The proof of his worth was in the 'distinction of being chosen to the Mayoralty three years in succession'. However, Potter's life is exemplified before the congregation primarily because of his motivation: an 'anxiety to be useful'.⁴²

Salis Schwabe was an acquaintance of the Gaskells, a German Unitarian, manager of a Calico Printer Works, and an example of a man who took upon himself, in the words of William Gaskell, the 'sacred work' of cultivating a public spirit.⁴³ He was a benevolent, paternal employer in an industrial village called Rhodes. His societal contributions included the education of the working classes, the improvement of the Manchester Royal Infirmary,

³⁸ William Gaskell, *The Duties of the Individual to Society*, p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 11.

Model lodging houses, and setting up a reform school for juvenile offenders.⁴⁴ However, what carries most weight for assessing Schwabe's attitude as employer, and his position as benefactor, is Tayler's sermon on the commemoration of his death in 1853. The title of his sermon – 'The Relation of the Unrighteous Mammon to the True Riches' – is a discourse on the appropriate use of wealth and influence, concluding that 'earthly riches are to be viewed simply as the instruments of a high moral purpose'.⁴⁵ Charges are not offered against wealth but 'against its misapplication'.⁴⁶ Schwabe is not directly referred to by name in the sermon but praise is given to the man who engages in manufacturing or commercial industry with an 'honourable determination', with a 'strict integrity and a generous spirit'.⁴⁷ Such a man, with an 'unflinching regard to principle and justice, which he professes as a Christian', should be venerated as a 'moral hero'.⁴⁸ Tayler does not dismiss the problem of class antagonism as described by Engels but does legitimise the existing structure through religious rhetoric; the sermon clearly supports the Unitarian belief that man is placed by his Maker in a 'certain sphere', surrounded by certain 'opportunities and instrumentalities', with an obligation to carry out his business as fitting to a Christian believer.⁴⁹ Therefore, Schwabe's manufacturing life can be offered to the listening congregation as a life worth emulating.

The nature of this obligation to the working class and how it should be fulfilled can be seen in the writings of Kay, in the Unitarians' activities, and in the novels of Gaskell. As the title implies, Kay's survey attempted to communicate both the moral and physical condition of Manchester's working class, although he openly admitted that the 'moral leprosy of vice' could not be recorded with 'mathematical precision'; for 'sensuality has no record'.⁵⁰ He makes a direct correlation between neglected domestic comforts and moral decline. Prolonged and exhausting labour, continued day after day, is not conducive for developing the intellectual or moral faculties of man. Consequently, the worst dens of iniquity have resulted from sustained habitation in unimaginable poverty. Kay also identified a suburban split, with the very poor populating the heart of the city, whilst their employers chose to live on the outskirts of this expanding city.⁵¹ Engels' description of the city is rather more scathing and accusatory, believing that the city's construction was deliberately planned

⁴⁴ R. K. Webb, 'John Good Robberds', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/23708>> [accessed 31.03.2014].

⁴⁵ J. J. Tayler, *The Relation of the Unrighteous Mammon to the True Riches: a Discourse Preached on Occasion of the Death of Salis Schwabe, Esq. of Manchester*, (Manchester, 1853), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Kay, p. 38.

⁵¹ Kay, pp. 6, 11, 33.

to hide poverty: ‘I have never seen so systematic a shutting out of the working class from the thoroughfares, so tender a concealment of everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie’.⁵² Gaskell was not unaware or unmoved by the juxtaposition of middle and working-class space as is seen in *Mary Barton* (1848). Her working-class protagonist John Barton is overwhelmingly depressed as he moves from one street to the next: ‘he felt the contrast between the well-filled, well-lighted shops and the dim gloomy cellar, and it made him moody that such contrasts should exist’.⁵³ Regardless of whether the city’s construction was deliberate or not, the Unitarians felt the need to intervene and improve living conditions for the sake of morality. Significantly, Cross Street Chapel was positioned in the ‘very heart of Manchester’, perhaps a symbolic location that reflected the Unitarian desire to serve the working-class community without committing to live there. They served the poor in two distinct ways: through the Domestic Mission and social housing projects.

The Domestic Mission was established in 1833, inspired by Joseph Tuckerman, who visited England that year and called for a ministry with a dual purpose: ‘to encourage Christian responsibility in the rich as well as relieve the poor’.⁵⁴ William Gaskell was one of the original founders, with his involvement as secretary and Chairman of the Committee commemorated in a service celebrating fifty years of ministry at Cross Street Chapel in 1878. John Seed describes the Domestic Mission as a scheme of middle-class intervention that secured the Unitarians’ position as ‘social managers’. It was mainly male volunteers from chapel who gained access to the working-class home, observing its environment in order to restructure it around organised virtue. They were concerned with inculcating a ‘self-help’ mentality that would instil pride in the physical conditions of the working-class home.⁵⁵ It was a bold or perhaps even ambitious move that the volunteers undertook, asking to enter into the private homes of working men. It is clear that the Unitarians differed in agenda from other social observers like Engels who wanted first-hand experience in order to overthrow the existing social hierarchies: ‘I wanted more than a mere *abstract* knowledge of my subject, I wanted to see you in your own homes, to observe you in your everyday life, to chat with you on your condition and grievances, to witness your struggles against the social

⁵² Engels, p. 59.

⁵³ *Mary Barton*, ed., Edgar Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.70.

⁵⁴ Uglow, p. 90.

⁵⁵ Seed, pp. 13-14.

and political power of your oppressors'.⁵⁶ In contrast, the Resolutions from the founding meeting of the Liverpool Domestic Mission in 1836 stated its purpose as the following:

To put himself in close sympathy with their wants – to become to them a Christian advisor and friend – to promote the order and comfort of their homes, and the elevation of their social tastes – to bring them into a permanent connection with religious influences – and, above all, to promote an effective education of their children, and to shelter them from corrupting agencies.⁵⁷

Intervention was justifiable in the Mission's mind because it had spiritual implications. This was not a mission to redress capitalist society but to alleviate its worst excesses.

Gaskell never made personal visits, but in *Mary Barton* she offers the reader the experience of entering into the private domain of the working-class home. Her sympathy for the working-class plight is not communicated face to face but conducted through the literary imagination. In a much later circumstance, Gaskell refused a request from the *Daily News* to provide the 'statistical view' of the early 1860s industrial slump, claiming that she was not 'competent to deal with' it (L, p. 677). Gaskell's reluctance and modesty here, however, speaks most clearly of her purpose to address contemporary concerns through the literary form, using it, in a similar way to the sermon, to appeal to middle-class responsibility. Christine Krueger states that Gaskell 'recognized the authority' enjoyed by preachers; they were able to challenge political systems from the pulpit. As a consequence, Gaskell sought to use 'evangelical rhetoric' within her novels, as a way of assuming the authority of the religious preacher. By doing so, Krueger argues, she avoids her novels being confined to an 'ostensibly depoliticized domestic sphere'.⁵⁸ Apart from Krueger's assessment of Gaskell's rhetoric as 'evangelical', this argument is convincing, demonstrating the similarities in Gaskell's mind between the purpose of a sermon and the novel.⁵⁹ Gaskell, like the preacher, assumes an authority to compel her reader to engage with capitalist society, using spirituality as a lens through which to understand class unrest. W. R. Greg's rather unsympathetic and critical review of *Mary Barton* did accept the legitimacy of the domestic descriptions,

⁵⁶ Engels, p. 9.

⁵⁷ J. Drummond and C. B. Upton, *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, 2 vols (London: J. Nisbit, 1902), I, p. 89.

⁵⁸ Krueger, p. 85.

⁵⁹ Krueger argues that Evangelicalism 'fostered the emergence of female orators and writers of remarkable authority, whose legacy shaped social discourse'; she considers Gaskell's writing as a recipient of this tradition. If Gaskell is seen to be following in the metaphorical footsteps of the authority and discourse adopted by Evangelical preachers then I am inclined to concur with Krueger's conclusions. However, I would strongly disagree with labelling Gaskell's agenda as evangelical, if such a definition is predicated on the proclamation of traditional doctrines like original sin, justification by faith and the divinity of Christ. One of the concerns I have with Krueger's monograph is that she fails to define Evangelicalism in any concrete terms (p. 3).

assuming, wrongly in this case, Gaskell's physical presence in the working-class home: 'she has evidently lived much among the people she describes [...] made herself intimate at their firesides'.⁶⁰ When John Barton and Wilson visit the Davenports' 'cellar' the narrator does not spare the reader the sensory horror of living in a 'fetid', 'stagnant', 'foul' environment, where human waste is mingled with human activity. Fever is the feared fate of the working class whose 'filthy neighbourhood' and 'great depression of mind and body' make them susceptible (MB, pp. 66-68). Unfortunately, there is no beneficial outcome of such an intrusion because the petition to middle-class benevolence fails. Wilson attempts to evoke sympathy and action in the mill owner, Mr. Carson, but his inability to be moved by the welfare of his employees – 'I don't pretend to know the names of the men I employ; that I leave to the overlooker' – leaves his response inadequate and too late: Davenport dies (MB, p. 79).

Gaskell's description of the working-class home also demonstrates the importance of useful occupation, not only for the upkeep of domesticity but for the moral good of its inhabitants. Similarly to the Unitarian sermon, Gaskell does not berate or condemn the 'sinner' but draws attention to the 'certain spheres' in which the development of character is formed. The Barton household does not escape the problems of a capitalist system and we witness the deterioration of a comfortable home once Barton loses his employment. This was once a house that 'possessed many conveniences', was 'crammed with furniture (sure sign of good times among the mills)' and its 'fire-light' created a merry and congenial atmosphere. Mrs. Barton, with her 'hospitable thoughts', took pleasure in such domestic surroundings (MB, p. 13). However, by degrees this house was 'stripped of all its little ornaments', becoming 'dingy' and 'comfortless' (MB, pp. 132, 134). Gaskell uses the shifting intimate details of the home to imply that Barton's 'shrunk, fierce, animal look', and consequently violent behaviour, results from the inadequacies of the domestic home: he hungers for food, comfort and meaningful occupation (MB, p. 132). Mary, too, is placed in a morally dubious position, accepting the company of Henry Carson to 'linger with him in the sweet summer air' and to put off returning to a home that lacked a 'cheerful look' (MB, p. 134). The 'extinguished' fire, referred to on several occasions, literally and metaphorically represents the changing state of the Bartons' household, implicating the physical and moral coldness that has settled in (MB, p. 182). The narrator concludes that the cause of the hunger crisis in the 1840s was of so 'complicated a nature' that it even baffled the 'philanthropists who had studied the subject' (MB, p. 96). In a letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, Gaskell

⁶⁰ W. R. Greg, 'Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life', *Edinburgh Review* (April, 1849), 402-435 (p. 403).

admits that her novel has faults and cannot possibly contain the ‘whole truth’, but believes that there is much to be ‘discovered yet as to the right position and mutual duties of employer, and employed’. She writes that the ‘gloominess’ of the text was not chosen but ‘impressed upon’ her (L, pp. 119-120). This impulsiveness, however, is not apologised for; Gaskell has used the novelistic form to transcribe the experience of working-class life, particularly highlighting the priority of domestic help in any discussions concerning middle-class intervention. In this sense, Gaskell mimics the preacher’s intention, combining a moralistic and practical response to the problems of the industrial city.

The Sanitary Report was written in conjunction with the Domestic Mission and ‘disclosed a state of things which ought no longer to be tolerated in a Christian country’.⁶¹ One of the schemes that did interest Gaskell and her fellow Unitarians as a feasible solution to the misery of the working-class living space was to invest in model housing projects. The following letters, written to Charles Eliot Norton in 1860, reveal Gaskell’s desire to take her American friend’s experience and help her young friend Holland Thurstan (later son-in-law) set up a lodging house:

I want you *both*, as soon as you conveniently can to send me all manner of information and plans about your BLOCKS of dwellings for working-men. You know what I mean; for I don’t know what you call them in America – great conglomerate sets of rooms in one vast building, – erected according to laws of health &c &c &c (L, p. 598).

Norton laid out his involvement with a scheme that took place in Boston in 1853: a subscription secured the sum needed (\$40,000) to buy a piece of land and pay for the building. His assessment of the scheme was based not only on its usefulness to the poor but on its economic viability. He writes:

From the time of the first occupation of the houses to this not a single tenement has been vacant for over a week [...] The money expended in building has thus been proved to be a good investment in a merely mercenary point of view [...] The hope which the houses were put up, that they might stimulate private individuals to improve the habitations of the poor, and to erect new ones of a similar kind, has been so far fulfilled.⁶²

⁶¹ Raymond Holt, *The Unitarians Contribution to Social Progress in England* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 179.

⁶² Charles Eliot Norton, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton with Biographical Comment by his Daughter Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1913), I, pp. 204-205.

This successful venture not only reaffirmed the moral right of middle-class involvement in housing the poor, but also that it could be achieved within a capitalist structure. The money spent could be safely invested and returned without detrimental cost to the individual. This was middle-class paternalism at its finest, using influence in a cost-effective manner and reaffirming the need for class dependency whilst satisfying religious morality. Gaskell wanted her young friend Thurstan Holland to understand the privilege of his education and to use his resources accordingly. In a second letter to Norton on this topic, she reveals further her motivation for wanting the information: ‘I like to see that their previous luxurious (so to speak) education has not unfitted them for strong feeling and prompt acting in behalf of those less fortunate’ (L, pp. 610-611). Gaskell seeks advice so that she can in turn advise and call to account the younger generation.

There was, however, a strand of the Unitarian community, particularly those involved in industry, which prioritised the authority and expertise that came with this position rather than the spiritual values exhorted from the pulpit. There is fictional evidence, too, that Gaskell was critical of a middle class which chose to compartmentalise their religious faith, particularly those that refused to acknowledge a religiously-motivated obligation to the working class. W. R. Greg was such an example of a Unitarian who increasingly lost his spiritual faith in the act of promoting political economy and utilitarian morality. Greg’s essay *The Christian Creed*, published in 1851, but written between 1845 and 1848, was an exercise in scriptural interpretation through the lens of rationalism. He accepted Biblical criticism as a method of interpretation but wanted to go further and separate truth out from the supposed error of the gospel accounts: ‘to seek that pure original devotional spirit and righteous life in the authentic words and deeds of Christ, and in these alone’.⁶³ As a consequence, Greg not only denied a supernatural explanation but, according to the critic Richard Helmstadter, reduced the ‘meaning of Christ’s personality into a list of moral principles’.⁶⁴ Such a line of thinking resulted in a religion that could address man’s moral behaviour only. There was no place for a conviction of faith to interfere with industrial practices; this is what Greg found incomprehensible and irresponsible in Gaskell’s fiction, particularly in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*.

In Greg’s review of *Mary Barton*, published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1849, he predicts that ‘its chance of lasting popularity would have been far greater, had the writer

⁶³ *The Creed of Christendom: Its Foundations Contrasted with its Superstructures* (London: Trubner, 1875), p. xlviii.

⁶⁴ Richard J. Helmstadter, ‘W.R. Greg: A Manchester Creed’, in *Victorian Faith in Crisis*, pp. 187-222 (pp. 189, 203).

endeavoured to represent the real position of the operative classes'.⁶⁵ He objected to those passages previously mentioned that showed the extreme poverty of the working class, resulting in class antagonism exemplified in Carson's murder. In Greg's mind, this was a gross oversimplification of the industrial system, a system which allowed workmen a fixed share of the profits through regular wages, regardless of whether the factory made a profit that month. Greg not only criticises Gaskell's portrayal of the working man's home but the implied responsibility that she lays at the factory owner's door. The sympathy that she evokes for John Barton's fate – 'can I wonder that many of them, in such times of misery and destitution, spoke and acted with ferocious precipitation?' – suggests to Greg that those in authority are not doing enough to alleviate suffering (MB, p. 97). This is where Greg's ideological understanding of class responsibility utterly departs from Gaskell's. He writes that the novel is pervaded by one 'fatally false idea' that seems to have taken 'possession' of the writer's mind: 'that the poor are to look to the rich, and not to themselves, for relief and rescue from their degraded condition and their social miseries'.⁶⁶ Such rescue, however, is to come from 'within', for the worst excesses of poverty are not solely an industrial or charitable problem – 'it is notorious, that in no town are there better organised or more efficient charities than in Manchester' – but a moral one.⁶⁷ He affirms his position more clearly in *The Creed of Christendom*, writing that 'few things are more certain than that if our working classes are ever to emerge from their present most unsatisfactory condition, if they are to become respectable citizens and true Christians, they must learn to save for tomorrow's needs'.⁶⁸ Barton's decline, in Greg's mind, is the fault of personal weakness; he did not save or live thriftily in times of plenty.

Although Greg is attempting to empower the working-class man, he fails to understand Gaskell's agenda which explores the 'seeming injustices of the inequalities of fortune' and the suffering that results from a lack of sympathy and understanding (L, p. 74). She did not react angrily to Greg's review but, in a measured and deferential letter to Mrs. Samuel Greg (wife of Greg's brother), writes that she desired to 'throw light down upon their groping search after the causes of suffering, and the reason why suffering is sent' (L, p. 74).⁶⁹ The physically elevated language of looking 'down' on the poor reveals not only

⁶⁵ Greg, 'Mary Barton', p. 434.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 419.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 421, 425.

⁶⁸ Greg, *The Creed of Christendom*, p. lxvii.

⁶⁹ Michael D. Lewis argues that industrial novelists insisted that discussion was an 'essential liberal ideal' and could 'reconstitute and reconceive political relations'. In many ways, Gaskell's novel, like the Unitarian sermon, is part of the opening up and redirection of discussion, particularly to the problem of working-class unrest. 'Democratic Networks and the Industrial Novel', *Victorian Studies*, 55.2 (Winter, 2013), 243- 252 (p. 244).

Gaskell's acceptance of an authoritative position, but that it should be used to understand God's workings in the world.⁷⁰ Her conviction of faith directly correlates with her social position and the responsibility that comes with it. Paternalism was evident even in the most liberal of commentators: although Mill's ideas of liberty were not built upon a religious conviction, he, too, sees a need for a paternalistic response to the working class. He condemns equally the discarding of the working man's skills or his enslavement in 'fetters', but instead would advise, inform, and help him to fulfil his liberty.⁷¹ Mill's position reveals the complexities evident in liberal thought and the difficulties of defining a definitive liberal position. Greg's waning religious faith became separated from his rational understanding of industry, but this did not lead him, like Mill, to consider other ways of aiding the working-class man towards liberty. Regardless of the Unitarian preacher's appeal to spiritual ideas of class responsibility, Greg's attitude shows that in practice conviction of faith still trailed behind industrial rationale. He saw the 'accumulation of capital' as the essential mechanism for the 'civilization' of 'complex modern communities'.⁷² Greg was certainly in favour of societal progress, wanting the working class to be 'men of property instead of proletarians', but this had to take place in the existing capitalist system.⁷³ For Gaskell, moral and authorial authority could only be exercised effectively in a world governed by God's principles. Greg's decision to separate religious authority from industrial practice is what Gaskell collided with in *Mary Barton* and, as I shall show, in a slightly different context in *Ruth*.

Ruth: The Fallen Woman

'I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it' is how Elizabeth Gaskell attempts to assess her character after the publication of her novel, *Ruth* (1853), which offended the sensibilities of certain public readers, culminating in the dramatic if confined action of copies being 'burnt' (L, p. 223).⁷⁴ Gaskell's anxiety concerning the formation and final production of *Ruth* can be observed in her correspondence as she anticipates the 'talk

⁷⁰ Krueger surveys the critical field and concludes that Gaskell has been judged to be dependent on male authorities (such as the sermon), inevitably producing what 'Rosemarie Bodenheimer has termed "female paternalism"'. Krueger, however, departs from this assessment, arguing that Gaskell did try to imagine 'social reform that would entail the destruction of paternalistic relationships' (p. 93). In section two, Gaskell's dissatisfaction with the societal set up is evident in the premature death of Ruth. What is not in doubt is that Gaskell's appropriation of the rhetoric of sermons confirmed her paternalistic relationship to the working class, whilst allowing her to challenge middle-class behaviour.

⁷¹ *On Liberty*, p. 207.

⁷² Greg, *The Creed of Christendom*, p. lxxvii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. lxix.

⁷⁴ This section has been adapted and developed from my MA dissertation: 'I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it': Fallenness and Unitarianism in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*.

people [will] make' of choosing to depict a fallen woman as heroine, an 'unfit subject for fiction', especially for 'family reading' (L, p. 209, 220, 223). She acknowledges the necessity of courage and endurance against such criticism by believing in her intentions as a writer to speak out a 'very plain and earnest truth' (L, p. 225). However, what troubles Gaskell's resolve is the unforeseen experience of feeling 'improper' under the gaze of friends and worshippers, particularly of those attending Cross Street. In this section I will explore why Gaskell felt exposed in this way, particularly among her own Unitarian community, finding answers in her first-hand observation of the prostitute's condition, and in the conclusions that she reached in *Ruth* regarding the causes and consequences of fallenness. It was her conviction of faith that allowed her to face such opposition, taking comfort in the fact that *Ruth* had brought a 'subject which is so painful' out into the discussion of the public domain (L, p. 227). By doing so, she secured her place in a growing dialogue surrounding mid-century prostitution.

In a letter addressed to her close friend Eliza Fox (Feb., 1853), Gaskell diagnoses herself as having a "'Ruth" fever', in which she is physically indisposed from the 'hard things' that have been said about the novel, unsettling her mind and dreams (L, p. 222). In the novel, Ruth succumbs to fever several times with the last bout proving fatal. The first time she suffers is after the abandonment of her lover, Bellingham, when the full weight of her public shame and inconsolable position is revealed. Gaskell's decision to align herself with Ruth's fever associates her experience as a publishing novelist with the exposure and tainted character of the fallen woman.⁷⁵ To 'shrink' and 'hide one's head like an ostrich' in the sand because of shame is to identify with the fallen woman's condition, both as a genuine experience of fallenness and as a forced punishment dictated by public disapprobation (L, pp. 220, 227). Another image that Gaskell draws on to describe her experience is of 'St Sebastian' tied to a tree to be 'shot at with arrows' (L, pp. 220-221). This saintly image has been absorbed and depicted by numerous artists, representing a 'martyred male body undergoing simultaneous physical agony and spiritual transcendence', and interestingly such a painting is used as the source of poetic inspiration in Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850).⁷⁶ Alton, a working-class aspiring poet, visits Dulwich College Picture Gallery for the first time and is introduced by the cultured Stauntons to the story behind Guido Reni's painting of St. Sebastian. Alton's encounter with the painting's context causes him to remark: 'what a beautiful poem the story would make!' Mr. Staunton

⁷⁵ For a pre-Victorian account of the association of female authorship with gendered identities such as fallenness, see Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

⁷⁶ Richard Menke, 'Cultural Capital and the Scene of Rioting: Male Working-Class Authorship in *Alton Locke*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000), 87-108 (p. 93).

expresses the hope ‘that your seeing a subject for a good poem will be the first step towards your writing one’.⁷⁷ Richard Menke reads the scene as the commencement of Alton’s conflict between his political views and his high-cultural aspirations; for the painting turns a politicised scene of Christian rebellion into a piece of religious art.⁷⁸ Whether or not Gaskell was aware of this reference in *Alton Locke*, it adds a fascinating context to her identification with St. Sebastian; both she and Alton have claimed an authorial identity with the martyr.⁷⁹ It is a position, as Deborah Epstein Nord rightly states, which suggests vulnerability but is also defiantly chosen.⁸⁰ For Gaskell, the subject matter is what has led her to feel ostracised from her fellow believers; for Alton, the art gallery scene is a defining moment in his thinking that he, a tailor, could write poetry, and yet the martyrdom foreshadows the consequences of this audacious thought.

Gaskell’s identification with St Sebastian suggests an anxiety with her authorial role and the way it collided unfavourably with her Unitarian community. Before examining the nature of this difference, I want to consider Gaskell’s personal engagement with the fallen woman and how this formed and contributed towards her conviction of faith – a conviction that was absorbed into her novel, *Ruth*. In 1850, Gaskell became involved in the tragic, but sadly familiar fate of an Irish immigrant and seduced girl, Pasley, held in Manchester’s New Bayley prison. At a young age she had been abandoned by her mother to grow up with the dubious and precarious identity of an orphan. A series of misfortunes led Pasley to be seduced by a doctor, and rather than finding safety in a penitentiary, she was lured into the life of a prostitute, stealing to survive. Interestingly, we learn that Gaskell has ‘been to see her [Pasley] in prison’ – a face to face encounter within the working-class space that Gaskell had failed to experience during her active role with the Domestic Mission (L, p. 99). It seems that this particular circumstance of seduced innocence challenged the depth of involvement Gaskell was willing to give. The story of Pasley is personally and narratively owned by Gaskell – the personal pronouns of ‘my’ and ‘our’ girl confirm this – and she not only recapitulates the circumstances surrounding the girl’s past, but favourably and sympathetically reconstructs Pasley’s character and usefulness, and, as I will be arguing

⁷⁷ Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet* (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 76.

⁷⁸ Menke, p. 96.

⁷⁹ Gaskell’s identification with St. Sebastian also offers a possible gendered reading in which she associates her authorial position with martyred masculinity. The feminisation of Christ is a persistent theme throughout this thesis and although Gaskell does not align herself with Christ, she does choose to associate herself with a sacrificial Christianity in the male form. It is impossible to see this as a direct comment on a gendered Christianity, but it does suggest that Gaskell was not afraid to compare her experience to male suffering; her novel, and its subsequent treatment, is deemed worthy of the martyr’s fate.

⁸⁰ *Walking the Victorian Street: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 159.

later, absorbs her experience into the novelistic character of Ruth. This is not an entirely comfortable or unproblematic appropriation, but once again indicates the authoritative and paternal position that Gaskell takes when dealing with the working classes: Pasley becomes Gaskell's latest study, enabling her to understand the intricacies of fallenness and its effects. She is a girl with a 'wild wistful look in her eyes, as if searching for the kindness she has never known' and is a 'good reader [,] writer, and a beautiful needlewoman' (L, p. 99). These circumstances are related in a letter that Gaskell wrote to Charles Dickens, seeking advice about his own schemes of emigration for fallen women. The description reads like a personal statement, as if Pasley is in need of recommendation; the only sure way of helping her achieve respectability. In fact, Gaskell is also keen to understand what is involved in the process of emigration: who will the girl travel with? What will be known about her past life? Will she be able to leave with as 'free and unbranded a character as she can; if possible, the very fact of having been in prison &c to be unknown on her landing'? (L, p. 99). There is a clear anxiety here concerning the girl's past life, with an expressed desire for concealment, but there is the sense that this deception is the only option available because of society's disapprobation of such women. In a letter to Eliza Fox, Gaskell writes that 'our girl' (and it is unclear whether this is Pasley or another girl: the dates of the letter and the imminent emigration are conflicting) is ready to sail but she cannot conceal her disappointment that emigration has to happen at all: 'I suppose it won't do to pull this world to pieces, and make up a better, but sometimes it seems the only way of effectually purifying it [sic]' (L, p. 91).⁸¹ The use and necessity of deception becomes a vitally important theme in *Ruth*, particularly when Gaskell questions its effectiveness as an ameliorative policy.

Gaskell's encounter with Pasley, and the subsequent anxieties surrounding her reintegration, paralleled a larger, national concern to tackle the 'problem' of the fallen woman. Amanda Anderson argues that the depictions of prostitutes and fallen women in Victorian culture (both through medical and literary forms) dramatised the 'predicaments of agency and uncertainties about the nature of selfhood, character and society'.⁸² There was an underlying fear that fallenness proved the unpredictability of identity, with women susceptible to an irrevocable loss of character. As Sally Mitchell explains, sexual desire was considered to be either 'weak or nonexistent' in women and therefore to fall was a

⁸¹ This reference appears to allude to the Christian hope of regeneration and worldly redemption. Gaskell seems unconvinced that this can be achieved without starting again. In the final chapter, I will look more closely at Butler's future hopes for society in which Christian community can emulate the change that they wished to see, particularly for the prostitute. In this specific situation of Pasley's emigration, Gaskell is resigned to the reality of nineteenth-century attitudes towards sexual transgression.

⁸² *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993), p. 1.

conscious, deliberate or forced choice.⁸³ As a consequence, a mythology of fallenness was conceived, a myth, according to Nina Auerbach, that enabled cultural fears of female sexuality to hide behind it. The fallen woman could embody, depending on the observer, either a monstrous, autonomous aggressor or a pitiful victim, and yet neither viewpoint sought to understand female sexuality.⁸⁴ This myth was also reaffirmed by domestic ideology in which the virtuous woman protected the morality of the home, and, through the husband, influenced the nation too.⁸⁵ Therefore, as Lynda Nead notes, the prostitute was a deviation from this respectable norm, and ‘threatened not only stable class relations but also national and imperial security’.⁸⁶ Consequently, such diverging representations of female sexuality helped to affirm the ‘dichotomy of two classes of women’: the fallen and the virtuous.⁸⁷ Individual weakness, with certain women susceptible to fall, fuelled the myth, and this was often conceived in religious terms; it is this area of thought that is most interesting for the study of *Ruth*, because original sin, a doctrine we will see flatly disowned by Gaskell, was often blamed for the downfall of the unfortunate woman.⁸⁸

This set of assumptions, to a larger or lesser extent, fuelled the social and religiously-conceived investigations of prostitution that began to emerge in the 1840s and into the 50s, due to conflicting evidence that it was expanding at an exponential rate, with unsustainable estimates figuring one in six unmarried women, or an equivalent of 83,000, working as prostitutes.⁸⁹ It was labelled as the Great Social Evil, not only as an ‘affront to morality’, but as recognition that it was acting upon economic principles of supply and demand. The writings of prominent Congregational Minister Ralph Wardlaw and moral reformer J. B. Talbot were characteristic of the 1840s approach to the ‘intolerable evil’, arguing that prostitution was a threat to the sanctity of family life and to the wider social order.⁹⁰ Wardlaw’s *Lectures on Female Prostitution* (1843), first delivered to an exclusively

⁸³ *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women’s Reading 1835-1880* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1981), p. xi.

⁸⁴ ‘The Rise of the Fallen Woman’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35 (June, 1980), 29-52 (pp. 29, 31).

⁸⁵ This feminine influence, as observed in Chapter One, was upheld by Hannah More, and yet was complicated by the Evangelical understanding of Christian values: all were called to exercise the virtues normally associated with femininity.

⁸⁶ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 91.

⁸⁷ See George Watt, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 3.

⁸⁸ See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 37.

⁸⁹ E. M. Sigsworth and T. J. Wyke, ‘A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease’, in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 77-99 (p. 78).

⁹⁰ Walkowitz, pp. 31-33.

male audience in Glasgow, looked to ‘unite all truly patriotic and Christian men [...] to active and strenuous co-operation for the prevention and cure of the prevailing immorality’.⁹¹ There was a significant branch of social science at this time, which Wardlaw, Talbot and William Bevon represented, whose practices were synonymous with ‘applied Christianity’: it was a desire to promote ‘monogamy, self-discipline and cleanliness’; three things that the prostitute’s life seemed to refute.⁹² Christian morality, in fact, informed the societal identification of prostitution as the ‘illicit intercourse of the sexes’, with the sin of fornication intensified by the act being ‘committed for hire’.⁹³ Judith Walkowitz explains that these empirical surveys, carried out by laymen and medical practitioners, were intended as ‘preliminaries to action’, in which accumulated data could be used as recommendations for ameliorative policies.⁹⁴

By the 1850s, there was an attempt to review the accounts put forward in the previous decade, building upon the evidence collected by Wardlaw and Talbot, generating an ‘intellectual climate sympathetic to regulation’.⁹⁵ William R. Greg, a figure already introduced, published ‘Prostitution’ (1850) in the *Westminster Review*, whilst William Acton, practising surgeon, as well as a prolific writer of medical articles, published *Prostitution: Its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects* (1857).⁹⁶ Acton also published a second edition in 1870 that contains a useful Preface expanding upon his initial conclusions, demonstrating a far greater confidence in his assertions which were nevertheless born out of the 1850s. Acton and Greg were advocates of what Acton termed ‘recognition’ and ‘regulation’, and he defines it in his introductory remarks:

I propose, in the following pages, to inquire whether, in the interest of society and civilization, on what are commonly called sanitary and social grounds, some compromise, which I should term ‘RECOGNITION’, may not be effected between

⁹¹ Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures on Female Prostitution: Its Nature, Extent, Effects, Guilt, Causes and Remedy* (Glasgow, 1843), p. vi.

⁹² Mary Poovey, ‘Speaking of the Body: Mid-Victorian Constructions of Female Desire’, in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. by Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, Sally Shuttleworth (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 29-46 (p. 31).

⁹³ Wardlaw, pp. 10, 17.

⁹⁴ Walkowitz, p. 37. Finding the correct designation for this type of writer was of some concern, as the term ‘sociologist’ was not wholly appropriate and not applicable until much later in the century. Walkowitz refers to the work, as presented by Wardlaw, as early social investigations. It is an eclectic mix of medical science, religious moralisation and statistical surveys. Therefore, whenever I am referring to Wardlaw, Acton or Greg, I will use the term ‘social investigator’ or ‘essayist’.

⁹⁵ Walkowitz, p. 42.

⁹⁶ This thesis will quote substantially from the 1857 edition of William Acton’s *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (London: John Churchill, 1857). I will also quote from the 1870 revised edition, where appropriate, because the revisions do provide clarity of thinking and expression, offering an insight into the work’s development.

sanction and pretended ignorance of vice, and whether some useful mean may not exist between unbridled licence and despotism, which for want of a better name might be called 'REGULATION'.⁹⁷

Acton believed that because of 'men's nervous reluctance to admit acquaintance with it [prostitution], only half-formed opinions prevail[ed] among the most enlightened official men, and extremely erroneous ones among the general public'.⁹⁸ It became the duty, therefore, of the essayist to dispel such ignorance, to promote prevention, amelioration and regulation as state responsibilities. Greg attempted to achieve sympathetic regulation by insisting that fallenness should 'no longer be held to necessitate, depravity', for the woman was the victim of male desire.⁹⁹ Greg's nervousness of the enormity and difficulty of this task is evident in his introductory remarks as he anticipates objections: 'we are aware that we shall expose ourselves to much scoffing [...] much dishonest misrepresentation [...] much unmerited anger [...] much serious blame'.¹⁰⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that Gaskell enters into this debate hesitantly and with much concern, aware that she is not an essayist, statistician or preacher but a female novelist attempting to participate in the construction of the female subject.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, *Ruth* critiqued the texts that sought to recognise and regulate prostitution, challenging the causes and effects of fallenness, complicating assumptions of individual weakness and victimisation, and offering redemption other than through legislative solutions. Gaskell's conviction that this was possible stemmed from her Unitarian disavowal of original sin, and her Necessarian understanding of character formation.

Gaskell was no different from her contemporaries in designating prostitution as an illicit act, with women vulnerable to male desire, but she refused to view salvation as selective, insisting on a Unitarian dismissal of original sin. The concept of original sin, or as the Calvinist defined it, total depravity, was the 'linchpin' of the Evangelical creed.¹⁰² Man was under the curse of the 'fall', the consequences of the first, unlawful disobedient act towards God by Adam and Eve, releasing evil into the world. The only solution to man's

⁹⁷ Acton (1857), pp. 3-4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁹ 'Prostitution', *Westminster Review*, 53.2 (July, 1850), 448-506 (p. 503).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

¹⁰¹ Poovey argues that Josephine Butler, through the public campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, began to take control and 'participate actively in constructing the female subject'. However, she admits that previous to these public debates authors, such as Charlotte Brontë, had begun to 'exploit the contradiction written into female sexuality in the 1840s'. I argue that this initial exploration can also be seen in Gaskell's novel, especially through the uncertain and contradictory construction of Ruth's fallenness (pp. 44-45).

¹⁰² Jay, p. 54.

moral dilemma was through faith in the atoning death and resurrection of God's son Christ.¹⁰³ This placed salvation securely in the hands of God, with man unable to redeem himself. Another dimension to salvation, affirmed by Calvinists, was predestination: the belief that only a select number of mankind, already known to God, will experience his salvation. What is of interest here is the 'flaw in Evangelical logic' – the contradictory behaviour that resulted from those who subscribed to original sin.¹⁰⁴ Despite recognising that all men were weak and susceptible to sin, and in need of moral salvation, there was a tendency towards exclusiveness and separation. As Mark Knight and Emma Mason explain:

The individualistic tendency of Evangelicalism meant that total depravity was seen primarily in terms of personal human sinfulness, yet it extended to the belief that all society was fallen. As a result, many Evangelicals sought to separate themselves from the evil of their society and its corrupt 'worldly' influences.¹⁰⁵

This helps to explain why the myth of the fallen and the virtuous existed, even though, according to orthodox Christianity, all were sinners: the prostitute had become original sin incarnate, the corruptible, dangerous figure, who, it can be assumed, was not predestined and thus beyond societal and redemptive help.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, to prevent contamination, she must be isolated from her virtuous counterpart. Obviously, this is the Calvinist position taken to its extreme, and not all social investigators held these views, but it does highlight the root of such thinking.

Gaskell made it explicitly known in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton (1861) that she had one 'antipathy' when it came to religious conviction and that was towards the 'Calvinistic or Low Church creed' (L, p. 648). Her stance towards the fallen woman, therefore, challenged the Calvinistic 'predetermined nature' of man's moral condition, allowing instead a moral level playing field in which individual choices and environmental

¹⁰³ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Jay, p. 58.

¹⁰⁵ Knight and Mason, p. 128.

¹⁰⁶ Patsy Stoneman's chapter on *Ruth* explores the conflict between Gaskell's ideological projects of rescuing female sexuality from an innately evangelical view of sin, with the need to repress and regulate its activity. Stoneman argues that Ruth's fever, madness and subsequent death indicates the breakdown of this attempt, with the definition of sexuality as sin preventing Ruth's rehabilitation. Stoneman recognises that Unitarianism is an important feature of Gaskell's novel – seeking to attack 'punitive Calvinism' –, but she fails to unpack why Unitarians found the novel so unsettling. *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 67.

circumstances formed character.¹⁰⁷ Despite referring to herself as ‘Unitarianly’ unorthodox, Gaskell did follow the essential Unitarian doctrines, such as the belief in a benevolent God as judge, Christ as *the* model but not divine human, universal salvation, a dismissal of both pre-destination and, as already noted, original sin (L, p. 785).¹⁰⁸ The human mind and soul were not born with an innately sinful nature, but instead with an immense potential for growth. Unitarians considered the environment as fundamentally responsible and crucial for shaping the individual, hence any weakness in character was blamed on this early formation. Gaskell understood Providence to be at work in the laws of nature that governed human behaviour, whilst continuing to affirm man’s moral freedom.¹⁰⁹ The role of Christ, therefore, was not to atone for original sin but to offer a perfect example of self-redemption. R. K. Webb explains that within a Necessarian scheme the ‘inescapable effect of wrong formation of character or of deliberate or careless choice is suffering’.¹¹⁰ Through such an experience, the person would learn the ‘dictates of duty’ and to put others before themselves.¹¹¹ This position was affirmed from the pulpit, with William Gaskell stating that ‘he who has never suffered, has not attained to anything like true moral elevation and maturity of character. We must be purified in the fires of affliction’.¹¹² These two Unitarian beliefs informed Gaskell’s attitude towards the fallen: prostitutes were not innately sinful and although a period of suffering may have to be worked through because of malformation, this was no different to any other human experience. Suffering was not endured to satisfy societal expectations but to attain a spiritual elevation; therefore, self-redemption could be achieved by the prostitute. This reading strongly departs from Yoko Hatano’s understanding of Gaskell’s novel within the context of Evangelicalism. Hatano argues that the portrayal of Ruth’s innocence is an example of the type of seduced woman that the Evangelical penitentiary wished to rescue: those that were free of corruption.¹¹³ Such a differentiation conforms to the belief that Evangelical, particularly Calvinistic, redemption was unheeded and consequently

¹⁰⁷ See Amanda Anderson, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ See Easson, p. 10; Webb, ‘The Gaskells as Unitarians’, p. 144.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Gallagher argues that Gaskell attempted to break out of a strict Necessarianism by reconciling moral freedom with causality. This resulted in the problematic form of *Mary Barton* because she tried and, in Gallagher’s view, failed to mix within John Barton a heroic, morally integral, and yet tragically, determined character. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), pp. 64-65, 72-73.

¹¹⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the Necessarian scheme as a ‘believer in necessity; a person who holds that human conduct is dictated by force of circumstance (as opposed to free will)’ <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/125623?redirectedFrom=necessarian#eid>> [accessed: 23.03.14].

¹¹¹ Webb, ‘The Gaskells as Unitarians’, pp. 164, 166.

¹¹² William Gaskell, *Christian Views of Life and Death*, p. 12.

¹¹³ Yoko Hatano, ‘Evangelicalism in *Ruth*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 95 (July, 2000), 634-641 (p. 637).

unavailable to the hardened prostitute. However, as I will go on to show, this is not only a misunderstanding of Gaskell's conviction of faith but also a misreading of Gaskell's intentions in highlighting Ruth's innocence.

However, Evangelical social investigators of the 1840s rarely questioned the belief that a woman's sinful nature contributed to her fallen state. Although receptive to the vulnerability of the prostitute's position, the rhetoric of lectures presented by Ralph Wardlaw insisted upon her guilt. Wardlaw sincerely felt his responsibility to verbally strip the prostitute of her 'allurements', revealing her 'true character of moral loathsomeness' and her 'wretched and damning tendencies'.¹¹⁴ He quotes extensively from Dr. William Tait's *Magdalenism: Inquiry into the Extent, Causes and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh* (1842), in which Tait outlines natural and accidental causes of prostitution, with 'licentiousness of inclination' taking the top spot. Wardlaw also suggests that the ready compliance of the seduced almost deprives the term seduction of its appropriateness.¹¹⁵ Gaskell demonstrates the consequences of employing such rhetoric through her first example of a fallen woman, Esther, in *Mary Barton* (1848), whose seduction and later abandonment by a soldier leads her into the life of a 'street-walker' (MB, p.6). Gaskell places the rhetoric, as voiced by Ralph Wardlaw, into the mouth of Esther, who condemns her own position and describes herself as a 'wretched loathsome creature', with the 'black curse of Heaven' resting upon all her actions (MB, pp. 145, 277). She is haunted by 'some spiritual creature' that she equates with the condemning eyes of family and friends (MB, p. 192). John Barton's violent reaction, to fling her 'trembling, sinking, fainting', reinforces Esther's guilt that she is 'past hope' (MB, pp. 144, 192). Despite the suggestiveness of Esther's untimely demise, Gaskell consistently avoided the use of rhetoric that insisted a lapse into sin was inherent and not circumstantial. Esther goes out into the streets to feed her starving child and asks her listener Jem Wilson: 'Do you think God will punish me for that?' The 'wild vehemence' of her tone, along with the directness of her question, also seeks a response from the reader (MB, p. 189).

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Gaskell interested in the role that the environment plays in a fallen woman's plight, closing the gap between the prostitute and her respectable counterpart. Gaskell commences *Ruth* with her familiar trope of describing the novel's locality, drawing attention to people's traditions and mode of work. Her justification for such an opening is to

¹¹⁴ Wardlaw, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 116.

enable one to understand more clearly the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character. The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and break when the right times comes.¹¹⁶

The above quotation suggests that a 'strong moral strength' is required to overcome negative environmental factors. The assertion that few individuals possess this strength allows Gaskell to place Ruth's seduction alongside common human experience. Gaskell uses Ruth's environment to suggest possible reasons for her susceptibility to seduction, whilst maintaining the innocence of Ruth's character and behaviour. Ruth is described as a caged bird in Mrs. Mason's dress-making establishment after being 'wrenched' away from her past life of familial affection in the countryside (R, p. 38). She is now orphaned and isolated in a 'large populous desolate town', and the narrator asks of the reader 'what became of such a Ruth?' (R, p. 34). Her life is confined to the 'incessant labour of the work-days' and the isolating 'monotonous idleness' of Sundays (R, p. 35). Gaskell's use of juxtaposition highlights Ruth's problematic position, where, although she is surrounded by people and activity, she is removed from the protection of intimates and fruitful labour. The lack of parental supervision is regretted, particularly for the vulnerable situation it leaves Ruth in as she is pursued by her potential lover Bellingham; she is without any protector or advice respecting 'the subject of a woman's life' (R, p. 44). Ruth is described as 'innocent and snow-pure', someone who had heard of falling in love but did not know the 'signs and symptoms' (R, p. 44). Gaskell is determined to distance Ruth from an innately sinful character, for at the crucial point of seduction the narrator appeals to the reader to 'remember how young, and innocent, and motherless she was!' (R, p. 56)

The 1850s, however, did see some writers attempt to 'inculcate a more humane and reasonable response' to prostitution by shifting responsibility onto the male user and his unrestrained sexual desire.¹¹⁷ Gaskell notes this shift and demonstrates her knowledge of the social investigator's findings by using Bellingham, Ruth's seducer, to characterise the male persona that Greg and Acton put forward as the main cause of prostitution; they transfer blame from a woman's inherent sinful nature to that of the man. Bellingham exercises an unbridled sexuality, which Jemima unconsciously alludes to when comparing him to a race horse:

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. by Alan Shelston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Anne Humpherys, 'Biographical Note', in *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects in London and other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (London: Frank Class, 1972), pp. v-vi (p. vi).

She watched her father's visitor attentively, with something like the curious observation which a naturalist bestows on a new species of animal [...] "Brutes are sometimes very beautiful, mamma. I am sure I should think it a compliment to be likened to a race-horse, such as the one we saw. But the thing in which they are alike, is the sort of repressed eagerness in both [...] Though he seems so gentle, I almost think he is very headstrong in following out his own will" (R, pp. 263-264).

Jemima has never been acquainted with such a man before; hence her observation is likened to a 'naturalist' bestowing interest upon a 'new species of animal'. However, Jemima does not possess the vocabulary or knowledge to successfully identify 'repressed eagerness' as a coherent sexual desire, so Gaskell is able to implant a coded reference to sexuality in the text through the metaphor of the racehorse. Jemima is able to hint at his dangerous attractiveness, surmising that 'brutes' can also be 'beautiful'. Similarly, Old Thomas, a servant in Ruth's family home, tries to warn Ruth of the dangers Bellingham presents, using the scriptural reference of the 'devil' prowling around as a 'roaring lion' (R, p. 51). She cannot translate this 'biblical warning into the appropriate social terms': the words fail to form a 'definite idea' in Ruth's mind as she is ignorant of male passion, especially desire disguised in the form of a 'handsome young man' (R, p. 51).¹¹⁸ The narrator, however, makes it clear that Bellingham is motivated by the possession of Ruth's beauty, the only commodity he 'cared for, and it was supreme. It was all he recognized of her, and he was proud of it' (R, p. 74).

Both Greg and Acton refer to prostitution as a profession, insisting that it exists and is spreading because it relies on the economic principles of supply and demand. According to Sigworth and Wyke, low earnings, even during periods of employment, presented a 'compelling temptation to supplement income', with the prostitute finding a ready demand to supply her financial needs.¹¹⁹ Greg confirms the importance of male demand as the perpetuating cause of prostitution.¹²⁰ Such a shift in responsibility could only be affected if a woman's frailty was admitted and her sexuality was denied altogether. Greg's position was dangerous as he knew that if women were seen to have no sexual inclination, then those who did sell themselves must be perverse, beyond societal help, and open to the severest condemnation. Jill Matus argues that the 'vision of a world in which sexually driven women

¹¹⁸ See Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 158.

¹¹⁹ Sigworth and Wyke, p. 81.

¹²⁰ Greg, 'Prostitution', p. 490.

exercise their urges is, for Greg, a hellish apocalypse'.¹²¹ Hence, Greg had to dismiss an autonomous desire in women. He writes:

Women's desires scarcely ever lead to their fall, the desire scarcely exists in a definite and conscious form, till they have fallen [...] men's sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous.¹²²

Acton also denies the possibility of a woman's enjoyment motivating her fall by stressing that 'uncontrollable sexual desires of her own play but a little part in inducing profligacy of the female'.¹²³ One physician, giving advice on the developments of puberty for adolescents, argued that 'puberty, which gives man the knowledge of greater power, gives to woman the conviction of her dependence'.¹²⁴ Greg believed that a woman's sexuality only became active once sexual intercourse had taken place; she was dependent on the man's 'greater power' and unable to control or assert her own sexuality. Consequently, female unconsciousness of sexuality was a sure way of keeping women protected until marriage could provide a secure awakening. Prostitution only confirmed to the essayist the degradation demonstrated in the diseased body and mind of the woman subjected to unsanctioned sexual relations. Ignorance construed as innocence was perpetuated and encouraged by advice pamphlets, stipulating that if any information of a sexual nature was to be imparted it must come from the mother. This attitude can be seen in advice literature such as Lydia Child's *The Mother's Book* (1832), quoted by historian Deborah Gorham: a girl 'who receives her first ideas from shameless stories [...] has in fact prostituted her mind by familiarity with vice'.¹²⁵

Gaskell's characterisation of Ruth as ignorant and sexually unaware could be seen at face value as an affirmation of Greg's denial of female sexuality. The narrator confirms that Ruth never received her mother's advice respecting 'the subject of a woman's life', and it takes a child's rebuke, after living with Bellingham for several weeks, to spark 'new ideas' of her compromised position (R, pp. 44, 72). Ruth cannot dismiss Bellingham's justification

¹²¹ Jill L. Matus, *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 123.

'If the passions of women were ready, strong, and spontaneous, in a degree even remotely approaching the form they assume in the coarser sex, there can be little doubt that sexual irregularities would reach a height, of which, at present, we have happily no conception'. Greg, 'Prostitution', p. 457.

¹²² Greg, 'Prostitution', pp. 456-457.

¹²³ Acton (1857), p. 20.

¹²⁴ Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 86.

¹²⁵ Gorham, p. 91.

for committing herself to him when it is presented to her as ‘natural’, in the sense of throwing ‘yourself upon the care of the one who loves you dearly’ (R, p. 57). Greg boldly asserts that nine out of ten women fell from ‘pure unknowingness [...] from motives or feelings in which sensuality and self have no share’.¹²⁶ When Ruth begins to realise the ‘estimation in which she was henceforward to be held’, she accepts “I must not think of myself so much. If I can but make him happy, what need I care for chance speeches?” (R, p. 73) Ruth upholds what Greg terms ‘weak generosity’.¹²⁷ However, it is a more credible and convincing assessment, as suggested by Jill Matus, to view Ruth’s ‘unknowingness’ as a ‘topical representation of passionlessness’, in which Gaskell critiques the dangers of sexual ignorance.¹²⁸ Contrary to Hatano’s assessment, Gaskell is not distinguishing here between types of fallenness (the seduced innocent versus the hardened corruptible) but demonstrating the problems of female ignorance. Bellingham primes Ruth for seduction by slowly extending their un-chaperoned walks after the Sunday church service. Ruth at first refuses but then

suddenly wondering and questioning herself why she refused a thing which was, as far as reason and knowledge (*her* knowledge) went, so innocent, and which was certainly so tempting and pleasant, she agreed to go the round [...] she forgot all doubt and awkwardness - nay, almost forgot the presence of Mr. Bellingham (R, p. 40).

This quotation draws attention to the many dangers of feminine ignorance towards sexual desire. Firstly, the parenthetical inclusion of ‘*her* knowledge’ is deliberately chosen by the narrator to identify Ruth as ill-equipped to make an accurate assessment of the impropriety of Bellingham’s suggestion; she does not possess the right knowledge to reveal Bellingham’s subterfuge of seduction. Secondly, when she is caught up in the ‘beauty of an early spring day’, she forgets Bellingham’s presence completely (R, p. 40). Ruth is unable to perceive Bellingham as a sexual being; hence, she cannot comprehend herself being viewed in similar terms. This is also seen in her ability to disassociate physical beauty from herself. She acknowledges that “yes! I know I am pretty [...] I could not help knowing [...] for many people have told me so”, yet this speech is void of all conceit or any understanding that beauty can be exercised as a power (R, p.12).¹²⁹ Ruth’s forgetfulness of Bellingham’s presence indicates her naïve misunderstanding of the situation and consequently leaves her vulnerable to his advances.

¹²⁶ Greg, ‘Prostitution’, pp. 459-460.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 458; See Poovey, p. 33.

¹²⁸ Matus, p. 126.

¹²⁹ See Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherazade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 61.

Greg believed that if women were ‘placed in the right environment’, protected from and ignorant of the knowledge of sexuality and associated vice – ‘from exciting causes’ – then all would be pure and virtuous.¹³⁰ This appears to affirm a Unitarian dismissal of original sin, considering all women to be virtuous until circumstances seduce and coerce her into falling. However, Gaskell once again departs from her fellow Unitarian’s position by promoting female sexuality as an essential and not shameful part of a woman’s nature. Patsy Stoneman is right to identify the tension Gaskell faced between advocating ‘self-regulating’ adult women, whilst retaining the desire to control and protect female purity that was often only achieved through the denial of sexual knowledge.¹³¹ This tension is reflected in Gaskell’s own confession that *Ruth* is a ‘prohibited book in *this*, as in many other households [...] I mean to read it with MA some quiet time or other’ (L, p. 221). This suggests that Gaskell will use *Ruth* to acquaint Marianne with fallenness and female sexuality, but this event has to be carefully communicated and appropriately timed. It is important, however, that this knowledge be communicated to young women, and the comparable ages between Marianne and the character of Jemima suggest that the development into early womanhood is not complete without it. There is evidence within *Ruth*, demonstrated through the characterisation of Jemima, of female passion, desire and yearning that contradicted both the dangers of sexuality and the consequent need to promote passionlessness in women.¹³² Gaskell is able to explore sexual desire without expressing it explicitly by defining it as ‘impulse’. John Kucich takes impulsiveness, as found in Gaskell’s novels, and explores it in relation to sexuality. He argues that sexual identity is constructed through an ‘axis of honesty and dishonesty’: in the case of Jemima’s identity, she has to pass through a ‘period of masculine impulsiveness’ and ‘feminine deceit’ to finally arrive at ‘feminine humility’.¹³³ However, what is of interest here is that this supposed ‘masculine’ experience of impulse leads to Jemima having a greater knowledge of her ‘self’ as a sexual being; desire, contrary to Greg’s belief, is not exclusively a male experience but can be found in the unmarried woman. Jemima is aware of the growing attachment between herself and Mr. Farquhar, the suitor chosen by her father because of the ‘fitness’ of the alliance for his purposes (R, p. 216). However, the ‘silent rebellion’ existing

¹³⁰ Matus, p. 123.

Greg uses several eye witness accounts of living conditions found in Common lodging houses and suggests that they should be brought under the surveillance of the police to mitigate the ‘worst sinks of iniquity’. ‘Prostitution’, pp. 457, 496.

¹³¹ Patsy Stoneman, ‘Gaskell, Gender and the Family’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. by Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 131-147 (p. 140).

¹³² See Matus, p. 130.

¹³³ John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 121, 137.

in Jemima's heart against the 'manoeuvring' of her future course like 'pieces at chess' causes her to withdraw, maintaining a 'sullen reserve' in Farquhar's presence (R, pp. 215, 240, 224). Farquhar identifies 'impulse' as the guiding force of Jemima's behaviour and is troubled by its existence in such a girl, being 'taught to dread impulses as promptings of the devil' (R, p. 215). Jemima objects to this alignment of impulse with evil, lamenting "Poor impulse! how you do get abused" (R, p. 217). She will not 'change her very nature' to 'gain the love of any human creature' and, although Jemima's impulsive 'headstrong' and 'passionate' nature causes her uneasiness, both physically and mentally, as she wrestles the 'demon' of jealousy when Farquhar's affections are transferred to Ruth, it is significant that Gaskell allows her to experience the full range of desire (R, pp. 219, 365, 245).

Jemima's perceptions of her own sexuality and desires are greatly increased when she is made fully acquainted with Ruth's past. Her first encounter with 'open sin' was a tumultuous experience, comparing it to the diver's terrifying encounter with a 'strange, ghastly, lidless-eyed monster'; the 'family and religious circumstances' had tried to 'hedge' and 'guard' her from ever encountering vice (R, p. 323). Yet knowledge of sexuality enables Jemima to fully understand her own desires for Farquhar, as well as to recognise the unjust jealousy she has been harbouring against Ruth. It is a 'sudden impulse' that makes her aware of the offence she has caused Farquhar, to ask "I have not vexed you, have I, Walter?" (R, p. 374) The use of his first name settles the doubt of whether mutual affection still exists between them, and they are finally identified as lovers. During Bradshaw's violent admonition of Ruth's past sin, Jemima confidently, and for the first time openly, rebels against her father's wishes, bearing 'witness' to the goodness of Ruth's behaviour (R, p.339). There is a display of female solidarity as Jemima stands 'side by side' with Ruth, taking her 'cold, dead hand' in her 'warm convulsive grasp' (R, p. 338). Jemima's passionate nature, associated with impulse and manifested in bodily action, is only strengthened and confirmed in the revelation of possessing such a sexual nature.

Jemima's confession that "I might just have been like Ruth", susceptible to temptation, if it was not for the difference in family circumstances, draws Ruth's history closer to the bourgeois social sphere, refusing to affirm the myth of two types of women who should never interact (R, p. 365).¹³⁴ It also engages head on with the social investigator's contradictory viewpoint of what has happened to the fallen woman's character during the period of her prostitution. Despite Acton's insistence in his 1857 edition that 'it must not be imagined that, though disordered and for a time lost to our sight, the other strata

¹³⁴ See Bodenheimer, p. 163.

of the woman's nature have ceased to exist', he wrote in the revised 1870 edition that a woman's progression into fallenness, starting with a single act of unchastity, is a losing of her better self.¹³⁵ He explains:

By unchastity a woman becomes liable to lose character [...] reduced to prostitution for support. She is a woman with half the woman gone, and that half containing all that elevates her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity.¹³⁶

Acton's reading of a woman's fallenness suggests that her character becomes defective, with a significant breach taking place between her once virtuous state and her current position. Although Acton and Greg promoted rescue, believing that the 'first false step [...] should no longer be considered irretrievable', they did present the fallen condition as unstable and changeable.¹³⁷ It is this categorisation that Gaskell challenges, unconvinced that a transgression into sin changes the very nature of a woman's character.¹³⁸ It is perhaps this belief, more than any other, which caused her to stand apart, not only from the social investigators but also from her fellow Unitarians. Gaskell identifies herself with the prostitute's position, noting that her novel became a 'prohibited' book within many 'households', with men forbidding their wives to read it. Obviously, there are difficulties and limitations with this identification – Gaskell suffered no long term effects from her isolation nor was physically removed from her role as Minister's wife nor experienced Esther's fate, 'white face pressed against the panes', forever banished from the comforts of home – but she felt it acceptable and perfectly appropriate to assume a martyred position (MB, p.462). Gaskell was troubled by the congregational disappointment that she received from those sitting next to her in 'Chapel'; she could not help but feel 'improper' under 'their eyes' (L, pp. 221, 223). In practice, she inhabited a different space to that of the Unitarian minister: her pulpit was not elevated above the congregation, but she spoke through the textual in the intimacy of the family home. This Unitarian response seems to suggest that contamination, whether with the fallen woman or with the novelist's product, was possible through association. When describing Pasley's appearance in prison, Gaskell's language allows the dichotomy of two classes of women – the virtuous and fallen – to simultaneously

¹³⁵ Acton (1857), p. 53.

¹³⁶ Acton (1870), p. 166.

¹³⁷ Greg, 'Prostitution', p. 503.

¹³⁸ Elsie B. Michie argues that Gaskell refuses the cultural construction of femininity – separating whores from angels – by simultaneously characterising Ruth as innocent and guilty: 'This potentially allows Victorian women to recognize the split inherent in contemporaneous definitions of femininity'. *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 106-107.

cohabit in the girl: there is both a ‘wild’ and ‘wistful’ look in Pasley’s face as she searches for kindness in her visitor; she doubts the reception of sympathy in those that observe her (L, p. 99). Audrey Jaffe argues that *Ruth* is a dramatisation not only of this concern – that an exercise of sympathy will displace one’s own feelings – but also that the subject itself could alter the feelings that readers/characters have about *themselves*.¹³⁹ It makes perfect sense, therefore, that Pasley would not expect to receive sympathy in her situation of corruptible femininity. This is a useful observation when dealing with Gaskell’s Unitarian community, for they are distrustful of the novel, fearful that it will evoke emotions contrary to their view of fallenness. Through the act of sympathy, they become liable to losing their better selves. As Greg suggests in his review of lady novelists, such literature is ‘constantly admiring culpable conduct, constantly imbibing false morality’.¹⁴⁰ Gaskell accepts, and has seen first-hand, the detrimental consequences of prostitution, both for the woman’s physical and moral condition, but she cannot support the view that it destroys all trace of goodness, making redemption nigh impossible. Gaskell’s plan for amelioration, therefore, proceeds from this starting point.

Gaskell’s belief that fallenness does not irrevocably change or corrupt a woman’s character is reflected in her approach to amelioration, wanting to reintegrate women back into a ‘conventional and recognizable contemporary world’.¹⁴¹ Elsie Michie argues that the proposition of allowing fallen women to cross over the threshold into the home, before a period of reclamation was achieved, was ‘abhorrent’ to Acton and Greg.¹⁴² Instead, they favoured legislative and institutionalised solutions – ‘wise, discriminating and concentrated power’ – above philanthropic or well-intentioned amateur involvement.¹⁴³ Greg advocated ‘public and official management’, with Acton asserting that:

The voluntary system has been tried long enough with its affected ignorance and empty parade of hospitals, penitentiaries, and asylums. Individual efforts are powerless to effect

¹³⁹ ‘Because the object of sympathy in this novel is a fallen woman, the eliciting of sympathy for her is inevitably bound up with anxiety about sympathy with her: with nervousness about the possible communicability of her feeling’. Audrey Jaffe, ‘Under Cover of Sympathy: “Ressentiment” in Gaskell’s *Ruth*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 21 (1993), 51-65 (p. 55).

¹⁴⁰ W. R. Greg, ‘False Morality of Lady Novelists’, *National Review*, 15 (Jan, 1859), 144-167 (p. 149).

¹⁴¹ See Mitchell, p. 33.

¹⁴² Acton, in the voice of a reformed prostitute, confirms this need for segregation: ‘Take me anywhere but home first; let me not pass at once from the fume of my guilty life into that pure circle’, in ‘Review of *A Short Account of the London Magdalene Hospital and De la prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* par A. J. B. Parent-Duchâtelet’, *Quarterly Review*, 83 (September, 1848), p. 366. Qtd. Michie, p. 105.

¹⁴³ Acton (1870), p. 302.

either the cure of disease or the reformation of the prostitute. The nation's weakness can be assisted only by the nation's strength.¹⁴⁴

The 'nation's strength', in this context, is legislative power, such as the Contagious Diseases Acts or regulative asylums where a 'rigid separation should be enforced between the penitent and yet unfallen'.¹⁴⁵ Writing in his essay 'False Morality of Lady Novelists', Greg criticises Gaskell, among others, for labouring under the 'disadvantage of partial study and superficial insight'.¹⁴⁶ This accusation is very similar to the problem that he had with *Mary Barton*, believing that as a reader 'we are constantly gazing on inaccurate pictures'.¹⁴⁷ It seems that Greg could not support Gaskell's alternative projections of the fallen woman, as explored in *Ruth*, because in his opinion they were ill-informed and misleading, seeking an ineffective and amateurish response to the problem. Interestingly, he fears that character, particularly for women, is more regularly formed through the act of 'reading novels' than from edifying sources such as the essay or sermon.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, Greg is not only objecting to the content of Gaskell's novel but arguing that its imaginative form is damaging; unlike the sermon, it is not contained in the chapel but is illicitly entering the middle-class home, influencing character with its erroneous ideas. He unwittingly aligns the prostitute's corruptibility with Gaskell's novel, and it is this unspoken fear that lurks behind the hostile reception received from her fellow Unitarians.

However, as already noted, Gaskell had first-hand encounters with the fallen woman's state and took courage in her conclusions. Consequently, she became sceptical that 'deception' (giving a woman a new identity), as carried out by penitentiaries and institutes of reclamation, was the correct solution for dealing with fallenness. Charles Dickens' 'Home for Homeless Women', whose activities were described in detail in *Household Words*, perfectly demonstrates the type of scheme that Greg and Gaskell had concerns with, albeit for different reasons. After an average term of probation, usually lasting a year, a 'refining and humanising alteration' was 'wrought in the expression of the [woman's] features [...]

¹⁴⁴ Greg, 'Prostitution', p. 501; Acton (1870), p. ix.

¹⁴⁵ Greg, 'Prostitution', p. 502.

¹⁴⁶ Greg, 'False Morality', p. 149.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

There is one occasion in 'Prostitution' where Greg refers to Gaskell's representation of the fallen woman; he praises the 'faithful picture of the feelings of thousands of these poor wretches' as depicted in the character of Esther. He simply takes this character to confirm the downward projection of the fallen woman rather than to interrogate Gaskell's portrayal. Greg is willing to engage with the literary form but cannot figure out (or misunderstands) Gaskell's agenda. 'Prostitution', p. 454.

¹⁴⁸ Greg, 'False Morality', p. 147.

which can scarcely be imagined'.¹⁴⁹ With irreproachable character matching their transformed appearance, such women could emigrate to Australia, taking up their new positions as domestic servants, governesses and eventually wives. Such schemes implied that reintegration could only occur in an environment where past lives were unknowable. The uncomfortable knowledge of a woman's sexuality had to be erased in a scheme of forgetfulness. Gaskell was frustrated that Pasley's new life could only be achieved through emigration, so she explored these tensions in her fictional portrayal by stripping Ruth of her widowed disguise and allowing her sexual past to be known in the heart of domesticity, the Bensons' home.¹⁵⁰

Gaskell uses the domestic environment to dramatise the functional benefits that it has in restoring a fallen woman's social reputation. This space has been conceived in slightly different ways, and its importance debated, by Mary Poovey in 'Speaking of the Body' (1990) and Rosemarie Bodenheimer in *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (1988). Poovey seeks to understand the representation of female desire in the mid-nineteenth century and argues that the result of the 'prostitute as a victim' ideology, endorsed by writers such as Greg, meant that the home became an oppressive symbol, the place of protection, sheltering women from an outside, sexualized space.¹⁵¹ Bodenheimer argues that the pastoral genre of the novel allowed Gaskell to relocate the fall in a 'classless, lawless, natural realm', protecting Ruth from social judgment, but that the transition of Ruth to the Bensons' household effectively ends this identification with nature; the social implications of the fall become confusedly portrayed, with Gaskell unable to align Ruth's guilt with the innocent heroine of nature that is initially described.¹⁵² Therefore, the novel's conflicted form makes it difficult to envision restoration in a recognisable setting. I believe, however, that regardless of the narratorial flaws within the novel, Gaskell conceived the domestic space to be the only setting where Ruth's past life could be knowable and yet be capable of absorbing the hostility that she would have to endure. Faith Benson is the first person to voice the possibility of a disguised Ruth entering the Bensons' home and Thurstan thanks her for "reminding me of my duty [...] it is just what we ought to do" (R, p. 125). In Thurstan's

¹⁴⁹ Charles Dickens, 'Home for Homeless Women', *Household Words*, 7.161 (April, 1853), 161-175 (p. 173).

¹⁵⁰ Roxanne Eberle argues that the 'fate of Gaskell's fallen heroines depends on their power over the "telling" of sexual transgression: what is told, who relates it, and who hears it'. Once Ruth's true story is exposed and is out of her control, 'the expected progress towards death' is assumed. Gaskell, too, experiences this exposure as her alternative projection for Ruth's life is rejected and in many ways misread by her Unitarian community. *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 137, 165.

¹⁵¹ Poovey, p. 33.

¹⁵² Bodenheimer, pp. 116, 160.

defence of his decision to conceal Ruth's seduced innocence, he reveals his intention to provide a space of restoration: "I earnestly desired to place her in circumstances in which she might work out her redemption" (R, p. 348). This differs from the types of penitentiary surveillance discussed earlier; Ruth is granted access to the domestic space before proving her 'humanising alteration'. And yet this dissenting minister is plagued with doubts, suffering with subsequent 'indecision about right and wrong', with the narrator commenting that the decision to disguise Ruth is the 'wrong way' to turn the 'pivot, on which the fate of years moved' (R, pp. 200, 122). Prior to this decision, the narrator notes that Benson's thoughts had 'wandered' through 'labyrinths of social ethics'; Ruth's fallenness and its impact on those around her can be played out in multiple scenarios. The consequences (her ostracisation from the Bradshaws' house as governess) of Ruth's exposure have to be faced in the context of her domestic relationships and this is largely accomplished through her identification as a mother and friend (R, p. 117). G. H. Lewes' review of the novel, in which he identifies its moral sentiment, suggests that Gaskell sought to show that '[i]f women are to have their lives rehabilitated, it must be through the means of women'.¹⁵³

The importance of female solidarity can also be seen in Gaskell's own life and in her response to situations of female vulnerability. There are a series of letters (written in 1854) between Gaskell, her fellow Unitarian Mrs Schwabe, and Anglican Lady Kay Shuttleworth about the future care of an orphan, Miss Harvey. They discuss the various pros and cons of either educating the girl abroad where she could acquire 'accomplishments and languages', or allowing her to remain with Mme Leray, learning the business of a dress maker. It is not surprising to find Gaskell prioritising Harvey's domestic arrangements, arguing that

[i]t seems to me so very desirable to surround an *orphan* with something of the love and duties of a home, to place her as nearly as possible in the relation of a daughter, and to secure for her the nearest approach to the domestic relationships of which she has been deprived (L, p. 268).

Gaskell concludes that this 'education of the affections, and the domestic duties that arise out of them' are of equal importance to finding Miss Harvey a vocation. For Miss Harvey's character to be complete and well-rounded she must be nurtured by a motherly affection. There is the underlying sense that without it Miss Harvey's character will be defectively formed and easily swayed, as she has been in her religious convictions: she is at 'present not remarkable tidy in her habits; and having been tossed about from Protestants to Catholics, not very settled in her religious opinions' (L, p. 269). In Gaskell's opinion, a conviction of

¹⁵³ G. H. Lewes, 'Ruth and Villette', *Westminster Review*, 59.116 (April, 1853), 474-491 (p. 483).

faith is something that should be firmly settled and so this uncertainty indicates a weakness of mind. The relevance of this for Gaskell's response to the prostitute is more than apparent: without the safety of domestic relations and female support, character vulnerabilities can be exploited and fallenness may not be too long in following.

Ruth is given six years peace in the Bensons' home and the narrator interestingly describes the external change that this has made to her, whilst subtly playing down any internal change:

But, perhaps, in Ruth herself there was the greatest external change; for of the change which had gone on in her heart, and mind, and soul, or *if there had been any*, neither she nor anyone around her was conscious; but sometimes Miss Benson did say to Sally, "How very handsome Ruth is grown!" (my italics, R, p. 208)

Gaskell uses the domestic setting to confirm the beneficial effect it will have upon the fallen woman without succumbing to the premise that this proves corruption is within her, or that it will contaminate those who inhabit the same space. The emphasis upon her external features indicates that it is the physical effects of Ruth's ordeal that have been soothed by domesticity. The strong bond between mother and son is evidence that the domestic space can restore, with Ruth's 'whole heart' given over to this 'boy' (R, p. 209). Gaskell is concerned with the proper sphere and object of love, concluding that Ruth's motherly and fierce regard for her son should supersede her childish love naively conceived for Bellingham.¹⁵⁴ This practice of selfless love, which is distinguished from 'weak generosity', has implications for Ruth's redemption. Thurstan Benson, when he first hears that Ruth is pregnant, dismisses Faith's concern that this will be Ruth's "badge" of "shame", but instead rejoices, believing that "reverence" for her child will "shut out sin, – will be purification" (R, p. 119). This physical reminder of Ruth's fall will not debase her, but be revered as the means of blotting out the past wrong, initiating her spiritual renewal. At first, Ruth fears that she 'loved him too much – more than God himself – yet she could not bear to pray to have her love for her child lessened', and, in consequence of this honest dialogue with God, the narrator comments that 'her love for her child led her up to love to God' (R, p. 209). Ruth and her son Leonard 'grew and strengthened into the riper beauty of their respective ages', with 'no touch of decay' transferred to their respective household members (R, p. 214). This

¹⁵⁴ Schor argues that Ruth's love for Bellingham is conceived in the natural setting of a Wordsworthian poem – she as heroine – with her beauty and sexuality commodified by Bellingham. The increase of her guilt and shame is closely connected to her understanding that her beauty has been exploited and she has lost her integrity. Therefore, the transferral of her love from Bellingham to her son indicates her need for the more 'perfect, spiritual and intellectual love' (p. 66).

bond, nurtured in the domestic home, leads to Ruth's spiritual awakening and protects her from the worst excesses of outside disapprobation.

As already noted, Jemima's understanding of her own self is increased with the knowledge of Ruth's fall, but it is also important to mention that Jemima's sense of responsibility towards Ruth heightens too. During the scene of Bradshaw's verbal attack, Jemima's instinct to protect and care takes over, 'arranging' Ruth's dress with 'one or two gentle touches'. She is physically forced out of the room by her father and this severance of bodily sympathy is replaced with an audible identification: 'her passionate woeful crying was heard' (R, p. 341). She is forbidden by her father's authority from seeing Ruth, but she finds an opportunity to question Thurstan in the street about Ruth's welfare. Thurstan makes it known that her "clear duty" lies with obeying the prohibition of Bradshaw, but Jemima insists:

"Oh! but if I could do any good – if I could be of any use or comfort to any of you – especially to Ruth, I should come, duty or not. I believe it would be my duty" (R, p. 364).

In her mind, Jemima's womanly concern for Ruth overrides any other consideration, even a filial commitment to her father. Ruth is unaware of Jemima's conflict with duty but she, too, is desirous of a chance for them to meet:

She yearned all the more in silence to see Jemima [...] painfully conscious that she had not thanked Jemima for her generous, loving advocacy; it had passed unregarded at the time in intensity of agony – but now she recollected that by no word, or tone, or touch, had she given any sign of gratitude (R, p. 382).

Each woman is acutely aware of the other person's advocacy but ignorant of her own role. This ignorance is symbolically broken when they are both able to physically display their gratitude to the other by sharing a 'long, fast embrace' after two years of separation (R, p. 385). Gaskell champions the strength of this emotional and physical bond which prioritises female welfare, despite every attempt to sever the link. It is significant that at the time of *Ruth's* publication, Gaskell, anticipating pain from her acquaintances, actually forbade people to write to her. This fear of disapproval caused Gaskell to suspend the mode of communication that most successfully represented female support to her. She had to apologise to neglected correspondents for her silence, finally recognising the counter-productivity of such an action: 'how glad I am to begin our writing again; my fault it was dropped' (L, p. 220). The importance of a physical, touchable object of support is evident in

the distress Gaskell displays when a 'precious little packet' of letters, containing comforting words regarding the novel, is lost in the post. They have become essential for combating the letters of 'reprobation and blame' that have come at her 'straight as an arrow' (L, p. 226). Once again, an allusion to the image of St. Sebastian can be felt here; it is significant that it is the epistolary form that both contributes to and is the solution to her martyrdom.

One of the most troubling aspects of Gaskell's novel was the extended period of suffering that Ruth is led through, resulting in her untimely death. Greg could not come to terms with Ruth's demise, especially after the pains Gaskell took to secure her innocence. This is where an understanding of Gaskell's Unitarian and Necessarian beliefs are important for an accurate assessment of Ruth's suffering. The narrator explicitly identifies suffering as having a spiritual benefit, using it to satisfy God's law: 'His law once broken, His justice and the very nature of those laws bring the immutable retribution' (R, p. 286). Ruth, after the trial of turning down Bellingham's proposal and the resurfacing of love for him, suffers an acute sense of doubt and mental uncertainty, but within the turmoil 'suddenly a fresh thought came, and she prayed that, through whatever suffering, she might be purified [...], God might see fit to chastise her' (R, p. 285). Ruth correctly responds to her circumstances by relying on her 'tears' to wash away the 'errors' of her youth, realigning her love and allegiances with God, which is juxtaposed against Bellingham's complete lack of guilt or awareness of his waywardness (R, p. 301). His conduct has 'left no sense of sin' or shame upon his 'conscience' and he lives out his life dismissive of eternal consequences (R, p. 303). Gaskell uses Ruth's acceptance of her suffering as a positive indicator of her path towards self-redemption and salvation.

The transitory nature of suffering is an important factor when examining this novel, for Gaskell insisted on its reforming purpose and would not allow it to be judged as punishment.¹⁵⁵ Lant Carpenter, a Unitarian Minister, believed that retributive punishment could have 'no place in God's intentions', but that when 'suffering has done its work, and the deep stains of guilt have been removed as by fire, suffering will be no longer continued'.¹⁵⁶ There is an uneasy tension between Gaskell's insistence on Ruth's innocent nature and on her need for spiritual reform. Through a controlled suffering process, Gaskell finds an opportunity to address humanity's spiritual condition that will eventually culminate in universal salvation. Ruth finds spiritual strength in a carved gargoyle her eyes rest upon whilst in church. The narrator describes the unknown carver's ability to capture an 'intense

¹⁵⁵ Rowell, p. 43.

¹⁵⁶ *An Examination of the Charges made against Unitarians and Unitarianism...by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Magee, Bishop of Raphae* (Bristol, 1820). Qtd. Rowell, p. 43.

expression of suffering' without retracting from its beautiful features (R, p. 282). Ruth views the carving as a memorial to an 'imager, carver, sufferer' who has long passed away, but has left evidence of a hope that in time all human suffering would be at an end (R, p. 283). This identification with another human sufferer directly engages with the Unitarian understanding of Christ's role in the world. He is the perfect embodiment of humanity and leaves an exemplified life of self-redemption for all men to follow. As James Drummond preached at the funeral of Gaskell, 'we must suffer with him, if we would be also glorified together [...] sorrow belongs to us as immortal beings'.¹⁵⁷ Ruth's suffering, therefore, satisfies a social fall, but more significantly attempts to represent a Unitarian understanding of universal spiritual failings that are inevitable in a Necessarian worldview. Interestingly, Gaskell disrupts the sermon within the novel to confirm this belief system: during Ruth's funeral, Thurstan stops his sermon and comforts his listeners with a scriptural passage from the book of Revelation. He offers the hope that there will be a time after death when those who have come out of a "great tribulation" are cleansed and are before the "throne of God" (R, p. 457). This is a pointed dismissal of predestination and Calvinistic assumptions that not all will be saved.

Gaskell's conclusion has continued to receive various degrees of criticism of the validity of killing her heroine, beginning with Charlotte Brontë's objections: 'Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?'.¹⁵⁸ Audrey Jaffe argues that Ruth's death is the ultimate act of forgetfulness, with redemption and sympathy achieved in the letting go of and through the unconsciousness of self.¹⁵⁹ Both Stoneman and Matus read the final scenes as the consequence of illicit sexuality and desire, with Stoneman claiming that the classification of sexuality as sin is what is responsible for Ruth's demise.¹⁶⁰ Matus explains that the self-sacrificial image of Ruth nursing Bellingham critiques passionlessness in women; it can only lead to infection and death.¹⁶¹ Auerbach suggests that Ruth's death prioritises her spiritual redemption above and beyond the physical life, and this interpretation begins to get at the heart of Gaskell's agenda.¹⁶² Gaskell had bravely set out to challenge the Victorian myth of fallenness, choosing to depict a heroine free of original sin, restoring her into the domestic setting where female friendships were prioritised and

¹⁵⁷ *The Holiness of Sorrow: A Sermon, Preached in Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, on Sunday, Nov. 19th, 1865: On Occasion of the Sudden Death of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester, 1865), pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁸ T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington, ed., *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, 4 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1932), III, p. 332.

¹⁵⁹ Jaffe, p. 60.

¹⁶⁰ Stoneman, p. 76.

¹⁶¹ Matus, p. 131.

¹⁶² Auerbach, p. 42.

sexuality was affirmed. However, there is a sense that Gaskell continued to be frustrated with the limitations of Victorian culture, as witnessed in her unease about how *Ruth* would be received, particularly by her own Unitarian community. Unable to comprehend the full restoration of a fallen woman in her own reality, in a fit of disappointment, she handed Ruth over to the Unitarian security of redemption in death. Schor interestingly compares this fictional sacrifice to Gaskell's experience as writer, for both she and Ruth are silenced, with Gaskell's fiction unable to offer the redemption she hoped for.¹⁶³ Krueger presents Ruth's death as 'her apotheosis': Gaskell will not allow the 'fallen woman's story to be effaced by patriarchal plots', but instead uses the 'power of narrative to bring the patriarchy to repentance'.¹⁶⁴ This assessment helpfully suggests the parallels that existed between the Unitarian sermon and Gaskell's intention for the novel: she, like the minister, appeals to the hearts and minds of her reader. Societal condemnation that led to Ruth being ostracised should not be perpetuated but religious conviction should act in her defence. However, Gaskell's discomfiture with the Unitarian response suggests that her novel failed in its intent; the redemption of the fallen woman in a recognisable setting is still unimaginable.¹⁶⁵ Part of Gaskell's dissatisfaction also lies in the realisation that her authority as female preacher was inextricably linked to the 'conventions of sentimentalist social discourse'. As such, her work had been read and judged on this basis – as emotional, lacking in objectivity, and ignorant – rather than acknowledging Gaskell as a keen observer and well-informed inhabitant of Manchester.¹⁶⁶ Ruth is not able to live the fully redeemed life and Gaskell is left with a novel that failed to see through its progressive impulses but was still received critically. Once again, this justified but bitter martyrdom alludes back to the image of St. Sebastian and to the cost that writing *Ruth* incurred for Gaskell.

Conclusion

Through a reconstruction of the Manchester Unitarian community, using the medium of the sermon, this chapter has demonstrated the intersection between Gaskell's novels and the communal, philanthropic projects undertaken to create and direct Manchester's class and cultural life. The sermon sought to encourage the middle class to take seriously their God-ordained responsibility to serve the city and to relieve the plight of the working poor. This was a paternalistic liberalism that believed individual freedoms, particularly for the working

¹⁶³ Schor, p. 73.

¹⁶⁴ Krueger, pp. 202, 187.

¹⁶⁵ This same failure in intent could be leveled at the Unitarian sermon; it had limited success in influencing industrial practice.

¹⁶⁶ Mary Lenard, *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 129, 133.

class, could only be achieved through benevolent intervention. Changes in the sermon's content and presentation brought the boundaries between the novelistic form and this religious medium closer together. Based on a theological position, it was a peculiarly Unitarian attempt to encourage the art of preaching. As Gaskell herself confessed, she preferred spiritually-infused sermons over a dry and dogmatic talk. A dogma-less faith gave the Unitarian minister free rein in terms of subject matter and, as examined in detail, sermons addressed issues of money, societal influence, living conditions, and public and family life. This was a holistic approach to the formation of middle-class culture, directly connecting spirituality with rationality.

However, the lack of a dogmatic faith did mean that it was more difficult to reach a consensus, particularly concerning the practicalities of faith, and this was seen in the reaction Gaskell received to her novels. Greg, especially, failed to interpret the scenes of *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* in the sympathetic and engaging way that Gaskell had hoped for. The difference in opinion largely depended upon the extent to which a conviction of faith should influence industrial and rational practices. Greg identified the sympathetic agenda of Gaskell's novels as 'false morality', misleading the reader with an unthinking and irresponsible response to class conflict. He was unable to connect with Gaskell's acts of imagination, unconvinced that her fiction could or should reconstruct and reveal the working-class life. Instead, he defined himself as an 'ethical critic', taking it upon himself to correct the notions of ill-informed observers. And yet Greg appears to have misjudged Gaskell's credibility, who actually wrote with the authority of a Manchester inhabitant, as the wife of a prominent Unitarian Minister, and as the supporter and active member of the Domestic Mission. This was no uninformed observation of Manchester life, either of the working-class man or of the fallen woman. Therefore, it appears that Greg disagreed at a fundamental level with Gaskell's conclusions that spirituality should engage with every area of human conduct.

Gaskell also lost substantial communal support when she tackled a far more problematic subject of the fallen woman. *Ruth* dealt head on with the statistical, social and religious investigations of prostitution, complicating the effects and causes of fallenness, and refusing to endorse the sexual identification given to prostitutes. Her Unitarian conviction that original sin was a devastating tarnish placed upon these women meant that she saw the fallen woman as reclaimable; she wanted to reabsorb her back into a recognisable, domestic environment. The difficulty with this conviction was that it left her susceptible to the fears of her middle-class peers who mistrusted tainted femininity and overt sexuality. Interestingly,

the novel, in Gaskell's mind, also became a forbidden, corruptible object, which, like the prostitute, had to be kept away from the middle-class home. Despite her novels having similar intentions to that of the sermon, she was not able to access the authority that the minister possessed in the chapel. In fact, her appropriation of the authority of the preacher was continuously conflicted, as she sought to break free from patriarchal models. For her, authority could only ever be exercised effectively in a world where God's principles were paramount. Her criticism of middle-class culture in Manchester was largely to do with the evidence, as she saw it, of a separation, particularly in a capitalist context, between authority and an active spirituality. Her own identification with St. Sebastian suggests that she saw herself as a martyred novelist, exposed to the critical observations of her Unitarian community. Regardless of the vulnerability of this position, it was consciously taken and justifiably owned; she was convinced that her intention to speak out an 'earnest truth' would sustain her. Therefore, Gaskell's problematic relationship with the Unitarians did nothing to dissuade or weaken her conviction of faith, or prevent her using the literary form to interact with future societal concerns.

Chapter Four

Josephine Butler, the Campaign Community and the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts

Much has been written from a sociological, historicist and feminist perspective about Josephine Butler's involvement in the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, and 1869), her leadership of the Ladies National Association (LNA) and her contribution towards grassroots feminism. Dale Spender and Barbara Cain have sought to claim Butler as a feminist campaigner and yet her strong, religious convictions have made her a difficult recruit.¹ Judith Walkowitz, as already touched upon in Chapter Three, gives a detailed analysis of prostitution in the nineteenth century, assessing the effectiveness of the repealers' campaign by focusing on the parliamentary representatives and the pressure-groups.² Butler's own participation in the repealers' movement was prolific: she led an (inter) national campaign by using public oratory to arouse mass support, liaised with Sir John Stansfeld (the Parliamentary representative for repeal), organised inter-denominational prayer meetings, and withstood private, written and verbal attack. Despite failing health, she demonstrated great stamina and resilience to lead the campaign movement for over twenty years, culminating in the suspension and then the repeal of the Acts (1883, 1886). However, Butler's involvement in reform did not end there, for she desired to see the disestablishment of the Acts in all the far flung corners of the British Empire; in 1887, it was evident that the repeal of the Acts did not extend to British Colonies like India. She was also concerned with exposing child trafficking, and in 1885 supported W. T. Stead's five day exposé in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, entitled the 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'; she provided one of her reformed prostitutes, Rebecca Jarrett, as an undercover groomer. However, it is Butler's use of the written word, particularly produced for repeal that I want to explore in this chapter. Butler is usually assessed as a feminist reformer but I want to suggest that in order to understand her approaches to repeal we must engage with her as a literary writer. She disseminated much of her agenda and faith, not only in public speeches, but in a variety of literary forms – essays, biographies, and religious pamphlets.

In a conversation with two close friends and members of the LNA, Mary Priestman and Margaret Tanner, Butler discusses the predicament of what they, as women, should do

¹ See Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 151; Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas*, p. 334.

² See Walkowitz, pp. 69-147.

to get involved with repeal. She was answered with unflinching directness: “well, we must rouse the country”.³ The method of awakening public consciousness has typically been equated with the activities of the LNA, who toured the country holding repeal meetings and actively encouraging the protest of women. I would not deny that this was a large part of how the repeal movement disseminated its concerns, and much can be learnt, and will be assessed, from such touring speeches given by Butler and parliamentary representatives: they are a helpful starting point for establishing the repeal community’s agenda, particularly Butler’s contribution. However, I would also argue that Butler’s written word, her biographies (familial accounts and the lives of saints) and scriptural interpretations, which were often researched and written in the busiest, most exhausting legs of the campaign, were self-consciously produced to engage with repeal. Butler’s motivation for the campaign, her conviction of faith and her desire for a Christian society are meshed together in seemingly straightforward accounts of historical biographies of saints: *Catharine of Siena* (1878) and *Life of Jean Frederic Oberlin* (1882). As noted by Atkinson, there was a trend in the nineteenth century to write about the ‘obscure’ subject or the hidden life. Biographies of unknown missionaries, clergymen, schoolmasters or the lives of the saints became ‘prolific, explicitly defined against the contemporary fashion for biographies of “Great”, or famous, men’.⁴ Biographies of hidden lives allowed Butler to fix her own potentially controversial life in a Christian tradition, drawing affirmation from past, godly lives. This identification, however, did not end with her own individual experience, but instead she offered the saints’ lives as blueprints for her campaign community.

The chapter will be split into two unequal parts, spending slightly more time establishing Butler’s personal convictions before examining the communal experience of repeal. Despite not wanting to repeat sociological surveys, I will provide the context for Butler’s social engagement, summarising the impact and consequences of the Contagious Diseases Acts, whilst introducing the national and political campaign for repeal. Public and medical opinions of prostitution will be briefly touched upon, building upon the discussion in Chapter Three, but focusing this time on the latter half of the nineteenth century (1868-

³ Josephine Butler, *An Autobiographical Memoir*, ed., George W. Johnson and Lucy A. Johnson (Bristol, 1912), p. 306. Qtd. Walkowitz, p. 93.

There were four Priestman sisters, all Quakers, personally known to Butler, and involved in repeal. Ursula married Jacob Bright, Margaret was married to Arthur Tanner, whilst the two remaining unmarried sisters, Anna and Mary, became Butler’s most trusted colleagues and intimate friends. There are several unpublished letters cited in this chapter written simply to a Miss Priestman. In those cases, I have assumed the letter to be written to Anna, as the etiquette of writing to the elder sister would mean that the first name was often dropped. Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 110.

⁴ Atkinson, pp. 30-31.

1886). Key pressure groups such as the National Association and the LNA, alongside key individuals (Sir James Stansfeld and the Priestman sisters), will allow a communal, campaigning community to emerge, before we establish Butler's function within it. Butler's involvement in repeal, and her understanding and conceptualisation of community, stemmed from her Christian belief. Her allegiance to the Anglican Church, to which her husband George belonged, was tenuous and ambivalent. I will argue, therefore, that Butler's personal understanding of 'vital' Christianity superseded any church affiliation, and instead caused her to promote a coalition of Christian support centralised around repeal.

Butler exhorted a communion with God that was personal, direct and full of divine affirmation. Sue Zemka identifies a shift towards a 'feminine Christology' in art and literature, dating from the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ We can observe such a re-gendering of the divine in Butler's writings as she recognises the feminine within Christ. Consequently, Christ could act as exemplary model, calling Butler to follow his example and be a prophetic voice. Such an understanding of the prophetic – a divine call of God – caused her, as I will argue, to accept the leadership of a national crusade against the Contagious Diseases Acts. She believed that the role of the prophet, through prayer and protest, was to 'show forth the mind of God' and to stimulate and mobilise a reform movement.⁶ In this way, religious conviction allowed the feminine to be politicised. In Butler's understanding of the prophetic, a future vision should be revealed – an 'imagined' community – where the values of the prophet are lived out. Butler subscribed to a 'realized eschatology' that sought to see God's spirit at work in this world rather than waiting for a future consummation.⁷ God's kingdom embraced gender equality, a feminine Christ (which had implications for gender definitions), the conversion of those in opposition and the moral advancement of society. Sean Gill argues that 'no understanding of Christian gendered identity in Victorian society is possible without the recognition that masculinity and femininity were defined in relation to each other'.⁸ Therefore, as we explore Butler's identification with Christ, we not only understand Butler's conception of femininity but the implications that this had for masculinity; normative gender roles are complicated as Christ's humanity is appropriated by Butler. I will use Butler's writings, particularly the biography of Catharine of Siena, to unpack Butler's

⁵ *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Qtd. Melnyk, "Mighty Victims", p. 131.

⁶ This memoir was published posthumously (1912), prefaced by Butler's colleague James Stuart. It gathers together extracts 'from most of her principal publications, so as to give some idea of her extensive literary work'. *An Autobiographical Memoir*, pp. iv, 236.

⁷ See Hester Jones, "Recognising Fellow-Creatures": F. D. Maurice, Octavia Hill and Josephine Butler', in *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, ed. by Victoria Morgan and Clare Williams (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 21-38 (p. 30).

⁸ Gill, p. 166.

vision for the world, to understand her feminine calling and to see how she conceived the repeal campaign within this wider purpose.

Finally, in the second half of the chapter, I will explore how Butler negotiated her personally held Christian beliefs within the campaign community. To what extent was Butler's theology – her vision for repeal and the world – disseminated by the community? To what extent was repeal supported and fuelled through dissenting energies? It could be argued that Butler was rather single-minded, creating a community that revolved around her opinions and convictions. And yet Butler encouraged a consensus or coalition of belief, albeit on her grounds, which mobilised a national movement. I will take the poetic writings of Mary Lomax and Ursula Bright, the speeches of Sir James Stansfeld, the newspaper *Shield*, and the medical reports of Dr. Blackwell (to name just a few) to see where consensus was reached. Despite the differing literary forms and rhetorical voices, these texts shared similar ideas about how repeal should be achieved and maintained. By examining the texts alongside each other, I hope to reveal that this community 'created' a literature of its own.

'Vital' Christianity and Butler's Prophetic Call

Josephine Butler commenced the second edition of *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896) with the following succinct introduction:

Our long years of labour and conflict on behalf of this just cause, ought not to be forgotten. A knowledge of, and a reverence for, the principles for which we have striven ought to be kept alive, for these principles are very far from being yet so clearly recognised as that our children and our children's children may not be called upon to rise again and again in their defence.⁹

Almost immediately, from her opening words, we can glean something about Butler's attitude towards the 'Great Crusade': she venerates the worthiness of the cause and its personal cost; she reveals an anxiety that the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts might not be permanent, that the 'principles' of the reformers might be rejected; finally, the act of memorial is the only sure way of solidifying the foundations that they have laid down. In order to understand what motivated and sustained this 'just cause', and what principles were acted upon, we must first establish what the repealers were fighting against. Chapter Three has already established the differing public perceptions of the fallen woman, which fluctuated from demonic temptress to seduced innocence. This shifting ideological labelling

⁹ Josephine E. Butler, 'Introduction', in *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall, 1898).

of the fallen woman often determined the method of amelioration, and as explored in Gaskell's novel *Ruth*, philanthropic concern grappled with medical and legislative advice. Regulationists, such as Acton, believed that the problem of prostitution was not going to go away and so the spread of venereal diseases should be tackled and prioritised.¹⁰ As a consequence, the initial Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866) were implemented on what Walkowitz calls 'narrow sanitary grounds [...] designed to control the spread of venereal disease among enlisted men'. They applied to 'specific military depots in southern England and Ireland and they were overseen by the War Office and the Admiralty'.¹¹ In practice, this legislation allowed the detention and internal examination of suspected prostitutes. If the woman refused to be examined she could be imprisoned with or without hard labour until she submitted. Once examined and if found to be diseased then she could be sectioned, without objection or protest, for up to six months in lock hospitals. The names of those found to be clean were entered into a 'public register of permitted prostitutes', so in effect prostitution was legalised by the law.¹² Butler recognised that ideologically it was a 'deadly fight on the part of us women for our bodies', struggling particularly against the medical outrage of forced examination.¹³ Butler learned from first-hand accounts the violation and full horrors involved in the procedure that made her determined to fight this injustice. One woman described the experience in dehumanising terms: being pulled and prodded as 'if you were cattle, and hadn't no feeling'.¹⁴ It was the regulationist's intention to extend the parameters of the legislation to reach the entire country, endangering, in Butler's opinion, the respectability of all women found in the wrong place at the wrong time: working class women, particularly, if working late or early, were seen to be vulnerable if the Acts were extended and they were placed at the mercy of a policeman.¹⁵

¹⁰ Acton's 'Preface' to the 1870 edition of *Prostitution* acknowledges that the 'mind and conscience of the nation' has been awakened to the problem of prostitution, claiming 'without vanity' to have 'paved the way for, and guided the progress of this change'. His decision to revise and reprint his work, however, was to overcome the apparent 'great unwillingness' to extend the Acts nationally. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the views challenged by Butler's campaign community were those held by individuals like Acton (p. vi).

¹¹ Walkowitz, pp. 71-72.

¹² See Styler, p. 125.

¹³ 'A Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Mr. Edmundson, 28 March 1872'. Qtd. Caine, *Victorian Feminist*, p. 185.

¹⁴ 'Parliamentary Papers', 1871, XIX. Qtd. Walkowitz, p. 202.

¹⁵ 'Influential Meeting of Ladies, Speech given by Josephine E. Butler to the Women's Meetings, Mayor's Parlour, Manchester, Monday 14 March 1870', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic*, ed. by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 5 vols (London: Routledge, 2003), II, pp. 61-66 (p. 63).

In 1869, the third Contagious Diseases Act was passed, extending the legislation to cover 18 towns in the British Isles.¹⁶ Butler's involvement with the North of England Council for Education seemed to naturally recommend her for the public leadership of the LNA, which quickly formed after the NA excluded women from its membership. Despite female exclusion, both associations worked closely together, co-leading and subsidising the periodical *Shield*, as the primary disseminator of the repealers' campaign.¹⁷ Paul McHugh suggests that 'simply to have created a women's organisation to agitate on a subject which so many found distasteful was an achievement in itself'.¹⁸ The importance of female opposition will be explored later, in greater detail, but for now it is useful to note that exclusion from debate seemed to fuel female involvement all the more. Butler confessed in the *Recollections of George Butler* (1892) that the 'call to conflict' was not taken lightly, with her decision to be involved initially kept from her husband, for she feared his disapproval. In fact, the opposite proved true and he 'respected the conviction' that she recognised as a divine call.¹⁹ On the last day of 1869, the first Ladies' Protest was published, which outlined their 'solemn protest against these Acts'.²⁰ An examination of this pamphlet reveals the objections that were used consistently to undermine the legal, medical and moral status of the Acts.²¹ Firstly, the Acts were considered unparliamentary because they had been 'passed, not only without the knowledge of the country, but unknown, in a great measure, to Parliament itself'. This underhand manoeuvring of the Acts was something that Butler flagged up again and again. They illegally detained women without trial, conviction or correct procedure. Secondly, they were medically unsound because statistically there was no evidence that the measures were reducing the spread of disease. Finally, the laws were morally unjust because they unfairly punished one sex whilst letting the more culpable sex sin without consequence.²²

The unexpectedness of this female-devised objection caused one parliamentary member to note to Butler:

¹⁶ Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, p. 107.

¹⁷ McHugh does comment, however, that it was a 'constant source of annoyance' to the LNA that it was obligated to 'pay part of the *Shield*'s subsidy without, as it seemed, being able to influence its direction'. *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 181, 183.

¹⁸ McHugh, p. 165.

¹⁹ *Recollections of George Butler* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1900), p. 221.

²⁰ *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 94.

²¹ According to Anne Summers, 'opponents of the Acts took up their stand on three grounds, arguing that they infringed principles of morality, of the political constitution, and of natural justice'. "'The Constitution Violated": The Female Body and the Female Subject in the Campaigns of Josephine Butler', *History Workshop Journal*, 48 (1999), 1-15 (p. 2).

²² *Personal Reminiscences*, pp. 9-10.

Your manifesto has shaken us very badly in the House of Commons [...] We know how to manage any other opposition in the House or in the country, but this is very awkward for us – this revolt of the women. It is quite a new thing; what are we to do with such an opposition as this?²³

This protest of women shook Parliament because it had demonstrated both a logical and capable reasoning mind, but it was also evidence of a collective and mobilised voice. And yet when Butler reflected on this incident – on the possible success of female influence – she wrote that it was purely a ‘pause’ before the ‘signs of much agitation and business among our opponents’ ensued.²⁴ Their protest hit a wall of silence and the LNA had to engage politically through the parliamentary representative, Sir James Stansfeld. Stansfeld chose to announce his public support of repeal at the LNA’s Annual meeting in 1874, which suggests the importance he placed upon women’s involvement. Stansfeld was immediately effective in widening support by encouraging the formation of the National Medical Association in 1875, which helped to enlist ‘medical opinion in support of repeal’.²⁵ Repeal bills were ‘introduced into the House of Commons almost every year throughout the 1870s, but they rarely secured more than 100 votes’.²⁶ The combination of parliamentary, medical and amateur protest had finally come together but it would be a decade or so before the union paid off.

Butler is quick to concede in her *Personal Reminiscences* that ‘[w]e, the women of England, were not the first to arise in opposition to this iniquity [...] warning lights had been held out from time to time by persons or societies who thoroughly knew the system’.²⁷ Significantly, it is dissenting religious groups such as the Baptists and other Nonconformist Ministers (Charles Birrell) that she chooses to commemorate. Butler consistently championed the involvement of Christian, particularly nonconformist, groups, believing that such a coalition of belief would create a strong protest voice. However, in order to understand Butler’s vision of community we must first examine her own Christian conviction. Despite believing that faith was an intensely private matter, she was baffled that after years of public engagement her Christianity was frequently misaligned with Anglicanism. Writing in a letter to a fellow campaigner, Anna Priestman, dated 17th January 1883, Butler finds herself having to explain her institutional allegiance:

²³ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁵ Walkowitz, p. 97.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁷ *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 4.

I thought everyone knew that I am *not* of the Church of England & never was. I go to Church once a Sunday out of a feeling of loyalty to my husband – that is all. I was brought up a Wesleyan, but my father was allied with the free Church of Scotland, & my mother was a Moravian. I imbibed from childhood the widest ideas of vital Christianity, only it *was* Christianity. I have not much sympathy with the *Church*.²⁸

The use of italics within this letter is strikingly pointed as she attempts to distance herself from the Church that her husband serves. However, in the *Recollections of George Butler*, we get a sense that Butler objects, like her husband, to the institutional practices that detract from a personal expression of belief. For example, George wrote in 1851, ‘if I should ever take orders, I don’t mean to be a mere parson; for if I were like some of them whom I know, I should cease to be a *man*’.²⁹ Dressing up and performing official mannerisms was viewed by him as an ‘affectation’, with Butler noting that to the end of his life, George’s character was ‘essentially that of a layman’.³⁰ This suggests that they both saw religion not as a specific vocation or label but as an act of character, a disposition and as a state of being that one inhabits. Interestingly, Butler closely identified with George’s ordination, writing that ‘when the bishop’s hand rested on his shining curls, I felt as if I was being ordained too’.³¹ This speaks not only to the closeness of the Butlers’ relationship but to a shared, ‘vital’ principle of belief: that a calling from God superseded institutional affiliations. Such an ordination (of divine approval) could be received by Butler, but she would choose to exercise it outside of the Church.

As the above, extended quotation reveals, Butler’s family’s Christianity was ‘strongly trans-denominational, [and] non-sectarian’, incorporating into it what Rebecca Styler would label ‘Evangelical spirituality’. This became the ‘dominant form of faith in both orthodox and dissenting traditions’, emphasising an ‘emotional “experience” of God in daily life’, which ‘imbued the everyday with spiritual significance’.³² Butler called this experience of Christianity ‘vital’, seeking to capture within this adjective its centralising and essential characteristics: it is the life-force of a human, directing and fuelling all activity and purpose. Despite the evidence, as Jenny Uglow argues, of a ‘social milieu’ actively

²⁸ ‘Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Anna Maria Priestman, 17 January 1883’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, pp. 197-199 (p. 197).

²⁹ *Recollections of George Butler*, p. 64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³² See Lisa Severine Nolland, *A Victorian Feminist Christian: Josephine Butler, the Prostitutes and God* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), p. 265; Styler, p. 8.

participating in and around Butler's upbringing, Butler believed her own faith to be learnt directly from God:³³

Now the things which I believed I had learned direct from God. I never sat at the feet of any man; I never sought light or guidance even from any saint; man or woman, though I dearly loved some such whom I had known, and learned much from their example; nor on Churches and creeds had I ever leaned.³⁴

On first reading, it appears that Butler is prioritising her individual communion with God above the need for communal interaction. And in this context, Butler's spiritual survival is solely dependent on God's affirmation. This reflection came from a time of her life when she was first married to George and they were living in the isolating, academic environment of Oxford. Butler lacked female companionship and the space for open, mutual intellectual discussion. Instead, she listened in silence, with a 'sore heart', to men talking on topics (particularly the fate of the fallen woman) that she had 'already revolved deeply' in her own mind: 'things of which I was convinced, which I knew, though I had no dialectics at command with which to defend their truth'.³⁵ Because she failed to gain any communal approval for her opinions, she sought affirmation from God.

Butler's perception that she had no suitable 'dialectics' at hand with which to defend her understanding of God, particularly his affirmation of the female mind, resulted in new and creative ways of communicating her faith. Rebecca Styler argues that many female writers created a 'literary theology', which used literary forms to disguise and circulate religious ideas.³⁶ In Butler's case, she maximised the biographical form, and Biblical studies of character, to offer original ideas about God and his relationship to humanity. According to Julie Melnyk, such 'original ideas about God', despite the 'nontraditional' format, should identify Victorian women writers with the theologian.³⁷ Therefore, by examining Butler's biographies, I believe we can identify her theological leanings – what lay behind her definition of 'vital' Christianity – and get a clearer sense of what motivated her as a woman to participate in the repeal campaign.

As noted in the Introduction, Sean Gill and Julie Melnyk identify an increased anxiety concerning the feminisation of Christ in literature, theology and art; this image embodied the 'virtues and roles allotted to women according to "separate spheres" gender

³³ Jenny Uglow, 'Josephine Butler: From Sympathy to Theory', in *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions*, ed. by Dale Spender (London: The Women's Press, 1983), pp. 146-164 (p. 147).

³⁴ *Recollections of George Butler*, pp. 98-99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³⁶ Styler, p. 1.

³⁷ Julie Melnyk, 'Introduction', *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. xi-xii.

ideology'.³⁸ Christ's 'passivity and suffering' were prioritised above his divinity or power. According to Gill, 'what was at stake was the author's sense of self as a man' as he sought to exemplify those qualities traditionally regarded as feminine (and now Christian) without loss to his 'traditional masculine identity'.³⁹ Butler negotiates these anxieties by blurring gender boundaries, choosing instead to empower femininity. Firstly, Butler identified the feminine within the divine, choosing to see Christ as an embodiment of both female and male virtue. In the 'Introduction' to her edited collection, *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture* (1869), Butler is dismissive of St. Paul's writings, arguing that 'His (Christ's) teaching was for all time; much of St. Paul's was for a given time'.⁴⁰ She would rather be gazing on the acts of Christ who, through his words and deeds, proclaimed an equality that was wider and deeper than culturally assumed; subtle 'subdivisions' – physical, intellectual or moral – between men and women could not be found in the teachings of Christ. Instead, Christ chose women to reveal the 'most stupendous announcement' ever made to the world: his resurrected body.⁴¹ She is impatient of any male attempt to interpret Christ's behaviour to women, believing it to be 'deficient', for 'few men can thoroughly know the minds of women in a state of society in which the reality of woman's nature is repressed'.⁴² Interestingly, however, Christ is able to fully understand the female condition, and has permission to, because his behaviour towards women has proven his identification with them:

Search throughout the Gospel history, and observe his conduct in regard to women, and it will be found that the word liberation expresses, above all others, the act which changed the whole life and character and position of the women dealt with, and which ought to have changed the character of men's treatment of women from that time forward.⁴³

Christ's unique ability to understand femininity stems from Butler's belief that the divine Christ is both male and female. In *The Lady of Shumen* (1894), Butler writes that Christ alone 'knew perfectly the heart of woman', demonstrating his 'exquisite humanity' in his act of 'delivering the son to *his mother*'. Butler is alluding to Jesus' concern for his mother on the cross, securing her future protection with his disciple John.

However, Christ's divinity does not prevent Butler from exploring the idea that his 'exquisite humanity' could be nurtured and encouraged within men, and would ultimately

³⁸ Melnyk, "'Mighty Victims'", p. 131.

³⁹ Gill, pp. 166-167.

⁴⁰ 'Introduction', in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays*, ed. by Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869), pp. ii-lxiv (p. liv).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. liv-lv, lvi.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. lvi.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. lix.

transform men's perception of the capabilities of women. The essays included in Butler's edited collection reflect this shifting attitude towards women's capabilities, challenging assumptions of mental deficiencies. James Stuart writes that it was the wisdom of God which gave to women the 'capacity for science' and that science should be taught more widely because it teaches people to 'think' for themselves.⁴⁴ George Butler venerates women's concern for the individual, valuing this as an essential faculty for the teaching of children; they form not only the child's mind but character. He sees this concern for the individual as distinctively gendered but he uses it to open up the educational space, offering teaching as a worthy 'profession' for women. Educational opportunities should be increased for women, so that the quality of teaching is not limited by a lack of 'contact with minds of a superior order'.⁴⁵ There is also a call within the collection to radicalise the approaches taken towards philanthropy, which Butler believed to have been either too feminine or too masculine. She identifies feminine philanthropy as the independent ministering of inadequate voluntary groups, whereas there was a current trend towards a masculine show of large and comprehensive measures, sanctioned and organised by parliamentary men. She predicts the failure of both and instead asks the question: 'why should we not try at last a union of principles which are equally true?'⁴⁶ The tendency towards centralisation of government 'carried with it dangers that could only be met by bringing women's influence into public work'.⁴⁷ The possibility of such a union appears to be drawn from the understanding that Christ embodied in himself the perfect combination of feminine and masculine qualities, ministering to humanity out of this union.

As seen in Chapter One, Christian virtues were considered to be 'peculiarly feminine', but writers such as Charles Kingsley attempted to reclaim a feminised Christianity through a masculine identity; what came to be termed as 'muscular Christianity'. This definition sought to associate 'physical strength, religious certainty and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself' in the perfect embodiment of manliness, Christ.⁴⁸ Kingsley also objected to what he perceived as the Tractarian and unmanly 'fastidious, maundering, die-away effeminacy' which suppressed 'man's God-

⁴⁴ James Stuart, 'The Teaching of Science', in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, pp. 121-151 (pp. 135, 121).

⁴⁵ Rev. G. Butler, 'Education Considered as a Profession for Women', in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, pp. 49-77 (pp. 75, 53).

⁴⁶ 'Introduction', in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, p. xxxvii.

⁴⁷ J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *James Stansfeld: A Victorian Champion of Sex Equality* (London: Longmans, 1932), p. 143.

⁴⁸ See Donald E. Hall, 'Muscular Christianity: Reading and Writing the Male Social Body', in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. by Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 3-13 (p. 7).

given physical nature through ascetic privations'.⁴⁹ According to David Rosen, Kingsley's public persona, 'insofar as his contemporaries used it to define masculinity, suggested that manliness required "boldness", "honesty" and "plainness"; defiance of authority; stoic patience; and violent energy'.⁵⁰ By aligning man with such qualities, masculinity could attempt to 'control' a world in which gender and class boundaries were slowly being eroded.⁵¹ The trope of chivalry, however, was vital in balancing an assertive but potentially aggressive masculinity. Kingsley chose to view the image of Christ on the cross as 'the true prowess, the true valour, the true chivalry, the true glory, and the true manhood'.⁵² He sought to re-establish gender boundaries by providing masculinity with a Christ who could speak directly to man's middle-class role, particularly as contributors and performers in a 'competitive, capitalist economy'.⁵³

Butler, however, chose to complicate masculinity by infusing it with typically feminine (Christian) qualities of nurturing. In *The Lady of Shumen*, Butler declared that her 'humble' intention was to use Biblical lives to demonstrate God's attitude towards parents and families, particularly to encourage mothers that God had revealed his character to them. And yet Butler praises the fact that there are many men who can 'fathom and follow the mother's experience in all except natural child-bearing'.⁵⁴ She takes seriously the capacity of men to 'mother' children and, to prove this, she retells traditional stories of exemplary faith, such as the life of the Patriarch of Israel, Abraham; she re-imagines his life as a 'father, a human and earthly father'.⁵⁵ She confesses that her reading of Abraham's life might only be 'motherly, a womanly reading of it, and theologically worthless', but '[b]e it so!'⁵⁶ She claims the right to interpret the scripture in her capacity as a woman and as a mother. Gender, in fact, should not disqualify her reading of the text; for, as she astutely notes, St. Paul would consistently offer scriptural readings regardless of the fitness of his capacity to

⁴⁹ *Charles Kingsley Letters and Memories of his Life*, ed. by Fanny Kingsley, 2 vols (1877), I, p. 249. Qtd. Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 38.

⁵⁰ 'The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness', in *Muscular Christianity*, pp. 17-43 (p. 19).

⁵¹ See Donald E. Hall, 'Muscular Christianity', p. 9.

⁵² Charles Kingsley, *David: Four Sermons Preached before the University of Cambridge* (London: Macmillan, 1865), p.61. Qtd. Gill, p. 170.

⁵³ Gill, p. 166.

⁵⁴ *The Lady of Shumen* (London: Horace Marshall and Son, 1894), pp. 3, 8.

Rebecca Styler argues that men's love as mothers is a radical extension of care for the individual, and is de-gendered once and for all when Butler claims its source lies in the 'great Father-Mother, God'. God's character, itself beyond gender, models a quality of love to be imitated by all who call themselves Christian (pp. 145-146).

⁵⁵ *The Lady of Shumen*, pp. 3, 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

do so. In fact, as Rebecca Styler argues, St. Paul often reduced the person or character in his writings to an object, failing to see past his systemising agenda.⁵⁷ For example, in the letter to the Galatians, he fails to treat the story of Hagar compassionately because he was not a father nor did he have the ‘human heart of a man stirring within him’.⁵⁸ Butler is making a bold assertion here: that divinely inspired or not, her understanding of scripture can and should compete with St. Paul’s.

Despite Butler’s maternal identification with Christ, when it came to writing familial biographies, she appeared to follow common practice and prioritised the memorialisation of male members of her family: her father and husband.⁵⁹ However, Helen Rogers argues that for Victorian feminists, such as Butler, the father held the position of ‘exemplary role-model, for their own and for their reader’s private and public behaviour’. The ‘inspiration for moral or political agency lay not within, through personal examination, but on the contrary, without, by looking to the exemplary figure’.⁶⁰ Juliette Atkinson notes that exemplary biography in the latter half of the century was ‘pervasive, and the belief in the emulative power of biography was rarely questioned’. Much faith was placed in the ability of biography to ‘modify the way in which lives were lived’.⁶¹ The father’s life could constitute an exemplary masculinity that included feminine qualities and so provide the daughter with a physical manifestation of Christ. This is how I would assess Butler’s characterisation of her father, husband and an eighteenth-century pastor, retold in the *Life of Jean Frederic Oberlin*. In an unpublished letter dated October 1869, Mary Somerville congratulates Butler on ‘writing such a good life of her father’, believing it to be a ‘model’ to the ‘rising generation at home’ and raising the ‘character of the nations abroad’.⁶² Somerville recognised the exemplary impulse of Butler’s writing, perceiving the good that it will offer in raising the national character of men. When writing of her father, John Grey, Butler sets up his life, conduct, and moral code as the saving grace for the next generation. If young men heeded his way of life – ‘of purity of heart, of innocency of life, of constancy in

⁵⁷ Styler, p. 149.

⁵⁸ *The Lady of Shumen*, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Caine sees this as an unusual and rather regrettable move. *Victorian Feminist*, p. 158.

Butler did, however, towards the end of her life write a biography of her sister: *In Memoriam: Harriet Meuricoffre* (1901). A pamphlet concerning the life of *Rebecca Jarrett* (1886) was the only other publication Butler wrote concerning a female subject. This life of Jarrett was written with the express purpose to present the facts of this reformed prostitute’s involvement in W. T. Stead’s investigation into child prostitution. Jarrett was imprisoned for her alleged role as undercover groomer, a position that Butler recommended her for and hence felt responsible for.

⁶⁰ Helen Rogers, ‘In the Name of the Father: Political Biographies by Radical Daughters’, in *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, pp. 145-163 (pp. 148-149).

⁶¹ Atkinson, pp. 25, 29.

⁶² ‘Letter from Mary Somerville to Josephine E. Butler, 14 October 1868’, York, University of York Library, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

love' – then the morality and stability of society would be assured.⁶³ She is not afraid to write that he was 'like a woman in his tenderness; like a girl in purity of mind and thought'.⁶⁴ Here she is alluding to the sexual lusts of man and the argument that men cannot but live promiscuous lives. Her father's life is evidence that they can in fact be controlled. Suddenly, the feminine qualities of her father are brought into a wider ideological debate about the sexual mores of British men. A constant argument that Butler had to battle with (and which I will explore later) was that prostitution was an inevitable part of social life, the supply for man's lustful demands. Butler chooses to answer such opposition with experience, to 'testify' to the existence of pure men in 'our English homes'.⁶⁵ We see Butler using memoir to disseminate her arguments for the repeal campaign, but also to confirm her understanding of Christ and how gender was constructed in relation to his character. She understood that her feminine-imbued Christ would directly affect masculine identity, but instead of being troubled by gender confusion she sought to raise the stakes: masculinity could be enhanced by the embracing of feminine qualities.

Butler not only used biographies to complicate normative gender roles but also to justify her involvement in a contested political campaign. Her identification with Christ, his divine femininity and maternal qualities (also seen in the portrayal of her father), inspired Butler to accept the role of a public, *female* leader. According to James Stuart, a close family ally and an advisor to Butler, it was largely the campaign Butler led that 'broke down the state of things, and familiarized people with the appearance of women upon the platform'.⁶⁶ Stansfeld was determined to 'defend the part which women have taken upon this subject. I will hold the question above all things to be theirs'.⁶⁷ Although hopeful that men could inhabit Christian principles of mothering, Butler confirmed wholeheartedly that 'systematized prostitution' would never be 'overthrown' till it was 'attacked by women'.⁶⁸ It

⁶³ *Memoir of John Grey of Dilston* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1869), p. 339.

Similarly to Hannah More, Butler believed that not only individuals but the nation had a moral duty to set an exemplary model for the rest of the world. Writing in the *Shield*, Butler understood the national importance of repeal: 'When we have won our parliamentary battle at home, England will become a great lever-power for the rest of the world, and it will be her duty then to supply the moral force needed for the purifying of society elsewhere'. 'The Northern Counties' League for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts', *Shield* (25 November, 1874), p. 241.

⁶⁴ *Memoir of John Grey of Dilston*, p. 336.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁶⁶ James Stuart, *Reminiscences* (London: Chiswick Press, 1911), p. 230.

⁶⁷ *Substance of the Speeches of the Rt. Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P., on the Contagious Diseases Acts: Delivered at Bristol, Oct. 15th, 1874; Bradford, Nov. 11th, 1874; Scarborough, Nov. 20th, 1874; Birmingham, Dec. 8th, 1874; Liverpool, Jan; 25th, 1875; Edinburgh, Feb. 1st, 1875; London (St. James' hall) March 3rd, 1875; London (Cannon street hotel) May 4th, 1875* (London: National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1875), p. 30.

⁶⁸ 'A Letter to the Members of the Ladies' National Association, August 1875', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, pp. 149-159 (p. 150).

was her desire to mobilise a ‘holy league’ of women, uniting with a national league of men, to ‘make war against this evil’ of legislation.⁶⁹ Rather than openly challenging the ideological spaces that men had to articulate power – ‘the press, the pulpit, the bar, the senate’ – which she hoped one day would be opened up to their services, she insisted that ‘women alone can fully represent the down trodden of their own sex’.⁷⁰ By identifying themselves as mothers, middle-class women absorbed the suffering of prostituted daughters; this gave them the greater impetus to speak out. This was why the creation of the LNA was so significant because, as Butler encouraged its members, ‘you can by your presence bear your part in that collective protest, which is indispensable’.⁷¹

Butler’s rhetoric in speeches was persistently hostile, aggressively undermining a parliament which was not only ‘composed’ of men but ‘representative’ of men. She called for parliament to ‘pause’ before they legislated further on the behalf of women.⁷² Butler argued that suffrage was vital in the fight for equal rights – it would have been a ‘moral lever in the hand of some of us’.⁷³ She makes a direct comparison between the lack of representation in parliament for women and the outrageous treatment of the prostitute at the hands of men. Butler recalls the ‘bitter complaints’ of one particular prostitute:

“Men police lay hands on us. By men we are examined, handled, doctored, and messed on with. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayers and reads the Bible for us. We are had up before the magistrates who are men, and we never get out of the hands of men till we die!” And as she spoke I thought, “And it was a Parliament of men only who made this law which treats you as an outlaw. Men alone met in committee over it. Men alone are the executives.” When men, of all ranks, thus band themselves together for an end deeply concerning women, and place themselves like a thick, impenetrable wall between women and women, and forbid the one class of women entrance into the presence of the other, the weak, the outraged class, it is time that women should arise and demand their most sacred rights in regard to their sisters.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ ‘Address Delivered at Croydon, 3 July 1871’, *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (1871), 3-16 (p. 12).

⁷⁰ ‘A Letter to the Members of the LNA’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, p. 150.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 151.

⁷² ‘On the Dangers of Constructive Legislation in Regard to the Social Evil: Being Extracts from an Address’, *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (1884), 1-4 (p. 2).

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

Dale Spender notes that ‘great care was taken to ensure the two movements were kept distinctly separate [repeal and suffrage] because it was feared that the case for the vote [...] might be brought into disrepute if associated in any way with Josephine Butler and her denunciation of sexual economics’. *Women of Ideas*, p. 343.

⁷⁴ ‘The Garrison Towns of Kent’, *Shield* (9 May, 1870), in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, pp. 92-97 (pp. 92-93).

Butler has a moment of revelation when listening to the prostitute that men (politicians, medical doctors or religious leaders) have in almost every capacity failed to protect, legislate and support vulnerable women. Further still, in denying women the right to suffrage, they have prevented women from effectively changing or challenging the treatment of prostitutes. Butler is acutely aware that the road to suffrage will take too long to change the immediate circumstances of the prostitute. Therefore, she encourages the support of ordinary middle-class women to overcome the ‘impenetrable wall’ set up by men between women.

Butler used historical studies of past saints, and even the memoir of her own father, to uncover a larger, grand narrative of social justice in which to place her own contemporary story. Barbara Cain notes that Butler manipulated the biographical form to detail her own early life experiences, whilst ostensibly paying tribute to the primary life addressed.⁷⁵ Atkinson agrees that it was the ‘enduring trend’ to ‘minimize the presence of the biographer within the work’, and yet Butler, like many others, used the ‘narratives of hidden lives in a self-reflexive manner’.⁷⁶ In this way, Butler overcame the problem of self-effacement, of defining herself in relation to men. Instead, the biography of her father became a self-assertive endeavour, using her early formative years to strengthen her right to lead the campaign. For example, John Grey’s love of liberty is mentioned in relation to his daughter – his egalitarian behaviour is passed on: ‘long accustomed to give his wife and daughters a share in, and to confer with them on all matters of interest and importance, political, social, and professional’.⁷⁷ Through his familial example, Butler emulated his character, learning to love and value liberty: for ‘God made him a Liberal; and a Liberal in the true sense he continued to be to the end of his life [...] his large benevolence, his tender compassionateness, and his respect for the rights and liberties of the individual man’.⁷⁸ Butler makes a further, explicit connection between her father’s teaching and her political fervour: ‘I was educated by my dear father in sound political as well as religious principles’.⁷⁹ Andrew Tate argues that spiritual autobiographies, also known as conversion narratives, were ‘vital in connecting disparate religious communities to a grand narrative of God’s redemptive action in history’.⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Butler uses biographical accounts of saints, who actively participated in the defeat of oppressive practices, to validate the repeal

⁷⁵ Barbara Caine, ‘Feminist Autobiography’, in *Companion to Women’s Historical Writing*, pp. 192-203 (p. 197).

⁷⁶ Atkinson, pp. 24, 31.

⁷⁷ *Memoir of John Grey of Dilston*, p. 327.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁹ ‘On the Dangers of Constructive Legislation’, p. 1.

⁸⁰ ‘Tell the Story: Re-imagining Victorian Conversion Narratives’, in *Shaping Belief*, pp. 3-19 (p. 16).

campaign. Despite public opposition to female involvement, Butler presented contrary evidence that women had been and should always be involved in social justice.

According to Janet Larson, Butler wanted Christian history to be retold from the ‘viewpoint of the marginalized’. This stemmed from a belief that it was in the margins that the true essence of Christianity survived, away from the corrupting forces of pomp and power. It was also in the margins of history that Butler sought examples of radicalised justice, where the concerns of the oppressed had been prioritised.⁸¹ Somewhat troubled, Butler writes in her essay *The Lovers of the Lost* (1870) that her desire was to ‘make some slight record of what Christian Society has done for the Magdalene since the days of our Example on the earth; but such a record as this must needs be a brief and mournful one’.⁸² Interestingly, her search for role models lies entirely within the Catholic Church, conceding that ‘when we ask what recognition of their duty to the Magdalene has been given by the Church of Luther, the Church of Calvin, or our own, we find, till comparatively recent years, a blank’.⁸³ She proceeds to give biographical detail of the worthy women she has found (Queen Sancha, Elizabeth de Ranfain and Marie de Pollalion) who were ‘strongly moved to the aid of outcast women’.⁸⁴ These women are now laid to rest but they stand in the company of their accusers, awaiting the ‘verdict of a greater than any earthly tribunal’; Butler implies that because they have lived well, they will be judged accordingly.⁸⁵ However, the unsettling conclusion that Butler leaves her reader with is that the choice to act on behalf of the marginal still lies within her contemporary reader’s grasp, and, as a consequence, their future fate is still undecided. Her final imperative to ‘look to our own hearts’ is characteristic of Butler’s rhetoric which constantly uses historical lives to reflect on the present day moral condition of her readers; she hopes to move them through example to action.⁸⁶

Despite Butler’s assertion that she ‘never sought light or guidance even from any saint’, there is much evidence within her biography, *Catharine of Siena* (1878), of the saint’s life being used as an exemplary model of Christian femininity. Researched and written during the latter years of the campaign movement, it is difficult not to see the text as a

⁸¹ Janet L. Larson, ‘Josephine Butler’s *Catharine of Siena*: Writing (Auto) Biography as a Feminist Spiritual Practice’, *Christianity and Literature*, 48:4 (1999), 445-471 (p. 463).

⁸² ‘The Lovers of the Lost’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, I, pp. 93-120 (p. 102).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

reflective exercise on Butler's part to assess her practices and actions.⁸⁷ Repeal was tantalisingly close but frustratingly uncertain, and it is likely that Butler sought reassurance not only of success but of God's continued support. The godly life of fourteenth-century Catharine, who sought to reform and reunite the Italian and French Catholic schism, offered Butler the chance to reengage directly with a historical God who had called and chosen a woman for his purposes. Butler liberally uses Catharine's personal diaries and written prayers to reveal the nature of her communion with God, hopeful of revealing the 'real woman, such as she was in her true human character', not only to the reader but to herself.⁸⁸ The prolific hagiography of Catharine makes this seem a sensible decision for a Protestant biographer, but it also suggests Butler's desire to connect ordinary women with extraordinary spirituality.⁸⁹ By diminishing Catharine's saintliness, Butler also protected herself from accusations of self-canonization. Too close an identification and Butler could have been seen as promoting and aggrandising her own importance to the repeal campaign. Historically, the discourse of hagiography had centred on the 'exemplarity of saintly lives', often diminishing the individuality of their subject.⁹⁰ Male-authored vitae, particularly, represented women in such a way as to render them powerless: as 'passive vessels of God's will'. Butler, however, radicalised the female saint, carving out a 'public role' for Catharine, justifying the political space that Butler herself wished to inhabit.⁹¹ She explains that Catharine, from a very early age, began to 'have her little visions of celestial glory, and premonitions of the career to which she was to be called', a career that demonstrated 'power

⁸⁷ Janet L. Larson concludes that Butler's Catharine was 'too complex' a figure, requiring an 'ideological reconstruction' that was beyond her contemporaries' abilities. Catharine embodied an 'athletic woman saint', the 'holy innocent' and 'Christ'. 'Praying Bodies, Spectacular Martyrs, and the Virile Sisterhood: "Salutary and Useful Confusions" in Josephine Butler's *Catharine of Siena*', *Christianity and Literature*, 49:1 (1999), 3-34 (pp. 6, 29).

Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan argue that the 'study of the lives of saints enabled Josephine Butler to develop the spiritual dimension to her identity', whilst teaching her the importance of self-sacrifice. *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), p. 98.

⁸⁸ *Catharine of Siena: A Biography* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1885), p. 331; See Larson, 'Praying Bodies', p. 5.

⁸⁹ Butler, like the Winkworth sisters, had to transcribe a text full of Catholic theology and somehow present it in a palatable form to her largely Protestant readership. Butler chose to omit episodes of troubling supernatural revelations (e.g. the drinking of Christ's blood) and her self-flagellation. Instead, she reclaimed Catharine as a Reformer: 'there can be little doubt that, had she lived two centuries later, in the midst of the convulsion which rent Christendom, she would have stood firm on the side of evangelic truth, and joined her protest to that of the Reformers' (CS, p. 239); The mystical marriage to Christ became an 'evangelical event'. See Larson, 'Writing Auto/Biography', p. 466.

⁹⁰ Juliette Atkinson also notes that one of the difficulties of writing biography was how to achieve a 'balance between the particularity of the subject and the way that he or she was representative of other hidden lives'. The excess of hagiography made it more difficult for Catharine to be accepted by a nineteenth-century Protestant society (p. 36); Mary Spongberg, 'Female Biography', in *Companion to Women's Historical Writing*, pp. 172-182 (p. 173).

⁹¹ Mary Spongberg, 'Hagiography', and Caine, 'Josephine Butler 1828-1906', in *Companion to Women's Historical Writing*, pp. 231-232 (pp. 231-232), pp. 74-75 (p. 75).

to win, to convert, to suffer, to rule, to command, for the salvation of erring man, and for the glory of God' (CS, pp. 23, 43). This hefty list of verbs locates Catharine's life within a politically-charged religious discourse, but, unlike traditional hagiography, Catharine is not passive but has agency, wielding considerable power for the 'glory of God'. She is the 'handmaiden' of the Lord, filled by God's grace with 'courage and power, for the confusion of their [The Roman Church's] forwardness' (CS, pp. 67-8). Catharine is clearly identified here with the Virgin Mary. In the book of Luke, Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel's commission is to declare her willingness to be God's agent: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'.⁹² Mary carries within herself the divine presence of God; this is all the evidence that Catharine and Butler need to show that God endorses femininity, combining fragility with great, divine strength.

This transformation of feminine weakness into a spiritual conduit is crucial for understanding another motive of Butler's for writing the biography. As we have already seen, Butler complicated masculinity and brought it closer to normative female behaviour, but she also wanted to politicise the feminine and reclaim the female body as a site of power.⁹³ Contradictorily, female weakness was a major theme of Catharine's and Butler's life, with both willing to suffer physically for the good of humanity. Butler said of Catharine that she suffered from sickness, stomach complaints and faintness, which made eating difficult, but she failed or refused to acknowledge the ideological attitudes governing Catharine's eating disorders (CS, p. 33). Grace Jantzen has rightly noted that Catharine's 'self-conquest which ended in her starvation in her early 30s' was a 'conflict of wills that was strongly gender-related'. It was commonplace in the Middle Ages to believe that women were strongly tied to the passions of their bodies; in order for them to be considered spiritual, they would have to demonstrate physical 'heroics' – like fasting – beyond what would be necessary for a man. Consequently, female mysticism was linked to the body.⁹⁴ What is troubling is that Butler was unable to see this power discourse in operation in Christian mysticism, but rather confirmed bodily suffering as fitting for followers of Christ. Butler eschews the morbidity or martyrdom present in the following lines: '[Catharine] whispered continually in her prayers the deep desire to be made more and more a partaker of his sufferings' (CS, p. 133).

⁹² Luke 1. 38, p. 932.

⁹³ Larson quotes Margaret R. Miles: she explains that the female mystic chose her flesh to be the 'location and symbol' of her religious identity. *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 54. Qtd. 'Praying Bodies', p. 23.

⁹⁴ Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 217-218, 193.

Inadvertently, Butler seems to have fallen into the trap of making female biography ‘prescriptive’, presenting women with ‘unachievable ideals of femininity’, which were based on extreme suffering.⁹⁵ Melnyk suggests that

a disciplinary account of the effects of Christian ideology – an account long dominant in cultural studies – would claim that women who identified themselves with a feminized Christ were succumbing to a patriarchal ploy: the model of the suffering Saviour was an effective tool for controlling women and encouraging their self-sacrifice in the service of patriarchy.⁹⁶

However, Butler’s valorisation of suffering is not supportive of an earthly patriarch; instead, she had a spiritual understanding of bodily suffering, seeing it as an essential element of Christ’s redemptive role on earth. Despite the problems of this identification, Butler perceived suffering with Christ to be a source of power. Butler pushed her own body to the limits, uncertain that she would physically live to see the repeal of the Acts. In a speech delivered at Croydon, still early on in the campaign (July, 1871), Butler’s rhetoric is of a leader worn out – ‘we have borne a heavy cross’ –, submitting to the probability that ‘strength may not be granted me for a continuance of a public nature’.⁹⁷ This proved not to be the case, but it is fascinating to see that Butler’s identification with Christ was prepared to go all the way to death: ‘I spoke as a dying man to dying men’.⁹⁸ Roxanne Eberle suggests that at times Butler ‘deliberately casts herself into the role of saint’, with redemption offered through her bodily suffering and even through an untimely death.⁹⁹

In order to fully understand Butler’s identification with Christ, particularly the more troubling construction of the necessity of physical suffering, we need to explore another dimension of Butler’s public role: her position as prophet. Butler, like Catharine of Siena, accepted a divine call of God (‘elected’) to serve humanity (CS, p. 42). In the speech delivered at Croydon (July 3rd, 1871), Butler surmises that if she was a ‘preacher’, she would preach the following:

I would choose for my text to-day the words, “The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ” [...] Do you believe this prophetic utterance, which is echoed through every part of the Scriptures of God? I believe it with all my heart and soul; and I shall fearlessly speak to you *as if you believed it too*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Spongberg, ‘Female Biography’, p. 173.

⁹⁶ Melnyk, “‘Mighty Victims’”, pp. 131-132.

⁹⁷ ‘Address Delivered at Croydon’, pp. 3, 14-15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁹ Eberle, p. 216.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Address Delivered at Croydon’, p. 4.

There are several striking thoughts uttered in this passage. Firstly, Butler imagines herself as a preacher and despite her conditional statement, ‘If I was a preacher’, assumes the authority of one. She offers an exegetical reading of the Biblical passage that is directly informed by her understanding of repeal. She places the ‘kingdoms of this world’, and here she is alluding to political powers, under the dominion of God. To participate in legislative debate, is a religious right. Secondly, she understands the individual verse in the wider context of Biblical scripture, seeking to legitimise her seemingly audacious claim that the kingdom of God can be established in the here and now. Finally, she chooses to act and speak as if the verse was a living reality, both in the external world and in the internal hearts of those listening. According to Lucretia A. Flammang, the role of the prophet, in the Biblical sense of the word, was to provide ‘the people knowledge of God’s role and presence in human history’. Through sympathy and time spent in prayer, the ‘prophet experiences the divine pathos, interprets it, and then communicate it to others’.¹⁰¹ Butler defined a prophet as one who would “‘show forth to man the mind of God” on any matter’ and in the *Hour before the Dawn* (1876), she confessed that ‘I know nothing except what I have learned upon my knees before him, and I will speak nothing except that which I have so learned’.¹⁰² Flammang rightly states that female prophecy ‘disrupted and inverted centuries of patriarchal discourses’; women simply refused to defer to men, having received authority to speak without mediator with God.¹⁰³ Butler’s boldness and acceptance of the LNA’s leadership directly correlated with the validation she received to act as God’s prophet, using biographies like *Catharine of Siena* to testify to this distinctly female tradition.

It was not only Butler who conceived of her role in this way; in fact, it was important for her effectiveness that she was recognised externally as a prophet. James Stansfeld spoke of Butler’s contribution to the campaign in 1875 with the warmest regard and reverence. Interestingly, he takes the qualities of a mother and the figure of Christ and sees them intermingled in the actions of Butler:

She nursed this movement in its infancy; she almost gave it life. She and her co-workers of her own sex, amid obloquy and shame, bore the cross, despising the shame. She led

¹⁰¹ Lucretia A. Flammang, “‘And Your Sons and Daughters Will Prophecy”’: The Voice and Vision of Josephine Butler’, in *Women’s Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 151-164 (pp. 152, 158).

¹⁰² *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 236; *Hour before the Dawn: An Appeal to Men* (London: Trubner, 1876). Qtd. Flammang, p. 158.

¹⁰³ Flammang, p. 159.

the forlorn hope; she sustained the movement in its darkest hours by her dauntless courage and her lofty faith.¹⁰⁴

The religious iconography is striking for the image it paints of Butler as a type of Creator-God, who has not only given life to this movement but has sustained it with her own resources. Stansfeld then takes the religious identification one step further and locates the Christ-like qualities of suffering and endurance in the actions of Butler and her co-workers. He alludes to a passage in Hebrews where the writer calls on the reader to look ‘unto Jesus’, who ‘endured the cross, despising the shame’.¹⁰⁵ It is apparent here that suffering is a part of the Christian life, regardless of gender. This suggests that the bodily suffering embraced by Butler was not a peculiar feminine choice but a model of exemplary Christian behaviour. Butler does not suffer in isolation but is part of a collective stand against opposition. The implication, however, is that she has front-led the movement, providing, as Annie Besant suggests, an ‘example by which we should strive to profit’.¹⁰⁶

A prophet is also chosen to inspire and encourage the faith of others and we see this in an unpublished letter of Butler’s, written to a young woman, Emily Fox, who was involved in the regional LNAs in Leeds. Butler understands the urgency to write to Emily as an ‘impulse’ from God:

When I saw you at the *second* meeting, sitting alone, the words came powerfully to me, “Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord” [...] “She is waiting to be called”. And I felt very tenderly towards you. It was *not* a call to my special work (of the federation) that I was thinking of [...]. It was a higher call I was thinking of – the call to give myself to God, saying “What wouldst thou have me do?” O! If I could tell you the blessedness of offering oneself to God! It is so simple too. *Do it now*.¹⁰⁷

Butler describes here a direct communion with God that demonstrates not only an ability to hear from him in the midst of company but to listen on behalf of others. She also discerns and interprets the divine, recognising that the ‘call’ for one woman might be different for another. In fact, Butler does not reveal to Emily the details of the call but encourages her, nonetheless, to believe that God has something in hand. Butler’s message from God appears to be filtered through her own mental capacity. She describes Emily in the exact words that Catharine of Siena gave to herself: the ‘handmaiden of the Lord’ (CS, p. 68). This

¹⁰⁴ *Speeches of the Rt. Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ Hebrews 12. 2, p. 1108.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Legislation of Female Slavery in England’, *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (1885), 1-8 (p. 1).

¹⁰⁷ ‘Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Emily Ford, 16 June 1882’, Leeds, Brotherton Special Collections, MS c19 Butler.

interestingly suggests that the mystical and the rational co-mingle in the prophet, relying on Butler's ability to navigate between the two. It also makes available to ordinary women, the extraordinary spirituality of Mary – the ultimate model of female obedience.¹⁰⁸ Butler uses her prophetic role to empower and motivate women into an active Christian faith that is individually owned and practised, and yet is cemented in a collective female and Biblical tradition.

It was the prophet's duty, as already suggested, to mediate the vision of God to the wider community. In Butler's case, she wanted to bring God's agenda to the campaign community. By opposing injustice, she believed that the kingdom of God would be established. According to Hester Jones, Butler lived out a 'realized eschatology', putting faith in a divine kingdom that could be experienced in the here and now.¹⁰⁹ She rejected a pre-millennial evangelical notion that the kingdom would only come with the apocalyptic appearance of the second coming of Christ. Butler chose to live as if every act of human kindness would usher in God's kingdom, convinced that Christ was saying to 'his poor deaf Church, "I am here. I am with you now"'.¹¹⁰ Boyd Hilton suggests that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the 'age of atonement' – prioritising God's divinity and distance from man – gave way to the 'age of incarnation': God was understood to dwell in the physical realm through his son, Christ.¹¹¹ Although this is a rather broad historical claim, this shift can be observed in artistic depictions such as William Holman Hunt's painting, *The Shadow of Death* (1873). The painting sought to create and depict an 'authentic' representation of the humanity of Christ by locating him in a historical setting. Gill argues that Hunt was concerned with the physical representation of Christ, seeking to win back his masculinity.¹¹² However, what was important for Butler was that Christ's presence could be experienced in this world through man's cooperation with the Holy Spirit. This is, theologically speaking, a Trinitarian understanding of how God works in the world. Butler confirmed this role of the Spirit in her essay, *Prophet and Prophetesses* (1898):

¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that there is a constant tension in a woman's demeanour towards God between submission and exercising authority. She must pray to God with boldness but it is through obedience and submission that she receives divine power to change the world around her.

¹⁰⁹ Hester Jones, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ 'Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Stanley'. Qtd. Nolland, p. 272.

¹¹¹ The 'age of atonement' characterises Hannah More's and the Evangelicals' faith. See *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economical Thought 1775-1865*, p. 5. Qtd. Styler, p. 18.

¹¹² Gill, p. 164.

The illumination of the Spirit is not a promise of the future only; it is given here on earth to all who seek and wait for it in truth and singleness of heart. We are living to-day under the dispensation of the Spirit.¹¹³

Butler was aware that her hopes for the world might appear as those of a ‘Utopian dreamer’, but she refused, in the light of her relationship with a personal God, to give them up as fancies. Her response is deeply practical and direct: ‘I am sure, that every effort which is made in sincerity and truth, every life which is spent and yielded up in the cause of suffering humanity, is hastening the advent of the Day which we long for’.¹¹⁴ This is how ‘vital’ Christianity had become to Butler: she needed her faith to respond to the wrongs of society in this world; waiting for redemption in the next world was not quite soon enough.

Lisa Severine Nolland is one of several critics to recognise Butler’s involvement in the repeal campaign as one essential part of a wider vision:

The LNA was aiming at a target far beyond simple Repeal; its ultimate goal was the moral transformation of the social order. And Josephine would link this moral transformation with a vision of spiritual renewal.¹¹⁵

Echoes resonate here of Hannah More’s Evangelical vision for the reformation of society. However, Butler does not emulate the Clapham sect’s austere approach of separating the community out from the passions and pleasures of the world in order to see society changed. Instead, Butler shuns the ‘spirit of the world’, which would drown out the thoughts of God.¹¹⁶ Times of quiet meditation are essential in helping the Christian believer to integrate and face the challenges of an ungodly society. Butler, in fact, sees a direct correlation between her spirituality and her social work: ‘I would sit down on the doorsteps of the brothels and pray the people out’.¹¹⁷ For Butler, such an engagement with society would include the repeal of the Acts but also the transformed behaviour of both sexes, particularly the sexual behaviour of men. We have briefly alluded to the double sexual standards that the Acts permitted, with Butler desiring to see men culpable and morally responsible. The ‘practical application’ of ‘equality’ was the only way to see undone the ‘legalised injustices

¹¹³ *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 241.

¹¹⁴ ‘Introduction’, in *Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture*, pp. lxii-lxiv.

¹¹⁵ Nolland, p. 270.

Vron Ware writes that Butler saw Christianity as the ‘means by which the whole world would be saved’. *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 159.

¹¹⁶ *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 238.

¹¹⁷ ‘On the Dangers of Constructive Legislation’, pp. 3-4.

of every kind'.¹¹⁸ In Butler's 'realized eschatology', there is perfect equality between the sexes – the legalised exploitation of one sex for the benefit of the other would become an abhorrent historical event. In fact, enemies of the cause would become converted, abandoning their position to join the forces of good:

Shall we not see the hostile cohorts melting away like mist before the full light of the glad morning, and recognise our foeman of the night to be our 'brothers at break of day'.¹¹⁹

She viewed the struggle against the Acts as a spiritual battle with God's redemptive power available to all: 'The evil is a moral one, and can only be met by moral and spiritual forces'.¹²⁰ Crucially, however, in order for this vision to be ushered in – where the educational and work opportunities of women were advanced, suffrage is a given, and equality between the sexes is paramount – Butler insisted, 'we need some great manifestation of the power of God'.¹²¹ It was this theological understanding of the 'power of God' and man's agency in encouraging it that caused Butler, according to Nolland, much distress and anguish when the transformation she hoped for failed to eventuate.¹²²

Butler appeared to have great confidence in the perfectibility of man's character and progress, believing, like Gaskell, that a fall into sin was largely circumstantial. The 'first duty' of an individual was to know and obey the moral law and to make 'infinite progress, up to the point when he resumes the primitive likeness in which he was first created'.¹²³ She disliked the emphasis placed upon Original Sin which, as we have seen in Chapter Three, often caused prostitutes to be harshly treated. Nolland argues that Butler's opinion of the feminine nature was essentialist, that if the prostitute was removed from accentuating circumstances then she would be pure and virtuous.¹²⁴ However, the evidence that I have examined of Butler's expectations for male purity seems to indicate that a Christian environment, once established, would shape *all* character, whether male or female. One of the great travesties that resulted from prostitution, in Butler's mind, was the inability of the

¹¹⁸ 'The Principles of Abolitionists: An Address delivered at Exeter Hall, 20 February 1885', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, pp. 112-119 (p. 112).

¹¹⁹ *Hour before the Dawn: An Appeal to Men* (London: Trubner, 1876). Qtd. Flammang, p. 161.

¹²⁰ 'The Principles of Abolitionists', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, p. 115.

¹²¹ 'Some Thoughts on the Present Aspect of the Crusade against the State Regulation of Vice, Liverpool, April 1874', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, pp. 51-70 (p.55).

¹²² Nolland, p. 290.

¹²³ 'The Choice Between Person Freedom and State Protection, Address delivered by the Hon. Auberon Herbert and Mrs. Josephine E. Butler at the Annual Meeting of the Vigilance Association for the Defence of Personal Rights, 9 March 1880'. Qtd. Nolland, p. 275.

¹²⁴ Nolland, p. 281.

prostitute to respond to God's grace. The deprivation that the woman endured left many unable to conceive that a God could exist.¹²⁵ Butler, therefore, realigned her theology to allow such women to experience God's grace in the life hereafter. She refused to accept the Evangelicals' understanding of salvation, which required confession, sanctification and an overt acknowledgement of man's sin and God's grace. Writing in her *Personal Reminiscences*, long after the immediacy of her campaign, Butler was still troubled by the scenes of great sorrow that she had witnessed. She was distressed by a God who would fail to redeem individual sinners because they had never repented here on earth. She would rather have the problem of why God had not acted in the here and now than be left with a punitive God, punishing for all eternity:

I do not find in ordinary evangelic teaching anything which meets this mystery of wrong and pain, this woe of the murdered innocents [...] Religious teachers never lead us to hope that God makes up hereafter to these outraged creatures of His for all they have endured, unless they have gone through a proper repentance here below. Some day I believe He will tell Himself what He has done, and is doing for them. The winter is long and dark; but summer will come, and will bring more light.¹²⁶

Butler, like Gaskell, was increasingly troubled by the lack of spiritual transformation in society, for it begged the question of responsibility. In Butler's worldview, God's power in acts of transformation was indispensable. Therefore, God's or man's inactivity was to blame. Butler had difficulty in accepting a detached, distant God, so instead she chose to blame man's lethargy. This suggests why Butler's vision for repeal was intensely driven, pushing her body to the limit; there was an underlying fear that man could fail to propitiate the hand of God.

I would argue that in order for Butler to remain positive about God's involvement in the world, she sought historical examples of where God had engaged with a particular people or with a particular campaign. In the *Life of Jean Frederic Oberlin*, drawing on the biographical trend of writing the hidden lives of saints, Butler takes an eighteenth-century pastor, Oberlin, and describes his spiritual and working life. Oberlin devoted his life to the small isolated township of Ban de la Roche, ministering to its spiritual and physical needs. Despite the unusualness of Butler's choice, taking on the unfamiliar, unorthodox Protestant pastor as biographical subject, she seems to find a kinship with Oberlin, approving of his 'vital' Christianity. His life was conceived as another exemplary model, with her posthumous biography offering a direct comparison between her Father's and Oberlin's life:

¹²⁵ See Flammang, p. 155.

¹²⁶ *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 211.

‘Like John Grey, he changed the whole aspect of the country side, and in his old age his great services were recognised’.¹²⁷ Butler admits, for ‘biographical accuracy’, that Oberlin did not rigidly adhere to the Protestant confession of faith. Despite being an ‘evangelic’ in the true sense – believing in the faith of Christ crucified – he retained in his ‘heart’ a Catholic leaning towards superstition and mysticism: he had a heightened awareness of the ‘invisible world’.¹²⁸ Regardless of this, Butler chose to celebrate Oberlin’s unorthodox faith, which enabled him to heal the spiritual divisions between denominations (there was a Catholic and Protestant divide), aligning his doctrines with those of the ‘truly Christian, and therefore the truly Catholic Church’.¹²⁹ Butler includes a ‘Solemn Act of Consecration’, which Oberlin composed to God when a young man and renewed several times throughout his lifetime. It reveals a life that sought to be devoted to God, to accept the ‘alliance’ that had been offered through God’s son, Christ. Such an alliance involved Oberlin giving God ‘all I am and all I have, my mind, my body, my means, and my time’. Oberlin understood his faith as an act of gardening, cultivating the ‘moral wilderness’ so that it could ‘rejoice and blossom as the rose’. When he asked his wife to marry him, his proposal imagined their lives as gardeners: ‘Will you be my helper and companion in the cultivation of the Ban de la Roche, this still tangled garden of the Lord?’¹³⁰ Butler, too, understood the world as a garden in need of weeding, relying on God’s power to ‘change the tangled wilderness around us into the garden of the Lord’.¹³¹ She also approved, as we shall see, of Oberlin’s approach to ‘weeding’, believing that God’s kingdom would be established through the ‘uprooting of national evils’.¹³²

Oberlin’s Christianity was intensely practical, seeking to overcome the extreme poverty which existed in the valleys. He strengthened the infrastructure of society through the building of roads and improving trade. A highroad to Strasbourg allowed the exportation of potatoes, whilst the formation of the Small Agriculture Society tackled the impoverished soil of the valleys.¹³³ Oberlin’s gardening, therefore, was both metaphorical and literal. Eventually, he organised the provision of better schools throughout the district, ‘begging the necessary funds’. In the recording of such detail, Butler cannot help but reveal her approval

¹²⁷ *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 170.

¹²⁸ *Life of Jean Frederic Oberlin: Pastor of the Ban de la Roche* (Piccadilly: The Religious Tract Society, 1886), p. 69.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 61, 14.

¹³¹ ‘Address Delivered at Croydon’, p. 15.

¹³² ‘Introduction’, in *Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture*, p. xviii.

¹³³ *Jean Frederic Oberlin*, pp. 37-43.

of such practical Christianity.¹³⁴ She was also keen to cite the difference that this man made to his society, as evidence that God established his kingdom through ordinary acts of people:

Ban de la Roche had become a place of pilgrimage, visited by persons of different countries and opinions, who desired to see the successful work carried out by Oberlin, of which the report was now spreading far and wide.¹³⁵

Those outside the immediate influence of Oberlin could not help but see the impact his lifestyle had had on his community. This was the ultimate hope for God's kingdom that it would be infectiousy passed on from one person to another, transforming society through the individual's response to God's Spirit. Butler's identification with Oberlin, once again, complicates gender norms, for she was not afraid to infuse his masculinity with qualities that she too would embrace. She calls him the 'chivalrous champion of the oppressed', who had the 'feelings of a father towards his children'.¹³⁶ Her language echoes Kingsley's understanding of masculinity, and yet she is not afraid to let Oberlin (in his own words) admit his feminine qualities: 'I am so very sensitive, tender-hearted, and compassionate'.¹³⁷ Christ is the site of blurred gender boundaries, for he is the source of empowerment: 'conform me more and more to His image'.¹³⁸

I have already discussed how Catharine of Siena's life engaged directly with Butler's political agenda, but it also offered Butler reassurance of God's active participation. Catharine's ministry was characterised by the mystical: God revealed his intentions through revelatory episodes. She healed the sick, demonstrated a supernatural ability to go without food, and heard the 'literal' voice of God. Butler surmises that doubt, the inability or lack of desire 'to live a life of prayer such as she lived' are the reasons why such acts of faith are not repeated, and perhaps why God's power is not so evident in nineteenth-century life (CS, p. 37). She continues:

No historian of the Church has yet ventured to assign an exact date to the cessation of the so-called miraculous gifts of healing; perhaps when we see things more clearly, we shall know these gifts only ceased in proportion to the decay of the faith which claimed and exercised them; and we may be able again by the prayer of faith to heal the sick and cast out evil spirits (CS, pp. 98-99).

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 175, 172.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

Due to the lack of accurate accounts in Church history, Butler believed it was impossible to pinpoint a moment in time when the miraculous gifts ceased to exist. Her suspicion is that they ceased when God was willing but man was not. Catharine's total abandonment to her faith continued to inspire Butler to further self-sacrifice in the hope that it could propitiate God to act. Butler could not let repeal fail because she had refused to partner with God's Spirit. Nolland suggests that Butler placed great emphasis upon 'human agency', motivated by the example of Christ's relationship with his Father God.¹³⁹ However, it did leave Butler with troubling theological holes when she was faced with an unresponsive society and an inactive God.

However, Butler's Utopian hopes were always checked by her experience as a reformer and, despite wanting immediate results, Butler discerned that Catharine's life also spoke to the reality of disappointment:

Like many other reformers, she at first hoped for a more quick return for her labours; but as the years went on, she learned, as they have learned, that God had greater designs in view than any which came within their human calculations; that her place in the great work was that of a pioneer; that after she had laboured, others would enter into the reward of her labours (CS, p. 237).

Human calculations could not twist God's hand into action, but instead the reformer had to humbly accept that her own efforts might be rewarded in a lifetime not hers to live.

Interestingly, Stansfeld made every effort to cement into history Butler's part in the repeal campaign, convinced that history would and should remember her:

When the history of this movement comes to be written, she will appear upon its pages a figure, typical and heroic, the embodiment of roused womanhood of her country and of her time – proclaiming the equality of moral law for women and for men, raising high the standard of social purity and making common cause with the most unfortunate of her sex [...] it is a sacred, a providential inspiration; and this spirit, this inspiration, are at work in the mind of your fellow-countrywoman.¹⁴⁰

Stansfeld summarises perfectly all that Butler sought to accomplish, rightly placing 'providential inspiration' at the heart of her activities. Despite personal disappointment that there had not been an overhaul of society's conduct and morality, Stansfeld pinpointed exactly what Butler had achieved – a proclamation of principles –, drawing on a historical tradition of female religious activism.

¹³⁹ Nolland, p. 274.

¹⁴⁰ *Speeches of the Rt. Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P.*, p. 29.

The Campaign Community: Print Culture, Literary Writings and Dissemination

I have sought to understand Butler's religious ethos and how it intersected with her involvement in repeal. Despite the individualistic nature of her belief, Butler's leadership of the LNA clearly demonstrated her commitment to community and the need for a strong show of opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts. I want to explore how, and to what extent, Butler's conviction of faith and her vision for society were disseminated by the campaign community. I will suggest that Butler's primary strength as a charismatic leader was her ability to create and mobilise a coalition of religious belief, which centred round her own convictions of faith. She channelled the community's diversity into an effective unit of opposition, drawing on members' legal, medical and administrative skills. Stansfeld honoured with 'profound joy' the involvement of religious communities, concluding that 'I have no doubt of the issue of the appeal on the part of those communities to the religious and moral sense of England; it will end in the defeat of these laws'.¹⁴¹ Like Butler, Stansfeld understood the importance of attacking the Acts with a collective moral force. The community produced a varied selection of literary works and speeches designed to promote the repealers' campaign, particularly to disseminate Butler's agenda. Despite their differing forms, these texts do share common ideas about how to achieve repeal. These similarities of method and form will be examined alongside the individual's religious convictions.

Two different theoretical approaches to community – how it is created or realised – have implications for the understanding of Butler's religious community. Benedict Anderson's influential study *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991) conceived the nation as owing its existence to 'national languages fostered by print capitalism'; a virtual or imagined community of readers is created through the daily act of reading, particularly of newspapers.¹⁴² Robert Thornton, an anthropologist, reconsiders this concept of community through his study of the HIV epidemic in Africa, particularly focusing on sex networks. He concludes that HIV is disseminated through networks of unimagined relationships, through acts that are carried out privately and are 'invisible' to the public mind. The 'unimagined community', those who carry the virus and suffer from the effects of AIDS, bear a 'deeply problematic relation to the imagined community of the nation'.¹⁴³ How do these conceptions of community help us to understand Butler's model? Firstly, there is evidence that Butler's convictions reached beyond her immediate community to impact an unknown body of

¹⁴¹ *Speeches of the Rt. Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P.*, p. 31.

¹⁴² Robert J. Thornton, p. xx; Benedict Anderson, p. 35.

¹⁴³ Thornton, pp. xviii, xx

people, with authors unacquainted with Butler producing supportive publications. The *Shield* newspaper, to be examined shortly, was created to be the voice of the repeal movement and was a perfect example of how print culture could engage with community. This culture created a virtual readership, ‘visually rooted in everyday life’, where one newspaper reader could observe another.¹⁴⁴ There is lettered evidence of Butler’s publications being circulated and made available to the immediate community and to those associated with the LNA. Writing to Priestman concerning an imminent publication, Butler advises ‘if you have any orders, send them to him (her publisher)’.¹⁴⁵ In this way, Butler envisions a community of readers ready and waiting to receive her work. Through the act of reading, Butler’s beliefs and sentiments were shared and distributed, despite the community’s invisibility or anonymity. Secondly, Butler, as I have already explored, believed in a future world that aligned itself to the principles of God’s kingdom. Such a belief required an act of imagination, not only from individuals but by the collective Christian community. In fact, the actions of this community could determine the realisation of this imagined kingdom. Community, therefore, was responsible for defining and promoting the vision, using literary discourse to establish itself. Finally, Thornton’s exploration of sex networks holds implications for how the prostitute intersected with and related to religious communities. It was Butler’s intention to uncover and expose the degradation caused to prostitutes by the Acts. In doing so, she was making visible a private underworld that was largely incomprehensible to her middle-class readership/ audience. Such exposure had to be carefully managed, in order to relocate the prostitute from an invisible network to a highly visual, highly communal environment.

Walkowitz characterised the repealers, particularly the parliamentary representatives, as ‘wealthy industrialists and merchants residing in northern cities’. They were, like Jacob Bright M.P, ‘staunch supporters of the Liberal Party [...] overwhelmingly nonconformists, with a heavy concentration of Quakers in leadership roles’.¹⁴⁶ It is this religious nonconformity, particularly Quaker influence, which is most interesting for identifying Butler’s campaign community. Despite her husband’s association with the Church of England, this established institute lagged behind in support; in Butler’s own frustrated words, the ‘stiff formal Church [...] holds aloof!’¹⁴⁷ According to McHugh, the ‘Church was unwilling to take any collective stand over the Acts and indeed could hardly do

¹⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson, pp. 35-36.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Postcard to Priestman from Josephine E. Butler, 10 Nov 1884’, York, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

¹⁴⁶ Walkowitz, pp. 99-100.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Anna Maria Priestman, 17 January 1883’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, p. 198.

so given the level of dissension'.¹⁴⁸ The Butlers experienced this hostile opposition personally when George attempted to deliver a speech at the Church Congress in 1871, entitled 'The Duty of the Church of England in matters of Morality'. His speech was heckled and disrupted with 'expression of disapprobation' until he could no longer proceed.¹⁴⁹ As Styler argues, Butler recognised that the 'establishment opinion was ideologically loaded', unable or unwilling to perceive prostitutes as victims or as women.¹⁵⁰ Butler correlated this intolerance with 'evil advisers', training the clergy to 'consider this legislation an excellent thing'.¹⁵¹ She did not want to publically disparage the Church, particularly because of her husband's affiliation, but she did admit elsewhere that she had not 'much sympathy with the Church'.¹⁵²

However, there was a certain rationale in Butler keeping her distance from the establishment, as Styler points out: the authority of the prophet derived largely from his or her 'status as an outsider to religious or social norms', allowing an unbiased perspective to see more clearly the problems in need of rectification.¹⁵³ Interestingly, however, an unpublished letter reveals that the community avoided a show of Catholic support, with Stansfeld writing to Butler in 1874 that 'I rather fear of getting Manning [...] the Protestant feeling against him remains strong [...] better leave him till we get some hold of the Church of England'.¹⁵⁴ Stansfeld organised the parliamentary show of support but he deemed that an alliance with the Catholics was too risky, particularly in a campaign where public perceptions were so crucial. Instead, they were still hoping that the Anglican Church would eventually mellow and support the cause.¹⁵⁵ In the mean time, Butler sought recruits for the campaign from other sources, particularly amongst the nonconformists.

Butler gave a special tribute to the Society of Friends in *Personal Reminiscences*, recognising that they were among the 'first to welcome the public action of women', offering the Quaker meeting houses as venues for public meetings. She was particularly grateful to the Quakers for accepting her leadership when she had no credentials or wider

¹⁴⁸ McHugh, p. 188.

¹⁴⁹ *Personal Reminiscences*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁵⁰ Styler, p. 130.

¹⁵¹ *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 35.

¹⁵² 'Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Anna Maria Priestman', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, p. 197.

¹⁵³ Styler, p. 147.

¹⁵⁴ 'Letter from James Stansfeld to Josephine Butler, October 1874', York, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

¹⁵⁵ Petitions in the *Shield* do record Anglican clerical support, with Stansfeld acknowledging that 2,000 signatures had been received in 1874 from the Church of England. 'Letter from the Right Hon. James Stansfeld M.P., to Ministers of Religion', *Shield* (1 November, 1874), p. 221.

backing other than her ‘own assertion that the cry of the oppressed and the voice of God’ were calling her to this work.¹⁵⁶ McHugh notes that the LNA found a willing ally in the chapel attendees, who embraced the campaign with open arms and were willing to support and organise women’s petitions against the Acts.¹⁵⁷ The Quakers were already predisposed to act in repeal because they, like Butler, saw the Acts as another ‘manifestation of that subordination of women to men’ which they had ‘long resented in other spheres’. They had also been at the forefront of the Abolition movement, a cause that Butler often aligned her own campaign with.¹⁵⁸ James Stuart, advisor to Butler, confirmed that

the Friends always have been ahead in most things, especially in what concerns women. Women and men stand on exactly equal footing in their religious organisation (if such a word can be applied), and the Friends have always recognised that women can form their own opinions upon a public subject just as well as men.¹⁵⁹

Although Butler would not have affiliated herself directly with the Quaker faith, she found a willing and compatible ally: ‘I feel so home at the Friends [...] they are so pugilistic, and so obstinate and so gentle and so calm’.¹⁶⁰ This fighting spirit was essential for withstanding the longevity of the campaign, with Butler consistently applauding their relentless support. In the early days of the campaign, a successful tactic of the repealers was to split the vote in local elections, providing an alternative candidate to stand against the supporter of the Acts. This happened in Colchester in 1870: Butler relates in a letter to Mrs. Wilson the Quakers’ involvement in helping the seat to be contested. The Quakers congregated together to ‘keep silence’ before the Lord, whilst making it overtly clear that it was a ‘disgrace’ to vote for the opposition leader, Sir H. Starks.¹⁶¹ The Quakers effectively showed the power of combining contradictory method – silence and debate – to achieve a coherent protest. This combination of prayer with social justice, as seen in the *Life of Catharine of Siena*, and in Butler’s own life, goes some way to explain why Butler closely aligned the repeal movement with the Quakers.

In the *Life of Oberlin*, Butler reflected on the advice given to Oberlin that ‘without constant prayer’ there is the danger of falling into a ‘lifeless state’. Butler agreed that this advice was ‘directly applicable to Christian workers in our day’, who were constantly battling the ‘pressure of *over-work*’, dictated by the ‘tyrant Society’. The only solution was

¹⁵⁶ *Personal Reminiscences*, pp. 238-239.

¹⁵⁷ McHugh, p. 188.

¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 252-253.

¹⁵⁹ *Reminiscences*, p. 227.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Letter to Mrs. Forsaith, March 1898’. Qtd. van Drenth and de Haan, p. 97.

¹⁶¹ ‘Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Mrs. Wilson, November 1870’, Leeds, MS c19 Butler.

to ‘determine to be often alone with God’.¹⁶² For Butler’s husband, this resulted in written prayers to God; they enabled him to ‘define his thoughts’ and to fight against mental fatigue.¹⁶³ Butler took herself away, ‘to be one hour in the presence of God with every voice silenced except His’.¹⁶⁴ It was also impossible for the prophet to ‘enter deeply into the thought of God’ without times of such restful contemplation. The ‘thirsty multitude’ was dependent on the prophet’s ability to hear from God, so space for prayer, in Butler’s mind, became an essential act for the well being of the entire community.¹⁶⁵ Butler came away from such times of rest with a new ‘freshness for the work’, confessing that without ‘secret personal love and sympathy with God’, this ‘machinery, drudgery of work’ would be too much.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, this reliance on prayer had to move outwards, from the inner spiritual life to the collective movement of repeal. Butler insisted that the power of God had to accompany human action, so she took the unusual step of organising prayer meetings to be held at the Houses of Parliament during the repeal debates. The audacity of such an event, and Butler’s ability to draw together an array of Christian belief under one roof, testifies to her dynamic leadership, and the skill that she had to orchestrate and maintain a coalition. McHugh equates the LNA’s success with Butler’s ‘charismatic leadership’ and her ‘almost mystical ability to inspire her followers’.¹⁶⁷ It was, however, only accomplished through negotiation and sensitivity, and with a great awareness of where the coalition could break down. Nolland highlights the importance of Butler’s inclusiveness, noting that a different leader, perhaps someone who had an ‘exclusive mind-set would have been disastrous for the LNA’; they would have been unable to sustain a ‘common cause with other Christians’.¹⁶⁸ Butler took a calculated step of allowing two distinctively different beliefs, Catholicism and Unitarianism, to publically open the convention, hopeful that a wide spectrum of Christian conviction would overcome accusations of ‘exclusion’.¹⁶⁹ Although Stansfeld did not feel comfortable attending the meetings, he wrote to Butler affirming the prayers of the campaign community: ‘I am so thankful for the women’s prayers’.¹⁷⁰ During the conventions, Butler chose to take a back seat, believing it was now time for God to speak: ‘I

¹⁶² *Jean Frederic Oberlin*, pp. 49-51.

¹⁶³ ‘He knew he could at all times speak face to face with our Father in Heaven, but he found the mechanical act of writing enabled him to keep awake and also to define his thoughts as he could not otherwise do when mentally fatigued’. *Recollections of George Butler*, p. 347.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Letter to Albert Rutson, 27 April 1868’, York, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

¹⁶⁵ *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 236.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Letter to Albert Rutson, 27 April 1868’.

¹⁶⁷ McHugh, p. 169.

¹⁶⁸ Nolland, p. 265.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Anna Maria Priestman, 17 January 1883’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, p. 198.

¹⁷⁰ *Recollections of George Butler*, p. 280.

said very little. There was no need to, for God was there'.¹⁷¹ Once again, Butler's personal conviction about how God worked with human agents directly informed her actions within the campaign community.

More than any other organisation involved in repeal, the LNA operated as a coalition of religious belief, working closely with Butler and disseminating her vision. The LNA was run by a 'small, long-serving executive committee', with an initial membership of 13, gradually rising to 25 by 1885. The newspaper *Shield* described the LNA ('if we may be permitted to use a warlike phrase') as the 'advanced guard of the movement', with Butler using similar military imagery when referring to the assistance of the Priestman sisters, Margaret Tanner and Miss Estlin – all Quakers and tireless members of the LNA: 'a kind of body-guard, a *corps d'élite* on whose prompt aid, singleness of purpose, prudence, and unwearied industry I could and can rely at all times'.¹⁷² In another incident, Butler referred to the LNA ladies as 'steady planets' whose great value lay in the fact that they 'never err from their orbit'.¹⁷³ Butler was well aware that her (inter) national travelling caused her involvement in the day to day running of the campaign to be sporadic and erratic. Therefore, the women behind the scene – their organisational prowess – were vital for the success of her public engagement. In fact, Butler exemplified the spiritual and professional usefulness of the LNA, believing it to be a training ground and a 'political nursery' for women:

God, in His provision, had a far deeper and wider work in view than we had any conception of when we first arose at His call to oppose an unjust Act of Parliament. His purpose embraced also our own education [...] He brought them through all the trials and vicissitudes which were needful for the strengthening of their faith.¹⁷⁴

Retrospectively, Mary Priestman noted that the LNA had been an invaluable organisation in showing the wider world (particularly the political arena) that women could not only unite around a purpose, but could do it successfully: 'It has been often said that women are not loyal to women and that they do not work well together – the experience of the LNA is contrary to this'.¹⁷⁵ She also agreed with Butler that religious fellowship was of great value

¹⁷¹ 'Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Stanley Butler, 10 February 1884', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, pp. 210-213 (p. 210).

¹⁷² Anonymous, 'National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts', *Shield* (24 September, 1870), p. 232. Qtd. McHugh, pp. 163, 171; *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 104.

¹⁷³ 'Josephine Butler to a friend, 9 October 1882'. Qtd. McHugh, p. 169.

¹⁷⁴ McHugh, p. 165; *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 209.

¹⁷⁵ 'Mary Priestman to George Butler, 21 February 1901'. Qtd. Walkowitz, p. 113.

in ‘overcoming the natural shrinking’ of many women from such a painful subject.¹⁷⁶ Using the appropriate rhetoric, women learnt how to converse on the topic in a safe environment.

The ladies of the LNA were not only adept at their administrative duties but were proactive in using the literary form to disseminate their convictions. Ursula Bright wrote the poem ‘C.D.A’ in 1872 to be circulated among repealers. It was first sent to Henry J. Wilson, a parliamentary representative, whose wife and daughter were closely connected to the cause. Bright was also married to the leading Quaker politician of his day, Jacob Bright, and she was a member of the LNA’s Executive Committee, along with her mother. Her sisters, as already noted, were the Priestmans, the close friends and colleagues of Butler. Familial involvement was not an unusual characteristic of the repeal campaign, with Butler personally modelling such an approach, drawing on the skills of her husband, sisters and sons: ‘it has been to me an indescribable blessing and strength to have been surrounded all along by tenderly loyal adherents and supporters in the persons of my own family, and of those dearest to me’.¹⁷⁷ For the prayer conventions of the 1880s, Butler notes in a letter to one of the Priestman sisters that her niece Rhoda had been ‘practicing to help us in the singing’, demonstrating not only Butler’s reliance on family members, but the multiplicity and depths of skills deemed necessary to secure repeal.¹⁷⁸ Jacob Bright’s profile was depicted in one of a series of pamphlets entitled ‘Our Public Men’, produced by the Co-operative Printing Society in Manchester in 1876. His distinguishing characteristic was described as ‘fearless independence’, and his manner and mode of address were considered serious, frank, manly and earnest. These qualities, coupled with a strong liberalism, were celebrated by the Co-operative Printing Society as evidence of his ‘devotion to public aims’. Demonstrating similar fearlessness – a ‘thoroughly English bull-dog tenacity of purpose’ – Ursula Bright produced a poem that challenged the apathy and weariness experienced by the campaign community.¹⁷⁹

Jane Jordan usefully notes that Ursula Bright was present with Butler at the violent Pontefract Election in August 1872.¹⁸⁰ The repealers were attempting to undermine Mr. Childers’ electoral campaign because he was an advocate of the Acts. Mr Childers’ supporters responded to such opposition by disrupting and attacking a meeting of women

¹⁷⁶ Mary Priestman, ‘Ladies’ Branch Associations’, *N.L.J.*, (1 December, 1881). Qtd. Walkowitz, p. 134.

¹⁷⁷ See McHugh, p. 170; *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Letter to Priestman from Josephine Butler, 1883’, York, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

¹⁷⁹ *Our Public Men: No 4. Mr. Jacob Bright* (Manchester: Co-operative Printing Society, 1876).

¹⁸⁰ ‘C.D.A: Verses written by Mrs. Ursula Bright, Sent to Henry J. Wilson, 15 August 1872’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, pp. 206-207 (p. 207).

organised by Butler. She, among others, narrowly escaped a burning Town hall, pursued by an angry mob and verbal assault. Butler described it as a situation which ‘required strong faith and calm courage’ in the face of ‘rage, profanity and obscenity of the men’.¹⁸¹ The circulation of Bright’s poem occurred only a few weeks after this scene, perhaps highlighting the significance of this event in the poetic creation. Its rhetoric is particularly stirring, responding with equal vigour to the previous threat posed to her personal liberty. The regular rhyme scheme (abab), reminiscent of the ballad form, gives the poem a greater rhetorical impact when spoken out loud as a rallying cry. She exhorts her ‘Comrades!’ to ‘rest not!’ but to take up once again the ‘battle axe’, to strike an ‘unseen, unclean foe!’¹⁸² Bright unashamedly depicts the repeal campaign as a raging battle against forces of evil, particularly ‘Lust and Slavery and Woe!’¹⁸³ These are unnamed and largely unseen foes, suggesting the spiritual dimension of the campaign: men may hurl abuse and destroy prostitutes’ lives, but there is a deeper, spiritual reality lurking behind such abhorrent behaviour. She dismisses excuses of weariness (the campaign had been running, at this point, for several years) but through repeated exclamatory imperatives, calls for action: ‘Forward then! Brave men, brave women!’¹⁸⁴ She acknowledges the necessity of a united front, with men and women collectively taking responsibility for the campaign’s success. Her decision to send the poem to Henry Wilson also suggests the need for parliamentary representatives to remain supportive; the legislation will not be repealed without them.

Echoes of Butler’s beliefs are disseminated throughout this poem: Bright encourages the involvement of women, despite the risk to personal reputations, and prioritises human and divine agency in securing repeal. Bright is convinced that ‘victory waits on you though few’ and God will ‘strengthen’ those with failing resolve.¹⁸⁵ Theologically, Bright stands alongside Butler in promoting a unique combination of divine and human intervention. Suffering, too, is seen as an encouraging sign that progress is being made: the ‘boon’ or ‘Freedom’s flag’ are bravely being won.¹⁸⁶ Butler confirmed in a letter read out to a meeting of ladies in the Friends’ Meeting House that ‘this awakened enmity and bitter opposition are the most helpful of all signs – the *sure mark* that we are doing *God’s work*, and that Satan is

¹⁸¹ *Personal Reminiscences*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁸² ‘C.D.A’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, p. 206, ll. 17, 4, 14.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 206, l. 16.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206, l. 13.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206, ll. 18, 20.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206, ll. 8, 6.

in great alarm'.¹⁸⁷ Melnyk argues that Butler empowers suffering for women by making it into a collective experience. Salvation becomes associated not with individuals but with the community as a whole: they are a 'communal Christ'.¹⁸⁸ Bright's poem supports such an understanding, asking the campaigners to suffer collectively in order to achieve their end goal. In a slightly different context, within the familial home, Butler demonstrates this commitment to communal suffering; it is a way of experiencing God's presence in the midst of sickness and impending death:

I am God's prisoner here in my husband's sick room. But often, though my heart is sore with grief, he and I both feel so sweetly the presence of the living God with us that room seems, at moments, like the gate of heaven.¹⁸⁹

The 'gate of heaven', leading to God's kingdom, alludes to the spiritual reality of life after death; and yet this reality is rooted in the physicality of the sick room. Once again, Butler identifies suffering as a necessary conduit in bringing God's kingdom to earth. There is, however, an uncertainty of victory, and paradoxically this makes Bright all the more convinced that perseverance is essential. It will only be assured once the commitment has been cemented. Similarly to Butler, the call for perseverance is based on the wrongs suffered by the victims of the Acts. The maternal instinct is called out in the poem's reader by narrowing the gap between classes and allowing, instead, a closer identification between middle-class mothers and the prostitute: 'our daughters'.¹⁹⁰ When we consider that Henry Wilson was the first recipient of the poem, the imperative to identify as mothers is doubly striking. It appears that Butler's conflation of gender, infusing masculinity with supposedly feminine Christian virtues, is supported by Bright. Such a familial identification also helped to transfer the prostitute, in the mind of the repealer, from an invisible community of degradation to a space of hopeful redemption.

A poem written by the dying Mary Lomax (February, 1867) is an unexpected source for exploring how Butler's beliefs were assimilated and absorbed by another. Mary Lomax was the very first prostitute that Butler rescued from the Liverpool oakum sheds, taking the unusual and rather bold step of situating her into the family home. Butler ideologically understood herself as a mother rescuing a daughter by taking Mary into the intimacy of her

¹⁸⁷ 'The State Regulation of Vice: Mrs. Josephine Butler E. Butler to the Ladies of Hull, Read at a Meeting of Ladies in the Friends' Meeting House, Hull, on Friday, 29 September 1876', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, pp. 145-148 (p. 147).

¹⁸⁸ Melnyk, "Mighty Victims", p. 153.

¹⁸⁹ 'Letter to LNA from Josephine E. Butler, 27 October 1886', York, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

¹⁹⁰ 'C.D.A', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, p. 206, l. 11.

domestic life: ‘You shall come home with me dear, & I will nurse you in my own home, & you shall be my own daughter’. Mary was consumptive and lived for only three months in the Butlers’ household, but in that time Butler wrote that Mary’s room had become a ‘kind of centre of religious life’.¹⁹¹ Mary devoured Butler’s Christianity, using the poem to articulate her own burgeoning faith and the debt that she owed Butler for it. Lomax’s poem is significant for the rhetorical moves that it takes, mimicking her redemptive journey: she progresses and transitions from prostitute to penitent to pupil to friend. Her mobilisation starts with Butler and ends with Christ, as she is taken from that ‘wretched place’ to her ‘holy home’ to the ‘feet’ of the ‘Holy One’.¹⁹² This seamless transition closely binds Christian conviction with social action, for Lomax’s spiritual redemption is inseparable from her removal from the ‘desert’, the site of ‘guilt and woe’.¹⁹³ It is equally wrapped up with the maternal love that Lomax received from Butler, which enabled her to experience ‘God’s goodness’.¹⁹⁴ Overwhelmed, Lomax’s heart could break, not with pain but with an excess of Butler’s ‘gentle love’.¹⁹⁵ It is difficult to see where the veneration of Butler ends and the rightful worship of Christ begins.

Lomax appeals to unknown ‘friends’ to help ‘praise her [Butler’s] well-loved name’ and to offer up a prayer of blessing.¹⁹⁶ Lomax finds it difficult to distinguish between an earthly and spiritual love, directly linking Butler’s devotion to God’s: ‘O sweet reminder of my Lord’.¹⁹⁷ She has identified within Butler the prophetic calling that was so important in establishing Butler’s public role. It was essential for Butler’s effectiveness that she was recognised as a conduit for God, and Lomax’s verse perfectly encapsulates this connection. In fact, Lomax envisions a legacy of rescued women who are able to depend, like she has, on ‘some holy friend’.¹⁹⁸ This bond between rescuer and rescued, in Lomax’s mind, will transcend death. A poignant aspect of this poem is how the imminent death of the poet – ‘I am lying on a dying bed’ – is re-imagined in a vision of future life.¹⁹⁹ The reader of the poem is reminded of the temporality of life but Lomax offers an alternative future, where community will be re-established by collapsing social norms. In the imagined community of heaven, there will be a great levelling of earthly hierarchies and Lomax will no longer be

¹⁹¹ Jane Jordan relates the circumstances of Mary Lomax’s rescue and time spent in the Butlers’ household, from which I have gleaned the details. *Josephine Butler*, pp. 70-73.

¹⁹² ‘Poem Written by Mary Lomax and Dedicated to Josephine E. Butler, February 1867’, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, I, pp. 89-90 (p. 89, ll.10, 13).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 89, ll. 11, 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90, l. 33.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89, l. 2.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90, l. 32.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90, l. 34.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90, l. 25.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90, l. 23.

Butler's 'pupil' but 'friend'.²⁰⁰ There is something wonderfully touching about Lomax's vision that despite her evident earthly gratitude, she is able to conceive of a different reality where equality of circumstance will render gratitude irrelevant. This poem, written in the early days of Butler's involvement in repeal, reveals great insight into how Butler's convictions were absorbed by those around her and disseminated almost accidentally into literary forms. Despite the private nature of the poem, written by one woman for another, we are able to grasp the national significance that Lomax's devotion would have had for Butler. According to Roxanne Eberle, Butler conceived of Mary as a dead sainted woman whose life and death gave her the courage and inspiration to continue her work. Writing in George's *Recollections*, Butler recalls Mary's charge to use her life as a memorial: 'When your souls quail at the sight of evil, which will increase yet awhile, dear Mrs. Butler *think of me* and take courage. God has given me to you, that you may never despair of any'.²⁰¹ Already the earthly categories of rescuer and rescued have been turned on their head, as Mary, alongside Catharine of Siena, becomes a sainted figure to which Butler aligns her own life.

Another significant organisational space in the repeal movement, which Butler had limited access to, was Parliament, the centre stage for legislative debates. Over the years, Butler worked closely with several parliamentary representatives: Stansfeld, Wilson and Stuart. Stansfeld, perhaps more than any of the others, front-led the parliamentary campaign, speaking on behalf of the repealers in the relentless debates. Walkowitz suggests tension within this relationship, particularly experienced by Butler: his 'undisputed pre-eminence in the national movement must have caused some concern as well – if only as a symbol of the shift in balance of power from female to male leadership'.²⁰² In fact, it was years later that Stansfeld's biographers, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, felt the need to reclaim the significance of Stansfeld's influence in securing repeal, noting that 'for some time the history of the agitation' has largely been the 'history of her [Butler's] career'.²⁰³ They sought to identify what Stansfeld brought to the campaign, and, by doing so, unearthed some of the similarities of thought and practice between Butler's and his own involvement:

An eloquent speaker, a master of debate, he could hold his own with experts, and he was enabled by his lucid mind and his patient industry to make statistics intelligible to a plain audience. Above all, he saw where the agitation lacked power. He knew enough of the

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90, l. 36.

²⁰¹ *Recollections of George Butler*, p. 192. Qtd. Eberle, p. 214.

²⁰² Walkowitz, p. 139.

²⁰³ *James Stansfeld: A Victorian Champion*, p. 142.

conditions of Parliamentary life to realise that having failed to carry the position by storm the Repealers must settle down to the hard, unexciting discipline of a siege.²⁰⁴

Butler and Stansfeld were both able to command an audience and clearly communicate their ideas in a compelling and influential manner. Stansfeld excelled at attacking the statistical information used for the Acts, reinterpreting them in such a way as to undermine their purpose: 'I say that these statistics are discreditable to the men who put them forth, and are calculated to impose, as they did impose, upon the imagination and the judgments of men'.²⁰⁵ He was concerned with the correct distribution of facts, which would (re) inform an ignorant public of the true nature of the Acts.

In Section one, I suggested that Butler's main complaint against the Contagious Diseases Acts were that they were undemocratic and consequently unlawful. They had been passed without public awareness, and even to a large extent the full knowledge of Parliament: 'it was a system which had been silently and stealthily admitted into the laws of the country'.²⁰⁶ Stansfeld took this argument and fed it into his touring speeches, emphasising the secret nature and deviant impulses lying behind the Acts. Using religious allusions to the Devil, Stansfeld refers to the Acts and its instigators as a 'thief in the night'. The laws were 'smuggled through Parliament', with a 'conspiracy of silence' enacted both by its members and by the press. Stansfeld argued that the press had deliberately kept silent about the meetings, so that legislation could pass without comment or objections.²⁰⁷ He also questioned the good that the Acts could achieve if produced, as he believed, through 'stealth'. His dislike of deception was a prominent and well remembered characteristic that his biographers recorded: 'those who remember him noticed [...] that he could not forgive subterfuge, that he held opinions with religious fervour'.²⁰⁸ Such conviction made Stansfeld adamant that the Acts' content and initiation were morally dubious and hence could not be supported. Butler, too, objected and lamented this 'conspiracy of silence' that had been inaugurated after the famous Ladies' Protest of 1870 and was kept up for several years. Retrospectively writing about this silence, she argues that it was consistently upheld not for reasons of propriety but because the press overwhelmingly supported the Acts. Butler cynically comments that the 'statements in favour of the Acts were continually admitted'.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²⁰⁵ *Speeches of the Rt. Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P.*, p. 6.

²⁰⁶ 'Influential Meeting of Ladies', Speech given by Josephine E. Butler to the Women's Meeting, Mayor's Parlour, Manchester, Monday 14 March 1870', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, pp. 61-66 (p. 61).

²⁰⁷ *Speeches of the Rt. Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P.*, pp. 1, 6.

²⁰⁸ *James Stansfeld: A Victorian Champion*, p. vii.

²⁰⁹ *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 11.

However, this silence of the press did have one important outcome for the community; it forced the repealers, as we have seen, to ‘create a literature’ of their own.

The *Shield* (1870-1933) was the weekly circular, single-issue paper that was created with the intention to disseminate the cause and opinions of the opponents of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Butler had a certain amount of editorial input into this paper, and eventually took on a more direct control of the quarterly *Dawn* (1888-1896) and *The Storm-Bell* (1898-1900). The *Shield* was temporarily suspended in 1886 after the repeal of the Acts, only to be reinstated the following year to support the cause of the British Committee of the Federation for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice; the committee sought to maintain and establish repeal both in Britain and its Colonies.²¹⁰ The very first issue of the *Shield* (March, 1870) owed its existence to the ‘conspiracy of silence’ enacted by the press, protesting against parliament’s ‘audacious attempt at secret legislation’.²¹¹ A letter had recently appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* by Dr Elizabeth Garrett in support of the Acts, but the *Gazette* refused to include letters of response, of which there were many written by the repealers.²¹² The *Shield*’s creation resulted from this frustration that the efforts to publicise anti-legislative opinions were constantly thwarted. A letter was finally printed in the *Leeds Mercury* signed by Harriet Martineau and Butler; they expressed anger that the newspapers had constantly shunned all opposition to the Acts. Butler comments in a later issue that ‘discussion and publicity are the one thing needful for the success of every just cause’.²¹³ Consequently, the *Shield* was formed to enter publicly into this debate, to ‘do our part by diffusing information respecting the nature and operations of the atrocious system’. This would involve the exposure of ‘false arguments and garbled statistics’, chronicling the ‘progress of the movement’ and reporting ‘from time to time, the labours of those who are striving, by wiser methods to diminish sin and to mitigate its penalties’.²¹⁴ It was clear from the outset that this was a paper attacking the Acts from a primarily moralistic and religious position, one that clearly endorsed Butler’s viewpoint.

²¹⁰ Cheryl Law, ‘Shield’, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* <http://0c19index.chadwyck.co.uk.wam.leeds.ac.uk/fullrec/fullrec.do?id=1312&resultNum=2&entries=1&area=reference&forward=quick&queryId=../session/1393429678_6317> [accessed 26.02.2014].

²¹¹ Anonymous, ‘Our Address’, *Shield* (7 March, 1870), pp. 1-2.

²¹² A. N. Wilson argues that Garrett, one of the few practicing women doctors at the time, refused to support the repeal campaign because of the serious impact of syphilis among the working class. She viewed the Acts as a limited but best option available for preventing the spread of disease. Wilson comments that ‘some members of the women’s movement never forgave her support for the CD Acts’. The *Shield*’s reaction to Garrett’s letter demonstrates how deeply unpopular her position was felt to be. *The Victorians* (London: Random House, 2003), p. 310.

²¹³ J. E. Butler, ‘The Conspiracy of Silence Ended’, *Shield* (1 November, 1874), p. 209.

²¹⁴ Anonymous, ‘Our Address’, *Shield* (7 March, 1870), p. 1.

To peruse the opening contents page is to get a sense of how and in what format this dissemination would take place. The paper was committed to reporting and summarising the meetings held by the Associations by providing first-hand or third-person narratives of the content of speeches. Letters to the editors were encouraged, as were the publication of letters written by prominent repeal leaders such as Stansfeld and Butler. Whole sections, week after week, were given over to listing the petitions collected and presented to Parliament. These lists are particularly illuminating for identifying the depth and range of supporters involved in repeal. Petitions were signed by the Free Church Presbytery, working men, physicians and surgeons, ladies from particular towns such as Wakefield or Aberdeen, students of medicine, and from chapels dotted around the country.²¹⁵ A letter written to the editor in the first issue, by a lady J. E. R., suggested that ‘when we have secured the hearty co-operation of the ladies, the clergy and the medical profession, we might *perhaps* eventually win over the press too, which, hitherto, has been very shy in advocating our views’.²¹⁶ What is interesting about this assessment is that J. E. R. has identified not only the key drawback of the campaign – no publicity – but the appropriate target groups for overcoming this disadvantage. This is a letter that could have almost been rewritten by Butler as a plan of action. Even from this first issue, it is clear how the paper would effectively support the public campaigns that were already in full flow.

The prospective audience of this weekly paper was potentially wide as it was priced reasonably at 1d an issue (including postage) and catered for a mix of gendered and class readers. Meetings of ladies and working-class men were reported alongside the parliamentary debates held by Stansfeld.²¹⁷ In a letter (1870) to the Editor, Butler offered ‘extracts from my own note-book’ about her investigations into the conditions and effects of the Acts in Garrison towns. She clarifies that ‘[i]n all cases when I cite I shall suppress the names of the women; for *The Shield* is now known in the garrison towns, and a sight of it

²¹⁵ Anonymous, ‘Parliamentary Intelligence’, *Shield* (7 March, 1870), p. 8.

²¹⁶ J. E. R., ‘Correspondence’, *Shield* (7 March, 1870), p. 8.

²¹⁷ It is noticeable throughout this discussion that there was a lack of a working-class woman presence in the repeal campaign. Walkowitz argues that the repealers did not ‘entirely ignore its female constituency in the working class’; there is evidence that they participated in a limited capacity at public rallies. However, the LNA did, on the whole, fail to draw working-class women into the heart of the campaign. This ‘failure’, as Walkowitz argues, ‘cannot be blamed simply on elitism and indifferent organizing efforts of the LNA’. Instead, the ‘low profile’ of such women was ‘symptomatic’ of their ‘general social and political demoralization’. They had an isolated position in the political system, only able to ‘exert indirect political influence’ on their husbands. Middle-class women understood this political powerlessness, but instead of a closer identification with the working-class woman, they found it to be more effective (for the cause) to appeal to the political freedom of working-class men. Walkowitz also suggests that the working-class woman’s attitude towards the prostitute was also ‘ambivalent’; in many ways, the prostitute ‘posed a social and sexual threat to respectable working-women’ (pp. 143-146).

coveted by some of them, to whom it might be painful to see their names'.²¹⁸ Fascinatingly, in such a short space of time, the *Shield* had made its presence felt in the environment of the prostitute, a space largely unvisited and unknown to the paper's readership. Anderson's understanding of the imagined community resonates here, for an unexpected community of readers was established through print culture. The inclusion of Butler's letters, speeches, extracts from notebooks, and requests for funding demonstrates, too, the great influence that she had in this publication. McHugh, as already noted, suggested that the LNA, as a whole, was frustrated with the lack of control that it felt it had in steering the direction of the paper, but what cannot be disputed is that Butler's contribution to the cause was revered. One speech was described as a 'very effective address', whilst another commentator reflected on her composure: '[w]ith admirable calmness, dignity, and simplicity of manner, she proceeded to discuss the question in an exceedingly able and eloquent address'.²¹⁹ Another valuable role of the paper was its ability to promote and advertise Butler's work, providing a far greater readership than she would have been able to achieve through acquaintances or word of mouth. Once again, the Editor's praise of *The Constitution Violated* (1871) was effusive: 'We have read it and re-read it with pleasure and surprise, and our deliberate opinion is that it should be, not only in the hands, but in the heads and hearts of every opponent of the Contagious Diseases Acts'.²²⁰ Through such unashamed endorsements, the paper was able to direct the campaign community towards the reading material that was saturated with Butler's convictions.

In order to see more clearly how the *Shield* acted as a body of literature for the campaigning community, I want to show how religiosity, a vital conviction of Butler's, permeated and dominated the paper's ethos. Stansfeld's presence within the paper became increasingly evident after his acceptance of the parliamentary leadership in 1874. In August of that year, a letter by Stansfeld was addressed to Religious bodies, affirming them as 'guardians of the higher law and the conscience of the nation'.²²¹ He acknowledges the substantial contribution made by the clergy, the Society of Friends, and the Wesleyans to the repeal campaign, but he pushes for a more overt, explicit presence – a central committee – in London. Interestingly, he steps back from presuming to 'dogmatize on the form which

²¹⁸ 'The Garrison Towns of Kent', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, p. 82.

²¹⁹ 'Speech Given by Josephine E. Butler to the Women's Meeting, Mayor's Parlour, Manchester', *Shield* (28 March, 1870) and 'Speech Given by Josephine E. Butler to the Working Men's Meeting, Richmond Hall, Liverpool', *Shield* (28 March, 1870), in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, pp. 61-66 (p. 64) and pp. 67-76 (p. 71).

²²⁰ Anonymous, 'Mrs. Butler's Book', *Shield* (4 March, 1871), p. 410.

²²¹ 'Letter from the Right Hon. James Stansfeld M.P., to Ministers of Religion', *Shield* (1 November, 1874), p. 221.

denominational action should take', but nonetheless he prioritises religious union as vital for the campaign's success.²²² George Butler confirms at a meeting for working men that denominational differences should be set aside in pursuit of a worthy moral cause: '[w]e belong to no particular order, but we ought to be a link between all orders – ready to testify to high and low, rich and poor, our interest in the great principles of morality and religion'.²²³ Finally, the inclusion of an introductory speech by a Miss Wishart of Edinburgh demonstrates this wider commitment to Christian principles, especially the role of God's Spirit in achieving repeal. She encourages the 'all-availing efficacy of heartfelt prayer', believing that it is not only by works but by prayer that men will be drawn to the 'Throne of Grace'.²²⁴ Evidence of individual conviction similar to Butler's, and the inclusion of opinions dearest to her, reveals the two-fold effectiveness of this paper: it disseminated Butler's own vision, but it also provided national evidence that it was being communicated, accepted and shared in all parts of Britain.

It could be argued that this community was no community at all, for it primarily functioned through and for Butler's agenda. Consensus was largely reached on Butler's terms and yet the diverse nature of religious beliefs within the community demanded a strong, dynamic leader which Butler unequivocally provided. Butler tirelessly promoted female influence (coupled with God's power) as the essential ingredients in achieving the 'greater justice', writing in a letter to Priestman that

[t]he future depends on the permanence of an awakened spiritual life and of a higher moral sense among the people. And women must not rest until equally with men they have the power of directly influencing the law by which they are governed.²²⁵

However, Butler's influence did have limits, particularly when it came to the final parliamentary decisions. Repeal was achieved in 1886 but this was only the beginning, for the details of the Act had to be worked out. A clause was included in the Criminal Law and Amendment Act that effectively meant girls could be prosecuted for soliciting. Butler believed such punishment was inappropriate – she wanted compulsory examination to be outlawed without having to replace it with some other form of disapprobation. Stansfeld, as

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²²³ Butler, 'Speech Given by Josephine E. Butler to the Working Men's Meeting, Richmond Hall, Liverpool', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, II, p. 69.

²²⁴ Wishart, 'Ladies Meeting in Glasgow', *Shield* (24 October, 1874), p. 207.

²²⁵ 'Letter to Priestman from Josephine E. Butler, 16 August 1883', York, MS Josephine Butler Letter Collection.

the key leader negotiating policy, found himself in a difficult position; he pleaded with Butler: 'I have to represent the one thing on which we agree', which was the penalty for unlawful detention. Butler eventually, and rather reluctantly, withheld her objections, allowing Stansfeld to draw up the parliamentary policy on his terms; she tried to reassure herself that he had 'proved himself worthy of all confidence'.²²⁶

Despite Butler's misgivings about the changing direction of repeal, she saw the necessity of including within the campaign community men and women of different vocations and expertise, who could strengthen and disseminate her own ideas. Anne Summers suggests that Butler – supported by an army of amateur women protesters – actually challenged the 'rise of expertise': by staking a claim to the authority of God, she undermined the 'professional and academic claim to a monopoly of scholarship and information'.²²⁷ However, there is evidence of Butler taking advantage of professionals such as Stansfeld; as an eloquent and gifted public speaker, he was able to negotiate successfully her Christian convictions. Butler also recruited legal and medical experts to bring advice that would complement and support her vision for repeal. Butler accepted that the community must 'reach out for every lawful means, on every side of us, for the destruction of this iniquity'. She envisioned this community as a warrior, grasping onto a sword whilst his or her 'heart is stayed on God'. The repealer, whether doctor, M.P or mother, should imagine themselves as this warrior, using any 'lawful means' available to defeat the enemy.²²⁸ For example, in Butler's essay *Dawn* (1895), we are given a medical point of view from a female doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell. Her knowledge or metaphorical 'sword' is used to thwart the view that the regulation of prostitution would be modified or improved by the appointment of women doctors to carry out the degrading, compulsory examinations. Blackwell argues that the great principle of 'Christian Art of Healing' is the '*voluntary resort* of the patient to the physician', an understanding that is undermined by the enforced legislation of the Acts. Any female physician who should 'consent to serve as a tool of the Administration' would be a 'traitor to her responsible calling and unworthy of the noble profession to which she has been admitted'.²²⁹ Echoed in these words are the Christian principles of Butler, calling out for a united womanhood to stand against the injustices of discriminatory legislation.

²²⁶ James Stansfeld: *A Victorian Champion*, pp. 247, 238.

²²⁷ Summers, p. 8.

²²⁸ *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 184.

²²⁹ This makes it clear, beyond doubt, how unpopular Dr Elizabeth Garrett's position was. Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, 'Women Physicians and the Regulation of Vice', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, I, pp. 170-172 (pp. 170-171).

Writing to Henry Wilson, Butler affirmed that ‘my motto is *no* legislation at all on prostitution, for all such legislation will press on women only’.²³⁰ She held strong views that the state should not interfere with the morality of the sexes, but that the law was simply there to prevent ‘one citizen from wronging another, and preserving the rights and liberties of all’.²³¹ William Shaen, lawyer, President of the NA, and Unitarian (who incidentally was married to the Winkworths’ sister, Emily), was described by Butler as a ‘man of great firmness of Character [...] of great gentleness’ who could be relied upon for advice and sympathy. He drew up several weighty documents on the legal side of the question, stating clearly the future direction that legislation should take.²³² He produced a paper for the First International Congress of the British, Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Prostitution, held in Geneva in 1877, and expounded a similar understanding of the moral law that Butler held. He wanted to limit legislation against prostitution, believing it to be his and his audience’s ‘duty to abolish and to resist all laws that we perceive tend to obscure, or to oppose any branch of the moral law’.²³³ In Shaen’s mind, the legislation unequally yoked women with the cost of prostitution, allowing men to solicit without blame or consequence. This logic offended and broke ‘the law of chaste love’.²³⁴ The repealers charged the Acts with not only being undemocratic, smuggled through parliament, but morally reprehensible. According to Shaen, ‘our national downfall will be approaching when we deliberately permit the Law of the Land to contradict the Law of Conscience’.²³⁵ Cleverly, Shaen’s rhetoric feeds into anxieties surrounding the degeneration of society, exposing the fears of illicit sexuality. He, however, takes such fears and turns them on their head: it is the legalisation of vice which treats male and female participation differently that should be feared; a society built upon such legislation must be dismissive of equality, morality and chaste love. Shaen, however, did not support the public displays of religiosity in the campaign. He boycotted Butler’s prayer conventions, having, in Butler’s opinion, a ‘feeling of “*hostility*” personally to all the sects wh [sic] may be called

²³⁰ Moberly E. Bell, *Josephine Butler. Flame of Fire* (London: 1963), p. 109. Qtd. van Drenth, and de Haan, p. 91.

²³¹ Similarly to Gaskell, Butler’s liberalism has Millian characteristics. Repeal was primarily a middle-class campaign on behalf of working-class women. This mild paternalism sought to readdress the wrongs of society by dismissing any and all legislation that restricted the rights of individuals. ‘On the Dangers of Constructive Legislation’, pp. 1-2.

²³² *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 109.

²³³ *Suggestions on the Limits of Legitimate Legislation on the Subject of Prostitution* (London: Frederick Charles Banks, 1878), p. 3.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Evangelical'.²³⁶ Despite his misgivings concerning Evangelicalism, Shaen continued to advise Butler and work for the common good of the repeal campaign. Once again, the solidarity that Butler was able to create between differing religious, political and organisational opinions was both impressive and unprecedented.

There is also evidence that the scope of Butler's communal values reached beyond those that she knew and closely worked with, as demonstrated in an endorsement that Butler gave to a novel, *The Martyrs of Hell's Highway* (1896), written by an unacquainted author, H. Elwyn Thomas. In the first of two letters written by Butler, which bookend the novel, she responds to Thomas' request of approval with an affirmation of its value: 'publish it [...] because your book is true'.²³⁷ Butler confirms that the incidents he narrates, particularly episodes of child grooming, are not only as he describes but much worse. She will not be accused of exaggerating circumstances, believing instead that it is 'impossible to exaggerate the horrors which are being practised and endured daily'.²³⁸ In a similar pursuit of truth, and denial of hyperbole, Thomas' novel launches into a melodramatic retelling of a young girl's (Bell) descent into the life of a groomed prostitute. At certain points in the narrative, he pauses to summon the courage to proceed: 'I have a horrible scene to describe, which I must also veil and hide'.²³⁹ Without using a direct gaze, Thomas describes the 'coarse laugh' and 'claws' of the 'human monster' who has violated and destroyed the innocence of Bell. Thomas self-consciously narrates this scene in a guarded manner for the benefit of 'tender-hearted mothers'.²⁴⁰ Similarly to Butler, he targets mothers with this story of wronged innocence, in an attempt to awaken apathy and to provoke them into action. Butler agrees that such agitation is necessary as many have gone back into a 'state of indifference'.²⁴¹ At the time of Thomas' publication (1896), repeal had been secured for almost a decade, but underlying issues continued (particularly sex trafficking) unchecked or without opposition. He, like Butler, appeals to maternal instincts and cross-class identifications. If the mother could but imagine her own daughter in similar circumstances as befell Bell – to 'plunge' momentarily into the 'depths of these hells' – then the prostitute's fate would be humanised and opened up to empathy.²⁴² Interestingly, it is an act of imagination that is required to achieve this understanding, with the invisible life of the prostitute illuminated. Butler's

²³⁶ 'Letter from Josephine E. Butler to Anna Maria Priestman', in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, III, p. 197.

²³⁷ H. Elwyn Thomas, *The Martyrs of Hell's Highway: A Novel with a Purpose, with a Preface and Appendix by Mrs. Josephine E. Butler*, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, I, pp. 188-279 (p. 188).

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 207.

presence in Thomas' novel not only legitimises the didactic purpose of the work, but also demonstrates the dissemination of Butler's values to a wider readership and/or community that is not necessarily identifiable or visible.

Conclusion

Building upon the rich body of work presented by feminist, sociological and historicist scholarship, I have developed the case for Butler to be considered as a literary writer in a campaign community. Butler chose to disseminate her vision for repeal not only through speeches but through biographical memoirs and the lives of Christian saints. In this way, Butler took the biographical form and moulded it to fit a social and religious agenda, choosing to define her life and work through the lens of another. This challenged biography's (particularly hagiography's) prescriptive and conservative function by deflecting attention away from the subject to the author. Butler found compatible and exemplary models in the lives of saints, such as Catharine of Siena, allowing her own life to be fixed in a Christian tradition of reform. Theology disguised as literature allowed women, as Melnyk argues, to theorise about God's relationship with humanity, placing the woman writer in the realm of the theologian. The prophetic and supernatural experience of Catharine, despite the difficulties of hagiography, was appropriated by Butler as evidence that God had and would continue to commune with and use women for his purposes. This understanding of the prophetic – a divine call of God – encouraged Butler to lead the national movement of ladies against repeal: the LNA. Christ had demonstrated his divine affirmation of women's abilities through his acts and deeds on earth, but also by embodying the feminine within himself. This feminisation of Christ, as examined in Chapter One, was deeply influential in problematising gender roles; the boundaries between femininity and masculinity blurred, with 'peculiarly feminine' virtues to be embraced by all Christians. One consequence of this was that suffering was not seen as a passive ideological symptom of female domesticity, but a powerful, politically-infused *Christian* experience; suffering, as modelled by Christ, could save the world. Butler's understanding of a feminine Christ, his affirmation of her leadership, and the power offered in weakness directly informed her approach to repeal, whilst encouraging her to envision the moral transformation of society.

By attacking what she considered unlawful and immoral Acts, Butler hoped to initiate the kingdom of God. Through acts of liberation, Butler believed that the future consummation of God's kingdom could be established in the here and now. This kingdom would also be reflected in the communal life of Christians, but interestingly Butler looked for this unity not within the Church or in denominational bodies but within her campaign

community. In Butler's opinion, religious fervour and practical deeds were lacking in the lacklustre Anglican Church. Instead, the campaign community was both proactive and diverse in its Christian traditions, drawing on the resources of the Quakers, Unitarians, Wesleyans, and eventually the Anglicans. As I reconstructed this community, through the poetry of Lomax and Bright, and the parliamentary speeches of Stansfeld, it became apparent that it revolved and centred itself on Butler and her vision. She managed to cultivate a consensus or coalition of belief, albeit on her grounds, which mobilised a national movement. Parliamentary, medical and religious expertise were sought in an attempt to widen the dissemination of *her* vision. This community was not identifiable by geographical location or collaborative texts but through print culture: Anderson's 'imagined communities'. The publication of the *Shield* emerged in 1871 to challenge the 'silence of conspiracy' enacted by the press. More than any other form, this newspaper demonstrated the depth and breadth of the repeal community by reporting who was involved and what was being said. Butler's convictions saturated this newspaper, and it was this dynamic ability to mobilise a varied, scattered and largely anonymous movement – bringing everyone with her (ideologically speaking) – that was so impressive. She produced and sustained the protest power that finally achieved repeal in 1886.

Conclusion

We are human first; women secondarily.

Josephine Butler, *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*

This thesis has examined the communal experience of five religious dissenting women writers whose lives spanned across the nineteenth century. By reconstructing community life, I have sought to establish the importance of literary collaborations and the role of dissenting belief in textual choices and in the setting of social agendas. My case studies have shown that women vocally and with confidence addressed and shaped national debates such as the Abolition movement, the ideological construction of the fallen woman and the impact of industrial practice on working-class life. In its various expressions, dissenting faith was at the heart of these social ventures: an understanding of humanity's place in God's universe lay behind the call for slavery to end, behind the desire to see prostitutes treated with dignity, and behind the need for class relations to improve. The most effective medium for these women to articulate their conviction of faith was through unassuming literary forms, ranging from hymns to biographies to poetry, and fiction. Consequently, there has been a reassessment of the female literary canon, allowing unacknowledged or neglected forms to become 'visible'.¹

There has been a proliferation of research concerning the experience of collaborative creativity in the Romantic period and this thesis has attempted to extend that gaze onto the nineteenth century. The case study approach, as modelled by Jeffrey Cox, Callum Brown and Sue Morgan, has allowed the thesis to address the methodological difficulties of reducing historical experience to either the particular or the universal. Instead, each chapter has taken a writer and located her in a collective, religious environment, in order to define, nuance, problematise, challenge, but ultimately to try and offer a model of literary community life for women. Gendered assumptions about what it means for a female writer to write in community have been re-examined and re-imagined, finding literary space for male-female partnerships. This thesis confirms Susan Morgan's and Jacqueline de Vries' assessment that female Christian identity, as informed by Christ, was often constructed in relation to men. The collaborations within these case studies have not only revealed woman's innovative literary choices, of which there were many, but also challenged the reductive separation of male and female spirituality and literary experience. As the distinctions between orthodoxy and dissenting faith cannot be simply separated, so, too, the religious experience of women and men.

¹ London, p. 18.

For Hannah More and Josephine Butler, community formed around a specific social issue – abolition and repeal –, using literature to disseminate vision and to encourage support. Butler took centre stage in her community, using her dynamic leadership to mobilise a variety of different religious views and expertise. The Winkworths' circle, despite their geographical location within the Manchester Unitarian community, was largely reconstructed through epistolary communication. As Bette London argues, to study female collaborations is to uncover their invisibility.² Unexpected mentoring relationships were revealed, which were essential in helping the sisters to reach their potential as translators. Hannah More, too, gained spiritual advice through the conversations that she shared with Newton and Wilberforce; she used her only novel *Cælebs* to reconstruct the favourable relationships that she had experienced within the Clapham Sect. In this way, literature became a medium through which successful community, in this case Evangelical living, could be offered as a blueprint for future generations.³ However, when I examined Elizabeth Gaskell's Unitarian community, it became clear that fictional creations could also be the result of tension and dissatisfaction within one's circle. Gaskell found herself isolated when her novels chose to address the problems of industrial practice and the contentious issue of fallenness; with this latter cause, she entered into a divisive, national debate that had sexual politics at its heart. She stood apart from her fellow Unitarians by insisting on a paternalistic spirituality that should affect *every* part of a man/woman's life. Authority over another (whether exercised in industry, in the pulpit or in the novel) could only ever succeed if it was bound to Unitarian principles. Consequently, the middle class should be motivated by their religiosity to alleviate the worst excesses experienced by the working poor and the ostracised prostitute.

The opening epigraph from Butler exemplifies the attitude that many of the writers of this thesis took towards their literary work and Christian faith; there was a common humanity that superseded gender conventions. This identification, particularly with Christ's humanity, was what empowered them to bypass normative gender roles and use literature to engage with a politicised public space. The feminisation of Christ was a contested figure throughout the nineteenth century (the hymns translated by Catherine Winkworth also

² London, p. 18.

³ Significantly, as Anne Stott points out, the children of the Clapham community were in the 'process of abandoning their parents' religion'. The 'powerful legacy of high-minded solidarity in the cause of public good', coupled with 'evangelical fervour [...] strong family attachments, deep friendships, intellectual curiosity', could not be replicated by the next generation. Therefore, it seems that *Cælebs* was unable to offer or reproduce the environment or sentiment necessary for encouraging an Evangelical community. Instead, it was confined to memorialising the immediate generation. *Wilberforce*, pp. 273-274.

confirm that Christ's gender had been a site of conflicted representation as far back as the Reformation), simultaneously empowering and restricting a woman's Christian experience. For Butler, Christ's feminised suffering was radicalised into a figure worth emulating; he provided, along with the saintly life of Catharine of Siena, the evidence that she needed to prove that God affirmed her femininity, empowering weakness with his divine strength. Hannah More agreed that the Christian virtues were 'peculiarly feminine', which allowed traditional feminine influence, as embodied in the dutiful wife, to reach outwards, from the intimacy of the family home to the masculine domain of the public sphere. Parliamentary figures, such as Wilberforce, found themselves embodying the femininity of Christ – his humility, passivity, kindness and self-control – within the public space of debate. Equally, a woman like More could venture out from the confines of the drawing room and produce politically-engaged poetry. A conception of the nation as divinely ordained was also significantly tied up with the Evangelicals' view of Christ. More believed that she and her fellow Evangelicals had a duty to represent Christ well, not only at a local level but to the world. The slave trade, therefore, was a 'millstone' around the nation's neck, 'sufficient to sink' it to the 'bottom of the sea'.⁴ Although Butler's evangelical or 'vital' Christianity was in essence very different to More's faith, she shared a similar understanding of the nation as Christ's ambassador to the world. In Butler's context, the nation needed to abolish its double sexual standards, leading the way in convicting Europe of its woeful sexual transgressions.

This blurring of gender boundaries caused by the shifting characterisation of Christ was, I would argue, closely connected to the values upheld by those involved in the dissenting tradition. The emotional and intellectual life of the dissenting believer was prioritised above all else, allowing theological interpretation to be coupled with spiritual experience. In the very act of preferring a different expression of faith or method of worship, dissenters demonstrated the capacity for autonomy and independent thought. Consequently, the women in this thesis found a confidence to move beyond a simple declaration of faith to dictate and influence the particulars of their belief. Julie Melnyk, as already noted, argued that women produced coherent theological understandings of God through the medium of unassuming literary writings. Butler took the biographical writings of her husband and father, the biblical stories of Abraham, and the saintly lives of Catharine of Siena and transformed them into a 'self-reflexive' exercise.⁵ She was able to fix her life into a Christian tradition whilst re-imagining the examples of faith to fit her nineteenth-century

⁴ *The Correspondence of W. Wilberforce*, I, p. 302.

⁵ Melnyk, 'Introduction', *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. xii; Atkinson, p. 31.

context. The Winkworth sisters blurred the boundary line between religious and literary texts by offering an experiential understanding of Christianity through German hymnody and the vernacular language of fourteenth-century mystical theology. They were highly skilled as translators, staying faithful to the original language, whilst ensuring that the texts' literariness was acceptable to an English ear. As such, the sisters' experience showed that successful translators needed not only a high comprehension of another language, but also to have a flair for the literary, as much as any novelist or poet. Hannah More used the medium of the novel as a blueprint for Evangelical living, whereas Gaskell borrowed the rhetoric of the preacher to challenge her middle-class peers to live a holistic, spiritual life.

A simple binary opposition between an orthodox and dissenting Christian faith has been carefully avoided throughout to reveal the complexities evident in the lives of these religious women. An allegiance to the Established Church was not simply brushed away with the immaturity of youth, but creative and theologically-informed adaptations and reformations of the Church and of Christ were considered. An allegiance to an orthodox or dissenting faith became increasingly difficult to establish, particularly as Evangelicals, such as Hannah More, sought to change the Church from within. The inclusion of Evangelicalism in this thesis, although a potentially disputable move, was justifiable: the female writer relied on complex, inter-denominational relationships which were essential for informing spiritual beliefs and literary practices. In fact, all five women offered a new model of what a national body of believers should look like. Hannah More and the Evangelicals inadvertently but irrevocably changed the status of the Anglican Church. In their zeal to reform, they weakened its national position as it became internally divided. It was this decision to reform the Church that gave them, rightly or wrongly, their reputation as dissenters. Susanna Winkworth was initially sceptical about the necessity of a universal church, but she eventually believed that it was the 'divine' life [LG 2nd, p. 58, l. 18]. However, the existing Anglican model was in desperate need of an overhaul, a reformation; it needed to embrace the Unitarian values of inclusivity, doctrinal freedom and individual ownership of belief. If this was attempted, then the severest assaults against Christian belief (in this context, Higher Criticism) could be overcome. Butler's vision for collective faith was closely affiliated to her conviction that Christ's kingdom could be experienced in the here and now. Significantly, however, the expectation of Butler's 'realized eschatology' – initiating God's reign on earth – was granted to the campaign community, rather than to denominational bodies or the Anglican Church. Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' resonates here, as the members of the community, whether known to each other or not, had to shape and act upon the vision of the world that they wished to see in the present day.

Technological advances in print culture allowed writers like Josephine Butler to collectively imagine an identity beyond the present experience.

Gaskell's novels do not comment directly on Christian community, but as a Unitarian novelist she was subjected to the disapproving gaze of her fellow chapel-worshippers. The pulpit, as discussed in Chapter Three, was the space inhabited by the Unitarian minister to make connections between liberal values and spirituality. This authoritative position was claimed by Gaskell in the fictional space of the novel but to a less successful degree. Instead, she experienced the rejection of her own community; the exposure to negative criticism after the publication of *Ruth* was comparable to the arrow-shot fate of St. Sebastian. Although Gaskell is silent on the issue of Christ's gender, she does embody the figure of martyred masculinity. There is a power conceived in weakness here as passive absorption of hostility (whether physical or mental) results in defiance and revered martyrdom. Gaskell is able to accept her perceived temporary rejection by trusting in a long-term hope that attitudes towards fallenness will change. Through the act of redeeming Ruth in death, I would argue that Gaskell does not give up on chapel, but she does place more confidence in a communal afterlife.

This study has demonstrated that simplistic, glib conclusions about the religious and literary experience of women should be avoided. Instead, the case studies have revealed a multifarious and diverse model of community life. Hannah More excelled in her Evangelical community, revelling in the literary activity that the Abolition movement generated. For the Winkworths, a circle of male mentors dictated literary choices whilst challenging their underdeveloped Christian faith. Although Gaskell's experience within the Manchester Unitarian community was mixed, her novels and social convictions were shaped in this environment: out of division and isolation, her literary voice was established. Butler stood at the centre of her community and effectively forged a campaign around her vision and convictions. Literary communities, whether supportive, confrontational or conflicted, did allow for a dynamic space in which each woman could develop her literary talents and discover her spiritual convictions. The dissenting tradition encouraged a faith that was individually shaped and owned and yet it was to be explored *within* community. It was through collective experience—mentorships, confession, epistolary debates, and campaigning – that these five women contributed to the abolition of the slave trade, addressed Higher Criticism's threat to the Christian faith, challenged sexual ideologies, and repealed the Contagious Diseases Acts.

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