

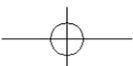
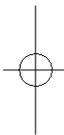
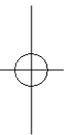


Enlightenment and Dissent

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INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGES:
WOMEN AND RATIONAL DISSENT

edited by
Gina Luria Walker and G M Ditchfield



INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGES: WOMEN AND RATIONAL DISSENT

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FOREWORD

This special number of *Enlightenment and Dissent* had its origins in a series of discussions among a group of scholars interested in the role of women in the evolution of Rational Dissent and their contribution to its theological, social and political ethos in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Their discussions crystallized into a workshop under the aegis of the Centre for Dissenting Studies held at Dr. Williams's Library on 27 June 2009. We are most grateful to the Centre, and its co-directors, Professor Isabel Rivers and Dr. David Wykes, for their active co-operation in making this event possible. In particular, we thank Dr. Wykes, the Director of Dr. Williams's Trust and Library, for allowing us to use the historic reading room of the Library, which provided a splendid atmosphere for our workshop. The programme of refurbishment which the Library completed in 2010 has already enhanced its scholarly reputation as a major repository of material for Dissenting history, and as a meeting place for scholars from all over the world.

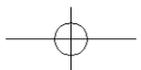
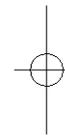
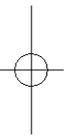
Four of the papers in this volume, namely those of Grayson Ditchfield, Anthony Page, David Sekers and Gina Luria Walker, began life as papers to this workshop. In addition, we have been fortunate in engaging six other experts to contribute. Accordingly, we thank Arianne Chernock, Felicity James, Fiore Sireci, Mary Sponberg and William McCarthy, and we owe a special debt of gratitude to Ruth Watts, who, although unable to join us on 27 June, gave us the benefit of her expertise on the subject by writing the introductory chapter to this volume. It is a pleasure to record our appreciation as editors to all the contributors for their promptness in meeting their deadlines, and their co-operation in accommodating to the conventions of *Enlightenment and Dissent*.

We thank those who, in addition to those named above, took part in the workshop, namely Stephen Burley, Elizabeth Clapp, David Wykes, Martin Fitzpatrick, Felicia Gordon, Clarissa Campbell Orr, Ann Peart, Isabel Rivers, John Seed, and Chauncey Walker, for their contributions to the discussions, formal and informal. Penelope Corfield kindly agreed to chair the final session and did so in a stimulating and sparkling way, which ended the day's proceedings on a high note.

We thank Martin Fitzpatrick and James Dybikowski for inviting us to edit this special number of *Enlightenment and Dissent* and for their support through all its stages.

We add our appreciation to those colleagues who have helped us with the copy-editing and other essential preparations for the publication of the volume. In particular Gina Luria Walker thanks Stephanie Bendik and at the University of Kent G M Ditchfield is grateful to Tim Keward.

Gina Luria Walker
G M Ditchfield



INTRODUCTION:
RATIONAL DISSENTING WOMEN AND THE TRAVEL OF IDEAS

Ruth Watts

‘There are periods in which the human mind seems to slumber, but this is not one of them. A keen spirit of research is now abroad, and demands reform.’¹ So, in 1792, said Anna Barbauld, poet, essayist, educationalist and later literary critic, glorying in the radical British Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century even as reaction against the excesses of the French Revolution were dampening the spirit of reform in which Rational Dissenters, among whom Barbauld was a significant figure, led the way. The Enlightenment, political reform and revolution, and Rational Dissent itself are all important aspects of the period but ones which historians have commonly portrayed as dominated by men. Recently, however, historians have revealed the significant part that women played in British cultural life at this time, including in politics and religion. Contemporaries, indeed, were very much aware of this development, their reactions to it ranging from encouragement to satire and vilification. At a time when minds were awake, debate flourished and ideas travelled, some women not only imbibed current ideas, but were also responsible for disseminating, teaching and developing them. A few were amongst those leading the way and in the late eighteenth century, as amongst men, a disproportionate number of these were Rational Dissenters.

Women have featured very little in the standard histories on Rational Dissent.² This is hardly unusual as they were generally written out of all kinds of serious history³ until the growth of feminist and gender history

¹ A L Barbauld, *Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield's inquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (London?, 1829; 1st edn., 1792), 58.

² E.g. C Gordon Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H L Short, Roger Thomas, *the English Presbyterians* (London, 1968), 232, 236, 264, 269, 273 refer only, and briefly, to Anna Barbauld; for the nineteenth century Harriet Martineau and Frances Power Cobbe receive passing references. Michael Watts, *The Dissenters from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), E M Wilbur, *A history of Unitarianism* (Boston, 1945), Anthony Lincoln, *Some political and social ideas of English dissent 1763-1800* (New York, 1938) and others ignore women. R V Holt, *The Unitarian contribution to social progress* (London, 1938 & 1952) is better, while Herbert McLachlan, *The Unitarian movement in the religious life of England. Its contribution to thought and learning 1700-1900* (London, 1934), 120-2, 176, 282 has

in the last decades began to restore women whose achievements had once been recognised, to analyse more fully gendered attitudes and actions in the past and to formulate new interpretations and lines of enquiry. Such analysis has opened up very fruitful investigations on women in the eighteenth century, with new and substantial editions of the letters and writings of women well-known in literary and cultural circles at the time,⁴ explorations of portraiture and imagery,⁵ and investigations of women in education, crafts, science and medicine⁶ paralleling those in literature, the arts and society.⁷ Modern publication of their voluminous correspondence, coupled with the reissuing of their publications, has brought to light how significant numerous women were in the culture of their age,⁸ as have modern biographies.⁹ Many of these studies, aided by

various references to Barbauld and mentions five Unitarian women of the nineteenth century; see 139-40, 196, 183, 262.

- ³ There were some excellent earlier works, e.g. Dorothy Gardiner, *English girlhood at school* (Oxford, 1929); Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women workers and the industrial revolution 1750-1850* (London, 1930; reissued by Virago in 1981), but they were hardly followed up for decades. Some useful chapters on eighteenth century women could be found also in longer works on specialised subjects, e.g. Kate C Hurd-Mead, *A history of women in medicine from the earliest times to the beginning of the nineteenth century*, (Haddam Connecticut, 1938); H J Mozans, *Women in science*, (London, 1991, first publ. 1913).
- ⁴ E.g. Janet Todd ed., *The collected letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York, 2003); Deirdre le Faye ed., *Jane Austen's letters* (London, 2003; 1st edn. Oxford, 1995); Hannah More, *Selected writings of ...*, ed. Robert Hole (London, 1996).
- ⁵ E.g. various authors in Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Pelt ed., *Brilliant women: 18th-Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008), effectively use portraiture to understand gendered attitudes of the period.
- ⁶ E.g. Mary Hilton, *Women and the shaping of the nation's young: education and public doctrine 1750-1850* (Aldershot, 2007); Londa Schiebinger, *The mind has no sex? Women in the origins of modern science* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991; 1st edn. 1989); Ludmilla Jordanova, *Nature displayed. Gender, science and medicine 1760-1820* (London and New York, 1999).
- ⁷ E.g. Eger and Peltz, *Brilliant women*; Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus eds. *Gender in eighteenth-century England* (Harlow, 1997); Leonore Davidoff, and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes. Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (London, 1987); Amanda Vickery, *The gentleman's daughter; women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven & London, 1998).
- ⁸ E.g. Elizabeth Eger ed., *Elizabeth Montagu. Bluestocking feminism: writings of the bluestocking circle 1738-1785, Vol. 1* (London, 1999); Judith Hawley ed., *Elizabeth Carter. Bluestocking feminism: writings of the bluestocking circle 1738-85, Vol. 2* (London, 1999).

useful anthologies of texts by and about women,¹⁰ ask deep and penetrating questions on the gendered attitudes underpinning the norms, opportunities and restrictions in life for both women and men.¹¹ In the same way, this special edition seeks not just to restore women to the history of Rational Dissent, but in doing so, to explore new sources and questions and examine old ones afresh. In so doing it will hopefully give a deeper and richer understanding of Rational Dissent and add substantially to the reinterpretation which has already been occurring,¹² including in *Enlightenment and Dissent*.¹³ This introduction will examine: firstly, the position of women generally in the eighteenth century, how this was developing in a changing cultural and economic world and women's participation in 'enlightened' culture; secondly, the inter-relationship of the British Enlightenment and Rational Dissent; and, thirdly, women within the culture of Rational Dissent. Throughout, the focus will be on the way ideas on and by women travelled, ending with

⁹ E.g. Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (London, 1997; pbk. 1999); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination* (Cambridge, 2003); Gina Luria Walker, *Mary Hays (1759-1843). The growth of a woman's mind* (Aldershot, 2006).

¹⁰ E.g. Bridget Hill ed., *Eighteenth century women. An anthology* (London, 1984); Vivien Jones ed., *Women in the eighteenth century, Constructions of femininity* (London, 1990).

¹¹ Sarah Knott, and Barbara Taylor eds., *Women, gender and the Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Hampshire, 2005) is a superb collection of scholarly essays on sex, gender and politics in Enlightenment Britain, Europe and America.

¹² E.g. William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld. Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2008), Ann Peart, *Forgotten prophets: the lives of Unitarian women 1760-1904* (University of Newcastle upon Tyne unpublished PhD thesis, 2005); Ann Peart, "'Deconsidered by men": women and the British Unitarian movement before 1904', *TUHS*, 24, no. 2 (April, 2008), 61-80; Ruth Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (London, 1998).

¹³ Notable articles have been D L Macdonald, 'Master, slave and mistress in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*', *Enlightenment and Dissent* (cited as *E & D*), 11 (1992), 46-57; B B Schnorrenberg, 'Liberty or luxury: Catharine Macaulay Graham and the socio-economic foundation of the state', *E & D*, 11 (1992), 58-69; Marilyn L Brooks, 'Mary Hays: finding a "voice" in Dissent', *E & D*, 14 (1995), 3-24; Gordon Spence, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's theodicy and theory of progress', *E & D*, 14 (1995), 105-27; Saba Bahar, 'Richard Price and the moral foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism', *E & D*, 18 (1999), 1-15; Pamela Clemit, 'The different faces of Mary Wollstonecraft' (review article), *E & D*, 21 (2002), 163-69; Mary

a brief indication of how gender underpinned the lives of women in the articles following.

* * * * *

From a current British viewpoint, the position of women in the eighteenth century does not appear to have been very enviable. Generally women were completely economically, socially and politically dependent upon men. In legal parlance, a married woman was subsumed into the persona of her husband while he was still living and despite the marriage vows of the established Anglican Church to which most of the population at least nominally belonged, her worldly goods became his. Her promise to obey was factually very significant and worried more independently-minded and situated women as the musings of Hannah Lightbody exemplified.¹⁴ Single women remained long under the authority of their parents, spinsterhood offering any real independence only to the rich and generally derided as a failed state for women. Below the wealthier sections of society, nearly all women worked, mostly within the family economy or increasingly in service, but if paid, generally receiving much lower wages than men, with ‘women’s work’ perpetually less valued. Society remained dominated by landowners, but commercial activities stimulated by both population growth and empire helped the growth of urban commercial middle ranks while by the end of the century in some English and Scottish areas rapid industrialisation was taking place. Such developments led to new social groupings and networks which in themselves generated new political and philosophical ideas. Some of its leaders were proudly terming the new industrial and urban middle ranks a ‘class’ by 1812, although this was a male definition: women were commonly placed in the rank of their fathers or husbands, but the attribution of rank had a very different effect on their ability to work or achieve any independence. Nevertheless, it is now recognised that women’s employment and community networks played a large and significant part in both the

Spongberg, “‘An extraordinary destiny’: Mary Hays, Dissenting feminist’ (review article), *E & D*, 24 (2008), 82-93. There have also been some relevant reviews in *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society (TUHS)* and a recent article with interesting material on Eliza Gould/Flower, see Timothy Whelan, Radical politics and Unitarian piety: the life and career of Benjamin Flower, 1775-1829’, *TUHS*, 24 (April, 2010), no.4, 235-53.

¹⁴ David Sekers ed. ‘The Diary of Hannah Lightbody’, *E & D*, 24 (2008), 26.

domestic industries and the industrial developments of this age, albeit regarded as subordinate.¹⁵

Women's inferior position was both the cause and result of their largely second-rate education. At a time when few people experienced much formal education, female literacy was far below that of males.¹⁶ Throughout society male and female education was generally differentiated according to preconceived gender roles. Whatever their lives, girls were expected to lead them dominated by some kind of domestic employment. Although the extent and depth of their education would differ according to their ranking in society, generally they were considered not to need or even be capable of a deep or extended one. Generally any woman with pretensions of being learned was seen as a pedant, ridiculous or morally lax.¹⁷ Even the highly educated Anna Barbauld pronounced that young ladies only needed 'to have such a general tincture of knowledge as to make them agreeable companions to a man of sense, and to enable them to find rational amusement for a solitary hour',¹⁸ although the range of education she both recommended for them and gave young ladies she tutored and mentored would have been highly gratifying for any girl thirsting after knowledge and understanding.¹⁹ It is true that boys' education was in much need of reform to suit the demands of a changing society but opportunities for them were nearly always better than for girls of the same rank. Girls were debarred from public and grammar schools, private classical and vocational schools and all higher education. Despite the growth of a number of transient

¹⁵ David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven and London, 1998), 61-73, *passim*; Maxine Berg, *The age of manufactures, 1700-1820. Industry, innovation and work in Britain* (London, 1994), 136-64, *passim*; Roy Porter, *English society in the eighteenth century* (London, 1990), *passim*.

¹⁶ David Vincent, *Literacy and popular culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), 24, *passim*.

¹⁷ Sylvia Harestark Myers, *The Bluestocking circle: women, friendship and the life of the mind in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1990), 3-5, 132.

¹⁸ Grace Ellis, *Memoirs, letters and a selection from the poems and prose writings of Anna Laetitia Barbauld* (2 vols., Boston, 1874), I, 57.

¹⁹ Watts, *Gender ... Unitarians*, 67, 80-3; although I never subscribed to the conventional view on Barbauld's conservatism on female education, I have revised my ideas further on the motivation behind this letter in the light of William McCarthy's scholarship – see his *Barbauld*, 141-6.

boarding and private day schools for the wealthier and middling ranks and the use of governesses for some, most even from these institutions received a fairly indifferent education intellectually and at best, as Jane Austen later said, ‘scrambled’ themselves into education by learning in the family and reading.²⁰

This is not the whole picture for, although such learning was usually portrayed as unsystematic and unmethodical unlike the supposedly ‘superior’ classical education given to boys, in cultured and learned households especially, fortunate women could learn much at home, whether taught or self-directed. Such education would most often be based on modern literature, history and languages and the new translations of the classics and thus could be both deep and very relevant. French, for example, both allowed a traveller such as Mary Berry to appreciate the best of French Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Émilie du Châtelet and the ‘spirit of enquiry’, ‘mental revolution’ and understanding of science they inspired and a writer like Anna Barbauld to cherish the refinement and polish of its modern novelists, educationalists and philosophers.²¹ Women across a spectrum of religious, social and political adherences, such as Hester Chapone, Catharine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, derided exaggerated stress on female ‘accomplishments’ and could be united in longing for an education based on more rational, deeper standards than the norm for girls: some of these wrote widely read books on this.²²

Such developments are a reminder that the eighteenth century was a time of profound change in Europe and America. Britain was both part of

²⁰ Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Collins, 1953; 1st ed.1816), 31.

²¹ Michèle Cohen, “‘To think, to compare, to combine, to methodise’: Girls’ education in Enlightenment Britain” in Knott and Taylor eds., *Women, gender ... Enlightenment*, 224-42; Michèle Cohen, ‘Gender and “method” in eighteenth-century English education’, *History of Education*, 33 (September 2004), no. 5, 585-96; Mary Berry, *A comparative view of the social life of England and France from the restoration of Charles the Second to the French Revolution* (London, 1828), 173-5, 191, 339-40, 353-4, 399-402, *passim*; McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 47.

²² Hester Chapone, *Letters on the improvement of the mind 1793* (London, 1996); Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on education 1790*, ed. Janet Todd (London, 1996); Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the education of daughters* (Oxford, 1994, first publ. 1787) and *A vindication of the rights of women* (Harmondsworth 1975; first publ. 1792); More, *Selected writings*.

this and followed its own unique trajectory. Its political institutions inspired reformist, even revolutionary thinking abroad, yet it had its own radical movements calling for rational evolution of the country's political structure. Such demands were partly stimulated by economic and industrial advances in which Britain led the way and the social developments they caused. Religious ferment was closely interrelated both with these various developments and with the Enlightenment, the profound cultural disturbance in thinking which underpinned the political, social, religious, intellectual, literary and artistic thinking of the age. This term 'the Enlightenment' has provoked argument ever since it was first used in the eighteenth century. Certainly it is no longer viewed simply as relatively homogenous or predominantly a French movement led by cosmopolitan *philosophes*, peaking in the mid eighteenth century, but as an intellectual movement varying in time and place. It has been seen as a power to emancipate individuals from localism and enable them to cooperate with others in a search for universal values and liberate themselves from 'traditional privileged forces'²³ or 'as a living language, a revolution in mood ... [decreeing] new ways of seeing, advanced by a range of protagonists, male and female, of various nationalities and discrete status, profession and interest groups.'²⁴

Importantly, it is now realised that this ferment of ideas was not solely a masculine affair as it has long been characterised. Indeed, examining it through exploring how women found a way into it and both further disseminated ideas and added to them provides a deeper, clearer, more just perspective.²⁵ Gendered notions prevented women from entering many of the new informal meeting places of culture such as coffee houses, clubs, academies and literary and philosophical societies but those from the middling and upper ranks could gain access to the expanding print culture, museums, libraries, art galleries, concert halls, music rooms, the

²³ Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1995), 1-13, 48; Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Rational Dissent and the Enlightenment', *Faith and Freedom*, 38, part 2 (1985), 113, 83-6.

²⁴ Roy Porter, *The creation of the modern world: the untold story of the British Enlightenment* (New York/London, 2000), 3.

²⁵ For feminist historians' arguments on how the use of gender as a prism can enlarge our historical understanding, see e.g. Gerda Lerner, *Why history matters* (Oxford, 1997); Sandra Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives* (Milton Keynes, 1991).

theatre and the vastly expanding consumer market in art, artefacts, furniture and design. Some managed to travel abroad, but for most travel was restricted to the mind. The internet of the day was the vast outpouring of literature, including journals, translations, encyclopaedias and, of course, the new genre of novels. The leaders of ‘gentlemanly’ society extolled the merits of ‘politeness’ and ‘taste’, mutual tolerance and self-discipline but these were social virtues so needed to be cultivated in society. Literature and the arts were seen as a means to them, but the social arts, especially that of conversation, were most highly prized. In these, women, if they were sufficiently educated, could excel and some men and women believed virtuous women who could converse well and intelligently were essential to civilise urban and urbane society.²⁶

From the late 1750s to the late 1780s, the most famous examples of women who excelled in such ways were the ‘Bluestockings’, whose name, in the first instance, was derived from the hosiery of one of its male members – a pertinent illustration of the mixed company who daringly met together at the homes of Elizabeth Vesey, Elizabeth Montagu and others, to discuss literary and philosophical subjects rather than play cards or drink heavily. Celebrated men of the day attended, such as Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds and David Garrick, but some of the women were to become almost as celebrated in their day.²⁷ Elizabeth Montagu for instance was amongst those women who promoted a significant revival of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, her ‘Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear [sic]’, of 1769, inspiring many from Garrick to fellows at Edinburgh University.²⁸ Elizabeth Carter, singular in being a female classical scholar, was the first to translate the entire works of Epictetus into English, a translation which was used long afterwards. She also translated and published Count Francesco Algarotti’s

²⁶ Ruth Watts, ‘A gendered journey: travel of ideas in England c.1750-1800’, *History of Education*, 37 (July 2008), no. 4, 513-17.

²⁷ Eger and Peltz, *Brilliant women*, Preface, 16-19, *passim*.

²⁸ Eger, *Elizabeth Montagu*, lxxv-lxxii, *Montagu*, ‘Essay’, 6-19; ‘Letters’, 161-6, 170, 173-4, 182-7, 195-8.

Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy explain'd for the use of the ladies..., subsequent editions making Newtonian physics accessible not only to women, but also many men.²⁹

Montagu, Carter and others in and beyond the actual Bluestocking circles, however, not only wrote on a variety of subjects and in diverse genres, but through reading, brilliant conversation and correspondence and highly significant literary and social networks, they also absorbed, disseminated, translated and interpreted varying cultural, moral, educational, social, political and religious ideas, creating some fresh ones in so doing. Despite being circumscribed by gendered attitudes and shut out from major avenues of learning, therefore, they latched on to the whirlwind of ideas swirling around them and circulated and extended them.³⁰ For example, the highly intelligent, well-educated Hester Thrale, long Samuel Johnson's domestic and emotional support, not only helped lead the brilliant conversation of a large circle of friends and acquaintances meeting constantly at her marital homes in Southwark and Streatham, but was later an innovative author in her own right.³¹ One of her guests, Fanny Burney, a younger Bluestocking, flourished in such networks. She was one of a growing band of women who participated in and even led ideas in contemporary culture in a professional and, almost, respectable manner, by writing novels. Burney, indeed, one of the most popular authors of the day, influenced both Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen.³² Strong female friendships and mutual support, hitherto a rather

²⁹ Hawley, *Carter*, 'The works of Epictetus', 1-333, 'Letters', 379-80; Patricia Phillips, *The scientific lady. A social history of women's scientific interests 1520-1918* (London, 1990), 92-8.

³⁰ Watts, 'A gendered journey', 518-25.

³¹ Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of Samuel Johnson*, ed. S C Roberts (Cambridge, 1932), *passim*; R Brimley Johnson ed., *The letters of Mrs Thrale* (London, 1926), 17-83; Nigel Wood ed., *Dr Johnson & Fanny Burney: extracts from Fanny Burney's prose 1777-84* (Bristol, 1989), 7, 35-6, 38-40, 76, 82-7, 89, *passim*.

³² Cheryl Turner, *Living by the pen: women writers in the eighteenth century* (London, 1994), 6, 53, 79, *passim*; Pat Rogers, 'Burney, Frances (1752-1840)' *ODNB*, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/603>.

underrated aspect of history, plus vast correspondence, underpinned the flow of ideas between the leading Blues and other women writers and artists.³³

Consequently such women helped ideas travel further, or at least through the literate middle and upper ranks, their own ideas becoming an important part of the process. Catharine Macaulay, for instance, became famed for her *History of England* in eight volumes in which she argued that government could be improved through experience and thus should be continuously monitored by independent rational beings, including women, to ensure real liberty developed and survived. Believing that the primary duty of the state was to preserve liberty – that is popular control of government, a free press, free speech and disestablished religion – she was influential in the John Wilkes election struggles and defended Richard Price against Edmund Burke.³⁴ Lauded long by republicans and reformers in America and England, she eventually fell from grace through virulent criticism of her politics, temerity in marrying a man half her age and generally stepping beyond the ‘province of her sex’. Mary Wollstonecraft and other radicals admired her, however.³⁵ Other prominent women of the 1770s and 1780s included two who were welcomed by the older Bluestocking group, Hannah More and Anna Aikin (Barbauld from 1774), both of whom like Macaulay, Montagu and Carter, were included in Richard Samuel’s painting of *The nine living muses* in 1779.³⁶ Hannah More, daughter of a Bristol schoolmaster and self-educated in Latin, French, Spanish and French, was first hailed as a

³³ Eger, *Montagu*, ‘Introduction’, lvii, lxii-lxv, ‘Dialogues of the Dead’, 115-37, 217 n.19; Myers, *Bluestocking circle*, 223, 249, 257-67, *passim*; Hawley, *Carter*, xxxi; Norma Clarke, *Dr Johnson’s women* (London, 2005, 1st ed.2000), 202, 227-9.

³⁴ Karen O’Brien, ‘Catharine Macaulay’s Histories of England: a female perspective on the history of liberty’ and Sarah Hutton, ‘Liberty, equality and God: the religious roots of Catharine Macaulay’s feminism’, in Knott and Taylor *Women, gender ... Enlightenment*, 523-50; B B Schnorrenberg, ‘Liberty or luxury: Catharine Macaulay Graham and the socio-economic foundation of the state’, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 11 (1992), 58-69.

³⁵ Lucy Peltz, ‘A revolution in female manners’, in Eger and, *Brilliant women*, 94-107; the quote is from Mary Hays, *Female biography* (6 vols., London, 1803), V, 169.

³⁶ Lucy Peltz, ‘Living muses. Constructing and celebrating the professional woman in art and literature’, in Eger and Peltz, *Brilliant women*, 59-64, *passim*.

brilliant playwright, although she is remembered more for her later work in schools for the poor, her evangelical *Cheap Repository Tracts* and her *Strictures on the modern system of female education* of 1799, which desired to reform the manners and morals of the fashionable world she had once eagerly dallied with, but within a hierarchical and deferential society.³⁷ Anna Barbauld first became celebrated as a poet, a medium she used to stimulate thought upon liberty and freedom and the consequences of scientific discovery.³⁸ Both women used their talents to oppose the slave trade but, later, differences in politics were to stall their former friendship as, indeed, it did Barbauld's with the Blues generally.³⁹

Political differences were interrelated with religious differences that affected attitudes to gender also. Generally those in the recognised Bluestocking circles were orthodox in religion and politics and more anxious to demonstrate that women could not only be learned but also stay virtuous and 'proper' than to stretch gender norms too far, although admittedly their forays into intellectual paths often earned them opprobrium and ridicule because they were women. They often hid their authorship or deferred rather ostentatiously to male authorities.⁴⁰ Highly respected writers, whether a Rational Dissenter like Barbauld or an evangelical Anglican like More, suffered vitriolic abuse because of their sex when their writings or actions were being criticised. Barbauld's poem '1811' particularly led to bitter remarks and malicious ridicule of her as a 'lady-author',⁴¹ but even Hannah More's national reputation as a conservative Christian moral and social reformer did not prevent some traditionalists shuddering at this 'Bishop in Petticoats'.⁴²

Catharine Macaulay, however, believed she was qualified to debate with 'enlightened' men by virtue of her intellect and rational independence. Her denial of the influential arguments of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that

³⁷ More, *Selected writings, passim*; Susan Skedd, 'More, Hannah (1745-1833)', *ODNB*; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19179>]

³⁸ Lucy Aikin ed., *The works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld* (2 vols., London, 1825), I, 1-22, 35-8, 55-8, 168-84, 192-5.

³⁹ McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 122-3, 148, 162, 190, 224-7, 277-8, 291-9, 303-4, 499.

⁴⁰ Watts, 'Travel of ideas', 524-5.

⁴¹ McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 477.

⁴² Peltz, 'A revolution in female manners', 115-21.

women could not develop full reasoning powers was echoed by Mary Wollstonecraft and by Anna Barbauld, the former renowned for her views on the potential of women's mind and character if only they were untapped by the best education, the latter a much stronger advocate of women's potential and rights than often portrayed.⁴³ Macaulay was a Latitudinarian Anglican, much influenced by the thinking of the Rational Dissenter Richard Price, who described a benevolent, wise God who gave all human beings the chance to achieve true wisdom and reform of society through use of their reason.⁴⁴

This is a significant example of how Rational Dissenters were important in British Enlightenment thinking. Many historians have underplayed Britain's part in the Enlightenment, but Roy Porter, for example, has stressed its formative role as a political and ethical model and in its science and experimental philosophy. Besides the influence of the brilliant Scottish Enlightenment in philosophy, moral and natural science,⁴⁵ he highlighted the dazzling achievements of Isaac Newton in science in leading the scientific Enlightenment and John Locke's *Essay concerning human understanding* and his *Some thoughts concerning education* in underpinning a century of educative and pedagogic experiment on how best to create rational, virtuous beings, just as his political theories influenced both the American and French Revolutions so strongly.⁴⁶ Locke's argument that all ideas came from sensation or reflection, his dismissal of innate ideas and stress on understanding being developed through the association of ideas, his call for clarity of perceptions and language and for reason to pervade in all matters, including, indeed, especially in religion,⁴⁷ affected all progressive education in eighteenth century Britain including that of royalty and aristocracy.⁴⁸

⁴³ Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on education 1790*, ed. Janet Todd (London, 1996), *passim*; Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*; Mary and *The wrongs of women* (Oxford, 1980); Watts, *Gender, power*, 26-7, 30-2, 80-6, 92-4; McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 79-86, 119-20, 348-60, 491-506.

⁴⁴ Hutton, '... religious roots of Catharine Macaulay's feminism', 523-50.

⁴⁵ Porter, *Modern world*, 1-12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-71, 132-8, 242-57, *passim*. Both Newton and Locke have been suspected of Arian views; for example, see Holt, *Unitarian contribution*, 283-4.

⁴⁷ John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, ed. A D Woodley (Glasgow, 1964, first publ. 1690), *passim*.

⁴⁸ Jill Shefrin, *Such constant affectionate care. Lady Charlotte Finch – Royal Governess of the children of George III* (Los Angeles, 2003), 2, *passim*.

Locke's works were particularly influential in Dissenting education, however, and, as extended by David Hartley – published and promulgated by Joseph Priestley – were profoundly significant in the rational idealism and educational philosophy of Rational Dissent, the form of Christianity perhaps most profoundly akin to the Enlightenment, not least in its denial of original sin.⁴⁹ It drew principally from Dissenters, especially Presbyterians, but two of their best-known members, Joseph Priestley and Richard Price were, like others, former Congregationalists, while also drawn into its ranks were Latitudinarian Anglicans such as Theophilus Lindsey, whose chapel in Essex Street, London became the first recognised Unitarian chapel in 1774, and Baptists such as Robert Robinson at Cambridge. What united Rational Dissenters were their general Enlightenment assumptions of accepting nature as a self-regulating system of laws but with God as the author of it, civilisation as continually evolving and that man ('man' was the term always used) best understood himself and nature through the application of reason, although their interpretations of this differed. In a religion which upheld free enquiry and barred subscription to any doctrinal articles, there was necessarily a range of thinking and Rational Dissent covered a continuum and many nuances of belief, including both Arianism and Socinianism or Unitarianism, although Unitarianism became more predominant as the eighteenth century progressed. As Martin Fitzpatrick has argued, both Priestley and Hartley's associationist psychology and Price's intuitive sense of right and wrong were informed by an ethical concern; their hearty agreement that man and nature were creations of a beneficent providence made them unique in the European Enlightenment in that while applying scientific thinking to all matters of existence, they retained God with reason and allowed all, including the laity, free open enquiry even into religion. Their stress on independent judgement and moral order underpinned their quest for religious and constitutional reform, their

⁴⁹ David Hartley, *Observations on man: his frame, his duty and his expectations* (2 vols., London, 1801, 1st edn. 1749), *passim*; Joseph Priestley, *An examination of Dr Reid's inquiry into the human mind...* (1775, 1st edn. 1774), in *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley*, ed. J T Rutt (25 vols, London, 1817-31), (hereafter *Works*), III, 10, 25-6; Joseph Priestley, *Hartley's theory of the human mind on the principle of the association of ideas with essays relating to the subject of it* (London, 1775); Ruth Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and Education', *E & D*, 2 (1983), 83-100.

support of the American and French revolutions and their detestation of slavery. They wanted liberalism and civil liberty so individuals could serve both God and the community more effectively. In campaigning for these they contributed greatly to the fight for ‘free, unfettered enquiry’, just as their emphasis on scientific thinking and science itself was to be significant in science, industry and education alike.⁵⁰

Such principles were learnt much through the educational institutions which Rational Dissenters attended, the Scottish universities and liberal Dissenting academies – Warrington and later Manchester and Hackney Academies – from which came many ex-students and tutors who became the leaders of Rational Dissent, men whose teaching, publications and actions put them in the vanguard of change and reform in religion, politics, scholarship, science, education and industry. Small in number in the total population and generally despised for their religious views if not their radical politics, their chapels particularly in growing urban centres, often became citadels of liberal thought. Priestley, for example, – minister, scientist, educationalist, radical political thinker, prolific writer and controversialist – was an explosive stimulus to ideas in all these areas and wherever he lived, including his years in Birmingham where he was prominent in the Lunar Society, that small, but remarkable powerhouse of ideas in science, industry and the arts with links to the nation and empire, Scotland, France and the USA.⁵¹ The flowering of the late eighteenth century Enlightenment in Britain, indeed, was both affected by and affected the advance of Rational Dissent, whose members included many of those leading political, educational, scientific and economic and social change. Their educational philosophy that all people, male and female, rich and poor, were the result of lifelong associations, meant that a rational

⁵⁰ Fitzpatrick, ‘Rational Dissent and the Enlightenment’, 87-101; R K Webb, ‘Price among the Unitarians’, *E & D*, 19 (2000), 147-70; Nicholas Hunt-Bull, ‘Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson – does a moral sense theory make ethics arbitrary?’, *E & D*, 23 (2004-07), 24-44; Gina Luria Walker, ‘“Brief encounter”’: Robert Robinson and the right to private judgement’, *E & D*, 24 (2008), 54-70; Ruth Watts, *Women in science: a social and cultural History* (London, 2007), 83-98.

⁵¹ Watts, *Gender ... Unitarians*, 56-66, *passim*; Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar men. The friends who made the future* (London, 2002), *passim*; Malcolm Dick ed., *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley, Warwickshire, 2005).

education from birth should produce rational men and women able to usher in a liberal, humane, rational, scientific society; in other words, 'enlightened' people for an 'enlightened' world.⁵²

Such ideals excited Mary Wollstonecraft who with her sisters opened a school for girls in Newington Green in 1784 and worshipped at Richard Price's chapel, absorbing his philosophy and becoming well acquainted with his theological and philosophical writing. Thence her own theological, political and gender aspirations fast developed. Grateful for Price's support, their intellectual relationship became a cornerstone of her thinking. Barbara Taylor, in seeking to restore Mary Wollstonecraft to the intellectual world of the British radical Enlightenment, demonstrates how much the latter was influenced by Price's emphasis on private judgement, freely exercised by all, as a true basis of religion. Wollstonecraft, argues Taylor, countered the 'servility' of Edmund Burke's sentiments with the 'virile alternative' of Price's reasoning by portraying a passionate search for truth as leading to a 'sublime system of morality'.⁵³ Saba Bahar also shows how in Wollstonecraft's *Vindications of the rights of man*, she adopts Price's views that without exercise of humanity's God-given capacity to redeem itself through reason, to live virtuously and to choose to do so, there can be no moral agency. In the *Rights of women* Wollstonecraft applied these arguments specifically to women who also needed liberty and knowledge in order to exercise their conscience and acquire virtue. Thus customs and matrimonial laws which prevented this should be changed and Rousseau's exaggerated emphasis on sensibility in women denied since women were made not just for the immediate happiness of men but for an independent theological and moral existence which required civil and political rights.⁵⁴ Such ideas were forcefully reaffirmed by Mary Hays, the radical feminist who found her 'voice' in *Rational Dissent* through the mentoring of the Baptist minister Robert Robinson of Cambridge, the correspondence and sermons of Hugh

⁵² Priestley, 'Introductory essays', 167-96; Hartley, *Observations*.

⁵³ Taylor, *Wollstonecraft*, 2-3, 6-7, 40-1, 67, 103.

⁵⁴ Bahar, 'Price and Wollstonecraft', 1-15. See also Spence, 'Wollstonecraft's theodicy', 105-27 and Sireci, below.

Worthington, John Disney, Theophilus Lindsey and Richard Price and the writings of Priestley and Hartley. Claiming the need for women to seek truth and for their thinking to be respected, she adapted ideas of sensationalism and association of ideas to include the gender factor,⁵⁵ taking further the educational assent to this of many Rational Dissenters, many of whom were so deeply influenced by Priestley's promotion of the work of Hartley and his associationist psychology.

These educational principles and the stress on independent freedom of thought based on educated reason can also be seen in those nurtured in Rational Dissent, for example, in the writings of Anna Barbauld, a stalwart friend of Priestley, although not necessarily agreeing with all his views, a prime educationalist of the day and a champion of Dissenters' rights, if also sometimes a critic within their ranks.⁵⁶ Daniel White, indeed, suggests she tried to domesticate the masculine culture of Rational Dissent by introducing a new warmth of sensibility and a regulated form of enthusiasm to 'the rational sublime of Socinian reason'.⁵⁷

This is significant because, despite their non-appearance in many accounts, women were exceedingly important in most of the areas central to Rational Dissenters as writers, thinkers, educationalists, reformers, political activists and in the way they held together and furthered, if not established, the social, religious and educative networks that bound Rational Dissent. Hannah Lindsey played a key role, for example, in the chapel in Essex Street which became the prime headquarters of Unitarianism, and Hannah Greg (née Lightbody) was the cultural beacon of her husband's community at Styal.⁵⁸ Women, such as Harriet Martineau, emerged from Rational Dissenting families who had long-lasting effect in both their religious community and localities – Norwich,

⁵⁵ Walker, *Mary Hays, passim*; Brooks, 'Mary Hays', 3-24.

⁵⁶ E.g. Aikin, Works of Anna ... Barbauld, 'To Dr Priestley' (1792), and *passim*; 'Thoughts on the devotional taste and on sects and establishments' (1776), 232-59; 'Address to the opposers of the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts' (1790), 355-75; McCarthy, below.

⁵⁷ Daniel E White, "'With Mrs Barbauld it is different": dissenting heritage and the devotional taste', in Knott and Taylor, *Women, gender ... Enlightenment*, 474-92.

⁵⁸ See the articles by Ditchfield and by Sekers, below.

Birmingham and Ambleside in the Martineau family case. For example, Susannah Taylor, liberal in her views and firmly against slavery, was a deeply loved and respected hostess in the rich literary and political society of Norwich which included ‘many of the most cultivated men and women of her day’, not least many leading people in Rational Dissent. She was respected for attending to ‘all the small details of daily life, in the midst of which she found time to read and appreciate philosophy and poetry, and to think for herself.’⁵⁹ Her sons achieved much in engineering, printing, music and science, but Susannah was determined her daughters should also receive a thorough and liberal education. Her daughters, Susan and Sarah (Sally) learnt Latin, French, Italian and German and were encouraged to read widely and deeply on literature, history, politics and current affairs. Sarah lived with Anna Barbauld for a time, her mother eagerly advising her that her mentor’s conversation would be an education in itself. Sarah enjoyed the poetry, art, drama and music there as she had done in her own home at Norwich at gatherings of the Martineau and Taylor clans. Sarah was later a translator of German, the editor of her husband John Austin’s works on jurisprudence, a promoter of national education for the working classes and a superb hostess to the men and women of intellectual and scientific renown who flocked to her successive homes.⁶⁰

In York, Catharine Harrison was the centre of a different kind of network in Rational Dissent. Her father was an Anglican vicar liberal on everything except girls’ education. Her mother, daughter of a wealthy baronet, had had to teach herself to read and write. Longing for a more substantial education than she was ever offered, Catharine attempts at self-education flowered only through knowing Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey in Catterick and converting to Unitarianism along with them. Subsequently, through travelling to attend the services of Rev. Wood in Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds and the care of Mrs. Dawson, an admired friend of Priestley, she became an ardent follower of Priestleyan philosophy and

⁵⁹ Janet Ross, *Three generations of English women. Memoirs and correspondences of Mrs John Taylor, Mrs Sarah Austin and Lady Duff Gordon* (2 vols., London, 1888), I, iii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, iii-ix, 4-41, *passim*.

was firmly ensconced in the Unitarian networks of Yorkshire. Her move to York and marriage to the learned Newcome Cappe, minister at St Saviourgate, York furthered this, especially when she began first transcribing the notes of her increasingly sick husband and then, after his death in 1799, began publishing numerous editions of his discourses and sermons. As editor of an esteemed scholar she was able to enter the 'masculine' domain of theology, gradually and increasingly articulating her own comments and reflections. Thence, she became a regular contributor to Robert Aspland's *Monthly Repository* and, from 1815, to his *Christian Reformer*. A firm defender of Unitarianism, she equally insisted on the right to private judgement and thus opposed too much doctrinal hardening. She built up an impressive network of contacts in the Unitarian world of England and America and her informal and public support was a vital ingredient in the survival of Manchester Academy in its early years as Manchester College in York. Importantly, she encouraged the social and intellectual life around the college to include female relatives of students who stayed at her home. Mary Turner, daughter of William Turner of Newcastle and sister of William Turner, the maths tutor met her future husband John Gooch Robberds in this way.⁶¹

It is unsurprising that Cappe nurtured such links as those to the Turner family and others such as Lant Carpenter, as like them, she was a keen educationalist. Long before her marriage she had tried to help the poor through Sunday classes and female benefit clubs. In York her continuing work for charity and education convinced her that all female departments of public institutions should be inspected and visited by officially appointed well-educated women. The book she wrote on this, *Thoughts on charitable institutions*, excited much attention from Unitarians. Working with the evangelical Anglican Faith Grey and other women, she managed to secure some progress in York, but the bitter opposition to women's involvement she encountered, exacerbated by the suspicions of some Unitarians against working with evangelicals and others who were usually so hostile to them, illustrated the thorny path that both women

⁶¹ Catharine Cappe, *Memoirs of the life of the late Mrs Catharine Cappe* (London, 1822), *passim*; Helen Plant, *Unitarianism, philanthropy and feminism in York 1782-1821: the career of Catharine Cappe* (University of York, 2003), 8-10; Mary Robberds, 'Recollections of a long life' in J A V Chapple and Anita Wilson eds., *Private voices* (Keele, 1996), 105-16.

and heterodox believers trod in this period. As Helen Plant has shown, however, Cappe, an Enlightenment woman, took further humanist philanthropy and assertions that civilisation could be marked by the respect shown to women, for she argued not for what men should permit women to do but what women themselves should claim as a right. Seeing women's involvement in a wider sphere as an extension of their practical Christian duties, her stress on female citizenship was localised, limited and gendered. Nevertheless, it went further than most and anticipated women's philanthropic initiatives in the nineteenth century. Thus in many ways Cappe demonstrated how women could utilise opportunities within the networks of Rational Dissent.⁶²

As Ann Peart has shown to excellent effect, the story of Rational Dissent and Unitarianism can be much better understood if the correspondence, networking and the travel of ideas between women and between them and men is appreciated.⁶³ Women travelled both literally and mentally in these networks. For example, Hannah Lightbody's travels before her marriage took her from Liverpool (with its important networks centred on Dr. James Currie, William Roscoe, William Rathbone, Rev. James Yates and others), to Leicestershire and Birmingham where she visited the 'manufactures' (probably Boulton's Soho Works); to London, especially Newington Green where she met Drs. Price and Kippis and Anna Barbauld and she visited her old school at Stoke Newington; and Manchester where she met her future husband Samuel Greg.⁶⁴ Anna Barbauld's most formative years were at Warrington where her father John Aikin and, later, her brother John were tutors; subsequently she lived, worked and socialised in Palgrave, not far from Norwich, Hackney and Stoke Newington, all areas where Rational Dissent was strong.⁶⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft was not only connected to Newington Green but also to Joseph Johnson's home and shop in St Paul's Churchyard, a lively, influential centre of thought and action for Rational Dissenters and radical thinkers generally, many of whom, such as Barbauld, Priestley and Wollstonecraft were published by Johnson. Wollstonecraft met her future

⁶² Cappe, *Memoirs*, passim; *Monthly Repository*, IX (1814), 424-7, 542-6, 673, 686-8; Plant, *Catharine Cappe*, 16-31.

⁶³ Peart, *Forgotten prophets*.

⁶⁴ Sekers, *Hannah Lightbody*, passim.

⁶⁵ McCartney, *Barbauld*, passim.

husband William Godwin there and introduced her young friend Mary Hays.⁶⁶ Hays, circulating in London Rational Dissenting circles, was mentored by Robert Robinson, Baptist minister at Cambridge who also influenced Eliza Gould/Flower and was a friend of William Frend, the ‘university rebel’, whose conversion from Anglicanism to Unitarianism cost him his living at Cambridge. Hays’s correspondence with both Robinson and Frend was crucial to her own intellectual development, even as her romantic disappointment in Frend aided her journey of self-discovery.⁶⁷ Frend was the tutor to the Unitarian Annabella Millbanke whose friendship with the man who stimulated her deep love of mathematics, astronomy and classics lasted longer than that with her future husband Lord Byron.⁶⁸ Lady Byron, a firm supporter of Unitarian educational ventures and campaigns for women’s rights in the nineteenth century, was an ally of Mary Carpenter and a friend of another reformer and educationalist, Elizabeth Rathbone, daughter of Hannah Lightbody/Greg and so the wheel turns full circle.⁶⁹

Many other such wheels could be turned, however, illustrating the interconnectedness of the ideas and actions of women and men in Rational Dissent. Many of them concerned education. Not only were there the networks around the academies, but there were interrelated ones around the schools Rational Dissenters promoted, ran and used. For example, Cappe’s minister in Leeds, William Wood, valuing the influence of those who would be educators of infants in the future, ran a school for girls with a full modern curriculum similar to those run by Rational Dissenters for boys except the classics were in translation. Her correspondent Lant Carpenter ran a school in Exeter, ostensibly for boys, but to which Hannah Greg appears to have sent her eldest daughter Elizabeth, (later Rathbone). Her friend Rev. James Yates, part of the William Roscoe circle, had earlier persuaded Carpenter to teach history, philosophy and other subjects to young ladies in Liverpool. Other Greg daughters, like their brothers, attended Rev. J J Tayler’s school in

⁶⁶ Taylor, *Wollstonecraft*, *passim*.

⁶⁷ Walker, *Mary Hays*, *passim*; Frida Knight, *University rebel. The life of William Frend 1757-1841* (London, 1971), 46-9, 53-71, 128-65, 198-201, 203-10, 213; Whelan, ‘Benjamin Flower’, 235-53.

⁶⁸ Knight, *University rebel*, 228-40, 243, *passim*.

⁶⁹ Watts, *Gender ... Unitarians*, 79, 113, 114, 122, 123, 128, 156, 176, 177, 206.

Nottingham. There were a few very successful girls' schools run by Unitarian women, but largely the education of girls remained in the family home and through visits to other families or tutoring such as Anna Barbauld offered. Since, however, at least among the cultural elite of Rational Dissent, these homes were often hotbeds of cultural and intellectual activity and included many actively involved in teaching and/or the publication of educational texts, this was better than many might receive.⁷⁰

Such an education would necessarily need to start from infancy and would have to be based as much on the methods of teaching and learning as the content. Priestley and other progressive educationalists of his circle, produced many of the books necessary to enable such teaching and learning in all sectors of education, getting them published by both the Eyres Press in Warrington and Joseph Johnson in London. It was Priestley's younger friend Anna Barbauld, however, who made the breakthrough in writing such works for infants, particularly through her *Lessons for children* (1778, 1779) which influenced many, including one of the most popular writer of children's books and novels of the turn of the century, Maria Edgeworth. Innovative and enjoyable, both the *Lessons* and Barbauld's following *Hymns in prose for children* were printed in large clear type on good paper. In tune with the principles of education by association they led the child in gradual steps to read, to develop their appreciation of language and to observe and partly understand the world around them. *Lessons* used a conversational style of a mother teaching her son while *Hymns* was written in rhythmical prose intended for memorization and recitation. They were designed to impress devotional feelings upon the very young mind in the hope that early wonder and delight in connecting God with a variety of sensible objects and nature would lay 'deep, strong and permanent associations' for practical devotion. Although written by a Unitarian, such hymns were generally acceptable in contemporary culture and, indeed, were read and learnt by generations of children, securing Barbauld a long influence on the minds of the young.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Cappe, *Memoirs*, 188-9; Watts, *Gender ... Unitarians*, 43-56, 66-90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 33-43, 51, *passim*; Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth A literary biography* (Oxford, 1972), 61; Lucy Aikin, *Anna ... Barbauld*, I, v-xv, xxv-xxxviii; Ellis, *Barbauld*, I, 13-230; Betsy Rodgers, *Georgian chronicle: Mrs Barbauld and her family* (London, 1958), 72-4; Anna Lætitia Barbauld, *Hymns in prose for children*

Similarly long-lasting was the exceedingly popular book *Evenings at home* which Barbauld wrote with her brother Dr John Aikin – a very apposite example of their ideals on education, interweaving the principles of associationist psychology with a love of poetry and literature, excitement over new discoveries in science and technology and passionate belief in humane, liberal principles in a variety of stories, fables, dialogues, homilies and plays which hopefully engaged and delighted the reader. Designed to be read and used in the family circle, the aim was to arouse curiosity while introducing children to useful knowledge, pleasure in observation and science, and, not least, the virtues of intelligent industry and the humane, liberal morality of a rational middle-class.⁷² According to his daughter Lucy Aikin, *Evenings at home* encapsulated her parents' favourite ideas and the whole family was encouraged to involve itself in and critique John Aikin's writings. For Lucy, this was 'philosophy teaching by example'.⁷³ The significant point here is this was education for girls as well as boys as can be seen in other examples of educational writings of Rational Dissenting writers who published fiction and textbooks based on associationist principles to promote a modern, liberal education for both males and females which did not wholly displace classics but stressed modern subjects such as English literature, modern history, geography, modern languages and science.⁷⁴ Mary Hilton sees such writings by Rational Dissenters, in particular those of Anna Barbauld, as significant pioneering works in encouraging children and young people to think for themselves, explore, question, criticise and connect observed facts to draw rational conclusions and to do this in familial settings. She sees this as an important contribution to women of this era configuring themselves as 'the nation's teachers' and thus becoming hugely influential constructors of the moral education of the young. She also depicts the scientific outlook, the union of the

(London: John Murray, 1880, 1st ed. 1781); "'Preface" by Anna Lætitia Barbauld', in *A celebration of woman writers*, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barbauld/hymns> accessed 11/02/2008.

⁷² John Aikin, and Anna Barbauld, *Evenings at home* (Edinburgh, 1868, 1st edn. 1793), *passim*.

⁷³ Anna le Breton, *Memories of seventy years*, ed. Mrs Herbert Martin, (London, 1883), 37-8; Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of John Aikin* (2 vols., London, 1823), I, 156-9, 165, 201-2.

⁷⁴ Watts, *Gender ... Unitarians*, 43-52, *passim*.

imaginative with the applied and the practical among Rational Dissenters, as an educative culture ‘permeating the family and community lives of Unitarian manufacturing families, and admired by other nations’.⁷⁵

Science, or natural philosophy as it was still called then, was an example of the wider education encouraged for girls by Rational Dissenters. Scientific subjects were generally taught only in private commercial, mathematical and technical academies.⁷⁶ Rational Dissenters, however, led the way in their teaching of scientific subjects in their educational institutions and through their educational writings. Their liberal Dissenting Academies and the new scientific and literary and philosophical societies in which they played such a prominent part were for males only, but girls were also encouraged to realise the significance of science in modern life, to have as deep an understanding of it as possible and to share in the excitement of a scientific approach to all subjects.⁷⁷ Anna Barbauld supported such ideas and gave practical examples: for instance, she wrote on how disgusting materials could be turned into the most useful article of paper.⁷⁸ Mary Turner’s education, including attending lectures at the Royal Institution in London, enabled her to do the drawings for her father William’s lectures at the New Institution in Newcastle, although female propriety was still strong enough for her to do them beforehand so no-one knew of her participation.⁷⁹ Another woman, very close to Rational Dissent, Jane Marcet, was inspired by attending lectures at the Royal Institution to use the familial mode of education to teach girls and young women the prime experimental science of the day, chemistry. In her *Conversations on chemistry* she utilised progressive teaching methods to include dialogue, experiment and much reference to everyday concerns in her lively conversations directed, unusually for scientific educational books, by a knowledgeable, sympathetic woman. Her teenage girl students were encouraged to think for themselves and to learn through questioning, mistakes and cooperation to build knowledge through a scientific

⁷⁵ Hilton, *Women and the ... nation’s young*, 98-104, *passim*.

⁷⁶ Nicholas Hans, *New trends in education in the eighteenth century* (London, 1951), 82-116.

⁷⁷ See Watts, *Women in science*, chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of this theme.

⁷⁸ Aikin and Barbauld, *Evenings at home*, 113-16.

⁷⁹ Robberds, ‘Recollections’.

approach with all their experiments possible within the home.⁸⁰ This book, the first of many such others, was a huge success in Britain, Europe and the USA, engaging people of both sexes, all ages and classes.⁸¹ Marcet may not have been a Rational Dissenter herself, although she moved in their circles in London, was a friend of Harriet Martineau and other Unitarians and was a great admirer of the American Unitarian Dr. Channing. She was also a great friend of a greater scientist, Mary Somerville, who similarly moved in such circles in the early nineteenth century and moved into Rational Dissent.⁸²

These examples are used to demonstrate the culture in which Rational Dissenting women moved. This culture and education aimed at producing the type of citizen described above – rational, humane and liberal and, of course, supporting the principles of Rational Dissent. It was not necessarily expected that women would actively participate in this beyond educating the young in such principles, but they did. Their understanding of history produced not just women who wrote on history such as Lucy Aikin, but those who could write eloquently on matters of government such as Ann Jebb and later Harriet Martineau. Anna Barbauld wrote tellingly on slavery in prose and poetry (Hannah Lightbody was convinced by James Yates on the iniquities of this but as Hannah Greg felt she had to be more circumspect in the Liverpool circles in which she moved); Mary Wollstonecraft compared the evils of slavery to the conditions of women to expressive effect. Both she and Mary Hays broke new ground in the way they expounded on women's rights; Ann Jebb and Anna Barbauld were effective campaigners against the Test and Corporation Acts and the disabilities suffered by Dissenters while all the women included in this volume initially supported the French Revolution and, whatever their varying later reactions, continued to uphold the rights of individual conscience and thinking for themselves which was crucial to the principles of Rational Dissent, even if they suffered calumny for doing so. Barbauld used the new journals successfully to disseminate her

⁸⁰ Jane Marcet, *Conversations on chemistry* (2 vols., London, 1806), I & II, *passim*.

⁸¹ Bette Polkinhorn, *Jane Marcet: an uncommon woman* (Berkshire, 1993), *passim*.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30-1, *passim*; Anna Lætitia le Breton ed., *Correspondence of Dr Channing and Lucy Aikin (1826-42)* (London, 1874), 126; *Record of Unitarian worthies* (London, 1876), 8 – this work also claims Jane Marcet as a Unitarian.

views as did women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and, indirectly, Eliza Gould.⁸³

In such ways women contributed much to Rational Dissent, an involvement sometimes difficult to discern because of lack of records, but made even more difficult by previous gendered approaches to history which ignored or underestimated women's contribution. The women included in this volume were well aware of gender issues and their lives and writings were underpinned by them. Hannah Lightbody, when a single woman, debated long over whether a 'sensible, liberal' man would want a well-educated companion as well as a housekeeper, deciding she would never marry a man who did not value the type of education she had enjoyed so much. Assuming men were generally selfish and unreasonable, she argued she would not relinquish her happy single life to obey one who would not add to her happiness. Yet her assumption that obedience was part of marriage for a female meant that, once engaged to Samuel Greg, she soon learnt, sometimes at great cost, to temper her opinions in order to avoid domestic strife.⁸⁴ Ann Jebb played a significant part in Rational Dissenting and radical politics, but, although she might use female authorship to her advantage, she wrote anonymously or under a pseudonym (as, admittedly, men often did) and did not champion women's rights as such. The writer of her obituary in the *Monthly Repository* (who appeared to be more interested in her husband than her), praised her liberalism but said she had a 'delicacy of mind, which admitted no compromise with that masculine boldness, in which some females, of a highly cultivated intellect, have at times indulged.'⁸⁵ Hannah Lindsey thought and acted independently, played a leading role in the all-important Essex Chapel, did much to popularise Unitarian doctrines and was crucial in memorializing her husband's work and in Rational Dissenting networks. Her intellectual exchanges, like those of other women, were part of the fabric of heterodox theology, but the very vitality of her female role has undermined her place in history.⁸⁶

⁸³ Rodgers, *Georgian chronicle*, 191; Lucy Aikin, *Works ... Barbauld*, I, 173-9; Sekers, *Lightbody*, 57-8, 63; Macdonald, 'Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*', 46-57; Walker, *Mary Hays, passim*; Whelan, 'Eliza Gould', 246; see all articles below.

⁸⁴ Sekers, *Lightbody*, 24-7, 111, 118-9, and below.

⁸⁵ *Monthly Repository*, VII (1812), 597-603, 661-72 and Page, below.

⁸⁶ See Ditchfield, below.

Anna Barbauld's position can seem ambiguous: denied the educational and professional opportunities available to the males at Warrington, she did much to further the cause of women both in her writings and in her very life, becoming one of the most significant writers of the age through her poetry, her essays, journalism and editorship of Samuel Richardson and other leading eighteenth century writers, her educational work and her championship of Dissenting rights. Reticent in some ways, she had the confidence to use her considerable intellectual and writing talents to critique perceived abuses, including those of Rational Dissenters. She delighted in women's company, encouraged their full intellectual development and promoted both their writings, especially fiction, and their meeting together in societies such as the one she and Lucy Aikin founded in Stoke Newington.⁸⁷ On the other hand, her portrayal of the 'Enlightenment mother' could be interpreted as paradoxically limiting as well as extending women's role, while her arguments with Mary Wollstonecraft have been well-rehearsed.⁸⁸ In fact, most of the latter's ideas were congenial to her, she was pleased by her marriage to Godwin and never upset by the gossip about her. The Aikin women generally were 'great admirers of Mrs Godwin's writings' according to Lucy Aikin but 'were too correct in their conduct to visit her'.⁸⁹

This statement, in itself, is a significant pointer to the difficulties that 'respectable' Rational Dissenting women faced. Even the controversial Mary Hays fell into the usual apologies about female authorship although Wollstonecraft scolded her on this and neither she, nor Anna Barbauld, ever fell into this trap.⁹⁰ Wollstonecraft's controversial promotion of the 'rights' of women drew on her comparison of the disabilities oppressing Dissenters to the position of women and her application of the associationist education principles of Priestley and of Price's thinking, sure that women should learn to reason for themselves not just through their male relatives.⁹¹ Such thoughts were eagerly welcomed by some Rational Dissenters such as the William Roscoe circle in Liverpool and William Enfield's circle in Norwich where T S Norgate was inspired to go further and demand the vote for women – a demand echoed by Roscoe's friend, William Shepherd, minister and

⁸⁷ Barbauld 'The Invitation'; McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 79-91, 149-64, 199, 207, 214, 423-30, 505-6; White, 'Mrs Barbauld', 474-92.

⁸⁸ See e.g. Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 182-7; McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 348-55.

⁸⁹ Rodgers, *Georgian chronicle*, 133, 189.

⁹⁰ Walker, *Mary Hays*, 64-5; McCarthy, *Barbauld*, 356-7.

⁹¹ Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 103-9; see Sireci, below.

educationalist.⁹² Mary Hays similarly utilised the values and philosophy of Rational Dissenters to pursue her own ‘enlightened’ journey, interpret Enlightenment concepts to female autodidacts and in return, interpolate the concept of gender into Enlightenment and Rational dissenting thinking. Her ideas, praised by some in Rational Dissent, went too far for many, especially on sexual matters as Lucy Aikin (great friend of William Roscoe), author, eminent conversationalist and supporter of highly educated women, regretted.⁹³ Such views would be reiterated to some extent by Harriet Martineau who, influenced for life by the ideals of individual enquiry after truth, human perfection and progress which she imbibed from her Unitarian upbringing and education, was to become one of the foremost writers and controversialists of the nineteenth century, an articulate supporter of women’s rights, higher education and employment, but who drew back from women who broke the rules of propriety.⁹⁴

In such ways ideas travelled not only between these women and out to others in their own generations but also into the next century. Rational Dissent itself enabled the women affected by its beliefs and philosophy to attain better education, greater independence of thought and opportunities to participate in current debates and culture, although still restrained in varying degrees by the norms of their day. Just as Rational Dissenters in this period formulated the reasoned arguments that could lead to greater religious equality, so their principles enabled some women to apply this to gender, albeit this was too explosive for society as a whole and even threatening to some Rational Dissenters. The threads of women’s networking, actions and ideas interweaved throughout Rational Dissent and understanding this gives a deeper perception of Rational Dissent as a whole, as the articles in this special number of *Enlightenment and Dissent* will demonstrate.

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⁹² Holt, *Unitarian contribution*, 152; see Chernock, below.

⁹³ Walker, *Mary Hays*, *passim*; Rodgers, *Georgian chronicle*, 165, 181-2; Philip Hemery ed., *Memoirs, miscellanies and letters of the late Lucy Aikin* (London, 1864), ix-xxviii, 125-6, *passim*; see Spongberg, below.

⁹⁴ Susan Hoecker-Drysdale, *Harriet Martineau, first woman sociologist* (Providence and Oxford, 1992), *passim*; Josephine Kamm, *John Stuart Mill in love* (Salisbury, 1977), 47, 52; see James, below.

FEMINISM IN THE PROVINCES: T S NORGATE AND THE 'RIGHTS OF WOMAN' IN NORWICH

Arianne Chernock

At first glance it would seem that Thomas Starling Norgate (1772-1859) intended his bold and occasionally blustery two-part essay 'On the Rights of Woman', published anonymously in *The Cabinet* in 1794-5, primarily as a publicity stunt. Dismayed by the course of the French Revolution abroad and by 'Pitt's Terror' at home, this Norwich-based Unitarian radical, just 22 years old at the time, was no doubt fearful that the Revolutionary 'moment' was drawing to a close before he had had the opportunity to revel in, and exploit, its possibilities. What better way, then, to jockey for attention on a shrinking national stage than by taking on the subject of women's rights, in many respects still the 'ne plus ultra of radical extremism'?¹ And what more inflammatory approach than to attempt to upstage Mary Wollstonecraft, women's rights enthusiast *par excellence*?

Surely, such considerations could not have been far from Norgate's mind as he prepared for publication what for all intents and purposes remains one of the most ambitious statements of late-eighteenth-century feminism. In his essay 'On the Rights of Woman,' Norgate had no less a goal than to 'endeavour to supply the omission' to those aspects of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of woman* (1792) on which he felt she had been too tentative.² Where Wollstonecraft had offered few specifics on why marriage was a form of 'legal prostitution,' Norgate outlined in great detail the problems with the policies of coverture and primogeniture, tracing their origins in Britain to the Norman Invasion. Where Wollstonecraft had only 'hinted' at the need for women's political rights, Norgate explicitly endorsed women's right to vote and to stand for parliament, substantiating his claims with appeals to constitutional,

¹ For this formulation of feminism, see Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination* (Cambridge, 2003), 177.

² Thomas Starling Norgate, 'On the Rights of Woman, Continued,' in *The Cabinet* (3 vols., Norwich, 1795), II, 43.

sentimental, and natural-rights-based logics. ‘[I]t is observable,’ Norgate notes, without a trace of hesitation, ‘that in almost every age and country, the tyranny and cunning of man, have prompted these specious fascinating means to deprive the female sex of those rights, which they would not have dared to deny nor even to dispute, had reason and justice been the tribunals of decision: rights which any unbiassed [sic] theorist, who should trace the rise and progress of society, would esteem coeval with its existence, and perfectly independent on any sexual distinction; that to which I principally allude, and from the exercise of which the female world is totally excluded, is THE RIGHT OF DELEGATING REPRESENTATIVES TO PARLIAMENT.’³

Norgate’s desire to outmaneuver Wollstonecraft, however, was not mere scheming on his part. While there were certainly calculations involved in drafting this essay – an essay which, given its explosive content, yielded surprisingly little national or local comment in print – it was more than a youthful ploy to secure the limelight.⁴ Rather, Norgate’s attempt to place himself on the cutting edge of the women’s rights conversation in Britain must also be regarded as an earnest expression of his embeddedness within, and indebtedness to, particular networks in Norwich, a textile centre in East Anglia known for its heterodox religious tendencies and ‘intellectual Jacobinism,’ and which Norgate himself once proudly described as the ‘Athens of England’.⁵ Norgate’s interactions with, and

³ Ibid., 42. For more on Norgate’s specific modes of argumentation on the question of female suffrage, see my article ‘Extending the “right of election,”’ in *Women, gender and enlightenment*, eds. Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott (New York, 2005), 587-609.

⁴ That Norgate’s essay did not yield much commentary in print does not mean that his audience did not *discuss* and *debate* his inflammatory argument. As Norgate himself observed in his *Essays, tales and poems* (Norwich, 1795), 1, ‘the measures of the cabinet are dictatorially canvassed in every domestic conversation’.

⁵ On Norwich as a centre for religious and political experimentation, and especially for ‘intellectual Jacobinism,’ see Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of liberty: the English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution* (London, 1979), esp. Chapter Five, ‘The Origins of Provincial Radicalism, 1790-1792’; C B Jewson, *The Jacobin city: a portrait of Norwich in its reaction to the French Revolution, 1788-1802* (Glasgow and London, 1975); Helen Braithwaite, *Romanticism, publishing and Dissent: Joseph Johnson and the cause of liberty* (New York, 2003), esp. 135; Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 303-4; and, most recently, David Chandler, “‘The Athens of England’”: Norwich as a Literary Centre in

observations about his local scene, where his family had resided since at least the early seventeenth century, primed him to adopt an exceptionally forward-thinking and even occasionally combative stance on the question of women's rights.⁶ It is the goal of this essay to flesh out this communal context, so as to locate Norgate's feminist thought more precisely within a particular time and place. In the process, this piece will also shed light on the provincial dimensions of the 'rights of woman' conversation in late-eighteenth-century Britain, dimensions that are only just beginning to come into focus.

* * * * *

To stress the significance of the local in T S Norgate's development as a feminist thinker and writer is not mere supposition. Thanks to the preservation of Norgate's extensive unpublished autobiography, *Hora otiosa*, which he began writing in 1812, coupled with his published musings in both poetry and prose, we are allowed a sustained and intimate window onto how Norgate's engagement with his immediate community motivated him to lobby not just for governmental reform, repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and the abolition of slavery – stock causes of the day for any self-respecting radical, especially in Norwich, long a centre for religious and political agitation – but also more unusually for the rights of women, a concern that as Norgate himself noted at the start of his *Cabinet* essay, he was well aware would 'expose the author to ridicule; and although he may not draw down the thunders of an attorney-general, Bigotry will frown, and Folly – thrice happy Folly! will jingle her bells, and laugh at the attempt.'⁷

Yet the plight of women was not at all abstract to Norgate. While he may have carried his arguments farther than others in his community, Norgate wrote his essay on the 'Rights of Woman' well knowing that he

the Late Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43, no. 2 (2010). On Norgate's estimation of Norwich, see T S Norgate, 'Sketch of the State of Society in Norwich,' *Monthly Magazine*, 7 (1799), 279.

⁶ For the Norgate family tree, see *Norfolk Genealogy* (1981), 13/3, 118.

⁷ On T S Norgate's stance on the 'Woman Question,' see T S Norgate, *Hora otiosa; or family memoirs & personal recollections. Begun January 1, 1812*, Norfolk Record Office, MC 175/3; and T S Norgate, 'On the Rights of Woman, Part 1st,' *The Cabinet*, I, 178.

was surrounded by men and women who either sympathized with, or by their very example confirmed at least some aspects of his arguments. From a very early age, in fact, Norgate was exposed to individuals who in various ways encouraged him to consider the ‘Woman Question’, pushing him to develop his own ambitious theories about women’s need for equal education, and for legal and political entitlements. It is the tangibility of his concerns that make his heated inquiry in his ‘Rights of Woman’ essay so poignant. Norgate wrote as much from his experiences as from philosophical premises.

Central to T S Norgate’s experiences were his observations of his own rabble-rousing parents, Elias Norgate (1727-1803) and Deborah Starling (1733-1801), stalwarts of Norwich’s Rational Dissenting community (most of whose members identified as Unitarians by the 1790s) – a community that burgeoned in Norwich following the establishment in 1756 of the Octagon Chapel under the leadership of John Taylor (1694-1761).⁸ Long before the Bastille fell in France, both parents proved that they were committed to questioning established customs and traditions, a product no doubt of the Rational Dissenting emphasis on the ‘right to private judgment’. For Elias, in particular, his belief in free inquiry inspired him to take an active part in community affairs, where he became an ‘aggressive *agent provocateur*’.⁹ In addition to overseeing a surgical practice and working to improve medical care and facilities in the city, Elias helped establish a ‘calves-head’ debating club in the early 1770s whose main purpose was to debate ‘whether or not a prime minister was more harmful to English constitutional liberty than royal power’.¹⁰ He

⁸ For general background on Rational Dissent in the late-18th-century context, see Mark Philp, ‘Rational Religion and Political Radicalism in the 1790s,’ *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 4 (1985), 35-46; and Knud Haakonssen, ‘Enlightened Dissent: An Introduction,’ in *Enlightenment and religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1996), 1-12. On the rise of Rational Dissent in Norwich in particular, see David Chandler, “‘The Athens of England’,” 171-92. This is not to suggest that Rational Dissent drew the largest number of nonconformist followers in Norwich. As Chandler notes, 189, the Baptists were in fact the city’s largest Dissenting denomination.

⁹ See Wilson, *The sense of the people*, 415.

¹⁰ See Wilson, *The sense of the people*, 415.

also served as speaker and, from 1779, alderman of the Common Council, the local governing body representing the interests of the community.¹¹ As alderman of the Council during this period of increasing national unrest – the American War for Independence, the escalation of Anglo-Irish tensions – Elias ‘helped to maintain vital links with the national agitation, involving themselves in a variety of civic initiatives and providing institutional leadership for the more broadly based radical politics in the town’.¹²

It was not just political tradition, however, that the Norgates sought to question. As committed Rational Dissenters, Elias and Deborah also adopted a relatively cavalier stance on gender relations, manifest in their relationship with each other and in their treatment of their children. Because Rational Dissenters assigned great value not just to critical inquiry but also to education – they regarded all humans as rational subjects and identified reason as the primary means of reaching God – followers often insisted that both sexes gain access to knowledge, either through formal or informal means.¹³ Certainly, there is evidence that this was the case in the Norgate household, where the women, at least as T S Norgate recalls, were committed to the pursuit of knowledge and proved to be formidable intellects in their own right. While Norgate was not above praising the women in his family for their more traditional feminine attributes – the ‘endearing manners’ and ‘gentle & sweet tones of voice which are especial ornaments to the female sex’ – it was their powers of

¹¹ See Wilson, *The sense of the people*, 414 n113.

¹² See Wilson, *The sense of the people*, 414.

¹³ There is a rich literature on the pro-woman or even proto-feminist strands in Unitarian thinking. See, for the most useful discussions, Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical Unitarians and the emergence of the women’s rights movement, 1831-1851* (New York, 1995); Kathryn Gleadle, ‘British women and radical politics in the nonconformist enlightenment, c. 1780-1830,’ in *Women, privilege, and power*, ed. Amanda Vickery (Stanford, 2001); Ruth Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (London, 1998); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*; and my own ‘Cultivating woman: men’s pursuit of intellectual equality in the late British enlightenment,’ *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 45, 3 (July 2006), 511-531. Raymond Holt’s older *The Unitarian contribution to social progress in England* (London, 1938) also contains a substantive discussion of these interconnections.

mind that seem to have most captivated his attention.¹⁴ As he explains in his memoirs, in the context of discussing his family, ‘[A] thousand and a thousand instances have already been adduced by various writers to disprove the mental inferiority of Females, & it is universally acknowledged that their minds are capable of infinitely higher cultivation than it has usually fallen to their lot, heretofore to receive.’¹⁵ His mother was responsible for much of Norgate’s early informal instruction, and imparted to her son a love of learning. ‘I should ... acknowledge [sic],’ Norgate writes in his memoirs, ‘how far it surpasses my ability to express those feelings of reverence, & gratitude, & affection which I entertain for her memory,’ a sentiment further supported by the fact that, following his mother’s death in 1801, Norgate kept a piece of her gray hair in a lock on his watch chain.¹⁶

Norgate’s younger sister also made a strong impression, dazzling her brother with the ‘superior strength & acuteness of her intellectual powers in argument,’ so much so, in fact, that Norgate ‘used to fret’ with the ‘sense of my own inferiority’ when in her presence. For a time, from 1795 to 1797, the two even lived together, after Norgate inherited his maternal grandmother’s estate. Reflecting on this period, Norgate recalled how ‘a habit of debate was formed on almost every topic which came before us,’ and that their relationship was characterized above all else by ‘habitual sparring’.¹⁷ Indeed, it was the easy sociability Norgate shared with his mother and especially with his sister that he sought to reproduce in his relationship with his wife, Mary Susan Randall (1774-1857), the Anglican daughter of an East India merchant, whom he married in August 1797. In T S Norgate’s estimation, the marriage lived up to this expectation. As he explained in later years, looking back on his relationship with his wife, their marriage ‘not only bound me in bonds indissoluble of love and friendship to an Individual’ but also ‘gave to us both a community, and

¹⁴ See Norgate, *Hora otiosa*, 78-9.

¹⁵ See Norgate, *Hora otiosa*, 81.

¹⁶ See Norgate, *Hora otiosa*, 58.

¹⁷ On Norgate’s sister, see Norgate, *Hora otiosa*, 190.

identity of interest in each other's concerns'.¹⁸ With such a spiritual and familial background, there is little wonder that Norgate began his essay 'On the Rights of Woman' by celebrating the 'reason in the breast of woman' and urging men to assist their friends in becoming educated.¹⁹

If T S Norgate's family, with its strong Unitarian leanings, encouraged certain freethinking and egalitarian tendencies, then individuals and institutions in the broader community provided further fodder for feminist thought. After attending the Norwich Free School, under the direction of the classicist Samuel Parr (whom Norgate described as a brilliant scholar but unsatisfactory teacher), Norgate enrolled in 1789 at New College, Hackney, a Dissenting academy established the previous year on the outskirts of London and led by Thomas Belsham. At Hackney, Norgate not only encountered a provocative group of peers and eminent scholars, all hungry for debate, but also witnessed firsthand the effects of the profound changes sweeping the nation. According to William Shepherd, a peer of Norgate's at Hackney who would go on to become a Liverpool-based Unitarian minister and women's rights advocate, it was virtually impossible as a student at Hackney during the 1790s not to get swept up in the current of the times:

Our Academical life at Hackney was short, yet the period of it is memorable for the occurrences then passing at home and abroad. Stirring events characterised the last portion of the eighteenth century ... The French revolution was hastening on, the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Act was agitated. In the High Court of Parliament the trial of Warren Hastings was proceeding, and Westminster Hall invited the young aspirant after usefulness and honor, to hear under its roof the most celebrated orators of the Senate and the Bar.²⁰

¹⁸ See *Hora otiosa*, 281. For an earlier statement of Norgate's conception of marriage as the union of souls, see his poem 'To Susan,' written in 1796 during his period of courtship and published in his *Essays, tales and poems*.

¹⁹ T S Norgate, "On the rights of woman, part 1st," 184.

²⁰ See William Shepherd, *A selection from the early letters of the late Rev. William Shepherd, LL.D* (Liverpool, 1855), 33.

Certainly, these ‘days so full of momentous changes,’ as Shepherd described them, helped Norgate reach his own controversial decision to abandon a career in law for a career as an author, so as to ‘enlighten the world by my lucubrations!!!’ Norgate’s father – who had long imagined his son as an attorney – was not pleased, and a period of ‘alienation’ set in between the two men.²¹

It was during this highly impressionable moment, while estranged from his father, that Norgate returned to Norwich around 1793 and fell under the influence of the energetic Unitarian minister William Enfield (1741-1797), the *éminence grise* of the Norwich cultural establishment and a man widely credited with transforming the city into a burgeoning literary centre.²² Prior to his arrival in Norwich, Enfield had served as tutor in belles lettres at Warrington Academy, where he established himself as a leading cultural authority through numerous reviews in the *Monthly Review* and the publication of *The Speaker* (1774), a popular anthology

²¹ On Norgate’s decision to pursue a career as a writer, see *Hora otiosa*, 184. On Norgate’s ‘alienation’ from his father, see *Hora otiosa*, 178: ‘Active & industrious himself, he could not regard with complacency an inglorious sacrifice to indolent repose, a dereliction of the possibility of distinction in public life, accompanied with a lazy ignoble love of rural occupations, rural scenery, rural society.’

²² On Enfield’s contributions to the cultural and intellectual life of Norwich, see Trevor Fawcett, ‘Measuring the provincial enlightenment: the case of Norwich,’ *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 8 (1982-3), 13-27; Chandler, “‘The Athens of England’”; and Albert Goodwin, *The friends of liberty*, 152. As Goodwin writes of late-eighteenth-century Norwich, in a description that owes much to Enfield’s presence, ‘[The city possessed a] talented, earnest and brilliant coterie which came as near as any other in England (except perhaps the members of the Birmingham Lunar Society) to one of those provincial academies of contemporary France which did so much to endow the eighteenth-century Enlightenment with its humanity and social significance.’ Even prior to Enfield’s arrival in Norwich, however, the city could boast many ‘firsts’ in comparison with other provincial centres: the first provincial English newspaper, the *Norwich Post*, founded in 1701; the first permanent provincial theatre company, the Norwich Company, established about 1726; the first town library ‘under municipal control’ in 1608. On these ‘firsts,’ see Chandler, “‘The Athens of England.’”

intended to assist its readers ‘in acquiring a just and graceful Elocution’.²³ As David Chandler explains, ‘[T]o a much greater extent than his predecessors, [Enfield] believe that the traditional studies of a Dissenting minister should be broadened to include science, philosophy, and polite letters – in other words, the entire intellectual and literary culture of his time.’²⁴

When Enfield moved to Norwich in 1785, he determined to use his new post as minister at the Octagon Chapel, to which the Norgate family had long been members, to serve as a spiritual leader, public intellectual, cultural critic and, on occasion, political controversialist – emboldened by the Unitarian commitment to free inquiry and from 1788-9 at least, by the Revolutionary activity transpiring at home and abroad.²⁵ Under Enfield’s aegis, the Octagon Chapel thus became a space for spiritual reflection, philosophical examination, and political critique. As Enfield himself urged his congregation in November 1788, in the context of commemorating the centennial of the Glorious Revolution, ‘It is the glory of Great Britain, that it has perhaps less to do, in the important work of political reformation, than any other nation in the world. But this is surely a reason, not for remaining inactive, but for going on, with an accelerated motion, towards perfection.’ To this end, Enfield recommended that worshippers come together to ‘obliterate the false maxims of ignorance and bigotry’ and lobby for the abolition of those institutions ‘contrary to sound policy, and inconsistent with that share of natural or political liberty

²³ See William Enfield, *The speaker: or, miscellaneous pieces, selected from the best English writers, and disposed under proper heads, with a view to facilitate the improvement of youth in reading and speaking* (London, 1774). For the success of Enfield’s literary endeavors, see R K Webb’s entry for William Enfield in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Webb notes that ‘The Speaker went through many editions in Britain and America and remained in print well after the middle of the nineteenth century.’

²⁴ See Chandler, “‘The Athens of England,’” 176.

²⁵ On this point, see especially John Aikin’s *Memoirs of the author*, included in William Enfield’s posthumously published *Sermons on practical subjects* (London, 1798), xviii: ‘The rights of private judgment and public discussion, and all the fundamental points of civil and religious liberty, were become more and more dear to him; and he asserted them with a courage and zeal which seemed scarcely to have belonged to his habitual temper.’

to which every member of a free state is entitled.’²⁶ Stimulated by this and other rousing sermons delivered by Enfield during his tenure, Norwichians in attendance at the Octagon in turn authored texts and launched philosophical clubs, such as the Speculative and Tusculan societies, intended to realize Enfield’s ambitions. In the process, they helped augment Norwich’s already dynamic public sphere.²⁷

While Enfield’s contributions to the cultural and intellectual life of Norwich have been much touted, however, his feminist argumentation has received decidedly less attention.²⁸ Yet here, too, it seems, the core tenets of Unitarianism motivated Enfield to also plumb the inequalities between the sexes. During his time in Norwich, a period that Enfield himself described as particularly felicitous for his writing, he demonstrated a keen interest in the ‘Woman Question’ and explored in various forums the means by which current inequities might be redressed.²⁹ In pieces that he wrote for the *Monthly Review*, *Analytical Review*, and from 1796, the *Monthly Magazine*, Enfield devoted ample space to reviewing the most up-to-date treatises by and about women, usually offering strong words of encouragement to the authors of the pioneering texts. He praised Mary Wollstonecraft for producing a ‘great variety of just observations and bold reflections’ in her *Vindication of the rights of woman* (1792) and commended Maria Edgeworth for her *Letters*

²⁶ See William Enfield, *A sermon on the centennial commemoration of the revolution, preached at Norwich, November 5, 1788* (London, 1788), 16-17.

²⁷ On the Speculative and Tusculan societies in particular, see Chandler, 178-9. The Speculative Society was founded in 1790, possibly by Enfield himself. The Tusculan Society was organized in 1792-3 by the Deist Charles Marsh and his Catholic friend John Pitchford. Marsh attended the Octagon.

²⁸ Key exceptions here would include Gina Luria Walker, *Mary Hays (1759-1843): The growth of a woman’s mind* (Burlington, VT, 2006) and my own *Men and the making of modern British feminism* (Stanford, 2010).

²⁹ Enfield once observed of Norwich that, ‘[f]or a man of literary tastes and pursuits, I can truly say that I know of no town which offers so eligible a residence.’ See William Enfield to John Taylor, quoted in John Taylor and Edward Taylor, *History of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich* (London, 1848), 53.

for literary ladies (1795), noting that he was ‘highly gratified with the perusal of the sensible and elegant performance.’³⁰

In his strongest endorsement of those ‘high-spirited’ females seeking to push the boundaries of their craft, Enfield defended in 1793 the writer Helen Maria Williams for her impassioned defense of the French Revolution. Responding to the author of *Letters on the female mind, its powers, and pursuits, addressed to Miss H.M. Williams, with particular reference to her Letters from France* (1793) – a mean-spirited attack on Williams for her allegedly unwomanly behavior in penning the *Letters from France* (1790-1796) – Enfield maintained that Williams had every right to express her political views. ‘As to the sarcastic and indignant contempt with which Miss Williams is treated in the volumes before us,’ Enfield explains, ‘for no other offence than that of publicly expressing the natural feelings of a generous mind on the contemplation of so great an event as that of a nation rescuing itself from the yoke of tyranny, and asserting its natural rights to govern itself according to its own will; we shall only say that, if this be a sin, let our souls be with such Sinners.’ Enfield continued by noting that the female author of the critique had no place discrediting Williams for her display of erudition, as her own ‘abilities’ provided more than enough evidence ‘against her arguments in depreciation of the female mind’.³¹

Perhaps even more indicative of Enfield’s feminist tendencies than his numerous reviews, though, were the essays that he published in the *Monthly Magazine* under the name of ‘The Enquirer’.³² These essays, which according to the periodical’s editor John Aikin ‘obtained great

³⁰ See, respectively, ‘Review of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,’ *Monthly Review*, 8 (June 1792): 199; and ‘Review of Maria Edgeworth’s *Letters for literary ladies*,’ *Monthly Review*, 21 (September 1796), 25. The attribution for reviews authored by Enfield in the *Monthly Review* come from Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review, first series 1749-1789 index of contributors and articles* (Oxford, 1934) and *The Monthly Review, second series 1790-1815, index of contributors and articles* (Oxford, 1955).

³¹ See William Enfield, ‘Review of *Letters on the Female Mind, its Powers, and Pursuits, addressed to Miss H.M. Williams, with particular Reference to her Letters from France*,’ *Monthly Review* (December 1793), 399.

³² John Aikin, editor of the *Monthly Magazine*, identified William Enfield as ‘The Enquirer’ in his *Memoirs of the author*, xxiii-xxiv.

applause from the manly freedom of their sentiment,' rigorously challenged the notion that there existed an intellectual distinction between the sexes.³³ To undermine what he took to be a specious argument, Enfield cited the accomplishments of those exemplary women, past and present, who had demonstrated the potential reach of the female mind. 'If, in the depressed state in which female intellect has hitherto been kept,' Enfield argued, writing from the perspective of a woman named 'Eliza,' 'the ancient world had its Aspasias, Cornelias, and Hypatias; and modern times can boast of their Carters and Macaulays, their Barbaulds and Wollstonecrafts, what may not be expected in a new order of things, in which rational beings, of both sexes, shall meet together, to prosecute, without any frivolous interruptions, or childish restraints, the noble object of intellectual improvement?'³⁴ But Enfield was not solely interested in holding up 'female worthies' as evidence of all women's potential. He also expressed outrage at the way in which men collectively conspired to limit women's access to knowledge. 'The tree of knowledge, planted by the hand of nature, in an open plain, invites every passenger to partake of its bounty,' Enfield insisted, echoing the language employed by Wollstonecraft in her second *Vindication*. '[A]nd man, instead of rudely hedging it round with thorns, to deter the approach of woman, ought to assist her in plucking the fruit from those branches which may happen to hang above her reach.'³⁵ Once men stopped seeing women as women and started regarding them as fellow human beings, he explained, so many other alleged distinctions between the sexes would also slip away – perhaps why elsewhere Enfield championed the notion of abandoning the pronouns 'he' and 'she' and replacing them with the common appellation 'homo'.³⁶

³³ See again Aikin's *Memoirs of the author*, xxiii-xxiv.

³⁴ Enfield, 'The Enquirer, No. III,' *Monthly Magazine*, 1 (April 1796), 183.

³⁵ Enfield, 'The Enquirer, No. III,' *Monthly Magazine*, 1 (April 1796), 181.

³⁶ As Enfield explained in his review of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of woman*, published in the *Monthly Review*, 8 (June 1792), 209, where he recommended the introduction of the term 'homo,' 'Both men and women should certainly, in the first place, regard themselves, and should be treated by each other, as human beings.'

Enfield's positions on these controversial subjects would not have been lost on Norgate. As Norgate's later writing suggests, Enfield was his most important mentor – a man who took Norgate with him on trips to the Lake District, offered council on professional decisions, collaborated on local writing projects, and facilitated contact with the editors of the *Monthly Magazine* and *Analytical Review*, progressive publications closely connected to the 'Unitarian intelligentsia', for which Norgate became a regular reviewer.³⁷ In his unpublished memoirs, Norgate repeatedly makes clear the debt he owes Enfield, as evident in his recollection of the moment when Enfield first suggested that he take up reviewing: 'My friend Dr. Enfield, when we were on an excursion of pleasure together round the Lakes of Cumberland & Westmoreland, about the year 1793 or 1794, had taken a considerable number of Books with him to Review for "the Analytical," which was published by that most worthy & benevolent man, Joseph Johnson of St. Paul's Church Yard. Half in sport & half in earnest, the Doctor one day asked 'If I would try my hand at Reviewing.' I thought nothing further about it, however, 'till some time after our return to Norwich, when I proposed in my turn, half in sport & half in earnest, "to try my hand at Reviewing."' ³⁸ In his 'Sketch of the State of Society in Norwich,' published in the *Monthly Magazine* a year after Enfield's sudden death in 1797, Norgate expounded on the debt he owed his mentor. Describing Enfield as one of the city's 'brightest ornaments,' Norgate observed that 'Dr. Enfield's literary character is known full well: his domestic virtues, the benignity of his disposition, the mildness of his

³⁷ See R K Webb's entry for Thomas Starling Norgate in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and Chandler, "'The Athens of England",' 177: '[T]hrough Enfield's recommendation [Norgate] embarked on a career as an *Analytical* reviewer in January 1797. After Enfield's death Norgate took over responsibility for the 'Retrospects' in the *Monthly Magazine*, expanding the feature with more extended reviews.' This was a role that Enfield adopted not just for Norgate, but also for other local authors as well, especially the reviewer and translator William Taylor (1765-1836) and poet and scholar Frank Sayers (1763-1817).

³⁸ Norgate, *Hora otiosa*, 236. The *Autobiographical memoirs of Thomas Fletcher* (Liverpool, 1893) 51, suggest that Norgate's sister, listed as 'Miss Norgate,' may have been in attendance on the trip to the Lake District as well, along with Enfield's wife and their daughters, Anna and Maria.

manners, his sensibility, and in short, the general excellence of his heart, comparatively can be known to few: to those few who enjoyed his intimacy and friendship.’³⁹

Given their intense relationship, as illustrated in these select anecdotes, Norgate would have been fully cognizant of Enfield’s position on the ‘Woman Question’. If Norgate was so admiring of Enfield’s ‘sensibility,’ so deferential on a range of subjects, then why not also tow the same line on women’s rights? Certainly, Norgate’s own writing on women suggests a sense of indebtedness to Enfield. His ‘On the Rights of Woman,’ in fact, contains several passages that rehearse the arguments Enfield had made two years earlier in his assessments of the accomplishments of Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, and that Enfield would expound on at greater length in his ‘Enquirer’ pieces, published after Norgate had introduced his own essay to the public. In the first part of his ‘On the Rights of Woman,’ for example, Norgate commences by averring that ‘the mind knows no difference of sex,’ and proceeds to turn to history for examples of women possessing ‘masculine virtues’.⁴⁰

To describe Enfield as Norgate’s mentor on the “Woman Question,” though, is not to suggest that the two proceeded in lockstep. Tellingly, Norgate departed from his mentor when he endorsed women’s legal and especially political rights in his own inquiry, a position that Enfield, writing in 1793, had been unable to countenance.⁴¹ Norgate seems to have had the self-possession needed to recognize when he ought to speak his own mind. Even so, it is clear that Enfield proved a decisive feminist influence on Norgate, serving alternately as counsellor, debating partner, and sounding board on the ‘rights of woman,’ as well as other social and

³⁹ Norgate, ‘Sketch of the State of Society in Norwich’, 279.

⁴⁰ Norgate, ‘On the Rights of Woman, Part First’, vol. I, 179.

⁴¹ Writing in the December 1793 issue of the *Monthly Review*, Enfield observed that women ought to have an understanding of politics, inasmuch as they were educators of their offspring: ‘[H]aving necessarily so large a share in the education of men, who are to live in society, [women] doubtless ought to be well-acquainted with the general rights and obligations of men as associated beings; and thus far, at least, it is their duty to be politicians.’ Unlike Norgate, however, he avowed that women should not aspire to be politicians in any formal sense. See Enfield’s ‘Review of *Letters on the Female Mind*’, *Monthly Review*, 8 (December 1793), 399.

political issues. Enfield's death in 1797 would rob Norgate of a dear friend with whom he had spent four formative years.

Despite Enfield's towering presence in Norgate's life, he was not the only local figure to play a formative role in the development of the author and activist as a feminist. Several of Norgate's Norwich peers were also beginning to engage with the subject of women's rights, even if their scope and aims were not always quite as ambitious. In part, of course, these men and women were similarly inspired by Enfield, who preached perfectibilism as a way of life. Mostly Unitarians, in attendance at the Octagon Chapel, they strove to emulate their minister in extending Rational Dissenting precepts to the 'fair sex'. Yet in many respects their feminist explorations also extended beyond theological imperatives, and stemmed from a broader, generational impulse to shape their world anew. These select men and women, keen observers of the Revolution in France, recognized that for their own nation to become truly 'enlightened' they would need to modify at least to some extent the relationship between the sexes.

It was this impulse, after all, that inspired Norgate himself to publish his essay 'On the Rights of Woman' in *The Cabinet*, an ultra radical journal hailed by E P Thompson as 'perhaps the most impressive of the quasi-Jacobin intellectual publications of the period'.⁴² Launched by Norgate, with his friend the attorney Charles Marsh, *The Cabinet* aimed to gather the best minds in Norwich to determine how a 'perfect government' might be attained. As Norgate explained in the preface to the first issue of the journal, published fortnightly from October 1794 until some point in 1795 and then subsequently bound into three volumes for distribution both in Norwich and London, such a state would be one '*in which the means of happiness are the same to every member of the community; where there is a perfect equality of rights; where there is an universal toleration of opinions, whether civil or religious; where the election of every public*

⁴² See E P Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (New York, 1963), 142.

functionary is the result of the will of the majority'.⁴³ For Norgate, then, his inquiry into the rights of women was always understood as one facet of a larger exploration into 'the nature and object of civil government'.⁴⁴ It was important to Norgate that he place his essay 'On the Rights of Woman' alongside pieces on the need for annual parliaments, the immorality of slavery, and the advantages of a liberal education for 'persons in commercial life'. Women's rights would need to be part of the 'rational reformist' agenda. The 'fair sex' could not – and should not – be treated separately.

Others who contributed to *The Cabinet* shared Norgate's feminist convictions. Richard Dinmore (1765-1811), a politically-active surgeon and likely *Cabinet* contributor, who resided in Norwich during the 1790s before emigrating to the United States, had already insisted before the launch of the journal that women's rights – and especially women's political rights – would need to be included in any truly enlightened reformist proposals.⁴⁵ A year before Norgate began to set his own ideas

⁴³ For background on *The Cabinet*, see David Chandler, "'The Athens of England",' 178; and Penelope Corfield and Chris Evans eds., *Youth and revolution in the 1790s* (Phoenix Mill, 1996), esp 'appendix 3'. See also Norgate's own account of his involvement with the journal in *Hora otiosa*, 187-8. Contributors to *The Cabinet*, all of whom published their work anonymously, included in addition to Norgate and Marsh, John Pitchford, Amelia Alderson, William Youngman, John Stuart Taylor, William Dalrymple, William Enfield, Annabella Plumtre, Henry Crabb Robinson, and William Taylor, amongst others.

⁴⁴ See Norgate's 'Preface' to *The Cabinet*, Vol I, iv-v.

⁴⁵ For general background on Richard Dinmore, see *A general history of the county of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1829), 1001. On Dinmore's links to *The Cabinet*, see 'appendix 3' in *Youth and revolution*, 187. In his *An exposition of the principles of the English Jacobins; with strictures on the political conduct of Charles J. Fox, William Pitt and Edmund Burke* (Norwich, 1796, repr. 1797), 5, Dinmore 'boast[ed] an intimate acquaintance' with many Norwich 'Jacobins,' whom he took great pains to distinguish from their French equivalents. 'Their aim,' he explained on p. 7, 'is to assist the poor and needy; to lessen the horrors of the dungeon; to uprear the olive branch of peace; and teach men to do to others as they would they should do unto them.' Perhaps an even more compelling case for Dinmore's participation in *The Cabinet*, however, can be made by noting that Dinmore edited from 1801-02 a journal called *The National Magazine; or, Cabinet of the United States*, following his immigration to Washington, DC. Among other topics pursued, the U.S. *Cabinet* took on the difficult subject of slavery.

about the ‘rights of woman’ down on paper, Dinmore provided a stunning assessment of the ‘absurdities’ of Britain’s electoral system in his *A brief account of the moral and political acts of the kings and queens of England, from William the Conqueror to the Revolution in the year 1688*, published anonymously in 1793. In the context of praising Queen Elizabeth for her prudence as a ruler, Dinmore questioned why his own contemporaries were so reluctant to allow women to play a direct role in the political process. ‘Indeed,’ Dinmore noted, ‘the character of this Queen convinces us of the injustice that has hitherto been done to the Rights of Women; they are equally subject to the laws as the Men; why not then have an equal voice in the choice of the representatives of the people?’ Pursuing this line of inquiry further, Dinmore added that, ‘[t]he want of this right is peculiarly absurd in this kingdom, where a woman may reign, though not vote for a Member of Parliament.’ For Dinmore, Britain’s rejection of Salic Law – in contrast to France, where women were barred from the throne – in and of itself offered sufficient grounds for extension of the franchise to *all* women.⁴⁶

Anne or Anna Plumptre (1760-1818) and her younger sister Annabella (early 1760s-1812) were also figures in Norgate’s immediate *Cabinet* circle – Annabella likely contributed at least one poem, ‘Ode to Moderation,’ to the journal – who were keen to bring the rights of women on to the radical reformist agenda.⁴⁷ The precocious daughters of Ann Newcome and Robert Plumptre (1723-1788), former president of Queen’s College, Cambridge and Prebendary of Norwich, both Anne and Annabella used their poems, translations, and novels to address a range of radical concerns in their writing, including the status of women in Britain, especially in regards to female education.⁴⁸ The beneficiaries

⁴⁶ For this intriguing argument, see Richard Dinmore, *A brief account of the moral and political acts of the kings and queens of England, from William the Conqueror to the Revolution in the Year 1688* (London. 1793), 178-179.

⁴⁷ See Corfield’s ‘Appendix 3’ in *Youth and revolution*. Corfield explains, 192, that both Anne and Annabella could have been contributors to the journal.

⁴⁸ For more on Anne and especially Annabella’s connections to *The Cabinet*, see Penelope Corfield’s ‘appendix 3’ in *Youth and revolution*. Corfield, 138, describes Anne Plumptre in particular as a politically-engaged citizen, who invited John Thelwall to lecture in Norwich in 1796. For further background on Anne Plumptre, see also Deborah McLeod’s useful overview in her introduction to Anne Plumptre, *Something new*, ed. Deborah McLeod (Peterborough, ONT, 1996 [1801]), vii-xxv.

themselves of an ‘unusually liberal’ education, thanks to their father’s strenuous efforts to provide his daughters with what the *Biographical dictionary of the living authors of Great Britain and Ireland* described in 1816 as ‘an education very different from what generally falls to the lot of even well instructed females,’ both Anne and Annabella perhaps felt compelled to share their positive experiences with others.⁴⁹

In her novel *Montgomery*, published by the Minerva Press in 1796, Annabella Plumtre traces the fates of two sisters, one of whom is accorded a rational education, the other, a more typical ‘feminine’ one. Where Plumtre herself comes down is made eminently clear: ‘It is a narrow-minded system,’ observes one of her characters, ‘that would confine women only to the employments that have hitherto been allotted to them, and I am always glad when I see them stepping beyond it into intellectual pursuits. That woman will always best perform the duties of life, who has boldly investigated the nature of them, and acts consequently on principle, not merely as the obeyer of orders, or the dull child of similar habits, to those, which guide the horse to his own stall in the stable.’⁵⁰ Anne Plumtre’s novel *Something new, or, adventures at Campbell-House*, published in 1801, further develops the themes set out earlier by her sister. An author once described by George Dyer, in a letter to Mary Hays, as ‘an excellent moral character, a practical philosopher,’ Anne used *Something new* as a vehicle for exploring the best means by which to educate both sexes so as to produce rational and moral individuals.⁵¹ As Plumtre explains, ‘a mind not trained from its earliest infancy to the exertion of its powers, scarcely ever attains the full possession of them.’⁵²

⁴⁹ See respectively *A biographical dictionary of the living authors of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1816), 277; and McLeod’s introduction to *Something new*, vii-viii. As McLeod notes, Robert Plumtre took particular pains to teach his daughters modern languages. Anne, for example, knew French, German, Italian, and Spanish.

⁵⁰ Annabella Plumtre [writing as Bell Plumtre], *Montgomery; or, scenes in Wales* (2 vols., London, 1796), I, 69.

⁵¹ See George Dyer to Mary Hays, in *The love-letters of Mary Hays (1779-1780)*, ed. A F Wedd (London, 1925), 238.

⁵² See Anne Plumtre, *Something new*, 243. See also Plumtre’s observation on 142 that ‘I hold it to be the most sacred and indispensable duty of every mother, however elevated her rank or affluent her fortune, to attend herself to the education of her daughters...’

In her useful assessment of the novel, Deborah McLeod notes that Plumtre is here ‘criticizing both a female education that leave women unprepared for meaningful labour and a male education that results in an endless pursuit of pleasure and in an unthinking adoption of societal norms and mores.’⁵³

Norgate no doubt took comfort in the fact that some of his close peers were also seriously and purposefully engaged with the ‘Woman Question’, and identified the ‘rights of women’ as part and parcel of a broader reformist vision. Perhaps even more comforting for Norgate, however, would have been his recognition that there were some beyond his immediate circles who also had a stake in the ‘Rights of Woman,’ even as they questioned the larger political project with which these rights were so often associated. The Norwich-based Quaker poet and dramatist John Henry Colls (1764-1802), for example, was an open supporter of Mary Wollstonecraft’s argument about women’s rights, even though he distanced himself from her revolutionary politics. As he explained in his ‘Poetic Epistle Addressed to Mrs. Wollstonecraft,’ written during the Terror and included in his posthumously-published *Poems* (1803?), ‘I can admire your abilities without subscribing myself a proselyte to your political creed’.⁵⁴ More conservative than his *Cabinet* peers, Colls nevertheless used his poem to condemn ‘tyrannic man’ for transforming women into ‘splendid playthings.’ Colls also reflected more generally on the problem of sexual difference. ‘In *what* and *where* this sexual difference lies?,’ he demanded, frustrated by the challenges posed in distinguishing nature from nurture.⁵⁵

Colls’ sympathies for women’s plight may have been stirred by his earlier involvement with the United Friars of Norwich, a group established in 1785 by the publishers William and Seth Stevenson, supporters of William Enfield if not active Unitarians themselves.⁵⁶ The

⁵³ See McLeod’s introduction to *Something new*, xx.

⁵⁴ See John Henry Colls, ‘A Poetic Epistle, Addressed to Mrs. Wollstonecraft; Occasioned by reading her celebrated essay on the Rights of Woman, and her Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution,’ in *Poems* (Norwich, 1803?), 24.

⁵⁵ See Colls, ‘A Poetic Epistle, Addressed to Mrs. Wollstonecraft’, 25-27.

⁵⁶ The Stevensons are listed as subscribers to Enfield’s posthumously published *Sermons on practical subjects* (London, 1798).

Friars, self-proclaimed ‘Gentlemen of taste and fortune’ and ‘moderate men’, were committed to ‘learning, benevolence, and philanthropy’ and demonstrated a keen interest in supporting local female authors, most notably Elizabeth Bentley, a Norwich-based poet of considerable talent who had recently been orphaned by her father.⁵⁷ It was the Friars who raised the money needed to publish Bentley’s *Genuine poetical compositions* in 1791, and who continued to support her throughout her literary career. When William Stevenson died in 1821, Bentley expressed her gratitude by writing a poem for her deceased benefactor, conceding that the poem was ‘an inadequate tribute of respect to that kind, deceased Friend, to whose memory I shall ever look up.’⁵⁸ The Friars’ generous gestures on Bentley’s behalf would also have resonated deeply for Norgate, as many of his friends – Enfield, William Taylor, the Plumptres – subscribed to Bentley’s *Poetical compositions*, and at one point Taylor had been appointed an honorary member of the Friars.

The local context becomes only more important for Norgate’s particular brand of feminist argumentation, however, when we move beyond consideration of individual actors and take in the social scene as a whole. Norwich in the late eighteenth century seems to have been characterized by an exceptional level of social intermingling between the sexes, fostered no doubt by the city’s vibrant civil society, extra-parliamentary political traditions and Dissenting theology. That is to say, in Norwich there were unusual opportunities for men and women to meet and contribute to shared enterprises, in the production of such journals as *The Cabinet*, in select literary and philosophical clubs such as the Tusculan Society, and, on occasion, even at political assemblies.⁵⁹ Indeed, what transpired between men and women in Norwich, at least in certain venues, echo the social dynamics at publisher Joseph Johnson’s dinner parties in St. Paul’s Churchyard, London, where writers including Anna Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft conversed with their

⁵⁷ See United Friars of Norwich MS, Norfolk Record Office, COL/9/1-COL/9/37.

⁵⁸ Letter from Elizabeth Bentley to Seth Stevenson, May 1821, Norfolk Record Office, MS 4566.

⁵⁹ On women’s participation in select political clubs, see Gleadle, ‘British women and radical politics,’ in Vickery, *Women, privilege, and power*, 132.

male colleagues and weighed in on moral and political subjects.⁶⁰ There was much to recommend the ‘simplicity and generosity of republican manners,’ explained the poet George Dyer in a letter to Mary Hays, stressing the group’s overarching commitment to inclusive exchange. As a result of this similar inclusivity in Norwich, women were also able to prove their capabilities in the company of members of the opposite sex. These interactions, too, provided Norgate with only more raw material on which to build his feminist argument.

Perhaps no incident better illustrates the significance for Norgate of this dynamic than an event that occurred in the summer of 1794, when the aspiring Unitarian author Amelia Alderson (1769-1853), another disciple of Enfield, addressed a crowd of roughly 1,500 ‘Jacobins,’ gathered at Norwich’s town hall to protest the re-election of local Whig MP William Windham.⁶¹ Flanked by Annabella and Anna Plumptre, both close friends, Alderson apparently delivered a rousing speech that galvanized the reformist base. As Sarah Scott reported to her sister Elizabeth Montagu, in a letter written that summer, a ‘most curious incident’ had just taken place in Norwich: ‘a young woman of uncommon talents of about 25 years of age made a long speech in the Town Hall to about 1,500 of the Jacobins assembled against Mr. Wyndham [sic], and two daughters of a late Doctor of Divinity stood one on each side of her to encourage her in the proceeding. The girl herself is Daughter to a phisician [sic] of Scotch creation lately an Apothecary.’⁶² Could T S Norgate have been one of those in attendance to hear Alderson’s political speech? If he was, the fact that he would go on just a few months later to endorse women’s political rights takes on new and richer meanings. At the very least, he would certainly have heard accounts of the event, as he and Alderson travelled

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the social dynamics of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin circle, see Gerald Tyson, *Joseph Johnson: a liberal publisher* (Iowa City, 1979), 118; and Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*, 146. For Dyer’s exchange with Hays, see *The love letters of Mary Hays*, 238.

⁶¹ For more details on this incident, see McLeod’s introduction to *Something new*, ix-x.

⁶² For Sarah Scott’s letter, see John Busse, *Mrs. Montagu ‘Queen of the Blues’* (London, 1928), 304.

in close circles, and would go on to collaborate together the following fall in the production of *The Cabinet*, to which Alderson contributed the short story 'The Nun' and at least fifteen poems.⁶³

The women of Norwich, however, did not have to deliver speeches at the town hall to prove to Norgate their status as men's equals. As Norgate himself recorded, everywhere he looked in his city he found evidence that women were eminently rational creatures, fully deserving of every educational opportunity and more than capable of participating in the project of reforming the nation. In his 'Sketch of the State of Society in Norwich', which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1799, Norgate observed that Norwich was to be commended not just for its public library and numerous book clubs, but also for the seriousness of purpose exhibited by its women. 'We have among us some female circles,' Norgate explained, 'where it is more common to hear the merits of a new book canvassed, the truth of an author's theory or the solidity of his system, than the merits of a new fashion, the elegance of a cap, or the gracefulness of a gown.'⁶⁴ As if to underscore this point, Norgate returned to this theme again later in the piece. These women, he wrote, might offer 'relief' to the visitor to Norwich who has 'tired himself with listening to the vacant prattle of some of the fair daughters of fashion,' to which he added that 'The manners of our females are, in general, easy and familiar.'⁶⁵

* * * * *

A troublemaking Unitarian father, an astute mother and sister, an exceptionally broad-minded minister as mentor, peers committed both in theory and practice to egalitarian principles – all of these influences helped inspire T S Norgate to become that 'scrutinizing genius' committed to liberating women from 'the accumulated errors of a thousand years'.⁶⁶

⁶³ For additional background on Amelia Alderson, see Gary Kelly's entry in the *Oxford dictionary of national biography*.

⁶⁴ See Norgate, 'Sketch of the State of Society in Norwich,' 278.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶⁶ See Norgate, 'On the Rights of Woman, part 1st,' 178.

To stress the importance of these familial and communal networks in Norgate's development as a woman's rights advocate, however, is not to downplay or discredit other influences on his thought. As much as Norgate was a Norwichian, he was also a member of a national avant-garde, whose ideas and exchanges were characterized by a complex circuitry. Through his own educational experiences and extensive reading of Paine, Millar and others, as well as through the connections facilitated by William Enfield with *The Monthly Review*, *Analytical Review* and *Monthly Magazine*, all based in London, Norgate was necessarily also a participant in a national conversation about women's rights, informed by concerns with the reach of 'the rights of man', the status of the ancient constitution, the meaning of 'civilization', and the perfectibility more generally of the British Enlightenment.

We see the imprint of this national conversation on a number of levels, most importantly in the ways in which Norgate foregrounds Wollstonecraft in his argument. Without the *Vindication of the rights of woman*, in fact, it is hard to imagine that Norgate would have written about women's rights. He is heavily indebted to Wollstonecraft even as he wrestles with extending her challenging arguments. As Norgate concludes his essay, it saddens him that Wollstonecraft's *Rights of woman* has been 'censured as gross and indelicate'. '[I]t is a book', he stresses, 'which I would recommend no one to ridicule, who cannot refute.'⁶⁷ Yet other voices from outside Norgate's immediate community also informed his writing. For example, Norgate was clearly swayed by the arguments put forward by the attorney Thomas Cooper, an outspoken Manchester-based radical who had supported women's political rights in a much-publicized rebuttal to Edmund Burke. In his essay 'On the Rights of Woman,' in fact, Norgate lifts an entire passage from Cooper's response to Burke.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ See Norgate, 'On the Rights of Woman, Continued', II, 49.

⁶⁸ See Norgate, 'On the Rights of Woman, part 1st', I, 182-3. Here Norgate imports a passage directly from Thomas Cooper's 'Answer to Burke's Invective': 'I have read the writings of Catharine Macaulay, of Mrs. Wollstonecraft, of Mrs. Barbauld, of Mrs. Montague, Miss Carter, Miss Seward, Mrs. Dobson, Miss H. M. Williams, &c. in England; I have conversed with Theroigne, Madame Condorcet, Madame Lavoisier & c. in Paris: I have often felt my own inferiority, and often lamented the present iniquitous and most absurd notions on the subject of the disparity of sexes. I have

Elsewhere in his writing, Norgate also directly commends George Philips, another Manchester-based radical and affiliate of Cooper, who in his *Necessity of a speedy and effectual reform in Parliament* (1793) had boldly urged a female electorate.⁶⁹

Still others whose arguments did not make it directly into the pages of Norgate's writing may have shaped his work. Norgate's memoirs indicate that he was in correspondence with William Roscoe, a Liverpool-based supporter of Mary Wollstonecraft and advocate of women's rights, to whom Norgate might have been introduced by Enfield, whose eldest son had clerked for Roscoe before becoming town-clerk of Nottingham.⁷⁰ Either through Roscoe or his Hackney networks, Norgate may also have been in touch with William Shepherd, the Liverpool minister who endorsed women's political rights. Then there were also the numerous 'exemplary' female radicals outside of Norwich – Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Jebb, Mary Wollstonecraft – whom Norgate would have encountered through various friends and professional contacts. Anna Plumptre, for example, was close friends with both Williams and Jebb.⁷¹

conversed with politicians, and read the writings of politicians, but I have seldom met with views more enlarged, more just, more truly patriotic, or with political reasonings more acute, or arguments more forcible, than in the conversation of Theroigne, or the writings of Miss Wollstonecraft: Let the defenders of male despotism answer (if they can) the Rights of Woman by Miss Wollstonecraft'. For the original, see Thomas Cooper, *A reply to Mr. Burke's invective against Mr. Cooper* (London, 1792).

⁶⁹ For Norgate's praise of George Philips, see his 'notes and historical elucidations' to his edition of William Jones' *The principles of government, in a dialogue between a gentleman & a farmer* (Norwich, 1797, 2nd edn.), 44: 'On the necessity of, and plan for parliamentary reform, I refer my readers to a pamphlet, by George Philips, of Manchester, where he will find the subject treated with ingenuity and argument.' For George Philips' endorsement of female suffrage, see George Philips, *The necessity of a speedy and effectual reform in parliament* (Manchester, 1793), 13.

⁷⁰ See Aikin, *Memoirs of the author*, xxi.

⁷¹ On Anna Plumptre's friendship with Helen Maria Williams, see Deborah McLeod's introduction to *Something new*, ix; on Plumptre's friendship with Ann Jebb, see McLeod's introduction to *Something new*, xxiii, n.12: 'Plumptre is mentioned in "Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb" (*The Monthly Repository*, Oct 1812, 670) as being "long and intimately acquainted" with Mrs. Jebb and "frequently an inmate of her house". For further background on Ann Jebb, see Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the English Enlightenment origins of British radicalism* (Westport, CT, 2003) as well as his article, "'A Great Politicianess": Ann Jebb, Rational Dissent and Politics in Late Eighteenth-century Britain,' *Women's History Review*, 17, no. 5 (November, 2008), 743-65.

These women too, each working to make theirs a more 'perfect' world, would have further inspired Norgate to work to widen women's sphere of influence.

At the same time, to describe Norwich as an ideal incubator for Norgate's particularly ambitious brand of feminism is not to suggest that its denizens offered unequivocal support of Norgate, or of his stance on the 'Woman Question'. Even in the most liberal community, advocacy of women's rights could provoke outrage and disunity. The claims put forward by Norgate and others, after all, challenged prevailing assumptions about women's 'natural' roles, as prescribed by religion, law, science and medicine. What is more, such claims carried with them the potential to upend the social order, an order structured around fixed gender roles and responsibilities. In Norgate's own circles there were thus some who almost necessarily found his conclusions disquieting. As the lawyer-in-training Thomas Amyot complained in a letter to his friend William Patisson, after having read Norgate's *Cabinet* essay on women, 'A virtuous wife and an affectionate Mother are perhaps the most amiable Characters in the Universe. To these Characters let every female aspire and let us hear no more of the *Rights of Woman*'. Amyot for his part sought to distance himself from this 'champion of the fair sex', whom he described as 'far from invincible'.⁷²

Finally, to highlight Norwich as a city that proved hospitable to women's rights thinking is not to suggest that the feminism cultivated there was of a hardy stock. From the very start, this was a fragile enterprise, buoyed by the broader radical agenda and sustained by a limited number of particularly committed individuals. Yet enthusiasm for radicalism was waning by 1798, the year when the threat of French invasion seemed immanent. And most of the vocal supporters of women's rights in Norwich had died or left the city by the start of the new century: William Enfield died in 1797 and John Henry Colls died in 1802; the Plumptre sisters were permanently residing in London by 1799; Richard Dinmore had emigrated to America by the early nineteenth century.⁷³ This

⁷² Thomas Amyot to William Patisson, February 18, 1795, reprinted in *Youth and revolution in the 1790s*, 120.

⁷³ On the Plumptre sisters' move to London, see Deborah McLeod, *Something new*, ix.

left Norgate as a relatively isolated supporter of women's rights. Yet over the next six decades of his long life, Norgate himself proved reluctant to make women's rights a priority. In his various capacities as a fire insurance officer, founder of the Norfolk and Norwich Horticultural Society, and editor, with his eldest son Elias, of the *East Anglian*, a weekly newspaper, Norgate left little record that egalitarianism remained a pressing issue. In his memoirs, in fact, Norgate even admitted that some of the 'schemes and suggestions' offered by the earlier 'visionary reformers' (himself included) on women's rights were worthy of 'ridicule,' although he did acknowledge that many of his 'sober hints' were still 'worthy of attention'.⁷⁴

These qualifiers, however, should not inure us to the radicalism of Norgate's original vision, nor to the degree to which this vision stemmed from his specific experiences and observations as a Norwichian. The formative role that Norwich played in shaping Norgate's radical and feminist worldview, in fact, suggests that we need to pay more attention to the provincial dimensions of women's rights thought in late-eighteenth-century Britain. In provincializing the women's rights conversation – that is, in moving beyond London – we see how this nascent struggle was shaped as much by local traditions, characters, customs and faiths as by broader political and philosophical pressures. In the process, we also gain a deeper appreciation for the variety of feminisms in circulation during this period, in what was surely a more dense and communally-inflected enterprise than has previously been recognized. As Norgate's personal trajectory so well illustrates, Norwich was not just an outpost for enlightened thinking about women but a hub in its own right.⁷⁵

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⁷⁴ Thomas Starling Norgate, *Hora otiosa*, 80-1.

⁷⁵ In this sense, my argument here extends Chandler's point about Norwich's place as an important late-eighteenth-century literary centre. As he writes in 'The Athens of England', 187, 'In the 1780s and '90s, Norwich was not so much a city aspiring to cultural independence, as an important node on an increasingly intricate and decentralized national network of literary production. Rather than attempts to create a distinctively Norwich, or provincial, product, the literary innovations found there reflect the city's growing importance to that larger network.'

HANNAH LINDSEY AND HER CIRCLE: THE FEMALE
ELEMENT IN EARLY BRITISH UNITARIANISM

*G M Ditchfield**

My text is taken from the dedication to Joseph Priestley's *History of early opinions concerning Jesus Christ* (1786). Priestley wrote

It is a great and important question that is now in agitation, and it is but justice that posterity should, if possible, be made acquainted with the names of those zealous advocates for truth, whose exertions, though not in the character of writers, have yet, in various other ways, contributed to its successful spread.¹

The dedicatee was Elizabeth Rayner of Clapham, whom Priestley was to describe as 'my chief benefactress,'² and who had helped to finance the publication of more than one of his works. They had met at a service at Essex Street Chapel, an institution to which she had been the largest single financial contributor immediately after its foundation.³ Crucial to her involvement in Rational Dissent was her financial independence as a

* I am grateful to those who took part in the 'Intellectual Exchanges' workshop at Dr Williams's Library on 27 June 2009 and who commented helpfully on this paper. In particular I appreciate the critical and constructive observations of Anthony Page, Gina Luria Walker and Ruth Watts on the revised version. I thank Dr Williams's Library, London, John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Cambridge University Library, the National Library of Wales, Harris Manchester College, Oxford, the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and the Royal Society for permission to consult and quote from manuscripts in their custody. Dr John Scott kindly allowed me to make use of the letters of Lindsey in his Unitarian Collection (cited here as Scott Collection).

¹ J Priestley, *History of early opinions concerning Jesus Christ, compiled from original writers, proving that the Christian Church was at first Unitarian* (4 vols., Birmingham, 1786), I, iii-iv.

² J T Rutt ed., *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley* (25 vols. in 26: London, 1817-32; Bristol, Thoemmes reprint, 1999), I (i), 215. Vol. I of this work is divided into two: I (i) and I (ii); it is cited as Rutt, *Works of Priestley*.

³ Rutt, *Works of Priestley*, I (ii), 208.

widow.⁴ On her death in 1800, Theophilus Lindsey wrote ‘For the last 23 years of her life, when she became mistress of her fortune, I believe, she gave away not less than two thousand pounds yearly’.⁵ The list of legatees in her will reads like a catalogue of leading figures of Rational Dissent: Lindsey, Priestley, John and Jane Disney, William Gifford, William Frend, William Blackburne. She left a sizeable residuary bequest to Hackney College, an academy so important, as Gina Luria Walker’s contribution to this volume has shown, to the education of Mary Hays.⁶ Lindsey referred to the presence of ladies at the annual orations at Hackney College; perhaps Elizabeth Rayner was among them.⁷ And since she anticipated, correctly, that the college would not survive her, in 1796 she added a codicil to her will and transferred that legacy to the trustees of Essex Street chapel.⁸ Nor were her contributions to Rational Dissent solely financial. Priestley credited her with ‘a mind superior to every thing that this world can hold out in opposition to the claims of reason and conscience’.⁹

The key words in Priestley’s dedication are ‘not in the character of writers’. His anxiety was that the ‘exertions’ of non-writers in the cause of what he believed to be truth, enlightenment and liberty would be overlooked by ‘posterity’. Since the majority – although, as this volume demonstrates, very far from all – those who did appear in ‘the character

⁴ Elizabeth Rayner inherited from her husband John Rayner, who died in 1777, houses at Sunbury on Thames and Southampton Street, London, as well as a considerable sum of money. John Rayner’s will may be found at TNA: PRO, PROB 11/ 1030, ff. 260r-261v.

⁵ Dr Williams’s Library (DWL), MS 12.46 (22), 30 July 1800.

⁶ Elizabeth Rayner’s will may be found at TNA: PRO, PROB 11/1345, ff. 264r-274r. Among other bequests, she left £2000 in Bank of England annuities to Priestley, and £1000 each to Lindsey and John Disney.

⁷ John Rylands University Library of Manchester (JRUL), Lindsey Letters, vol. II. No. 85, Lindsey to William Tayleur, 26 June 1795.

⁸ TNA: PRO, PROB 11/1345, f. 273.

⁹ Priestley, *History of early opinions concerning Jesus Christ*, I, vi. Admittedly, dedications to benefactors often adopt a flattering, or even sycophantic, tone, but Priestley was no flatterer and he cited Elizabeth Rayner’s ‘noble intrepidity in following truth’ (*History of early opinions*, I, vi) as an example to his own work.

of writers' were men, Priestley feared that the greatest danger would be a future failure to appreciate female 'exertions'. So this paper proposes to examine what Priestley called 'various other ways' of advocacy for 'truth'. It suggests that ample evidence of intellectual ability beyond the careers of those who were published authors is available to the historian of eighteenth-century Dissenting women and that 'Intellectual Exchanges' were by no means necessarily confined to those who published. In particular, a study of Hannah Lindsey and her circle might facilitate our understanding of those 'various other ways' in which 'intellectual exchanges' could be facilitated.

There are two obvious methodological objections to such an approach. Firstly, it bears the rather old-fashioned appearance of 'writing women into', or, rather, 'back into, history'. Secondly, it raises the question as to whether Hannah Lindsey and her circle were genuinely representative of Rational Dissent? To the first objection, I would suggest that female writers, although of fundamental importance, have tended to overshadow several other intellectual roles among female Rational Dissenters. Furthermore, this essay contends for the importance of broadening the category of women who were involved in such exchanges and, in doing so, suggests that there might be rather less significance to the distinction between women who were published authors and those who were not than was the case with formally educated men. It is not necessarily appropriate to classify women as 'learned' or 'unlearned' as if these were the only two available categories. To the second objection, I would argue that Hannah Lindsey's circle, through its post-1774 metropolitan base at Essex Street chapel, and through its sponsorship of Rational Dissenting enterprises elsewhere, served as one of the most important meeting-grounds for male and female Rational Dissenters from different religious backgrounds (including Latitudinarians) and from different parts of the country. It also took the form of a centre of communication between metropolitan and provincial Dissent.

In most of the formal, and in many of the informal, senses, the world of Rational Dissent has an unmistakable appearance of male dominance. Such a state of affairs will not appear surprising. It was a fundamental assumption of eighteenth-century British society that formal political and ecclesiastical participation should be confined to men. This generalisation

extended to radical and reforming movements as well as to the institutions of government. Dr J A Hone, prefacing her detailed examination of London radicalism in this period, noted:

Throughout my work I have caught glimpses of the girlfriends, wives, mothers, daughters, and occasionally women of a more independent mien, about whom we should know more It may be that further research would uncover more. Certainly it should not be assumed that the radical movements described in this book were unaffected by women and had no effect on them.¹⁰

But, although no such assumption should be made about Rational Dissent, its ministerial and preaching role was, by something amounting almost to common consent, a male preserve. To find anything remotely resembling female ministry in the later eighteenth century, we have to look, ironically, to those evangelical Protestant groups which Rational Dissenters held in the greatest contempt. In Britain itself, the most familiar example could be found in the female preachers of early Methodism. In continental Europe, one of the best example may be found within the Moravian Church in Germany, where at Herrnhut in Saxony Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf ordained twenty women as deaconesses in 1745 and thirteen years later ordained three of them as presbyters with priestly-type powers, (admittedly, one of them was one of his relatives).¹¹ This happened at the very time when the Moravian 'blood and wounds' theology was the subject of amused contempt on the part of Rational Dissenters. At the same time female ministers among the Society of Friends in England, Ireland and America exercised a significant, albeit limited, measure of spiritual authority.¹² By contrast, although female membership constituted

¹⁰ J A Hone, *For the cause of truth. Radicalism in London 1796-1821* (Oxford, 1982), 5-6.

¹¹ See Paul Peuker, 'Women priests in the Moravian Church in 1758', *Moravian Messenger*, June 2009, 61-2; an earlier version of the article appeared in *This Month in Moravian History* (published online by the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), May 2008.

¹² See Phyllis Mack, 'Religion, feminism and the problem of agency: reflections on eighteenth-century Quakerism', in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor eds., *Women, gender and enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 2005), 434-59.

a significantly high proportion of members and hearers of Rational Dissenting congregations, the numbers of women formally involved in their governing structures was minimal. When in 1803 Timothy Kenrick, minister to the George Meeting, Exeter, received an invitation to move to a congregation in Birmingham, and an address signed by forty-six members of his flock urged him to remain with them, only five of the signatories were female.¹³ Partly as a result of the nature of the property laws, chapel trustees were overwhelmingly male, propertied and often representatives of professions which were closed to women. Even Dr Williams's Trust did not admit its first female trustee until 1945, with the election of the distinguished classical scholar Dorothy Tarrant.

Such was the eclectic nature of Rational Dissent that it would be an over-simplification to regard it as a straightforward and linear precursor to early nineteenth-century Unitarianism. Nonetheless, the connection is sufficiently close for an examination of the male dominance of its main organisational bodies to be relevant to the theme of this special number of *Enlightenment and Dissent*. The first list of members of the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by Distributing Books (better known as the Unitarian Society) in 1791 named 144 individuals, of whom eight were women.¹⁴ When membership was conferred upon Elizabeth Dodson in 1799, it was less in her own right than as a tribute to her husband Michael Dodson, the Society's first treasurer and a contributor to its *Essays and commentaries*, who had died earlier in that year.¹⁵ The founding list of 31 members of the Western Unitarian Society in 1792 included no female members. Even by 1808, of

¹³ 'The Kenrick Letters', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* (cited as *TUHS*), V, part I (1931), 'Record Section', 84-5.

¹⁴ *Society for promoting Christian knowledge and the practice of virtue by the distribution of books* (cited as 'Unitarian Society') (London, 1791), list of members, pp. 9-14.

¹⁵ DWL, Essex Hall archives, Unitarian Society minute book, p. 68 (16 Jan. 1800). The obituary of Elizabeth Dodson in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXI, ii (1811), 197, however, gives an impression of a model Rational Dissenter: 'She was greatly distinguished and respected by those who knew her, for her serious and unaffected piety; for her correct principles of civil and religious liberty; for the soundness of her judgment, and her universal candour for all who differed from her'.

the 271 individually named subscribers to the Unitarian Fund, only thirteen were female.¹⁶ Nor are we particularly surprised that all the 240 members of the London Revolution Society, founded in 1788 and lasting until 1793, a Society which drew very heavily for its membership upon Rational Dissent, were male, as revealed by its Minute Book.¹⁷

An examination of the published lists of subscribers to a reasonably representative series of works by leading Rational Dissenters of this period produces only a marginally different impression. Subscription lists were, in a sense, advertisements – offering testimony to a book’s importance and presenting to the reading public an image of one’s collective identity, and an impression of the social and intellectual respectability of one’s readers. Here is a brief survey of the subscription lists to seven such works – of which the authors were all men. Of the 534 named individual (as distinct from institutional) subscribers to the three-volume edition of the works of John Jebb in 1787, thirty-five (seven per cent) were women. Of the 487 individual subscribers to the eleven-volume edition of the works of Nathaniel Lardner in 1788, nineteen (four per cent) were women. Of the 160 subscribers to William Hazlitt, *Discourses for the use of families on the advantages of a free inquiry, and on the study of the Scriptures* (1790), thirty-five (twenty-two per cent) were female. Of the 376 individual subscribers to Robert Robinson’s, *The history of baptism* (1790), fifteen (four per cent) were female; and of the 480 individual subscribers to the same author’s posthumously-published *Ecclesiastical researches* (1792), nineteen (including Mary Hays) were female. Gilbert Wakefield’s *New translation of the New Testament* (1791) listed nine female subscribers out of a total of 280; and finally, of the 801 individual subscribers to William Enfield’s *Sermons* in 1798, 134 (seventeen per cent) were women.¹⁸ Admittedly, there is no necessary correlation between subscribers and readers; one must take into consideration the issues of cost, financial independence or lack thereof, and the availability to other members of a family of one copy purchased

¹⁶ ‘Unitarian Society’ (London, 1813), published list of members, pp. 11-19.

¹⁷ BL Add. MS 64814 (London Revolution Society, minute book).

¹⁸ In each case the list of subscribers may be found at the beginning of the volume, or, in multi-volume works, at the beginning of volume one.

by a father, brother or husband. But only with the subscription list to the two-volume edition of the *Poems of Helen Maria Williams* (1786), whose closest associates included the Dissenting minister Andrew Kippis and members of Godwin's circle, and where the leading figures of Rational Dissent are interspersed among the aristocracy, gentry and senior clergy, do we find a significantly higher proportion of female subscribers. The exact figure is 697 (or thirty-one per cent) of a total of 1,567 named subscribers.¹⁹ But even with partial exceptions of this kind, the overall impression of a male-dominated intellectual elite is very difficult to avoid.

Moreover, academic focus has, for very good reasons, concentrated particularly upon those female Rational Dissenters who were published authors. We are particularly indebted in this area to the work of Ruth Watts, while some of the most distinguished recent examples include Gina Luria Walker on Mary Hays, and William McCarthy on Anna Letitia Barbauld.²⁰ The political significance of their writing was always apparent. When the Unitarian Society, at its annual dinner in April 1791, included among its numerous toasts 'The Ladies and Gentlemen who have asserted and supported civil and religious liberty, by their writings and speeches', it is not difficult to see for which female writers it was intended. Anna Letitia Barbauld had just published her *Address to the opposers of the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts* (1790), while Ann Jebb had been a prolific contributor to the newspaper press in the Rational Dissenting interest.²¹ Mary Scott had already acquired a literary reputation as the author of *The Female advocate* (1774) and her *Messiah, a poem, in two parts*, published for the benefit of the general hospital at Bath, followed in 1788.

However, in suggesting that there is a case for examining a series of different and varied female roles within, and contributions to, Rational

¹⁹ *Poems, by Helen Maria Williams. In two volumes* (London, 1786). The non-paginated list of subscribers immediately follows the preface to vol. I.

²⁰ See, in particular, Ruth Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (London, 1998); Gina Luria Walker, *Mary Hays(1759-1843). The growth of a woman's mind* (Aldershot, 2006); William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld. Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2008).

²¹ See Anthony Page, "'A great politicianess": Ann Jebb, Rational Dissent and politics in the late eighteenth century', *Women's History Review*, 17 (2008), 743-65.

Dissent, and in seeking to use Hannah Lindsey and her circle as a case study of those multiple roles, this essay needs to ask who constituted Hannah Lindsey's circle, and in particular, who were its female associates? What is the evidence for their intellectual exchanges? Prominent among this circle was Hannah's own half-sister Jane, who in 1774 married Lindsey's future fellow-seceder and co-minister John Disney. According to Belsham, she 'expressed upon all occasions her high approbation of the step which Mr. Lindsey had taken; and with the generosity and ardour which belonged to her character, she defended the principles and the conduct of her calumniated friends'.²² In conjunction with her husband, in the 1780s she edited a new edition for children of the hymns of Isaac Watts.²³ From 1782, when her husband joined Lindsey at Essex Street chapel, Jane Disney and her family resided at Knightsbridge, in fairly close proximity to the chapel. Indeed, those associated with Hannah Lindsey's circle tended to be regular worshippers at Essex Street chapel, or hearers there during visits to London. They included Priestley's benefactress Elizabeth Rayner, who owned houses at Clapham and Sunbury-upon-Thames; Sophia and Elizabeth Chambers, the sisters of Theophilus Lindsey's Cambridge friend and fellow-Latitudinarian William Chambers, to whom Lindsey dedicated his last book, *Conversations on the divine government* (1802), and who regularly provided Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey with a summer retreat at Morden. Their sister Rosamund Chambers married the MP John Sargent, whose estate at Halstead, Kent, gave both Lindseys access to a further intellectual and politically liberal grouping.²⁴ Those female associates also included Ann Jebb, of whom Lindsey immediately thought when asked by William Turner of Newcastle upon Tyne to recommend writers for the short-lived *Oeconomist* in 1799; though 'greatly equal to the work', as he put it, he thought her poor health made it impossible for her

²² Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A* (Centenary edition, London, 1873), 58.

²³ See G M Ditchfield ed. *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808)*. Volume I, 1747-1788 (Church of England Record Society, 15, Woodbridge, 2007), 523.

²⁴ See G M Ditchfield, 'The Revd. William Chambers, D.D.', *Enlightenment and Dissent* (cited as *E & D*), 4 (1985), 3-12.

to undertake it.²⁵ At a greater distance they included Mary Lee, the widow of the attorney and Rockinghamite MP John Lee, who had been a chapel trustee. They included the poet Mary Scott, who looked to Theophilus Lindsey as her theological mentor; and who dedicated her poem *Messiah* (1788) to Lindsey. Her love letters during a frustratingly long courtship with the enigmatic John Taylor are models of Rational Dissenting candour: 'I ever thought', she told him, that 'the claims of honor, truth and humanity infinitely superior to the rules of *Decorum*'. Scott's sentiments are comparable in many ways to those expressed by Mary Hays in her letters to John Eccles in 1779.²⁶ And Catharine Cappe, who had known Hannah Lindsey in Yorkshire before her marriage and before Lindsey's resignation of the vicarage of Catterick in 1773, and was one of her most frequent and consistent correspondents and friends over almost half a century, devoted a substantial section of her memoirs to her and her husband.²⁷

Much of what we have known about Hannah Lindsey comes from male sources, notably the surviving letters of her husband. It is partly through Catharine Cappe that we find some of the most important evidence from female sources. For we have not only Hannah Lindsey's letters to members of her own family, as distinct from those which she wrote to her husband's correspondents on his behalf, but a small number of letters between her and Cappe survive her instructions that they be destroyed after her death.²⁸ When writing to Cappe, she could be particularly open and self-revealing; 'I have been more of a useful than a loveable creature', she told her friend in 1797; and she referred several times to what she called her 'irritability' of temperament.²⁹ Writing to Thomas Belsham in 1804, at the age of 64, she described herself as 'an old woman, who assumes to a bit of Philosophy'.³⁰ 'Bit' was a very substantial understatement. For, as is the case with Catharine Cappe, we can trace

²⁵ DWL, MS 12.44 (61), Lindsey to William Turner of Newcastle, 1 Apr. 1799.

²⁶ Walker, *Mary Hays*, ch. 1, passim, especially p. 21.

²⁷ *Memoirs of the life of the late Mrs. Catharine Cappe. Written by herself* (London, 1822), especially chs. 15-17, 19-20.

²⁸ Cappe, 'Memoir of Mrs. Lindsey', *Monthly Repository*, VII (1812), 114.

²⁹ Cappe, 'Memoir of Mrs Lindsey', 116.

³⁰ DWL MS 12.57 (29), Hannah Lindsey to Belsham, 24 July 1804.

her intellectual formation to a strongly Latitudinarian Anglican household. Although her step-father, Francis Blackburne, archdeacon of Cleveland, Yorkshire, held an office of authority in the established Church, he was strongly critical of the power structure of the Church which he served. Hannah Lindsey grew up in a family where opposition to subscription to human doctrinal formularies had become almost a way of life. Blackburne refused further preferment after 1750 because of the requirement to subscribe the Thirty-nine Articles; in 1773 his son Thomas Blackburne (Hannah's half-brother) declined for the same reason to graduate at Cambridge University despite the appropriate period of successful study there.³¹ Another son, William Blackburne, studied at Edinburgh University to evade the subscription demanded at Cambridge and Oxford. And, as we know, two of Francis Blackburne's sons in law (Lindsey and Disney) resigned from the Church of England to become Unitarians; while his grand-daughter Sara married another seceder from the Church, the Unitarian William Frend.

Hannah Elsworth, to quote her family name, was only four years old when Francis Blackburne married her widowed mother in 1744. As archdeacon of Cleveland it has been estimated that he never had an income much in excess of £150 per annum, but he also drew a modest competence from his prebend in the diocese of York, which he annually set aside for the increase of his library. According to Thomas Belsham's memorial sermon for Hannah Lindsey in 1812, Blackburne recognized her intellectual ability:

He soon discovered an extraordinary quickness of apprehension and tenaciousness of memory in his young step-daughter, and took great delight in cultivating her mind, and in forming her early - - to an eager desire after scriptural knowledge, to a freedom of inquiry similar to his own into the truth and importance of popular opinions, and to a fixed aversion to all restraint upon religious liberty.³²

³¹ See *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLIII (1773), 132, 219.

³² Thomas Belsham, *The Christian character exemplified in a discourse occasioned by the death of Mrs Hannah Lindsey* (London, 1812), 11-12.

The Church of England, in Blackburne's view, was insufficiently reformed and was in urgent need of a re-assertion of Reformation principles – the sufficiency of scripture, the importance of reading the Bible for oneself, the fundamental right and duty of private judgement. Hannah Lindsey, in short, spent her formative years in a household where *The confessional*, a seminal text for late eighteenth-century debates over religious liberty, was written, improved, polished and discussed.³³ Citing the Aikin family, and Susannah Taylor of Norwich among other examples, Ruth Watts has pointed out that the daughters of liberal Dissenters often benefited educationally from an intellectually stimulating domestic environment, in which books were freely available and wide reading was encouraged.³⁴ Might one speculate that something similar could have applied in at least some Latitudinarian homes? The Peterhouse connection of Disney, Jebb, Capel Lofft and, indeed, the Duke of Grafton, who all shared a common heterodoxy, is familiar to us; and Mary Scott could write in 1777 'To say the truth, I look upon the Church of England to be, under Providence, the chief Bulwark of rational Christianity in our Nation'.³⁵ Dorothy Evanson, the wife of Edward Evanson, vicar of Tewkesbury, who adopted the Anglican liturgy in a Unitarian direction, despite her high church background, came to share his opinions (as did her family), and his sister Margaret Evanson wrote a theological defence of him shortly after his death.³⁶ When, during the early 1770s, Evanson

³³ Francis Blackburne, *The confessional; or, a full and free inquiry into the right, utility, edification and success, of establishing systematical confessions of faith and doctrine in Protestant churches* (London, 1766, with further editions in 1766 and 1770). Although published in 1766, six years after Hannah's marriage to Lindsey, *The confessional* had been under contemplation during the latter's years as rector of Kirkby Wiske (1752-55) and was completed after Lindsey became vicar of Catterick in 1763.

³⁴ Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians*, 16-23, 43-52.

³⁵ Isabella and Catherine Scott, *A family biography 1662 to 1908, drawn chiefly from old letters* (London, privately printed, 1908), 64.

³⁶ [Margaret Evanson], *A letter to a friend; containing some observations on Mr [Thomas] Faulkner's critique on the Dissonance* (London, 1811). Edward Evanson's work was *The dissonance of the four generally received evangelists, and the evidence of their respective authenticity examined* (Ipswich, 1792). For the background of this controversy, see G M Ditchfield, 'Varieties of heterodoxy: the career of Edward

was prosecuted for heresy in the church courts, 309 members of his parish published in the *Gloucester Journal*, with their names, an address in his support; 94, or almost one-third of them were women, including what was probably a significant proportion of widows. The (admittedly eccentric) Charles, third Earl Stanhope, a determined, if clumsy, advocate in the House of Lords for causes close to Rational Dissenting hearts, arranged that that Jeremiah Joyce should be tutor to Stanhope's daughter, Lady Hester, as well as to his sons.³⁷ It must be admitted, however, that there are numerous counter-examples – Archdeacon William Paley, when asked by a bishop's wife for his opinion upon a successful marriage, is reported to have responded, perhaps drawing upon his own experience, with the words 'mighty flat, madam'; Samuel Parr's eldest daughter eloped to Gretna Green, while Parr himself quarrelled violently with his grand-daughters at the time of his second marriage.³⁸

If the libertarian Whig values of Latitudinarianism played a leading part in Hannah Lindsey's mind, another factor may be located in her youthful interest in medicine, and the wider intellectual context of natural philosophy to which it belonged. Unlike two of her brothers, she could not study medicine at university in England or Scotland; unlike John Jebb, she could not have the opportunity to acquire medical training as a kind of external student at a London hospital. But she seems to have been determined to learn about medicine as a means of intellectual improvement as well as a means of fulfilling what she saw as a useful function in whichever community she lived, just as Mary Hays was determined to acquire the liberal education, of which the formal means of access were closed to her. Hannah Lindsey's uncle on her mother's side owned an apothecary's shop near Richmond, and after her marriage, Hannah Lindsey followed this example at Catterick. Her acquisition of the

Evanson (1731-1805)', in Robert D Cornwall and William Gibson eds., *Religion, politics and Dissent, 1660-1832. Essays in honour of James E Bradley* (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT, 2010), 111-126.

³⁷ John Issitt, *Jeremiah Joyce. Radical, Dissenter and writer* (Aldershot, 2006), 34, 70-71.

³⁸ M L Clarke, *Paley. Evidences for the man* (London, 1794), 49; Warren Derry, *Dr Parr. A portrait of the Whig Dr Johnson* (Oxford, 1966), 283, 199-200.

skills necessary for the management of this enterprise formed part of the process whereby she became, in effect, a self-taught, but uncertified, physician. On innumerable occasions she was solicited for medical advice by leading male Rational Dissenters – from Priestley’s gallstones to Thomas Fyshe Palmer’s eyesight (‘Mr Palmer expresses himself highly delighted with my wife’s spectacles’, wrote Lindsey on 22 April 1794.³⁹). From her letters we know something of her interests and reading of natural philosophy. She owned Antoine François de Fourcroy’s *Elements of chemistry* in the four-volume English translation of 1796, and Samuel Stanhope Smith’s, *Essay on the causes of the variety of complexion and figure in the human species* (Philadelphia; reprinted in Edinburgh, 1789). Her letters indicate a familiarity with the work of David Hartley and the associationism which became fundamental to the thought of Priestley.⁴⁰ Lindsey himself recorded that she was a far from uncritical reader of Mary Hays’s first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, on its publication in 1796.⁴¹

These were among the qualities which Hannah Lindsey brought to the new Unitarian enterprise at Essex Street in 1774. And it becomes immediately clear that there could hardly have been a sharper contrast than that between her marriage to Lindsey and that between Joseph and Mary Priestley. The latter’s main purpose in life seems to have been solely domestic; to look after Priestley’s material needs and to provide him with the space, peace and quiet necessary for his scientific and theological work. Indeed, Priestley was wont to say that he was ‘only a lodger in her

³⁹ Scott Collection, Lindsey to Rev. Russell Scott, 22 Apr. 1794. Writing to Lindsey from Sydney on 15 Sept. 1795, Palmer expressed his appreciation, ‘Mrs. Lindsey will accept of my best regard; her spectacles often recall her to my mind’; Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 362.

⁴⁰ For example, Cambridge University Library (cited as CUL), Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), nos. 128 and 135, Hannah Lindsey to her half-brother Francis Blackburne, vicar of Brignall, Yorkshire, ‘early in 1794’, 13 Nov. 1798. All Hannah Lindsey’s to Francis Blackburne cited in this essay were written to this half-brother, not to her step-father of the same name, who died in 1787.

⁴¹ Royal Society, Priestley Memorial Volume, 59; Lindsey to John Rowe, 23 Dec. 1796.

house.⁴² One undoubted reason for the difference was that Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey had no children (the Priestleys had four). In the eighteenth century, we read many letters from many clergymen – and others – to their patrons anxiously seeking elevation to a more rewarding position – and often citing the financial demands of ‘a numerous family’ in so doing. Had Lindsey and his wife possessed a ‘numerous family’, would their actions have been any different? That they were childless no doubt made their decision to leave the Church and their neighbourhood an easier one, although Lindsey’s colleague and successor as minister of the Essex Street Chapel, John Disney, was not deterred by the needs of his ‘numerous family’ from resigning his Church benefices in Lincolnshire to join Lindsey in 1782. But Lindsey would not have done what he did without determined and active collaboration of his wife, who was prepared to endure the breakdown of her relations with her step-father Blackburne, who bitterly deplored her actions as well as Lindsey’s.⁴³ Her motivation is evident in the leading part which she played in the design of the new chapel and house at Essex Street in the mid-1770s; her duties, as Catharine Cappe put it, involved ‘daily superintending the various workmen employed in the building, and contriving how to make the most of the small allotted space’.⁴⁴ Once the chapel was opened for worship, she kept meticulous financial accounts, wrote letters on Lindsey’s behalf when he was ill, and undertook visits, and provided medical sustenance, to members of the congregation. Over and over again, Lindsey’s letters

⁴² Quoted in Robert E Schofield, *The enlightened Joseph Priestley. A study of his life and work from 1773 to 1804* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2004), 348. See also H John McLachlan, ‘Mary Priestley: a woman of character’, in A Truman Schwartz and John G McEvoy eds. *Motion towards perfection: the achievement of Joseph Priestley* (Boston, Mass., 1990, 251-64.

⁴³ Lindsey was well aware of Blackburne’s disapproval; see, for example, his letters to William Tayleur of 25 Nov. 1782 and 18 Oct. 1783; Ditchfield ed., *Letters of Lindsey*, I, 366, 397. Blackburne’s resentment was all the greater because during the 1750s and early 1760s he had endeavoured to persuade Lindsey to remain within the established Church, and because he blamed Lindsey for John Disney’s secession in 1782.

⁴⁴ Cappe, ‘Memoir of Hannah Lindsey’, *Monthly Repository*, VII (1812), 114. Cappe added ‘I believe it will be admitted that there are few professional architects who could more completely have succeeded in their object’.

refer to Hannah's superior organising ability and financial acuteness. 'She is exactness itself ... in every thing'; 'My wife, who takes the trouble of keeping an exact statement of all money matters'; 'I mention my wife, because she is more attentive to these matters and more punctual in them than myself'.⁴⁵

Among many other examples, in 1799 Hannah Lindsey took responsibility for the organisation of financial relief for the Welsh Unitarian Thomas Evans; she sent £2 to the wife of Thomas Evans for her son Joseph Priestley Evans.⁴⁶ It was not so much the case that Lindsey was sustained by his wife. A far more accurate verdict would be that they sustained each other in a partnership characterised by the form of teamwork which allowed Lindsey to write in 1795 of 'my wife, to whose good management I owe everything'.⁴⁷ Hannah Lindsey can be regarded without exaggeration as the co-founder of the Essex Street chapel, and thus of the modern Unitarian denomination. Parental analogies may no longer be appropriate; but if they are, then if Lindsey was the patriarch of British Unitarianism, Hannah Lindsey was its matriarch.

Moreover Theophilus Lindsey's physical decline after 1800 enhanced Hannah Lindsey's involvement in the chapel and its circle. We find her taking independent initiatives. Perhaps this helps to explain the discord within the Lindsey/Disney connection. Hannah Lindsey disapproved of Disney during his final years as minister; she complained in her letters of his declining commitment after 1800 to the Unitarian enterprise, which accompanied his growing wealth (he had inherited the Hollis family estate and fortune) and material interests. She wanted him to resign much sooner than he actually did: and wished, as she wrote to her brother, 'that he would justly make good his neglect of repairs for eleven Years, by giving the Trustees a few hundred pounds to put the place in order for a new Minister'.⁴⁸ This was why she played a large, albeit informal, part in the

⁴⁵ These tributes may be found, respectively, in DWL MS 12.46 (12), Lindsey to Robert Millar, 19 Nov. 1796; DWL MS 12.46 (13), Lindsey to Millar, 10 Dec. 1796; DWL MS 12.44 (63), Lindsey to William Turner of Newcastle, 18 Mar. 1800.

⁴⁶ National Library of Wales, MS 3639C, Lindsey to Thomas Evans, 22 Feb. 1799.

⁴⁷ Scott Collection, Lindsey to Russell Scott, 30 Dec. 1795.

⁴⁸ CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 142, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 5 Jan. 1805.

nomination of Thomas Belsham to succeed John Disney as minister in 1805. She was determined that a committed, lifelong, Dissenter (Belsham was a product of the Daventry academy and a tutor at Hackney) should follow in her husband's place.⁴⁹ It was an unmistakable indication that by 1805 Rational Dissenters from Latitudinarian families had recognized that the prospect of internal Church reform to which they had so earnestly aspired was no longer a realistic possibility and that their future lay with Dissent.

The Disney connection offers a backhanded tribute to her leading involvement in the affairs of the chapel. It may be found in the lengthy and detailed manuscript annotations which Disney made to his (folio) copy of Belsham's *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey* (1813) and to Belsham's memorial sermon for Hannah Lindsey the previous year. Disney's jaundiced observations amount to a character assassination of his step-sister in law, and may be interpreted as a grudging recognition of her importance. To Disney, Hannah Lindsey was 'obstinacy personified'; her solicitations for financial contributions to the chapel amounted to 'impertinent importunity' and bullying; and even in her charitable support for the poor of the neighbourhood – 'she often spoiled the gift by the manner of giving'; she exaggerated the financial loss incurred by the resignation of Lindsey's parish and helped to create her own myth of sacrifice and martyrdom. Disney summed up Theophilus Lindsey's career with the embittered comment that he 'had been the henpecked husband of a very harsh, intolerant wife all through life'. This remark may be seen in effect as the complaint of a man who thought that a woman was usurping a male role. It was echoed in the observation of the eminent Unitarian scholar Alexander Gordon (1841-1831), who, alluding pointedly to her childlessness, exclaimed 'Alas, good lady, in whom the miracle of motherhood had not been wrought, what wonder if life's wine of duty carried for her some spice of gall'.⁵⁰ But Disney had unknowingly identified an example of the type of relationship which Mary Waters has

⁴⁹ See John Williams, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Thomas Belsham* (London, 1833), 544-57.

⁵⁰ Alexander Gordon, *Addresses biographical and historical* (London, 1922), 253.

termed ‘a dissenting model of egalitarian heterosexual sociability and companionate marriage’.⁵¹ And indeed, some historians of Unitarianism, including Gordon, have by implication credited Theophilus Lindsey with what they saw as traditionally feminine, and Hannah Lindsey with traditionally masculine, virtues.⁵² Dr John McLachlan, for example, drew attention to what he saw as the contrast in their temperaments, with Theophilus Lindsey much ‘gentler’ than his wife, with her ‘singular firmness of mind’, amounting to ‘sheer obstinacy’.⁵³ Hannah Lindsey’s surviving letters certainly bear out this verdict; Theophilus Lindsey’s surviving letters, however, indicate a far sharper and more aggressively controversial tone than Dr McLachlan implied, suggesting that the success of the Lindseys’ marriage owed more to similarities than to differences of temperament.⁵⁴

This organisational effectiveness and the close partnership with her husband were doctrinally driven. Hannah Lindsey was also theological adviser and supporter – with clearly independent opinions. Priestley more than once acknowledged his intellectual debt to her as well as to her husband. In September 1787 he specifically asked her to read a draft of his memoirs.⁵⁵ One wonders whether he asked his own wife to read it. Many times Hannah Lindsey on her own initiative recommended Unitarian tracts to Dissenters in other parts of the country, such as the merchant Robert Millar of Dundee. She had her own favourites, one of which, perhaps appropriately for the 1790s, was George Walker’s sermon on Christian fortitude (1793). And it was Hannah Lindsey and not her husband who berated Arthur Aikin in 1795 for his publicly-expressed loss

⁵¹ Mary Waters, review of Gina Luria Walker, *Mary Hays (1759-1843). The growth of a woman’s mind*, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42 (2008), 177-9.

⁵² Alexander Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian history* (London, 1895), 123. See also Herbert McLachlan, *Alexander Gordon* (Manchester, 1932), 103-105.

⁵³ John McLachlan, ‘Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey: Two Hundred years later’, *TUHS*, XV, no. 2 (Oct. 1974), 120.

⁵⁴ This, in my view, is amply confirmed by Volume I of my edition of Lindsey’s letters (see n. 23, above) and will be further confirmed by Volume II, covering the years 1789 to 1808, and due for publication in 2011.

⁵⁵ Rutt, I (ii), 418. See also Priestley’s letter to Hannah Lindsey of 16 Oct. 1802, Rutt, I (ii), 493-4.

of faith, which could only damage their cause; she ‘rallied him a good deal upon his precipitancy, and told him the astonishment as well as concern that it had caused to his good friends at York [such as Newcome and Catharine Cappe], of which we heard much when we were there. All which he took in very good part.’ She took part in attempts to popularise Unitarian doctrines, no doubt drawing upon her experience at Catterick, where she and Lindsey have – rather flatteringly – been regarded as pioneer Sunday school teachers. Here is Lindsey’s account of one of her undertakings in 1795:

You shall have a large assortment of the little tracts recommended by my wife and which you so much approve, together with a few others that are come out since from the same mint. I think my wife told you that some very valuable characters, and many learned and ingenious, were engaged in the labour of this undertaking to set forth small tracts for the edification of their Xtian brethren who might not have leisure or capacity for longer works, and without mixing doctrinal points, keeping chiefly to what is practical.⁵⁶

When leading Rational Dissenters raised a subscription for the works of Priestley in 1802, Hannah Lindsey carried out much of the practical work.⁵⁷ And her involvement in the preparation of the new translation of the New Testament in 1808, under the aegis of the Unitarian Society, was recognized at the time and subsequently commemorated by Robert Spears in his *Unitarian worthies* of 1876.⁵⁸ Such indeed was her value to the emerging Unitarian movement that after 1808 the Duke of Northumberland continued to her the financial support, in the form of an annuity, which he had provided for her husband.⁵⁹

Hannah Lindsey exemplifies two other roles, both of which played some part in redressing the male preponderance in the survival of primary sources from this period. The first was that of archiving, preserving, and

⁵⁶ DWL MS 12.46 (8), Theophilus Lindsey to Robert Millar, 19 Dec. 1795.

⁵⁷ Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 295, n.*.

⁵⁸ Robert Spears, *Record of Unitarian worthies* (London, 1876), 133-36.

⁵⁹ Harris Manchester College Oxford (HMCO) MS misc 3, f. 89r, Duke of Northumberland to Thomas Belsham, 24 Feb. 1809.

memorializing. We know that many letters of Theophilus Lindsey were destroyed after his death by Jeremiah Joyce, and we are told that Priestley left instructions to his son for the destruction of letters to him from Lindsey and from Belsham up to 1802. Hannah Lindsey asked her closest female friend, Catharine Cappe, to destroy at least some of her letters, and it would seem that the injunction was obeyed. By contrast, however, she was anxious to preserve Lindsey's letters, and to commemorate him. At Harris Manchester College, Oxford, there is a short account, in her hand, of Lindsey's youth, his education, and his decision to secede from the Church. It concludes with the publication of Lindsey's *Apology on resigning the Vicarage of Catterick* 1774. She referred to him throughout as 'our author' and concluded 'his subsequent works tell the rest'. It was clearly intended for archival preservation.⁶⁰ That practice itself, of course, was far from confined to Rational Dissenters; the Puritan and evangelical spiritual autobiography was a well established literary genre; and Sarah Horne, the daughter of the High Church George Horne, Dean of Canterbury and a particularly vehement critic of Priestley, left a manuscript autobiography. But Hannah Lindsey was writing a biographical, not an autobiographical, essay, while in similar vein Catharine Cappe undertook the task of memorializing her deceased husband Newcome Cappe, minister of St Saviourgate Chapel, York, by editing his works and prefacing them with a full account of his life. A woman could not preach a memorial sermon, even for another woman; this type of memoir was an alternative means of doing so – and may be considered as one of Priestley's 'various other ways' of contributing to what he termed the 'spread of truth'.

Allied to that was the important role as correspondent: providing epistolary commentaries to friends and relatives; and, again, creating historical sources. The intellectual circles and the range of contacts to which she had access enabled Hannah Lindsey to become a well-informed as well as an acute social and political observer. Several MPs attended the chapel, as did publishers such as Joseph Johnson and Benjamin Flower,

⁶⁰ HMCO, Manuscript memoir, in Hannah Lindsey's hand, of Theophilus Lindsey. It was probably written immediately after Lindsey's death. The college also has a typescript copy.

and numerous professional men and their families. Her correspondence amounts to a commentary on the British responses to the French Revolution; what she repeatedly called ‘this abominable war’ after 1793, with its attendant hardships, high prices of provisions, and high taxation; she condemned the powder tax in 1795 with the contemptuous dismissal ‘men bow like bulrushes to power and fashion’.⁶¹ Indeed, she shared the short term pessimism of Priestley which saw the people as misled by government propaganda: ‘The public are yet in a state of delusion, & will probably so remain, till ruin comes upon the Country’, she wrote to her brother in July 1794.⁶² The suspension of cash payments by the Bank of England in February 1797 led her to the despairing exclamation:

As the people chuse to sit still & be so plundered & governed, the consequences must be submitted to by those who have uniformly on the principles of right and justice bore their testimony against it.⁶³

She regularly read parliamentary debates and sent reports of them to her relatives in the country; on 1 March 1797 she attended the House of Commons, with the two daughters of the Unitarian MP James Martin, who was a member of her congregation.⁶⁴ Her letters are replete – predictably – with admiration for the Foxite Whigs, the parliamentary grouping with the closest affinity to Rational Dissent and of all political parties that most likely to promote its causes through legislation. She regularly arranged for her ‘newsman’ to send London newspapers to provincial friends.⁶⁵ Of the ‘repressive’ legislation of the 1790s she was very strongly and consistently critical. In October 1794 she wrote:

⁶¹ CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 130, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 27 Apr. 1795.

⁶² CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 126, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 31 July 1794.

⁶³ CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 132, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 1 Mar. 1797.

⁶⁴ CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 132, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 1 Mar. 1797.

⁶⁵ For example, CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 140, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 13 Aug. 1803.

The approaching trials of the State prisoners excite great attention in the Capital, & the first processes are not favourable in their aspect: How blind are our Governors not to see the tendency of these things upon the lower classes of w^{ch}. rank most of the prisoners are: They are sowing the seeds of that resistance & commotion, w^{ch}. they mean to crush.⁶⁶

And five years later, we find her engaged in philanthropic endeavour on behalf of those caught up in the treason trials:

The prisoners in the King's Bench, Mr Wakefield especially, is reconciling himself to his fate, whatever be the length of his confinement: Men who have a true religious principle upon any system bear suffering the best. Messrs Wakefield, Johnson and Flower can all look to the Maker for support & comfort. Neither are they without the kind attentions of many worthy friends.⁶⁷

Like some Rational Dissenters such as Thomas Belsham, but in sharp contrast to others, such as William Hazlitt, Hannah Lindsey moved from sympathy with the French Revolution to a deep suspicion of Bonaparte, coupled with fear of invasion, and support for the raising of Volunteer regiments for home defence. She embodied the type of Rational Dissenting patriotism which detected overseas as well as domestic threats to liberty and which placed a higher priority upon the preservation of those liberties than upon a veneration for existing institutions. In particular she deplored Bonaparte's impact upon British public life and culture, noting in March 1805 'He [Bonaparte] has done by his threats, what never can be undone, changed the manners and views of this country from Commerce merely, to a Military cast'.⁶⁸ If one were to suggest one reservation about Emma Vincent MacLeod's excellent article, 'Women at war: women and the debate on the war against revolutionary France',⁶⁹ it

⁶⁶ DWL, MS 12.80, opp. p. 278, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 20 Oct. 1794.

⁶⁷ CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 136, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 14 May 1799.

⁶⁸ DWL MS 12.46 (46), Hannah Lindsey to Robert Millar, 12.46 (46). Although this was a joint letter from Hannah and Theophilus Lindsey, the state of Lindsey's health by 1804 meant that the opinions, as well as the handwriting, were those of Hannah.

⁶⁹ *E & D*, 15 (1996), 3-32.

would be that it deals almost exclusively with women writers, and hardly draws upon private correspondence at all. It would have been better entitled 'Women writers and the war', for it runs the risk – admittedly difficult to avoid – of regarding the female authors whose work it analyses as representative of a wide range of women's opinion as a whole.

These organisational and cultural efforts helped to create the conditions in which Rational Dissenters could meet, encounter kindred spirits, and engage in intellectual exchanges. David Hempton wrote that 'the public performances of women whether as preachers or exhorters, were but the tip of the iceberg of Methodism's oral culture'.⁷⁰ In the past, we have been well-informed about the 'tip', but rather less so about the iceberg itself. Oral culture – what Professor Walker has called 'part of the daily give and take in a community caught up in doctrinal and political struggles' – was essential for the conduct of intellectual exchanges.⁷¹ In our case study today, that oral culture was underpinned by a commitment to religious liberty with its essential – indeed indispensable – concomitant of constitutional reform. In the 1790s Rational Dissent often perceived itself as part of a persecuted minority, with a growing mistrust of the church-state, and especially of the ministry of Pitt. It saw itself, too, as imbued with a philanthropic concern for social ills which owed something to the long-term ideal of unlimited possibilities for human improvement, which itself was inspired in part by the rejection of the doctrine of original sin.

Some of these 'various other ways' of advocacy for truth – to quote Priestley again – were traditional female roles. Their successful accomplishment might be said to have reinforced stereotypes; to have entrenched female subordination. And there remained throughout the culture of Rational Dissent an assumption of male leadership. Although the notion of 'Separate spheres' seems too neat and clear-cut, I agree with Felicia Gordon and Gina Luria Walker in *Rational passions*, where, in the context of the work of female authors, they contend that 'assumptions of subordination of status and gender were built into such educational

⁷⁰ David Hempton, *The religion of the people. Methodism and popular religion, c.1750-1900* (London and New York, 1996), 186.

⁷¹ See Gina Luria Walker's essay in this volume.

and didactic narratives'.⁷² From Hannah Lindsey's circle come two striking examples in support of this contention. In the first, Theophilus Lindsey described a meeting in October 1798 with a group of William Godwin's friends, among whom was Basil Montagu:

I began with asking abt M^r Coleridge; when he [Basil Montagu] told me that he [Coleridge] was gone to pursue his studies in Germany: My wife asked if he had taken his wife along with [him]. Oh, no, says he; what could he do with that clog about his neck. He woud then be able to think freely. It was impossible in such a state of Society as this for a man of genius to expand his faculties.⁷³

In the second example, Hannah Lindsey made a rare criticism of William Smith, MP, a leading parliamentary advocate of Dissenting liberties, and whom she held in high esteem, during the brief period of Anglo-French peace in 1802:

How can Mr William Smith be wasting his time at Paris looking at pictures, when duty urges him to be at his post, now he is the Organ of such a City as Norwich, & after such a struggle & such disinterested support? [in the election of 1802]. It must be the influence of his vain wife, who wants to have something new to display upon in her literary & picnic circles; What mischief women are capable of thro' vanity.⁷⁴

And Priestley, while expressing the view that female intellectual potential equalled that of men, could, when writing in flattering terms to Hannah Lindsey, repeat a characteristic assumption of his (and later) periods:

What do I not owe to you and Mr. Lindsey, and, at present, more particularly to yourself. Without your active assistance, I find that the works I have now in hand would hardly have been printed in my life-time, unless I should live longer than I see reason to expect. Dr Doddridge used to say he was confident

⁷² Felicia Gordon and Gina Luria Walker eds., *Rational passions. Women and Scholarship in Britain, 1702-1870. A reader* (Peterborough, ONT, 2008), 4.

⁷³ James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Lindsey to John Rowe, 15 Oct. 1798.

⁷⁴ CUL, Add MS 7886 (Frend Papers), no. 139, Hannah Lindsey to Francis Blackburne, 15 Dec. 1802.

there would be more women in heaven than men, and certainly you excel in the milder, and what are more particularly called the Christian, virtues of patience, meekness, sympathy and kindness; and I think that the history of persecutions proves you have your full share of the more heroic virtues, and have shewn as much true courage as men.⁷⁵

In one sense at least, this character sketch of Hannah Lindsey was spectacularly wide of the mark; she was certainly no exemplar of patience or meekness. She described herself as ‘a grievous sufferer from nervous affections’ and complained ‘morbid sensations are my natural inheritance, & they must go thro’ this system with me, but not I trust into the next, if properly improved’. In 1801 she felt obliged to apologize to one of her correspondents for ‘often saying brisk things to those who may be pained by the manner, however kind the intention’.⁷⁶

But it is still necessary to ask how one reconciles these assumptions of male superiority with the principles of Rational Dissent. We can point to the importance of doing justice to the female element to what R K Webb has termed ‘Rational Piety’; and from the work of Professor Watts and Dr Peart we learn that a distinctive female characteristic in the Rational Dissenting tradition was an unrelenting search for intellectual self-improvement, in whatever direction that search might lead.⁷⁷ One such direction was ‘intellectual exchanges’ with others. For, as Mary Scott put it in 1774, in the preface to *The female advocate*:

But zealous as I really am in the cause of my sex, yet I would not be understood to insinuate that every woman is formed for literature: the greatest part of both sexes, are necessarily confined to the business of life. All I contend for is, that it is a duty absolutely incumbent on every women whom nature hath

⁷⁵ Rutt, *Works of Priestley*, I (ii), 493.

⁷⁶ Hannah Lindsey to William Alexander, 10 June 1791, *Unitarian Herald*, II, no. 87 (27 Dec. 1862), 432.

⁷⁷ R K Webb, ‘Rational piety’, *Enlightenment and religion. Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1996), 287-311; Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians*; Ann Peart, ‘Forgotten Prophets: the lives of Unitarian Women, 1760-1904’ (University of Newcastle Ph.D dissertation, 2005). I am grateful to Dr Peart for allowing me to consult this dissertation.

blest with talents, of what kind soever they may be, to improve them; and that that is much oftner the case than it is usually supposed to be. As to those Ladies whose situation in life will not admit of their engaging very deep in literary researches, it is surely commendable in them, to employ part at least of their leisure-hours, in improving their minds in useful knowledge: the advantages of an understanding in any degree cultivated, are too obvious to need pointing out.⁷⁸

Scott was realistic enough to recognize the limitations imposed by domestic circumstances, especially upon married women, upon the possibilities of female self-education. But in writing as she did, she enunciated those fundamental Protestant principles whereby it was the right and duty of all individuals to read the Bible for themselves and to form their own judgements on disputed points of theology. Perhaps the implicit critique of priestcraft carried a feminist edge in an age when the priestly and ministerial functions were almost exclusively in male hands. More importantly, however, Scott illuminated the critical Rational Dissenting mentality to which Hannah Lindsey and her circle were among the heirs. Catharine Cappe neatly defined the nature of Hannah Lindsey's type of intellectual exchange:

I do not know that Mrs. Lindsey ever wrote any thing beyond the keeping up for many years a very numerous and extensive correspondence. She particularly excelled in the use of terms most appropriate to express her meaning; in the discriminating acuteness of her remarks; in seizing upon the prominent traits in the character she meant to delineate, or in the event she designed to relate, and above all, in the art of condensing her subject. Her sketches, like those of a master, were real portraits.⁷⁹

In her *Memoirs*, published in the year after her death, Cappe paid a final tribute to Hannah Lindsey's candour, observing that 'she was the friend

⁷⁸ Mary Scott, *The female advocate; a poem, occasioned by reading Mr. Duncombe's Feminead* (London, 1774), dedication, viii.

⁷⁹ Cappe, 'Memoir of Mrs. Lindsey', 114.

with whom I had gone through life, in the constant habit of confidential intercourse; not a thought on either side having been concealed, or a project or sentiment unimparted'.⁸⁰ Concealment, indeed, was entirely inconsistent with the ethos of Rational Dissent.

The contribution of Hannah Lindsey and her circle lay not in published works but in their illustration of Priestley's 'various other ways' in which the female element of Rational Dissent of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided more far than a series of support groups for a male leadership. Female Rational Dissenters were not confined to the margins of documentary survival, as, it seems, were the wives, girlfriends and other female associates of the London radicals so thoroughly examined by Dr Hone. Above all, they remind us through their intellectual exchanges that heterodox theology was a central element in the evolution of the feminism which is so well known to us.

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⁸⁰ *Memoirs of the life of the late Mrs Catharine Cappe. Written by herself* (London, 1822), 378. See also Helen Plant, *Unitarian philanthropy and feminism in York, 1782-1821: the career of Catharine Cappe* (University of York, 2003).

A LIFE OF DISSENT: HARRIET MARTINEAU AND UNITARIANISM*

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Rational Dissent made Harriet Martineau – her forthright commitment to truth, her endlessly enquiring mind and even her energetic, combative style had their roots in her Unitarian upbringing. Dissenting ministers and publishers saw her first work into print, and the Dissenting community encouraged and promoted her writing. Despite her later repudiation of Unitarianism as a narrow and closed-minded sect, the impact of Dissent on Harriet Martineau was profound. Indeed, her later rejection of Unitarian belief could be seen as the culmination of the free-thinking, questioning approach she had been encouraged to adopt by her Dissenting education. In this essay, I want to detail some of her early Unitarian context, and to show how it shaped her approach to writing, focussing, in particular, on two older Dissenters who shaped her concept of authorship: Joseph Priestley and Anna Letitia Barbauld.

In the late nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, with a few notable exceptions, Harriet Martineau was seen as a peculiar relic, ‘a curiously preserved survivor of a bygone age’.¹ It was hard to imagine the clamour of the 1830s for her *Illustrations of political economy* (1832-4), the barrow-loads of post, the numerous editions, and the sense that ‘every tale of mine, & every manifestation of opinion was followed by something perceptible in Govt or Parl.’² Recently, however, the

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¹ Valerie Sanders, *Reason over passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian novel* (Sussex and New York, 1986), ix. Sanders’ work, preceded by R K Webb’s outstanding biography, *Harriet Martineau: a radical Victorian* (New York and London, 1960), did much to rehabilitate Martineau’s reputation, along with the excellent studies by Linda H Peterson which I have drawn on extensively for this article.

² Letter to Richard Henry Horne, 5 Jun. 1844, *The collected letters of Harriet Martineau*, ed. Deborah Anna Logan (5 vols., London, 2007), II, 310 (cited as *Collected letters*); quoted by Linda Peterson, ‘(Re)inventing authorship: Harriet Martineau in the literary marketplace of the 1820s’, *Women’s Writing*, 9: 3 (2002), 337-350, at 343.

astonishing impact she had on her peers, and on the marketplace, is slowly being re-examined, and her work is becoming an important part of the nineteenth-century cultural landscape once again. I use the word 'cultural' because it is hard to pin down Martineau's writing identity: she is, perhaps, a truly interdisciplinary figure, an economic and political theorist, a historian, novelist, autobiographer and journalist, amongst other roles. New interest in life-writing has meant a re-evaluation of her *Autobiography* (1877), which, along with her novel, *Deerbrook* (1839), is in print once again. Meanwhile, her work as a sociologist is being seriously re-examined.³ As Valerie Sanders remarks, it is 'no exaggeration to say that her reputation is now higher than it was at any time since she soared to success with her *Illustrations of political economy* in 1832'.⁴

Her inclusion in this special issue of *Enlightenment and Dissent* allows us, also, the chance to see her as one of a larger community of female Dissenting writers, spanning decades. Critics have discussed the way in which Martineau is connected to nineteenth-century networks of women writers, friendly with Fanny Wedgwood and Jane Carlyle, entertaining Charlotte Brontë at her home in Ambleside, corresponding with Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Gaskell, intimate with Elizabeth Barrett in the 1840s.⁵ Sanders has shown the importance of her work to the nineteenth-century novel, the way in which she 'initiated ... continuing themes or traditions in Victorian literature'.⁶ It is rarer, however, to see her placed in a larger lineage of female Dissenters, perhaps because of her tendency to present herself as 'a solitary young authoress, who has had no pioneer in her literary path but steadfastness of purpose'.⁷ This was not quite true: Martineau spent much time meditating on female writers and female

³ *Harriet Martineau: theoretical and methodological perspectives*, eds. Michael R Hill and Susan Hoecker-Drysdale (New York, 2001).

⁴ Sanders, 'Harriet Martineau in the Bicentenary Year', *Women's Writing*, 9: 3 (2002), 331-336, at 331.

⁵ Martineau's friendships – often intense and affectionate – could, however, end abruptly, usually on a point of ideological difference. Barrett complained about her air of superiority concerning American politics; the friendship with Jane Carlyle seems to have foundered on mesmerism, and Brontë took offence at Martineau's review of *Villette*.

⁶ Sanders, *Reason over passion*, xiv.

⁷ Letter to Lord Brougham, 10 Oct. 1832, *Collected letters*, vol. 1, 154.

education, and critics are beginning to explore the ways in which she borrowed from and adapted authors such as Hannah More and Anna Letitia Barbauld.⁸ Indeed, her self-presentation as a solitary young pioneer carries a distinct echo of an earlier Dissenting author, Mary Wollstonecraft, looking forward to a career supporting herself through writing for Joseph Johnson, ‘I am then going to be the first of a new genus – I tremble at the attempt’.⁹ While Martineau sought to distinguish herself and the Dissenting authors whom she admired from Wollstonecraft, her own career path – fostered, like Wollstonecraft’s, by male Dissenters, and furthered by periodical work – emerged from a similar culture. ‘As was the case for her predecessors,’ suggests Mary A Waters, ‘the collaborative, supportive practices of that culture proved crucial to Martineau’s early career, both facilitating her intellectual growth and assisting her in turning writing into her profession’.¹⁰ My work seeks to further this interest in Martineau’s literary development and connections, and to emphasise the ways in which her familial context of Dissent shaped her concept of authorship.

It is also useful to be able to place Martineau in a broader time-frame, as an author who continues and extends earlier ideas. Again, partly because Martineau herself was keen to suggest that she was doing something completely different, and partly because of the ways in which we tend, as scholars and teachers, to demarcate period boundaries, she is most often read in a Victorian context. Recent criticism, however, has been more willing to place her in a larger spread of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas. Mary A Waters, for instance, has seen her as continuing and furthering a female tradition of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-

⁸ See particularly Peterson, ‘From French Revolution to English Reform: Hannah More, Harriet Martineau, and the “Little Book”’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 60: 3 (2006), 409-450 for details on Martineau’s debt to More. Shelagh Hunter, *Harriet Martineau: the poetics of moralism* (Aldershot, 1995), explores Martineau as ‘Mrs Barbauld’s daughter’, Caroline Roberts, *The woman and the hour: Harriet Martineau and Victorian ideologies* (Toronto and Buffalo, 2002) also places Martineau in a broader context, as does Mary A Waters, *British women writers and the profession of literary criticism, 1789-1832* (Basingstoke and New York, 2004).

⁹ Letter to Everina Wollstonecraft, 7 Nov. 1787, *Collected letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Ralph M Wardle (Ithaca and London, 1979), 164.

¹⁰ Waters, *British women writers and the profession of literary criticism*, 152-3.

century literary criticism. Anthony John Harding has, from a slightly different angle, seen her as a ‘post-Romantic’ – not only in terms of her passionate early reading of Wordsworth, but also by what he sees as ‘an embracing of the Romantic drive to yield up the individual self and be absorbed into something greater’.¹¹ It is appropriate, then, to place her at the close of this special issue of *Enlightenment and Dissent*, so that she is approached not through the more familiar context of Victorian ideologies, but instead as an author of transition and change, moving between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As well as placing Martineau in the context of a larger community of Dissenting writers, I also want to make the broader point that Martineau can tell us something about the way in which earlier images and figures of Dissent might inform the nineteenth century. She shows us how imagery of the 1790s might reappear in quite a different context, how the post-Revolutionary struggles of Priestley and Unitarian radicals might be used to illuminate issues of the nineteenth century. Through a focus on Martineau’s early work and her writing of the 1830s, I hope to show the ways in which Martineau might be seen as a bridge between different periods, and, in so doing, to shed more light on her as a Unitarian writer. Unitarianism – or Socinianism – was vital to the young Martineau’s identity, as Thomas Carlyle noted in his description of her as ‘a genuine little Poetess, buckrammed, swathed like a mummy into Socinian and Political-Economy formulas; and yet verily alive in the inside of that!’¹²

Martineau the Unitarian?

Harriet Martineau was by no means a typical Unitarian – but who *was* a typical Unitarian? Independent, intellectual, and often quarrelsome, Unitarians were defined largely by what they did *not* believe: chiefly, by their refusal to countenance the Trinity, and their rejection of original sin and the atonement. They had no set creed and a diverse range of opinions. The origins of the sect lie in Italy, Poland, and Transylvania, but

¹¹ Anthony John Harding, ‘Harriet Martineau’s anti-romanticism’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 40: 1 (2009), 22-9, at 29.

¹² *The correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834-1872*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (2 vols., London, 1883), I, 126.

Unitarianism emerged as an organised religion in England only relatively late in the eighteenth century, and even then could encompass various strands of Arianism, Socinianism and Presbyterianism.¹³ Yet if Unitarian Dissenters could not easily be categorised, they did share a central belief in individual freedom of enquiry and research, the importance for individuals to arrive at a personal interpretation of the scriptures, ‘following it in different ways according to their own apprehensions.’¹⁴ This is the message of the opening sermon preached at the first avowedly Unitarian church, Essex Street Chapel, by its founder Theophilus Lindsey. His emphasis on the importance of reading dictated not by authority but by individual belief echoes through later Unitarian work:

As the servants of God, and disciples of Christ, we can only submit to the authority of Christ in his written word; and in the sense we ourselves put upon it, and not that of another.¹⁵

This might be set alongside Martineau’s insistence on individual freedom, for instance in her essay ‘On Moral Independence’, when she asks, ‘What is Authority?’:

It is only by taking our stand on principles, and keeping ourselves free to act, untrammelled by authority, that we can retain any power of resolving and working as rational and responsible beings.¹⁶

Long after she had left Unitarian religion behind, she retained a Dissenting certainty in the importance of individual enquiry against the constraints of convention or authority. In the midst of the storm about her publicly proclaimed views on mesmerism, for example, Elizabeth Barrett

¹³ See Earl Morse Wilbur, *A history of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America* (Boston, 1945, repr. 1969) and Stuart Andrews, *Unitarian radicalism: political rhetoric, 1770-1814* (Basingstoke, 2003), for a discussion of the different forms of Dissent which fed into Unitarianism. I use the term ‘Dissent’ in this article, since my aim is rather to show a larger Dissenting community at work than to define the different strands of belief adopted by individuals.

¹⁴ Theophilus Lindsey, *A sermon preached at the opening of the chapel in Essex-House, Essex-Street, ... On Sunday, April 17, 1774* (London, 1774), 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ ‘On Moral Independence’, *Miscellanies by Harriet Martineau* (2 vols., Boston, 1836), 1, 182.

commented that ‘Her *love of truth* is proverbial among her friends’. This characteristic ‘*love of truth*’ is a defining feature of Martineau’s writing, and has its roots in this Unitarian defence of principles.

Another central concept for the Unitarians was an optimistic faith in human perfectibility and progress – yet this often co-existed alongside a perpetual consciousness of persecution. Thanks to its denial of the Trinity, Unitarianism was still illegal in Britain, and would remain so until the Blasphemy Act of 1698 was finally repealed in 1813; it was not until 1828 that the Test and Corporation Acts, which excluded Dissenters from holding public office, were repealed. Many Dissenters still looked back to instances of persecution in the past, such as Bartholomew Day, 24 August 1662, when, according to Richard Baxter, ‘about One thousand eight hundred, or Two thousand Ministers were Silenced and Cast out.’¹⁷ The event ‘played a part in fashioning [Nonconformists] distinctive denominational consciousness’, as A G Matthews comments. It lived, he continues, ‘as the memory of a great wrong, which those of later generations had vicariously suffered in the persons of their forefathers, the martyrs and confessors of 1662.’¹⁸ Lindsey, for example, who seceded from the Anglican church to found Essex Street Chapel, ‘fortified his mind by reading [Edmund] Calamy’s Account of the Ministers who were ejected for Non-conformity in the year 1662, and by collecting materials for a history of persons who had suffered for their profession of Unitarian principles.’¹⁹ Amongst these had been Harriet Martineau’s ancestor, John Meadows, minister of Ousden in Suffolk, noted by Calamy as ‘really a Pattern of true Religion, of Christian Candour’.²⁰ In the 1790s, this sense of martyrdom amongst the Unitarians was given a new impetus by post-

¹⁷ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae: Or, Mr. Richard Baxter’s narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and times*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (London, 1696), part II, 385, note 279.

¹⁸ A G Matthews, *Calamy revised: being a revision of Edmund Calamy’s “Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-6,”* (Oxford, 1959), xvi.

¹⁹ Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), 67.

²⁰ Richard Baxter and Edmund Calamy, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter’s History of his life and times. With an account of the ministers, &c. who were ejected after the Restoration* (2 vols., London, 1713), II, 641.

Revolutionary suspicion of their egalitarian politics. This ranged from pamphlets to actual attacks, most notoriously the Birmingham ‘Church and King’ Riots of 1791, in which the chapels and houses of Dissenters – including, as will be discussed in detail, Joseph Priestley – were burnt down. This sense of suffering for principle, and of being ‘everywhere spoken against’, I argue, deeply affects Harriet Martineau.²¹ Her 1830 *Monthly Repository* review of a sermon by Robert Aspland shows her consciousness of belonging to this Dissenting tradition:

Though we are no longer hemmed in on every side by bigoted enmity, there is still enough of ignorance and prejudice around us to make it necessary, for the millionth time, to declare what our opinions are, and in self-defence to “intreat” because we are “defamed”.²²

As a child, Martineau was deeply attracted to martyrdom, imagining ‘all manners of death at the stake and on the scaffold’.²³ Rational Dissent might, on the surface, seem quite incompatible with this yearning. Yet this Dissenting inheritance of suffering for principle, and resisting ‘ignorance and prejudice’, seems to have offered her a means to channel the longing for martyrdom. One way in which it finds expression comes through her interest in Joseph Priestley, and I hope to show how the memory of his treatment in the 1790s was embedded in her creative imagination, shaping her concept of how an author should behave under pressure.

The Unitarian community into which Harriet Martineau was born in Norwich in 1802 was comfortable, wealthy and well-established, and apparently far removed from turmoil and riot. The chapel at Norwich had originally been established by one of the Bartholomew Day ejected ministers, John Collinges, but by the 1750s, the lavish new Octagon Chapel had been built. John Wesley noted its ‘fine mahogany’ communion table, the ‘ornamental’ sky-lights and the polished brass pew fittings, and wondered ‘that the old coarse gospel should find admission

²¹ Quoted by Martineau, ‘Aspland’s Sermon’, *Monthly Repository* (second series), V (1831), 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (1877), ed. Linda H Peterson (Peterborough, ONT, 2007), 63 (Peterson’s edition is hereafter cited as *Autobiography*).

here'.²⁴ By the time Harriet was born, the Octagon was a Unitarian chapel: Harriet's father was a deacon here, and its minister, Thomas Madge – later to become minister of Essex Street Chapel, in succession to Thomas Belsham in 1829 – was a regular visitor to the Martineau household. Harriet remembered herself as a child sitting in the chapel staring up at those 'ornamental' sky-lights, and 'looking for angels to come for me and take me to heaven' – but she claims to have found little illumination from Norwich Unitarianism.²⁵ She takes a harsh approach to Madge's anti-Trinitarianism, and satirises the 'nonsense and vanity' of local Dissenting literati, such as the Taylors and Opies.²⁶ But Martineau's presentation of Norwich as a fussy, stuffy backwater does not do it justice; it was still a powerful Dissenting stronghold, with a background of involvement in radical politics, and her family background here exerted a lasting effect on her.²⁷ It also ensured that she had a relatively good education. As Ruth Watts and Kathryn Gleadle have discussed, Unitarians took women's education seriously.²⁸ Martineau was sent to a local grammar school run by the Unitarian convert, Isaac Perry, and studied for a year in Bristol where she encountered Lant Carpenter, minister of Lewin's Mead chapel, and eagerly responded to his preaching. Perry's teaching may be seen in a larger context of Dissenting academy instruction, with its emphasis on 'civic rhetoric – that is, on rhetoric as a vehicle for participation in the public sphere'.²⁹ Carpenter then showed her a way to use that rhetoric, through his appreciation of female 'intellectual strength' – for example, 'Barbauld and Hamilton, and More and Edgeworth'.³⁰ Indeed,

²⁴ H J McLachlan, Graham and Judy Hague, *The Unitarian heritage* (Sheffield, 1986), 63.

²⁵ *Autobiography*, 48.

²⁶ *Autobiography*, 232.

²⁷ For more on the radical sympathies of Norwich, see C B Jewson, *The Jacobin city: a portrait of Norwich in its reaction to the French Revolution, 1788-1802* (Glasgow and London, 1975).

²⁸ Ruth Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London and New York, 1998) and Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical Unitarians and the emergence of the women's rights movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke and New York, 1995).

²⁹ Peterson, 'Introduction', *Autobiography*, 9.

³⁰ Lant Carpenter and William Benjamin Carpenter, *Sermons on practical subjects selected by W.B. Carpenter* (Bristol, 1840), 52 and 264.

Martineau's own ambitions were shaped by Carpenter's ideal of a female writer who might bring together 'the clearness, simplicity, correctness, and well-stored understanding of an Edgeworth' with 'the brilliant yet chaste imagination and "devotional taste" of a Barbauld, and the energy and high-toned moral principle of a More' with 'genuine Christian theology'.³¹ When she began to write, she was informed by these Dissenting traditions of education and female intellectual achievement. Moreover, one particular female author, whom she had encountered in Norwich as a child, Anna Letitia Barbauld, would prove to be especially influential on her writing style, and on the ways in which she questioned and interrogated social constructions. If Priestley gave her the image of an ideal Dissenting author, 'glorious Mrs Barbauld' showed her how a female writer might put these Dissenting principles into practice.³²

In a more general sense, Dissent shaped the ways in which she negotiated her position as an author and constructed her writing identity. These questions have produced some of the most stimulating recent criticism in Martineau studies, as our understanding of the authorial role in the nineteenth century has become more complex and nuanced. Critics have contested the idea of an 'individualized authorial subject', as Alexis Easley puts it, by exploring the impact of factors such as publishing networks and the periodical press, and the ways in which women writers 'negotiated and capitalized upon these publishing conventions', and adapted to the pressures of the marketplace.³³ Both for Easley and for Linda Peterson, Martineau, the professional writer adept at self-presentation and a range of publishing strategies, occupies an important role for our understanding of such concepts of authorship:

Martineau redefines authorship away from Romantic conceptions of genius, originality, and inspiration and toward a new Victorian understanding of authorship as engagement with

³¹ Lant Carpenter, *Principles of education, intellectual, moral, and physical* (London, 1820), 41-2.

³² *Collected letters*, vol. 5, 178.

³³ Alexis Easley, *First person anonymous: women writers and Victorian print media, 1830-70* (Aldershot, 2004), 6; 2.

what Robert Darnton has called the “communications circuit”, what she would have called simply “the market.”³⁴

It is her early experience of Dissent, I argue, which gave her, like Wollstonecraft, a particular advantage in negotiating this engagement between author and society, author and audience – indeed, which gave her the model for such an engagement.

For a start, Martineau’s familial and religious connections allowed her to participate, from the outset of her writing career, in a widespread and well-established literary network: her first publication was in the Unitarian periodical, *The Monthly Repository*; her first conspicuous public success was through a Unitarian essay-writing competition; her early triumph, *Illustrations of political economy*, was published by the Unitarian Charles Fox, brother of the *Monthly Repository* editor W J Fox. Martineau’s striking description of her own struggle to have her *Illustrations* published sticks vividly in the mind:

On the road, not far from Shoreditch, I became too giddy to stand without support; and I leaned over some dirty palings, pretending to look at a cabbage bed, but saying to myself, as I stood with closed eyes, ‘My book will do yet’.³⁵

But this image of the solitary, excluded author – giddy, weak, cast out – should be placed in the context of the solid network of support she *did* have. While not underplaying the real financial and psychological difficulties Martineau faced in her journey to publication, and the disadvantageous terms on which she finally did achieve it, moments like this should be set against her scrupulous record of Unitarian families and friends who assisted her in her enterprise. Immediately after the cabbage bed depression – after she had stoutly resisted her own fears and doubts and buoyed herself with her sense of vocation – she found herself encouraged by her uncle David Martineau’s monetary and emotional support. Subscribing generously to the series, he told her that the family knows ‘your industry and energy are the pride of us all, and ought to have our support’; similarly, the great banking family the Gurneys, long-

³⁴ Linda H Peterson, *Becoming a woman of letters: myths of authorship and facts of the Victorian market* (Princeton, 2009), 62.

³⁵ *Autobiography*, 145.

standing Norwich friends, ‘considered the scheme an important one, promising public benefit’. ‘A clever suggestion of mother’s’, meanwhile, to send the ‘Prospectus’ of the *Illustrations* to ‘almost every member of both Houses of Parliament’ won many more subscribers.³⁶ The ‘clever suggestion of mother’s’ is particularly telling: Martineau’s relationship with her mother was complex and often strained, but this shows a remarkable willingness not only to support her daughter’s writing but to envisage its political and economic potential. Martineau’s certainty that ‘My book will do yet’ is backed by Dissenting faith, and family pride: moments like the cabbage bed depression should be seen as part of a larger Dissenting narrative of exclusion and suffering for principle. For, above all, Dissent shapes her concept of an author’s role in society, giving her a fearless self-belief in the face of criticism, and imbuing her with a strong sense of social purpose and usefulness. Her ‘Private Memorandum’ shows this at work:

I believe myself possessed of no uncommon talents, and of not an atom of genius; but as various circumstances have led me to think more accurately and read more extensively than some women, I believe that I may so write on subjects of universal concern as to inform some minds and stir up others. My aim is to become a forcible and elegant writer on religious and moral subjects, so as to be useful to refined as well as unenlightened minds.³⁷

To ‘inform’, to ‘stir up’, to be useful, rather than to indulge genius: these are key ideas for Martineau. Priestley and Barbauld, in different ways, showed her a model of authorship which might enable her to fulfil these aims.

Early Influences I: Joseph Priestley

Priestley was, by any estimation, a crucial figure of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although, as David L Wykes and Isabel Rivers write, his extraordinary range of interests is seldom remembered in full.

³⁶ *Autobiography*, 146-49.

³⁷ ‘Private Memorandum’, June 1829, reprinted in *Autobiography*, 654.

Not only is his work as a minister and theologian deeply important to any understanding of Rational Dissent, he was also a prolific author of works on grammar, optics, electricity, history and political theory; moreover, he was ‘a philosopher, an educationalist, a historian as well as a scientist’.³⁸ Although vilified and attacked during parts of his life, by the time of the centenary of his birth, in 1833, there were widespread commemorations of him as ‘an honour to his age and country’.³⁹ The Martineau family’s appreciation of Priestley, however, long predated this; they had provided support through the years of his persecution, and Harriet’s was a ‘life-long sentiment of admiration and love for Dr. Priestley’.⁴⁰ He recurs throughout her writing as a truly noble figure: a ‘single-minded martyr’.⁴¹ At the heart of ‘Briery Creek’, for example, one of her *Illustrations of political economy*, is the thinly fictionalised figure of Priestley, and she records her surprise on being asked for information about him by Lady Durham:

I found that she, the daughter of the Prime Minister [Charles, 2nd Earl Grey], had never heard of the Birmingham riots! I was struck by this evidence of what fearful things may take place in a country, unknown to the families of the chief men in it.⁴²

Priestley and his family had long since emigrated: they settled in Pennsylvania, and Priestley died in 1804. Yet, almost forty years after the riots, Harriet Martineau was still seeking to educate others about the persecution the minister had endured:

He was playing backgammon with his wife after supper when the mob came upon him: he was so wholly unprepared that his MSS. and private letters lay all exposed to the rioters; and the philosopher suffered, – calmly and bravely suffered – the anguish of feeling himself a hated and an injured man.⁴³

³⁸ *Joseph Priestley. Scientist, philosopher, and theologian*, eds. Isabel Rivers and David L Wykes (Oxford, 2008), 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14

⁴⁰ *Autobiography*, 200.

⁴¹ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of western travel* (3 vols., London, 1838), I, 177.

⁴² *Autobiography*, 100.

⁴³ *Retrospect of western travel*, I,190.

The riots become almost a touchstone in her work for martyrdom in the cause of truth. Indeed, Priestley is a figure of sacrifice for religious and political principles against which she always strove to measure herself. The importance she places on the riots functions as a reminder of the long collective memory of Dissenters, and allows us to make a link between the radicalism of the 1790s and nineteenth-century writing. Moreover, Martineau would have known about their particular connection with her own family history, a story which perhaps has not yet been fully explored.

The riots were prompted by a commemorative dinner held at a Birmingham hotel on 14 July 1791 by the Friends of Freedom. Although Priestley himself was not present at the dinner, this did not appease a gathering crowd outside the hotel. They began by breaking the windows of the hotel, before moving on to Priestley's New Meeting House, where they burst open the doors, demolished the pews, and eventually set fire to the whole church; the Old Meeting House met with the same treatment from a crowd 'who tore down the pulpit, pews, and galleries, and burnt them in the burying ground'.⁴⁴ The rioters then moved off to Priestley's own house, Fair Hill, and, according to a contemporary pamphlet, attacked it with 'savage fury.... breaking down the doors and windows, and throwing from every part of the house the furniture, library, &c.', until the floors were 'strewed over with torn manuscripts, books, &c.'⁴⁵ The rioters finished by destroying Priestley's laboratory and his collection of scientific instruments, before setting alight to the building. Several other houses of Dissenters were attacked and destroyed, before the

⁴⁴ *An authentic account of the riots in Birmingham, on the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th Days of July, 1791* (Deritend, Birmingham and London, 1791), 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

military restored order, in what G M Ditchfield has termed ‘an ‘explosion’ of religious [...] hatred’.⁴⁶

Dissenting communities, including Norwich, hurried to show support and raise money for Joseph Priestley. A collection of letters held by Harris Manchester College, Oxford, reveals the extent of the Martineau family involvement in organising and collecting funds. Philip Meadows Martineau, Harriet’s surgeon uncle, wrote to Priestley in the weeks following the riots to express his sympathy and offer £10:

Permit me while I join the liberal parts of the world, in the general regret for yr. late persecution & misfortune, to express the grt. pleasure wc. arises from yr. personal safety – Every friend to civil & religis. liberty – to science, – & to Virtue must rejoice in yr preservation – Yr cause, Sir, is the cause of every individual who is friendly to free inquiry, & every Dissenter must particularly feel himself obliged to lighten yr loss, so far as it is now possible to relieve you from it. I confess I feel tht. indigna[tion] for yr. suffering, which nothing could so much appease, as the noble magnanimity you discover for yr enemies – I venture to write thus Sir from the high regard I entertain for you – a regard which began when a boy & your pupil, & which has continued, as you have continued my instructor, to the present moment.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ G M Ditchfield, ‘The Priestley Riots in Historical Perspective’, *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XX, 1 (1991), 3-16, at 5. Ditchfield’s point is important because influential accounts of the riots, such as R B Rose’s ‘The Priestley Riots of 1791’, *Past and Present* 18 (1960), 68–88, have read the events as prompted in great part by class hatred, coming together with ‘old religious animosities and new social and political grievances’ (84). Instead, Ditchfield presents new evidence showing the extent of religious enmity specifically directed at Priestley. See also R E W Maddison and Francis R Maddison, ‘Joseph Priestley and the Birmingham Riots’, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 12, 1 (1956), 98-113, John Money, *Experience and identity. Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), particularly 223-4, and David L Wykes, “‘The Spirit of Persecutors Exemplified’: The Priestley Riots and the victims of the Church and King mobs’, *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XX, 1 (1991), 17-39.

⁴⁷ Harris Manchester College, MS Priestley 2/i, fols. 2-3, Philip Meadows Martineau (Norwich) to Joseph Priestley, 26 July 1791.

The letter continues by urging Dr. Priestley to come to stay with the Martineaus in Norwich, to join the Aikins and William Enfield. Promising Priestley that the Barbaulds, too, will soon arrive, Philip Martineau constructs the image of a harmonious Dissenting community, a sympathetic and ‘safe retreat’. Undaunted by Priestley’s wish to remain in London, he then set about raising funds, gathering money from the Taylors, the Rigbys and the Aldersons. Prominent Norwich banker Bartlett Gurney – whose descendants would support Harriet Martineau’s *Illustrations* as ‘promising public benefit’ – sent £50 with a note praising Priestley’s ‘firm attachment to Truth & his unremitting exertions in promoting knowledge’.⁴⁸ Despite the Quaker affiliations of the Gurneys, they seem to have felt a common Dissenting cause with the Unitarians at certain points, and Gurney goes on to lament that Priestley ‘is become the object of cruel persecution, originating in Envy, Superstition & Corruption’. All in all, Philip Martineau collected £232, which he sent with a letter to Priestley making clear the level of sympathetic community involvement:

We desire Sir to regard your cause, as one common to us all, & we trust that the Dissenters will never want unanimity, or resolution to give support to any of their body, who may be the victim of persecution or popular fury.⁴⁹

These letters of the preceding generation underlie Harriet Martineau’s extraordinary sense of vocation. They show a strong sense of mutual support, and shared conviction: Harriet was born into a family which, as a matter of pride, publicly demonstrated its principles of civil and religious liberty. She was also part of a broader Dissenting community which saw themselves as united – even across certain sectarian differences – fighting together against ‘Envy, Superstition & Corruption’. Philip Martineau writes to Priestley in the ‘cause of every individual who is friendly to free enquiry’: that commitment to ‘free enquiry’, truth and principle echoes through his niece’s writing decades later.

⁴⁸ Harris Manchester College, MS Priestley 2/i, fols. 11-12. Bartlett Gurney (Norwich) to P. Martineau (Norwich), 21 June 1792.

⁴⁹ Harris Manchester College, MS Priestley 2/i, fols. 13-14. Philip Meadows Martineau (Norwich) to Priestley (Hackney) 30 July 1792.

Not only would Harriet continue the family tradition by taking Priestley as her ‘instructor’ – she records her assiduous early reading of his work, and his edition of David Hartley – she would also keep the memory of his suffering alive, and, to some extent, try to repeat it herself. Her literary career, in many ways, is staged as a battle, in Priestleyan style, against the forces of ‘persecution’, ‘popular fury’ and prejudice – a sign of her fiercely principled independence, but also a homage to a family tradition. It is Priestley, facing the mob, who is remembered in Martineau’s comments about her own authorial practice: ‘on five occasions in my life I have found myself obliged to write and publish what I entirely believed would be ruinous to my reputation and prosperity’.⁵⁰ Her behaviour on her trip to America in 1834-36 affords us a particular instance of her fearlessness when principles were at stake. A known anti-slavery writer, she faced the might of American slave-owners and pro-slavery opinion. The danger was real: Martineau reports the New York riots of 1833 and 1834 against the Tappan family, who ‘were driven from the city, their houses destroyed, and their furniture burnt in the streets’.⁵¹ Her own appearance at an abolition meeting brought comments that ‘You will be mobbed. You will certainly be mobbed’, and indeed she was exposed to an angry anti-abolitionist crowd, who, like the Birmingham rioters, surged up, ‘hooting and yelling, and throwing mud and dust against the windows’.⁵²

One key to her calm behaviour on these occasions might be the guiding example of the martyred Priestley, who forms the subject of a whole chapter in her *Retrospect of western travel* (1838), and who stands as the supreme example of a sufferer ‘for opinion’:

If ever we are conscious of a breathing of the God-head in man, it is in the sanctified presence, actual or ideal, of martyrs to truth.⁵³

The chapter narrates Martineau’s visit to Priestley’s house in Northumberland, where she finds ‘nothing so sanctifying as the ideal

⁵⁰ *Autobiography*, 163.

⁵¹ *Autobiography*, 335.

⁵² *Autobiography*, 347-50.

⁵³ *Retrospect of western travel*, 175.

presence of the pure in spirit'. She pays a pilgrimage to his grave, where she plants a rose:

For another pupil of the philosopher's, whose homage I carried with my own, I planted a snow-berry on Priestley's grave. When that other and I were infants, caring for nothing but our baby plays, this grave was being dug for one who was to exert a most unusual influence over our minds and hearts, exercising our intellects, and winning our affections like a present master and parent, rather than a thinker who had passed away from the earth.⁵⁴

Moments like this make clear that despite the generational gap, Priestley was powerfully 'present' in Harriet's consciousness, and a shaping influence in her creative, intellectual, and affectionate life. The other pupil to whom she refers is, I think, her brother James, over whom Priestley exerted a similarly important influence. A generation earlier, their uncle Philip Meadows Martineau – a literal pupil of Priestley's – had invited Priestley into his family in Norwich. Now Harriet symbolically incorporates him into her family narrative, as she and James together pay homage to an earlier Dissenting 'master and parent'. Like Philip Meadows Martineau collecting money to repair Priestley's losses, Harriet uses the chapter to rehabilitate Priestley's reputation in the States, arguing strongly that Americans 'should not speak and write apologetically and patronisingly of one of the largest-minded and most single-hearted of sages'.⁵⁵

Her homage to – and identification with – Priestley finds special creative expression in her novel *Deerbrook*. Here she brings together her recent experience of prejudice in 1830s America with that of Priestley in the 1790s, when, at a crucial point in the book, the Birmingham Riots are remembered, and restaged. The novel has long been recognised as incorporating autobiography, but the presence of Priestley has not, I think, been acknowledged so far. The way in which his experiences lie buried in the book shows how deeply Martineau had assimilated earlier

⁵⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 188.

Dissenting struggles, and to what extent they were integral to her creative imagination.

On the face of it, *Deerbrook* does not seem an obvious setting for a post-Revolutionary riot. Martineau's first and most successful novel, it analyses the social relationships of a country village. It centres around two sisters, Hester and Margaret Ibbotson, newly arrived from Birmingham, and the dashing young doctor, Edward Hope. Hope loves Margaret, but, through misguided advice, believes his duty is to marry Hester. Margaret herself loves Phillip Enderby, but the whole family is tormented by the malice of Enderby's sister, Mrs. Rowland, who almost succeeds in crushing their relationship. *Deerbrook* is alive to the corrosive power of gossip, and to the carefully ordered social relations of the middle-classes, often shrewdly observed by the governess, Maria Young. Young, Margaret's particular friend, is an intellectual invalid who recalls Martineau herself, and who offers a side-long, satirical glance at the constraints of provincial society.

Indeed, *Deerbrook* has been termed 'the first serious novel of middle-class provincial life since Jane Austen'.⁵⁶ Certainly Martineau was reading Austen carefully as she prepared to write the novel.⁵⁷ Yet *Deerbrook* not only looks back to Austen's writing, but also anticipates some major plots and themes of Victorian realist fiction, which Sanders has identified as 'the two sisters', 'the governess' and the 'country doctor' plots.⁵⁸ Edward Hope, for example, 'no ordinary case of the village apothecary', finds a distinct echo in George Eliot's Tertius Lydgate, 'not altogether a common country doctor': both suffer from the constraints of the country town,

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Tillotson and Kathleen Mary Tillotson, *Mid-Victorian studies* (London, 1965), 324.

⁵⁷ Diary entries in *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, with memorials by M W Chapman* (2 vols., Boston, 1877), II, 331-333 detail her re-reading of the 'wonderfully clever' *Pride and prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*.

⁵⁸ See Valerie Sanders, 'Introduction', *Deerbrook* (London, 2004), xx [hereafter cited as *Deerbrook*]; see also "'No Ordinary Case of a Village Apothecary": The Doctor as Hero in Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook*', *Notes and Queries*, 30 (228), (1983), 293-294 and *Reason over passion*, ch. 3.

from prejudice, and from their own marital choices.⁵⁹ As the novel progresses, Hope finds his reputation under threat, partly because he has voted against the landed interest in a recent election; partly because his innovative medical practice and scientific interests lead townspeople to suspect him of grave robbery, in search of corpses to dissect.

But if Hope looks forward to Lydgate, he also looks back to the crises of the 1790s. His character, according to Martineau, was modelled on Rev. William Henry Furness, keen abolitionist and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Unitarian minister of the church in Philadelphia established by Priestley.⁶⁰ As a character, then, Hope is closely associated with Dissent; moreover, his experiences in Deerbrook directly echo those of Priestley himself. The accusations levelled at Hope might be different, but their gist is similar. In both cases, egalitarian politics and scientific practice provoke prejudice and, eventually, attack. Gradually ‘a real fear of Mr Hope, as a dangerous person, sprang up under the heat of the displeasure of the influential members of society’.⁶¹ This culminates, in volume two, in a riot. At first the protestors, as in Birmingham, break the windows of the Hopes’ house. The ferment dies down a little, but then flares up under the provocation of the ‘speechifying’ squire and local magistrate Sir William Hunter and his wife, who spreads rumours about Hope’s activities in the church-yard. Not only might he have been grave-robbing, but also contemplating burning down the church. In a recapitulation of the ‘Church-and-King’ arguments of the 1790s, the townspeople, egged on by the gentry, speculate that Deerbrook may become a ‘place of devastation and conflagration’: ‘Heaven only knew how long the churches of the land would be safe’.⁶² This inflaming of the situation carries memories, again, of the events of 1791, when Catherine Hutton, for one, feared that magistrates had been involved in stirring up the Birmingham crowd, too:

⁵⁹ See Tabitha Sparks, *The doctor in the Victorian novel* (Farnham, England, 2009), 39 for further discussion of the links between Eliot and Martineau.

⁶⁰ *Autobiography*, 339.

⁶¹ *Deerbrook*, 230.

⁶² *Deerbrook*, 362-3.

It is certain that the magistrates mingled with the mob assembled before the Hotel, and instead of keeping them quiet encouraged them to mischief.⁶³

An agitated crowd reassembles to besiege the Hopes' house: in a reworking of the destruction of Priestley's laboratory, Hope's surgery is attacked and its furniture carried outside to a bonfire. Finally, a procession appears 'bringing an effigy of Mr Hope to burn on the pile. There was the odious thing, – plain enough in the light of the fire, – with the halter round its neck, a knife in the right hand, and a phial, – a real phial out of Hope's own surgery, in the left!'⁶⁴ Again, contemporary letters report a similar event at the Priestley house: 'The mob solemnly cut off his head in effigy'.⁶⁵ Hope's effigy, however, is saved from the flames, thanks to a strange apparition:

Mr Enderby had possessed himself of the skeleton which hung in the mahogany case in the waiting-room, had lighted it up behind the eyes and the ribs, and was carrying it aloft before him, approaching round the corner, and thus confronting the effigy.

The spectre moved steadily on, while the people fled.⁶⁶

As the skeleton confronts the effigy, the people are confronted – and routed – by their own superstitious fears about Hope. Back in the 1790s, Bartlett Gurney had commented that Priestley 'is become the object of cruel persecution, originating in Envy, Superstition & Corruption'; something similar seems to be at work here. And, like the Gurneys and the Martineaus assisting Priestley, a select community of supporters champion Hope's cause.

However, as his name indicates, Hope enjoys a more positive outcome than Priestley: whereas Priestley, who wished to return to Birmingham, never could, the principled rationality of the Hope circle does allow them to conquer their attackers. As Enderby tells his meddling sister the next

⁶³ Catherine Hutton, *Reminiscences of a gentlewoman of the last century: Letters of Catherine Hutton*, ed. Mrs C H Beale (Birmingham, 1891), 4, cited by Maddison, 102.

⁶⁴ *Deerbrook*, 370.

⁶⁵ Letter from the Rev. W Jesse, quoted by Maddison, 102.

⁶⁶ *Deerbrook*, 370.

day, ‘The Hopes shall remain as long as they wish to stay, if truth can prevail against falsehood’.⁶⁷ In *Deerbrook*, in the end, truth *does* prevail: Martineau rewrites the Birmingham riots, and gives their narrative of 1790s anxiety and prejudice a more optimistic ending. There is a small hint that she knows exactly what she is doing here when she has Margaret Ibbotson exclaim ‘In Birmingham we could never have given credit to the story of such a riot about nothing’. The sage servant Morris, with a longer memory, knows better:

Morris was not sure of this. In large towns there were riots sometimes for very small matters, or on account of entire mistakes.⁶⁸

Prejudice will keep appearing, from Birmingham church and king mobs to the American anti-abolitionists. Martineau’s background in Dissent, however, gives her a sustaining faith that education, truth, and rationality will, eventually, prevail – a faith which outlasts her Unitarian allegiances, and which is fostered by her identification with figures such as Priestley.

As Ditchfield comments, the self-awareness of Unitarians ‘as a distinct group at this crucial period of their emergence’ in the 1790s was undoubtedly sharpened by the experience of the Priestley riots, and David L Wykes, in a reassessment of their longer term significance, concludes that the riots ‘had a formative influence upon Unitarianism and also upon its public perception’.⁶⁹ Martineau’s use of them in a novel of 1839 shows the long-lasting legacy of this experience, and how important they might be in the creative identity of a Unitarian author. The appearance of the riots in *Deerbrook* shows how Martineau had assimilated Priestley’s struggles, and there are several further instances of her sympathy with Priestley and his aims. A diary entry of 1838, for example, as she was finishing her *Retrospect of western travel*, sets her own difficulties alongside Priestley’s. Here she records her reading of his exchange with Gibbon alongside her discussion of her own troubles:

⁶⁷ *Deerbrook*, 376.

⁶⁸ *Deerbrook*, 353.

⁶⁹ Ditchfield, ‘The Priestley Riots in Historical Perspective’, 12; Wykes, “‘The Spirit of Persecutors exemplified’”, 33.

Wednesday, 6th. – Invitation to go out into the sun, but I must work first. Can't enjoy at ease till work is done. I read Gibbon. It makes me dread a single literary life, so selfish, so vain and blind, as this great man grew to be! How like a bully and coward are his letters to Priestley, and how honourable the good man's answers!.... In telling them how I am met and discouraged by ignorance and mistake at every turn, I went off into tears, which I could not stop for long.⁷⁰

The pairing of her reading and her thought about her own experience is telling. Priestley gave her a model of a Dissenting author on several different levels – an author who had advanced unpopular opinions, who had dared to resist and dissent, and who had faced down 'ignorance and mistake'.

Priestley also gave her an image of a writer who might work to achieve particular social ends. In *Retrospect*, she gives an adoring account of his character; her estimation of his works seems, at first, less passionate. His importance rests, she claims, on the fact that:

Priestley was, above most men, one who came at a right point of time to accomplish a particular service; to break up the reliance on authority in matters of opinion and conscience, and insensibly to show, in an age when prejudice and denial were at fierce war, how noble and touching is the free and fervent and disinterested pursuit of truth.⁷¹

Yet for Martineau, the idea that writing can accomplish a 'particular service' was crucial. The fact that Priestley's works were interventions in a 'critical social state' matters more than their durability; this might be set alongside Martineau's statement, as she begins her writing life,

Of posthumous fame I have not the slightest expectation or desire. To be useful in my day and generation is enough for me.⁷²

To further Peterson's idea that Martineau defined her writing in opposition to 'Romantic conceptions of originality, genius, and inspiration', I suggest

⁷⁰ *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, with memorials...*, II, 307.

⁷¹ *Retrospect of western travel*, 188.

⁷² 'Private Memorandum', *Autobiography*, 654.

that it was figures such as Priestley who afforded her a vision of socially engaged, politically active authorship. His principled stance – supported by a larger Dissenting community – showed her ways in which a writer might dare to confront prejudice. She strove both to commemorate and to continue his legacy, and in so doing, she paid homage to a family tradition of Dissent even as she forged her own independent writing identity.

Early Influences II: Anna Letitia Barbauld

If Priestley offered Martineau an image of a Dissenting author as ‘martyr to truth’, Anna Letitia Barbauld offered her a more practical model for her own writing. In ‘Female Writers on Practical Divinity’, Martineau looks closely at Hannah More and Barbauld, two powerful figures of female authorship which were important to her at a time when she was creating her own authorial identity through her writing for the *Monthly Repository*. Martineau’s early fiction borrowed a good deal from More, but her true interest in this piece lies with Barbauld: ‘She meets our ideas, and seems to express what had passed through our own minds ... We have a fellow-feeling with her in all that she says’.⁷³ This can have its dangerous side; Barbauld’s emotional ‘language of poetry and romance’ can seduce the reader into being ‘carried away by her fervour of feeling’ and overlooking errors and ‘extravagance’. Martineau, the eager ‘pupil’ of Priestley, reproduces some of his hesitation over Barbauld’s Romantic emotionalism, most evident in his response to her *Thoughts on the devotional taste, on sects, and on establishments* (1775), in which Barbauld defends devotional feeling, and brings the language of sensibility, of ‘the imagination and the passions’ to bear on religious practice. For Priestley, as for Martineau here, the conflation of ‘devotion’ and the ‘passion of love’ was disquieting.⁷⁴ This points up a larger

⁷³ *Monthly Repository* (first series), XVII (1822), 593-96; 746-50, at 749.

⁷⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Theological and miscellaneous works*, ed. J T Rutt (25 vols., London, 1817-32), I, i, 284. Harriet’s response might be set alongside her brother James’s reading of this disagreement between Barbauld and Priestley as the ‘passion for the sublime and the beautiful’ confronting ‘passion for the truth’ (‘Joseph Priestley; Life and Works’ in *Essays, reviews and addresses* (4 vols., London and New York, 1890-91), I, 1-42. James Martineau’s contribution to nineteenth-century thought, equal to that of his sister, lay in theology and in the development of the Unitarian movement. For James, as for Harriet, Priestley and Barbauld were of the

difference in Martineau's treatment of the two authors. Although sympathetic to both, she tends to treat Priestley with an almost worshipful reverence, whereas she does differ from Barbauld. Priestley, perhaps, represents an ideal; Barbauld, on the other hand, offered a working model.

Almost sixty years older than Martineau, Barbauld was a figure of a much earlier generation, but she retained a lively presence in the Martineau family circle in Harriet's own childhood – and was a hugely important influence on her intellectual and literary development. In his letters of 1791 to Priestley, Philip Meadows Martineau mentions that he was expecting the Barbaulds as visitors. She repaid the Martineau hospitality in 1800 with a poem, 'On the Death of Mrs. Martineau'. Privately printed for the family, with a dedication to 'her honoured friends of the families of MARTINEAU and TAYLOR', the poem celebrates the life of Sarah Meadows Martineau, mother of Philip and Thomas, grandmother of Harriet. Unitarianism unites and sustains the Martineau mourners – 'Her God you worship, and her path you tread' – and they will carry her brand of Dissent forward:

–Long may that worth, fair Virtue's heritage,
From race to race descend, from age to age!
Still purer with reflected lustre shine

The treasured birthright of the spreading line!⁷⁵

The echoes of Psalm 78, with its injunction to the people of Israel to keep the faith, turn this Dissenting manufacturing family into a chosen race of believers. The 'treasured birthright of the spreading line!' is their shared Unitarianism, binding family and friends – Martineaus, Taylors, Priestleys and Barbaulds – together. That 'spreading line!' also, unconsciously, carries a special meaning in light of Harriet Martineau's continuation of

utmost importance in determining his own outlook, although he – unlike Harriet – defined himself *against* Priestley. See R K Webb, 'Rational Piety', *Enlightenment and religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1996), 287-311 and Kathryn Ready, 'Dissenting Heads and Hearts: Joseph Priestley, Anna Barbauld, and Conflicting Attitudes towards Devotion within Rational Dissent', *Journal of Religious History*, 34:2 (2010), 174-190 for more details on James Martineau's approach to Priestley and Barbauld.

⁷⁵ 'On the Death of Mrs. Martineau', *Anna Letitia Barbauld: selected poetry and prose*, eds. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Peterborough, ONT, 2002), 149-50.

Barbauld's writing. Harriet's 'birthright' was not only the family Unitarianism, but also an inheritance of Dissenting female writing.

As the poem shows, there was a long history of friendship between the Martineaus and the Barbaulds. Philip Meadows Martineau had assisted Anna Letitia and her husband Rochemont to set up their highly-regarded school for boys in Palgrave, about twenty miles south of Norwich. Indeed, Harriet's father, Thomas, had been one of the early pupils there, alongside William Taylor. Palgrave teaching was liberal and progressive, and Palgrave pupils were loyal to its values well into later life. William Taylor hailed Barbauld as 'the Mother of his mind', and Thomas Martineau's sentiments must have been similar, since his children, as Harriet records, had 'all grown up with a great reverence for Mrs. Barbauld'.⁷⁶ Harriet's sister, Ellen [Higginson] pinpointed her father's time 'under the roof of the Barbaulds' as the beginnings of the 'strong political leanings, and the firm principles of Nonconformity', that characterized the conception of citizenship which he developed for himself and which he bequeathed in an unequivocal manner to his sons and daughters.⁷⁷ Another instance of the long-lasting impression of Barbauld's education comes from Thomas Denman, a schoolboy at Palgrave some years after Martineau and Taylor, who would, of course, go on to become Lord Chief Justice of England. Denman never forgot his Palgrave experience – his family attributed his 'steady and decided Liberal tendencies' to his early education, and, at the age of fifty one, meeting Barbauld's niece Lucy Aikin in 1831 at a reform dinner, he exclaimed: 'I dreamed of Mrs Barbauld only last night!'⁷⁸ Moreover, Barbauld reciprocated this life-long involvement with her pupils. During Harriet's childhood, well over twenty years after the Palgrave school had closed, Mrs Barbauld was still regularly visiting the Martineau house. 'It was a remarkable day for us when the comely elderly lady in her black silk cloak and bonnet came and settled herself for a long morning chat,' Martineau remembers, noting not only her 'gentle, lively

⁷⁶ *Autobiography*, 100.

⁷⁷ *The life and letters of James Martineau*, eds. J Drummond and C B Upton (2 vols., New York, 1902), I, 8.

⁷⁸ William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2009), 527.

voice, and the stamp of superiority on all she said', but also her insistence on helping the Martineau women-folk wind their skeins of silk as she talked.⁷⁹ The anecdote nicely captures Barbauld's ability to blend intellectual engagement with domestic involvement, and the young Harriet seems to have been deeply influenced by the combination of Barbauld's learning and her 'graceful, and playful, and kindly and womanly' behaviour.

That concept of Barbauld's 'womanly' intellect might be glimpsed behind Martineau's self-construction as a domesticated, yet politicized female author. While Unitarians encouraged female education and intellectual development, this took place, as Watts and Gleadle have shown, within particular constraints: 'although the liberalism of the denomination made Unitarians willing to listen to progressive views on women, the majority invariably fell back upon traditional notions of domesticated womanhood'.⁸⁰ Several critics have glimpsed this conflict between progress and tradition in Martineau's approach to feminism. Alexis Easley, in one of the most recent explorations, points out Martineau's layered response to the 'Woman Question', showing how, while advocating women's rights, she disapproved of particular aspects of female activism. She defined Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, as a 'poor victim of passion', and wished that feminists would leave personal troubles 'wholly out of the account in stating the state of their sex'.⁸¹ Meanwhile, she simultaneously rejected accusations of 'bluestockingism' while engaging in ambitious intellectual projects herself.

Easley suggests that the way through these paradoxes lay in Martineau's appropriation and complication of 'conventionally feminine genres of writing' – such as the domestic novel – to create a 'redefinition of women's authorship'.⁸² Behind this redefinition, I suggest, lies the memory of Barbauld, a woman writer who was similarly able to complicate traditionally feminine attitudes. While she employed passionate language, her own troubles – for example, her husband's

⁷⁹ *Autobiography*, 234.

⁸⁰ Gleadle, *The early feminists*, 20.

⁸¹ *Autobiography*, 303.

⁸² Alexis Easley, *First person anonymous*, 36.

madness – were never allowed to intervene in her arguments. Martineau remembered being enthralled by anecdotes of Barbauld’s ‘heroism when in personal danger from her husband’s hallucinations’, but never casts her as a ‘victim of passion’ in the Wollstonecraft mould.⁸³ Barbauld also offered Martineau an image of how a woman might incorporate intellectual activity into a context of ‘kindly’, domestic femininity. Certainly, despite her brother Thomas’s comment, on reading her first *Monthly Repository* contribution, ‘Now, dear, leave it to other women to make shirts and darn stockings; and do you devote yourself to this’, Harriet Martineau remained extremely proud of her domestic capabilities.⁸⁴ The failing fortunes of her manufacturer father, she explains, ‘saved’ her from ‘being a literary lady who could not sew’: but her early attraction to Barbauld’s skill at moving between different spheres of intellectual and domestic engagement, public and private roles, may also explain Martineau’s pride at her continuing ability to ‘make shirts and puddings, and iron and mend, and get my bread by my needle, if necessary’.⁸⁵

Moreover, Barbauld had been able to succeed in a wide range of different genres, from poetry to polemic, and to intervene in key political, religious and social debates. Her poetry can move between domestic playfulness and strong social critique – often elegantly balancing the two – and her pamphlets of the 1790s such as her *Civic sermons to the people*

⁸³ *Autobiography*, 234.

⁸⁴ *Autobiography*, 112.

⁸⁵ *Autobiography*, 51. Martineau could also be critical of Barbauld’s domesticity, at one point claiming that Barbauld ‘was not much of a needlewoman. There is a tradition that the skeleton of a mouse was found in her workbag’, ‘What Women are Educated For’, *Once a Week* (10 Aug. 1861), 177. However, this is part of a larger argument for the intellectual development and education of women. More generally, her comments on being able to combine intellectual and domestic activities might be set alongside the eighteenth-century tendency to praise women’s achievements alongside their practical skills: see, for example, Samuel Johnson’s comments on Mrs. Carter, who ‘could make a pudding, as well as translate Epictetus from the Greek, and work a handkerchief as well as compose a poem’. For a subtle analysis of this statement, and of the trope in general, see Claudia Thomas, ‘Samuel Johnson and Elizabeth Carter: Pudding, Epictetus, and the Accomplished Woman’, *South Central Review* 9.4 (1992), 18-30. Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of The South Central Modern.

(1792) show her persuasively utilising the Dissenting tradition of civic rhetoric. She was well aware of the ways in which particular genres might be exploited, speculating thoughtfully on the power of fiction in her preface to the 1810 collection *The British novelists*. ‘Might it not be said,’ she concludes, ‘...Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems?’⁸⁶ It was a message which Martineau took to heart, attempting to unite system and fiction in her *Illustrations of political economy*.

Martineau had encountered Barbauld’s writing at a very early age. Palgrave education filtered down to the younger Martineau generation in the shape not only of Barbauld’s visits but also of their reading. Like thousands of nineteenth-century children, Harriet and James read *Hymns in prose*, Barbauld’s book of religious instruction originally designed, in 1781, for her pupils at Palgrave. *Hymns* was designed to follow from the reading primer, *Lessons for children* (1778-9), and, like *Lessons*, shows Barbauld as expert educationalist, carefully attuned to the child’s reading abilities and experiences. The book is infused with Barbauld’s Dissenting beliefs: no mention, here, of sin or Hell, but instead a focus on the natural world and on the benevolent aspects of humanity. ‘The peculiar design of this publication is, to impress devotional feelings as early as possible on the infant mind,’ notes Barbauld in her ‘Preface’, and this was certainly the effect it seems to have had on the Martineau children, who learnt the work by heart, and responded keenly to its sensuous, Romantic approach to religious devotion.⁸⁷ Barbauld’s lines from the fourth ‘Hymn’, ‘I will shew you what is glorious. The sun is glorious’, seem, for instance, to have shaped the five-year old Harriet’s rapturous response to a ‘crimson and purple sunrise’, which she woke her baby brother James to see: ‘The sky was gorgeous, and I talked very religiously to the child.’⁸⁸

But *Hymns in prose* did more than help Harriet Martineau give voice to her youthful religious intensity. The concepts behind *Hymns* – which

⁸⁶ *Anna Letitia Barbauld: selected poetry and prose*, 417.

⁸⁷ ‘Preface’, *Hymns in prose* (London, 1781), vi.

⁸⁸ *Autobiography*, 44.

connect with Barbauld's larger religious and civic ideals – also helped form some of Martineau's early writing and thinking about social organisation. The eighth 'Hymn', for instance, begins with an image of the labourer's cottage, and the family it contains, governed by the father. From this family the reader moves outward to the village, the town, 'governed by a magistrate', the nation, ruled by a king, and finally the world, loved by God: 'All are God's family'.⁸⁹ This is a conventional sentiment, which, on first glance, might even seem an echo of Robert Filmer's construction of the 'universal fatherly care' of kings: 'As the father over one family, so the king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth'.⁹⁰ Yet Barbauld's model, predictably for one schooled in Locke, is distinctly different: while there is a direct analogy between the labourer's family affection and the fatherly love of God, other relationships – the magistrate, the king – are shown to be mutual social constructions. Barbauld's villages and towns are made up of people working together, governed by a magistrate; her king is a 'ruler', rather than a divinely-appointed father. The child is thus encouraged to think outwards from 'families of men' to 'nations of the earth' – not necessarily to see this move as one of natural hierarchy, but instead to reason about how and why government is constructed and the relationship between private family and larger modes of social organisation. The same question informs Barbauld's later political activism, as when, for example, in *Sins of government, sins of the nation; or, a discourse for the fast, appointed on April 19, 1793* (1793) she deconstructs the relationship between individual and nation. Faced with the thorny moral problem of where exactly Dissenters might stand when asked to participate in a national day of 'Public Fast and Humiliation' and to pray for the success of a war which they opposed, Barbauld examines the mutual relationship between individual and government and finds that 'a good government is the first of national duties'.⁹¹ This was dangerously republican talk: *The British Critic*, for one, detected Revolutionary insurgency in Barbauld's link

⁸⁹ *Hymns in prose*, 59.

⁹⁰ Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and other writings*, ed. J P Sommerville (Cambridge, 1991), 12.

⁹¹ *Anna Letitia Barbauld: selected poetry and prose*, 303.

between individual and nation, calling her a ‘gallicised lady’. Her interpretation, it claimed in a review of *Sins of government*, borrows from ‘the direct language of the present Convention of France’, and her principles are ‘the principles of that anarchical system’.⁹² Yet, although her writing is sharpened by the anxieties of the 1790s, these sentiments are hardly new and anarchical for Barbauld: they continue the same ideas put forward in *Hymns*, as she asked her child-readers to consider their part in the larger world, and the ways in which they might participate in society.

This would be developed – albeit with slightly different emphasis – by the young Harriet Martineau. *Illustrations of political economy* continue this investigation of the interplay between individual – the striking worker, the bankrupt, the charity case – and nation. A central concern of the *Illustrations* is the way in which the affairs of the individual might be affected by – and, in turn, effect – change on a wider level. Just as Barbauld, in *Sins of government, sins of the nation*, had represented national extravagance and debt through the figure of a ‘private man who lives beyond his income’ and who persists in ‘profusion in his family expences’, so too did Martineau investigate the ways in which political economy might be visualised as a larger form of ‘domestic economy’.⁹³ In her ‘Preface’ to *Illustrations* she moves outward from the family scene to suggest the ways in which the nation might organise itself:

Domestic economy is an interesting subject to those who view it as a whole; who observe how, by good management in every department, all the members of a family have their proper business appointed them, their portion of leisure secured to them, their wants supplied, their comforts promoted, their pleasures cared for; how harmony is preserved within doors by the absence of all causes of jealousy; how good will prevail towards all abroad through the absence of all causes of quarrel.⁹⁴

Just as an awareness of domestic economy leads to a well-managed

⁹² *The British Critic, A New Review*, II (Sept. 1793), 82.

⁹³ *Anna Letitia Barbauld: selected poetry and prose*, 307.

⁹⁴ ‘Preface’, *Illustrations of political economy* (9 vols., London, 1832-4), I, v.

house, so, Martineau believes, will knowledge of political economy help manage ‘that larger family,— the nation’. This is, moreover, a mercantile nation, in which well-regulated relationships are profitable relationships, and the tales are driven forward by the workings of the free market.

Barbauld’s sense of market-forces is similarly keen, if not so optimistic as Martineau’s. To return to Barbauld’s eighth Hymn, for instance, the families which the child is invited to consider not only live and work together, they also ‘meet together ... to buy and sell, and in the house of justice; and the sound of the bell calleth them to the house of God, in company’. Here, as elsewhere, Barbauld hints at the intimate links between commerce, law and religion, and shows how her work is firmly placed within the expanding economy of the eighteenth century. Poems such as ‘The Invitation: To Miss B[elsham]’ celebrate the intellectual power of the Warrington Academy alongside the Duke of Bridgewater’s canal network: Bridgewater’s canals force ‘the genius of th’unwilling flood’ into new courses, just as the discoveries of the Academy were opening up new directions for British development.⁹⁵ In her 1790 *Address to the opposers of the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* she again looks forward to a time of religious toleration and equality, characterised by ‘the pacific industry of commerce’.⁹⁶ Martineau’s easy connection between domestic and political economy – and her deep interest in commercial innovation – has its roots in the same culture of Rational Dissent, the same experience of manufacturing interest and commercial pressure, which shaped Barbauld’s work. Both women writers seek to explore the role of the individual in society from this particular standpoint, one which William Keach, writing about Barbauld, has characterised as an ‘alliance between rationalist Dissent and middle-class commercial interest’.⁹⁷

Keach goes on, however, to point out that Barbauld’s view of commercial interest is, nevertheless, shadowed by her keen awareness of inequalities, uncertainties, and injustice. As Angela Keane suggests,

⁹⁵ *Anna Letitia Barbauld: selected poetry and prose*, 52.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁹⁷ William Keach, ‘A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld’s Career’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 33:4 (1994), 569-577, at 574.

Barbauld ‘at times appropriates commercial discourse to show up the limits of its moral force’: this is one of the aspects, I think, where Harriet Martineau diverges from her predecessor.⁹⁸ Barbauld’s disturbing poem, *Eighteen hundred and eleven* (1812), for example, gives a vision of commercial advance and imperial pride far darker than Martineau’s. In this epic poem, Barbauld shows complacent London crumbling into decay, as power shifts westward and Britain becomes overshadowed by America:

Yes, thou must droop; thy Midas dream is o’er;
The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore...⁹⁹

Just as *The British Critic* had bristled at Barbauld’s ‘*perfectly French*’ brand of democracy in the 1790s, so too, in 1812, many saw this as a disloyal, unpatriotic poem. But for Barbauld, commerce is part of a larger cycle of growth and decay, over which presides a ‘Spirit [...] Moody and viewless as the changing wind’.¹⁰⁰ This ‘Genius’ represents shifts in cultural and national power, but he is capricious and unpredictable, in a way which persistently disrupts progress, and which works against – in Keach’s words – ‘the meliorist historical perspective’ so characteristic of Rational Dissent. Harriet Martineau’s commercial society, on the other hand, is a much more regulated and optimistic affair. Rather than Barbauld’s erratic ‘Genius’, Martineau assures us, once their underlying rules are understood, that capital and labour move in predictable ways, as in the ‘Summary of Principles’ which accompany each of her *Political economy* tales:

Productive Industry is proportioned to Capital, whether that Capital be fixed or reproducible.

The interests of the two classes of producers, Labourers and Capitalists, are therefore the same; the prosperity of both depending on the accumulation of Capital.¹⁰¹

While she does not shy away from criticising aspects of the commercial

⁹⁸ Angela Keane, ‘The Market, the Public and the Female Author: Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s Gift Economy’, *Romanticism*, 8: 2 (2002), 161-78, at 170.

⁹⁹ *Anna Laetitia Barbauld: selected poetry and prose*, 163.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰¹ ‘Summary of Principles’, ‘The Hill and the Valley’, *Illustrations of political economy* (9 vols., London, 1832-4), I, 140.

mindset, she attacks the ‘narrow and injurious’ view that commercial activity is necessarily associated with ‘sordid love of gain: in a section entitled ‘Morals of Commerce’ in *Society in America*, she argues strongly for its benevolent and progressive force. An ‘optimistic perfectibilist’, in the words of R K Webb, Martineau’s views often seem to iron out Barbauld’s doubtful nuances.¹⁰² Both are challenging – at times Revolutionary – thinkers. Barbauld’s Romantic self-questioning, however, honed through her experience of different turns in Enlightenment and post-Revolutionary thought, is firmed up, in Martineau’s prose, into a nineteenth-century vision of progress. Yet both, despite such differences, are sustained by essentially similar Dissenting ideals of free enquiry and expression, which support them through attacks on their writing, religion and gender.

As exciting new critical readings of Martineau emerge, the importance of these Dissenting ideals in shaping her extraordinary achievements should be remembered. Her strong self-image as a free-thinker, prepared to sacrifice ‘reputation and prosperity’ to principle, is forged in the ideal image of Priestley’s martyrdom; meanwhile, her complex negotiations as a female writer and her attitude to society and citizenship are shaped, in part, through the example of Barbauld. Above all, Rational Dissent helped give her a sense of the serious social purpose of authorship, and to show her the ways in which it might be achieved. Although she travels away from the sectarian religion of her childhood, her childhood heroes, Priestley and Barbauld, remain with her. Martineau has recently been read as transforming herself ‘from a “daughter of Mrs. Barbauld” to a “citizen of the world”’: I would, however, place Martineau’s experiences in Dissent not simply at the start of her writing career but at the heart of her concept of authorship.¹⁰³

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¹⁰² Webb, *Harriet Martineau*, 90.

¹⁰³ Peterson, *Becoming a woman of letters*, 62.

ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD, ALIENATED INTELLECTUAL

William McCarthy

According to her niece and first biographer, Anna Letitia Barbauld confessed to feeling that she ‘had never’ – as she put it – ‘been placed in a situation which suited her.’¹ The circumstances of her life and reputation indeed display a series of contradictions. Born middle-class, a third-generation Protestant Dissenter on both sides of her family, by literary affinity she should have become a leading member of the Bluestocking Circle, that group of intellectual women who kept company with countesses and bishops and were arch-Establishment in their politics and religion. By marriage she became the daughter-in-law of a Court preacher and the wife of a convert to Unitarianism, an illegal doctrine. Loyal to her own sex by preference and principle, she found herself chided by Mary Wollstonecraft for belittling women in one of her poems. Regarded by her contemporaries – with delight or horror, depending – as practically a French Revolutionary, she was also venerated by them as ‘good Mrs. Barbauld’, an icon of Christian motherhood (and this although she was neither a biological mother nor an especially conspicuous Christian). The situations which, she felt, never quite suited her can be seen today as a set of category conflicts – some of them, indeed, as the terms of disputes over what or who she was. Was she a Dissenter or a Bluestocking? Was she or was she not a feminist? A political radical, or a proponent of conformity?

In my biography of her I characterised Barbauld as, among other things, an alienated intellectual.² Here I wish to examine in a more synoptic way the events that made for her alienation, what being alienated meant to her, and the uses she made of alienation. Alienation was an effect of her intellectual and emotional honesty; feeling uneasy in each of the

¹ Lucy Aikin, ‘A family history’, quoted in Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld* (London, 1874), 26.

² *Anna Letitia Barbauld: voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2008), 29. Cited hereafter as *ALBVE*.

categories that crossed her life prompted her to negotiate among them and to try to reconcile or transcend them. Whether or not these efforts succeeded for her is less important, today, than the fact that she made them. Barbauld's refusal to embrace or be absorbed wholly into a single category presents a model of intellectual independence well worthy of emulation by intellectuals today. However out of place she felt in her time, for ours, I believe, she can be an exemplary figure. *Out of place* happens to be the title of a memoir by a more recent exemplary figure, Edward Said; it expresses his sense, like Barbauld's although for different reasons, of never being 'placed in a situation which suited [him].'³ A careful comparison of her life and intellectual outlook with his would show some interesting parallels.

Alienation was, of course, to a greater or lesser degree the posture of Dissenters as a group, placed as they were at a political and legal disadvantage by the Church-State Establishment. Their alienation was a response to their circumstances, but it was also rooted in their conviction that individual judgment must never surrender to institutional power. 'We dissent', wrote a spokesman in 1772, 'because we deny the right of any body of men, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to impose human tests, creeds, or articles; and because we think it our duty, not to submit to any such authority, but to protest against it, as a violation of our essential liberty to judge and act for ourselves in matters of religion.' '[R]eligious Liberty', wrote another, 'is a Liberty to be religious, and to be religious is not to take the Sacrament & subscribe Systems, but to read, to reason, to conclude & to act.'⁴ 'To read, to reason, to conclude and to act' could stand as the motto of intellectual independence itself, at least as understood in the Enlightenment and practiced by Anna Barbauld.

Barbauld's achievement of intellectual independence was a biographical event, and a response to life events that must greatly have pained and disillusioned her. The first event was, of course, that she was born a Dissenter. Thus she was born to alienation. But she was also born female,

³ *Out of place, a memoir* (New York, 1999).

⁴ Andrew Kippis, quoted in *Monthly Review*, 47 (1772), 103-04; Josiah Thompson, 'A collection of papers containing an account of the original formation of some hundred Protestant Dissenting congregations' (5 vols., MS 38.7-11, Dr. Williams's Library), vol. 1, 9-10.

which meant that her relations with Dissent itself were vexed from the start. In childhood she discovered that Dissent, in the person of her father, the Reverend John Aikin, master of a school for boys, was reluctant to teach her the Latin he taught to the boys as a matter of course; she had to badger and plead with him to learn it. If Aikin was denied education at the English universities because he was a Dissenter, his daughter experienced similar discrimination at the hands of Dissent – at his hands – because she was female. Although her father did encourage her to use her mind and allowed her to read in his library, the intellectual life surrounding her was that of boys and men. Since in childhood she knew no women other than her mother and the housemaids and her mother hewed to strict ideas of gender propriety, Anna Letitia may well have encountered no example of an educated, actively intellectual woman until the appearance, in 1758 when Anna Letitia was fifteen, of Elizabeth Carter’s translation of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus.⁵

Anna Letitia’s encounter with Carter is memorialized in her essay ‘Against inconsistency in our expectations’ (1773, but written probably years earlier), in which she paid homage to Carter’s Epictetus by quoting it as a motto, imitating its style, and adopting its outlook. At some point – we don’t know when – she also encountered the poems of Elizabeth Rowe (1674-1737), a Dissenter but admired by Carter. Since Carter was famously a Church of England woman but had, nevertheless, publicly paid homage to the poems of Dissenter Rowe, Anna Letitia could have admired Carter not only as a model intellectual woman but also as a model of broadmindedness. Carter’s example showed that a woman could be an active, public intellectual, and also that a Dissenter – at least, a Dissenting writer – could achieve the respect of the Establishment. Carter showed, or seemed to show, that in the world of letters the limitations of gender and sectarian identity might be transcended. Indeed, the previous example of Rowe herself showed, or seemed to show, the same thing, a point stressed by Anna Letitia in her ‘Verses on Mrs. Rowe’ (published in

⁵ *All the works of Epictetus . . . translated from the original Greek, by Elizabeth Carter* (London, 1758). A copy of this or the 1768 edition was held by the library of Warrington Academy; see *ALBVE*, 568 n. 57.

Poems, 1773), the poem in which she emulated Carter's homage to Rowe and thus paid homage to Carter and Rowe together. Anna Letitia's verses particularly notice that Rowe enjoyed the friendship and approval of bishops and titled ladies.⁶

After her literary debut (1773, as Miss Aikin), Anna Letitia seemed set to enjoy the same kind of acceptance that Rowe had enjoyed. She saw herself named in the press alongside Carter and Elizabeth Montagu, and Montagu took favourable notice of her; in 1774, if not earlier, Montagu invited her to join the Bluestocking circle. After Barbauld's death, Lucy Aikin intimated that Montagu had even offered to set Barbauld up as the head of a college for young ladies, an idea dear to the Bluestocking heart. In a letter published by Lucy Aikin as if sent to Montagu, Anna Letitia refused that offer. Her refusal was to damage her standing with twentieth-century feminists, for it seemed to reject the very idea of promoting women's education. Barbauld, wrote one commentator in 1980, 'was no feminist.'⁷

I have addressed elsewhere the details of her letter and the circumstances in which she wrote it. I wish to emphasize, however, that Anna Letitia wrote the letter not to Elizabeth Montagu or any other woman, but to her future husband, Rochemont Barbauld. This is a fact, not a hypothesis; it is the only certainty in an episode otherwise obscure.⁸ Here, in summary, is the story I have told elsewhere.

⁶ 'Verses on Mrs. Rowe' is reprinted in Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Selected poetry and prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Peterborough, ONT, 2001; hereafter cited as *SPP*). Carter's 'On the death of Mrs. Rowe' appeared in Rowe's *Miscellaneous works in prose and verse* (London, 1739). Even before Rowe, in early childhood Anna Letitia must have known *The Family Expositor* (1739-56) of Philip Doddridge, for copies of which her father and other family members subscribed. Doddridge was her father's teacher, and was famously ecumenical in outlook and acceptable to the Establishment: he dedicated the *Expositor* to the Princess of Wales, and its publication was sponsored by bishops as well as by other Dissenters. Hence one more reason why Anna Letitia could believe that prejudice against her sect was surmounted in upper Establishment circles.

⁷ Marilyn L Williamson, 'Who's afraid of Mrs. Barbauld? The Blue Stockings and feminism,' *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 3 (1980), 90.

⁸ For the provenance and full text of the letter see my article, 'Why Anna Letitia Barbauld refused to head a women's college: new facts, new story', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 23 (2001), 349-79. Lucy Aikin printed an abridged text in her memoir of Barbauld in *The works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld*, ed. Aikin (2 vols.,

Anna Letitia's fiancé was a student at the Dissenting academy at Warrington and a convert from the Church of England to Dissent. His father, Theophilus Lewis Barbauld, was a Court preacher at St. James's Palace and a colleague there of Lady Charlotte Finch, Royal Governess and member of the Bluestocking circle. Lady Charlotte, in turn, was a close friend of another Court lady, Lady Mary West. It was to Lady Mary West that Anna Letitia dedicated her first book, *Poems*.

Such a dedication was a new author's bid for patronage. But rather than Anna Letitia's own idea (she dedicated only one other of her books), it was probably the brainchild of her father-in-law-to-be. As a courtier, the Reverend Mr. Barbauld was well situated to pull strings on behalf of his son and future daughter-in-law. He would have thought it needful to pull strings because his son, Rochemont, by going over to Dissent had abandoned all prospects of a career in the Church. In order to marry, Rochemont and Anna Letitia would need a livelihood. With Bluestocking support, Anna Letitia's fame as an author could be used to set her up in a genteel school for young ladies. Such was probably Mr. Barbauld's reasoning.

Yet, although Anna Letitia presumably aspired to recognition by the Bluestockings, she refused a project they presumably would have supported. The most noteworthy feature of her letter to Rochemont refusing it is the anxiety – if not outright panic – she avows at the idea of having to form the minds and the *manners* of upper-class women. It was not women's education that frightened her, but rather her awareness of what an upper-class young woman was expected to learn and her sense of being socially awkward and utterly unfit to teach it: 'I know myself remarkably deficient in gracefulness of person, in my Air and manner, and in the easy graces of conversation; deficient even amongst those of my own rank, much more amongst those who move in so much higher a Sphere.' She imagined opening herself to ridicule by the girls whose manners she would be presuming to try to form: 'if I attempted to correct their Air, they might be tempted to smile at my own'. Anna Letitia

London, 1825), vol. 1, xvi-xxiv (cited hereafter as *Works*). I emphasize that Anna Letitia's writing to Rochemont Barbauld is a fact because I have seen references to my article as if it were only a conjecture. For the full story and sources of the following paragraphs see *ALBVE*, 141-46.

suffered from a socio-psychological affliction common among Dissenters, which she called *mauvaise honte*, false shame. It arose from the second-class status of Dissent, from Dissenters' consciousness of being tolerated rather than acknowledged, condescended to rather than respected. 'You have so long laboured under the ridicule and aversion of your fellow-subjects', Anna Letitia's brother wrote to fellow Dissenters in 1790, 'that it is no wonder you have been formed to a general character of reserve and timidity, and that a false shame and awkward humility has hung about you, which has prevented you from maintaining your part with ease and spirit in the mixed commerce of society.' The Dissenter, Barbauld herself wrote in that year, is a creature 'whose early connections, and phrase uncouth, and unpopular opinions set him at a distance' not only from civic office but from his next-door neighbors: 'in the intercourses of neighbourhood and common life' he 'is ever obliged to root up a prejudice before he can plant affection.'⁹ In 1773 Anna Letitia could not imagine maintaining her part with ease and spirit as a teacher of genteel young women. She was too conscious of her presumed inferior class, betrayed as it was by her 'Air and manner', her very body.

That is one reason why she refused the patronage proposal that came to her through Rochemont Barbauld. But there was another reason also, and it stabbed at the heart of any aspiration she had to Bluestocking acceptance. In two successive years, 1772 and 1773, a committee of Dissenters petitioned Parliament to relax the Toleration Act so that Dissenting teachers (such as the Reverend John Aikin) would not be obliged to subscribe to the Church of England's creed in order to teach. Opposed by the bishops in the House of Lords, both petitions failed: Dissenting teachers would remain compelled to subscribe to a creed they disbelieved. Anna Letitia responded to those failures by writing an allegory of Dissent's relation to the Establishment. It circulated in the manuscript underground and came to print twenty years later as 'The vision of Anna, daughter of Haikin'.¹⁰ In it she imagined the Church as a

⁹ John Aikin, *An address to the Dissidents of England on their late defeat* (London, 1790), 24; *SPP*, 264-65 (*An address to the opposers of the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*). 'As to *mauvaise honte*, you could not have complained of it to a person more at home in the feeling than myself': Barbauld to 'Dear Madam,' 11 Dec. [n.d.], quoted in *ALBVE*, 26.

¹⁰ *Christian Miscellany*, no. 4 (1792), 157-61.

great lady, ‘clothed in fine linen and gold and purple and silver’, whose ‘sons sat upon thrones among the princes of the land’: the Establishment, in all its pomp and power. She imagined, also, a figure that represents Dissent, an outcast woman clothed in rags, mocked by ‘the great ones of the earth’ and, moreover, kept in bondage. The great lady holds a sword over the outcast’s neck, ‘as though she would slay her’ – protesting, all the while, that she means no harm. That is an allegory of the Toleration Act, and of the stance of the Establishment towards Dissent, especially in its late refusal of the petitions. And in that allegory, Anna Letitia saw herself in the role of the Dissenter, the ragged outcast.

In 1773 Anna Letitia must have experienced a torrent of mixed emotions. She was about to marry into an Establishment family, to have a Court preacher for a father-in-law. And there was much in the Establishment that attracted her: besides Bluestocking literary affinities, there were the sensory enchantments of Anglican worship, far more appealing than anything she’d known in Protestant Dissent. In 1775, after her marriage, writing ‘On the devotional taste, on sects, and on establishments’, she admitted to being attracted by the pomp of the Church: an established church, she wrote, ‘speaks to the heart, through the imagination and the senses’.¹¹ Dissent, on the other hand, she accused of having lost the passion and principle that sustained its martyrs in the days before Toleration, and of having replaced them with nothing. But she dedicated the essay in which she made that admission and that accusation not to her father-in-law the Court preacher, but to her father, the Dissenting teacher at Warrington Academy. This and her earlier dedication to Lady Mary West, taken together, may be seen as a shorthand for Anna Letitia’s conflicted feelings: attracted to the Establishment she had married into and whose literary women she aspired to emulate, but stubbornly loyal to the Dissent she had grown up in, even despite her unhappiness with it; the more loyal, in fact, because Dissent had just suffered new insults. If the failed 1772-73 petitions showed her that Dissent was still a legal outcast despite its seeming acceptance by the great, Elizabeth Montagu’s invitation to her to join the Bluestockings, in

¹¹ *SPP*, 226.

a letter dated February 1774, showed her that in the world of letters also – Bluestocking letters, at least – sectarian identity was not transcended. Rather, it was brushed aside, and concern for it was deprecated as bad manners. In her letter Montagu replied to a letter from Anna Letitia, now lost. Part of what Anna Letitia might have said, however, may be guessed from one Montagu sentence: ‘The genuine effect of polite letters is to inspire candour, a social spirit, and gentle manners; to teach a disdain of frivolous amusements, injurious censoriousness, and foolish animosities.’¹² Readers acquainted with an essay by Emma Major on ‘The politics of [Bluestocking] sociability’ will recognize in this sentence by Montagu a sort of manifesto.¹³ In their social ethics the Bluestockings aimed to reconcile, or rather to subsume, political oppositions under ‘the benign empire of the muses’ (another phrase from Montagu’s letter to Anna Letitia). Political rancour – of which there was plenty during the Wilkes crisis in the late 60s and the American War in the 70s – was to be treated as bad taste and small-mindedness; under the sway of Bluestocking social management, political animosities ought to dissolve into polite culture. But since the Blues themselves embraced the Church of England, their ethic of a sociability that transcended politics could appear, to an outsider to that church, as disingenuous dismissal of the outsider’s deepest concerns. To an outsider whose feelings were smarting from partisan rejection, Bluestocking sociability might seem not to have transcended party politics.

We do not know whether, in the letter that Montagu answered, Anna Letitia had innocently intimated her pain over Parliament’s rejection of those Dissenting petitions. What she thought at the time of Montagu’s reply, with its mention of ‘foolish animosities’, we also do not know. She did visit Montagu in London just after her wedding, and on several occasions she was seen among the guests at Bluestocking assemblies. But Montagu was disconcerted by Anna Letitia’s retreat to tiny little Palgrave in Suffolk, to keep a school there with her husband, a retreat by which Anna Letitia exiled herself from London – and from Bluestocking

¹² Elizabeth Montagu to Miss Aikin, in Le Breton, *Memoir*, 38.

¹³ Emma Major, ‘The politics of sociability: public dimensions of the Bluestocking millennium’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65, no. 1-2 (2002), 175-92.

assemblies – for most of the next eleven years. That it was exile she herself felt; it put her out of touch with the book world, she complained. But exile – a word to which James Joyce taught us to add the words *silence* and *cunning* – can be an act of protest by a proud spirit who feels rebuffed.¹⁴

At Palgrave Barbauld published her essay ‘On the devotional taste, on sects, and on establishments’, an essay that, we have noticed, severely criticizes Dissent for lukewarm devotion and loss of self-respect. The essay could be read as an example of that loss (something like a self-punishment for being a Dissenter), but it can also, and better, be read as a confession of faith, a defiant assertion to the Establishment which had lately insulted Dissent that *she* would stand up with her co-religionists; as a demand, moreover, that her co-religionists stand up with her. Hence her dedication to her father, conspicuously identified as ‘Professor of Divinity in the Academy at Warrington’.¹⁵ But her co-religionists did not stand up with her. Her friend Joseph Priestley was especially hostile to her essay. He was offended by her calling devotion a ‘taste’ and by a passage in which she compared it to ‘the passion of love’: ‘abominable’, he declared this, and ‘nothing less than direct impiety’. He was ‘surprised’ at her ‘evident ... preference’ for established churches. He denounced her essay as ‘dangerous’, as giving aid and comfort to the Church and the ‘worldly’; another leader of Dissent accused Anna Letitia of harbouring a fondness for Roman Catholicism. But the Church and the ‘worldly’, as represented by the Establishment *Gentleman’s Magazine*, thought little better of her views than Priestley did: her plea for a devotional ‘taste’ ‘degraded’ the truths of religion.¹⁶ Thus, within the space of two years, Barbauld found her religious identity thrown out by Parliament and snubbed by the

¹⁴ I owe this thought to essayist and novelist Gore Vidal: ‘Pride,’ in *The last empire: essays 1992-2000* (New York, 2002), 125. See *ALBVE*, 220.

¹⁵ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Devotional pieces, compiled from the Psalms and the Book of Job* (London, 1775), dedication page.

¹⁶ Joseph Priestley, *Theological and miscellaneous works*, ed. John Towill Rutt (25 vols., 1817-32; repr. New York, 1972), I, pt. 1, 278-86; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 45 (1775), 581. For the reception of ‘On the devotional taste’ see *ALBVE*, 162-64. One co-religionist who did stand with her in print was William Enfield; he wrote the only favourable review of her essay, calling it the work of ‘an enlarged and independent mind’ (quoted on 163).

Bluestockings, and her feelings about religion rebuffed not only by the Establishment press but by the fellow sectarians to whom she had declared her loyalty – albeit a critical loyalty – in public. Her ideas unwelcomed by her sect and the Church and denounced by the man she thought her best friend among her co-religionists, she wrote bitterly to her brother ‘that in religious and political affairs if a person does not enlist under a party, he is sure to meet with censure from party.’¹⁷

Not until March 1790 did Barbauld again address the question of Dissent’s relation to the Church. She did so in her first political pamphlet, responding to yet another rejection by Parliament – the third in four years – of a bill to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts and thus make Dissenters eligible to hold public office on the same terms as Churchmen. Channeling her anger into irony that is usually suave but at moments savage, she spelled out to the Establishment what exactly Dissenters wanted. Not to despoil the Church of its wealth. Not even to attend the Universities. These things, she wrote, are ‘the children’s bread, which must not be given to dogs.’¹⁸ Dissenters want just one thing: recognition that they are equal citizens. Justice, in a word. No more toleration, but acknowledgement of their human and civil rights.

Barbauld’s 1790 *Address to the opposers of the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* nowhere mentions the Bluestockings, but it closes on a utopian note characteristic equally of Philip Doddridge’s ecumenical Dissent, of French-Revolutionary optimism, and of the Bluestocking ideal of a community into which religious and political differences are dissolved. Most conspicuous, rhetorically, is the revolutionary optimism. You *will* grant us our rights, she assures her opponents. You will grant them because the age is tearing down unreal distinctions and unjust barriers between people: both ‘Dissent’ and ‘Establishment’ will cease to be marks of difference among equal citizens of a common polity. Barbauld does not in the least repudiate the ethic enunciated to her by Montagu sixteen years earlier, the ethic of ‘a social spirit’ that disdains quarrelling and seeks a common culture. But, she implies, if you want a culture of sociability, you must first have justice;

¹⁷ Barbauld to John Aikin, [February? 1776], in *Works*, vol. 2, 7-8.

¹⁸ *SPP*, 266.

if you want people to be sociable, grant them their rights. That is the note on which Barbauld's *Address to the opposers* closes. It amounts to a critique of the Bluestockings' version of sociability, and redemption of their ideal of sociability through honestly transcending the differences the Blues only papered over. Sixteen years after Montagu urged on her the foolishness of political animosities, Barbauld replied that animosities did indeed have to be resolved, but that resolving them required that the grievances of outsiders be taken seriously.

As Emma Major has noted, after 1790 the Blues took sides with Edmund Burke's tirade against the French Revolution; they overtly joined a party. In 1790 Barbauld saw in the Revolution a chance to realize the Bluestocking ideal of a sociability that really did transcend party. 'If we [Dissenters] are a party', she urged, 'remember it is you who force us to be so.'¹⁹ Cease to single us out for special (unfair) treatment, and we cease to be a party; we become your neighbors and fellow-citizens, nonsectarian so far as you need be concerned. She demanded that Dissenters be received simply as individuals. Historically her demand proved utopian; not only had the Bluestockings all along belonged to a party, but in the 1790s British parties took hard lines against each other. Intellectually, Barbauld's ideal of post-partisan sociability is a version of the ideal to which Dissent had long claimed allegiance, the ideal of freely-thinking individuals freely conversing in the absence of imposed creeds. (No doubt that, too, was utopian.) Her demand for religious equality in 1790, her desire that 'every name of distinction' be buried 'in the common appellation of Citizen',²⁰ is, in effect, a Dissenting redesign of Bluestocking sociability. With Barbauld, the Bluestocking salon is exchanged for the public forum of citizenship.

Thus the *Address to the opposers* might be called Barbauld's declaration of independence as well as the moment in which she reconciled Bluestocking and Dissenting ideals. (Or, better, re-interpreted the one into the other.) In her publications thereafter she performed as a public intellectual, addressing political, religious, moral and literary topics in the voice of an autonomous person who pays allegiance only to an ethics

¹⁹ *SPP*, 270.

²⁰ *SPP*, 269-70.

presumed to be generally acknowledged, not partisan. ‘We have a golden rule, if we will but apply it’, as she wrote in *Sins of government, sins of the nation* (1793), a pamphlet that was received, inevitably, as partisan but in which she aimed to enunciate a trans-partisan ethics of citizenship based on widely accepted ethical ideals such as the ‘Golden Rule’.²¹ Because it was intended to transcend parties, *Sins of government* rebuked not only the administration of William Pitt for stalling reform and entering into a war (for which ‘loyalists’ at the time resented Barbauld, and for which we may cheer her) but also rebuked reformers themselves, for seeking to impose on the public their sectarian notions of political good (a rebuke that no doubt disconcerts many of us). And unlike her brother’s antiwar pamphlet, *Food for national penitence*, Barbauld designed *Sins* to address not the acts of a single nation or government (her own), but at least potentially those of *any* nation or government. Its argument aspired to universality.

The year before *Sins*, in her longest pamphlet, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s ‘Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship’*, Barbauld took the occasion of what seemed a scholastic controversy to examine the role of the intellectual in society. Intellectuals must not, like Wakefield, withdraw from the communal activities exemplified by churchgoing; especially in times of crisis, when parties and sects are facing off, the community needs ‘the powerful influence of their [intellectuals’] taste, knowledge, and liberality’.²² This was a rebuke to alienation itself. And the churchgoing envisaged by Barbauld in *Remarks* is also nonpartisan. Neither Established nor Dissenting, nor even necessarily Christian, the idea of ‘public worship’ she proposes is anthropologically global: ‘wherever men together perform a stated act as an expression of homage to their Maker, there is the essence of public worship’.²³ Public worship is whatever human beings anywhere, in any age, have done and do collectively in order to assert their relation to a deity.

²¹ *SPP*, 310. For the reception of *Sins of government*, see *ALBVE*, 340-41.

²² Barbauld, *Works*, vol. 2, 453.

²³ *ALB*, *Works*, vol. 2, 419.

A complaint by some of Barbauld's friends during her lifetime and admirers after her death was that they did not know exactly what her religious beliefs were. That she was a Christian of some sort they did not doubt, but her actual theology was a bit of a mystery to them.²⁴ And so it remains today. She is claimed by the Unitarians, but not even her husband, whose theology seems to have been more radical than hers, was a strict Unitarian (although he called himself one).²⁵ In her 1775 'Thoughts on the devotional taste' Barbauld mounted a deeply-felt protest against theological argument itself, much to the annoyance of Priestley and other Dissenting polemicists. Her description of the religious worship she preferred – and which she attributed to the ancient Hebrews – looks like a blend of Methodist enthusiasm and Church of England ceremonial: 'The living voice of the people, the animating accompaniments of music, the solemnity of public pomp, the reverent prostrations of deep humility, or the exulting movements of pious joy, all conspired to raise, to touch, to subdue the heart.'²⁶ The religion on offer in her *Hymns in prose for children* (1781) comes close to Deism; only in the next-to-last hymn does Jesus appear at all. It was in *Hymns* that Barbauld's post-sectarian stance first manifested itself, and there, perhaps, it had a practical motive. *Hymns* was written for her pupils at Palgrave School, who came from various religious backgrounds; she designed it to promote religious *feeling*, the substrate of any particular belief they might hold or adopt in later life. Practical or not, however, this move departed sharply from the normal practice of Establishment schools, where pupils were taught the Church's

²⁴ 'How far her precise notions or opinions may agree with yours or mine, I really neither know nor care. I know she is a zealous Christian, but not a zealous Socinian, Arian, or Athanasian; I should suppose most of the second' (Sir James Edward Smith to Elizabeth Cobbold, in Smith, *Memoir and correspondence*, ed. Lady Smith [2 vols., London, 1832], vol. 2, 181). Reviewing *Works* in 1825, the *Monthly Repository* regretted not knowing Barbauld's religious views better (vol. 20, 487). See also *Christian Reformer*, ns 8 (1841), 51: few know exactly what she believed.

²⁵ In her memoir of her husband, Barbauld wrote that he believed in 'the pre-existence of Christ, and in a certain modified sense, in the atonement'; notwithstanding this, he insisted on being called a Unitarian (*Monthly Repository*, 3, 1808, 706-09). He also came to believe in the evolution of God and the universal redemption of all humanity.

²⁶ *SPP*, 233.

creed. True to Dissent's foundation principles, Barbauld would not impose a creed on anyone.²⁷

Her intellectual independence could lead to disconcerting appearances of self-contradiction. Thus, in 1775 she argued warmly in defense of 'enthusiasm' (the individual worshipper's passion for personal closeness to God) and at least appeared to discount the 'rational Christianity' of Warrington Dissent in favour of a 'devotional taste' that could be nourished by times and places associated with religious experiences: 'superstition', as rationalists were apt to call it. Twenty-eight years later, reviewing *Le génie du Christianisme* by François René Chateaubriand, she took almost exactly the opposite view, censuring his religion as 'a matter of taste [rather] than of belief' and discounting 'imagination' in favour of 'truth'.²⁸ Much, to be sure, had happened in those twenty-eight intervening years to account for her changed views. For one, Edmund Burke's attachment of religious feeling to anti-reform politics in his *Reflections on the revolution in France* is likely to have disconcerted Barbauld.²⁹ Perhaps the change most relevant to her turn was the emergence of the Evangelical movement within the Church of England. Its most prominent advocate, Barbauld's friend Hannah More, was prone to speak of 'vital Christianity' and had gone with Burke in the French-Revolution controversy – a conjunction of politics and religion that must have tended to drive Barbauld back to 'rational religion'.³⁰ Rational religion was politically liberal.

²⁷ *Hymns* distressed the orthodox by failing to mention sin and punishment, a deficiency the editor of an 1840 reprint tried to make good by adding new hymns to it (*Christian Reformer*, ns 8 [1841], 39).

²⁸ *Annual Review*, 1 (1803), 247-55.

²⁹ An issue I discuss in *ALBVE*, 287-89.

³⁰ See Anne Stott, *Hannah More, the first Victorian* (Oxford, 2003), 161, 192. More sent Barbauld a copy of her *Strictures on the modern system of female education* (1799), in which More declared her allegiance to Evangelical conservative Christianity. Barbauld's letter acknowledging the gift is warm in its affection for the woman but politely circumspect in its response to the book: 'May all who have the good of mankind in view, preserve for each other the esteem and affectionate wishes which virtue owes to virtue, through all those smaller differences which must ever take place between thinking beings seeing through different mediums ...' (in William Roberts, *Memoirs of the life and correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More* [2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1834], vol. 3, 81). Roberts appends a note: 'The differences, however, were by no means small, between Mrs. More's and Mrs. Barbauld's religious opinions.'

Barbauld also tended – it was part of being intellectually alienated – to assert contrarian views almost for their own sake, or as if to give opposition a fair hearing. This practice was noticed by people who conversed with her and came away, like victims of Samuel Johnson’s conversational behavior, feeling roughed up. Amelia Opie remembered censuring to her a woman who did not read, and fully expecting Barbauld to nod agreement; instead, to Opie’s consternation, Barbauld opined that reading was idle and frivolous. Opie recalled then that she had heard that Barbauld ‘often contradicted for the sake of argument’.³¹ When John Aikin printed in the *Monthly Magazine* an essay objecting to the use of the words *rebel* and *infidel* to stigmatize one’s political opponents, Barbauld argued back that rebellions ought to be rare and that people who refuse the majority religion must expect some degree of ostracism.³² When, on the other hand, the London magistrate Patrick Colquhoun deplored petty thefts of commercial property by dock workers unloading ships, Barbauld took sides with the thieves; so unequally was property distributed, she replied, that the rich had left the working poor few means of survival apart from petty thefts and other frauds against their masters.³³

One of Barbauld’s most contrarian essays is also, perhaps exactly by virtue of being contrarian, one of her most profound: ‘On prejudice’ (1800). In it she takes on, and aims to transcend, two opposed meanings of the word *prejudice*, meanings associated with Rousseau on the Left and Edmund Burke on the Right. To Rousseau and, less radically, to most Enlightenment writers, *prejudice* signified a mental deformation, a bias, that could only interfere with one’s perception of truth; one prayed, like the Reverend Thomas Belsham for example, to be ‘delivered’ from it.³⁴ To Burke, from 1790 on a contrarian in his own way, prejudice was an

³¹ Cecilia Brightwell, *Memorials of the life of Amelia Opie* (London, 1854), 120-21.

³² ‘Opprobrious appellations reprobated,’ *Monthly Magazine*, 14 (1802), 480-82, signed ‘A.L.B.’ It replies to ‘Orthophilus’ on pp. 376-77.

³³ ‘Thoughts on the inequality of conditions’ (1807), *SPP*, 345-56. It replies to Colquhoun’s *Treatise on the police of the metropolis* (1796).

³⁴ John Williams, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Thomas Belsham* (London, 1833), 342-43.

honorable bias in favour of whatever was long-lasting and hierarchical, a natural proclivity of the heart. Mary Wollstonecraft had challenged Burke by asking *why* we should cherish an ‘obstinate persuasion for which we can give no reason’.³⁵ As if taking up Wollstonecraft’s challenge, Barbauld addressed the question of what prejudice actually *is*. If, she argued, prejudice is ‘a sentiment in favour or disfavour of any person, practice or opinion, previous to and independent of examining their merits by reason and investigation’, then, quite simply, prejudice is intrinsic to our learning to negotiate the world and cannot be excised from life. As we grow up our judgments of things arise from our experience, which creates biases. The intellect does not float free of time and place; we are situated beings, and every inquiry we make arises in and from our situations. ‘Let us confess a truth, humiliating perhaps to human pride: a very small part only of the opinions of the coolest philosopher are the result of fair reasoning; the rest are formed by his education, his temperament, by the age in which he lives, by trains of thought directed to a particular track through some accidental association – in short, by *prejudice*.’³⁶ In so arguing, and elsewhere in her work as well, Barbauld broached what amounted to a case for Existentialism, a case that would not be systematically developed for another century. Skeptical of both Enlightened and anti-Enlightened views, in ‘On prejudice’ she redefined *prejudice* on a new plane.

As with her religious views, Barbauld eluded other intellectual categories available during her lifetime, preferring to think outside them. When in 1804 Maria Edgeworth proposed to her the idea of conducting a journal to be opened exclusively to ‘all the literary ladies’ of the day, Barbauld exchanged the category of gender for the category of politics and urged that in this context politics trumped gender. ‘There is no bond of union among literary women, any more than among literary men; different sentiments and different connections separate them much more than the joint interest of their sex would unite them.’³⁷ She knew that she

³⁵ Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of woman*, ed. D L Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough, ONT, 1997), 241.

³⁶ *SPP*, 338. See the discussion of this essay in *ALBVE*, 379-81.

³⁷ Barbauld to Maria Edgeworth, 30 Aug. 1804, in Le Breton, *Memoir*, 86-87.

and Hannah More disagreed so sharply on politics and religion that they could not talk with each other about them, and she did not agree with Mary Wollstonecraft (in 1804 the late Mrs. Godwin) about romantic love and novels.³⁸ So, in this context, she counter-proposed to Edgeworth a journal to be opened to writers of both sexes but congenial politics. In other contexts, however, such as the laws governing the status of women, Barbauld could hold vigorous views on ‘the joint interest’ of her sex: it is a great loss to us that Henry Crabb Robinson, to whom she held forth on the legal status of women one day in 1806, didn’t bother to write down what she said.³⁹ It may be an even greater loss that there exists no known surviving copy of Barbauld’s ‘view of the female part of the creation a century hence on a g[eneral?] revolution of manners which is to take place when Mrs Woolstonecraft has been su[...]’. This truncated description by Barbauld’s nephew Charles Aikin is all we know about a piece that Barbauld evidently wrote in response to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the rights of woman*.⁴⁰ It must have been a ‘fancy piece’ of the kind Barbauld wrote on other topics, such as fashion: a dream vision set in a fantasy time or place.

‘Fashion’ itself she presented, when she published that essay in 1796, as a shift from one category to another: from the category ‘political liberty’, seen as rather abstract and highfalutin, to that of ‘daily life’, the arena in which we actually move and breathe.

To break the shackles of oppression, and assert the native rights of man, is esteemed by many, among the noblest efforts of heroic virtue; but vain is the possession of political liberty, if there exists a tyrant of our own creation; who, without law, or

³⁸ See Barbauld’s tart ‘Apology of the bishops, in answer to [More’s] “Bonner’s ghost”’ (*SPP*, 127-30). More herself acknowledged that her and Barbauld’s views ‘run so very wide of each other’ that it was hard for More to enjoy a Barbauld visit (Roberts, *Memoirs of... Mrs. Hannah More*, vol. 3, 368). I have explored Barbauld’s responses to Wollstonecraft in *ALBVE*, 350-61; and on novels, see 427-28.

³⁹ Barbauld ‘argued warmly against the present laws as they affect Women’, wrote Robinson to his brother on 28 March 1806 (MS. Henry Crabb Robinson Letters, Dr. Williams’s Library).

⁴⁰ C R Aikin to Barbauld, 6 Dec. 1792, quoted in *ALBVE*, 352. The original letter is torn.

reason, or even external force, exercises over us the most despotic authority; whose jurisdiction is extended over every part of private and domestic life....⁴¹

It was part of Barbauld's intellectual style to challenge claims of theory by testing them against what she took to be ordinary experience, or what she once called 'the common feelings of mankind'.⁴² In view of the long association between 'fashion' and women (or, in that association's ideological version, 'woman'), this essay may be said to address the common feelings of *womankind*. It was in fact written for an adolescent woman, a Barbauld pupil named Flora Wynch.

On a daily and intimate level, 'woman' remained for Barbauld a vexed category. In her youth she proposed that 'there is a cast of manners peculiar and becoming to each age, sex and profession', that a woman could be as 'perfect' in her kind as a 'tradesman' in his.⁴³ Thus 'woman', like 'tradesman', was simply a social role. But too much of playing that role meant honouring proprieties that Barbauld did not enjoy honouring, such as 'fashion' or, if a woman married, giving up her birth name and contracting her social circle to her family. While she conformed to some aspects of the 'woman' role, Barbauld preferred to step outside others. She was pleased when women won prizes at the Society of Arts competitions; she read the memoirs of the French Girondin leader, Manon Roland, with intense interest and admiration. At the same time, she thought that middle-class women's most usual occupation, marriage and child-raising, could confer important social influence on them: in raising children, they would be shaping the future of society.⁴⁴

Barbauld's feminism, like her Dissent, should be understood in the way she understood it, as a question of when to embrace and when to refuse a category. Much as she liked women and identified with their achievements 'for my sex's sake' (her words in applauding Maria

⁴¹ 'Fashion, a vision' (*SPP*, 282).

⁴² 'Thoughts on the inequality of conditions' (*SPP*, 347).

⁴³ 'Against inconsistency in our expectations' (*SPP*, 194).

⁴⁴ I discuss these issues at greater length in *ALBVE*, Chapter 21. On giving up birth names at marriage, see pp. 128-9.

Edgeworth's literary success),⁴⁵ it is likely that she no more wanted to be identified simply as a woman than she did simply as a Dissenter. (Dissenters, she argued in *An address to the opposers*, differed genuinely from their neighbors only in their churchgoing and their theological views, matters entirely their own business.) To judge from her behavior as a public intellectual, Barbauld wished to be identified as a thinking person whose authority derived from her knowledge, taste, and ethical seriousness, and whose gender and religious affiliation were, except on certain occasions and for certain purposes, incidental.

I do not mean by this that sect and gender were unimportant to her. If only negatively, had she been male and Church of England she might have lacked a motive to distinguish herself from her fellow-subjects; how fortunate that she felt the stings of sect and gender! But more positively, being a Dissenter put her in touch with a tradition – however redundant this may sound – of *dissent*. It was precisely from her experiences and in her identities as Dissenter and woman that Barbauld entered her universalist demands. Quite literally, she signed her demand for universally equal political rights, *An address to the opposers*, with the name 'A Dissenter'. And it is worth noting that she did so at a time when public hostility to Dissent was on the rise.⁴⁶

During most of her career, her public seems to have been willing to grant her claim to gender independence. They did so in the only way they seemed to know, by characterizing her as *both* 'feminine' and 'masculine', perhaps a way of perceiving that she spoke to issues that were fully

⁴⁵ Barbauld to Edgeworth, 23 Aug. 1816, in Le Breton, *Memoir*, 162.

⁴⁶ I was prompted to these remarks by a passage in an essay by Jacqueline Rose on the Dreyfus Affair ("'J'accuse': Dreyfus in our times", *London Review of Books*, 10 June 2010, 3-9). So rampant was anti-semitism in France at the time that very few Jews spoke out on the case. But one who did spoke specifically *as* a Jew, and *as* a Jew he entered a universalist demand: "'I belong to the race of those", [Bernard] Lazare said, "who were first to introduce the idea of justice into the world ... [M]y ancestors ... wanted, fanatically, that right should done to one and all, and that the scales of the law should never be tipped in favour of injustice"' (quoted, 9). On rising public hostility to Dissent in 1790 see *ALBVE*, 273-5.

human.⁴⁷ But at the end of her career Barbauld had to contend with a post-Burke political reaction that decried intellectual women, a climate in which *bluestocking* had been made a term of contempt.⁴⁸ Consequently, when she published her last big work, the poem *Eighteen hundred and eleven*, a profound critique of the seemingly endless war against France and the culmination of her career as a public intellectual and moralist, it was her being a woman that the most brutal of the reviews threw in her face: what business had a woman with affairs of state?⁴⁹

It was an unkind irony of history that Barbauld's identity as a woman was used against her at the end of her career, and then, for a different reason, against her literary reputation in the twentieth century. In the first instance she was painted as a female intruder on men's affairs, in the second as a traitor to her sex for not urging other women to intrude on men's affairs.⁵⁰ Both depictions she would have called partisan, and correctly so. Both were ways of denying or ignoring what she wanted to tell the public; both diminished her. And so, she would have argued and I have been arguing, would confining her to any other single identity, such as Dissent. She held herself free 'to read, to reason, to conclude and to act.' She was aware of and could operate in several categories, moving from one to another as occasion or her needs prompted. It is only

⁴⁷ For example, 'Your's is a BARBAULD's just Pretence / To female Softness - manly Sense' (*Jack and Martin: A poetical dialogue, on the proposed repeal of the Test-Act*, London, 1790, 12). Other examples can be given (see *ALBVE*, 636 n. 25), but it is also true that some of Barbauld's male contemporaries thought her insufficiently feminine. The question of Barbauld's femininity is discussed by Harriet Guest in *Small change: women, learning, patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago, 2000), ch. 9.

⁴⁸ The *locus classicus* of pejorating the Bluestockings must be Thomas Rowlandson's cartoon, *Breaking up of the Blue Stocking Club* (1815): it is reproduced, with commentary, in Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: women of reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 2010), 203-07.

⁴⁹ 'We had hoped, indeed, that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady-author' (John Wilson Croker, in *Quarterly Review*, 7 [1812], 309).

⁵⁰ See the essay cited in note 7.

superficially a paradox that in maintaining this multiple awareness, in refusing to subscribe to any one sect's way of thinking about the world, Barbauld acted up to the highest standards of Dissent in her time. Her intellectual independence did leave her vulnerable to misinterpretation by partisans of all sorts, then and later. Writing her biography has required an effort like the one she deplored for Dissenters: rooting up prejudice in order to plant understanding.

In belonging to multiple 'categories of difference' (I quote from a recent paper by Vivien Jones) and in her ways of managing them, Barbauld is an example for our time as well.⁵¹ Early in this essay I suggested that comparing Barbauld with Edward Said would be a worthwhile exercise. What follows is not that comparison, but further hints towards it. Said, too, experienced life in multiple categories of difference: as a colonial in the British Empire, as an Anglicized (in his very name) Arab, as a Christian among Muslims, a 'non-Egyptian' in Cairo, a secular humanist among fun-damentalists, and of course as a Palestinian exile among supporters of the state of Israel. Like Barbauld's, his ways of managing these categories included efforts to transcend them. Like her, in transcending them he made himself a spokesman for universalist views, views such as 'all peoples, regardless of religion, race, or language, are entitled to the same civil, political, and human rights'.⁵² Such were Barbauld's views, too. When she exchanged the (to her) spurious community of the Bluestocking salon for the ideal community of equal citizenship, she was making the kind of move described by Said when he

⁵¹ 'Women without gender: the pleasures and dangers of particularism,' unpublished paper read at a session of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, March 2010. I am grateful to Dr. Jones for sending me a copy of this paper. In it she considers whether 'gender, in any given moment or context, may or may not be *the*, or indeed (though this is much less likely) even *a*, primary determinant' of understanding women's writing. While she believes that gender always matters, she leans towards treating it as one among many 'categories of difference'.

⁵² Edward Said, *The end of the peace process* (New York, 2000), 263. 'I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on' (*Out of place*, 5).

wrote that ‘if Western humanism was discredited by its practices and hypocrisy, these needed to be exposed, and a more universal humanism enacted and taught.’⁵³ Note that this did not mean, for him, discarding Western humanism root and branch; and for Barbauld it did not mean repudiating the Bluestockings wholesale. For both, it meant taking seriously the virtuous claim and demanding that the claim be fulfilled in practice.

Further, Said came to urge non-capitulation in the face of political defeat, a position taken by Barbauld in her *Address to the opposers* (‘You will excuse us if we do not appear with the air of men baffled and disappointed.... [W]e may blush indeed, but it is for our country’) and, I have argued elsewhere, in her last big work, *Eighteen hundred and eleven*. That poem also exhibits, in its deliberately anachronistic relation to its time, one of the leading characteristics that Said attributed to ‘late style’. In form and substance, it proudly asserts its alienation.⁵⁴

Also worth contemplating is a comparison between Barbauld’s situation as a woman in Dissent and the situation of African-American women novelists such as Alice Walker: to which of the out-groups in which they find themselves do these woman owe greatest allegiance? In 1775 Barbauld’s co-religionists accused her of treason to Dissent for criticizing

⁵³ Edward Said, *Reflections on exile, and other essays* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), xxviii.

⁵⁴ See *ALBVE*, 466. Said drew his idea of ‘late style’ from an essay by Theodor Adorno, and meant by it ‘an inherent tension . . . that . . . insists on the increasing sense of apartness and exile and anachronism’ (*On late style: music and literature against the grain* [New York, 2007], 17). Late style insists, in short, on being alienated. I notice the poem’s anachronicity on pp. 471 and 478-9. The quotation from *Opposers* is *SPP*, 276.

Dissent; in 1993 reviewer Daryl Pinckney wrote skeptically of Black women novelists who seemed to regard their gender as a more urgent issue than their race.⁵⁵ Is it, perhaps, necessary for intellectuals to be cross-hatched by category conflicts in order to become fully humane thinkers? In a time when intellectuals are highly conscious of the multiple kinds of difference that people have to manage in their lives and their understandings of the world, Barbauld, elusive, ironic, contrarian and alienated, seems an ever more relevant ancestor.

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⁵⁵ Daryl Pinckney, 'The best of everything', *New York Review of Books* (4 Nov. 1993), 33-37. Although I have implicitly sided with Barbauld against her male co-religionists, on the gender-race issue I do not mean to take sides. I mean only to notice the tension.

**‘No effort can be lost’:
the Unitarianism and Republicanism of Ann Jebb (1735-1812)**

Anthony Page

Having become Unitarians John and Ann Jebb left Cambridge University and the Anglican Church in the mid-1770s and moved to London. There they became members of the Essex Street Chapel and continued to agitate for religious and political reform.¹ In what follows I will discuss in detail Ann Jebb’s family connections and role in the religious debate occasioned by the Feathers Tavern Petition in the early 1770s. In London she participated in reformist agitation and the burgeoning print culture, ending her years as a respected widow within the network of Unitarian reformers.

Women played an increasingly important role, both as producers and consumers, in driving the expansion of print culture during the Enlightenment. Recent scholarship is bringing to light numerous women whose literary careers complicate the notion that separate-spheres developed in the eighteenth-century.² Catharine Macaulay, author of a popular multi-volume republican history of the seventeenth century, has traditionally been seen as an outstanding figure prior to the 1790s. The Unitarian Ann Jebb, however, needs to be painted into the landscape surrounding Macaulay – both were friends with Thomas Brand Hollis and his ‘Commonwealthman’ circle.³ While less productive or publicly identifiable, Ann Jebb wrote forcefully in favour of religious and political liberty. Many of her pieces were not identifiable as from a female pen but she was well known and respected among Rational Dissenters and radicals as a woman of strong opinions who wrote for the cause of religious and political liberty. With discussion of liberty, rights and

¹ Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment origins of British Radicalism* (Westport, Conn., 2003). I have discussed Ann Jebb’s status within her marriage and in the public sphere as a case study of gender and politics in the late eighteenth century in ‘“A great politicianess”: Ann Jebb, Rational Dissent and politics in late eighteenth-century Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, 17:5 (2008), 743-65.

² Betty A Schellenberg, *The professionalization of women writers in the eighteenth-century* (Cambridge, 2005); Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: women of reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (London, 2010).

³ Caroline Robbins, *The eighteenth-century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959). See, for example, letters by Ann Jebb and Catherine Macaulay in John Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand Hollis* (London, 1808), 42-3.

revolution in the air in the final decades of the eighteenth century, women increasingly made their presence felt in print culture – often with the encouragement of Rational Dissenting men.⁴ In addition to writing, editing publications and discussing current affairs, Ann Jebb helped mentor some important younger female writers.

Ann Jebb's family and character

In 1764 Ann married John Jebb, a recently ordained clergyman with prospects of an academic career at Cambridge. In the late 1760s John Jebb began to espouse Unitarian views in his teaching and created enemies through his outspoken support for religious, educational and political reform. He eventually resigned from the Church and moved to London in the year of the American Declaration of Independence to become a physician, and threw himself into agitation for parliamentary reform in the early 1780s.

Ann Jebb began life in Cromwell country as a bookish daughter of Rev. James Torkington (d. 1767), Rector of King's Ripton and Little Stukeley and a leading member of a well-established Huntingdonshire gentry family. Ann's brother John Torkington was generally considered to lack learning and it was rumoured that he was only elected master of Clare College Cambridge because he was the grandson of Lord Harborough.⁵

Ann's mother, Lady Dorothy Sherard, was a daughter of Philip Sherard (1680-1750), Second Earl of Harborough. The Earldom of Harborough was created in 1719 as a reward for the family's loyalty to the Hanoverian Succession. Ann's uncles who became successively Third and Fourth Earls of Harborough cut unimpressive figures among the peerage. Bennet, Third Earl Harborough, is notable as the only eighteenth-century peer to marry four times, after which he nevertheless died without a male heir having lived beyond infancy.⁶ Rev. Robert Sherard, who became Fourth Earl of Harborough in 1770, had collected a number of minor preferments without shining as a Churchman and appears to have been orthodox in his religion and politics. A supporter of Lord North's government he very infrequently attended the House of Lords. Preferring local society and

⁴ Arianne Chernock, *Men and the making of modern British feminism* (Stanford, 2010).

⁵ D A Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1935), 14-16. John Torkington served as Master of Clare Hall at Cambridge from 1781-1815, and in the face of much opposition was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University 1783-84.

⁶ John Cannon, *Aristocratic century* (Cambridge, 1984), 83.

retaining the mindset of a priest, he most loved and did much to educate his youngest daughter Lucy, who in turn fostered an appreciation of religious doctrine on the part of her son Edward Pusey who became a famous High Churchman in the nineteenth century and leader of the Oxford Movement. Nigel Aston argues that ‘ties of blood counted for more with Harborough than political friendships forged at Westminster’, and this would explain the fact that the heterodox Jebbs appear to have remained on good terms with him.⁷ John and Ann visited her uncle in the summer of 1770 after he had succeeded to the earldom on the death of his brother, and again in the summer of 1775 prior to John’s resignation from the Church. Following John Jebb’s death in 1786 Harborough was listed among the subscribers to his collected *Works*.⁸

To an extent Ann Jebb lived within the bounds prescribed for women in the eighteenth century. According to memorialists she shared her husband’s views, supported his career choices, and her impressive intellect was combined with ‘the amiable softness of the female character’.⁹ Recent research has shown that it was common for aristocratic women to aid the electioneering of their husbands and generally promote their family’s political interests.¹⁰ In light of such scholarship and her family background Ann Jebb’s interest in politics is less surprising.

Some key features of Ann Jebb’s character stand out from the fragmentary evidence. People were attracted to her as a conversationalist and were impressed by her intellect and the clarity and boldness of her views. The memorialist in the *Morning Chronicle* noted that ‘with as few failings as could well fall to the lot of humanity, she exercised an unlimited candour in judging those of others. Candour and benignity were the prominent features of her character’.¹¹ The young William Paley

⁷ Nigel Aston, ‘An 18th century Leicestershire squarson: Robert Sherard, 4th Earl of Harborough (1719-1799)’, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 60 (1986), 34-46, at 41.

⁸ John Disney ed., *The works: theological, medical, political and miscellaneous of John Jebb, M.D. F.R.S., with a life of the author* (3 vols., London, 1787), I, part 1, xviii, 26, 103.

⁹ ‘Mrs. Jebb’, *Morning Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1812.

¹⁰ Elaine Chalus, *Elite women in English political life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005); idem., ‘“That epidemical madness”: women and electoral politics in the late eighteenth century’, in H Barker and E Chalus eds., *Gender in eighteenth-century England: roles, representations and responsibilities* (1997), 151-78.

¹¹ ‘Mrs. Jebb’, *Morning Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1812.

engaged in robust debate with her over tea at Cambridge. Abigail Adams, wife of the American envoy, seems to have had a meeting of minds with Ann.¹² And Mrs. Jebb appears to have had no shortage of visitors in her old age, with the writer Anne Plumtre being ‘frequently the inmate of her house’.¹³ She appears to have never lacked friends and visitors.

Ann Jebb was physically frail and remained childless – though she managed to live to the age of seventy-five, outlasting her husband by quarter of a century. She depicted herself as loving ‘fun and wit’ and having ‘high spirits’ and a ‘weak body’.¹⁴ In 1778 Theophilus Lindsey observed that ‘she is all spirit: for of all the persons I ever beheld I think she is the thinnest.’¹⁵ A memorialist reflected that her impressive mind and heart were ‘lodged in a body of the most delicate texture’ and that she was ‘always languid and wan’, and reclining on a sofa she ‘had not been out of her room above once or twice’ for the last two decades of her life. But despite this,

Her ardour and patriotic firmness, mixed with urbanity and gentleness, and occasionally brightening with innocent playfulness, gave that to her countenance, which the mere bloom of health cannot bestow ... it gave a singular interest to her character.¹⁶

Ann Jebb was a keen participant in the expansion of print culture. She published letters in the newspapers and helped edit the manuscripts of friends for publication. She was also a keen reader of the newspapers. During the Regency Crisis she expressed frustration at the political gymnastics of both Pittites and Foxites, observing that she was ‘almost worn out by reading long speeches’.¹⁷ During the Napoleonic Wars she

¹² Abigail ‘Nabby’ Adams to John Q Adams, 31 July 1785, *Adams family correspondence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), VI, 216. ‘Pray remember me affectionately to our friend Mrs. Jebb’, Abigail Adams wrote to Brand Hollis when leaving England, 5 April 1788, Disney, *Memoirs of Brand Hollis*, 39.

¹³ G W Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb* (London, 1812), 52.

¹⁴ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 7 April 1777, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers.

¹⁵ Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, 28 July 1778, in G M Ditchfield ed., *The letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808)*: Volume I, 1747-1788 (Church of England Record Society, 15, Woodbridge, 2007), 262-64 at 263.

¹⁶ ‘Mrs. Jebb’, *Morning Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1812.

¹⁷ Ann Jebb to John Cartwright, n.d., cited in Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 26.

monitored developments closely from her sofa – during the British attack on Copenhagen she observed that ‘Denmark has very long taken up my attention’.¹⁸

In what follows I will discuss her contribution to the cause of religious reform in the early 1770s, radicalism in London and her status as an eminent Unitarian widow.

Feathers Tavern Petition

Following the call of Archdeacon Blackburne’s multi-edition *Confessional* (1766) in the early 1770s some heterodox Anglican clergy such as Theophilus Lindsey and John Jebb organised the Feathers Tavern Petition. Presented in 1772 the petition asked parliament to remove the requirement that clergy subscribe belief in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. It is easy for modern historians to underestimate the significance of the Feathers Tavern Petition as it was signed by only a couple of hundred low-ranked clergy and was rejected in the House of Commons. Nevertheless, it generated a great deal of debate in print and arguably played a part in provoking the development of modern conservatism.¹⁹ On the whole the Anglican Church proved to be a pillar of loyalism during the American Revolution, and this must owe something to the fact that the cause of greater religious liberty had already been debated and held at bay within the Church in the early 1770s. The Cambridge Tory antiquarian William Cole wrote notes on men and events at Cambridge in the late eighteenth century and complained that promotion of Latitudinarian thought via the works of Tillotson, Clarke and Hoadly was undermining the Church. Cole saw a ‘Torrent of Infidelity, Arianism, Presbyterianism, and Republicanism in the [Feathers Tavern] Petitioners, who are bold, forward and arrogant to a Degree to surprise one’.²⁰ He noted each of John Jebb’s publications in support of the campaign to end clerical subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, observing of one: ‘By the first paragraph ... on *private judgement*,

¹⁸ Ann Jebb to John Disney, 24 August 1807, cited in Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 42.

¹⁹ G M Ditchfield, ‘The subscription issue in British parliamentary politics, 1772-79’, *Parliamentary History*, 7 (1988), 45-80; James J Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative* (Cambridge 1993), 79-80.

²⁰ William Cole, ‘Feathers Tavern Petition’, in British Library, Add. Mss. 5873.f.108.

Reason, Civil and Religious Liberty one may guess what he would be at'. In late April 1772 Cole noted that Jebb 'and his wife go up to London, as they always do together, on this occasion to the meeting of the Petitioners of the Feathers Tavern'.²¹

Ann Jebb wrote numerous newspaper letters during the Feathers Tavern controversy, sometimes writing under the name 'Priscilla' and often engaging with the orthodox polemics of Thomas Randolph, Samuel Hallifax and Thomas Balguy.²² The author of a 'Memoir of John Disney' noted he had collected six volumes of newspaper clippings on the Feathers Tavern Petition controversy, observing that none were 'entitled to more attention' than those of John and Ann Jebb. While a number of John's had appeared together as a pamphlet those 'of Priscilla, not less distinguished by their spirit and ability, may perhaps elsewhere be sought in vain'.²³ In essence, she argued that by imposing subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, the Church deprives itself of many potentially talented clergymen who find themselves unwilling to profess belief in doctrines they find intellectually unconvincing. In Ann Jebb's eyes, the essence of Christianity had nothing to fear from free expression; indeed, candid and rational discussion would cleanse Anglicanism of its 'irrational' doctrines and rituals, leaving a solid core of rational, unassailable Christianity that could counter the growth of scepticism and irreligion.

In what appears to be her first published letter on the subject, 'Priscilla' outlined to a female friend her view of the subscription issue. As 'a Lady who is so nearly connected with the University of —', she could attest that 'it is the fashion of the place to attempt to reconcile impossibilities'.

²¹ William Cole, 'John Jebb', in British Library, Add. Mss. 5873.ff.52b-53.

²² The liberal Anglican William Paley cited her letters as the most effective answer to Archdeacon Randolph's arguments. William Paley, *Defence of Bishop Law's considerations*, 30n. George Meadley provides a list of Ann Jebb's early 1770s letters on religious reform and quotes at length from some in his *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*. There are no extant copies of some of the newspaper editions in which Ann's letters were published. Fortunately, however, many have been preserved in John Disney, 'A collection of letters and essays on the subject of religious liberty published in the newspapers 1771-74', Dr. Williams Library, mss. 87.1-6.

²³ [anonymous], 'Memoir of John Disney', Doctor Williams Library, mss. 28.165(4).f.34.

Worse than that, however, ‘Doctors and Professors’ thought it ‘the duty of their hearers to be convinced by their arguments, under the penalty of being called unorthodox. And when once a man is stigmatised with that appellation, all tongues are let loose against him: he is at once a Calvinist, an Arminian, an Arian, and a Socinian, an Atheist, and a Deist; the contradiction cannot be too great’. He is called everything but a ‘Papist’, that ‘being so very like a Highchurch-man’. If her friend was mistaken if had been led by her ‘own reason’ to think that orthodoxy consisted in believing in the contents of Scripture:

Orthodoxy is the belief of a certain set of opinions, some of which were taken from the fathers, who wrote in the times of darkness, superstition and error; and who, being fallible men, it could not be expected that they should be entirely free from a tincture of the times in which they lived.

There were other ‘opinions’ in the Thirty-nine Articles that were ‘truly papistical’ and ‘derive their origin from a Pope Leo, or a Pope Paul’. Thirty-nine ‘opinions called Articles of Faith’ were drawn up by ‘our great reformers’ in order to foster ‘unity and peace’, but this in turn led some clergymen to subject the Articles to ‘cool dispassionate enquiry’ and find some to be ‘erroneous and contrary to the word of God’. The definition of orthodoxy was liable to ‘vast changes’ depending on the opinions of particular kings and archbishops. The result was a great deal of debate and confusion in which ‘many true Disciples of Jesus’ were branded as heretics. If there were no Articles then a great deal of ‘unchristian controversy’ would have been avoided.

And may we not suppose, that if the learned had spent only half that time in elucidating the Scriptures, which they spent endeavouring to prove them mysterious, and in wresting them to make them seem to prove the opinions of men, they would long before this time have made them appear in their original purity, and by doing so would have turned the heart of many an unbeliever to the living God.

While many ‘good men’ had defended the Articles in the past it was no longer justifiable in ‘this more enlightened age’. She hoped that

parliament would act on the petition and ‘permit us to enjoy that Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us FREE’.²⁴

Aside from the evident desire to have her say, ‘Priscilla’s’ letters seem to have been motivated by various rhetorical tactics. In her first letter Ann Jebb wrote to her female friend: ‘methinks you laugh at the *we*, and suppose that my acquaintance with the clergy makes me imagine that I have something to do with subscriptions’. She hoped her friend would ‘allow me to feel’ for the plight of the clergy and noted that subscription impacted upon families. ‘Priscilla’ stressed the burden put upon many clergy who were forced to choose between their conscience and family – between ‘subscribing to what they do not, cannot believe; or of starving, perhaps not only themselves, but families’.²⁵ Some privately heterodox clergy refused to support the petition, citing career and family interests. William Paley was a prime example of this and we know that he engaged in vigorous discussions with Ann Jebb at her Cambridge tea-parties. Depicting such ‘prudence’ as at the expense of their consciences and the interests of the nation, ‘Priscilla’ sought to shame such ‘worldly minded’ conduct. She pointed to ‘my Dear Dr –’, who signed the petition and stood ‘in the cause of religious liberty’ even though he had ‘a numerous family’.²⁶ Introducing a female voice may have in part been calculated to provoke a response from the opponents of reform, as Priscilla wondered why ‘the enemies do not come forth to maintain their ground’.

There must be some learned men amongst them – some who have leisure to write.... To what then must we impute their silence? Perhaps they begin to see the weapons of reason and argument are against them, and therefore mean to have recourse to force or stratagem.²⁷

Having orthodox clergymen bested by a woman in printed debate over ecclesiastical matters was clearly thought to carry polemical weight. Ann explicitly played on this. In her final letter to Archdeacon Balguy, she concluded that she hoped to have removed his many ‘extraordinary

²⁴ Priscilla (introduced by ‘A Protestant’ [John Jebb?]), *London Chronicle*, 16 July 1771.

²⁵ Priscilla (introduced by ‘A Protestant’ [John Jebb?]), *London Chronicle*, 16 July 1771.

²⁶ Priscilla (introduced by ‘Laelius’ [John Jebb]), *London Chronicle*, 9 Nov. 1771.

²⁷ Priscilla (introduced by ‘Laelius’ [John Jebb]), *London Chronicle*, 9 Nov. 1771.

objections' to the Feathers Tavern Petition. If she had failed, 'let it be imputed to the weakness of a Female Pen', but 'if I have succeeded, it will be a convincing proof that the arguments which are brought against a good cause want neither the aid of rhetoric, nor of learning, to refute them'.²⁸ Balguy's opposition to the petition was particularly galling to the reformers as he owed his position to the friendship and patronage of the liberal Whig bishop Benjamin Hoadly.

By late 1773 it was evident that the Feathers Tavern Petition was doomed to be rejected when presented a second time to Parliament. While Theophilus Lindsey resigned from the Church to establish a Unitarian Chapel in London, the Jebbs increased their efforts to reform the education provided at Cambridge in order to foster a more 'enlightened' rising generation of clergy. William Cole grumbled that 'in the Spring of 1773, after exerting every Power, with his associates in the University and elsewhere to overturn the religious establishment ... [John Jebb] turned his thoughts to reform of the University ... in short, this meddling Reformer, seeing that his religious project failed, has now thought of reforming the University'.²⁹

There was broad support in the University for improving the breadth of studies and frequency of examination with an eye to improving student learning and behaviour. The reforms, however, narrowly failed to be adopted owing to concern about their impact on the autonomy of colleges and opposition to the heterodox views of their sponsor. After a narrow defeat of the reforms Ann Jebb published an anonymous pamphlet to counter one by the ageing leader of opposition to reform, William Samuel Powell, Master of St John's College. She called for reform in light of public laments that Cambridge 'instead of being a School for Religion and Literature, is become a School of *Vice*, of *idleness*, and *dissipation*'.³⁰ Ann's pamphlet reflects detailed knowledge of the arguments and academic politics involved in advancing 'our cause'. In the face of Powell's arguments that students should be left to the care of their colleges Ann argued that 'our national manners' had changed over time

²⁸ Priscilla, *London Chronicle*, 26 March 1774.

²⁹ British Library, Add. Mss. 5873.f.69.

³⁰ Ann Jebb, *A letter to the author of an observation on the design of establishing annual examinations at Cambridge* (1774), 13.

and ‘we educate our children, *even from their cradles*, in a manner different from former times’. As ‘we now treat them like men, at an age when formerly they had scarcely left their nurseries’ they should be subject to new rules and requirements that would make ‘them *ambitious* of acquiring *every manly attainment*’.³¹

Correspondence with Rev. Henry Taylor

In January 1773 Henry Taylor (1711-85), a petitioning clergyman in Hampshire, wrote what appears to be his first letter to Ann Jebb praising her first three letters attacking Archdeacon Balguy’s *Charge*.³² Taylor seems to have been responding to a letter from Ann that inaugurated a correspondence lasting until Taylor’s death in 1785, and of which only his letters survive.

Taylor’s letters provide insight into the role of Ann Jebb in the campaign for religious reform. He often wrote in a jesting tone, perhaps in part designed to deflect requests that he play a more open role in support of the petition. ‘If you will favour me with a line when you sit President or Chair-woman again at the Feather’s’, he wrote, ‘I will certainly be there being myself a petitioner [to?] the news paper’. Later in 1773, and after a couple more letters had passed, he wrote: ‘I am very sorry to hear you do not intend to take the chair at the Feathers: if that be the case I shall never think of attending. My whole hopes of their doing any thing to the purpose is in their having a good head to direct them’.³³ After ridiculing Balguy’s *Charge*, at the start of his second letter Taylor wrote: ‘But methinks I hear some sneering Critick interrupt me and cry out here, oh indelicacy of sentiments, a charge! For shame! To talk of such things to a Lady! – But I answer ... I am not writing to a fine Lady, qua fine Lady; but qua Philosopher’. Drawing inspiration from Molière’s comedies,

³¹ Ann Jebb, *Letter to the author of an observation*, 21.

³² Thomas Balguy, *A charge delivered to the clergy of the Archdeaconry of Winchester in the year 1772* (1772). Throughout the 1770s Taylor promoted Arian theological views in tracts presented as an ‘apology’ for Benjamin Ben Mordecai for converting to Christianity.

³³ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 25 Jan. and 3 Oct. 1773, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers. Francis Stone, the nephew of Taylor’s wife, was chairman of the Feathers Tavern petitioners. Nigel Aston, ‘Henry Taylor’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

Taylor proceeded to play at length on contrasting caricatures of an over indulgent ‘fine lady’ and a ‘philosophical lady’ who, focused on metaphysics, ‘hurries down stairs to her pen and ink without her cap’, and neglects food and drink as ‘mere externals’.³⁴ After receiving Ann’s response to this Taylor began his next letter: ‘As you confess yourself neither fish nor flesh, but a kind of otter, between a fine lady and a philosopher, I must be on my guard; for I am afraid, that under the appearance of this humble confession, you intend to put in for a character which is worth both these together.’³⁵ When Taylor heard that she had published letters under names other than ‘Priscilla’ he wrote:

Pray let me know where to get them & let us have them all published together. Prithee don’t put on the hypocritical air of ‘a Grand Presumption in a female to trouble the public with her Performance’. Why did you write at all? Answer me that.... you should not be so niggardly as to refuse your good offices to do us a little good. Consider that Brains are neither male nor female.³⁶

With their correspondence established they settled into discussion of religious issues. Taylor began by suggesting arguments that could be employed against Archdeacon Balguy in future letters by ‘Priscilla’, adding that he was ‘extremely glad to find the Dr. has fallen into your hands and is likely to meet with a good *Drubbing*’. Yet as he was ‘particularly acquainted with Dr. Balguy and would not quarrel with him, I must beg that my name may not be mentioned upon the subject’.³⁷ In a number of letters Taylor outlined in detail weak points in Balguy’s *Charge* that Priscilla could criticise and he encouraged her to target an additional tract: ‘If you will answer B– [Balguy’s] Sermon on the Bp of St Asaph’s

³⁴ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 17 Feb. 1773, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers.

³⁵ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, [late Feb. 1773?], Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers.

³⁶ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, [Feb. 1774?], Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers.

³⁷ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 25 Jan. 1773, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers.

Consecration I should be glad to send you some hints – tis the abomination of abominations; but let that be only between ourselves.’³⁸

In addition to suggesting arguments that could be used in support of the Feathers Tavern Petition Taylor engaged in robust discussion of theology with Ann Jebb. In the early 1770s Socinianism was beginning to spread among advanced Protestant thinkers in Britain and the Jebbs combined this theology with a ‘materialist’ philosophy similar to that championed by Joseph Priestley.³⁹ Taylor asked Ann Jebb to explain particular points of their philosophy and theology, finding it hard to accept the mortalist doctrine of a ‘sleep of the soul’ between death and resurrection. ‘I only asked you whether a soul is any thing or nothing, and you won’t tell me. What you call the *breath of God* I suppose to be a *real Being*’, he wrote, and jestingly ridiculed her claim that ‘every particle ... has sensation’.⁴⁰ He thought it incredible that consciousness could be rooted in matter: ‘I beg you would let me into the depths of this Philosophy for it must lie pretty deep in some well or puddle: for till I hear from you, I shall religiously abstain from powdering either my Beef or my wig for fear of disturbing the souls of my ancestors’.⁴¹ Throughout his letters discussing Socinian materialism Taylor referred Ann to useful books and sections of his own work.⁴² Correspondence with Ann helped to develop Taylor’s thoughts on issues such as the relationship between the word ‘Jehovah’ and ‘Son of God’ in the Bible – the fruits of which appeared in his tract

³⁸ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 17 Feb. 1773, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers. Thomas Balguy, *A sermon preached at Lambeth Chapel, on the consecration of the Right Rev. Jonathan Shipley, D.D. lord bishop of Landaff, February 12, 1769* (London, 1769). Shipley was translated to St Asaph in the middle on 1769. Balguy took his text from Hebrews 8:7: ‘Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls’.

³⁹ Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment*, 77-90, 100.

⁴⁰ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 3 Oct. 1773, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers. See also the letter of 2 Dec. 1774.

⁴¹ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb [March-April 1774?], Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers 7901/3/8.

⁴² [Henry Taylor], *The apology of Benjamin Ben Mordecai to his friends, for embracing Christianity; in seven letters to Elisha Levi, merchant, of Amsterdam* (London, 1771-74).

on the nature of Jesus Christ.⁴³ Taylor remained an Arian and believed that John Jebb need not have resigned from the Church: ‘I think his conscience is too squeamish and Narvus’.⁴⁴

Taylor sought Ann Jebb’s assistance in preparing his own manuscripts for publication. He sent a manuscript containing notes on miracles to the Unitarian Edmund Law, Bishop of Carlisle, and asked that he pass it on to

Mr Hughes of Queens and the Master of Queens [Robert Plumtre], and to you.... Now will you be honest enough to tell me what is said of it by them and Mr Jebb, who will probably talk to them about it ... Now I not only [want] their opinion but your own; & be as explicit as you can.

The sooner Ann replied the more time he would have ‘to alter it for the better’.⁴⁵ After her move to London, Taylor asked Ann to comment on what was probably the manuscript of his *Thoughts on the nature of the grand apostacy*, and to seek the opinion of friends such as Theophilus Lindsey.⁴⁶ Ill and in the final year of his life in 1785 Taylor sent Ann Jebb the manuscript of his *Considerations on ancient and modern creeds compared*: ‘I have sent my Mss. to Dr. Price, who will transmit it to you for the press as you have been so kind as to undertake the trouble of it’.⁴⁷ In 1797 Henry Taylor junior wrote to Ann following up a meeting in which she had offered to ‘look out’ some fragments of his father’s

⁴³ [Henry Taylor], *An inquiry into the opinions of the learned Christians, both ancient and modern concerning the generation of Jesus Christ* (London, 1777), 9, 112.

⁴⁴ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb [1776?], Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers 7901/3/11.

⁴⁵ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 3 Oct. 1773, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers. These notes appear to have been published in his Ben Mordecai letters: [Henry Taylor], *The apology of Benjamin Ben Mordecai to his friends, for embracing Christianity; in several letters to Elisha Levi, merchant, of Amsterdam; letters II, III and IV* (London, 1773), 139-44, 166-69; and idem. *The apology of Benjamin Ben Mordecai ... letters V, VI, and VII* (London, 1774), 175-86.

⁴⁶ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 2 May 1782, Cambridge University Library, Taylor Papers.

⁴⁷ Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 20 April 1785, Cambridge University Library, Taylor Papers. Taylor died seven days after writing this letter and the work was eventually published posthumously with minimal alteration: Henry Taylor, *Considerations on ancient and modern creeds compared* (London, 1788), iii.

manuscripts that she thought still lay among her papers.⁴⁸ In the absence of surviving evidence we can speculate that there may have been other manuscripts that Ann Jebb helped to publish. At the very least we know that she read and provided feedback on William Paley's *Moral and political philosophy* (1785).⁴⁹

London Radical

With Britain fighting what Theophilus Lindsey described as 'the most dangerous civil war that any nation could be engaged in', the Jebbs' support for the American Patriots ensured their prospects at Cambridge looked increasingly bleak.⁵⁰ John Jebb at last resigned from the Church in late 1775 and moved to London in September 1776 to study medicine and attend the Essex Street Unitarian Chapel. The Jebbs soon became active in agitating for parliament-ary reform and in 1780 John became a founding member and driving force of the Society for Constitutional Information.⁵¹ Visiting her in the early 1790s George Dyer read over newspaper letters that Ann Jebb published in the 1780s on 'Annual Parliaments, the Right of Universal suffrage, Mr Fox's India Bill, Ship Money, the Liberties of the Irish Nation, and American Independence'.⁵² These letters will remain unidentified as Ann Jebb's papers were burnt after her death and George Meadley only lists her letters on the Feathers Tavern Petition in his *Memoir of Mrs. Jebb*. After the early 1770s Ann seems to have eschewed using a female penname. This appears to have resulted from 'Priscilla' becoming known as 'Jebb's wife'.⁵³ Both Jebbs often wrote under anonymous signatures owing to the notoriety of their heterodox religious views – they clearly wanted to minimise any personal prejudice with which their writings might be approached. Many friends,

⁴⁸ Henry Taylor jr to Ann Jebb, 6 Aug. 1797, Cambridge University Library, Taylor papers.

⁴⁹ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 50.

⁵⁰ Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner of Wakefield, 11 March 1777, Ditchfield, *Letters of Lindsey*, 236-238 at 237.

⁵¹ Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment*, 180-89, 239-65.

⁵² George Dyer, *Poems: by G Dyer, B.A. late of Emanuel College, Cambridge* (London, 1792), 36-37.

⁵³ Page, 'A great politicianess', 746.

however, knew Ann's pseudonyms and admired her published letters.⁵⁴

The Jebbs needed to be cautious about a potential charge of seditious libel – among the leading British radicals during the era of the American Revolution they came closest to espousing the idea of popular sovereignty.⁵⁵ The need for caution was underlined by the prosecution of the Dean of St Asaph for publishing the Society for Constitutional Information's pamphlet *Dialogue between a scholar and a peasant* on the principles of government.⁵⁶ 'The constitution of the Commons house of parliament can never be restored by gradualism', John Jebb told Christopher Wyvill, 'nor by any other power than that to which it owes its existence; I mean, the power of the people, whose proper weight and authority in the scale of government is now rising in every part of Europe.'⁵⁷ After several years of unsuccessful efforts to foster a national convention that would enable 'the people to new-model the constitution' John Jebb's health declined and he died in early 1786.⁵⁸

In addition to writing for the newspapers during the political activism of the early 1780s Ann Jebb helped keep regional members of the Society for Constitutional Information such as John Cartwright abreast of developments in London.⁵⁹ A surviving letter to the Irish radical John Forbes provides insight into the depth of her engagement with political affairs. Following the death of Lord Rockingham she reported that 'your Delegates are returning and have had assurance that the politics with

⁵⁴ Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner, 12 April 1772, Ditchfield ed., *Letters of Lindsey*, 130-32, at 131.

⁵⁵ Günther Lottes, 'Radicalism, revolution and political culture: an Anglo-French comparison', in Mark Philp, *The French Revolution and British popular politics* (Cambridge, 1991), 82-84.

⁵⁶ Anthony Page, 'The Dean of St Asaph's trial: libel and politics in the 1780s', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32:1 (2009), 21-35; Nigel Aston, "'Achitophel Firebrand" at St. Asaph: Dean Shipley and the Withering of Whiggism in the Church of England', in William Gibson and Robert G Ingram, eds., *Religious identities in Britain, 1660-1832* (Aldershot, 2005), 299-320; [William Jones], *The principles of government, in a dialogue between a scholar and a peasant, written by a member of the Society for Constitutional Information* (1782).

⁵⁷ John Jebb to Christopher Wyvill, 7 August 1781, in Jebb, *Works*, I, part 1, 167.

⁵⁸ [John Jebb] *An address to the freeholders of Middlesex* (4th edn., 1782), in *Works*, II, 469.

⁵⁹ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 17-22.

respect to Ireland will not be changed'. Charles James Fox had resigned and delivered an admirable speech giving his reasons,

not that we would, or do, condemn those who stay in – they were not precisely in the same situation, and perhaps have more confidence in Ld Shelburne (who is now prime minister) than Mr Fox has – we have been uneasy about the changes, but hope everything will turn out the best. Ld S[helburne] promises us much, and if he grants us an equal representation and short parliaments, he will be supported by the people. My Idea is that he is the K[ing]'s own minister and if he cannot govern the K[ing] the K[ing] will govern him. But whilst the Duke of Richmond continues in the people will have great hopes, tho' they will not be so unanimous as before. The Scotch advocate certainly comes in and then Charles Jenkinson the K[ing]'s favourite will soon come in – you will see therefore that tho' we have some hope we have some reason for fear. With respect to American Independence Mr Fox is certainly right – all our private information convinces us of it.⁶⁰

The Duchess of Devonshire was clearly not the only woman actively engaged in the turbulent politics of the early 1780s.

In the winter of 1792-93 Ann Jebb wrote two anonymous pamphlets in defence of the French Revolution and its British sympathisers. They were composed in response to the Loyalist Association's *One penny-worth of truth, from Thomas Bull to his brother John* (Nov. 1792).⁶¹ Perhaps she was also encouraged by George Dyer's 1792 poem 'On Liberty' which contained the lines: 'Then will I from my Jebb's pages prove / That female minds might teach a patriot throng'.⁶² Ann dismissed loyalist representations of the Dissenters as being in favour of anarchy and mob

⁶⁰ Ann Jebb to John Forbes, 11 July 1782, National Library of Ireland, F S Bourke collection. The Duke of Richmond was very popular with reformers, having moved a motion for universal male suffrage in 1780. The 'Scotch advocate' was probably Henry Dundas.

⁶¹ [Rev. William Jones of Nayland], *One penny-worth of truth from Thomas Bull to his brother John Bull* (1792); this was initially answered by [—], *John Bull's answer to Thomas Bull's pennyworth of truth* (13 December 1792).

⁶² Dyer, *Poems*, 36.

rule, arguing that they were champions of rational liberty. She lampooned Burke's talk of the 'swinish multitude' and his 'dagger speech'.⁶³ The French had chosen to become a constitutional monarchy and Louis XVI had the behaviour of himself and reactionary supporters to blame for the republican turn of the revolution. Contrary to loyalist rhetoric the French did not want equality of property, but only equality before the law and to enjoy 'the pleasing consolation, that poverty is no bar to merit'.⁶⁴ She scorned loyalist efforts to 'prove from scripture the wickedness of the republican system' and their claims that Tom Paine wanted to make 'a revolution in heaven'. 'Jesus was a great reformer', Ann declared, who had likewise been opposed by 'the chief priests and rulers' of his time.⁶⁵ Had she been a member of the National Assembly she would have voted against the death penalty for Louis – indeed, she was one who hoped to see the death penalty 'totally abolished' in Britain.⁶⁶ If the British government let 'loose the dogs of war' to revenge the execution of one man it would lead to 'the total ruin of our finances ... in a war against the liberty and property of France'.⁶⁷

Widow Jebb's defence of the republican turn of the French Revolution appears to have been widely read among radical circles. During the treason trials, over a year after it was published, authorities seized six copies of *Two penny-worth more of truth for a penny* as part of a swag of radical literature being distributed by the Society for Constitutional Information's Jeremiah Joyce.⁶⁸ Ann Jebb remained an opponent of war with France throughout the Napoleonic period and deplored the British bombardment of Copenhagen and Wellington's campaign in Portugal and Spain.⁶⁹ She continued to applaud the efforts of reforming Whigs in parliament, in particular 'our friend' Samuel Romilly and 'my favourite'

⁶³ [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth of truth for a penny* (2nd edn., 1793 [13 Dec. 1792]), 11; [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth more of truth for a penny; being a second letter from – Bull to Brother John* (26 January 1793), 13.

⁶⁴ [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth of truth for a penny* (2nd edn., 1793 [13 Dec. 1792]), 7.

⁶⁵ [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth of truth*, 9, 12.

⁶⁶ [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth more*, 15.

⁶⁷ [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth more*, 16.

⁶⁸ John Issitt, *Jeremiah Joyce: radical, dissenter and writer* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2006), 50.

⁶⁹ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 42-45.

Samuel Whitbread, but was disappointed to see deep divisions among the ‘friends of liberty’.⁷⁰ In her final years Ann Jebb continued to lament that ‘England, this most thinking nation’, groaned under ministers who ‘know how to extract money out of our pockets, and turn it into paper, or send it abroad to do mischief’.⁷¹ She died in 1812, a few days after her ‘intimate friend’ Hannah Lindsey who, as Grayson Ditchfield has shown in his excellent contribution to this volume, was a driving force behind the Essex Street Unitarian Chapel.⁷²

Unitarian widow

In addition to cutting short a potentially comfortable life at Cambridge by becoming Unitarian heretics, the Jebbs strained relations with their extended family. As a widow Ann Jebb seems to have been sustained by the friendship and to some extent financial assistance of fellow Unitarians. After John Jebb died in 1786 his friend and former student John Disney (who was also Lindsey’s co-minister at the Essex Street Unitarian Chapel) wrote a memoir and compiled letters, pamphlets and some manuscript notes which he published by subscription as *The works: theological, medical, political and miscellaneous of John Jebb, M.D. F.R.S., with a life of the author* (3 vols., 1787). This was done to honour Jebb’s memory and preserve his example as an inspiration to reformers, and it was supported by over six hundred Rational Dissenter and liberal Anglican subscribers. *The works* were also published with an eye to providing financial support for his esteemed widow. According to Lindsey Ann Jebb ‘very prudently gave up her groundless scruples’ and endorsed the publication of her husband’s *Works*. She would receive ‘not less than £800. Dean Jebb behaved unworthily to the last, and left her only one hundred pounds, which was more a debt than a favour’.⁷³ John Jebb’s father was a careerist clergyman who became Dean of Cashell in Ireland but chose to live at Egham in Surrey. A Latitudinarian he

⁷⁰ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 45.

⁷¹ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 45.

⁷² Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), 477.

⁷³ T Lindsey to W Tayleur, 9 June 1787, Ditchfield ed., *Letters of Lindsey*, 509-12, at 510.

nevertheless deeply disapproved of his son's conduct. While Dean Jebb subscribed to *The works*, it is notable that out of the large extended family only three additional Jebbs subscribed. David Jebb, John's only and younger brother who settled in Ireland, is a notable absence from the subscription list.⁷⁴ It would seem that the Irish John Jebb, who became Bishop of Limerick, spoke for the majority sentiment of the family when he described Dr. John Jebb as his 'very honest and able, but very wrong-headed and heretical cousin'.⁷⁵

Following her husband's death Ann continued to observe political developments as reported in the press and via conversation with publicly active friends. With the exception of her *Two-pennyworth* pamphlets, however, there is no record of her having produced any other publications. Until the mid-1790s she may have written any number of anonymous pieces for the newspapers and periodicals. She certainly did not lack contacts in the world of print culture. For example Andrew Kippis, a local Rational Dissenting minister and friend, was founder and editor of the *New Annual Register*.⁷⁶ In the absence of a surviving collection of personal papers and correspondence the important role Kippis played as facilitator of literary activity has been under appreciated – he did much, for example, to encourage the literary career of Helen Maria Williams, who went to live in Paris in 1790 and became a celebrated poet, translator

⁷⁴ The other subscribers lived in Chesterfield: Samuel Jebb Esq., Miss Jebb, and Mr Avery Jebb. David Jebb settled in Ireland at Slane in County Meath.

⁷⁵ Charles Forster, *The life of John Jebb, D.D., F.R.S., Bishop of Limerick, Ardferf and Aghadoe: with a selection from his letters* (2 vols., 2nd edn., London, 1837), I, 2.

⁷⁶ John Jebb and Andrew Kippis were active members of the SCI, and on familiar terms. Jebb and Kippis lived near each other in Westminster, and John Disney's diary (1783-84) notes his often having visited one house and then the other: 'Tuesday, January 7: Called on Dr. Jebb (who afterwards visited my wife) and on Dr. Kippis ... Monday, March 10: Writ letter to Miss F. Cartwright. Called at Lord Effingham's, Dr. Kippis's, Dr. Jebbs (who was with me also earlier) ... Monday, October 27: called on Mrs. Cadell and Mrs. Jebb and Dr. Kippis.... Wednesday, November 12: Called upon Mrs. Kippis and Mrs. Jebb ... Tuesday, November 25: Dr. Jebb called in the morning. Called on Dr. Kippis and Mrs. Jebb (taking my boys with me).... Tuesday, December 9: Called on Mr Shore, Mr Abel Smith, Dr. Jebb, Dr. Kippis.... Tuesday, February 10: Called on Mr R. Smith, Jebb, Kippis.... Thursday, April 29: Called on Dr. Jebb. Dined and drank tea with Dr. Kippis'. D O Thomas ed., 'John Disney's Diary: 1 January 1783-17 May 1784', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 21 (2002), 42-127.

and champion of the French Revolution.⁷⁷ He also helped start the philosophical career of William Godwin, who he employed as a writer for the *New Annual Register* in the 1780s. Kippis may well have engaged Ann Jebb's literary services. Such speculation needs to be taken seriously in light of a letter Theophilus Lindsey wrote to a friend in Newcastle in the late 1790s. Having suggested that he could help provide 'some aid towards carrying on the *Economist*', a proposed new publication, he had to excuse himself because 'my aids, whose names I would mention to you only, Mrs. Jebb and Mr. W Belsham failed me. Both greatly equal to the work. But the Lady from imperfect health was incapable for a long time, and the other from too much employ'.⁷⁸ In light of this letter, owing to ill health Ann Jebb may have ceased writing for the press during the mid-1790s. That Lindsey thought of her as a potential writer for the *Economist* indicates she may have written for a periodical at an earlier stage – though counting against this is the lack of mention of such activity by her biographer. At the very least, this letter further illustrates respect for Ann Jebb as an articulate writer among Rational Dissenters.

It seems that Ann Jebb had a frail constitution throughout her life and was largely confined to her house for the last two decades of her life.⁷⁹ While at Cambridge the Jebbs moved between the university, their rural parish at Bungay in Suffolk and visits to London. After they moved to London there were some visits to Brighton, but as she aged Ann seems to have increasingly socialised in her own house. Used carefully, John Disney's diary during 1783 and 1784 throws some faint light on Ann Jebb's apparent lack of mobility. The diary records his daily social calls, often at the Jebbs' and in turn frequently visited by Dr. Jebb – often for professional medical reasons. While the diary records occasions of Disney's wife and Hannah Lindsey being out visiting, there is no record of Mrs. Jebb being at a social engagement outside of her own house.⁸⁰ In

⁷⁷ Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (2002), 23-29.

⁷⁸ Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner of Newcastle, 1 April 1799, Dr. Williams's Library Mss. 12.44.f.61.

⁷⁹ 'For many years she was confined to her house; and in winter, for the most part, to her bed: but, as her health improved with the advancing season, she was accustomed to rise and remove into her sitting room, during the later part of the day. Reclining on her sofa, she then used to receive company at tea'. Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 52

⁸⁰ Thomas ed., 'John Disney's Diary', 42-127.

addition, while reporting the state of his congregation, Theophilus Lindsey observed that John Jebb ‘never misses our Chapel twice a day’ on Sundays.⁸¹ Considering her status and Lindsey’s desire to present a picture of a thriving chapel, we can expect he would have noted her attendance. When John Jebb was seriously ill in 1782 Lindsey observed that ‘Mrs. Jebb would have been of all women to be pitied if we had lost him – for she lives by him’.⁸² In light of her poor health Ann’s tendency to stay at home is understandable. Anna Barbauld found that having ‘got into the visiting way’ while in London ‘I begin to be giddy with the whirl ... it requires strong health greatly to enjoy being abroad’.⁸³ The fragmentary evidence of Ann Jebb’s social life presents an image of a well read, talkative but physically frail homebody whose social contacts consisted of visits (often by her husband’s male friends), and hearing of news John had gathered in his rounds as a physician, Dissenting and political activist.

While John Jebb’s memory was toasted at political meetings Ann Jebb continued to be visited and supported by Unitarians and reformers.⁸⁴ In Meadley’s words, she remained ‘on terms of the strictest intimacy’ with Thomas Brand Hollis, Capel Lofft, John Cartwright and Christopher Wyvill, the leader of Yorkshire political reformers; James Lambert, who became a Unitarian but remained a Fellow at Cambridge until 1828; and Edward Jennings who was one of the Jebbs ‘earliest associates in the Unitarian congregation’.⁸⁵ Thomas Jervis, who succeeded Andrew Kippis as Unitarian minister at Princes Street Westminster until he moved on to the Mill-Hill Chapel in Leeds in 1808 was a frequent visitor, perhaps as part

⁸¹ Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, 3 December 1778, Ditchfield ed., *Letters of Lindsey*, 273-76 at 275.

⁸² Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, 26 December 1782, Ditchfield ed., *Letters of Lindsey*, 370-71 at 370.

⁸³ Anna Barbauld to John Aikin, [?] Jan. 1784, in Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld* (1874), 52.

⁸⁴ *Abstract of the history and proceedings of the Revolution Society in London* (1789), 4. At a 14 July 1791 commemoration of the French Revolution in Belfast, toasts were made to ‘the illustrious dead, of Locke, Mirabeau, and Dr. Jebb’. *Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan* (1840), 154. Ann Jebb was one of a handful of female members of the Unitarian Society; see list of members in *Unitarian Society* (1794), 9-15.

⁸⁵ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 24.

of his ministerial obligations. Eccentric, kind and ubiquitous in literary circles, George Dyer remained an ‘occasional visitor’; as was Joseph Lomas Towers, author of *Illustrations of prophecy* (1796) and son of Joseph Towers who had been an active member of the Society for Constitutional Information since the early 1780s.⁸⁶ The philosopher William Godwin accompanied Brand Hollis on some visits to Ann Jebb.⁸⁷

John Disney and his family seem to have provided much support and Ann greatly lamented their relocation to the countryside after he inherited in 1804 the estate of Brand Hollis in Essex (where John Adams had been shown a tree planted in honour of John Jebb).⁸⁸ Ill health prevented Ann Jebb from visiting the Disneys at the Hyde and she sorely felt the loss of their company. According to Meadley, John Disney had shown ‘undeviating attention’ to Mrs. Jebb and they corresponded regularly after the move. She assured him that in her thoughts ‘I have attended you in your improvements, have been with Miss Disney in her green-house, and even with your cook in her new cottage’.⁸⁹ With many of her contemporaries aged or deceased, in her final years Ann Jebb was still being visited by some of the 1790s generation. George Meadley met her in 1808 while researching his biography of William Paley and then ‘repeatedly’ sought her company owing to her ‘cheerfulness ... and genuine good nature’.⁹⁰

Ann Jebb and younger women writers

Ann Jebb provided an example for the Romantic generation of female writers and pioneering ‘feminists’. During her time at Newington Green the young Mary Wollstonecraft probably heard about Ann Jebb (and may have met her) via Richard Price.⁹¹ The pioneering gothic novelist Ann

⁸⁶ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 48-52.

⁸⁷ 5 Oct. 1791, 31 March and 3 May 1792, William Godwin, *Diary*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Abinger Collection.

⁸⁸ L H Butterfield ed., *Diary and autobiography of John Adams* (4 vols., Cambridge, Mass.1962), III, 197.

⁸⁹ Ann Jebb to John Disney, 8 June 1808, Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 49.

⁹⁰ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 51.

⁹¹ Claire Tomalin, *The life and death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London, 1974), 35. Richard Price and his co-minister Joseph Towers were active members of the Society for Constitutional Information, founded by Jebb and others in 1780.

Radcliffe was related to the Jebbs and may have spent time with John and Ann at Bungay or in London.⁹² The unmarried literary sisters Anne and Annabella Plumptre had a long and close relationship with Ann Jebb that appears to have begun in their youth when their father Robert Plumptre was Master of Queens' College at Cambridge.⁹³ These sisters lived in Norwich, the 'Jacobin City', welcomed the French Revolution, translated German books and wrote novels. Anne Plumptre's *A narrative of three years in France* (1810) described her tour of provincial France between 1802 and 1805 and presented a favourable assessment of Napoleon as a rational reformer.

Most significant is the connection between Ann Jebb and Mary Hays. Raised a Dissenter, Hays became a friend of Wollstonecraft and one of the most radical female voices of the 1790s. While Hays is unmentioned in Meadley's *Memoirs*, this is not surprising as he sought to portray Ann Jebb as a woman who 'seconded' her husband and did not engage in the 'masculine boldness' displayed by some intellectual females.⁹⁴ Circumstantial and fragmentary evidence points to a relationship between Hays and Jebb. During the 1780s Hays' intellectual development was assisted by Robert Robinson, the Cambridge Rational Dissenter who was a friend of the Jebbs.⁹⁵ By the early 1790s she was acquainted with many Unitarians and had come to know John Disney very well, to whom she dedicated her *Letters and essays, moral and miscellaneous* (1793). Among the surviving fragments of John Disney's correspondence is a note arranging for Mary Hays to have tea with Mrs. Jebb in late January 1793.⁹⁶ Perhaps this was the only meeting between the two women and it may not have even gone ahead. It is nevertheless likely that the meeting

⁹² Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: the life of Ann Radcliffe* (Leicester University Press, 1999), 16-17. John Jebb was her grand-uncle and her mother 'Mrs. Ward, Milsom-street, Bath' subscribed to his posthumous *Works*.

⁹³ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 52. Anne Plumptre was daughter of Robert Plumptre, late master of Queen's College, who had been a supporter of the Jebbs when they were at Cambridge.

⁹⁴ Meadley, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb*, 15, 56.

⁹⁵ Gina Luria Walker, "'Brief Encounter': Robert Robinson and the right to private judgment", *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 24 (2008), 54-70.

⁹⁶ John Disney to Mary Hays, 31 Jan. 1793, Dr. Williams Library, mss. 24.93.f.3. In the course of arranging her visit to the Disney house for a Monday dinner, he wrote: 'we will settle the appointment [with] Mrs. Jebb for the afternoon'.

occurred and, given the close relationship both women had with John Disney, it is likely it was not an isolated meeting.

The timing of the intended meeting is significant. It occurs just after the publication of Ann Jebb's two pamphlets on the French Revolution and after Mary Wollstonecraft had begun to mentor Hays as a professional writer.⁹⁷ While Wollstonecraft and her publisher Joseph Johnson commented on the front-matter and preface, the *Letters and essays* was published by T Knott who also published Ann Jebb's *Two penny-worth* pamphlet.⁹⁸ Containing praise for 'the vindicator of female rights', Hays's book is very much the product of a Rational Dissenter. Indeed, much of it could have come from the pen of John or Ann Jebb: the calls for a 'reformation of manners' and the optimism about inevitable progress rooted in a rational Christian version of 'the philosophy of necessity' as expounded by David Hartley and Joseph Priestley. Wollstonecraft passed severe judgement on the original draft of Hays's 'Preface', telling her to remove the displays of 'vain humility' as 'your male friends will still treat you like a woman ... if your essays have merit they will stand alone'.⁹⁹ In the published version Hays is forthright: 'every endeavour towards meliorating the human mind – how weak, or imperfect soever – must be acceptable to that Being whose nature is pure benevolence, and "no effort will be lost"'.¹⁰⁰ John Jebb often repeated Milton's adage: "No effort can be lost" and we know that Ann often quoted him while pointing to his bust when entertaining visitors.¹⁰¹ Hays quoted at length her friend Dyer's claim that women tend more toward supporting the cause of liberty than men, 'in proof of which he celebrates the respectable names of Macaulay, Wollstonecraft, Barbauld, Jebb, Williams, and Smith'. To Dyer's observation she added words that may have been inspired by Ann Jebb,

⁹⁷ Mary A Waters, "The first of a new genus": Mary Wollstonecraft as a literary critic and mentor to Mary Hays', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37:3 (2004), 415-34.

⁹⁸ T Knott had published Hays's earlier *Cursory remarks on ... public or social worship* (1791). [Ann Jebb], *Two penny-worth more* (1793), dated as completed 26 January (five days before the Hays visit to Jebb), was jointly published by C Stalker and Knott of Lombard Street. Hays may have helped see the pamphlet through the press.

⁹⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft to Mary Hays, 25 Nov. 1792, in Todd, *Collected letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 209-11.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Hays, *Letters and essays, moral and miscellaneous* (1793), ix.

¹⁰¹ Jebb, *Works*, I, part 1, 236, 247.

who encouraged her husband in rebellion against subscription to the Articles of the Church:

As women have no claims to expect either pension or place, they are less in the vortex of influence; they are also more unsophisticated by education, having neither system, test, or subscription imposed upon them; and some subjects require only to be examined with an impartial and unprejudiced eye, to ensure conviction.¹⁰²

In one of her letters to the 'Bishops of the Church of England' Ann Jebb had declared that 'having nothing to hope for from the *favours* or to fear from the *resentment* of your Lordships, I shall endeavour ... to counteract the agreeable flatterer, by introducing that (I fear) unwelcome stranger plain, honest, undisguised *Truth*'.¹⁰³ In light of all this it is not surprising that Theophilus Lindsey was very impressed with Hays's book for its 'metaphysics and divinity: but most of all, what appears in every page, the enlightened mind, turn to virtue and to God, and ardent to inspire others'.¹⁰⁴ In the early 1800s Capel Lofft, former student and close friend of the Jebbs, read some of Hays's work and expressed astonishment that 'the emanations of a transcendently powerful Mind' had 'remained in comparative obscurity or had been insulted by ... malicious cavillings under the name of Criticism'.¹⁰⁵

Hays and Ann Jebb had much in common and much to talk about. In addition to their common friendship with the late Robert Robinson, the French Revolution, and the renewed push for reform at Cambridge by a new generation, there was the recent controversy with Gilbert Wakefield. After being educated at Cambridge, off the back of a glowing reference from John Jebb the Unitarian Wakefield had become tutor at the Dissenting Academy at Warrington.¹⁰⁶ He later moved to Hackney in

¹⁰² Hays, *Letters and essays*, 11-12.

¹⁰³ 'No Petitioner, but a Friend to the Petition', *Whitehall Evening Post*, 14 May 1772.

¹⁰⁴ Theophilus Lindsey to Mary Hays, 15 April 1793, in Gina Luria Walker ed., *The idea of being free: a Mary Hays reader* (Toronto, 2006), 191.

¹⁰⁵ Capel Lofft to William Godwin, [?] 1805, in *ibid.*, 312.

¹⁰⁶ 'The character given of me by DR. JEBB, through the medium of DR. PRIESTLEY, had so entirely secured the approbation of the *trustees*, as even to cut of at once every hope of another candidate'. Gilbert Wakefield, *Memoirs ... written by himself* (London, 1792), 191.

London where he published a condemnation of communal worship and the rituals of the New College in 1791. Writing as 'Eusebia' (pious woman), Hays had engaged along with others in a sharp exchange of pamphlets with Wakefield.

While discussing such topics Hays might have looked upon Ann Jebb and her past marriage to 'the Doctor' with some envy and pangs of regret. The young Abigail Adams, daughter of John Adams the American envoy, reacted negatively to Ann Jebb's appearance.¹⁰⁷ Hays's biographer observes that 'she possessed neither physical nor social grace, nor the self-confidence born of such qualities'.¹⁰⁸ The bookish and plain looking twenty-nine year old Ann had met a young Cambridge clergyman and spent over two decades in an intellectually vibrant and companionate marriage. At nearly the same age in 1779 Hays had developed a passionate romance with John Eccles only to have him die in an accident a few weeks before their intended marriage, sending Mary into years of mourning. At the time she met with Ann Jebb, Hays was developing a relationship with William Frend who had been barred from tutoring at Cambridge owing to his Unitarianism. This became for Hays a second case of disappointed romantic hope, but for a time at least she must have hoped that she too might establish a companionate marriage with a rebellious Cambridge Unitarian.

Conclusion

Jonathan Clark has argued strongly that eighteenth-century political radicalism was rooted in heterodox theology.¹⁰⁹ Ann Jebb supports this interpretation, as the failure of efforts to reform church and university in the early 1770s saw the Jebbs migrate to London and turn their efforts to reforming the parliament. It needs to be stressed, however, that their Unitarian theology was linked to a philosophical disposition rooted in the necessarian philosophy of David Hartley and their friend Joseph Priestley, and a critical engagement with the writings of the French materialist

¹⁰⁷ Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment*, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Gina Luria Walker, 'Mary Hays (1759-1843): an enlightened quest', in B Taylor and S Knott, *Women, gender and Enlightenment* (London, 2007), 493; idem., *Mary Hays (1759-1843): the growth of a woman's mind* (Aldershot, 2008), 97-98.

¹⁰⁹ J C D Clark, *English society, 1660-1832* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 2000), 318-422.

philosophe Baron d'Holbach.¹¹⁰ Ann Jebb's Commonwealthman politics were further radicalised by the American Revolution. In 1791 Thomas Brand Hollis noted that 'Dr. J. Jebb hoped he should live to see a general hunt of Kings. How near the time'.¹¹¹ Ann Jebb also clearly thought the world would be a better place without monarchs, aristocrats and ecclesiastical hierarchies, and that republicanism was the best system of government.

As other contributions to this volume of *Enlightenment and Dissent* show, publications were only one form in which intellectual exchange was conducted in the eighteenth century. Ann Jebb published anonymous contributions in support of religious and political reform and was one of the eight female members of the Unitarian Society when it was founded in 1791. She also helped others to publish, encouraged critical thinking over cups of tea, corresponded with fellow reformers, and discussed Unitarianism and current affairs with many of the rising Romantic generation of writers. If, as Grayson Ditchfield observes, women did not preach within the Rational Dissenting tradition and had a minimal role in Unitarian governing structures, they nevertheless played important roles listening, talking, writing, educating, hosting and sustaining the sociable networks of Rational Dissent out of which numerous reformist impulses emerged.

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¹¹⁰ Anthony Page, 'Enlightenment and a "Second Reformation": the religion and philosophy of John Jebb (1736-86)', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 17 (1998), 48-82; Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment*, 88, 100. Jonathan Israel argues that, along with materialist *philosophes*, the Jebbs should be included within his concept of a pan-European 'Radical Enlightenment'. *A revolution of the mind: Radical Enlightenment and the intellectual origins of modern democracy* (Oxford, 2009).

¹¹¹ Thomas Brand Hollis to Joseph Willard, 4 Nov. 1791, cited in Jenny Graham, *The nation, the law and the king* (Lanham, Maryland, 2000), 255.

**‘THE CULTIVATION OF MIND AND REFINEMENT OF MANNERS IN THE
MIDST OF A MONEY-MAKING AND SOMEWHAT UNPOLISHED
COMMUNITY’.¹**

HANNAH GREG’S LEGACY RECONSIDERED

David Sekers

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the later life of Hannah Lightbody, the precocious Liverpool woman whose education, talents and aspirations are revealed in her youthful diary.² Born in 1766 and dying in 1828, she witnessed the period of enlightenment aspirations, cruel disappointments when reforms were blocked, and industrialisation that brought in its wake not only prosperity but serious new social issues especially for the urban working classes.

Hannah came from a family of Dissenters and newly rich, intelligent and sober merchants. Her home circles included leading artists, doctors and reformers. Few young women of her time can have had the privileges that she had growing up in the 1780s when she shared the company and friendship of several prominent London radicals, of the Liverpool abolitionists, and of the wisest doctor in Manchester. The watershed for her was her marriage in 1789, when household and maternal duties threatened to cut her off from these contacts and from anything that stimulated her mind. The spirit of enlightenment was not entirely quenched, but its remit was confined to the home, the factory community and her circle of friends and readers. Education became her greatest remaining ambition. Perhaps this was a way of sublimating her aspirations, passing them on to the next generation.

¹ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher: with letters and other family memorials, edited by the survivor of her family* (Edinburgh, 1875), 97. Mrs. Fletcher visited the Gregs in 1808.

² See David Sekers ed., *The diary of Hannah Lightbody 1786-1790*, the supplement to *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 24 (2008). The present paper represents work in progress towards a lengthier biography. It is based on a contribution to the workshop ‘*Intellectual exchanges: women and rational dissent*’ held at Dr Williams’s Library on 27 June 2009. The author is grateful to Dr Martin Fitzpatrick who commented on a draft for that version, and for the perceptive comments and suggestions made by participants at that workshop.

It has been suggested that Hannah was ‘the driving force behind the enlightened welfare and educational provision for the parish apprentices’ in the Styal factory community.³ This paper considers whether this was Hannah’s principal legacy, or whether it was the ‘cultivation of mind and refinement of manners’ amid the materialistic industrial society that had emerged. It sketches Hannah’s development and her achievements, and considers factors which may have inhibited her from becoming a more prominent figure on a wider stage.

Hannah Lightbody growing up

Hannah’s father, Adam Lightbody, died in 1778 when she was twelve. He and two brothers had come to Liverpool in the 1750s to seek their fortune in the linen trade. Supported by a Scottish cousin whose fortune they inherited, the Lightbody brothers prospered, married well, invested wisely and were well connected in mercantile and Dissenting circles in the burgeoning town. As Adam’s sons all died in infancy, all three of his daughters inherited good fortunes.

Hannah’s elder sisters married in 1781, leaving her alone with her mother, Elizabeth Lightbody. A direct descendant of Philip and Matthew Henry, she was devout and philanthropic. In her old age she provided a lifeline and education to the young and impoverished Kitty Wilkinson who went on to become an important welfare reformer in early Victorian Liverpool.⁴ Elizabeth Lightbody was also cultivated, well-connected and well-read: she seems to have known Mrs Barbauld, Thomas Percival and other Warrington Academy alumni in the North West.

In 1783 she sent Hannah who was then seventeen to boarding school in Stoke Newington. There Hannah was befriended by the family of Thomas Rogers, cousins descended from the Henrys, and seems to have met a good number of his radical colleagues, such as the Thorntons, Dr Andrew Kippis and Dr Richard Price, (but not as far as we know Mary Wollstonecraft). By the time she left her school in London at the end of 1786, she had been educated beyond the usual accomplishments and was

³ Peter Spencer *A portrait of Samuel Greg* (Styal, 1982), 19, quoted by Ruth Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England, 1760–1860* (London, 1998), 72. The author is indebted to the late Peter Spencer for his original work on Hannah Greg.

⁴ Herbert R Rathbone ed., *Memoir of Kitty Wilkinson 1786-1860*, (Liverpool, 1927).

an avid student of history, the classics, literature, languages, religion, philosophy, and ethics.

On her return to Liverpool, Hannah started a diary. This document provides a picture of cultured, literary, medical and intellectual figures and Dissenting networks at a fascinating moment in the history of Liverpool and Manchester. Hannah devoured books, plays, and poetry. She went sightseeing in the Lakes, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. She thought and talked about women's roles and marriage, as well as about benevolence, charity, conduct and faith, with some of the leading Dissenters of her time.

To summarize what the diary tells us of Hannah's beliefs at this time: Hannah had absorbed the conviction that women had rational minds of their own. She saw mankind as indivisible. She saw her station and fortune as a gift which enabled her to exercise benevolence towards those less fortunate. She believed in the value of providing education - to banish doubt, superstition and prejudice. She revelled in the world of nature, landscape and the open air, all seen as healing and calming elements and manifestations of the divine.

Hannah was aware that once married, constraints would apply to her freedom of action and thought. She would become the servant of her husband, which could limit her discretion to act. She had reflected briefly on this in the diary; at times envying her sisters' married state and motherhood; at times relishing the freedom of thought, action and of companionship that was hers as a spinster. She held out the hope that her independence of mind and bookish nature could be compatible with a sensible man's ideas of a companionable wife.

The first months of Hannah's marriage to Samuel Greg are recorded in her diary in a few hurried, undated entries, and show her confidence and poise devastated. Living in his house in the centre of Manchester, she felt deprived of kind relations and intelligent friends. She was depressed, anxious, emotional and homesick. It is the first time that such candour and raw emotion disturb the surface of the diary.

There had been many debates in the later eighteenth century about the usefulness of education for women. Hannah herself had been a strong advocate, claiming that she could acquire domestic accomplishments

easily enough when the time came.⁵ In the meantime, she claimed that it was justifiable that she should devote time to wide reading, the development of taste, the enjoyment of the natural world, and frequent discussions about faith and conduct. Her initial dismay and dejection in her new role as a married woman illustrate that those debates about the value of education for women were not fanciful, but could reflect a harsh reality. We shall consider how Hannah recovered from this low ebb and how she developed a number of fulfilling roles: as wife, educator, matriarch and domestic impresario.⁶

Mrs Greg

Hannah's first challenge was to pick herself up from this anguished start to her marriage. She overcame it and went further, becoming a hard-working manager of the household and a successful hostess. While bringing up a dozen children, she seems to have regained her capacity for reading, writing and thinking. It seems that she also forged a companionable relationship with Samuel Greg in which he acknowledged to some extent her independence of mind and her social and educational aspirations.

Samuel Greg's textile business became large and important, contributing to the period of extraordinary growth in the cotton spinning industry between 1784 and 1830. He built several mills, took on others, and he had accumulated enough capital by the 1800s to weather commercial setbacks. The firm survived the dangerous recessions in the Napoleonic wars and the 1820s. In 1817 part of his marriage settlement money was used to bail out his nephew after a partnership failed.

⁵ *Diary of Hannah Lightbody*, 19 May 1787.

⁶ The main manuscript sources are the archives of Quarry Bank Mill, Styal; the Greg Collection in Manchester City Library; the Rathbone Collection in the Sidney Jones Library, University of Liverpool; the Pares Collection on loan to Derbyshire Record Office, Hodgson family papers in the possession of Jenny Smith and Dr Tim Paine; and *Lightbody history and records* in the ownership of Nick Lightbody. Hannah Greg's four publications are in the British Library. A private collection of Hannah Greg's papers, including her *Collected letters*, which was seen in the 1980's has disappeared, but it was used by Peter Spencer in his short publications *A portrait of Samuel Greg* (Styal, 1989) and *A portrait of Hannah Greg* (Styal, 1982). These two publications are referred to where they are the only remaining sources for specific quotations from Hannah Greg's letters.

Although Samuel Greg spent much time travelling around his growing business empire, his home in King Street, Manchester, was used often for entertaining business colleagues. In 1796 Hannah wrote that life in Manchester,

had become a very serious thing....hard work, painful illnesses etc to me they are the duty of my station. Except my regular letters to my one sister [the other had recently died], I never sit down to write but on business; and except to write or with company, of which we have enough (far, far too much,) seldom sit down at all.⁷

Samuel Greg acquired much of Hannah's fortune in their marriage settlement, although part of her extensive land and property investments were retained for her in trust, and she seems to have an understanding of the merchant's role in business and finance. A glimpse of Samuel's confidence in her business judgement comes from a letter he wrote her in 1811 when considering taking on his brother's lucrative London shipping and insurance agency:

The impression upon my mind at present is that it cannot be rejected without a very material prejudice to the interests of the family – however I will not even in my own mind decide without seeing you and consulting your feelings & inclinations.⁸

Samuel seems to have discussed his business plans with Hannah, such as buying raw cotton, and for her part she was fully conversant with the roles and risks managed by textile merchants. Although she had no official or acknowledged role in the business, Samuel wrote in 1818 as he set off to London as a cotton industry delegate 'It is fortunate that I can leave matters in your hands'.⁹ Hannah was able to develop several roles in the growing factory community, as we shall see below.

⁷ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 3.

⁸ Quarry Bank Mill, *Greg letter book* 1.178.

⁹ Spencer, *Samuel Greg*, 23.

Manchester was not short of cultured and forward-thinking figures at this time. Many of them worshipped with the Gregs themselves at Cross Street Chapel, while kinsmen from Liverpool such as the Hadfield and Nicholson cousins, lived nearby. According to Hannah's youngest daughter Ellen, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society used to adjourn to her house for supper after meetings; (Samuel Greg had become a member very soon after his marriage). Although Hannah seems to have made the most of the society around her, she still missed the intellectual stimulation of Liverpool.

I want....a little mental medicine and there is something in [Liverpool] that gives animation and speeds up a sort of circulation through my whole system. I shake off there what Dr Johnson calls 'the dust of life' (and I think there is more of that dust as well as all other dirt and dust in Manchester than anywhere else).¹⁰

Coming to terms with the married state, Hannah reflected on the way it debased women's nature and potential, which she maintained were frequently misunderstood and underrated. She wrote that the cultivation of the mind should be more strongly appreciated as the foundation for a companionable marriage. This may not have been very revolutionary but was a consistently held view, and one which appears to have earned Hannah the respect of her husband and a wide circle of family and friends. This unattributed quotation comes from Hannah's book of Maxims published anonymously in 1799. It may reflect the views of other forward thinking Dissenting women, and could be the opinion of Hannah Greg herself:¹¹

Nature has, perhaps, made the sexes mentally equal, but fortune and man, seem to have established an oppression which degrades woman from her natural situation; and it may be observed that in this, as in other instances, the crime creates the punishment,

¹⁰ Spencer, *Samuel Greg*, 12.

¹¹ Debates about the nature and role of women in the wake of the French Revolution are discussed in Gina Luria Walker, 'Women's voices', in Pamela Clemit ed., *Cambridge companion to British literature on the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), 265-294. I am grateful to Gina Luria Walker for drawing my attention to this context and likely connection.

inasmuch as a slave is less useful and valuable to man as a friend. The books that are intended for the instruction of the female sex, are commonly addressed to them as women, not as rational, accountable, individual human beings; their duties are made to refer to their connexion with men, and those are most insisted on which are most important to them, as those of wives, housekeepers, mothers, daughters, etc, whereas wisdom and virtue are the same to both sexes and will make a woman a good wife, a true friend, a tender mother, an active mistress etc as they will render a man a good merchant, statesman, or minister, a good husband, father or brother.¹²

It may however be significant that this mildly feminist plea was omitted from the later versions of Hannah's published work. This suggests that she was conscious of propriety and was herself no radical. The alternative to marriage – spinsterhood – was also a concern. Hannah wrote reflectively to William Rathbone in 1795:

[I have been] wishing for an extension of female pursuits that might render single life more eligible, convenient and honourable, and marriage less obligatory.¹³

Hannah had written in her diary that she hoped that the cultivation of her mind would help form her into a companion to a future husband. These qualities were respected if not universally shared by Samuel Greg. There are records of them going together on frequent damp visits round the farm at Styal and of jaunts to see his relatives in Ireland. Hannah drew up a list of books that Samuel liked having read to him: they are informative and entertaining, rather than intellectually stimulating.¹⁴ While it is believed that Samuel Greg had a great respect for his wife's educated mind, he seems to have had little time for philosophical or

¹² (Hannah Greg), *A Collection of maxims, observations &c* (Liverpool, 1799), 44.

¹³ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 4.

¹⁴ These include: Mrs Hunter's *Letitia*, and the *Grubthorpe family*, R C Dallas's *Percival, or nature vindicated*, Mary Charlton's *Phedora*, Henry Brooke's *The fool of quality*, Henry Pye's *The democrat*, Jane West's *A tale of the times*, Bowdler's *Essays*, Burnet's *Histories*, Holcroft's *Travels*, and Pratt's *Gleanings* (Quarry Bank Mill archives).

literary discussions. He was not fond of profound meditation: 'a serious reflection is quite a forbidden gratification to me',¹⁵ Hannah wrote in 1798.

Did Hannah's marriage to some extent rein in her capacity for acting on a wider stage? By nature she seems to have been self-effacing. Married to an ebullient husband who was less bookish, she was at times fearful of her husband's reaction to her views on politics and no doubt on other issues. Writing to her nephew in 1812 about the political disturbances in the factory districts, she may have felt a subservient role, in private let alone in public, was required on a range of issues:

I fear always to speak my sentiments about bad times because I am sure your Uncle Greg would be very angry.¹⁶

One of her Maxims refers to this constraint:

in many of the silent walks of life, especially female life, we are called to exercises of patience, of self denial, of self command.¹⁷

It may also be that she was one among many of her female contemporaries whose abilities were suppressed or frustrated because of their married status and whose arena of effective action was constrained by social pressures. Furthermore, there is some evidence that she had recurrent ill-health for the last twenty years of her life. But in her correspondence and her writings she was a consistent champion of the rights of women to be recognised for their independent minds.

After the birth of her daughter in 1790 Hannah appears to have regained poise and confidence. Having received advice from her eldest sister Elizabeth on the give and take of marriage, she gradually mastered that art as well as the skills of household management.¹⁸ Occasional solace was provided though visits to Styal where in the Bollin Valley a few miles south of Manchester Greg had built his first cotton spinning mill.

¹⁵ Spencer, *Samuel Greg*, 23.

¹⁶ Derbyshire Record Office, Pares Collection, Dss 336/3/214/6.

¹⁷ (Hannah Greg), *Maxims*, 89.

¹⁸ Quarry Bank Mill, Greg letter book, 1.479.

Childbearing was almost constant in the first dozen years of Hannah's marriage. By 1799 she had borne six children: and seven more by 1809,¹⁹ one of whom died young. She wrote:

In youth I was fond of reading books that required deep attention and of having my critical faculties exercised to their full speed – then came the dark ages – those middle years when household cares – bearing, feeding, clothing, teaching young children brought me down from the skies.²⁰

She had learnt how to manage her household and family, but regretted the lack of that company which provided the mental stimulation which she had become used to. Nevertheless, she was developing an ambition to shine as an educator.

The Educator

By her mid twenties, Hannah had absorbed a wide education and learnt – by painful experience – the accomplishment of domestic management. As the mother of an increasingly numerous family, she developed a desire to pass on to them the beliefs that she had been taught, the fruits of her experience and the convictions that she had arrived at. She became a dedicated teacher.

The development of the children's minds and characters was of the greatest importance and interest to Hannah. She directed the children's education when infants, and negotiated their later education with Samuel. The books she wrote were, she said, intended for their use. In a letter to her eldest son Thomas she refers to her educational aim as providing, 'habits of application, attention, the exercise of judgement, good sense and self-command.'²¹ And she refers to the,

development of character as a system of habits, nay a mere collection of actions – and every day even in the life of a humble manufacturer supplies opportunity of habitual practice of the

¹⁹ Elizabeth b.1790, Marianne b.1791, Thomas b.1793, Robert b.1795, Agnes b.1797, Sarah b.1798, Samuel b.1799 (d.1805), Hannah b.1800, John b.1801, Margaret b.1803, Samuel b.1804, Ellen b.1807, William b.1809.

²⁰ Spencer, *Samuel Greg*, 13.

²¹ Letter dated 15 April 1810, Quarry Bank Mill, Greg letter book, 1. 51.

sublime virtues of self-command, self-denial & fortitude & benevolence.²²

She saw education as a continuing vocation:

I have heard many of the cleverest men I have known (and I have been thrown among several) confess that what is called Education, in its usual periods had merely laid the foundations – taught the elements and left all the important and efficient knowledge to be gathered by themselves, when later years and experience had rendered them more fully sensible of the value of it – and so situated as to bring it into immediate application and use.²³

The children were also encouraged to explore their surroundings, to play in the open, use their eyes, draw and paint – ‘the eye is too much neglected in the business of education’²⁴ – but above all, to debate, analyse and think for themselves. Characteristically, Hannah was ambitious to give her daughters a wide education and the opportunity to develop their minds.

My advice and instruction (in relation to the education of daughters) will be in the notion of their being individual and rational and immortal beings.²⁵

In January 1805 William Rathbone recommended Hannah to send the boys to Lant Carpenter’s new school in Exeter where their curriculum seems to have been a wide one. Carpenter had made a strong impression among the Dissenting families whose children he had taught while in Liverpool.²⁶ Hannah replied:

I should think Mr Carpenter’s an excellent place the great improvements of a school education I hope to procure for a short

²² Ibid.

²³ To her son Thomas, 1 March 1814, Quarry Bank Mill archive, 2002-7092.

²⁴ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 10.

²⁵ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 11.

²⁶ After working under Corrie at his school in Birmingham, Carpenter had gone to Liverpool in 1802, where Dr Yates was ‘very desirous that he should undertake the tuition of young ladies who had completed their school education as he considered that at that period they frequently retrograded in mental cultivation’. He set up a class and taught grammar, composition, history, language and philosophy. See, *Memoir of the Reverend Lant Carpenter LLD, edited by his son* (Bristol & London, 1842).

time even for my girls, not having forgotten its advantage to myself.²⁷

After some schooling at home, Hannah's eldest daughter went to the Rev Lant Carpenter's in Exeter, while a younger daughter Margaret went to the Rev John Tayler's in Nottingham. Elizabeth meanwhile attended lectures on electricity in Manchester at the age of seventeen.

Among many of those in Hannah's social class at this time the education of girls was still an issue. Her own sons as well as daughters had the additional experience, encouraged by their mother's example, of helping the millworker families and the apprentice children in their factory community. In the same way that Hannah seems to have been taught from an early age to help the poor, her boys were expected to teach the mill's pauper apprentices reading, writing and arithmetic on Sunday afternoons, while the girls taught the apprentice girls sewing and housework. The apprentices of course had little time off work; and professional teachers had been engaged. But the Greg children seem to have taken an interest and some pride in this work.

The formal education given to the Gregs' male children was not very different from that provided by many other high ranking non-conformist business leaders at this period. On the contrary, the schools attended by the boys were becoming fertile ground for forming lasting relationships between leading families of Dissenters, relationships that would persist through the reforming decades to follow. Of the sons, Thomas was sent to Rev John Corrie's school in Birmingham,²⁸ before going to the Rev G Roger's academy in Oxford,²⁹ while Robert went to Rev John Tayler's in Nottingham – though Hannah may have preferred Rev William Shepherd's in Gateacre, Liverpool, where her sister Elizabeth's boys went. Their curriculum of the humanities and natural sciences did not

²⁷ Spencer, *Samuel Greg*, 27, 28.

²⁸ The curriculum there included 'The Evidences of Natural & Revealed Religion, Natural & Moral Philosophy, Metaphysics &c. These are subjects to which I think Mr Corrie is much attached & which he is extremely happy in illustrating.' Adam Hodgson to Robert Greg, 25 November 1808, Greg Letter book, 1.222.

²⁹ On 4 November 1804 William Rathbone wrote to Hannah that Mr Rogers of Oxford: 'takes 4 pupils with whom he passes 8 hrs every day.... He is a clergyman of the establishment, but not fully satisfied on all points relative to their creed, yet he preaches occasionally' (Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP ii.1.50).

satisfy Samuel Greg, who insisted that the boys also spent vacations developing commercial skills and getting to know business practices by working in a merchant's counting house. While Hannah saw Robert's year abroad as an enviable Grand Tour, Samuel regarded it as more essential that a merchant should speak some foreign languages fluently and that (following his own practical education as a merchant), he should travel specifically to learn about his markets. All the sons went to Edinburgh University except Thomas.

The more unusual component of the family's education was the home debating society established by Hannah around 1810. It was probably derived from John Aikin's and Anna Barbauld's idea of 'the Budget Box' in their *Evenings at home*.³⁰ A paper prepared by a member of the young family was randomly selected from the locked box, presented and then discussed. It encouraged both boys and girls in self expression, advocacy and the art of debate. For Hannah, it recalled the animated evenings that she had experienced as a girl in Liverpool with the members of the Octonian group. She called the family group the Duodecimo Society and was elected president by acclamation.

It is already apparent that the core of Hannah's life was her Dissenting faith. At the end of the eighteenth century Cross Street Chapel and Mosley Street Chapel congregations were the focus for the prominent Dissenting merchants near the Greg home in Manchester.³¹ Hannah and her family were members of the Mosley Street Chapel congregation, but no evidence has yet emerged of her playing a public or distinctive role there. She handed down to her children the essence of her beliefs, both in her writings and by recommending books. A study of these might reveal a development in her religious thinking, and it seems that she was increasingly convinced that devout and thinking people would daily reflect on and put into effect actions and communications that reflected

³⁰ John Aikin & Anna Barbauld, *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons* (London, 1792-6).

³¹ Mosley Street Chapel was founded by a group breaking away from Cross Street Chapel and its assertive minister Dr Barnes. Hannah attended the opening in May 1789, when she heard 'a most beautiful discourse' from the minister Rev W Hawkes (*Diary of Hannah Lightbody*, 17 May 1789).

their faith. She quotes the following credo from John Jebb's works edited by John Disney, in her second book, *The moralist*:

The religion which God requires of all is at once simple and it speaks an uniform language to all nations – it is intelligible to every sensible being – it is clear, and engraved on every heart in indelible characters – its decrees are secure from the revolutions of empires, the injuries of time, and the caprice of custom. Every virtuous man is its priest, errors and vices are its victims, the universe its altar, and God the only divinity it adores. Morality is the sum and substance of this religion: when we are rational we are pious; when we are useful, we are virtuous; and when we are benevolent we are righteous and just.³²

She wrote to William Rathbone IV of her personal faith:

I have sometimes risen from the Unitarian Writers with a convinced understanding, but on turning again to my Bible find there, what my early life better understood, that it is with the heart that we believe unto Salvation.³³

Hannah's three books of maxims are full of religious homilies and end with extracts from the Bible. She would continue to take a wide interest in contemporary developments in religious thought and organisation, writing to her daughter in 1818: 'consider it a most important feature and a new one that the three denominations are brought together on a question of principle.'³⁴

She remained wide ranging in her religious interests and this could inform her Sunday family readings, as revealed in this letter to her son

³² (Hannah Greg), *The moralist; or a collection of maxims, observations &c*, (Liverpool, 1800), 140; *The works theological, medical, political, and miscellaneous, of John Jebb, M.D. F.R.S. With memoirs of the life of the author; by John Disney ... In three volumes* (London, 1787), 2. 105. Based on information from English Short Title Catalogue. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale Group. I am grateful to Martin Fitzpatrick for identifying the source of this quotation.

³³ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 15.

³⁴ Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi 1.122. 'The three denominations' was a lay organization in which the Presbyterian, Baptist and Congregational denominations had co-operated since the early 1730s to protect and extend the civil liberties of Dissenters.

Thomas:

We have begun to read Paley's Works for our Sunday nights readings – I consider them as a Library and an Education of themselves (tho' some too lax principles in his 2 vols of philosophy must not be unregarded or quite admitted) – the first volume Natural Theology requires great attention ... but the exercise of that very intense attention is one of the very great advantages of reading such books.... His Evidences are entertaining. His Horae Pauline is considered by many judges the finest piece of reasoning extant, his occasional sermons masterpieces.³⁵

The spiritual and healing effects of nature, first noted in her diary, also remained an abiding theme. By 1798 Hannah had persuaded Samuel to provide a second home for the growing family adjacent to his Mill at Styal six miles south of Manchester. This romantic river valley landscape was a scene which Hannah found inspiring and refreshing:

Yet is a spring evening worth coming here for – it is truly a renovation of life, natural and moral – to change the long confinement among brick houses for such a scene - to deliver the oppressed frame and immured mind – to transport the heart itself.³⁶

The value of nature amounts almost to a creed throughout Hannah's life. It is expressed in one of Hannah's own Maxims as follows:

Cultivate a taste for the beauties of nature and rural scenery, as a means of happiness and of virtue; the stillness of the country, and the cheerful tranquillity of its scenes, have a sensible effect of calming the disorders of the passions, and inducing a temporary serenity of mind.³⁷

The children absorbed many of these convictions, Robert and Samuel junior became committed and leading Unitarians in Manchester and Bollington, and several showed a great interest in the natural environment.

³⁵ Hannah Greg to her son Thomas, 1 March 1814, Quarry Bank Mill archive 2002-7092.

³⁶ Hannah Greg to her daughter Elizabeth Rathbone, 17 July 1809. Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi.1.165.

³⁷ (Hannah Greg), *Maxims*, 122/113.

Writing was a further dimension of Hannah's role as an educator. William Rathbone and James Currie appreciated that after a long illness and amid child rearing in the early years of her marriage, Hannah needed some mental stimulation. She wrote to Rathbone that she was thinking of composing her thoughts in the form of a short book in 1797:

you kindly wish, I know, to engage me in something that may refresh and invigorate my mind, may prove some counterpoise to the busy worldly, harassing occupations that now overpower me.... my utmost hope has been to supply a want and my ambition would have been more than gratified to have seen it in the use of schools.³⁸

In a letter to James Currie three years later, Hannah admitted that she had a *penchant* for collecting sayings of these kinds and that the idea and perhaps also some of the aphorisms in her book of *Maxims* came from Ritson's *Spartan manual* published in 1785.³⁹ Currie encouraged her to get on with publishing it.

Her first book, *A collection of maxims, observations etc.*,⁴⁰ was published anonymously in 1799. Her aim, she says in her preface is to fill a gap in educational literature, for:

in the instruction of youth, she has found nothing more calculated to open the mind and form the judgement, than reading and examining maxims or opinions.

Though modest in intention and intended for a small circulation, it was followed by an expanded version, *The moralist; or a collection of maxims, observations, etc.* in 1800, and a further, even larger version in 1804 entitled *The monitor; or a collection of precepts, observations, etc.* The aphorisms culled from classical and contemporary writers are arranged under headings such as *Virtue, truth, fortitude, social affections, happiness*, etc. In the first edition most are given an attribution. Those which remain anonymous appear mainly to be the thoughts of the author

³⁸ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 4.

³⁹ Joseph Ritson, *The Spartan manual, being a genuine collection of the apothegms, maxims, and precepts of the philosophers, heroes, and other great and celebrated characters of antiquity ... For the improvement of youth, and the promoting of wisdom and virtue* (London, 1785).

⁴⁰ The British Library's copy has an inscription from the author to Dr John Yates.

herself and therein lies some of the interest of the publication. In the subsequent books, all quotations are anonymous, and it becomes harder to track those which may be original – a challenge which deserves to be addressed, as it seems likely that the later editions contain more original contributions from Hannah herself, which she intended to cloak in anonymity.⁴¹ It is worth noting that each volume is dedicated to Hannah's eldest daughter, and represents powerful evidence of her belief that a woman's mind could and should be trained and exercised for the good of her family, her soul and for society.

The success of the first volume may have encouraged the compiler to produce larger new editions, but it is doubtful whether together they contributed much to the evolving debate at the time about new ways to educate the young. The more original educational writers of this time (such as John Aikin, his sister Mrs Barbauld, Richard and Maria Edgeworth⁴² and even Thomas Percival of an older generation) were developing fresher ideas of how the mind of children may best be formed. Experience, imagination and activity were to be encouraged, rather than rote learning.

The archives at Quarry Bank Mill hold other manuscript fragments of Hannah's drafts for didactic writings that may have been intended for modest local circulation: these are *Catechisms of safety and health* (1800), *Sermons for the children at the Apprentice House* (1819), and a longer essay *The art of happy living* (1811) addressed to Thomas, her eldest son as he reached the age of twenty. A further series of notes in the form of

⁴¹ In *Maxims, observations &c* there are aphorisms from Reid, Lavater and Wollstonecraft as well as from the more obvious sources such as Chesterfield, Rochefoucauld and classical writers. In the British Library's copy of *the Monitor*, inscribed by the author to B H Bright, a discerning reader has noted on the flyleaf in pencil a list of sources, presumably those authors whose quotations he or she recognised. These include Priestley, Belsham, Edgeworth, Addison, Aikin and Moore (sic). But none of the actual quotations is given a specific ascription. In the Knutsford Library copy of *The monitor* (which was given by her aunt to Elizabeth Stevenson, who later became Mrs Gaskell, on her tenth birthday) a number of quotations are ascribed in pencil to Aikin. In the Liverpool University Library's copy there are several similar pencilled attributions to Dissenting and classical authors.

⁴² Hannah appears to have read the Edgeworths' *Practical education* (1798) which encouraged experimentation, observation and invention.

a written legacy advising her eldest daughter on managing the household and on looking after the family had been written before 1810 after another bout of serious illness. This manuscript is no longer traceable, but it confirms Hannah's instinct to set down in writing the things that she wanted her children to value.

Although Hannah had suggested that it was not seemly for women to be politically partisan, and had admitted that Samuel discouraged her from expressing political opinions, she did in fact develop and express strong views about politics and society. Over the dramatic thirty year period between the French Revolution and Peterloo, she frequently wrote on these topics to her friend Hannah Rathbone and to her eldest son and daughter. She seems to have been well informed about local issues and occasionally actively engaged. Her aspiration was that her children should be active as reformers, and indeed the work of Robert Hyde Greg as a pioneering and influential Manchester Liberal as well as the dedication of Elizabeth Rathbone to social and educational reform in Liverpool were partly the realisation of their mother's dreams and ambitions.

Dissenters in Hannah's family and circle were naturally conscious of the isolation of their position on the eve of the French Revolution, which many at first welcomed. As events in France unfolded, all Dissenters in Manchester were considered by loyalists as seditious Jacobins, and not long after settling in Manchester the Gregs felt ostracised. Violence threatened, as Mosley Street Chapel was attacked by a mob in 1792. Then in 1795 Samuel Greg was unpopular among loyalists for promoting peace. Writing to her radical Liverpool friend William Rathbone IV during this period, Hannah did not flinch from her political position. She exposed a fellow manufacturer as a spy and *agent provocateur* and saw through official wartime propaganda:

Government has indeed succeeded in (what I imagine their principle purpose) filling the public mind with consternation & a belief that a wide conspiracy to assist the French actually exists in the Country.⁴³

⁴³ Hannah Greg to Hannah Rathbone, April 1798, Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP ii.1.65

The frankness of her letters worried Currie and Rathbone, who begged her to temper her views when writing.

While all Manchester Dissenters were unpopular, the Irish community there was a target of particular hatred. The Gregs were unable or unwilling to conceal their sympathies for the Irish, particularly after Samuel's radical sister Jane came to live with them in King Street when life in Belfast became too dangerous for her following the Irish Rebellion in 1798. Hannah was saddened by the subsequent oppressive military rule of that country:

Surely in Ireland, in India and in Africa the English name must be for ever odious – expressive of Injustice, Arrogance and Cruelty.⁴⁴

Hannah feared for Samuel's safety in the town, and it is hardly surprising that a second home in the countryside appealed to them at this time.

Hannah was a Whig supporter. Electioneering for Roscoe in Liverpool was supported by the Rathbone family, their teenage children and Hannah's daughter Elizabeth and both her nephews. His victory in 1806 was a moment of triumph and hope which Hannah rejoiced in. But her remaining mission, for which she argued warmly, was to rid elections of bribery and corruption, so that a real democracy could flourish.⁴⁵ She did not live to see this revolution, but her sons Robert and William were vigorous and effective speakers in favour of the Reform Bill in 1831.

A consequence of the Napoleonic wars was lengthy unemployment and extreme poverty among thousands of Manchester millworkers. While neither national nor local government seemed incapable of addressing this major problem, the town was at risk of being controlled by either the mob or the militia. On several occasions food riots brought the town to the edge of civil disorder. Hannah feared the worst. Her sympathies were with the unemployed:

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hannah wrote to Elizabeth Rathbone in June 1818: 'putting out papers does seem to me important in every view – to address rational beings to give an unbribed, sober Vote – for the sake of Freedom of Election and Personal Independence – to seize the opportunity of introducing into the nation the purity of Political Principle' (Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi. 1.123).

Manchester looked very miserable – there are many beggars about ... and subscriptions are everywhere made for their relief, but money will not make potatoes or flour.⁴⁶

The problems were not resolved by the peace, and Hannah was shaken by the Peterloo massacre in August 1819, fearing that, as in Ireland, this would be followed by a dark age of oppression. Hannah laid much of the blame on the government:

The wants ought to have been relieved ... conciliated before they were ripened into despair and desperation – at least they should have been attended to and not disregarded and disbelieved. But the Rubicon is passed & I fear more readiness for insurrection than was imagined.⁴⁷

Writing to her daughter Elizabeth in this period, however, Hannah was able to encourage her in her support of Robert Owen and his vision for a massive effort at improved education, She was,

well aware that no private fortune whatever could uphold Mr O's excellent schemes and that his talents are more applicable to some public or National benefit.⁴⁸

She also encouraged Elizabeth to follow Mrs Fry's work in helping prisoners, providing Bible readings and a humane approach to their treatment and rehabilitation. Hannah's philanthropy in the local context of the Styal factory community, with its lessons and limitations, was not the only stage in which she was able to contribute to the welfare of the working population. She saw that the scale of educational, social and public health issues in towns now required new approaches. As Elizabeth was embarking on her remarkable career as a social and educational reformer in Liverpool, her mother's experience and advice were much sought and freely given.

⁴⁶ Hannah Greg to her son Thomas, 13 May 1812, Quarry Bank Mill archive, Edward/Gore deposit.

⁴⁷ Hannah Greg to Elizabeth Rathbone, 23 Aug 1819. Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi 1.129.

⁴⁸ Hannah Greg to Elizabeth Rathbone, 2 Oct 1813. Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi 1.109.

In Manchester Hannah's friend Thomas Percival had been a leading abolitionist since the 1780s. This was also a leading area for women's involvement in those campaigns.⁴⁹ There is no evidence that Hannah joined in any such activity, for example by signing petitions or by boycotting the consumption of West Indian sugar in her household – (as many middle class Manchester women did in the first decade of the nineteenth century).

Meanwhile Hannah's nephews Adam and Isaac Hodgson, the sons of the Africa trader Thomas Hodgson whom she helped bring up after their mother died young, both became committed and leading promoters of emancipation, working with James Cropper in Liverpool in the early 1820s. There is no record of Hannah joining in any of these activities, although she remained close to both nephews.

There may be a reason for this silence. Samuel's uncle had set up a sugar plantation in Dominica in the 1760s, which, together with several hundred slaves, was inherited (subject to a life interest) by Samuel and his elder brother Thomas in 1796. As Thomas was childless it all passed to Samuel's eldest son. After his death in 1739 it was inherited by the next son, Robert. Although it was profitable, it seems to have been considered as a peripheral investment. There appear to be no records of Hannah or her family commenting on the issues that must have arisen from having a slave plantation in the family

Perhaps this silence conceals a degree of inconsistency below the surface of the beliefs and ideas that Hannah expressed. She might have recalled Yates's January 1788 sermon in Kaye Street Chapel, Liverpool, in which he painted a picture of the inhumanity of the slave trade.⁵⁰ She was undoubtedly familiar with the arguments that in 1807 secured the

⁴⁹ See E M Hunt, 'The anti-slave trade agitation in Manchester', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, 79 (1977); David Turley, *The culture of British antislavery, 1780-1860* (London, 1991); and Brian Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool' in Richardson, Schwarz and Tibbles eds., *Liverpool and transatlantic slavery* (Liverpool, 2007).

⁵⁰ See *Diary of Hannah Lightbody* for Sunday 28 January 1788. In the week after it was heard Dr Currie wrote to Dr Clayton that the sermon was 'likely to make a real noise in the town, and to be so much misrepresented, as to render necessary it should be published'; Liverpool Record Office, 920/NIC/9/11/1. Yates's obituary confirms that transcripts were widely circulated (*Monthly Repository*, 22 (1827), 61. None have yet been traced.

abolition of the slave trade. Was she silent on the question of the emancipation of slaves, being aware of the cotton trade's reliance on slave labour for the shipments of ever increasing quantities of American grown raw cotton? Or was she inhibited by the family's impending inheritance of a sugar plantation? Either perception could have undermined any position she might have been inclined to take in the campaigns for abolition and then emancipation. And she may well have been influenced by her husband. As a young man in business in Manchester, Samuel Greg had slave plantation-owning friends such as the Hibberts, and there is no evidence that he had any liberal instincts on this topic.

Some of Hannah's letters and writings suggest that she may have looked to her children to overcome the constraints that inhibited her, and to achieve more than she herself was able to in the political and social spheres. Before Hannah died in 1828 she was able to see most of her twelve surviving children benefit from her constant care and advice, from their education at their carefully chosen schools, enjoying travel abroad, and the stimulating company of intellectuals at home and across the North West.

The enlightenment idea that a well trained mind and sense of ethics befit a merchant, might still have had some value and currency. But by the time of Hannah's death, both business and society had undergone massive changes. Textile manufacturing had become one of the largest businesses in the country with a new generation of mill owners competing ruthlessly for sales and profits. There was a massive influx of poor workers into overcrowded towns, but few manufacturers saw the social problems that occurred in the wake of their industry as matters for them to address. Exploitation, poverty and epidemics on an unprecedented scale were seen as new social problems in the wake of industrialisation. The late eighteenth-century Whigs' hopes for the franchise to be broadened and for local government to be transformed were still not realised by the time of Hannah's death.

So Hannah's children faced a challenging and changing world. While all inherited their mother's earnestness, none inherited their father's flair for business. Several had significant roles as social commentators, and

others aimed (with varying success) at doing good in society and in their communities.

Hannah's second son Robert (1795-1875) was the main heir of the family textile business. He was also one of the small but powerful group of 'Manchester men' who fought for free trade and who were to transform the structure of local politics, leaving a mark on the rest of Britain throughout the Victorian era. A man of many interests, he started out as an active liberal, a witness of the Peterloo massacre, a founder of the Mechanics Institutes and a supporter of working class education. One of Manchester's first Members of Parliament, he was also a supporter of the patriotic movements in Europe in the 1820s, of electoral reform, free trade and of the repeal of the Corn Laws. He pursued many outside interests with a scholarly attention, earning a reputation as a talented plantsman and a serious geologist. But he became increasingly intolerant, inflexible and illiberal as the tide of factory legislation was perceived as a threat to his values. His first duty was towards the businesses he inherited, but this was increasingly onerous as he had to take on several mills inherited by two of his brothers when they proved to be incapable of managing them. By the 1820's the textile trade had become highly competitive, with increasing social and labour issues and difficult trade cycles. The paternalism of the older rural spinning mills was becoming criticised as being exploitative, while there were growing public and political concerns about the working and living conditions associated with urban mills.⁵¹ So Robert, born and educated as a liberal and a supporter of progressive politics, had become a slave plantation owner, a cautious man of business and a defender of the apprentice system at Styal long after it had been abandoned at most other mills.

William Rathbone Greg (1809-1881), the youngest child, was never likely to be a successful man of business, but became a noted political commentator, committed to defending the middle classes whose distinctive station was, he felt, imperilled by pressures from below.⁵²

⁵¹ The Greg family business empire in the mid-nineteenth century is discussed in Mary Rose, *The Greys of Quarry Bank Mill*, (Cambridge, 1986), ch. 4.

⁵² W R Greg is remembered for his review of *Mary Barton* in *Edinburgh Review*, LXXXIX, 1849. Robert and William Greg's roles and their circles are discussed in John Seed, 'Unitarianism, political economy and the antinomies of liberal culture in Manchester 1830-1850', *Social History*, vol. 7, 1 (1982), 8-16.

Samuel Greg junior (1804-1876), in his paternalistic management of the workers at his mill in Bollington, saw his dreams turn to nightmares as the workforce went on strike, a blow from which he never recovered.

The eldest son, Thomas (1793-1839), the recipient of his mother's thoughts on *The art of happy living* led an unfulfilled life. After taking on his uncle's London insurance business, he failed to manage it well, and it went under with serious losses. There are faint hints that he may have had a dissolute nature. He died unmarried at the age of forty six.

For all Hannah's belief in the value of education for women, four of her daughters led mainly uneventful lives, but one at least was outstanding. Elizabeth (1790-1882), Hannah's eldest child probably fulfilled all her mother's hopes and expectations. She had married William Rathbone V in 1812 and, following the example of her mother and grandmother, devoted herself to education and to the poor and their welfare in Liverpool. She became a secretary of the Bible Society, and gave valuable support to the pioneering work of Kitty Wilkinson (her grandmother's protégée) during the cholera epidemic, helping her to establish a system of washing infected clothing and bedding. This led to the introduction of public baths and wash-houses. Elizabeth was a school manager and an important influence on the movement to reform standards in the Liverpool Corporation Schools. Hannah wrote to her in 1818: 'it does me good to hear of your prisons, Bible Society etc'.⁵³ An obituary for Elizabeth recalls: 'her life was one of constant, careful, conscientious helpfulness, on a scale that can have no record'. This echoes what was said of her mother.

The Matriarch: Hannah Greg's roles in the Styal factory community.

Samuel Greg had established his cotton spinning mill on the Bollin at Styal in 1784, a rural area with a thin local population. By 1789 he had built an apprentice house and employed a local physician, Dr. Peter Holland, to examine and attend the apprentices, as well as a superintendent and also some very part time teachers. By 1800, the mill was operating with about 200 workers, including about 100 children,

⁵³ Hannah Greg to Elizabeth Rathbone, 6 Dec 1818. Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi, 1.124.

some of them free labour but most of them pauper apprentices from Liverpool and further afield. This fast growing factory community provided the Gregs with opportunities.

Initially, Hannah only stayed at Styal in the spring and summer months. When there, however, she supported the medical supervision and welfare of the mill children, and took up practical roles in their nursing and education. She was also able and well qualified to take an interest in the welfare of the families of mill workers. James Currie had written to Hannah soon after her marriage about his recent visit to see David Dale's mill at New Lanark. He commended the attention with which the large workforce – including many apprentices – was cared for there.⁵⁴ She may well have agreed with the view of her contemporary Elizabeth Evans, the daughter of Jedediah Strutt and the wife of the spinning mill and factory community owner William Evans at Darley Abbey, that the mill owner and his family had a responsibility in this field. She wrote to her brother Joseph in 1793 recommending he read Godwin's *Enquiry concerning political justice* newly published, pointing out:

the grand desideratum in Politics is the diffusion of knowledge and morals among the poor. This the manufacturer has it in his power considerably to promote & is culpable in the neglect of it.⁵⁵

Hannah probably did not need much encouragement as she had been brought up to take a practical and active interest in the poor. Benevolence and philanthropy had long been important features of her life, and it was characteristic that these were mainly done with much personal modesty and inevitably most of her philanthropy remains unrecorded.⁵⁶ In the diary period we see Hannah delighting in being in a position to visit and support the poor in Liverpool with alms. She also got to know poor families in Manchester and Styal, and seems to have been able to offer them understanding and respect. When married and living in King Street,

⁵⁴ William Wallace Currie, *Memoir of the life, writings and correspondence of James Currie, MD, FRS, of Liverpool* (2 vols. London, 1831), vol.1, 160-162.

⁵⁵ 24 Oct. 1793, quoted in R S Fitton and A P Wadsworth, *The Strutts and the Arkwrights, 1758-1830* (Manchester, 1958), 166-7.

⁵⁶ This topic is discussed in G M Ditchfield, 'Unitarians and Philanthropy 1760-1810', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 21: 4 (1998), 254-268.

Manchester, she brought in a pauper woman found in distress in the street, who sadly died in her parlour. After her death her friend Rev J J Tayler recalled her 'constant stream of benevolence'.⁵⁷

Hannah also developed a vocation to promote health. At a period when epidemics decimated friends and families regardless of their station in life, Hannah took on the role of encouraging sensible steps to be taken to preserve and promote health. Her interest may have been first developed when helping to raise money for the Liverpool Infirmary, and in conversations with the gifted physicians she knew, such as James Currie and Thomas Percival (both of whom had lost children in infancy) as well as Dr. Holland. She saw the scope for educating poor families to look after themselves more effectually, and some of her thoughts were developed in a draft *Catechism on health and safety* of 1800. Her recommendations are not revolutionary: exercise, diet, moderation, cleanliness, country air, light and enjoyable activity are all commended. She suggests that mothers should include these provisions with their aspirations for the education of their children. It is likely that Hannah disseminated such practical advice among the workforce at Styal, and took an interest in Dr. Holland's prescriptions for ill apprentices. She may even have influenced Samuel who in 1802 bought a nearby farm, securing fresh provisions for his growing workforce. A distillation of her experience may be found in her final book, *Practical suggestions towards alleviating the sufferings of the sick*.⁵⁸

By 1800 the hot and dusty working environment of cotton mills were known to be unhealthy, and Thomas Percival had recommended steps such as ventilation to reduce the risk of the spread of epidemics. At Styal the workforce worked long hours, but not on night shifts and this seems to have helped to keep the workforce reasonably healthy. An outdoor

⁵⁷ For an example of the tributes sent to Elizabeth Rathbone after her mother's death in February 1828, see Rathbone Collection. Liverpool (RP, vi. 2, 31).

⁵⁸ (Hannah Greg), *Practical suggestions towards alleviating the sufferings of the sick* (London, 1828). John Morley refers to its second part as 'a discreet and homely little manual of nursing, distinguished from the common run of such books by its delicate consideration and wise counsel for the peculiar mental susceptibilities of the invalid' (*Critical miscellanies*, vol. iii, [London, 1886], 217). This publication ran to several editions after the author's death. The British Library copy is dated 1828.

playground was provided at the apprentice house.

Hannah had written in *The monitor* in 1804:

To see the poor adequately rewarded, to prevent exertion from exceeding strength or extinguishing spirit, to suppress the deficiencies occasioned by sickness, to procure for the mothers of families the ease necessary for rearing healthy children – to afford hours of pleasure and relaxation to the young, and years of cheerful inactivity to the old. It is, in short, to make man contented with his lot, that the rich should use their fortune and should consider themselves as stewards, appointed by their Creator, for the management of terrestrial affairs, in behalf of the rest of mankind'.⁵⁹

This approach on the one hand recognises that there is innate goodness and potential among the poor; but on the other hand, it is not the role of the fortunate few to help lift the less fortunate out of their station. It is, rather, to help 'make man contented with his lot'.

Finally, as we have seen, Hannah's matriarchal role extended to a close involvement with her children in the education of the apprentice children. It may be relevant in this context that she entitled her 1804 book *The monitor*; as that can signify the role of an older child enlisted to supervise and train younger children.

Hannah and her family probably contributed over many years to the care of the apprentices and other mill workers at Styal. It was a sphere in which a married woman could play a useful role, and one that matched many of Hannah's beliefs, aspirations and abilities. The assertion has to be qualified as the detailed evidence of Hannah's contribution remains sparse. As an example, she wrote in 1819 in her draft *Sermons for the children at the Apprentice House*, 'I... bring you food and medicine'. She and Samuel made a fuss of the leavers and best learners annually at Christmas (rather like the prize days at her school in London), a happy occasion recorded in a letter from the Rathbones.⁶⁰ And a variety of other sources suggest that she was in frequent communication with staff such

⁵⁹ (Hannah Greg), *The monitor*, 64-5. The chapter entitled 'Social Affections' contains some twenty aphorisms concerning the practice of charity and benevolence.

⁶⁰ To Hannah Greg from William and Hannah Rathbone, 12 April 1808, Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP ii. 1.

as the manager of the Apprentice House and with successive generations of mill workers' families, and listened to their concerns.

The paternalistic mill owner's motivation in caring for his workforce, we must remind ourselves, was largely self-interest. Labour costs were low. But the young workers had to have strength and stamina, and the interest of Hannah and her family in the health of the apprentices no doubt supported the work of Dr. Holland in sustaining the fitness of the young workforce. It is worth recalling that work in these early mills was arduous and if not dangerous, then probably injurious to health.⁶¹ Before legislation was introduced making children's education mandatory, one of the purposes of the school lessons was to instil a sense of discipline. As a means to self improvement, this was mainly limited to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

At Styal, mortality rates were comparatively low and retention rates were high with a large proportion of former apprentices staying on as adult workers at the Mill. Some developed further skills and one indeed eventually became the Mill Manager.⁶²

It would not be right to claim that the village institutions developed at Styal were in any way pioneering. Many other rural factory communities were established well before Styal. In the 1780s Arkwright had been the initiator of the rural cotton factory community with houses, inns, a truck shop, chapels, and a church. Arkwright, an Anglican, had organised paternalistic prize giving, dances, and occasional feasts for his workers. At Belper and Milford Strutt built scores of house between 1793 and 1794, all with gardens (and some workers rented allotments as well). Workers were supplied with coal, milk, meat and vegetables. The women

⁶¹ Hannah's friend Dr. Percival was the first to assess the risks and suggest remedies. See *Resolutions for the consideration of the Manchester Board of Health*, by Dr. Percival, 25 Jan. 1796, quoted in B L Hutchins and A Harrison, *A history of factory legislation*, (London, 1911). He also supported the *Health and morals of apprentices Act* of 1802, which included the requirement that apprentices be instructed 'in some part of every working day in the usual hours of work, in reading, writing and arithmetic ... by some discreet and proper person ... in some room set aside for the purpose.' This was the earliest legislation to require the provision of education.

⁶² Robert Greg reported seventeen deaths in a 22 year period. See Keith Robinson, *What became of the Quarry Bank Mill apprentices?* (Styal, 1996), 7-8.

of the Dissenting Strutt family at Belper and Milford, built a Dissenting chapel for the workers, and a Sunday school in 1784. By 1812 William Strutt started a Lancasterian school. Hannah's friend Richard Reynolds was renowned for his philanthropy at Coalbrookdale, where he had laid out rural walks for his iron workers; and at New Lanark, as Dr Currie told Hannah, David Dale provided for apprentices on a large scale, and later Robert Owen had given his workforce there unprecedented facilities, care and above all, education.

So the Greg factory community at Styal followed a pattern already established. Initially, many of the adult workers lived in the immediate area of Styal village, some of them in houses and cottages built or rented by the mill owner. Between 1818 and 1820 at the time of a major extension of the mill and its production capacity, Greg built dozens of new cottages for his adult workers and the infrastructure and facilities of a factory community – shop, school, chapel were then developed more briskly. It was during this late phase of community development that Hannah seems to have contributed to the physical development of the Styal factory community.

In 1823 'Mr G having lately referred anything in the village to be done or undone to 'the ladies',⁶³ a school and a Dissenting chapel were built as part of this new village. The Ladies can be assumed to have been Hannah and her unmarried daughter Marianne. While the apprentices were required to go to the local Anglican Church twice on Sundays, the adult mill workers – mainly Independents and Congregationalists – had been pressing for a chapel of their own. Building one for them, the Gregs were able to appoint the Minister.

What was Hannah's role in all this? She paid out of her own pocket for the building and equipping of the infant school.⁶⁴ Writing later, she also claimed some credit for the development of a mutual improvement society:

I pleaded for an institution for securing and paying interest for what could be saved from wages, suggested to me by one of our own workers at the Mill.⁶⁵

She and her daughter Marianne were probably given discretion by

⁶³ Hannah Greg to Mrs Rathbone, 22 Aug. 1822, Rathbone Collection, Liverpool

⁶⁴ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 6-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Samuel Greg to encourage and provide what would later be called welfare for the workforce. She may well have supported or influenced the development of a number of institutions in the growing factory community, such as a sick club (1817), a women's club (1816) and a female society which started in 1827, but no specific evidence of her involvement has yet been found.

So the village organisations at Styal, while good of their kind, were not pioneering. They may have been among the more effective and better managed. Although there is no evidence that Hannah designed or directed the community or its facilities, her supporting and guiding role in developing them probably was important, even if not pivotal. By the time of her death in 1828 critics like Cobbett were comparing the lives of mill apprentices to those of slaves in sugar and cotton plantations, and the state was intervening ever more to control the working hours and education of young factory workers. So the pioneering paternalist stage of the family patriarch or matriarch's role in factory communities was drawing to an end.

The impresario at home

In the later eighteenth century successful men of business based in cities such as Liverpool and Manchester built or bought fine houses in the country where they could relax, entertain and demonstrate their refinement of taste. Many of the Gregs' Manchester friends including Thomas Percival had achieved this. Were the Gregs aiming at a comparable country seat when they decided to enlarge the small and unpretentious Quarry Bank House in the valley of the river Bollin next to the mill at Styal? It was extended in the first and second decades of the nineteenth century, and a fine dramatic garden was developed, but it was never very large nor very impressive. Its distinction was probably in the 'elevated tone' of discourse there.

This was where Hannah seems to have put much thought and energy: her aspiration (in her case learnt the hard way) was first, to be good at the business of managing the household. Her advice to her daughter reflects what she herself had learnt as a young wife:

Your work must be to turn the work of everyone else to

advantage, and to make it [your home] a sum of comfort, accommodation, welfare and happiness in the use of all.⁶⁶

Hannah believed that one of her greatest achievements was to preside over a home where family and guests appreciated the finely tuned hospitality of a well run household. It was a stage, as she saw it, with her role as that of a 'Manager of a Theatre' - a subtle and self-effacing impresario-like role with the aim of bringing out the best in others.

Secondly, she saw her home as a place that brought together friends and family with people of distinction. She had made her home a place that was informal yet civilised, where books and serious conversation had a place, where intelligent people could come to relax, less a salon for the liberal intelligentsia, but more an elegant and tasteful place which the whole family might find stimulating and rewarding. Hannah worked hard to achieve this:

One of the greatest pleasures of my life has been bringing congenial minds within the sphere of attraction.⁶⁷

Frequent guests included local intellectuals such as Dr. Playfair, Dr. Roget, and philanthropists such as Richard Reynolds, so that it was normal for science, art and literature to be discussed at any time. Friends commented on the lively mixture of young and old, Britons and foreigners, and the wide range of religious convictions that could be encountered there. Books and magazines were not kept in a library (a man's sphere) but in the saloon. Professor William Smyth, Hannah's Liverpool friend and a frequent visitor left a charming poem⁶⁸ about visiting Quarry Bank which refers to:

Books – Drawings – over the Table strewed
And guests of every sect and Nation.

In 1808 Mrs Fletcher wrote:

We stayed a week with them, and admired the cultivation of mind and refinement of manners which Mrs Greg preserved in the midst of a money-making and some what unpolished community

⁶⁶ Spencer, *Hannah Greg*, 8.

⁶⁷ To her nephew John Pares Junior, 1 Sep. 1811, Pares Collection, Derby Record Office, 2/214/3.

⁶⁸ MS in Quarry Bank Mill archive.

of merchants and manufacturers.⁶⁹

It should be added that it was part of Hannah's aim to make home a stimulating place for her husband and indeed Samuel Greg probably played a vital role as he was by nature gregarious and convivial. As Mrs Fletcher put it, 'Mr Greg, too, was most gentlemanly and hospitable'.

After her death Hannah's friends drew attention not only to the taste and gentility of the home life that she had created but also to the encouragement of enquiry and intelligent conversation there. J J Tayler wrote of his 'vivid impression of hours of pleasing & instructive conversation'.⁷⁰ This serious and elevated domestic tone, which recalls the enlightenment experience of Hannah's youth in Liverpool, was perhaps unusual at this time, but not unique. There were other Unitarian families in the provinces where serious conversation and good taste were combined.⁷¹ Hannah's friend Hannah Rathbone, when a widow and still living at Greenbank in Toxteth Park, presided over a similarly hospitable and intelligent household, as did the later Strutts in Derbyshire and the Stanley family, liberal neighbours of the Gregs at Alderley. But it was a rare phenomenon in the factory districts where the increasing majority of employers were a new generation of more ruthless and less educated capitalists, competing for market share and profits.

* * * * *

In Hannah's lifetime the industrial wealth of the country had multiplied, but enlightened reforms had not spread so far as to improve the housing, health or education of the working masses in the manufacturing towns. Nor had reforming aspirations made much progress in changing the franchise either locally and nationally. The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, a thorn in the side of many Dissenters, was only passed six months after Hannah died.

So while the issues that had concerned Hannah – education, health and welfare for the poor – remained, the causes had multiplied and remedies remained elusive. As Hannah realised, the contributions of individuals in

⁶⁹ See footnote 1.

⁷⁰ Rathbone Collection, Liverpool, RP vi 2.31.

⁷¹ Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England*, 89-90.

their communities who addressed such issues were unlikely to have a widespread impact: there was increasing clamour for the state to intervene with public funding, controls and solutions.

Hannah did not break out of the conventional spheres in which women of her generation could contribute to society, but she brought up her family with the aim that they might play a wider public role. She was a gifted impresario making her home a stage for civilised gatherings. Some of her gifts and aspirations are revealed in her youthful diary, her educational and moral convictions in her three books of maxims, and her caring nature in her last book on alleviating the sufferings of the sick. But her continued interest in the welfare and education of the factory community at Styal is probably the legacy that she should be most remembered for. It may have been a small stage on which to act, but her commitment there endured for more than thirty-five years, contributing a humane, considerate and personal testament which reflected her beliefs and her gifts.

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THE SPIRITUAL VINDICATIONS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Fiore Sireci

In the nearly 220 years since the publication of *A vindication of the rights of woman*, investigations of Mary Wollstonecraft's religion, on both the level of biography and as a feature of her published work, have gone in and out of style.¹ A complex evolution of religious thought can be traced over the course of the works she intended for publication, in the letters, and in the biography. Coming to London in her mid twenties, Wollstonecraft was already a worshipper who had meditated profoundly on her beliefs. Wollstonecraft learned much from the friendship and teachings of prominent Dissenters, many of whom she met at Newington Green in 1783; she was also a great admirer of Catharine Macaulay, whose own Anglicanism took on heterodox attributes as her political writing grew more radical. According to William Godwin, Wollstonecraft's religion was a product of personal judgment, whether she was still attending Anglican services, making theodicy and rational religion compatible with a programme of radical social reform, or roaming the Scandinavian countryside in search of a Deity whose hand might still be felt in human affairs.² In short, Wollstonecraft was not only conversant with contemporary varieties of religious thought, but lived

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of woman* [1792], in *The vindications: the rights of men, the rights of woman*, eds. D L Macdonald and K Scherf (Peterborough, ONT, 1997), 101-2. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Rights of woman* in the body of the essay, and *VRW* in the notes.

² For Godwin's comments on Wollstonecraft's personal beliefs and practices, see William Godwin, *Memoirs of the author of a vindication of the rights of woman* [1798], eds. P Clemit and G L Walker (Peterborough, ONT, 2001), 56-7, et passim. Eileen Hunt-Botting has developed the tripartite thesis of Wollstonecraft's religious thought and its relevance to the *œuvre*. See Eileen Hunt, 'The family as cave, platoon, and prison: the three stages of Wollstonecraft's philosophy of the family', *The Review of Politics*, 64, no. 1 (2002), 81-119; and *Family feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the transformation of the family* (Albany, 2006). Essential studies of the problem of theodicy in *Rights of woman* are Daniel Robinson, 'Theodicy versus feminist strategy in Mary Wollstonecraft's fiction', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 9, no. 2 (1997), 183-202; and Gordon Spence, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's theodicy and the theory of progress', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 14 (1995), 105-127.

them thoroughly. However, it is important to distinguish the woman from the works in order to better understand the centrality of religion in the formation of her most central political and social demands.

In the late nineteenth century, Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough vindicated Mary Wollstonecraft as a political writer and as a Christian. The former could not be accomplished without addressing the latter, and Clough set about doing battle with the ‘reproach of irreligiousness’ that had ‘clung to the memory of Mary Wollstonecraft until of late years....’³ As has so often been the case, the road to a more profound understanding of the woman led through William Godwin’s *Memoirs of the author of a vindication of the rights of woman*. Clough takes particular issue with the following description of the Wollstonecraft on her death bed: ‘During her whole illness, not one word of a religious cast fell from her lips.’⁴ Clough responds by enumerating the many expressions of Wollstonecraft’s faith in her books and letters. With the air cleared of Godwin’s alleged obfuscation, Clough proceeds to draw connections between Wollstonecraft’s *œuvre* and writings by Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith, and Descartes. In particular, Clough demonstrates how the moral philosophy and theology of Richard Price played an important role in the formation of the arguments in *Rights of woman*.⁵ In contrast to those who could not, or would not, look past Wollstonecraft’s reputation, Clough’s approach is disciplined. After conceding the impropriety of Wollstonecraft’s adventure with Imlay, her American lover, and her premarital sexual activity with Godwin, Clough states that ‘it behoves the student of history to enquire, whether there was aught in her message to humanity that was true, good, and right.’⁶ With this statement, apart from its own commitments to religion and liberal rationalism, a serious intellectual reading of Wollstonecraft was initiated.

More than a century after Clough’s pioneering study, the role of religious thought in Wollstonecraft’s work is returning to the forefront of scholarly attention, due in no small measure to the efforts of Barbara Taylor. Taylor

³ Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, *A study of Mary Wollstonecraft and the rights of woman* (London, 1898), 62.

⁴ Quoted. in Rauschenbusch-Clough, *A study*, 62.

⁵ Rauschenberg-Clough, *A study*, 53, 126 et passim.

⁶ Rauschenberg-Clough, *A study*, 23.

cites a ‘widespread neglect of her religious beliefs’, and argues that this stems from a perspective which displaces ‘a religiously inspired utopian radicalism by a secular, class-partisan reformism as alien to Wollstonecraft’s political project as her dream of a divinely promised age of universal happiness is to our own.’⁷ Taylor’s historicist insight is invaluable, but her characterization of extant scholarship is generalized. In the extensive body of Wollstonecraft scholarship there are ample opportunities to trace the specificity and the *synthesis* of the secular and the religious foundations of her arguments.⁸ *Rights of woman* again proves its centrality for it is here that this synthesis is made most explicit by Wollstonecraft. The equality of souls, the distrust of spiritual and thus earthly mediators, and most importantly, the imperative of earthly trial are not static principles to be invoked, but concepts available for revision and reapplication. The crucial political implications of these concepts and others, such as theodicy, free will, and forms of worship, were evidenced by the strenuous debates in the public forums which Dissenting publishers like Joseph Johnson had done so much to reinvigorate.⁹ The present essay takes inspiration from Clough and examines in greater specificity how Wollstonecraft applies particular religious principles to the social and political agenda of *A vindication of the rights of woman*.

Earthly trial and individual development

A primary aim of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of woman* is to have women participate more fully in public life, and to attain a more equitable

⁷ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination* (Cambridge, 2003), 12.

⁸ For an indispensable examination of the relationship between the moral philosophy of Richard Price and Wollstonecraft’s political thinking, see Saba Bahar, ‘Richard Price and the moral foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft’s feminism’, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 18 (1999). For studies of the influence of Dissenting and Unitarian thought upon feminists of the eighteenth century and beyond, see Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical Unitarians and the emergence of the women’s rights movement, 1831-1851* (New York, 1995); and Ruth Watts, *Gender, power, and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (New York, 1998).

⁹ Jon Klancher notes that at the start of the 1790s, the four leading literary journals were published by Dissenters. See ‘Godwin and the republican romance: genre, politics, and contingency in cultural history’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 56, no. 2 (1995), 145.

standing in domestic life. Wollstonecraft makes her case in various ways, but ultimately her argument rests upon the theology of earthly trial, that is, justification by works rather than by faith alone. Wollstonecraft builds this argument gradually, and in explicit contrast with more secularized models. At first, in the Dedication addressed to the French jurist Talleyrand, Wollstonecraft appeals to an Enlightenment ideal, that of the progressive spread of knowledge.

In France, there is undoubtedly a more general diffusion of knowledge than in any part of the European world, and I attribute it, in a great measure, to the social intercourse which has long subsisted between the sexes.¹⁰

All of society benefits when women participate in public activities alongside men, particularly when they take part in intellectual discussion. Taken alone, this appears as a simple utilitarian argument, but not a commonplace one. For most of the *philosophes*, the republic of letters is itself responsible for the propagation of knowledge, but the influence of women in and upon that republic is not explicitly advocated, to say nothing of the outright exclusion from the public sphere proposed by Rousseau.¹¹ In contrast, Wollstonecraft's fleeting comment on the public sphere in France gives more credit to the influence of active intellectual women than one would find in many Enlightenment arguments for the utility of public discourse.¹² Further along in the Dedication, Wollstonecraft presents another inversion of the gendered constructions of the public, one that partakes of a more identifiably moralist discourse:

If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of

¹⁰ VRW, 101-2.

¹¹ Apart from the harangues against women who venture out of the domestic sphere, found in Book 5 of *Émile*, the most concise and developed expression of Rousseau's gendered vision of the public sphere is found in the *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the theatre* [1758], trans. A Bloom (New York, 1960).

¹² In the implicit criticism of her own country Wollstonecraft does not give weight to the influence of bluestocking salon culture. The 'social intercourse' she envisions would occur in a shared public forum rather than in the segregated settings of the salons.

mankind; but the education and situation of women at present shuts her out from such investigations.¹³

The civic education of women would make them more attentive to their duties as mothers and wives, an invocation of the ideal of ‘republican motherhood’. This ideology is a potential obstacle to Wollstonecraft’s doctrine of expanded public activity for women because in traditional republican social thought women’s domestic duties are exclusive of any other civic roles. However, Wollstonecraft is not complicit with a strictly gendered division between private and public activity, such as found in Rousseau’s writings.¹⁴ To be sure, she states that women have ‘peculiar duties’, particularly as mothers, which she reiterates throughout the text.¹⁵ In this sense Wollstonecraft approves of the gender complementarity which is a prominent feature of social thinking across the political spectrum. The subversive feature of Wollstonecraft’s version of republican motherhood is that *in order* for women to fulfil their domestic duties, they must be financially and legally independent: ‘[S]peaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother.’¹⁶ Thus, rather than excluding women from a broad range of public activities, Wollstonecraft makes the ‘peculiar duties’ of women compatible with the right to participate in public life.

The benefits that flow from women’s participation in public discourse may very well lead to the greater ‘diffusion of knowledge’ such as that which exists in France. However, Wollstonecraft’s defence of women’s civic participation is not argued on the basis of utility or empiricism, but

¹³ VRW, 102.

¹⁴ A number of studies have taken the position that Wollstonecraft was complicit with ideologies, such as republicanism, that could not structurally be made to serve feminist interests. See, for instance, Timothy J Reiss, ‘Wollstonecraft, women, and reason’, *Gender and theory: dialogues on feminist criticism*, ed. Linda Kauffman (Oxford, 1989); and Joan B Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (London, 1988).

¹⁵ VRW, 106, 110, 180, 307.

¹⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of woman*, 283. Virginia Sapiro suggests that the extension of a republican civic identity to women would have been utterly disruptive to a social system grounded upon gender complementarity. See Sapiro, *A vindication of political virtue: the political theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago, 1992), 294.

upon the mandate that each individual acquire 'virtues'. In the early portion of *Rights of woman*, Wollstonecraft invokes principles of self-realization which are apparently indisputable and universal.

In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole, in Reason. What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue, we spontaneously reply. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes, whispers Experience.¹⁷

Virginia Sapiro has characterized the opening of Chapter 1 of *Rights of woman*, from which these lines are taken, as a 'catechism of Enlightenment', an apt phrase which captures Wollstonecraft's religious inflection of what had become a secularized model of individual development.¹⁸ It will be made absolutely clear in the course of *Rights of woman* that the Platonic model of the sublimation of the passions is unacceptable in its purely secular form:

The appetites would answer every earthly purpose, and produce more moderate and permanent happiness. But the powers of the soul that are of little use here, and, probably, disturb our animal enjoyments, even while conscious dignity makes us glory in possessing them, prove that *life is merely an education, a state of infancy*, to which the only hopes worth cherishing should not be sacrificed.¹⁹

The context of this passage is a critique of conduct books on *male* education, such as that of Lord Chesterfield and other unnamed 'moralists' who recommend the pragmatic husbanding of the appetites and passions. Wollstonecraft concedes that this strategy is certainly effective in the development of faculties necessary for success in the world. However, if life is a period of preparation for a future state, then the distillation of virtue from appetites and passions (or from vices, as in the Mandevillian scheme), as mentioned at the start of Chapter One, is a

¹⁷ VRW, 117.

¹⁸ Virginia Sapiro, *A vindication*, 27. Robinson also discusses Wollstonecraft's reclamation of secularized theodicy from Pope and others, 'Theodicy', 188, 193.

¹⁹ VRW, 236.

spiritual mandate, and one that rests upon the principle of earthly trial, or 'probation'.

The theological principle of earthly trial, and its setting amongst a range of religious positions, is thematic to Wollstonecraft's writing from the start. In *Mary, a fiction* (1788), the young Mary travels to Portugal to the sickbed of a dear friend, just as Mary Wollstonecraft had gone to Lisbon to attend the sickbed of Fanny Blood. Perhaps it is the close exposure to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church that prompts the many meditations on religion in the text.

Mary thought of both the subjects, the Romish tenets, and the deistical doubts; and though not a sceptic, thought it right to examine the evidence on which her faith was built. She read Butler's Analogy, and some other authors: and these researches made her a christian from conviction, and she learned charity, particularly with respect to sectaries; saw that apparently good and solid arguments might take their rise from different points of view; and she rejoiced to find that those she should not concur with had some reason on their side."²⁰

This frequently quoted passage is essentially an apologia for a course of religious questioning. While Wollstonecraft is still nominally a member of the established church at this point, the invocation of Dissenting practices of rational and open discussion is apparent in the comparative approach here.²¹ David L Wykes has shown that the principle of reasoned private judgment, and thus the open discussion of heterodox views, was encouraged in the Dissenting academies from their earliest establishment in the seventeenth century.²²

Mary was published five years after Wollstonecraft's first close interactions with Richard Price and the Dissenting community at Newington Green, where she founded a school in 1783.²³ The mention

²⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary: a fiction*, in *The works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. J Todd and M Butler (7 vols., London, 1989), vol. 1, 29.

²¹ See Hunt, 'The family', 81-121, 89.

²² David Wykes, 'The contribution of the Dissenting academy to the emergence of Rational Dissent', *Enlightenment and religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1996), 99-140.

²³ Clough, *Study*, 5.

of Joseph Butler's *Analogy of religion* in Wollstonecraft's first novel as it affirms that by the time of the publication of *Mary, a fiction* Wollstonecraft had been meditating on theology in this period. The centrality of Butler's work for Price and the Dissenting community cannot be overemphasized. Butler was a nonconformist who eventually took Anglican orders, and had, like Price's grandfather Rees Price, studied with the celebrated Welsh teacher and nonconformist minister, Samuel Jones.²⁴ The *Analogy*, first published in 1736, had been republished in 1788, and was greatly admired by Richard Price. D O Thomas quotes a letter from later in Price's life, in 1785, a time when Wollstonecraft was still resident at Newington Green. Price writes,

I reckon it happy for me that this book was one of the first that fell into my hands. It taught me the proper mode of reasoning on moral and religious subjects, and particularly the importance of paying a due regard to the imperfections of human knowledge.²⁵

Price makes it clear that Butler's manner of reasoning was highly instructive to him as a young man, suggesting that he would likely have recommended Butler to Wollstonecraft as a guide to her own thinking.

Butler's mode of argumentation is to make analogies between observable phenomena in nature and certain tenets of revealed religion. The Augustinian principle of earthly probation is prominently stated at the start, and in analogical form:

Now the beginning of life, considered as an education for mature age in the present world, appears plainly at first sight analogous to this *our trial* for a future one, the former being in our temporal capacity what the latter is on our religious capacity.²⁶

This is directly at odds with the Calvinist element in orthodox Anglican doctrine, embodied in Article Ten of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, which reads in part, 'The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such,

²⁴ D O Thomas, *The honest mind: the thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), 1.

²⁵ Thomas, *The honest mind*, 9.

²⁶ Joseph Butler, *The analogy of religion natural and revealed, to the constitution and course of nature ... new edition* (London, 1788), 75.

that he cannot turn or prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God.' Thus Butler's emphasis on 'our trial' favours at least partial justification through works rather than justification through faith alone.

Article Ten is quoted in full in Price's *Sermons* as part of his argument against predestination.²⁷ The *Sermons* begin with a proposal for a broad reconciliation amongst Christians. This is thematic to the Latitudinarian tradition as well. In defining 'latitudinarian', John Gascoigne states that 'the term was meant to suggest theological breadth rather than depth and an emphasis on the few essentials that could unite English Protestants rather than the inessentials that divided them.'²⁸ The early pages of the *Sermons* breathe this generous spirit until, however, we come to the issue of predestination, when the language becomes heated: 'It seems [...] a system inconsistent with reason, injurious to the character of the ever-blessed Deity, and in the highest degree comfortless and discouraging.'²⁹

The endorsement of practical worldly action is even more clearly exemplified in the following passage from Price's *Evidence for a future period of improvement in the state of mankind* (1787), and again the date of this work coincides with Wollstonecraft's most frequent interaction with the Dissenting community:

It is the blessings of God on the disquisitions of reasons and the labour of virtue, united to the invisible directions of his Providence, that must bring on the period I have in view. Inactivity and sleep are fatal to improvement. It is only (as the prophet Daniel Speaks) by running to and fro, that is, by diligent inquiry, by free discussion, and by the collision of different sentiments, that knowledge can be increased and the dignity of our species promoted.³⁰

²⁷ Richard Price, *Sermons on the Christian doctrines as received by the different denominations of Christians* (London, 1787), 37-8.

²⁸ John Gascoigne, 'Anglican latitudinarianism, Rational Dissent and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century', *Enlightenment and religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (1996), 224.

²⁹ Price, *Sermons*, 49-50.

³⁰ Richard Price, *The evidence for a future state of improvement in the state of mankind* (London, 1787), 28. Isaac Kramnick quotes this passage in order to support his characterization of the Dissenters as pioneers of bourgeois discourse and apologists for commercial activity. See 'Religion and radicalism: English political theory in the age of revolution', *Political Theory* 5, no. 4 (Nov., 1977), 505-534, 523.

The Enlightenment ideal of the progress of knowledge is made compatible with a theodicy. Providence works to inexorably lead human society to greater knowledge and justice. These comments are prefaced by the example of Henry VIII, whose passions, as blameable as they may have been in themselves, led to the English Reformation.

The same essential formula is employed by Wollstonecraft, that is, a model of sublimated vice within a theodical framework, a model which stands in sharp contrast with the secularized versions of Pope or Mandeville.

Why should He lead us from love of ourselves to the sublime emotions which the discovery of His wisdom and goodness excites, if these feelings were not set in motion to improve our nature, of which they make a part, and render us capable of enjoying a more godlike portion of happiness? Firmly persuaded that no evil exists in the world that God did not design to take place, I build my belief on the perfection of God.³¹

As in Priestley and Price, Wollstonecraft finds no difficulty in asserting that a divine ‘design’ is fully compatible with, and even necessitates, vigorous worldly activity. The next step is to employ this basic concept to the reform of women’s social position. If the primary means by which knowledge is acquired is direct interaction in a contentious sphere of activity, then to prevent women from engaging in such activities is to deny them the opportunity for intellectual improvement, but a form of intellectual improvement that is divinely sanctioned. This forcing argument has been noted by Barbara Taylor: ‘[W]omen’s emancipation is not only a *desideratum* for this life, but the chief prerequisite for women’s eternal salvation.’³²

Worldly engagement was an ideal that Wollstonecraft, an active literary commentator, must have known to be ubiquitous in contemporary literature that discussed the education of young men.³³ Benjamin Franklin’s *Philosophical and miscellaneous papers* (1787) employs

³¹ VRW, 120-1.

³² Taylor, ‘For the love of God’, *Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, 110.

³³ By the time Wollstonecraft wrote *Rights of woman*, she had authored over 350 reviews.

almost identical language as Price in describing the salutary effects of public interaction. The ‘collision of different sentiments’ causes the ‘truth’ to be ‘struck out’.³⁴ Vicesimus Knox, frequently praised by Wollstonecraft, writes in *Liberal education* (1789): ‘Different men see objects in different points of view: and as things are said to cast light upon, and illustrate each other, so may minds be enabled to strike out knowledge by a collision of sentiments.’³⁵ In *Essays moral and literary*, Knox was clear that worldly engagement was the path to a full realization of the individual. Here again we find the familiar metaphor:

There is, perhaps, no method of improving the mind more efficacious, and certainly none more agreeable, than a mutual interchange of sentiments in an elegant and animated conversation with the serious and judicious, the learned and the communicative. Light and heat are elicited by the *collision of minds*.³⁶ [my emphasis]

Knox’s generic statement proves to be intended for men. First, it occurs in quite a different section of his work than his chapters on female education. The ‘elegant and animated conversation with the serious and judicious’ is an evocation of male sociability. Michele Cohen has pointed out that Knox was opposed to public schooling for girls: ‘As girls are destined to private and domestic life, and boys to public life, their education should be respectively correspondent to their destination’.³⁷ This statement is very much like one found in the document which ostensibly spurred Wollstonecraft to compose *Rights of woman* in the first place, the ‘Rapport educational’ of Talleyrand:

³⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *Philosophical and miscellaneous papers* (1787), 173.

³⁵ Vicesimus Knox, *Liberal education* (2 vols., London, 1789), vol. 2, 167.

³⁶ Vicesimus Knox, *Essays moral and literary* (2 vols., 11th edn., London, 1787), vol. 1, 81. As per my general practice, I use the edition which was published during Wollstonecraft’s phase of literary activity and was most likely to have been read by her. The first edition of this work, from 1778, will be referenced below because of the significance of some revisions.

³⁷ Knox, *Liberal education*, vol. 1, 331; quoted in Michèle Cohen, “‘To think, to compare, to methodize’: girls’ education in enlightenment Britain”, in *Women, gender and enlightenment*, eds. S Knott and B Taylor (New York, 2007), 224-242, 229.

Men are destined to live on the stage of the world. A public education suits them: it early places before their eyes all the scenes of life: only the proportions are different. The paternal home is better for the education of women; they have less need to learn to deal with the interests of others, than accustom themselves to a calm and secluded life. Destined to domestic cares, it is in the bosom of the family that they should receive their first lessons and their first examples.³⁸

Using the term ‘destiny’ implies that even in the revolutionary French state, there seems to be little prospect of subverting the traditionally gendered division of public and private.

If the ‘collision of minds’ and worldly activity of all sorts is the primary means by which knowledge and virtue are acquired, then a course of private education for women will by definition foreclose their full potential as intellectual and spiritual beings. For all of Knox’s advocacy of female education, the ultimate effect of his educational system is precisely this sort of exclusionary regime. In fact, he employs what had become a commonplace argument for excluding women from the salutary clash of differing opinions, which young men could take for granted. In the first edition of the *Essays*, Knox resuscitates a crude Augustan caricature of the learned lady, she who dares display her knowledge in public:

Corinna happened to fall upon some of the works of our modern sceptics. She could not understand them perfectly; but she discovered enough to be assured that scepticism was supposed to be a mark of superior sense, of a freedom from those narrow prejudices which enthral the vulgar mind. She ... pities the poor narrow souls who go to church and perform all their duties, as they call them, with mechanical regularity, just like their great grandmothers. Voltaire, Rousseau, Bolingbroke, and Hume, are her oracles.³⁹

³⁸ Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, *Rapport sur l’instruction publique*. in *The vindications* (Peterborough, ONT, 1997), 393-97.

³⁹ Vicesimus Knox, *Essays moral and literary* (1st edn., 2 vols., London, 1778), vol. 2, 359-360.

The association of women with republicans, deists, and suspected atheists evokes a partisan debate that seems anomalous in Knox's genteel conduct book. Female pseudo-scholars are associated with these dangerous forces. A certain Sempronia is depicted with 'slipshod shoes' and 'matted hair'. These particular names and descriptions recall the train of misogynist caricatures of literary women in Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*. Pope's 'slipshod sybil' is Susanna Centlivre (1667-1723), the poet, actress, and dramatist.⁴⁰ Like Knox's Sempronia, her 'tresses' are rarely washed.⁴¹ 'Corinna' appears in the *Dunciad* as a producer of literary excrescence.⁴² She is the poet Elizabeth Thomas (1675-1731), who gained her place in the *Dunciad* for her criticism of Pope. Anne McWhir examines in detail the treatment of Thomas and the use of a generic 'Corinna' in eighteenth-century harangues against learned women (including in Knox). Most interesting for histories of women's resistance to exclusionary conceptions of the republic of letters would be Thomas's reply. Thomas parodies those very characterizations, illustrating her refusal to accept conflation of her sex and her intellect. In one of her poems, a certain 'surly clown' declares,

pray, what's your crime
To superannuate before your time,
And make yourself look old and ugly in your prime?
Our modern pedant contradict the schools,
For learned ladies are but learned fools.⁴³

The fully engaged quality of these exchanges demonstrates that the struggle for women's presence in the literary public is joined long before Wollstonecraft appears with her own agenda of public activity.

⁴⁰ A Pope, *The Dunciad*, in *The poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. J Butt (New Haven, 1963), 408, Book III: 141-44.

⁴¹ Knox, *Essays*, 1st edn., vol. 2, 359. The depiction of Mary Hays in Elizabeth Hamilton's *Modern philosophers* (1800) is another reincarnation of the caricature of the female wit, complete with her unhygienic toilet, horrific looks, and manhunting ways.

⁴² Pope, *The Dunciad*, 376-7, Book II, 66-72.

⁴³ Elizabeth Thomas, 'The true effigies of a certain squire, inscribed to Clemena', quoted in Anne McWhir, 'Elizabeth Thomas and the two "Corinnas": giving the woman writer a bad name', *ELH*, 62, no. 1 (1995), 115.

To be sure, Knox's characterization of critical women is not on the order of the invective that will be levelled at women radicals in the 1790s. Two well-known examples are Burke's comments, in *Reflections on the revolution in France* (1790), on the women marchers on Versailles and Richard Polwhele's catalogue of insults in *The unsex'd females* (1798).⁴⁴ Unlike these writers, Knox does not draw simplistic associations between radicals, French republicans, women, and Dissenters. In fact, Knox's position was complex. He opposed the war with France, and included some carefully worded praise of the Dissenters of his generation:

I will here pay that tribute of respect which justice owes to the Dissenting Ministers. The gravity of their manners, and their judicious conduct in a variety of instances, has deservedly procured them a very considerable share of public estimation. Many among them, besides a Watts, have illustriously adorned human nature.⁴⁵

This comment remains in the subsequent editions after the start of the war with France, that is, in the 1793 and 1795 editions of *Essays moral and literary*.

Although the depiction of slovenly intellectual women disappears from editions of Knox's *Essays* after 1778, the exclusionary aspects of his educational program are intrinsic to his thoughts on women and society, and are reflected in the structure of the text. Although Knox declares the equal capacity of women's intellect, it is clear that women are to remain in their sphere. His advice to young men, whose education is consummated in the dialectical 'collision of minds' required for the full formation of character, appears in a separate chapter and is defined fundamentally differently from the 'proper education' that ought to be supplied to women.

Thus, even in those writers who influence Wollstonecraft's advocacy of equal education for women, we often find rote prescriptions of gendered

⁴⁴ Burke describes the French women who participated in the return of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to Paris as 'furies of hell' and the 'vilest of women'. See, *Reflections on the revolution in France. A critical edition*, ed. J C D Clark (Stanford, CA, 2001), 233.

⁴⁵ Knox, *Essays* (11th edn., 1787), 50.

spheres of action, and thus the foreclosure of vigorous public activity. For a writer who emphatically claims the spiritually mandated right to full worldly engagement for women, we must turn to another source, the historian and educational writer, Catharine Macaulay. Wollstonecraft had praised her *Letters on education* in a review in the *Analytical Review* in April of 1790.⁴⁶ Macaulay equates virtue with knowledge within a framework of spiritual vindication:

[A]s on our first entrance into another world, our state of happiness may possibly depend on the degree of perfection we have attained in this, we cannot justly lessen, in one sex or the other, the means by which perfection, that is another word for wisdom, is acquired.⁴⁷

The principle of earthly trial legitimizes an education free of gender constraints. Macaulay has been frequently associated with republican ideology because of her sympathy, in her *History of England*, with the Commonwealth tradition. Here, virtue is associated with 'wisdom' rather than with physical strength or property ownership, a position which was not unusual in the evolution of republican thought in the late eighteenth century. As Saba Bahar points out, the acquisition of knowledge is particularly important to Price because it revises classical republicanism in order to accommodate the activities of the Rational Dissenters.⁴⁸ One of the advantages of defining virtue in this way is that it becomes accessible to women, an application which the latter day Commonwealthmen did not explicitly make. The concession and then the nullification of the 'physical superiority' of men is a central argument in *Rights of woman* and, seen in the context of her debt to Macaulay as well as Rational Dissent, was consistent with full religious equality. At the same time, Wollstonecraft is not willing to abandon the dimension of physical activity as a form of 'virtue' for women. In fact, while Wollstonecraft does not permit bodily strength to be the deciding criteria

⁴⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, Review of *Letters on education* by Catharine Macaulay, *Analytical Review*, in *The works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. J Todd and M Butler (7 vols., London, 1989), vol. 7, 309-22.

⁴⁷ Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on education, with observations on religious and metaphysical subjects* (London, 1790), 201-2.

⁴⁸ Bahar, 'Richard Price', 82.

for citizenship, she emphasizes the mutually reinforcing effects of mental and physical vigour.

When in *Rights of woman* Wollstonecraft evokes the mechanism of the ‘collision of minds,’ it is a conscious appropriation of one of the most recognized and approved means by which male education is perfected.

[O]ne reason why men have superior judgment, and more fortitude than women, is undoubtedly this, that they give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds.⁴⁹

The logic is straightforward. Men can keep themselves in shape by public activities, and by being allowed to err. Wollstonecraft presents the opportunity for self-development as entirely consistent for both sexes. Women ‘have it not in their power to take the field and march and counter-march like soldiers, or wrangle in the senate to keep their faculties from rusting.’⁵⁰ Perhaps women would not want to march like soldiers and Wollstonecraft is not so radical as to make any concrete suggestion that women ought to be MPs, but it is necessary to understand how it is that men have been able to edify themselves through these public means, and physical activity is very much a part of this scheme. In fact, Wollstonecraft argues that any woman who has attained great things has had a childhood of energetic play, often alongside boys:

Girls and boys, in short, would play harmlessly together, if the distinction of sex was not inculcated long before nature makes any difference. – I will go further, and affirm, as an indisputable fact, that most of the women, in the circle of my observation, who have acted like rational creatures, or shewn any vigour of intellect, have accidentally been allowed to run wild – as some of the elegant formers of the fair sex would insinuate.⁵¹

The vision of an innocent, vigorous childhood is presented as the formative matrix of a society open to both sexes. The subtraction of gender difference from the traditional republican virtue of bodily strength reveals a fundamentally pluralistic social vision.

⁴⁹ VRW, 237.

⁵⁰ VRW, 283.

⁵¹ VRW, 155.

Ecclesiology and the reform of the public

As we have seen, for Wollstonecraft, women's participation in the world is grounded upon a theology of earthly trial, a piece of particularly forceful rhetoric. This necessarily results in a social critique, for social institutions must be refashioned in order to allow for the development of women along these lines. In fact, *Rights of woman* seems more weighted towards critique of the present system than the promulgation of ideal systems. Wollstonecraft's critical approach is twofold. On the one hand, she undertakes an analysis of the status quo. This is done primarily by means of a literary critique of writers whom she considers to be most influential in creating and sustaining gendered cultural identities, or 'characters', identities which become the behavioural ideals in childrearing, schooling, and sociability. The three primary targets are Milton, Rousseau, and the conduct book writer John Gregory. In each of her critiques of these writers, Wollstonecraft employs the methodologies of the literary critic to guide the reader to an understanding of where these writers transgress her religious principles. On the other hand, Wollstonecraft sketches out the elements of an ideal society. Her vision is influenced by a heterodox ecclesiology, and appears in *Rights of woman* in the form of strictures on sociability and on the reformation of educational practices.

Chapter Two opens Wollstonecraft's cultural and literary critique. She begins by attacking John Milton, an interesting choice, considering his high standing amongst the Joseph Johnson circle.⁵² Wollstonecraft's method here is a template for many of the critiques in the next four chapters, culminating in a Chapter Five whose five subsections which are essentially five reviews such as might be found in a contemporary periodical, considering their length, generic language, and methodology.

⁵² Mary Poovey notes that, 'Of all the cultural "authorities" she engages, Milton is clearly the most imposing, not only because of his preeminence in the English literary, political, and religious traditions but because of the special veneration accorded to Milton by [Joseph] Johnson's London circle.' Mary Poovey, *The proper lady and the woman writer: ideology as style in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago, 1985), 73. Poovey goes on to claim that Wollstonecraft's very style displays obsequiousness towards the great man.

The title of Chapter Two well describes Wollstonecraft's undertaking, 'The prevailing opinion of a sexual character discussed', which articulates a primary theme of the text, to illuminate the way in which social institutions shape and are shaped by gender. Drawing on her professional experience as a literary reviewer, Wollstonecraft closely reads Milton's text, employing allusion, quotation and typographical intervention in order to isolate a set of cultural prescriptions.⁵³

Claiming that Milton relegates women to a subordinate position in a spiritual hierarchy, Wollstonecraft employs the following hyperbole: '[W]hen he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls'.⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft's allusion refers the reader to a passage which evokes a number of crucial issues for women.

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him.

(*Paradise Lost* 4:296-299)

Modern scholars continue to debate whether Milton can justifiably be charged with making woman subordinate to man in both the spiritual and the worldly senses, a fact which illuminates Wollstonecraft's historically foundational role in theoretical questions concerning women. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's engagement with Milton throughout her works, and in *Rights of woman*, is complex. Just as he is critiqued at the opening of Chapter Two, he is invoked later in the book as a model of stoic strength and proper modesty, being classed with George Washington, William

⁵³ Mitzi Myers deepened the modern study of Wollstonecraft's reviews. A good summary of Myers's investigations, published late in her career, is 'Mary Wollstonecraft's literary reviews', *The Cambridge companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L Johnson (Cambridge, 2002), 82-98. Mary Waters has extended this important branch of Wollstonecraft scholarship. See, "'The first of a new genus": Mary Wollstonecraft as a literary critic and mentor to Mary Hays', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37, no. 3 (2004), 415-34.

⁵⁴ VRW, 126.

Shakespeare, and Jesus.⁵⁵ Wollstonecraft's immediate purpose, however, is to produce a powerful indictment; only by considering woman's soul as essentially inferior to man's could it ever be justified to make one human being an intercessor for another. Wollstonecraft returns to this crucial point after the conclusion of her critique of Milton: '[Women] must be permitted to turn to the fountain of light, and not forced to shape their course by the twinkling of a mere satellite.'⁵⁶ Barbara Taylor comments on Wollstonecraft's firm rejection of spiritual mediation. Wollstonecraft invokes 'the Protestant imperative for direct dealing with one's Maker'.⁵⁷ However, even those Protestants opposed to political establishments of religion were very much at odds over the nature and extent of mediation, as we will see in the controversy surrounding Gilbert Wakefield's ideas about modes of worship.

Wollstonecraft's dismissal of Milton's gender ideology concludes when she turns from what she calls his 'sensual arguments' to the question of the education of both sexes:

Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In every age there has been a stream of popular opinion that has carried all before it, and given a family character, as it were, to the century. It may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education.⁵⁸

Wollstonecraft's prioritization of systemic over individual reform is reasserted with more finality, and in a distinctly political key, later in the text:

⁵⁵ Chapter 7, 231-2. Even here, however, Milton and the others exhibit a personal strength that can be aspired to by women rather than passively admired.

⁵⁶ VRW, 127.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *Imagination*, 105.

⁵⁸ VRW, 129. This explicit distinction between a systemic critique and moralist commentary on individual behaviour helps to explain some of the generic heterogeneity that has intrigued generations of readers of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication*. The very title evokes both the genre of conduct writing and political criticism, *A vindication of the rights of woman: with strictures on political and moral subjects*.

The grand source of female folly and vice has ever appeared to me to arise from narrowness of mind; and the very constitution of civil governments has put almost insuperable obstacles in the way to prevent the cultivation of the female understanding.⁵⁹

In short, individual development is impossible without a reform of society itself.

Wollstonecraft's social thought flows naturally out of her critique of individual texts. In Chapter Five, critiques of educational, literary, and advice books leads to one of the many discussions of the reformation of society, in particular through the reformation of sociability. In the fifth and final subsection, Wollstonecraft discusses the inadequacies of educational plans which instil a shrewd scepticism towards the world. She begins by alluding to Chesterfield's *Letters to his son*, a common enough target.⁶⁰ However, her present quarrel with Chesterfield is not that he is too worldly – she certainly adverts that he is a 'rascal', while his system of education is 'unmanly', and 'immoral'⁶¹ – but that by introducing the young into the world too early, they develop an enduring scepticism.

An early acquaintance with human infirmities; or, what is termed knowledge of the world, is the surest way, in my opinion, to contract the heart and damp the natural youthful ardour which produces not only great talents, but great virtues.⁶²

We return here to Wollstonecraft's Platonic principle of gradual transcendence through the passions. Another mistake is to withdraw completely from the world, and to illustrate this, Wollstonecraft inserts an extraordinary passage, a brief satire on the self-segregated, high-minded moralist, which begins, 'Let me now as from an eminence survey the world stripped of all its false delusive charms.' As Steven Blakemore has

⁵⁹ VRW, 169.

⁶⁰ In *Essays, moral and literary*, Vicesimus Knox dismisses Chesterfield's all too worldly pragmatism: 'His paternal attention was all avarice and ambition' (new edn., Dublin, 1783), 307.

⁶¹ VRW, 172, 232.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 232.

also noticed, this is very similar to the opening of Dr. Johnson's poem, *The vanity of human wishes*, which is itself modelled the tenth satire of Juvenal, concerning the immorality of urban life. Within this imaginative passage, Wollstonecraft parodies moralist writing with comments such as, 'I see the sons and daughters of men pursuing shadows, and anxiously wasting their powers to feed passions which have no adequate object,' and, to alluding to Jacques's soliloquy in *As you like it*, 'After viewing objects in this light, it would not be very fanciful to imagine that this world was a stage on which a pantomime is daily performed for the amusement of superiour beings.'⁶³

Wollstonecraft, still in the role of the moralist narrator, rejoins the world: 'I descend from my height, and mixing with my fellow-creatures feel myself hurried along the common stream'.⁶⁴ Shifting back to the persona of the cultural commentator, Wollstonecraft delivers a verdict on the question of public interaction for the young:

The youth should *act*, for had he the experience of a grey head he would be fitter for death than life, though his virtues, rather residing in his head than his heart, could produce nothing great, and his understanding, prepared for this world, would not, by its noble flights, prove that it had a title to a better.⁶⁵

The role of public interaction is not merely to equip the young with the tools for worldly success. The development of the human mind, body, and heart is ultimately only justified by the individual's spiritual destiny. Thus, Wollstonecraft's understanding of the capacious term 'virtue' is not limited to its republican inflection, but to a religiously inspired morality.⁶⁶ Wollstonecraft specifically links public interaction with the development of a moral empathy.

⁶³ Ibid, 237.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 239.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ For landmark studies of the influence of republican thought upon Wollstonecraft, see G J Barker-Benfield, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Common-wealthwoman', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50, no. 1 (1989), 95-115; and Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal beings: politics, gender, and sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago, 1995).

Besides, it is not possible to give a young person a just view of life; he must have struggled with his own passions before he can estimate the force of the temptation which betrayed his brother into vice.⁶⁷

And,

Can I, conscious of my secret sins, throw off my fellow-creatures, and calmly see them drop into the chasm of perdition, and yawns to receive them. – No! no! The agonized heart will cry with suffocating impatience – I too am a man! And have vices, hid, perhaps, from human eye, that bend me to the dust before God, and loudly tell me, when all is mute, that we are formed of the same earth, and breathe the same element.⁶⁸

We do not, and cannot know each other; only God can truly know us, each in our individual communion with the Deity and nature. We can, however, come to sympathize with the struggles of others in our community, and this invaluable benevolence is best fostered through a measured, gradual introduction to the world. Thus, Wollstonecraft warns against two extremes in the education of the young. The first is a too sudden introduction into the world, which hardens the heart. The second is the ascetic segregation from the vices of public life, which does little to help develop a profound sense of benevolence and modesty. Wollstonecraft is not in favour of the atomization of a worshipping community, a crucial issue for the Dissenters associated with Joseph Johnson, as we will see.

There are egalitarian overtones in Wollstonecraft's statement that 'we are formed of the same earth'. In Chapter Twelve, where Wollstonecraft returns to the question of education after extensive literary and cultural critiques, she gives 'hints' on the form a national educational system might take. The social structures, curriculum, and discipline of the ideal school is a ready analogy (and matrix) for the configuration of a future society. For Wollstonecraft only a society which does not operate by

⁶⁷ VRW, 239.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 271.

formulas of hierarchy, including divisions by class and gender, can help individuals gain tolerance and a proper sense of modesty, ‘for only by the jostling of equality can we form a just opinion of ourselves.’⁶⁹

At the time that Wollstonecraft was composing *Rights of woman* a fierce debate was underway within the Dissenting community, one which had to do with the interrelated issues of worship, sociability, and civic life. This debate provides a more immediate context to Wollstonecraft’s thoughts on ideal forms of sociability than the commonplace resort to a republican heritage. In 1791, Gilbert Wakefield published *An enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship*. Wakefield’s position is that public worship is unnecessary for a Christian life, and it is not sanctioned by the words or the actions of Jesus in the New Testament. Wakefield was educated at Jesus College Cambridge and was ordained a deacon in 1778, an act he deplored as ‘the most disingenuous’ of his life.⁷⁰ In his *Memoirs*, Wakefield represents that he eventually left the established church as he matured and understood his own mind, apparently stilling the rumour that he was induced to do so by his earlier acquaintance with John Jebb.⁷¹ Recognized for his profound erudition in the classical and Eastern languages, and through the intercession of Jebb, he became a tutor at Warrington academy in 1779, where he remained until 1783. He began teaching at Hackney academy in 1790, but for only one year before apparently being pressured to leave.⁷² The *Memoirs*, published during the height of the debate, seem to be organized so as to climax with Wakefield’s debacle at Hackney and must therefore be considered as yet another salvo. He continues to severely reproach Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, and is incensed that he was asked for an account of his faith when being considered for the position of tutor of classical studies.⁷³ The extensive criticism of the educational practices at

⁶⁹ Ibid, 317.

⁷⁰ Gilbert Wakefield, *Memoirs of the life of Gilbert Wakefield B.A., late fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. Written by himself* (London, 1792), 120.

⁷¹ Wakefield, *Memoirs*, 109.

⁷² I am indebted to Laura Mandell for information on Wakefield’s early biography. See Mandell, ‘Prayer, feeling, action: Anna Barbauld and the public worship controversy’, *Studies in Eighteenth-century Culture*, 38 (2009), 117-142.

⁷³ Wakefield, *Memoirs*, 377-79; 340-1.

Hackney, which comes near the close of the *Memoirs*, taking up thirty pages, reveals yet another dimension of the controversy.⁷⁴ The centrality of issues of educational methodology demonstrates that the Wakefield controversy has to do with the broader implications of sociability and learning. These are precisely the same concerns in *Rights of woman*, where the education of women is explicitly linked with issues of legal, economic, and political autonomy.

Wakefield's *Enquiry* opens with a personal attack on Richard Price, whom Wakefield calls 'illiterate' in theology and 'no true friend of *religious liberty*', apparently because of his intolerance of Wakefield's own practices.⁷⁵ Wakefield's argument is sustained in two basic ways. First, Wakefield selects Scriptural verses to prove that Jesus intended that all prayer be private. He devotes separate sections of the text to the 'practice' and the 'precepts' of Jesus.⁷⁶ Second, to rebut any of the other instances in which the disciples are engaging in social worship, or in which Jesus seems to be participating in or implicitly complying with public ritual, Wakefield employs a progressivist argument. '[I]f we survey the *two Revelations*, which are generally allowed by Christians to come from heaven, we shall see the tenour of them conformable to our idea of *gradual* perfection, and consequently analogous to the progress of individual life'⁷⁷ Like many of his peers, Wakefield superimposes an organic metaphor upon a historiography of inexorable progress. The tension between his argument by Scriptural rule and his argument by the progressive growth, and implied improvement, of religious practice will provide opportunities for his opponents.

The male respondents to the *Enquiry* are more interested in Scriptural justifications, while the two female respondents, Mary Hays, and Anna Letitia Barbauld, emphasize social utility. The Dissenter John Disney, whom Wakefield calls his 'much respected friend', announces at the start that he will focus on Scriptural argument in order to battle Wakefield 'on

⁷⁴ Wakefield, *Memoirs*, 336-68.

⁷⁵ Gilbert Wakefield, *An Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (3rd edn., London, 1792), iii.

⁷⁶ Wakefield, *Enquiry*, 13-21 and 22-31.

⁷⁷ Wakefield, *Enquiry*, 7.

his own ground'.⁷⁸ Likewise, Joseph Priestley's brief missive also focuses primarily on Scriptural evidence. Priestley only argues by utility near the close, where he writes that 'brotherly love' is enhanced when the congregation 'jointly express the feelings that belong to our common, and most interesting relation to him [our Father]'.⁷⁹ Priestley's is a particularly intriguing argument, considering that in the earlier *Forms of prayer* (1783), he does not find public ritual essential, citing the practices of the Quakers, whom Wakefield also cites in a rebuttal to eight of his respondents.⁸⁰ In *Forms of prayer* Priestley had suggested that even a very small group of Dissenters can fulfil the duties of the Sabbath by praying at home.⁸¹ However, these are expedients for those Dissenters who are isolated from larger groups and do not constitute the atomization of congregations advocated by Wakefield as a regular practice. At the same time, the challenge presented by Wakefield is important as it spurs Priestley and others to define the limits of private, reasoned judgment, and unmediated communion with the Deity, both crucial concepts in the theology of Rational Dissent. These are precisely the same points that are crucial to advocates for women's rights.

Mary Hays as 'Eusebia' also employs Scriptural argument, but a much greater proportion of her response to Wakefield is devoted to describing the social benefits of public worship.⁸² Her first bit of Scriptural argument is a direct answer to Wakefield's histrionic challenge to 'give me but ONE SINGLE POSITIVE PROOF of the existence of *social worship* between CHRIST

⁷⁸ Wakefield, *Memoirs*, 94; John Disney, *A defence of public or social worship* (London, 1792), 5.

⁷⁹ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to a young man, occasioned by Mr. Wakefield's essay on public worship* (London, 1792), 20. It is significant that this text, as well as Disney's and Barbauld's responses to Wakefield, were published by Joseph Johnson.

⁸⁰ Priestley, *Letters*, 11. Gilbert Wakefield, *A general reply to the arguments against the enquiry into public worship* (London, 1792), 10. Wakefield responds to the following writers, in this order and by these titles: Doctor Disney, 'Eusebia' (Mary Hays), Mr. Wilson, Mrs. Barbauld, Dr. Priestley, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Bruckner, and the man who replaced Wakefield at Hackney as classical tutor, Mr. Pope.

⁸¹ Joseph Priestley, *Forms of prayer and other offices for the use of Unitarian societies* (London, 1783), 11-12.

⁸² Mary Hays, *Cursory remarks on an enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (London, 1792).

and his APOSTLES'.⁸³ Hays simply notes that Jesus allows for communal prayer, quoting Matthew 18:19: 'Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.' She then quotes a number of verses from John 17, and then Acts, James, and Corinthians.⁸⁴ In the third edition of the *Enquiry* of February 1792, where he acknowledges Hay's *Cursory remarks*, Wakefield concedes this very point, but not to her. In a response to John Wilson, who has singled out the same passage as Hays, Wakefield states that perhaps 'Jesus might allow and practice' some form of social worship 'in those days' but then Wakefield reverts to his catchall progressivist argument. Because 'those days' were not as 'advanced', Jesus was adjusting his behaviour to the understanding of the time.⁸⁵

Hays proceeds to arguments by utility, with emphasis on the education of the young. Without having read Wakefield's *Memoirs*, and his discussion of education, Hays finds the educative nature of religious meetings relevant to the debate. After all, Wakefield's profession was to be a *tutor*. It would therefore be disingenuous of him to claim that he speaks only for himself. For all of Wakefield's claim that his work is an 'apology' for his own actions, both Hays and Barbauld see his work as an exhortation, or as Barbauld writes, a 'dehortation'.⁸⁶ Aside from the larger questions of religious practice and the civic functions of Dissenting sociability, it is his role at Hackney which seems to have provoked the numerous Dissenters who replied to the *Enquiry*. Thus, Hays remains on point when she moves immediately from Scriptural examples to the effect of public worship upon the young. She argues that even 'mechanical' prayer has a 'restraining effect upon the conduct'.⁸⁷ This invokes the psychological mechanism of association, made current by Priestley's

⁸³ Wakefield, *Enquiry*, 19.

⁸⁴ Hays, *Cursory remarks*, 6-8.

⁸⁵ Wakefield, *Enquiry*, 64.

⁸⁶ Wakefield, *Enquiry*, iii; Anna Lætitia Barbauld, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (2nd edn., London, 1792), 2.

⁸⁷ Hays, *Cursory remarks*, 11.

advocacy of Hartley's theories.⁸⁸ She writes that, 'through the medium of the senses, repeated impressions have been made on the brain, good or evil habits acquire an ascendancy not easily to be eradicated.' Wakefield's practice also has directly negative effects on society; his ideas may grant licence to those already disposed to laziness and vice: 'From a neglect of the sabbath, numbers of youth have dated the commencement of a career of guilt and folly; and in an observance of it, the wounded heart has frequently received consolation; the careless been rectified, and the ignorant instructed.'⁸⁹

Like Hays, Anna Letitia Barbauld focuses upon the social functions of public worship, and like Hays, Barbauld reads Wakefield's text closely, pointing out apparent contradictions. She notes that his progressivist argument is implicitly utilitarian, which is certainly far from his intentions.

[...] Mr. Wakefield, by considering public worship as a practice to be adapted to the *exigencies of the times*, evidently abandons the textual ground, in which narrow path he seemed hitherto to have trod with such scrupulous precaution, and places it on the broader footing of utility.⁹⁰

Barbauld does not intend to dismiss 'utility' but to examine just what value there is in public worship, something that Wakefield unwittingly implies. To say that the early church shaped its practices to accommodate the barbarous mores of the less civilized peoples of the time would imply that public worship has always had a social function.⁹¹ This provides an

⁸⁸ The relevant texts are Joseph Priestley, *An examination of Dr. Reid's inquiry into the human mind on the principles of common sense* (London, 1774), and Joseph Priestley, *Hartley's theory of the human mind, on the principle of the association of ideas, with essays relating to the subject of it* (London, 1775). It is significant that both the first and second edition (1790) of Priestley's *Hartley* were published by Joseph Johnson, the publisher of all of Wollstonecraft's works, a number of works by Barbauld and Hays, and all the works of Theophilus Lindsey.

⁸⁹ Hays, *Cursory remarks*, 11, 15-16.

⁹⁰ Barbauld, *Remarks*, 34-5.

⁹¹ Hays also argues that Jesus sanctioned the functional aspect of ritual. When John asks why Jesus would need to be baptized, he answers, 'Suffer me now, for so it becometh us to perform every righteous ordinance.' Matthew 3:15, quoted in Hays, *Cursory remarks*, 12.

opening for Barbauld to proceed with her own thoughts on the matter: ‘The *utility* of this practice therefore comes next to be considered.’⁹² One of Barbauld’s central points is that interaction with others helps regulate the behaviour so that individuals do not veer towards extremes. Those who have lost their feeling for religion can be inspired anew in a welcoming and sincere assembly, while those who are too fervent, and too much alone in their prayers, tend to become fanatical, and need the stabilizing effect of interaction. Perhaps this is what has caused Wakefield’s distemper, Barbauld implies.

The other crucial principle in Barbauld’s text is the characterization of public worship as a form of civic activity.

Let it be observed, in the next place, that Public Worship is a *civic* meeting. The temple is the only place where human beings, of every rank and sex and age, meet together for one common purpose, and join together in one common act.⁹³

The egalitarian and pluralist overtones are unmistakable, but the crucial question that would differentiate Barbauld from Wollstonecraft is the relationship of *this* form of civic activity to those undertaken in the other areas of public life. Is ‘Public Worship’ meant to be the *only* occasion where gender and class distinctions are suspended? In other words, does Barbauld approve of the apparent division between the egalitarian sociability of the meeting house and the hierarchical and gendered sociability of the broader public? She continues, ‘Other meetings are either political, or formed for the purposes of splendour and amusement; from both which, in this country, the bulk of inhabitants are of necessity excluded.’⁹⁴ Harriet Guest discusses this precise point and argues that Barbauld’s essay is ‘conducted in terms of the notion that the public, civic business of collective religion can be distinguished from a political assembly’ yet also notes that the essay is ‘thoroughly and unambiguously politicised’.⁹⁵

⁹² Barbauld, *Remarks*, 35.

⁹³ Barbauld, *Remarks*, 43.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Harriet Guest, ‘Eighteenth-century femininity: “A supposed sexual character”,’ *Women and literature in Britain, 1700-1800*, ed. V Jones (Cambridge, 2000), 59.

It is speculative to extrapolate from this essay an explicit theory of the relationship between religious sociability and broader civic life, but it is clear that Barbauld intends for the religious meeting to have at least an effect on society at large, by means of the mechanism of universal benevolence. Stated briefly, this was the principle that acts of benevolence that took place amongst mutually indebted individuals, such as in families or in friendships, would gradually ‘diffuse’ their effects throughout society at large.⁹⁶ In Barbauld’s apology for public worship, the condition of the poor, for instance, is alleviated: ‘the enquiring eye of benevolence pursues them [the poor], and they are not unfrequently [*sic*] led home from social worship to the social meal.’⁹⁷ The sense of a separate ground of interaction is enhanced when Barbauld suggests that enmity between rivals can be reduced through constant ‘intercourse’, by which ‘feuds and animosities are composed, which interrupted the harmony of friends and acquaintances; and those who avoided to meet because they could not forgive, are led to forgive, being obliged to meet.’⁹⁸ In other words, other modes of public life produce a form of atomization and alienation and do not compel people to act benevolently towards each other. What feuds cannot be resolved in the world of commerce or, apparently, in the world of polite letters perhaps can be resolved at church. Barbauld’s eloquent period could also apply to Wakefield’s own apparently embattled condition.

Wollstonecraft does not address the Wakefield controversy explicitly. However, the status of individuals and communities within the larger civic public, religion’s role in society, and the reformation of social hierarchy in an age of republican revolution are issues which Wollstonecraft and the interlocutors in this debate hold in common. *Rights of woman* contains extensive commentary on religious ritual as it relates to the education of the young. A good portion of Chapter Twelve, which offers suggestions

⁹⁶ For a thorough account of the evolution of the concept of ‘universal benevolence’ and especially its significance in the writings of Dissenters, see Evan Radcliffe, ‘Revolutionary writing, moral philosophy, and universal benevolence in the eighteenth century’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54, no. 2 (1993), 221-240.

⁹⁷ Barbauld, *Remarks*, 39.

⁹⁸ Barbauld, *Remarks*, 38.

for the establishment of educational institutions and practices on a national level, necessarily includes a critique of the religious practices of tutors and other caretakers of the young. 'In public schools ... religion, confounded with irksome ceremonies and unreasonable restraints assumes the most ungracious aspect.'⁹⁹ Moreover, if we consider that Joseph Johnson published many of the responses in the same year that *Rights of woman* appeared, it is highly unlikely that Wollstonecraft had not read or discussed the texts in the Wakefield debate. Wollstonecraft's position on the status of the individual in relation to the public, to take the first point of comparison with Wakefield's interlocutors, is developed through illustrations that sometimes employ the same terms as the texts above. Although she advocates for women's participation in nearly all the public activities open to men, Wollstonecraft also advocates a distinct form of individualism, one that is resistant to the effects of psychological association as well as cultural pressures. In this she actually concurs with some of the elements of the highly individualized practice of worship advocated by Wakefield.

Wollstonecraft employs the identical Scriptural reference at issue in the debate of 1791-2 when she states that, 'They who only strive for this paltry prize [reputation], like the Pharisees, who prayed at the corners of streets, to be seen of men, verily obtain the reward they seek; for the heart of man cannot be read by man!'¹⁰⁰ Here, the woman in society must be as immune to the temptations of public show as the worshipper, and it is *as* a worshipper that woman is called to an understanding of her interiority. In the following section, Wollstonecraft goes on to describe a solitary practice of prayer, one in which the 'humble mind ... calmly examines its conduct when only His presence is felt'. The time of prayer is 'the still hour of self-collection'.¹⁰¹ The key difference here between Wollstonecraft and Wakefield is that, in order to *arrive* at these moments of prayer fully, it is first necessary to break the habits of excessive sensibility, vanity, and weakness.

These pernicious habits are the effect of education and the irresistible onrush of associated ideas. The antidote is a familiar one, that is, worldly

⁹⁹ VRW, 302 et passim.

¹⁰⁰ VRW, 269.

¹⁰¹ VRW, 270.

engagement, but first Wollstonecraft guides the reader to an understanding of associative mechanisms in the mind. Wollstonecraft divides association into two categories, ‘habitual’ or ‘instantaneous’. The latter she finds less dangerous, for it is yet another route, apart from reason, for ‘that quick perception of truth’.¹⁰² The former, however, is described as the mechanism which at the very least influences identity: ‘[T]here is an habitual association of ideas ... which has a great effect on the moral character of mankind, and by which a turn is given to the mind that commonly remains throughout life.’ The idea of a ‘moral character’ would be roughly equivalent to what we would call ‘personality’ today. Employing Lockean epistemology, Wollstonecraft sees the formation of personality as a result of environmental input: ‘So ductile is the understanding, and yet so stubborn, that the associations which depend on adventitious circumstances, during the period that the body takes to arrive at maturity, can seldom be disentangled by reason.’ Wollstonecraft extends this simple associative theory of personality to the issue of gender, or ‘female character’. Women are made less capable than men of breaking the grip of psychological routines, or ‘habitual slavery’, precisely because ‘business and other dry employments of the understanding tend to deaden the feelings and break the associations that do violence to reason.’¹⁰³ But the entry into society, as we have seen above, has to be managed by parents and preceptors with great care, so that the young do not become hardened and cynical.

Thus, a society that provides an environment conducive to the development of the virtues in both sexes is one which allows the individual to preserve a personal relationship with God *before* being exposed, or in the case of the young, overexposed, to improper habits and vices. Seen from a secular perspective, this is a social philosophy which rejects any definition of morals which makes them contingent upon cultural mores, or ‘manners’. While Wollstonecraft fully concurs with her contemporaries that association is the mechanism which ‘fixes’ the personality, she is less sanguine than either Barbauld or Hays about the *effects* of association, and is thus cautious about the introduction of the young into ‘the world’.

¹⁰² VRW, 244.

¹⁰³ VRW, 245.

If we really deserve our own good opinion we shall commonly be respected in the world; but if we pant after higher improvement and higher attainments, it is not sufficient to view ourselves as we suppose that we are viewed by others, though this has been ingeniously argued, as the foundation of our moral sentiments. [Smith is noted here]. Because each bystander may have his own prejudices, beside the prejudices of his age or country. We should rather endeavour to view ourselves as we suppose that Being views us who seeth each thought ripen into action, and whose judgment never swerves from the eternal rule of right.¹⁰⁴

For Wollstonecraft, the moral regulation of individual behaviour ought not to come from a collectively formulated sense of propriety. To make her point, she distinguishes herself from the social theory of Adam Smith. Saba Bahar has examined Wollstonecraft's critique of Adam Smith, stating that Wollstonecraft objected to 'a purely utilitarian approach to virtue'.¹⁰⁵

Daniel O'Neill, who has demonstrated the profound effect of the Scottish Enlightenment upon Wollstonecraft's thought, objects to Bahar's characterization of Smith as utilitarian. He points out that Smith bases social mores upon 'innate, pre-rational affects'.¹⁰⁶ However, Wollstonecraft is concerned with distinguishing her system against what she reads as the secular, and (therefore) contingent, foundations of morality. If Smith grounds behavioural norms upon innate and affective human characteristics, this is still an essentially materialist psychology, and if the 'impartial spectator' is only the means by which the individual is made aware of how these universal human characteristics manifest as social norms, Smith's model is quite at odds with Wollstonecraft's reliance on divine guidance. Thus, even if she is misreading Smith, which is not at all clear, at the very least he is the most recognizable interlocutor for the discussion of moral education and conduct.

¹⁰⁴ VRW, 270.

¹⁰⁵ Bahar, 'Richard Price', 87.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel O'Neill, Review of Saba Bahar, *Mary Wollstonecraft's social and aesthetic philosophy*, in *History of Political Thought*, 24, no. 2 (2003), 363.

In contrast with her earlier writings, Wollstonecraft in *Rights of woman* is less concerned with those books which affect the young directly, never discussing particular novels for instance. In fact, it is in the reviews for the *Analytical Review* that the bulk of her critique of novels takes place. Instead, she is generally more concerned with metadiscourses of education and conduct. Wollstonecraft engages Rousseau's *Émile* and not his *Julie*. She engages with the *criticism* by literary women, and not their novels.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Smith's social theory is most relevant for that phase of Wollstonecraft's argument where she is discussing not the role that women might play in public, but what role the public ought to play for women. The spectators who delimit and prescribe female behaviour, whether external or internalized, must be challenged in order to firmly establish a doctrine of worldly activity for women.

Wollstonecraft shares with Hays and Barbauld a set of principles of social interaction that are drawn from Dissenting ecclesiology. She imagines a public which is less hierarchical, more inclusive of women, and where actions are motivated by Christian morals. For Hays and for Barbauld, public worship is an occasion for the various social classes to interact, and through this interaction for poverty to be ameliorated. Wollstonecraft is also concerned with divisions of social class, and she is explicit that these divisions lead directly to the breakdown of public morality: 'There must be more equality established in society, or morality will never gain ground ...'.¹⁰⁸ However, the context of this remark makes it clear that Wollstonecraft does not advocate an egalitarian society but one in which all members are equally required to perform benevolent civic services and the daily round of domestic duties, what Wollstonecraft refers to as 'relative' or 'respective' duties.

I mean therefore to infer that the society is not properly organized that does not *compel* men and women to discharge their respective duties by making it the only way to acquire that

¹⁰⁷ *Émile* is a constant target throughout *Rights of Woman*. It is most closely read in Chapters 3 and 5. The review of women's writing is found in section 4 of Chapter 5, where Wollstonecraft engages with Hester Thrale Piozzi, Madame de Stael, and Madame Genlis, primarily on the issue of their impression-ability towards the writing of influential men.

¹⁰⁸ VRW, 277.

countenance form their fellow-creatures, which every human being wishes some way to attain (my emphasis).¹⁰⁹

This passage is a qualification of her earlier, and more summary, criticism of Smith. Rather than dispense with a mechanism of public regard, Wollstonecraft wants to refashion it. Apart from the individual basis of moral action drawn from a relationship with ‘that Being who views us’, there is a role for social sanctions on behaviour, but again, these social mechanisms must ultimately be grounded upon religious principles. At the start of her harangue against the immorality of the luxurious classes, she states that, ‘Religion is also separated from morality by a ceremonial veil, yet men wonder that the world is almost, literally speaking, a den of sharpers or oppressors.’¹¹⁰ Significantly, when Wollstonecraft discusses the ideals that she shares with Barbauld and Hays, those of greater social equality and Christian motives of duty, she invokes settings within the broader public: the school, the city, the polite assembly.¹¹¹ While Barbauld emphasizes the civic component of religious meetings, Wollstonecraft’s emphasis is upon the need for religious elements in civic society.

Thus, the ecclesiological principles debated by Mary Hays, Gilbert Wakefield, and Anna Letitia Barbauld are directly relevant to Wollstonecraft’s particular configuration of an ideal public which would welcome and nurture the development of the virtues in women. As we have seen in Hays and Barbauld in particular, tolerance for other modes of living, social pluralism, and a morality of reciprocal duties, are all constitutive of this ideal public realm, and these principles are in turn born of the particular configurations of Dissenting worship. Most crucial is that worldly activities are subordinate to spiritually mandated, and immutable, morals. The rhetorical and philosophical value of this position for Wollstonecraft and many of her contemporaries is clear. The demand

¹⁰⁹ *VRW*, 278.

¹¹⁰ *VRW*, 277.

¹¹¹ See Chapters 12, 3, and 5, iii, respectively. Chapter 12 deals primarily with education. At the end of Chapter 3, Wollstonecraft offers two tales of widows. Much of the pressure that they experience comes from urban life. In Chapter 5, subsection iii, Wollstonecraft’s criticism of John Gregory’s conduct book for young women centres upon his advice to be guarded in various types of ‘company’.

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for women's greater engagement and consequence in the world, then, with its foundation in these morals, is presented as extra-rational and indisputable.

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MARY HAYS AND MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND THE EVOLUTION OF DISSENTING FEMINISM

Mary Spongberg

In January 1803, some short time after the publication of Mary Hays's monumental collection *Female biography*, fellow Dissenter Lucy Aikin in a letter to her friend Mrs Susannah Taylor of Norwich, wrote disparagingly of her effort:

Alas, alas! Though Miss Hayes [*sic*] has wisely addressed herself to the ladies alone, I am afraid the gentlemen will peep at her book and repeat with tenfold energy that women have no business with anything but nursing children and mending stockings.

Hays was described by Aikin in this exchange as a 'great disciple of Mrs Godwin ... and zealous stickler for the equal rights and equal talents of our sex with the other'. While there is a sense Aikin grudgingly admired Hays's candour, she nonetheless felt it counter-productive, as she confessed to Mrs Taylor, 'I would not so much as whisper this to the pretend lords of creation,

Her arguments directly tend
Against the cause she would defend.'¹

Lucy Aikin's assessment of *Female biography* has been sometimes noted, but rarely interrogated. Indeed, in Ruth Watt's authoritative study of gender and Unitarianism, it marks the only extended discussion of Hays's most significant work. Kathryn Gleadle, too, mentions this exchange, but little else about Hays in her two studies of early feminism.² Such an absence of discussion is curious, as Aikin's comments reflect a stark contrast to claims made by modern critics of *Female biography*, that this monumental collective biography represented a retreat from the

¹ Philip Hemery Le Breton, *Memoirs, miscellanies and letter of Lucy Aikin* (London, 1864), 125.

² See Ruth Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (Edinburgh, 1998), Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical Unitarians and the emergence of the Women's rights movement* (New York, 1995) and Kathryn Gleadle, *Radical writing on women 1800-1850* (London, 2002), 26. The exchange is also noted in Gina Luria Walker's *The growth of a woman's mind* (Aldershot, 2006), 228-9 as an example of Hays 'equivocal reputation' among Dissenting women.

scandalous, and a retrograde shift in her politics, as Hays sought to distance herself from Mary Wollstonecraft in the wake of her death. Gary Kelly's dismissed *Female biography* as 'hack-work' in one of the first detailed studies of Hays, and such ideas have inflected the few modern studies of its reception.³ Most critics who have engaged with Hays's *œuvre* have tended to follow Kelly in assuming that Hays's shift from novels of self-disclosure to works of collective biography meant a rejection of her early radicalism and a recantation of Wollstonecraftian feminism. Such a shift seemed to confirm that Hays had always been less 'overtly political' than Wollstonecraft, and that her feminism was merely derivative.

In this article I want to position Aikin's exchange about Hays both as a key moment in post-Wollstonecraftian feminism, and as a key moment from which to consider the relationship between feminism and Dissent in this period. I want to resituate Hays's *Female biography* within her own body of work, within the history of Dissent, and within the history of feminism. While Hays was clearly influenced by Wollstonecraft, nonconformist religion was an equally powerful force in shaping Hays's life and work, and *Female biography* was marked emphatically with ideas derived from her engagement with radical Protestantism. I will challenge the idea that Hays was merely acting under the direction of Wollstonecraft by offering a more detailed analysis of the relation between their work, how they came to share a critique of certain aspects of Godwin's philosophy, and how Hays's understanding of the 'sexual distinction' informed Wollstonecraft's last work, *The Wrongs of woman, or Maria*. In so doing I will also show that Hays's engagement in the compiling of lives should not be viewed as a retreat from Wollstonecraftian feminism, but rather represented a culmination of all the influences of her political education, and an attempt to advance Wollstonecraft's ideas, within her own unique brand of Dissenting biography.

³ Gary Kelly, *Women, writing and revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford, 1993), 234. This seems a strange comment for Kelly to make, as all such compilations in the eighteenth century were faced with a 'scarcity of reliable source material' and *Female biography* features a number of original articles such as the first on Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay. See Donald W Nichol, 'Biographia Britannica' in Steven Serafin ed., *Dictionary of literary biography: eighteenth century literary biographers* (Detroit, 1994), 288.

Accounts of Mary Hays's literary achievements have been framed by historical narratives that mark the nadir of Enlightenment feminism with the tragic death of Mary Wollstonecraft. In line with this trajectory, Hays's career has been split into two distinct phases. The first phase is characterised by a growing commitment to Revolutionary feminism under the tutelage of Wollstonecraft, and the second is defined by a repudiation of radical politics following Wollstonecraft's death. Only Gina Luria Walker's biography of Hays situates *Female biography* as an extension of her engagement with Wollstonecraft and other enlightened observers of the condition of the female sex.⁴ In part this is because of the alignment that critics such as Kelly have made between feminism and Jacobinism. But as recent scholarship has suggested, such an alignment has been problematic, as women on all sides of the political spectrum often shared 'common ground on matter such as the intellectual capabilities of women, their education and their social role.'⁵ Perhaps more significantly in this context, and as I shall trace in the essay, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays came to distance themselves from Jacobin politics by the mid-1790s, as both sought to articulate a feminism that owed little to Republican notions of manly self-reliance, rationality and radical sincerity.

Yet Aikin's comments suggest that *Female biography* was considered scandalous among her contemporaries. Aikin herself did not think the book was written 'in an edifying manner', concluding her assessment of *Female biography* with the telling observation that 'the morals are too French for my taste'.⁶ Early reviews made similar critiques, regretting Hays's failure to successfully edit out of the text those women whose lives 'can have no claim whatever to a place in a collection calculated "for the advancement of the fair sex in the grand scale of rational and social existence"'.⁷

⁴ Gina Luria Walker, *The growth of a woman's mind*, 187-241.

⁵ William Stafford, *English feminists and their opponents in the 1790s* (Manchester, 2002), 34.

⁶ Le Breton, *Memoirs*, 126.

⁷ [Anon.], *Monthly Magazine*, XV (June, 1803), 450-3.

Aikin's exchange with Susannah Taylor clearly demonstrates that Hays's work continued to unsettle after the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, even among those members of the community to which she was most closely attached. This anomalous reaction, mostly ignored by modern critics, can be attributed to the lack of scholarly engagement with *Female biography*. Most critics have read *Female biography* as a proto-Victorian text, an early example of the mostly plagiarized collections of female prosopography that became popular in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸ Critics have assumed that Hays's *Female biography* shares the generic quality of Victorian collective biographies of women, and have ignored its more radical and innovative features.⁹ They have generally taken an ahistorical approach to the genre of collective biography, if indeed it can be considered a single genre, assuming shared and universal characteristics of female-authored prosopography since its first

⁸ Rohan A Maitzen, for instance, includes Hays among 'Victorian' writers of collective biography, however she only cites Hays's later collection *Memoirs of Queens*. See 'This Feminine Preserve: Historical biographies by Victorian women', *Victorian Studies*, 38 (1995), 371-93. Alison Booth also situates Hays as anticipating Victorian female prosopographies. See *How to make it as a woman: collective biographical history from Victoria to the present* (Chicago, 2004), 19. Miriam Elizabeth Burstein includes Hays's *Female biography* in her catalogue of 'Early histories of women' held in the Huntington Library Collections. Burstein defines these works largely as 'Plutarchan biographies – a series of biographical sketches, with each sketch supposedly illustrating some national trait, moral virtue, spiritual characteristic, or the like'. See "'Unstoried in History?": Early Histories of Women (1652-1902) in the Huntington Library Collection', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 64, no. 3-4 (2001), 469-500. Jeanne Wood categorizes *Female biography* as a biographical dictionary, and reads it alongside other works by Dissenting scholars such as the *Biographia Britannica* and *General biography*. See "'Alphabetically Arranged": Mary Hays's *Female biography* and the Biographical Dictionary', *Genre*, 13 (1998), 117-42. Harriet Guest, however, reminds us that Hays abandons the dictionary form becoming so interested 'in the different lives of individual women that a substantial proportion of the six volumes of her *Female biography* is taken up by a selected few.' Guest suggests that Hays text is markedly different from the other dictionaries of biography produced by women writers at this time. See *Small change: women, learning and patriotism* (Chicago, 2000), 171.

⁹ Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, 'From good looks to good thoughts: popular women's history and the invention of modernity, ca 1830-1870', *Modern Philology*, 97, no. 1 (1997), 48.

appearance with Christine de Pizan's *City of ladies*.¹⁰ Most scholars make little distinction between those texts written by men and those written by women, and this has led to the suggestion that such works are not expressive of a feminine/feminist perspective.¹¹ Collective female biography in all its forms has recently been described as forming a 'gyneceum' tradition, one that establishes a canon of women's history.¹² Such a tradition offered a set cast of female figures from whom women might draw inspiration, but also functioned as guides to female excellence, codes of respectable female behaviour and histories of 'women worthies'.¹³ Read in this context, *Female biography* has been treated as an early attempt to codify acceptable feminine behaviour

¹⁰ This is particularly true of Alison Booth's *How to make it as a woman*.

¹¹ Until the end of the eighteenth century most catalogs of 'women worthies' in English were written by men. Mary Scott produced the first biographical listing by a named woman author with *The female advocate: a poem occasioned by reading Mr Duncombe's Feminiad*, in 1774. Ann Thicnesse published the first specialized work of collective biography by a named woman author *Sketches of the lives and writings of the ladies of France* in 1780. By the end of the eighteenth century Mary Pilkington had also produced a work of female collective biography, *A mirror for the female sex-historical beauties for young ladies intended to lead the female mind to the love and practice of moral goodness* (1798). This text was definitely a precursor to Victorian prosopography, however it was not without its Wollstonecraftian flourishes about the education of women. For a detailed bibliography of all such texts see Sybil Oldfield, *Collective biography of women in Britain, 1550-1900* (London, 1999).

¹² On collective female biography in the nineteenth century, Miriam Ellen Burstein writes, '[B]ooks published in 1829 and 1889 are virtually indistinguishable in terms of their historiographical standards... authors wrote encyclopaedic texts characterised by instances of *déjà lu*, plagiarism, and mutual raiding of sources.' 'From good looks to good thoughts', 48.

¹³ Natalie Zemon Davis first used the term 'women worthies' to describe the 'little biographies of great women' that have existed since ancient times. See 'Gender and genre: women as historical writers 1400-1820' in Patricia H Labalme, ed., *Beyond their sex: learned women of the European past* (New York, 1983), 153-82. Alison Booth's study, *How to make it as a woman*, attempts to historicise what she terms 'collective biographical histories of women', however she conflates various different forms of collective biographies of women, due to her focus on 'collective exemplarity'. Hanna Östholm's project, the 'History of Gyneceums', similarly seeks to create a 'canon' of biographical dictionaries of women, and assumes that such 'all-female' catalogues form a genre. Such homogenisation of these works ensures that which is truly unique about texts such as Hays's *Female biography* is lost.

through biography, rather than as a radical intervention into post-Wollstonecraftian feminism.¹⁴

Few critics have analysed more than an individual entry of *Female biography* in order to dismiss the work as a ‘dumbing down’ of Hays’s feminism.¹⁵ Cynthia Richards has made this rather pejorative reading of *Female biography*, following the example of eighteenth-century observers who conflated her life and work, representing both as ‘an erotic soap-opera, Rousseau’s Julie in burlesque’.¹⁶ For Richards, *Female biography* marks a ‘retreat of sorts’ too, for as she observes, ‘if the first half of Hays’s career is characterized by thinly disguised and ardent autobiography, then the second half is characterized by rather generic biographies.’¹⁷ Richards reads *Female biography* alongside a number of male-authored texts and repeats Kelly’s description of *Female biography* as ‘hack work’.¹⁸ In such a critique we hear the echoes of Hays’s

¹⁴ Jeanne Wood argues that Hays evokes exemplary biography when she states her desire ‘to excite a worthier emulation’ and appears to concede the expectation of biography’s proper reputation when she excludes Mary Wollstonecraft, however she also suggests that Hays inclusion of a number of controversial women ensured ‘that some of the instructive narrations ... directly challenge the kinds of intellectual and creative pursuits conventionally prescribed to women.’ ‘Alphabetically arranged’, 127-8.

¹⁵ Cynthia Richards, ‘Revising history, “dumbing down”, and imposing silence: the *Female biography* of Mary Hays’, in Linda V Troost ed., *Eighteenth-century women: studies in their lives and culture* (New York, 2003), 264-94. Richards however notes that Hays was more prolific after the scandal of her involvement with Charles Lloyd, a fact often overlooked by critics who note her shift towards pedagogical texts in the early nineteenth century. For a more sympathetic account of Hays’s work in *Female biography* see Greg Kucich, ‘Women’s historiography and the (dis)embodiment of the law: Ann Yearsley, Mary Hays, Elizabeth Benger’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 33 (2002), 3-6.

¹⁶ The phrase is Barbara Taylor’s. See *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination* (Cambridge, 2002), 188. Taylor has written that Hays was ‘one of the most audacious feminists writers to put pen to paper’. See her review of Elaine Showalter’s *Inventing herself*, entitled ‘Mother haters and other rebels’, *London Review Bookshop*, 24, no. 1 (2002), 3-6. Yet even Taylor concedes that Hays ‘was too intimidated to include Wollstonecraft’ in *Female biography*, after the scandal that erupted upon the publication of Godwin’s *Memoirs*.

¹⁷ Richards, ‘Revising history’, 270.

¹⁸ Richards mentions George Ballard, *Memoirs of several ladies of Great Britain* (1752) Thomas Amory, *Memoirs: containing the lives of several ladies of Great Britain; biographyum fœmineum* (1766) and William Alexander, *The history of women*.

unsympathetic male observers, who seem to have been more offended by her person than scandalized by her politics.¹⁹

While later critics have assumed that Hays's recourse to biography marked a conservative shift, made in order to appeal to a broad female readership, Aikin's comments on the text strike a discordant note, as she opines to Mrs Taylor:

At the same time that she attempts to make us despise 'the frivolous rivalry of beauty and fashion,' she holds forth such tremendous examples of the excesses of more energetic characters, that one is much inclined to imitate those quite good folks who bless God they are no geniuses. However a general biography is something like a great London rout, everybody is there, good, bad and indifferent, visitable and not visitable, so that a squeamish lady scarcely knows whom she may venture to speak to.'²⁰

Unlike modern critics, Lucy Aikin could not have read *Female biography* as anticipating the genre's evolution in the Victorian period. Indeed, she was probably more attuned than most to the development of the genre in the eighteenth century, and to its radical history. As well as reconsidering Mary Hays's engagement with Wollstonecraftian feminism, I want to suggest that Aikin's exchange with Taylor, and the publication of her *Epistles exemplifying their character and condition in various ages and nations*, some years later, demonstrates that Wollstonecraft's legacy continued to be debated in the aftermath of her death, at least among women of the Dissenting community who sought to engender distinctive modes of feminist historical understanding to further the cause of the rights of woman.

¹⁹ Jocelyn Harris notes in her wonderful study of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, that vehement attacks on Fanny Burney by male critics in the early nineteenth century, often conflated the novelist with the novel. See *A revolution almost beyond expression* (Newark, 2007), 26-7. A similar trend is easy to detect in criticism of Hays, particularly following the death of Wollstonecraft.

²⁰ Le Breton, *Memoirs*, 126.

Post-Wollstonecraftian feminism

The very idea of post-Wollstonecraftian feminism is, of course, quite contentious. Most historical accounts of Enlightenment feminism have insisted that the immediate period following the death of Wollstonecraft saw its instantaneous and emphatic decline. It is usually asserted that the scandal that ensued following William Godwin's revelations of his wife's unorthodox life in his *Memoirs of the author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) retarded the development of feminism for at least a generation. Feminist historians have maintained the idea that the *Memoirs* marked the end of Enlightenment feminism in Britain. Most studies contain descriptions of the vilification of Wollstonecraft in the Anti-Jacobin press, and the public abuse heaped upon Godwin by his enemies.²¹ The focus upon the tragedy of Wollstonecraft's demise has ensured that the multifaceted nature of feminism in the 1790s has been obscured. There has been a tendency to view all women writing in the wake of Wollstonecraft's death as particularly concerned to distance themselves from her, and to aver any elements of her feminism. There is little discussion of those women writers who remained loyal to Wollstonecraft, except to suggest that such women became increasingly conservative in their views in the aftermath of the scandal.²² Such ideas have sustained Godwin's erroneous suggestion that Wollstonecraft's feminism was formed by her unique subjectivity, rather than it having emerged as part of an extensive debate among her friends and contemporaries.²³

Even scholars, such as Ruth Watts and Kathryn Gleadle, who have offered sophisticated examinations of the connections between Dissent and feminism have not really interrogated the period between 1797 and

²¹ Pamela Hirsch, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: a problematic legacy' in Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Wollstonecraft's daughters* (Manchester, 1996), 43-60; Jane Rendall, *The origins of modern feminism* (Basingstoke, 1985); and Barbara Caine, 'Victorian feminism and the ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Women's Writing*, 4, no. 2 (1997), 261-75; Barbara Caine, *English feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997).

²² Kelly, *Women, writing and revolution* and Eleanor Ty, *Unsexed revolutionaries: five women novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto, 1993).

²³ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their fathers' daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and patriarchal complicity* (New York, 1991).

1830. Gleadle describes this period as a ‘feminist wasteland’ and situates the re-emergence of feminism among Dissenting women in the 1830s.²⁴ While Watts suggests that men in the Dissenting community were impressed by Wollstonecraft, she too maintains that the idea that the rabid anti-feminism which had emerged during the Napoleonic wars ensured that women ‘otherwise attuned to calls for liberty, were disinclined to move too fast on issues concerning their own sex’.²⁵ Wollstonecraft has been said to ‘haunt’ feminism in the nineteenth century, inhabiting it as a spectral presence that could not be named or acknowledged.²⁶ As a consequence of Godwin’s *Memoirs*, Mary Wollstonecraft’s life has served as a cautionary tale, an unwelcome reminder of the connection between personal rebellion and feminist commitment. This has created the appearance of the absence of a legitimating tradition in British feminism.²⁷ The history of feminism has been cast in terms of its ephemeral nature, a story of exceptional but marginal women who moved the discourse of women’s rights forward at a huge personal cost, only to be deserted by other women, traduced and rendered obscure. Hays fits all too readily into such accounts, as a ‘Wollstonecraft wannabe’, a less beautiful and less brilliant version of her Romantic friend. Aikin, however, rarely appears in such discussions, and if she does, she is aligned with her aunt, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and fellow Dissenters such as Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Benger. Such women were not as conservative as Hannah More, but neither did they wish to be associated with ‘Miss Hays’s or ‘Mrs Godwin’.²⁸ This does not, however, mean that they were untouched by Wollstonecraft’s legacy, or uninfluenced by her radicalism. In fact what I hope to demonstrate is that even during this period, Wollstonecraft’s ideas inflected the works of Dissenting women, who sought to recuperate her politics from the disastrous effect of Godwin’s memorialisation.

²⁴ Kathryn Gleadle, ‘Early Feminists’, in *Radical writing on women, 1800–1850: an anthology*, compiled by Kathryn Gleadle (London, 2002), 2. Gleadle says that feminism was ‘alive and kicking’ in the early 19th century, however most of this text is made up of examples drawn from the later period after 1830.

²⁵ Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians*, 94.

²⁶ Caine, ‘The ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft’, 261-75.

²⁷ Caine, ‘The ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft’, 262.

²⁸ See Anna Letitia Barbauld’s comments to Maria Edgeworth on this subject, most recently recounted in William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2008), 360.

Dissent, reading and history

Hays's first feminist text, *Letters and essays* (1792), was begun shortly before she met Wollstonecraft, and although Wollstonecraft undoubtedly influenced this work, the text was essentially a 'primer of Rational Dissent for female readers'.²⁹ The connection between Dissent and feminism in this text had been shaped for a decade before Hays met Wollstonecraft, by her intense but sporadic correspondence with the controversial Baptist Minister Robert Robinson. Hays had first come into contact with Robinson when seeking consolation after the sudden of her fiancé John Eccles. She credited Robinson with saving her life after Eccles' death.³⁰ The connection with Robinson gave Hays the courage to pursue a life of learning, and the intensive course of self-education she followed under his tutelage drew her into the debates that framed radical Protestantism during the Enlightenment. Robinson advocated a system of universal toleration, and like other Dissenters was committed to the right to private judgment and the virtues of engaged citizenship. He introduced Hays to the works of dissident theologians such as Jean Claude and Jacques Saurin. Hays's familiarity with Saurin 'provides some explanation for her early and continued rebellion against the historical commandment that chastity should be the pre-eminent virtue for women'.³¹ The graphic portrayal of sexually 'wronged' women throughout the body of her work can be traced to this early influence.

Hays's thoughts on reading history and differed greatly from those put forward by Mary Wollstonecraft and this distinction can be traced to the influence of another Dissenting pedagogue, Joseph Priestley, whom Hays encountered at the New College in Hackney shortly after Robinson's death. In *Letters and essays*, but also in her later works of history and biography, it appears that Hays drew upon Priestley's ideas about the relation of passions, judgment and imagination to different genres of writing.

Joseph Priestley had preached Robinson's funeral sermon and shared his enthusiasm for the education of women. Priestley's great innovation

²⁹ Walker, *Growth*, 66.

³⁰ Marilyn L Brooks ed., *The correspondence of Mary Hays, British novelist (1779-1843)*, Mellon Critical Editions and Translations, vol. 13 (Lampeter, 2004), 238.

³¹ Walker, *Growth*, 40-1.

as a pedagogue had been to introduce practical science and the study of history when he had arrived at the Warrington academy at the beginning of his career.³² Priestley recognised that the curriculum at Warrington, like other Dissenting academies, had been developed to train young men for the learned professions, while most of his students would find careers in business or public life. History and were critical elements within the curriculum created by Priestley, and he treated both as part of a larger system, which he had developed in order to challenge ‘ignorance, superstition, confusion and unfounded authority’.³³ He regarded history as a ‘study doubly valuable to the political philosopher’ as a lesson in cause and effect, but chiefly as constituting ‘anticipated experience’ for the political thinker. ‘From this source only’, he thought, ‘can be derived all future improvements in the science of government’.³⁴ Priestley created a chart of biography naming 2000 ‘great men’, for his ‘Academical Lectures on the Study of History’, having it engraved so that all young men might be able to access this ‘TABLE OF FAME’.³⁵

While such ideas reflected the gendering of history as a ‘science’ of politics for young men, Priestley’s early pedagogical writings offered Hays insights into making history accessible to young women. In his *Lectures on oratory and criticism*, published in 1777, Priestley put forward the idea of ‘sympathetic reading’, a sentimental and affective response to historical writing, which he adopted from the works of David

³² Watts, *Gender, power and the Unitarians*, 34.

³³ Ruth Watts, ‘Revolution and reaction: “Unitarian Academies 1780-1800”’, *History of Education*, 20, no. 4 (1991), 312.

³⁴ Anthony Lincoln, *Some political and social ideas of English Dissent* (1938, repr. New York, 1971), 158-9.

³⁵ Priestley does include a handful of women, but these inclusions are somewhat idiosyncratic (Boaedicea, Anna Comnena, Madame Dacier, Eudisia, Faustina, Margaret of Anjou, Mary of Scots, Matilda, Messalina, Platina, Semiramis, and Sulpicia). See Joseph Priestley, *A description of a chart of biography, with a catalogue of all the names* (London, 1785). Women of eminence were not entirely absent from other works of collective biography, but were most often found as addendum to men’s lives, wives and mothers relegated to footnotes. The *Biographia Britannica* for instance listed a select group including Arlotta, Mary Astell, Lady Anna Bacon, Elizabeth Barton, Mary Beale, Joan Beaufort, Aphra Behn, Juliana Berners, Margaret Cavendish, Susanna Centrivre, Lady Mary Chudleigh, Susannah Cibber, Catharine Cockburn, Mary Delany, Elizabeth Elstob, Lady Katherine Killigrew and Lady Elizabeth Russel.

Hume and Henry Homes, Lord Kames.³⁶ In this text he argued particularly that biography had the power to awaken the ‘pleasures of the imagination’.³⁷ As Mark Salber Phillips has suggested, in these early lectures Priestley was advocating ‘that in mobilizing the passions history and fiction stand on much the same footing’, although in later works he would adopt a more rigorous approach to the learning of history.³⁸

While Wollstonecraft was critical of the novel’s tendency to make women ‘*the creatures of sensation*’, Hays was drawn to fiction and recognised the novel’s potential to evoke sympathy and understanding in female readers.³⁹ Wollstonecraft believed that the similarity between history and fiction functioned to history’s detriment, rendering ‘the reading of history, scarcely more useful than the perusal of romances’.⁴⁰ Hays however resisted Wollstonecraft’s understanding of history, and instead seized upon Priestley’s ideas, instructing women in appropriate modes of reading that allowed them to move effortlessly from works of fiction to history.⁴¹ Hays believed that novels provided a useful entry point for women into more rigorous fields of study such as history. Acknowledging that women were most likely to read novels of sensibility such as Richardson’s *Clarissa* or Rousseau’s *La nouvelle Héloïse*, she argued, ‘Would it not be easy to lead young persons from these works to periodical essays, which are continually interspersed with lively, and entertaining narrations, and where instruction comes in the dress of amusement.’ From thence, the transition to reading biography and then history would not be difficult. Hays put forward a study of biographical works such as Mrs Dobson’s *Life of Petrarch*, Voltaire’s *History of Charles the Twelfth* and Stuart’s *History of the unfortunate Mary Queen of Scots*, such works she suggested were ‘composed in a manner to amuse and instruct, and to generate a taste for historical reading’.⁴²

³⁶ Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and sentiment: genres of historical writing in Britain 1740-1820* (New Haven, 2000), 110.

³⁷ Joseph Priestley, *Lectures on oratory and criticism* (New York, 1971), 79.

³⁸ Phillips, *Society and sentiment*; see fn., 16, 110.

³⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of woman*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge, 1995), 137.

⁴⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the rights of woman*, 238.

⁴¹ It is clear from Hays correspondence with Priestley that they had discussed such issues; see Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 394.

⁴² Hays, *Letters and essays*, 96-7.

Like Priestley, Hays recognised the potential of biography to contribute to the formation of autonomous subjectivity, and in this and later works she would expand upon the curriculum she had seen at Hackney to include the lives of women and the interests of women readers. Hays engaged with Priestley's ideas about the public utility of history in other works such as *Historical dialogues for young persons (1806-1808)*, where she again argued contrary to Wollstonecraft, that 'History ... can be interesting and amusing only in proportion as it is biographical'.⁴³

Memoirs of Emma Courtney

The question of appropriate female reading also formed a major theme in Hays's most (in)famous work, the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), as she continued to refine her ideas about the utility of different genres to educate women. In the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Hays recounted in 'fictionalized' form, her unhappy entanglement with the heterodox Anglican clergyman and Cambridge mathematician William Frend. Although this text is usually described by literary critics as a 'novel of sensibility', Hays's use of the term 'memoir' requires consideration here, particularly in relation to eighteenth-century understandings of that term, its nebulous critical positioning between history and fiction, and its association with critique of the hegemonic social/political order through the creation of a secret or particular history.⁴⁴ Certainly Hays's engagement with sincere self-examination in this text renders its production an extremely significant moment in both the history of life writing and feminism.

In the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Hays drew upon the evidence of her own life as an exercise in sincere self-examination, at the suggestion of the rational philosopher William Godwin. Hays came to Godwin to borrow his seminal work, *Political justice*, and he began to act as her 'Confessor' and 'good physician' during her fraught relationship with Frend.⁴⁵ Mark Philp has argued that while much is made of Godwin's

⁴³ Mary Hays, *Historical dialogues for young people* (London, 1808). See also Kelly, *Women, writing and revolution*, 250 and Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 2009), 209.

⁴⁴ Faith E Beasley, 'Memoir', in Mary Spongberg et al., *Companion to women's historical writing* (London, 2005), 330, 333.

⁴⁵ Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 365.

avowed atheism, his philosophy was emphatically marked by ‘the language, culture and traditions of Rational Dissent’.⁴⁶ Certainly their encounter was shaped by Dissent, as Godwin’s ‘therapy’ for Hays was based on notions relating to the duty of private judgment and the impelling nature of moral truth. For Rational Dissenters the concept of ‘private judgment’ emerged in relation to religious practice, but Godwin secularised this notion, ‘taking sincerity to its logical extreme’. At the heart of Godwin’s philosophy was the idea that sincerity and individualism were essential requirements for the politically just society, only ‘complete lack of reserve between individuals will guarantee absolute freedom in the political sphere’.⁴⁷

Godwin sought to rescue Hays from her ‘excessive sensibility’ by convincing her of the merits of sincerity and autonomy and the acquired discipline of rationality. Initially Godwin the ‘philosopher’ inspired Hays ‘with confidence’ and she felt she could ‘unfold her mind without reserve or apprehension’, in order for him to ‘trace, & to investigate, the source’ of its ‘disorder’.⁴⁸ This exchange between Hays and Godwin functioned as a quest for truth acquired through a rigorous and frank interpersonal dialogue.⁴⁹ Their relationship, however, quickly became fraught, as Hays furiously resisted Godwin’s recourse to ‘excessive rationality’. She insisted instead ‘that the search for subjective, situational truth arising from experience and not abstract truth was the business of enlightened minds.’⁵⁰

Godwin believed in the public utility of texts engaged in sincere self-examination, and thus encouraged Hays to publish their experiment as a ‘novel’. Men such as Rousseau were, of course, celebrated for their confessional writing, and in the tumultuous decade in which Godwin and

⁴⁶ Mark Philp, *Godwin’s political justice* (London, 1986), 16.

⁴⁷ Jennifer Davidson, “‘Professed Enemies of Politeness’: Sincerity and the Problem of Gender in Godwin’s *Enquiry concerning political justice* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the rights of woman*”, *Studies in Romanticism*, 39 (2000), 600.

⁴⁸ Letter to William Godwin from Mary Hays, 13 October 1795, Marilyn L Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 402.

⁴⁹ Mary Jacobus, *Psychoanalysis and the scene of reading* (Oxford, 1999), 202-34. See also Gina Luria Walker, *The growth of a woman’s mind*, 120.

⁵⁰ Walker, *Idea of being free*, 120.

Hays exchanged letters, such writers served to forward the cause of the revolution. Godwin himself believed that the study of individual lives ‘had a political purpose.’⁵¹ During the course of Hays’s correspondence with Godwin, she had reintroduced him to Mary Wollstonecraft, whom he married in the year after the publication of *Emma Courtney*. Both Wollstonecraft and Godwin also engaged in a course of critical self-examination inspired by Rousseau at this time, and their experiments in various forms of life writing in their brief time together formed an integral part of their courtship.⁵²

Read by both Hays’s contemporaries and modern scholars principally for its shameless self-disclosure, the arguments Hays makes in the *Memoirs*, about women’s engagement with genre in this text have been overlooked, as indeed has been her claim that the fate of her heroine Emma, a victim of sensibility, was ‘calculated to operate as a *warning*, rather than as an example’.⁵³ Emma’s sensibility, we are told early in the text, had been nurtured by an almost addictive tendency to read novels (‘I Subscribed to a circulating library, and frequently read, or rather devoured – little careful in the selection – from ten to fourteen novels in a week’).⁵⁴ Upon the death of her guardian, the kindly Mr Melmoth, Emma’s absent father reappears. Seeking to curb her indulgence in sentiment, he insists Emma make weekly visits to his establishment in Berkley Square, to ‘prepare and strengthen’ her mind for the inevitable hardships that await her as a single woman of no fortune. Emma confesses that the ‘only idea that alleviated the horror of my weekly-punishment (for so I considered the visits to Berkley-Square) was the hope of reading new books, and of being suffered to *range uncontrouled* through an extensive and valuable library...’ Again Hays refers to novel reading in terms of addiction and excess, as Emma recounts: ‘I still retain my passion for adventurous tales,

⁵¹ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the author of a vindication of the rights of woman*, eds. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Peterborough, ONT, 2001), 14.

⁵² For a discussion of this experimentation see Mary Spongberg, ‘The “Abelard complex”: William Godwin’s *Memoirs of the author of a vindication of the rights of woman* and the gender of romantic biography’, *Angelaki*, 13, no. 2 (2008), 17-32.

⁵³ Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), ed. Eleanor Ty (Oxford, 1996), 4. An exception to this is Katherine Binhammer’s ‘The persistence of novel reading: governing female novel-reading in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *Memoirs of modern philosophers*’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 27, no. 2 (2003), 1-22.

⁵⁴ Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 18.

which, even while at school, I was enabled to gratify by means of one of the day-boarders, who procured for me romances from a neighbouring library, which at every interval of leisure I perused with inconceivable avidity.⁵⁵

Much emphasis has been placed on Hays's connection with William Godwin, and this has until recently ensured that the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* has been misleadingly labelled a 'Jacobin novel'.⁵⁶ Yet as Marilyn Brooks has powerfully argued, a close reading of the text, and of her anguished correspondence with Godwin, suggests that Hays was not so much engaged with Godwinian philosophy, as offering a sustained and at times, rather vehement critique of the theories Godwin expounded. As Brooks observes, Hays believed that Godwin ignored the fact that 'sexual distinction' was 'the first circumstance that mankind meets and that this circumstance had subsequently been cajoled into a prejudice.'⁵⁷ Hays continually foregrounds the injustices arising from the sexual distinction, which she believed distorted women's adoption of the cornerstones of Godwinian discourse, truth, virtue and sincerity.⁵⁸ Godwin's refusal to acknowledge the masculinist nature of his philosophy, and its potential to harm women who engaged with it, is a powerful theme running through Hays's novel, and indeed other 'novels' sometimes referred to as anti-Jacobin (I am thinking here particularly of Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* and Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of modern philosophers*). For Hays, the recognition that her small contribution 'towards mending the world' would probably 'meet with reproach and malignity, instead of respect and esteem', was all too true, and adds poignancy to her critique of Godwin.⁵⁹

Emma's struggle with appropriate reading forms a central theme of the text, dramatizing some of the tensions Hays experienced as she tussled with Godwin. When Emma reads Plutarch, her mind is 'pervaded with republican ardour', her sentiments 'elevated by a high-toned philosophy' and her bosom glows 'with the virtues of patriotism'. However, Emma's engagement with Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* marks her indelibly, and is 'productive of a long chain of circumstances' that set her on the path

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁶ Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin novel 1780-1805* (Oxford, 1976).

⁵⁷ Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 18.

⁵⁸ Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 370.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 436.

to a life of sorrow and heartbreak.⁶⁰ As Nicola Watson has observed, Emma's father's actions have the ironic effect of ensuring that she only reads the first volume which contains Julie's sexual transgression: thus, 'Emma never benefits from the corrective re-insertion of Julie into patriarchy, or, indeed from the punitive cutting short of her revived desire'.⁶¹ Here we see Hays shifting closer to Wollstonecraft's perspective on the novel, as she depicts this moment as critical to the formation of Emma's character. Later Emma would complain that her education had given her a 'sexual character', and her early exposure to Rousseau is explicitly implicated here. Emma declares that 'Like Rousseau's Julia, my strong individual attachment has annihilated every man in creation' thus doubly implicating Rousseau as the source of women's tendency to early, inappropriate and fatal romantic attachment.⁶²

Certain types of biographical writing are also blamed for Emma's predicament in the text. While Plutarch may have left her glowing in their initial encounter, she confesses later to Mr Francis (the Godwin character in *Emma Courtney*), that 'dwelling with ardour on the great characters, and heroic actions of antiquity, all my ideas of honour and distinction were associated with those of virtue and talents.' This tendency led her to trust philosophy, as she conceived 'that the pursuit of truth and the advancement of reason, were the grand objects of universal attention', and she 'panted to do homage to those superior minds, who teaching mankind to be wise, would at length lead them to happiness.'⁶³

But Emma is not liberated by philosophy either. As Katherine Binhammer has observed, what Emma discovers is that 'reason is impotent to address the concerns of a single woman in the world'.⁶⁴ Thus in the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Hays is not embracing the tenets of Godwinian philosophy, but rather reflecting an increasing scepticism of

⁶⁰ Hays ironically echoes Rousseau in *Émile* here. Rousseau however is writing of first love. See *Emilius or, an essay on education*, trans. Mr Nugent (London, 1763), ii, 285.

⁶¹ Nicola Watson, *Revolution and the form of the British novel* (Oxford, 1994), 46.

⁶² Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 117.

⁶³ Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 46.

⁶⁴ Katherine Binhammer, *The persistence of novel reading*, 9.

the power of sincerity and truth to engender the rights of woman.⁶⁵ In this text we see Hays in the process of recognising the limitations of female subjectivity and its relation to social change. After several years of correspondence with Godwin, she wrote: 'I repent of the confidence I have reposed in you – I repent of the ingenuousness of every part of my past conduct. Sincerity is a fine theory – I have tried it, but find it impracticable – *I am its victim*.'⁶⁶ As her intense exchange with Godwin drew to an end, Hays revealed that his philosophy had done her no personal good, making the tragic admission in 1796, 'I have acquired the power of reasoning on this subject at a dear rate – at the expense of inconceivable suffering'.⁶⁷

The wrongs of women

Such observations complicate our understanding of Hays's shift away from self-revelatory novels to collective female biography in the early nineteenth century. While undoubtedly Hays was rejecting Godwinian sincerity and Rousseavian autobiography as a mode through which to understand the self and to plead for the rights of woman, there is no evidence to suggest that she was rejecting Wollstonecraftian feminism. In fact, following her reintroduction to Godwin, Wollstonecraft herself was in the process of testing the limits of Rousseau's ideas around sexuality and female subjectivity and its relation to social change in her last work, *The wrongs of woman, or Maria*.⁶⁸ If in the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* Hays's ideas about the impact of genre on the female reader became more aligned with Wollstonecraft's, in *Maria* Wollstonecraft's understanding of the particular nature of women's oppression came to more closely resemble Hays's. In this text, Wollstonecraft foregrounds the prejudices arising from sexual distinction by exploring the relationship between women's embodiment and their oppression. While in her earlier *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft had assumed that an identification with the

⁶⁵ Critics since the eighteenth century have tended to accept the representation put forward in the anti-Jacobin press of Mary Hays, which characterised her as a 'balding disciple' of Godwin, spouting forth large sections of *Political justice*, with little understanding and even less decorum. See Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 370.

⁶⁶ Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 436.

⁶⁷ Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 430.

⁶⁸ Spongberg, 'The Abelard Complex', 17-32.

masculinised Republican body offered women strategies for emancipation, in *Maria*, as Claudia L Johnson has observed, ‘the female body, – having been insulted, sold, hunted down, imprisoned solely because of its femaleness – is accepted in all its creatureliness, and is offered as the basis for solidarity with other women, and as the spring of moral sentiment.’⁶⁹ Wollstonecraft’s exploration of the connection between women’s emotional life and morality align her emphatically with Hays, who had spent months attempting to convince Godwin of the need to recognize that the sexual character imposed on women limited them, and allowed them to better access passion, which she characterized as ‘another name for powers’.⁷⁰

In *Maria* too, we see Wollstonecraft like Hays, struggling to develop new modes of understanding women’s particular experience and new methods to achieve their emancipation beyond those offered by masculinist radical politics. A recognition of the specificity of the female body and how female embodiment shaped women’s exclusion from discourses of citizenship and equity before the law emphatically frames Wollstonecraft’s narrative. *Maria* is not merely the victim of sensibility, or philosophy, but of ‘matrimonial despotism of heart and conduct’. In *Maria* Wollstonecraft defines matrimonial despotism as ‘the particular wongs [sic] of woman’, thus placing her at odds with Godwin. Godwin’s refusal to concede this point was a source of some contention between the pair.⁷¹

The relation between women’s embodiment and their oppression limits their potential to achieve subjectivity. Thus the story of each woman in *Maria* is the story of women’s oppression due to sexual distinction. It is

⁶⁹ Claudia L Johnson, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft: styles of radical maternity’, in Susan C Greenfield and Carol Barash eds., *Inventing maternity: politics, science and literature 1650-1865* (Lexington, 1999), 162.

⁷⁰ Brooks ed., *Correspondence*, 394.

⁷¹ In an unpublished critique of *Maria*, Godwin complained to Wollstonecraft that the text was damaged by her ‘womanly indulgence of a feeling about nothing’ and warned her that if she did not construct her plot along more rational lines, she risked producing ‘a common-place story of a brutal insensible husband.’ See Mitzi Myers, ‘Unfinished business: Wollstonecraft’s *Maria*’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 11, no. 2 (1980), 110. See also her letter to George Dyson, 15 May 1797, in Ralph M Wardle ed., *Collected letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca, 1979), 391-2.

not a unique story, but rather the same story of oppression rooted in the sexed body, of the erasure of individuality in different guises. Wollstonecraft writes in the Preface that this ‘history ought rather to be considered as of woman, than of an individual’. The laws of England allow woman little chance of achieving autonomous existence and without autonomy women cannot access the revolutionary potential of the autobiographical in the way articulated by Rousseau in the *Confessions* (or indeed by Godwin in the *Memoirs*).⁷²

The text suggests that Wollstonecraft can no longer imagine that her confessions will be the record of a singular self. The scandal that emerged as her marriage to Godwin became known forced her to recognize the limitations of radical truth telling and sincerity, for it is she, not he, who is snubbed and scorned.⁷³ Thus while Maria’s ‘code of emotional authenticity’ leads her to offer a radical revision of conventional morality, in the end this ‘truth’ fails to set her free.⁷⁴ At the moment before her death, Wollstonecraft appears to be critiquing her husband’s philosophy, demonstrating by his refusal to recognize the prejudices arising from the sexual distinction, that he had erased the political experience of difference.⁷⁵

Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft

If Hays had suspected that she was a victim of Godwinian sincerity before she published *Emma Courtney*, its reception among her contemporaries and the scandal that ensued when its autobiographical nature became known thoroughly convinced her. Although she maintained her

⁷² It is somewhat ironic that since the 1970s feminist scholars have suggested that the *Memoirs of the author of a vindication* functioned as a sort of literary coverture, whereby the political philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft was subsumed into the ‘woman of feeling’, Mrs Godwin. See Claire Tomalin, *The life and death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London, 1974).

⁷³ Note for instance the reaction of the actress Mrs Inchbald to the news of Godwin’s marriage. See Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: a revolutionary life* (London, 2000), 420 and Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: a life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London, 2005), 365-6.

⁷⁴ Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*, 136-7.

⁷⁵ This sentiment can be detected in her letter to George Dyson, and also in a heated exchange with Godwin, 4 July 1797. See Ralph Wardle, *Collected letters*, 391, 404.

acquaintance with Godwin upon his marriage to Wollstonecraft, they fell out completely after her death. Both appear to have lost confidence in the others' ability to assess Wollstonecraft's legacy. The scandal that greeted Godwin's publication of the *Memoirs of the author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* did nothing to salvage their relationship, forever casting Hays in a secondary role, an unsexed female follower of Wollstonecraft.

Hays was not, however, cowed by the scandal, and produced the only female-authored memorials of Wollstonecraft, in the period following her death.⁷⁶ In her 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', published in the *Annual Necrology* (1800), Hays sought not only to recuperate the reputation of her dear friend; she also constructed her biography in ways that subtly subverted the authority of Godwin's *Memoirs*. This is made obvious from the outset by the way that she foregrounds Wollstonecraft's religiosity in her obituary. Godwin had, of course, scandalized with his revelation that 'during her whole illness not one word of a religious cast fell from [Wollstonecraft's] lips'.⁷⁷ Hays did not attend Wollstonecraft's burial service, which had been held in St Pancras, an Anglican Church. In her 'Memoirs', she aligns Wollstonecraft's religious belief and politics conspicuously with Dissent. Wollstonecraft's move to that centre of Rational Dissent, Newington Green, is represented by Hays as formative, 'giving a tincture to her future views and character'.⁷⁸ More significantly Hays represents Wollstonecraft as deeply religious, although 'she laid no stress on creeds or forms'.⁷⁹ Such ideas undercut Godwin's suggestion that his wife's religion 'was founded rather in taste, than in the niceties of polemical discussion' and disrupted the complementarity he sought to depict in the *Memoirs*, through his representation of Wollstonecraft as woman of feeling, to his rational male philosopher.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Mary Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', in *The Annual Necrology* (London, 1797-98), 411-60.

⁷⁷ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the author*, 118.

⁷⁸ Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', 416. Figures of Dissent Hays mentions as in her memorial include the Rev. Richard Price and Mrs James Burgh. Hays also claims that Wollstonecraft compiled *The female reader* in the model of Dr. Enfield's *The speaker*.

⁷⁹ Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', 416.

⁸⁰ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the author*. See also Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*, 96.

In his *Memoirs*, Godwin had moved beyond Rousseau in his construction of Wollstonecraft's revolutionary consciousness, demonstrating the 'inseparability of individual and social experience in a woman's life, as well as in a man's'.⁸¹ Yet his depiction of the forces that shaped her experience and politics paid little attention to that which was particularly feminine in her experience, to the discrimination generated by 'sexual distinction'. Godwin sees nothing particularly 'feminine' in the travails that shaped Wollstonecraft's personality or politics, instead describing her as a 'female Werter', after Goethe's hero.⁸² Godwin did not consider Wollstonecraft's actions or politics to be the result of the peculiar circumstance of the female condition, but a trait of personality that links her not with other women, but with the male Romantic subject. Godwin's allusion to Goethe's *Werther* made a horrifying connection between the rights of woman and female self-destruction, and ensured that Wollstonecraft's contemporaries associated her with narcissism and self-indulgent sexuality.⁸³

Hays however represented Wollstonecraft's actions and politics as being shaped by the typical experience of being a woman. As with her character Emma Courtney, Hays depicts Wollstonecraft as being formed by 'rigid self-denial, economy, the seclusion of her habits' which caused her 'originally fervent character' to have 'a tincture of enthusiasm; brooding in solitude over her feelings' until 'they became passions'.⁸⁴ This is not the excessive sensibility which Godwin attributes to his wife, but rather conditions engendered by the distinction of sex. This emphasis on the everywoman quality of Wollstonecraft's experience and its impact on her politics is particularly evident in the way Hays renders Wollstonecraft's relationship with Gilbert Imlay central to her narrative, and in so doing contests the image of Wollstonecraft as 'female Werter'.

⁸¹ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the author*, 20.

⁸² Godwin refers to *Werther* twice in the *Memoirs*, and he prefaced his edited version of her private correspondence with Imlay published in the *Posthumous works*, with the comment that these letters were 'superior' to those of that fictional hero.

⁸³ Todd, Janet, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the rights of death' in *Gender, art and death* (Cambridge, 1993), 102-119.

⁸⁴ Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', 421.

Godwin had placed no undue significance on this aspect of Wollstonecraft's life. He relayed the story of her relationship with Imlay matter-of-factly, in tones that reflected his own philosophy of cohabitation. He offered the rational explanation for her breach of accepted mores, that she took the name of Imlay, to enable her to stay in Paris following the declaration threatening to imprison Britons resident in France. Yet he constructs her response to the tragic dénouement of her relationship with Imlay as the result of her exquisite feelings, and her too trusting nature. Her suicide attempt thus reported by Godwin is stripped of any rationality, becoming, in Janet Todd's word, an act of 'sentimental surrender'.⁸⁵ Unlike Godwin, Hays spends much of her narrative exploring what she considers Wollstonecraft's most critical relationship, to discover the personal and situational truth arising from Wollstonecraft's experience. Rather than casting Wollstonecraft as a tragically romantic figure, she instead depicts the 'important consequences' of her relationship with Imlay, 'on her subsequent life and character.'⁸⁶ While undoubtedly Hays sought to restore the reputation of Wollstonecraft, in the wake of Godwin's *Memoirs*, her discussion of this relationship also functioned to demonstrate how the tragedy was formed by Wollstonecraft's straitened circumstances as a woman, her relative seclusion, poverty, lack of independence and education, and of her experience of prejudice arising from the sexual distinction. While Hays cites Godwin on Wollstonecraft's personality in this part of her narrative, she adds as a corrective to his description an addendum that aligns Wollstonecraft's experience with that of other women. Hays considers Wollstonecraft a 'great soul' but insists even this soul cannot escape the conditions engendered by sex. As she writes of Wollstonecraft's falling for Imlay, there is a distinct sense that Hays is projecting here, not just her own experience, but those of all women:

To her affections, long forbidden to expand themselves, exalted to enthusiasm by constraint, she now gave a (sic) loose. Her ingenuous spirit, a stranger to distrust, had yet the melancholy experience to acquire of the corrupt habits of mankind. Her

⁸⁵ Todd, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the rights of death', 117.

⁸⁶ Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', 425.

confidence, her tenderness, was unbounded, lavish, ineffable, combining the force, the devotion, the exquisite delicacy and refinement, which in minds of energy, the chaste habits of female youth are calculated to inspire.⁸⁷

Much of Hays's narrative is drawn from Wollstonecraft's letters to Imlay. Godwin had published Wollstonecraft's private letters to Imlay after her death; he had edited them and then destroyed the originals, thus controlling the legacy of this correspondence. Hays's use of the letters in her memoirs creates a relentless monologic effect similar to the one she had achieved in using her own letters in the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Here the voice of Wollstonecraft is privileged, unfiltered by Godwin, as Hays uses Wollstonecraft's 'own unembarrassed display of romantic fixation' to further connect her own experience with that of her mentor.⁸⁸ It is possible to detect in this biographical sketch the longstanding influence of Robert Robinson and Jacques Saurin upon Hays's feminism. In accepting the circumstances of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Imlay and explaining this as a particular effect of the female condition, Hays rejected contemporary sexual mores and advocated that Robinson's idea of "universal toleration" be extended to real women'.⁸⁹

In Wollstonecraft's last work, *Maria*, a distinct shift towards a more woman-centred notion of feminism can be discerned. The potential alliance between Maria and her friend and protector Jemima, however, allowed Wollstonecraft to replace the heterosexual couple as the imaginative construct that can liberate the rational and feeling female, subverting Rousseau's ideal of an homosocial order. Such ideas were in keeping with the female community she was forming around herself in London during the last months of her life with women such as Hays, and suggest the significance of their interchange. Godwin's *Memoirs* effectively wrote women such as Hays out of her life, focusing instead on her earlier romantic friendship with Fanny Blood. Hays's memorial

⁸⁷ Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', 430-431.

⁸⁸ Barbara Taylor has suggested that *Emma Courtney* was partially inspired by Wollstonecraft's *Short residence in Sweden*. See *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*, 190. See also Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler eds., *The works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (7 vols., London, 1989), vol. 6, 280.

⁸⁹ Walker, *The idea of being free*, 40-1.

focuses extensively on Wollstonecraft's female networks and it is possible to suggest that *Female biography* too served as a memorial for Wollstonecraft. As Gina Luria Walker has observed, Hays's 'memoirs' of Wollstonecraft formed the template for her memoirs of other women, linking 'Wollstonecraft's own struggle to the universal condition of women's lives that inevitably led Wollstonecraft to champion her own sex'.⁹⁰

Female biography

While earlier commentators have implied that Hays's shift to collective biography marked a retrograde shift in her politics, I want to conclude by suggesting that it instead marked the inevitable result of her philosophical education as a Dissenting feminist. The idea that understanding and sympathy were created through the study of biography was a critical element of Dissenting education in the 1790s. Hays clearly engaged with such ideas, and in her early works held that reading biography was a mind-expanding and liberalising experience, one that would prevent women from adopting the worse excesses of sensibility. She was well acquainted, too, with men such as Andrew Kippis, William Enfield, Joseph Towers and John Aikin (Lucy's father), who authored works of collective biography and made them such a significant element of the intellectual culture of Dissent in the late eighteenth century.

Biographical collections may have their roots in hagiographical vitae and Plutarchan lives, but following the publication of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* in 1697, they had taken on a more radical edge. Bayle's *Dictionary* was essentially an anti-hagiographic text, designed as a 'dictionary of error'. It was constructed principally as a corrective to less rigorous works, particularly Louis Moréri's *Dictionary*. Bayle was not merely concerned to use collective biography as a vehicle to illustrate some particular moral virtue or spiritual trait, but rather to explore certain themes, such as absolutism, the philosophy of history, civil and ecclesiastical tolerance and the liberty of conscience.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Gina Luria Walker, 'Female biography: imagined communities of intellectual women' Paper presented at NACBS, Cincinnati, OH, October 2008.

⁹¹ Sally Jenkinson, *Bayle political writings* (Cambridge, 2000), xiv.

Dissenting scholars such as Kippis followed Bayle in using their collections as vehicles for exploring tolerance, seeking to ‘rise above narrow prejudices, and to record, with fidelity and freedom, the virtues and vices, the excellencies and defects of men of every profession and party’.⁹² In spite of such protestations, Kippis was criticised for littering his volumes with the lives of many ‘obscure dissenting teachers’.⁹³ James Boswell may have regretted such a judgment, but it was not without insight. Such texts not only inserted nonconforming lives into the national imaginary, they also functioned as a curious form of secularized hagiography within Dissent. As William Turner explained in his *Lives of eminent Unitarians* (1840) many years later, ‘[T]he practical efficacy of Unitarian principles’ is best displayed ‘in its influence on the lives and character of its most eminent professors.’⁹⁴

Like these Dissenting scholars, Hays drew on Bayle’s *Dictionaire* as her inspiration and her principal source, but perhaps with less scruples about his ‘scepticism and licentiousness’.⁹⁵ Hays states in her introduction that she is following Bayle, who opined ‘that to abridge with judgment, is of literary labours, one of the most difficult.’ Such a statement, rarely considered, suggests that far from ‘dumbing down’ her feminism, Hays was in fact steeling herself to take on what she perceived to be a most difficult intellectual endeavour. More significantly she suggested that while she disdained the work of ‘mere compilation’, she needed to be ‘solicitous for uniformity of language and sentiment’ in order to attract the female reader. Hays’s text was certainly innovative in this regard, being accessible both in the language she used and in its style of publication, conveniently packaged to make it easy to read. While Hays made no pretence to the sort of erudition that characterised Bayle’s text, she was nonetheless familiar with its arguments, and understood that one of its principle themes was toleration. Like Kippis and other Dissenting biographers, she followed Bayle by including women of many sects and

⁹² Andrew Kippis, *Biographia Britannica: or, The lives of the most eminent people who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland* (6 vols. [in 8 pt.], London, 1778 -95), vol. 1, xxi.

⁹³ Donald W Nichol, ‘Biographia Britannica’, 290.

⁹⁴ William Turner, *Lives of eminent Unitarians* (London, 1840), vv.

⁹⁵ Kippis, *Biographia Britannica*, xix.

racess.⁹⁶ Hays emphatically claimed to be '[U]nconnected with any party' and disdainful of bigotry'. But unlike other compilers of women's lives who focused on particularly pious or immoral women, Hays chose to represent 'Every character' in her collection, 'judged upon its own principles'.

For Hays toleration meant both the acceptance of sexual difference and religious toleration, including the toleration of Roman Catholics. While undoubtedly she meant the text to demonstrate her belief in 'universal toleration' in relation to religion, she also sought to demonstrate the need to ameliorate the conditions engendered by the distinction of sex, thus ensuring the principles of toleration be extended to women, as well as men. Hays did more than repeat what she found in the works of Bayle and other Dissenting biographers. She applied Bayle-like scepticism to many of their observations about women, challenging the dead hand of male authority that had shaped and traduced the lives of 'women worthies' since ancient times. As Harriet Guest has observed, Hays's memoirs 'are about history and the judgments it involves, rather than about representative or exemplary lives'.⁹⁷

To criticise Hays for being a compiler of lives as others have done is to miss the point of her project. The distinctive quality of the text was not formed by original research but by its selection of lives, its engagement with themes, and its endeavour to create an intellectual history of women that linked their achievements and ideas as well as their struggles. Hays was not merely creating a dictionary of women worthies; from the outset she framed her study of women's lives in ways that foregrounded the civil and moral disadvantages that impinged upon them. While some of Hays's essays were certainly derivative, they were nonetheless distinctive because she chose to contest the masculinist historical record in much the same way she had contested Godwin's memoirs of Wollstonecraft. Thus while she drew on narratives created by men, she subtly shifted their focus, giving women agency, while also emphasizing the way in which the prejudices arising from the distinction of sex shaped their existence.

⁹⁶ Collections such as Ballard's and Gibbons focused on women from the Established Church.

⁹⁷ Guest, *Small change*, 171.

Thus the women whose lives Hays depicts in *Female biography* are not merely vehicles to depict the ‘heroic actions of antiquity’; instead Hays uses each life to find the subjective truth that arises from experience. In so doing she showed how exceptional women were, nonetheless, still formed and shackled by the constraints that bound all women. This was a project of which she knew Wollstonecraft would approve, as in *Female biography*, Hays moved the discussion of women’s history beyond tales of exceptional women, treating women as neither brutes nor heroines, but rather rational creatures responding to the exigencies of life under patriarchy.

Conclusion

Hays’s refusal to censor or edit the lives of the women she produced in *Female biography* ensured that this work was considered scandalous by her contemporaries. Lucy Aikin saw that Hays’s choice of such a democratic genre as collective biography was especially likely to cause scandal, being as it was ‘like a great London rout’. Yet Hays had not entered this field naively; she had deliberately chosen to document the lives of women, famous and infamous, to demonstrate unequivocally that ‘whatever the obstacles’, women had always ‘participated in the great intellectual and political struggles of their day’. As Gina Luria Walker has suggested, ‘she demonstrated her own worthiness to be included in the panorama she constructed by demonstrating her abilities as a historian with a progressive purpose, in the style of Robert Robinson and perhaps even Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay.’⁹⁸

For Aikin, Hays’s insistence that women be judged by similar moral standards as men was shocking, as was her acceptance of the idea of equality between the sexes. Aikin dismissed such ‘French’ ideas in the Preface to her own gynocentric history, *Epistles on women, exemplifying their character and condition in various ages and nations*, in 1810. A poetical and historical work dedicated by Aikin to her aunt, Anna Letitia Barbauld, the *Epistles* appeared to challenge ‘the absurd idea that the two sexes ever can be, or ever ought to be, placed in all respects on a footing

⁹⁸ Walker, *Growth*, 215.

of equality.’ It would be easy to dismiss this text as a part of a backlash against Wollstonecraftian feminism, in keeping with her derogatory comments about Hays. I would however suggest that Aikin’s *Epistles* bear closer scrutiny. Although Aikin’s eschews Hays’s method, her work nonetheless draws on many of the same lives and texts that featured *Female biography*. In the *Epistles* Aikin reframes the boundaries of collective biography through her engagement with Enlightenment modes of conjectural history, thus discreetly aligning herself with Wollstonecraft.⁹⁹

Aikin’s dismissal of the idea of equality between the sexes is in fact rather hollow, given her recourse to the argument that:

instead of aspiring to be inferior men, let us content ourselves with becoming noble women ... but let not sex be carried into everything. Let the impartial voice of History testify for us, that, when permitted, we have been the worthy associates of the best efforts of the best of men.¹⁰⁰

Here we no longer detect just the influence of Wollstonecraft, but in her wish that ‘sex’ not be carried into everything, Aikin too is rejecting the prejudices arising from distinction of sex, and like Hays is returning to the historical record to challenge masculinist versions of the past. Read in this way, the *Epistles* mark not a conservative shift in Enlightenment feminism, but rather a continuing engagement with Wollstonecraft among Dissenting women, as well perhaps as a covert endorsement of Hays’s own brand of Dissenting feminism.

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⁹⁹ Kathryn Ready, ‘The Enlightenment Feminist Project of Lucy Aikin’, 449. It should be noted also that Sybil Oldfield includes the *Epistles* in her bibliographic study *Collective biography of women in Britain*, 43-4.

¹⁰⁰ Lucy Aikin, *Epistles on women, exemplifying their character and condition in various ages and nations with miscellaneous poems* (London, 1810), v-vi.

**‘ENERGETIC SYMPATHIES OF TRUTH AND FEELING’:¹
MARY HAYS AND RATIONAL DISSENT**

Gina Luria Walker

‘Intellectual Exchanges’ is our theme, an exploration of the complex interplay between women and Rational Dissent. Ruth Watts launched scholarly consideration of the topic in *Gender, power and the Unitarians* (1998), describing the general parameters of the connections between women, Unitarianism, and Unitarians. Her work pointed the way toward further investigation of these subjects. Building on Watts’s groundbreaking efforts, I will briefly examine the idiosyncratic intellectual genealogy of Mary Hays (1759–1843), religious controversialist, experimental novelist, and feminist historian. I will suggest the ways in which the philosophical perspectives and evolving culture of Rational Dissent provided Hays with a unique set of tools to create new knowledge. I will describe how within the closely connected Rational Dissenting networks in Cambridge, Chesterton, and London in the 1780s and early 1790s Hays sought and found encouragement, material support, teachers, models, publishers, critics, and audiences.² I will propose that we build on the foundation Watts provided to ask not only how women benefitted or not from Rational Dissent but also how women contributed in their intellectual exchanges with Rational Dissent, male Rational Dissenters, and each other. In particular, I will respond to the question, how did Hays seek to modify Rational Dissent itself?

More than any other among her female contemporaries, Hays’s published and private texts joined the issues of religious and political dissent to concerns of gender.³ Hays pursued this line of inquiry well aware of the realities of what Kathryn Gleadle has described as the disparity between ‘the urbane liberalism professed by Unitarians and the

¹ Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Marilyn L Brooks, (Peterborough, ONT, 2000), 312. The rest of the quotation reads, ‘Energetic sympathies of truth and feeling – darting from mind to mind, enlightening, warming, with electrical rapidity!’

² This essay builds on *Mary Hays (1759-1863): The growth of a woman’s mind* (Aldershot, 2005) and new research to locate Hays’s feminism firmly within the culture of Rational Dissent.

³ See ‘Mary Hays: An Enlightened Quest,’ *Women, gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Houndmills, 2005), 493-518.

conservative, patriarchal tenor which overshadowed their personal relationships and codes of etiquette.’⁴ Hays suffered from the reflexive gender prejudice of some Rational Dissenters, female as well as male. She confronted the historical exclusion of women from the cultures of teaching and learning at the Dissenting Academies. Yet she also discerned the pro-woman sympathies of prominent Dissenters, and took advantage of their receptivity to her passion to learn to make opportunities for herself. Generous men encouraged Hays to become a shadow student at New College Hackney. She attended their sermons, corresponded with tutors, read lectures and other publications written by the Dissenters she knew and those they recommended and loaned or gave her. As a result of her immersion in Dissenting print culture and pedagogy, Hays was one of the late Enlightenment female thinkers to explore the possibility that Rational Dissent, to date solidly male, had potential to become something more inclusive and more radical, that its optimistic view of human nature, its commitment to theological inquiry, its willingness to tolerate heterodoxy, and its profound belief in progressive education gestured toward a new kind of human equality and freedom: enlightened feminism.

Mary Hays was born in 1759 into a large family in the Southwark section of London where she lived with her widowed mother and younger sister.⁵ The Hays family attended Blacksfields Particular Baptist Church on the corner of Gainsford Street where the family lived, presided over by Michael Brown, a respected minister, with contacts among Cambridge

⁴ Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical Unitarians and the emergence of Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (New York, 1995), 8.

⁵ Information about Hays's early life is drawn from A F Wedd, 'The Story of Mary Hays', *The love-letters of Mary Hays* (London, 1925). Wedd, a collateral descendant of Hays, inherited Hays's surviving manuscripts and other documents, including two volumes of Hays's love letters in her own hand. Wedd subsequently abridged and published the manuscript 'Love Letters' in 1925 as *The love-letters of Mary Hays 1779-1780*. Wedd had the complete two-volume set at her disposal, as well as autobiographical materials that no longer exist. Volume One of the manuscript 'Love Letters' is now included with other Hays documents in Mary Hays Correspondence and Manuscripts, The Carl H and Lily Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Volume Two has not been located. Additional information can be found in Marilyn Brooks, 'The Mary/John correspondence 1778-9', *The correspondence (1779-1843) of Mary Hays, British novelist* (Lewiston, 2004), 7-31.

Dissenters.⁶ Hays's earliest surviving texts are the love letters⁷ she exchanged with John Eccles who also lived and worshipped on Gainsford Street. Hays was nineteen and Eccles was twenty three when they pledged their love to each other; the senior Mr. Eccles refused to give permission for them to marry because his son was not financially independent. The two young people settled into a daily routine of clandestine messages conveyed back and forth by Hays's younger sister. They also found opportunities for illicit meetings that provoked Hays's serious consideration of the gendered proprieties and the burden on every young woman to uphold them. Almost immediately, Hays proposed that Eccles be her teacher. She was curious about his studies with his tutor, and longed to know Latin, French, and other male mysteries with which he was familiar.

Sitting in chapel, observing erudite men debate, Hays resolved to learn what they knew and to think for herself as they did, but there was no formal, sanctioned route to higher training for women. John Eccles's death in 1780, just after they finally received parental approval and were to be married, was the great tragedy of her life. Yet his death allowed Hays as a 'virgin widow' to turn from a conventional path as wife and mother that Hannah Lightbody⁸ followed, to the work of making a career for herself in the Republic of Letters for which there was precedence in Ann Jebb's publications⁹ and in the wider print culture where women made steady gains.¹⁰

⁶ Some participants at the 'Intellectual Exchanges: Women and Rational Dissent' workshop at Dr. Williams's Library in June 2009 speculated that Mary Hays may have found the theology and practices of the Particular Baptists repressive and that her subsequent embrace of Rational Dissent was rebellion against these. However, the Reverend Brown's friendship with Rational Dissenters and Unitarians argues against such interpretation. Too little is known of the Gainsford Street congregation to make a compelling argument about its culture. Dr David L Wykes comments, this 'is a case of the label, Particular Baptist, concealing much, and encouraging us to imagine all P[articular] Baptists are the same over time – clearly not true.' Dr Wykes, personal correspondence, 3 March 2010.

⁷ See Gina Luria Walker, 'Mary Hays's "Love Letters",' *Keats-Shelley Journal*, LI (2002), 94-115.

⁸ See David Sekers' essay in this volume.

⁹ See Anthony Page's essay in this volume.

¹⁰ Betty A Schellenberger, *The professionalization of women writers in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 2005).

The principal influence on Hays's development during the 1780s was the Reverend Robert Robinson (1735–90) of Chesterton, to his admirers distinguished by 'his earnest love of truth, and laborious search after it', his espousal of 'unlimited toleration', and his rejection of any imposition on private judgment.¹¹ Robinson was politically active on behalf of the same reforms as the Unitarian leaders who were his contemporaries. Hays wrote to Robinson after hearing him preach in London in 1781. He replied, and visited her at Gainsford Street soon after. He read an autobiographical account she sent him describing her despair at John Eccles's death that threatened her Dissenting faith. In his response, Robinson addressed her depressive state, its effects on her spiritual confusion, and her excessive deference to himself. He laid out the terms of their future engagement: 'No, you are not my pupil, but my friend'.¹²

In their meetings and correspondence over the next eight years, Robinson provided copies of his published works and responded seriously to Hays's theological and philosophical inquiries, fostering her independence while extending her contact with liberal Enlightenment thinkers. He addressed her concern over the apparent theological paradoxes in his faith in both '*the divine decrees and man's free agency*.' 'In my opinion,' he explained, 'it is extremely difficult to deny either, and there is no difficulty in believing that the *reconciling* is possible to God, though far above our comprehension.'¹³ Importantly to Hays, Robinson was an autodidact who built upon a few years of early schooling in Latin and French to produce a substantial body of publications that engaged with the most controversial issues and advanced learning of his time. Robinson demonstrated to Hays that experience galvanized learning, that ideas had meaning, not only in the abstract, but as they could be felt and realized. Hays discerned the implications of Dissenting ideas to the condition of women long before meeting Mary Wollstonecraft. Reading Robinson's translation of Huguenot Jacques Saurin's 'Sermon on the

¹¹ Len Addicott, 'Introduction,' *Church Book: St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge 1720-1832* (London, Baptist Historical Society, 1991), 1-xxxii. See also Gina Luria Walker, 'Brief encounter': Robert Robinson and the right to private judgement, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 24 (2008), 54-70.

¹² Robert Robinson to Hays, 13 Nov. 1782. Pforzheimer Collection, misc. ms: 2153. Most of Hays's extant correspondence can be found in Brooks, *Correspondence*.

¹³ Robert Robinson to Hays, 26 Mar. 1783. Pforzheimer Collection, misc. ms: 2155.

Repentance of the Unchaste Woman,' Hays discovered an empathetic account of the fallen woman's sin and redemption.¹⁴ Robinson's influential sermon, *Slavery inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity* (1786, 1788), called for every Christian to take action to obliterate depraved passions produced by the desire to enslave others. Robinson linked sensibility and reason to individual agency. Hays incorporated Robinson's strategy in her evolving faith and feminism.

Robinson died in June 1790 while on a preaching visit to Joseph Priestley's meeting house in Birmingham and was buried there. In his eulogy, Priestley praised Robinson for his determination to educate his daughters as he did his sons, teaching them learned and modern languages himself, engaging tutors to instruct them in mathematics and philosophy.¹⁵ Priestley called attention to Robinson's egalitarian vision of human potential that at birth all human beings have an equal capacity to learn and his determination to resist gender prejudice: 'Certainly,' Priestley affirmed, 'the minds of women are capable of the same improvement, and the same furniture as that of men, and it is of importance that, when they have leisure, they should have the same resources in reading, and the same power of instructing the world by writing, that men have.' Priestley's comments were suggestive of the fruitful collaboration between Robinson and Hays, his female student. Abraham Rees, Joshua Toulmin, and others also preached memorial services for Robinson. Rational Dissenters were anxious to try to claim that after publishing *A plea for the divinity of Christ* in 1776, Robinson had changed his opinions and adopted a Unitarian view. According to George Dyer, Robinson's first biographer, Priestley's eulogy was published some months later, and caused a stir within Dissenting circles for declaring Robinson a convert to Unitarianism who led his congregation to this position in the last

¹⁴ Jacques Saurin (1677-1730), *Sermons of Jacques Saurin. Translated from the original French by Robert Robinson* (5 vols., Cambridge, 1775-84), vol. 5, 'Sermon 4. The repentance of the unchaste woman.' Saurin's texts were published between 1728-39. *Souscription. Sermons complets de Jacques Saurin, avec une notice sur sa vie et ses écrits, par M. le Cte Boissy-d'Anglas,...* 8 vol. in-8°... Éditeur: M Burigny [Texte imprimé] Paris : impr. de F Didot (s. d.).

¹⁵ Joseph Priestley, *Reflections on death. A sermon, on occasion of the death of the Rev. Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, delivered at the New Meeting in Birmingham, 13 June 1790, and published at the request of those who heard it, and of Mr. Robinson's family* (Birmingham, 1790), 419.

months of his life.¹⁶ Robinson's Cambridge parishioners, supported by his survivors, protested so loudly that Priestley had to withdraw the assertion. Thus Robinson remained mired in controversy even after his death.¹⁷

During 1791, Hays professed Unitarianism¹⁸ and popular, albeit controversial, tutor Gilbert Wakefield left New College Hackney. Late in the year Wakefield published *An enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship*, an incendiary pamphlet attacking the religious practices at New College. Wakefield wrote for a learned male audience and assumed his readers' fluency in Greek and Latin. Wakefield declared that communal worship was a dilution of true religious devotion.¹⁹ Hays was the first to react to Wakefield in *Cursory remarks* (1791) in which she announced the direction of her career by writing as 'Eusebia', the Greek word for 'piety', with connection to the historical roots of Unitarianism, and likely to suggest to readers the 'good Eusebia' in William Law's popular and influential *A serious call to a devout and holy life* (1728). Law's 'Eusebia' was a learned widow representing 'the spirit of a better education' in his chapter that expounded on the deplorable superficiality of female education and the need for improvement. *Cursory remarks* was Hays's first publication. The publisher was Thomas Knott (flourished 1790–1830) who published several of Robinson's works, including his posthumous *History of baptism* (1790), as well as works by other Rational Dissenters like John Evans and Joshua Toulmin who may have referred Hays to Knott.

'Eusebia' presented herself in *Cursory remarks* as an example of those Christian souls without formal education who needed collective worship to inform their comprehension and elevate their belief. Her assertive rebuttal, although modestly expressed, offered a glint of irony: 'Should Mr. Wakefield take the trouble of perusing the following pages,' she

¹⁶ George Dyer, *Memoirs of the life and writings of Robert Robinson* (London, 1796), 392, 398, 402–16.

¹⁷ For example, see William Robinson, *Select works of the Rev. Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, edited, with memoir; by the Rev. William Robinson* (London, 1861), II, lxix–lxxii.

¹⁸ E Kell, 'Memoir of Mary Hays: With some unpublished letters addressed to her by Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, and others,' *The Christian Reformer*, XI/CXXXIX (Sept. 1844), 814.

¹⁹ Gilbert Wakefield, *An enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (London, 1791).

began, ‘he will probably charge the writer with great presumption; a woman, young, unlearned, unacquainted with any language but her own; possessing no other merit than a love of truth and virtue, an ardent desire of knowledge, and a heart susceptible to the affecting and elevated emotions afforded by a pure and rational devotion.’²⁰ Hays attested to the duality of her public role: uneducated by traditional male standards, nonetheless she struggled to learn what she could by reading scripture, noting that she used Wakefield’s recent translation of the *New Testament* (1791), compared these with doctrinal arguments of various sects, attempted to keep an open mind and to divest herself of prejudice. Like the men she most admired, Eusebia now spoke out with the intention of ‘pursuing and embracing truth without partiality and without prejudice, wherever it may be found.’²¹

Eusebia challenged Wakefield’s presumption that he stood at the apex of a moral, academic, and intellectual hierarchy that decided who might and might not seek enlightenment. She argued that Wakefield’s outstanding qualities as scholar, theologian, and philosopher made him a poor judge of the religious capabilities of others. The majority of Christians were ‘not yet ripe for a religion purely mental and contemplative.’ Eusebia knew that Rational Dissenters, and particularly Unitarians, were portrayed as excessively rational. Christianity, she said, ‘By becoming a science, too frequently appears sour, haughty, and contentious.’ Less enlightened believers condemned such rationality as on the road to outright religious infidelity. Eusebia insisted that the doctrine of necessity and materialism mandated that habits of worship be impressed by early associations in the minds of the young, and reaffirmed in adults. Domestic affection was enriched by communal prayer in Eusebia’s female vision of the Christian community, a family bound by feeling and reason. Worship with others provided emotional satisfaction and mental improvement, as well as spiritual fulfillment.

Wakefield claimed that the true Christian had no need of priest or minister. Eusebia replied that a clergyman was not necessarily in charge of another’s soul. The true minister was like Robinson, although Eusebia

²⁰ Cursory remarks on *An enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield, B.A., late fellow of Jesus-College, Cambridge*. By EUSEBIA (2nd edn., London, 1792), 1. The pamphlet in DWL in London bears Theophilus Lindsey’s signature, and is the copy Hays sent him as a gift.

²¹ *Cursory remarks*, 1.

hesitated to name him, quoting instead Rousseau's Savoyard vicar in *Émile* (1762; English translation 1762-3), for its affective power. *Cursory remarks* ended on an optimistic note. 'This is an age of controversy,' Eusebia explained, paraphrasing Robinson's remark that 'controversy is a privilege to Christians.' She continued, 'All who love truth must rejoice in seeing the spirit of freedom and enquiry universally disseminated.' Affirming the affective element in belief, as well as the intellectual, she rhapsodized, 'In a future system, where our faculties will expand, neither bounded by time, nor darkened by frailty; we shall, I trust, penetrate to the heart of things, and become true philosophers, without any danger of mistake or hazard.' She looked forward to the time when the divine Intelligence would be manifest and men's minds could apprehend the truth. Judging by the prominent declaration of her sex at the start, she envisioned that women's minds would, too.

Wakefield published a second edition in which he addressed his several challengers including Anna Barbauld²² and Joseph Priestley, focusing on Eusebia as one of the 'Amazonian auxiliaries' that had attacked him. Wakefield assumed that Eusebia was a man hiding behind the identity of a woman. In his published rejoinder, Wakefield deflected the prospect of intellectual battle with a female impersonator to that of a sexual ENCOUNTER, expressing mock awe at confronting 'so mysterious an adversary,' and quoting from the *Book of Proverbs*, 'THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID'.²³ Wakefield's tactic pointed to the novelty of a female presence in religious disputes and his lack of experience in addressing a female critic. Hays solemnly replied to Wakefield in her second edition, admitting that his 'ludicrous sally' had offended her, correctly pointing out that he had not addressed the substance of her comments.²⁴ She described herself as 'abashed and wounded,' unequal to the strident demands of public debate with him. Hays's prudent supporters may have

²² A Barbauld, 'Remarks on Mr. Wakefield's Enquiry....' (London, 1792).

²³ A second edition, subtitled 'A New Edition,' was published after 29 Feb. 1792, by Deighton. Wakefield's response to 'Eusebia' is from the 'Appendix,' 59. Gilbert Wakefield responded again in 'A general reply to the arguments against the enquiry into public worship,' published after 19 June 1792. In this work, Wakefield replied to his critics, including Dr Disney, Mr Wilson, Anna Barbauld, Dr Priestley, Mr Simpson, Mr Bruckner, Mr Pope, as well as 'Eusebia.'

²⁴ 'Cursory Remarks on An enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield, B.A., Late Fellow of Jesus-College, Cambridge. By EUSEBIA' (2nd edn., London, 1792), 1.

recommended this strategy; Wakefield's eroticizing of their dispute likely threatened Hays's authority as a self-taught, unmarried woman.

Unitarians rallied around Hays. Theophilus Lindsey worried in a letter to William Turner that Wakefield's reputation as a rigorous scholar would be diluted by his provocations.²⁵ William Frend took Wakefield to task for his foolishness in a private letter.²⁶ Frend knew of Eusebia's identity from mutual acquaintances, including George Dyer, Robinson's assistant minister, and Michael Brown, minister of the church the Hays family attended. Frend had been a member of Robinson's congregation.²⁷ His loyalty extended to Hays as Robinson's spiritual daughter.

Wakefield replied to Frend, pleading ignorance of Eusebia's gender. 'You must lower your opinion of me,' Wakefield wrote, 'for you seem to suppose, that I have the gift of Prophecy: otherwise how was it possible for me to know, without any Means of knowing, that the Author of that Pamphlet was a Lady? There is no Artifice more common ... and so often complained of by Reviewers, as that of assuming a female Name to escape the Lash of Criticism. Had I known who it was, I certainly wd by no Means have thought of such a Piece of Levity.'²⁸ On the back flap of the envelope, Wakefield wrote that the same ladies who were so quick to take offense at sexually suggestive ripostes 'very likely go & read bawdy Novels, as soon as the Person to whom the[y] complain, has turned his Back.' Presuming that Eusebia was a man hiding behind the identity of a woman, in the heat of battle Wakefield resorted to perfunctory assumptions about gender and genre and the etiquette of chivalry. Despite his rhetorical gibes, like Robinson, he was an intellectually generous father to his several daughters and tutored them himself.²⁹

Frend wrote to Eusebia after Wakefield's explanation. In his letter, Frend introduced himself, praised her pamphlet, and appealed to her to continue as peacemaker between sectarian men, for 'the aid of the fair

²⁵ Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner of Newcastle, 4 May 1792, DWL, 12.44 (55).

²⁶ Although Frend's letter does not survive, its substance is evident from Wakefield's reply to it.

²⁷ Frida Knight, *University rebel: the life of William Frend (1757-1841)* (London, 1971), 63.

²⁸ Gilbert Wakefield to William Frend, DWL. I appreciate permission to quote from this unpublished letter.

²⁹ *Memoirs of the life of Gilbert Wakefield, B.A.... in two volumes. Vol. I. Written by himself. A new edition, with his latest corrections and notes by the editors, to which is subjoined, an appendix of original letters* (London, 1804).

sex' might be needed again 'to soften the animosity and fervor of disputation.'³⁰ He judged that as a studious, plain woman known to many of his associates, Eusebia would expect only intellectual exchanges with him, too. This was a serious, if understandable, misjudgment, and so the plot for the explosive narrative of Hays's later autobiographical fiction, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, was set in motion.

Cursory remarks brought Hays increased acceptance among London Rational Dissenters. She regularly attended Essex Street, the first avowedly Unitarian chapel, where Jane Disney, wife of Assistant Minister John Disney, kept a watchful eye out for matrimonial prospects for Hays.³¹ Encouraged by attentions from like-minded women as well as men, Hays attempted a small *salon* at her mother's home to which she invited Frennd on his visits from Cambridge, Dyer, the Disneys, the Lindsays, and the Worthingtons. In return, she was invited to dine by the Disneys and Worthingtons and met their families. While she paid attention to her romantic interests, Hays continued to advance her educational aspirations under the guidance of leading Dissenting *philosophes*, all of whom were involved as tutors, supporters, and defenders of the newest Dissenting Academy in Hackney.

Free inquiry was the engine that fuelled New College, and Hays sought access there to the unmediated roots of knowledge by studying informally, attending sermons, and reading tutors' lectures. She thrived in this setting, perusing tutor William Enfield's adaptation from the Latin of Jakob Brucker's magisterial *History of philosophy* (1742–44) published in 1791. Hays was now able to study the history of ideas from the ancients to the moderns in English and assess the absence of women in this system. She read Priestley's edition of Anthony Collins's *A philosophical inquiry concerning human liberty* (1790) and his abridgement of David Hartley's *Theory of the human mind, on the principles of the association of ideas* ([1749], 1791 edn.). Hays found rationale for her pedagogical convictions in Priestley's *Essay on a course of liberal education for civil and active life. With plans of lectures* (1765, 1788). This work added history,

³⁰ William Frennd to 'Eusebia,' 16 April 1792, DWL, HCR 24, 93(2).

³¹ Diary of Samuel Pipe-Wolverstan, 7 July 1793; Staffordshire Record Office, 7 July 1793. Evidence recently recovered and generously provided by G M Ditchfield reveals that Hays attended Essex Street Chapel frequently and that Jane Disney, John Disney's wife, attempted to make a match between Hays, whom Mrs Disney refers to as 'Eusebia', and an older, widower congregant.³¹

government, and economics to the traditional curricula because, Priestley wrote, contemporary geopolitical circumstances required new and different information. Priestley quoted Hume's hope that women might learn from the study of history that 'love is not the only passion that governs the male world'; Priestley acknowledged that history was 'calculated for the use of persons of both sexes.'³² Hays incorporated these views in her ideas about curricula for women.

She was introduced to Priestley, read many of his works, heard him preach at the Gravel Pit Meeting, and saw him in company with Dyer and Frennd before his remove to America in 1794.³³ John Disney provided her with books including *The Life of Thomas Hollis* (1780) by Francis Blackburne, an extreme Latitudinarian whose 'Memoir' of Hollis was pro-American and with a reform agenda; Priestley's *An appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity* (1770); and Disney's life of his Cambridge tutor, John Jebb.³⁴

Hays read Priestley's *The history and present state of electricity* (1767) with special interest. In his book, Priestley extended Hartley's arguments about the world's materiality and explained that pursuit of scientific truth was second only to the love of God. Heaven itself might be glimpsed in the history of the study of electricity. Priestley opined that electricity was the field of investigation that offered the opportunity, even for 'raw adventurers', to make discoveries. According to Priestley, the road to human happiness depended on an individual's sense of purpose, and the intensity with which that purpose was pursued. Moreover, personal energy was best expended on pursuits of one's own choosing, rather than in conformity to conventional goals. Personal fulfillment, Priestley preached, depended on an individual's honest, often courageous, willingness to strike out on an autonomous path to enlightenment. This was a crucial idea for Hays from which she extrapolated an idiosyncratic concept of empirical research based on actual experience, gaining confidence to choose as her subject what most interested her. Priestley's hypothesis about the unseen but omnipresent 'electrical fluid' in all matter provided Hays with useful metaphors to express Enlightenment

³² Joseph Priestley, 'Lectures on History and General Policy', in Ira V Brown ed., *Joseph Priestley: selections from his writings* (University Park, 1962), 111.

³³ Dyer to Hays, 28 Feb. 1794, Pforzheimer, 2107.

³⁴ John Disney to Hays, 7 Feb. 1793, DWL, 24, 93(4).

excitement that free inquiry could reveal the otherwise hidden operations of the natural world and, as importantly, of human nature. Hays shared with others among her Rational Dissenting associates belief in the marvelous confluence of reason, feeling, and faith that electricity and current advances in natural philosophy signified.³⁵

Like Priestley and Robinson, Hays believed in perpetual enlightenment. 'Look back through the history of the world,' she wrote, 'from its golden days of infancy and innocence, to the maturity of the present times, and you will discern various truths, first dawning like the sun through a misty horizon, and after encountering many dark clouds of error and opposition, at length beaming forth in meridian brightness; thus gently and gradually diffusing light and happiness, lest our weak faculties should have been overpowered with the sudden splendor.'³⁶ Such advancement had an analogue in God's 'wise and benevolent plan' in which 'our nature is progressive, and every thing [sic] around us is the same.' Improvements in human understanding had political, legislative, personal, and cognitive implications: Hays recognized that pursuing truth wherever it might be found, as Eusebia declared, inevitably involved following truth wherever it might lead. There was no turning back from enlightenment: 'the emancipated mind is impatient of imposition,' she wrote, 'nor can it, in a retrograde course, unlearn what it has learned, or unknow what it has known.'³⁷

She discerned another, radical implication of the new approaches to natural philosophy. Hartley, Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, and other researchers demanded that knowledge must be based on empirical observation and experience. Hays found in their insistence on Baconian experimentation an epistemological basis for investigating her own perceptions. Female consciousness, she posited, was a valid form of knowledge, although not recognized or accepted as traditional learning. Locke had written in *An essay concerning human understanding* (1690), 'Every man being conscious to himself that he thinks' then what of every woman, or at least Mary Hays? As an enquiring woman she had access to, and could experiment with, chronicle, and assess her own awareness. Haltingly, she gained courage to interrogate the crucial question at the

³⁵ Patricia Fara, *Sympathetic attractions: magnetic practices, beliefs, and symbolism in eighteenth-century England* (Princeton, 1996), 174.

³⁶ *Letters and essays, moral, and miscellaneous* (London, 1793), 40.

³⁷ *Letters and essays*, 11-12, 16.

heart of gendered inquiry: was the female mind as competent to observe, objectify, generalize, and report back as the male? Her interest was epistemological as well as sociological and psychological; she argued that separate cognitive training disadvantaged women as profoundly as patriarchal laws and cultural proscriptions. Hays's first impulse as a nascent scientist without credentials, colleagues or laboratory was to investigate herself. Life-writing provided the vehicle for her experiments. She practiced with observations of the Rational Dissenters she knew, delved deeper into herself in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and advanced her technique in *Female biography; or, memoirs of illustrious and celebrated women, of all ages and countries* (1803), her major work.

Hugh Worthington, a former tutor in Classics and Logic at New College, responded to Hays's ambitiousness in especially helpful ways. Hays initiated contact with him after hearing Worthington preach at Salter's Hall.³⁸ Worthington welcomed Hays to his congregation; in frequent correspondence and meetings over the next two years, Worthington cheered on Hays's self-learning, including her study of Lavater's theories of physiognomy, French, and mathematics, especially geometry, as key to investigating scientific knowledge.³⁹ Worthington urged Hays to teach and instruct others on the basis of her performance in *Cursory remarks*. She wrote back quickly and proposed to show Worthington some short pieces she had already written that she deemed 'more affecting' than fiction because they were 'drawn from truth.'⁴⁰ The culmination of this phase of Hays's career was *Letters and essays, moral, and miscellaneous* (1793), a primer on Rational Dissent for women, with a dedication to John Disney. Hays broke new ground by appropriating the female conduct book that hectored women, transforming it into a vehicle for instructional curricula for them, adapted from the male education at New College.

The book also reflected Mary Wollstonecraft's political feminism. George Dyer gave Hays a copy of *A vindication of the rights of woman* in June 1792. Hays read the book, marking passages in her excitement, handed it on to her younger sister Elizabeth, then quickly wrote to request a meeting with Wollstonecraft. The two breakfasted together soon after at

³⁸ Hugh Worthington to Mary Hays, 16 June 1791, DWL, 24, 93(9).

³⁹ Hugh Worthington to Hays, 17 Jan. 1794, DWL, 24, 93(18).

⁴⁰ Hays to Worthington, 3 July 1792, in private hands.

Wollstonecraft's rooms in Store Street. When they met Hays asked Wollstonecraft, as a seasoned editor at the *Analytical Review* and published writer, to review a draft of the introduction to *Letters and essays*. Wollstonecraft sent Hays her comments on the piece which she attacked for its obsequiousness towards the erudite men who supported Hays in her career. Wollstonecraft insisted that Hays 'rest on [her]self.'⁴¹ Hays took this to heart, minimized the flattery towards her male mentors who, Wollstonecraft insisted, whatever their verbal flattery, 'will still treat you like a woman – and many a man, for instance Dr. Johnson, Lord Littelton [sic],⁴² and even Dr, [sic] Priestley, have insensibly been led to utter warm eulogiums in private that they would be sorry openly to avow without some cooling explanatory ifs'. Hays used the opportunity to strengthen her message that Rational Dissent must integrate feeling with learning to attract and teach unlettered women as well as formally trained men. Following Robert Robinson, in *Letters and essays* Hays emphasized the affective springs of faith as complement, rather than alternative, to reasoned theology. 'A piety arising out of sensibility', she explained, 'in minds who have neither leisure nor capacity to pursue an abstract chain of ratiocination, may yet have all the meliorating effects that sweeten social intercourse, and amend the life.'⁴³ Wakefield might criticize the feminizing of Rational Dissent but Hays knew from her own experience and inquiry that for women, as for men, the new science of the mind conjectured that cognition was also sensation.⁴⁴

Hays elaborated on Catharine Macaulay's feminist last work, *Letters on education* (1790) in a fantasy of female tuition. *Letters and essays*

⁴¹ Mary Wollstonecraft to Mary Hays, Nov. 25 [17]92, *The collected letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (New York, 2003), 210.

⁴² Janet Todd comments on the reference to Lord Lyttelton, 'It is hard to imagine [Wollstonecraft] meeting George Lyttelton, first baron Lyttelton (1709-1773); perhaps she was alluding to Johnson's remark (in his sketch of Lyttelton in *Lives of the English poets*) that, after the *Critical Review* praised [Lyttelton's] *Dialogues of the dead* [1760], 'poor Lyttelton with humble gratitude returned, in a note which I have read, acknowledgements which can never be proper, since they must be paid either for flattery or for justice', 210, n. 485.

⁴³ *Letters and essays*, 'Letter 1. Letter to Mr.— on the Meliorating and Beneficial Effects of Pulpit Elocution,' 5,

⁴⁴ Alan Richardson, *British romanticism and the science of the mind* (Cambridge, 2001). See also Thomas Dixon, *From passion to emotions: The creation of a secular psychological category* (Cambridge, 2003).

included four letters to ‘Amasia,’ a biblical name that suggested female erudition based on the sharing of knowledge between two women, with Hays as fledgling instructor. Hays addressed major philosophical, political, and theological issues –Materialism and Necessity, Authority and Hierarchy, the Calvinist concept of original sin, separation of church and state, the next world, theory of dreams, the presence of evil, the French Revolution and the ongoing Terror. She declared that her understanding was acquired, not the product of that feminine intuition historically attributed to women in the absence of male powers of reason. Traditional restrictions on female education produced gendered differences in intellectual achievement, but not in human potential, or in women’s willingness to strive for knowledge. Hays’s attention to the absence of learned women in the historical record foreshadowed her *Female biography* (1803), a compendium for and about women modeled on Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, 2nd ed. 1703; English translations 1709, 1734-1741). Hays demonstrated that the female mind could reason as well as intuit and enthuse. She represented herself as the object lesson from which other informally trained women might be encouraged to learn how to learn.

In ‘Letter No. IV.’ Hays situated her narrator in the privacy of the domestic enclosure where she expressed her sense of claustrophobia at the tedium of women’s hand work that stifled the ambition to live the life of the mind. ‘I confess I am no advocate for cramping the minds and bodies of young girls’, she wrote, ‘by keeping them for ever [sic] poring over needlework.’⁴⁵ She gave an existential cry at observing young women still being required to learn intricate repetitive patterns in ‘the tapestry and tent-stitch of former times.’ She lamented their ‘waste of eyes, spirits, and time ... nor do I think it so very important a part of female education as has generally been supposed.’ Even in the familial domain, earthly existence was training for the divine, and women, too, must be elevated mentally and spiritually as preparation for paradise. Enlightenment should change women’s work. ‘Surely the covering of the body ought not to be the sole business of life,’ Hays insisted, then shrewdly asked, ‘I doubt whether there will be any sewing in the next world, how then will those employ themselves who have done nothing else in this?’

⁴⁵ *Letters and essays*, 74.

In *Letters and essays* Hays described the progressive culture of Rational Dissent in which women's autonomy could be respected by men committed to the idea, if not the wider social practice, of egalitarianism. She drew on her opportunities to examine a different kind of marital interplay from more conventional relationships, one based on Christian principles that promoted friendship. Hays knew or knew of Catharine Cappe, Jane Disney, Ann Jebb, Hannah Lindsey, Mary Priestley, Anne Wakefield, and Susanna Worthington as part of the daily give and take in a community caught up in doctrinal and political struggles. The wives influenced the direction of Hays's feminism and represented an emerging market of serious female readers.

Hays expressed a buoyant faith in the divine design in human affairs. Matrimony was part of the providential plan. In 'Letter No. IX., To Amasia,' Hays synthesized her observations of Rational Dissenting marriages in the Ciceronian figures of Hortensius and Hortensia. Hortensius was the gold standard for enlightened men. He was good-looking, trained in the liberal arts, 'a citizen of the world',⁴⁶ open-minded, committed to pursuing truth wherever it might lead, and his integrity was intact despite the blandishments of ambition and financial gain. His friends and enemies might wonder at his choices, but imbued with the examples of others' greatness and goodness, he was not self-conscious about resisting conventional glory. This might describe Friend, Lindsey, Disney, Jebb, and Priestley. Hortensius's liberal *bona fides* included his egalitarian attitude towards the education of his sons and daughters who were trained to judge the differences between prejudice, opinion, and principle. He saw beyond the 'absurd notion' that 'nature has given judgment to man, to women imagination.' Hays commented that 'sexual distinctions in intellect and virtue, have depraved and weakened the human species.' Hortensius had his flaws; if 'drawn from truth', Hays may have observed Lindsey's readiness to argue, Disney's occasional impatience, Friend's stubbornness, and Jebb's propensity to make himself 'obnoxious.' Hortensius's faults rendered him observant, humble, and honest because they arose from his virtues. Even earthly flaws, Hays urged, tended towards providential goodness.

Hortensia, Hortensius's wife, adjusted herself to his character and interests, reflecting and refining his virtues. In a progressive marriage,

⁴⁶ John Jebb, *The works, theological, medical, political, and miscellaneous, of John Jebb, with memoirs of the life of the author by John Disney* (3 vols., London, 1787), vol. 3, 346.

Hays argued, kindred minds were capable of marital harmony that physical attraction, earthly wealth, and worldly power could not produce. Hortensia shared her husband's intellectual interests and his amusements but not as cipher or follower. Hortensia and Hortensius rejected formality or familiarity; they were friends and associates in the work of their lives, as well as lovers. They did not argue in public: they were frugal, cheerful, and their genuine hospitality compensated for modest means. These were scenes drawn from life, an idealized composite of actual relationships that Hays saw around her, perhaps embellished by Ann Jebb's memories of her marriage.⁴⁷

From progressive marriage Hays turned to Dissenting romance which she portrayed in stark contrast to the predictable lending library 'female fiction' on the theme of a young woman's entrance into the marriage market. She set her love story in New York State, a remote scene of fruition and harvest. Melville, a spiritually confused British widower, encountered 'Theron',⁴⁸ a pastor based on Robinson, and his niece Cecilia who was no longer young and still unmarried. Melville easily discerned Cecilia's spiritual and intellectual loveliness because 'moral sentiment entered into his ideas of beauty'.⁴⁹ Hays situated the relationship between Cecilia and Melville in the young, hard won republic, expressing her characters' interactions in terms of electricity which provided the metaphor for vital forces that could not be seen, but rather revealed through free inquiry. Electricity connoted sexual attraction, female eroticism, and psychological interplay – everything Hays experienced for which there was no codified language. In Hays's Eden, electricity kindled understanding that transcended reason. 'It is certain,' she explained, 'there is in some minds a certain attraction, a congeniality – were I not a

⁴⁷ A reply from John Disney to a letter from Hays in early 1793 attests to Hays's interest in visiting Ann Jebb, DWL. Mss. 24.93.f.3. Anthony Page notes that Disney scheduled Hays's visit, perhaps one of several, a few days after Ann Jebb's two pamphlets on the French Revolution were published anonymously by T Knott, who also published *Cursory remarks* and *Letters and essays*. See Anthony Page, "'A great politicianess': Ann Jebb, Rational Dissent and politics in the late eighteenth century', *Women's History Review*, 17 (2008), 743-65.

⁴⁸ A native of Theron, France, and the same name that George Dyer used for Robinson in his 'Monody on the Death of a Friend' (1790). The name also alludes to Eusebia's invocation of the Savoyard priest in Rousseau's *Émile*.

⁴⁹ *Letters and essays*, 54.

materialist, I should say, a recognition of souls, which glows in the features, and moves the heart with a sort of electrical sympathy.’⁵⁰ Hays’s autobiographical ‘fiction’, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, subsequently elaborated on the sexualization of science and the capacity for powerful feeling refined by enlightened values that signified the spiritually elect among lovers.

Hays applied Priestley’s hypothesis that electricity was everywhere to the realm of the emotions, and beyond, to the uncharted psychological realm which a century later neurologist Sigmund Freud would locate in the unconscious. Hays called upon her research as an amateur natural philosopher to report those ‘energetic sympathies of truth and feeling – darting from mind to mind ... with electrical rapidity’ to express the exchange of associations and ‘Newtonian vibrations’ that were her fantasies of deep human connection. She used the language of experimental science to identify the experience of love at first sight and the material foundation of moral, intellectual, and sexual engagement. In the uncorrupted American landscape where Cecilia and Melville met, women were supposed to speak their minds, and did, in candid exchanges with men. They were allowed to be contemplative, bookish, unfashionable, even appropriately melancholy, but still loving, lovable, and loved.

Hays concluded her fable with Theron’s peaceful ‘Christian death’ and Cecilia’s marriage to Melville. Although Hays was thirty four years old when *Letters and essays* was published, this was a vision to live by. Hays sustained faith that misogyny, like every other species of intolerance, need not thwart deep connection between liberal believers. Progressive marriage signified to her the confluence of human impulses for love, earthly pleasure, and moral perfectibility, in which women and men chose each other freely and fully in the sight of God.

Letters and essays expresses Hays’s confidence that ‘in this world, intellectual pleasures afford the most elevated and real gratification, – the pursuit after truth, the benevolent affections’ –and quoting poet James Thomson, ‘Knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure’.⁵¹ From her early exposure to Rational Dissent, Hays rejected ‘the gross Calvinistic notion of original sin.’ She valued freedom of the will and the boundless potential for what Grayson Ditchfield describes as ‘the material and

⁵⁰ *Letters and essays*, 56.

⁵¹ James Thomson, *The seasons: Winter*.

intellectual enhancement of the human condition.’ She was ‘Priestlian’ [sic] in her belief in the promise of ‘happiness reserved for the virtuous in a future *system of existence*,’ although she recognized the ‘need for a stimulus still more vivid and powerful; and this Christianity affords, in teaching a resurrection from the dead, and a future moral retribution. He who wishes to deprive us of this hope, is an enemy to his species, and to society, and ought to be shunned and dreaded.’ She looked forward to ‘joining the society of the just made perfect!’ in the next world.

From these liberal foundations Hays acted on the God-given ‘right of private judgment’ in all aspects of human experience. She had faith in the Dissenting imperative to inquire, applying this principle to every facet of female life, insisting that rational inquiry, even into the apparently non-rational forces such as love and sex, was a legitimate path to comprehend the divine. *Letters and essays* represented Hays’s most innovative melding of Rational Dissent, her own female understanding, and aspirations for her gender.

Within Dissenting circles she was acclaimed for the achievement. Despite the carping of Establishment critics, her demonstration of women’s mental potential was taken seriously as far away as Boston where her cousin, Benjamin Seymour, had settled to seek his fortune. In his first letter Seymour addressed her as ‘Eusebia,’⁵² telling her of his hopes for success in the new country. In his second letter he reported on ‘your friend Dr Priestley’ and Priestley’s difficulties buying real estate for a fair price in Northumberland, Pennsylvania, where he and his family had settled.⁵³ Hays had sent a copy of *Letters and essays* to Seymour; now he wrote that he had lent it to ‘one of the most respectable’ among his American friends, Unitarian Josiah ‘Quincy’ [sic],⁵⁴ a young lawyer who eventually became the President of Harvard University.⁵⁵ Seymour included Quincy’s written opinion of Hays’s book:

⁵² Seymour to Hays, 15 Dec. 1794. Pforzheimer, misc. ms: 2211.

⁵³ See Jenny Graham, ‘Joseph Priestley in America’, *Joseph Priestley*, 203-30.

⁵⁴ Josiah Quincy (1772-1864), Harvard 1790; Federalist congressman; mayor of Boston, 1823-28; president of Harvard, 1829-49. <http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/HVDpresidents/quincy.php>

⁵⁵ G M Ditchfield points out that Seymour’s friend Josiah Quincy was the son of Josiah Quincy (1744-75), who visited England in 1774 and met and admired Theophilus Lindsey, *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808)*. Volume 1, 1747-1788, ed. G M Ditchfield (Woodbridge, Church of England Record Society, 15, 2007), 205, n.3.

It has long since been demonstrated, that literary taste and eminence was not the sole prerogative of our sex. Mrs [sic] Hays has furnished new and convincing evidence that whatever superiority we profess, is attributable to superior education, not a higher nature, in 'lofty flights of fancy', in delicate conceptions and sublime sentiments, the palm may lawfully be contested with us, by the female world. Your friend has laid her claim effectually to literary honour, a claim which I sincerely wish successfully and universally asserted as I firmly believe the dignity of the male sex, is never more surely consulted than by elevating the female to that respectability to which nature has entitled them.⁵⁶

Hays continued to seek support from men she judged could further her public ambitions. She initiated contact with another influential man when she wrote to William Godwin, political philosopher and novelist, in October 1794 with a request to borrow a copy of his *An enquiry concerning political justice* (1793). Godwin came from a family of Dissenters, trained for the ministry and attended the Dissenting academy at Hoxton. He was briefly a minister but found his calling as a professional writer while maintaining connections with leading Rational Dissenters and Unitarians. Hays parlayed Godwin's willingness to lend her the first and then the second volumes of his work into an intense relationship played out mainly in her correspondence, punctuated by frequent conversations together, that dramatically altered the direction of her career. Most stimulating for Hays was Godwin's commitment to 'the collision of mind with mind', intellectual interactions between women and men in new, more relaxed modes of sociability.⁵⁷

Godwin's conviction that Dissenting 'candour' fostered independence and personal freedom⁵⁸ offered Hays the vehicle to experiment with her own impulses for autonomy. Her letters to Godwin comprise a late Enlightenment variation on Puritan Charles Baxter's '*Heart accounts*',⁵⁹ detailing her thwarted emotional history and her rational and erotic passions. In the correspondence, Hays revealed much and strengthened

⁵⁶ Benjamin Seymour to Mary Hays, 21 Dec. 1795, Pforzheimer, misc. ms: 2212.

⁵⁷ Pamela Clemit, 'Godwin, Women, and "The Collision of Mind with Mind",' *The Wordsworth Circle*, XXV/2 (Spring, 2004), 72-6.

⁵⁸ Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker, 'Introduction,' *Memoirs of the author of A vindication of the rights of woman* (Peterborough, ONT, 2001), 12-14.

⁵⁹ See H N Keeble, *The literary culture of nonconformity in later seventeenth-century England* (Athens, GA, 1987), 204-8.

cognitively through the mental gymnastics that Godwin demanded of her. Godwin insisted on equality with Hays, as Robinson had, to dramatic effect. In autumn 1795 Hays moved out of her mother's home to rooms of her own. In October she wrote a lengthy letter to Godwin in which she described the meaning of this momentous step. She acknowledged, 'Thus have I (as the world would say & as some of my friends say) very foolishly thrown myself out of the asylum of my youth, & exchanged a life of what is called easy indolence, that is, one of worldly cares, for one more exposed and less assured.' The answer to her critics was tentative yet clear: 'Shall I reply, a kind of, I know not what, satisfaction in the idea of *being free*.'⁶⁰

For Hays freedom led ineluctably to candid exposure of her experience as a highly conscious, unmarried woman in quest of enlightenment. With Godwin's support, Hays transformed the record of their 'collision of mind to mind' into her first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), in which she made use of living documents – her own letters to and from Frennd and Godwin, applying Bacon's inductive method to tell the story of unrequited passion and disappointment that the promise of Enlightenment freedoms was still inaccessible to women.

The novel was published in November 1796. Readers of every political and religious persuasion were horrified by the 'fiction' that was widely – and correctly – believed to be autobiographical. When the hero, modeled on Frennd, refuses to return the heroine's feelings, Emma tells him that her desire for him trumps every other consideration: propriety, reputation, money, and chastity. In the most notorious statement in the book, Emma mischievously blurts out Frennd's name as a homonym: 'My friend', she cries, '*I would give myself to you* – the gift is not worthless.' Readers were titillated and shocked by the display of female sexual passion, as they were by Emma's contemplation of suicide, further compounded by her questioning of God's existence and divine purpose.

The novel enjoyed the success of scandal. Rational Dissenters reacted idiosyncratically. Kindly George Dyer praised the book and wondered how the reviewers would react.⁶¹ Wollstonecraft reported to Hays that at dinner with Rochemont Barbauld, he '*stigmatized* [Hays] as a Philosopher – a Godwinian'.⁶² Wollstonecraft hastened to assure

⁶⁰ Hays to Godwin, 13 October 1795, Pforzheimer, MH 8.

⁶¹ George Dyer to Hays, 6 Feb. [1797], Pforzheimer, 2170.

⁶² Mary Wollstonecraft to Mary Hays [c. early 1797], *Collected letters of Wollstonecraft*, ed. Todd, 310, 400.

Reverend Barbauld that *Emma Courtney* did not subvert Rational Dissenting beliefs. Amelia Alderson wrote to Godwin, ‘Upon my word General Godwin, you have a very skillful aide de camp in Captain Hays.’⁶³ Theophilus Lindsey heard about the novel and commented to a correspondent,

I am sorry to mention that these zealous antichristians have had but too much success in proselyting [*sic*] some of the other and better sex; one or two of my own knowledge. There is also lately come forth a novel, *Emma Courtenay* [*sic*], by Mary Hays. You may perhaps have met with this ingenious young woman, a Dissenter, as she used sometimes to come to our Chapel. I am told, for I have not read it, that this book, w^{ch} I should apprehend is written for bread as well as fame, retails too much of the principles of Helvetius and other french [*sic*] writers, as well as M^r Godwin, all of whom she frequently quotes: the plan of it, being an unedifying ranking love-story, though without any indecencies, as my wife tells me, who has read it.⁶⁴

Publication in 1796 of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* coincided with increasing threat of invasion by the French, the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, and intensified oppression against religious and political subversives. These forces were paralleled by an increase in gender conservatism.⁶⁵ In the climate of adversity to all heterodoxy, perception of Hays as Godwin’s puppet was confirmed in Elizabeth Hamilton’s savage satire, *Memoirs of modern philosophers* (1800). Hamilton represented Hays as the anti-heroine, Brigetina Botherim, a sex-starved, man-chasing, reformist ideologue intent on overturning conventional gender expectations. Brigetina crystallized the British majority view that revolutionary principles threatened to corrupt even sexual proprieties like who takes the initiative in erotic adventures. Hamilton’s novel was a success; with her brilliant parody, Hamilton created the *persona* of Hays as transgressive woman and prating fool, mimicking ‘French principles’

⁶³ Amelia Alderson to Godwin, 22 Dec. 1796, Oxford Bodleian Library, [Abinger] Dep. B. 210/6.

⁶⁴ Lindsey to Rev. John Rowe, 23 Dec. 1796. Royal Society, London, Manuscript letter in the Priestley Memorial Volume, 59. I appreciate G M Ditchfield’s generous contribution of this letter.

⁶⁵ Gina Luria Walker, ‘Women’s Voices’, *The Cambridge companion to British literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (2010), 265-94.

without understanding their dangerous consequences. Hays/Emma Courtney/Brigetina have remained fodder for the historical propaganda mill ever since.

For the next several years Hays participated in the philosophical and literary debates in the *Monthly Magazine*, reviewed new publications assigned to her by Wollstonecraft and participated with other radicals in the social group that formed around Wollstonecraft and Godwin. She, like Godwin, was devastated by Wollstonecraft's sudden death of the after-effects of childbirth in 1797. Hays and Godwin quarreled soon after. In her isolation, Hays began a risky friendship with unstable poet, Charles Lloyd, a friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Manning, and Robert Southey. Lloyd gossiped that Hays would have given herself to him had he asked her, and then recanted. Nevertheless, Hays's reputation for immoral behavior persisted. In 1799 Anglican minister Richard Polwhele proposed a new gender category of 'Unsex'd Females' for the likes of Hays, Wollstonecraft, Ann Jebb and other morally subversive women.⁶⁶

At the nadir of her life, Hays drew on her autodidactic education in Rational Dissent with its long history of struggle and persecution. In the spirit of the dead and living heroes she knew who had refused to be crushed by intolerance Hays envisioned a new writing project that would address gender prejudice in Baconian detail. She began intense research on her major work, *Female biography*, in 1798-9. Hays composed her preface to the volumes after nearly three years' reflection on her purpose and method. She explained her intentions in undertaking *Female biography* as educational, meant to instruct and inspire her readers to surmount misogyny by revealing the many kinds of activity, private and public, possible for women. 'My pen has been taken up in the cause,' she declares, 'and for the benefit, of my own sex.'

Hays says in 1803 what she said in *Letters and essays*: women barred from formal training read primarily for pleasure, secondarily for

⁶⁶ Richard Polwhele (1760-1838) was an Anglican minister, poet, topographer of Cornwall and Devon, acquaintance of Catharine Macaulay, Anna Sewell, and Hannah More, and a contributor to the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. His mock epic, *The UnSex'd females* (1798), contrasted More and Wollstonecraft as 'in all points diametrically opposed'. Among the perverted 'Wollstonecraftians', Polwhele identified Hays, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Yearsley, Mary 'Perdita' Robinson, and Anna Letitia Barbauld.

instruction. As interlopers in the universe of learning, their understanding can be reached initially through their emotions. Hays's intent in *Female biography* was prospective, as well as retrospective, and pedagogical. 'I have at heart the happiness of my sex,' Hays writes, 'and their advancement in the grand scale of rational and social existence.' She expresses her concern and indignation, echoing Wollstonecraft's in the *Vindication of the rights of woman*, at women's complicity in perpetuating their own ignorance. Hays affirmed that her book was for informally trained women, not scholars educated in the classical male tradition. Hays assured her readers that she was not merely compiling information, but had worked to achieve a comprehensive narrative style and balanced commentary, that she accomplished this entirely on her own, and that she welcomed corrections from the constructive critic. Hays had learned to anticipate complaints (or much worse) about her work from more erudite men like Gilbert Wakefield.

Female biography was a daring experiment in history writing, and Hays knew it. It was also a strenuous effort to re-gender History. Previous compilations about women, even George Ballard's celebrated *Memoirs of British ladies* (1752), had included only pious women. Hays broke the mold, including women of all kinds of moral character. Despite her apologies, disclaimers, and assurances to the reader, in six volumes Hays constructed a parallel story of the past to existing ones. The emerging truth she bade her readers discover in *Female biography* was the lineage of women she brought together for the first time from the historical record in which they had languished, mostly marginal or hidden or ignored. In *Female biography*, she constructed an imagined community in which women of all historical eras, nationalities, political and theological persuasions, reputations, and classes, were assembled to invite the reader into their gendered realm.

Hays acknowledged at the turn into the new century that misogyny was so deeply embedded in Western culture that even the free-thinking Dissenters and political radicals she knew, male, of course, but female too, could not yet discern that it was another, pervasive obstacle to full humanity for both sexes. She advanced the reach of Rational Dissent in several of her individual 'memoirs', advocating toleration of heterodox views, describing the powerful influence of Reformist learned ladies like Marguerite of Navarre and Anne Askew, and extending the contributions

of women to knowledge and to the practice of toleration of difference in accounts of Catholic and Muslim women, and, later in her *Memoirs of queens* (1821), those from many non-Western cultures.

Female biography was widely reviewed in both England and America with much critical clucking over the ‘memoirs’ Hays included of disreputable women. A pirated American edition in three volumes appeared in 1807. In England the books sold so well that the royalties allowed Hays to purchase a ‘cabin’ of her own outside London. The six volumes were presented as an anniversary present to Lady Elizabeth Austen Knight in 1807 by her oldest son. It is likely that Jane Austen read and referred to *Female biography* during her extended visits to Godmersham, the estate of her brother Edward and her aristocratic sister-in-law, Lady Elizabeth, where she composed and revised her novels. Further research and analysis will likely demonstrate the influence of Hays’s work on Austen’s.⁶⁷

As she grew older, Mary Hays cherished her Rational Dissenting roots. There is a note in novelist Elizabeth Gaskell’s hand on a page of a letter from Wollstonecraft to Hays that she gave Mrs. Gaskell, now in the Pforzheimer Collection. The note reads, ‘This letter written by Mrs. Wolstonecraft [sic] authoress of the Rights of Woman and addressed to Miss Hays authoress of The Lives of Illustrious Women was given me by Miss Hays 1st May 1836. It may have been written 1792–96 and certainly before her marriage with Godwin.’⁶⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, although not a Unitarian, remembered Hays’s achievements; after Godwin’s death, Mary Shelley replied to Hays’s note of condolence, ‘Your name is of course familiar to me as one of those women whose talents do honour to our sex – and as the friend of my parents.’⁶⁹

Hays knew Harriet Martineau, whose Huguenot and Unitarian lineage afforded her a unique education, even as it kept her, too, at the margins of English culture. Shortly before her death in 1843, Hays wrote to Henry Crabb Robinson, with whom she sustained a long, introspective

⁶⁷ Gina Luria Walker, ‘Pride, prejudice, patriarchy: Jane Austen reads Mary Hays,’ Chawton House Library Fellow’s Lecture, 25 Feb. 2010, podcast [tp://www.soton.ac.uk/english/news/news.shtml](http://www.soton.ac.uk/english/news/news.shtml).

⁶⁸ Quoted with the generous permission of the Mary Hays Correspondence and Manuscripts. The Carl H Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁶⁹ Mary Shelley to Mary Hays, 20 Apr. 1836. Pforzheimer, MWS 361.

correspondence, about some of the terms of her will. She told him that Mrs. Martineau had taken a mutual friend to visit the second Mrs. Godwin, now dead. On that occasion, Mrs. Godwin had presented Mrs. Martineau with an engraving of Godwin, and inquired whether Hays would like one. Of course, Hays would. She then went on to say that should Crabb Robinson outlive the friend to whom Hays had promised the engraving on her death, she was making a provision in her will for the image to go to him. In addition, she hoped to see him soon when she would make him a gift of Robert Robinson's controversial *Plan of lectures on Nonconformity*, a gift from Robinson. Hays remembered that Robinson's text 'was taken to the House of Commons, and read by a member there, as a proof of the disaffected spirit of the Dissenters.' Hays confused the Robinson piece read in Parliament: It was his *Political catechism*. But she evoked Robinson as he had inspired her 50 years before, reminding Crabb Robinson that 'this Great and good man was the awakener of my mind, and the Preserver of my life by rousing me by the energy of his genius from the morbid effects of a deep rooted Grief.'⁷⁰ In a late letter to her favourite niece, Hays reaffirmed her abiding faith. She singled out her intellectual works as her most significant achievement. She expressed satisfaction at having risen above the mundane existence she had rejected in her earliest writings, and intimated that her lonely, idiosyncratic struggles over the last 50 years to gain recognition for women's cognitive potential might make a difference to subsequent generations. Despite her persistent sense of female disabilities, she had carried on the legacy of freethinking bequeathed to her by Robert Robinson and other Rational Dissenters, as well as the pioneering Unitarians. Like Wollstonecraft and the other heroes she revered, she too had imagined new human possibilities. She reaffirmed her abiding religious faith and her renewed optimism. 'To the Being who gave them, I bequeath my life and my mind,' she wrote, 'in the humble hope that I may not have lived wholly in vain, or "folded in a napkin" the talent entrusted to me.'⁷¹ She died in 1843 at the age of eighty one.

⁷⁰ Mary Hays to Crabb Robinson, April 1842, DWL, HCR 154(a).

⁷¹ E Kell, 'Memoir of Mary Hays: With some unpublished letters addressed to her by Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, and others', *The Christian Reformer*, XI/CXXIX (Sept., 1844), 814.

Hays's Unitarian values sustained her as she struggled to make a career as a public female intellectual, anticipating the Unitarian women who followed like George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, Jane Marcet, and others. The long-lived Hays may be understood as an historical 'missing link' between the situational emergence of late Enlightenment feminisms and the professional, academic, and political momentum of women during the Victorian period and beyond. Hays's personal disappointments and unfortunate public character do not detract from an accurate assessment of her contributions: in addition to her other achievements, she never lost that fundamental sense of optimism as to human progress which characterized her earlier work. Mary Hays offered a female version of Rational Dissent as a hopeful and inclusive faith that integrated reason and feeling, acknowledging women's humanity as well as men's. She remained confident about the potential for beneficial advances in new and mutual understanding when women and men make opportunities for intellectual exchanges.

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REVIEWS

David Sorkin, *The religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton University Press, 2008; pp. ix + 526; ISBN 0 300 10356 5, \$35/£19.95.

It is increasingly hard to talk of the Enlightenment without acknowledging its religious dimension, and few have been more prominent than David Sorkin in making that essential connection. Sorkin is best known for his studies of Moses Mendelssohn and the Berlin Enlightenment and of enlightened Genevan Calvinism. These topics recur in this fine study, here subsumed within a wider survey of enlightened religion undertaken on a geographical west-east axis and built around an exposition of the writings and reputations of archetypal 'religious enlighteners'. Sorkin is insistent that we should see his cast of characters as sincere believers and apologists rather than scarcely veiled freethinkers, and he is in most cases persuasive, such as his first subject, William Warburton. The latter's debt to Dutch Collegialism is well emphasised as being a core element of his 'heroic moderation', although Sorkin's location of Warburton within the spectrum of contemporary Anglican opinion is awkward. It fails to register sufficiently the divisiveness of his idiosyncratic moderation and his relative intellectual eclipse well before his death in 1779. Sorkin moves next to Jacob Vernet, the classic expositor of the 'middle way' in his five volume *Christian instruction* (1751-4), the man whom he credits with making Arminianism the public creed of Geneva, one for whom 'Man's intact faculty of reason makes him free to be moral, while his corruption makes him need Jesus for expiation and grace' (p. 78). Vernet famously impugned Voltaire and d'Alambert while showing himself anxious to hold up a role for utility in Christian expression and was resolutely anti-Catholic. Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten (1706-57), a product of Wolffianism, is perhaps one of Sorkin's least progressive enlighteners (though he is not discussed in those terms). In his hands, history became an effective weapon for Christianity, as damaging

to the polemics of freethinkers as it was to Catholic dogma. Bringing Pietism and Orthodoxy together and insisting that natural theology was inferior to revealed truth, Baumgarten classically embodies what Sorkin would see as the 'Lutheran enlightenment'. A 'shifting [of] emphasis from the visible church of sacraments and doctrine to the invisible church of personal devotion and ethical behavior' (p. 121) Sorkin writes of Baumgarten, but it could stand more generally.

From chapter four, Sorkin moves on to deal with non-Protestant exponents of his religious Enlightenment. With his first subject, Moses Mendelssohn, Sorkin is on his familiar ground of the early Haskalah (seen as a minority version of the religious Enlightenment) and he offers a brilliantly succinct essay on this theme. Mendelssohn – a 'legend in his lifetime' (p. 168) – is presented as concerned mainly with the intellectual renewal of Judaism starting from the presumption that it is founded in natural religion: refined Biblical translation and commentaries were, for Mendelssohn, central to the task of defending rabbinical exegesis.

The last two characters treated are maverick Catholics, one lay, the other a cleric. The position of the first, Joseph Valentin Eybel, is wittily given by Sorkin as counter counter-Reformation. As professor of Church law at the University of Vienna, Eybel was a loyal apologist for the extensive religious reforms undertaken within the Habsburg Empire during the 1770s and 1780s. Anti-Jesuit, anti-papal, averse to saints and oral confession, this neo-Jansenist stretched the limits of the Catholic Enlightenment to breaking point. A die-hard supporter of Joseph II, the learned Eybel never quite came to terms with the collapse of his imperial master's policies by 1790 and found it hard to comprehend that his claim that the state existed to serve the 'well-being of citizens' (p. 231) might not be what those citizens sought if it was inimical to their lives as Catholics. Adrien Lamourette, faced comparable problems. He is one of those progressive Catholics who ended up highly placed in the Constitutional Church of France, in his case as bishop of Lyon. With other such figures like Fauchet and Grégoire, he has intrigued recent historians, and there can be no doubting his commitment to reconciling religion and reason, and applying natural law theory to the Church. The Revolution

gave him enhanced career opportunities which he seized hoping to bring in his ideal of a propertyless Church dedicated to ‘The Sage of Nazareth’ (p.302). Hence the famous ‘kiss’ of 1792, a gesture signalling the marriage of Christianity with the Revolutionary Republic defended by the state.

Lamourette’s behaviour scandalised Catholic opinion, even moderate opinion, and indicated that the era of ‘enlightened’ religion was reaching its end in the polarised ideological climate of the 1790s. In the eyes of many, it had given away too much, compromised the deposit of faith, and had a lot to do with the destruction of a stable European order. And yet it is these dimensions of the Religious Enlightenment – that it was for a minority, connected inadequately with the majority of observant Christians, and did a disservice to Judaism and Christianity by abetting religious decline – that are never really confronted in David Sorkin’s deeply learned and wide ranging book. He offers us superb summaries of the life and writings of each of his subjects and yet the social contexts within which they operated can be slightly hazily given and there is not enough consideration of the reception of their controversial outputs; they tend to be treated in isolation with too few comparisons either between themselves or with other contemporary Christian apologists. Because he is so concerned with progressive thinkers, Sorkin leaves out a huge swathe of Christian and Jewish experience that looked to history and tradition for its validation, those who were ‘orthodox’ for want of a better term. They did not consider themselves ‘unenlightened’ because they did not have the progressive agendas of Sorkin’s theologians and yet the author sets up ‘supernaturalism’ as inherently unenlightened and dogma likewise. There is no room here for any exploration of heresy, almost a redundant term in the enlightened religious universe inhabited by wishful thinkers like Lamourette. Sorkin is right to stress that the Religious Enlightenment had a decisive role for Jews and Catholics too, yet the fact remains that most of its exponents were Protestants and scarcely less anti-Catholic than the deists and *philosophes*. This remains an important

dimension of the Religious Enlightenment that scholars who write about progressive and otherwise tolerant Christians need to lay bare.

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F P Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume II, 1784-1797*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. xiv + 605; 2006, hardback ISBN 978 0 19 820679 8, £110; 2009, paperback ISBN 978 0 19 954153 9, £35.

The appearance of this volume marks the completion of the most scholarly, detailed and useful biography of that great parliamentarian and political writer, Edmund Burke, that has appeared so far. It is doubtful whether another biography of this particular kind will ever again be needed. Professor Lock is a distinguished professor of English literature, based in Canada, who has written a great deal on the politics and the literary style of major eighteenth-century writers such as Jonathan Swift. In his two-volume biography of Burke he has examined all the printed primary and secondary sources that are available to him, as well as many manuscript sources. He has had to read a vast amount on the politics of the period and a huge number of works interpreting Burke's thought. I did not notice a single relevant modern work on Burke or his context that he has ignored and he has subjected all the voluminous speeches and writings of Burke to the closest scrutiny. He has himself discovered sixty Burke letters to add to the ten volumes of Burke's correspondence previously available to us (and he has published them in three issues of *The English Historical Review* in 1997, 1999 and 2003). He has also previously published a valuable monograph on Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. His biography follows Burke through his life, week-by-week and almost day-by-day. His political life is naturally to the fore and we have never been provided with so much detail in chronological order about his political activities. Not a single speech by Burke in parliament, not a single work he wrote, and not an intervention

he made in the impeachment of Warren Hastings escapes notice or comment. Nor is his personal and private life ignored as we learn a great deal about Burke's health, his at home life, his relations with family members, acquaintances and visitors, and his interest in his small estate.

This second volume of Lock's biography is dominated by Burke's views on India and his long and intense involvement in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, by his writings on the French Revolution and the war with Revolutionary France, and by his opinions on the Catholic question in Ireland. There is not a speech, pamphlet or major letter of Burke on these subjects that is not brought to the attention of the reader. Burke was enormously well informed in these issues and so is Professor Lock. All readers will be impressed with the breadth of Burke's knowledge and the number of well-judged and well-expressed words he spoke or wrote. Burke's charges against Hastings alone ran to 135,000 words and years later he delivered a speech against Hastings that lasted for almost exactly twenty-seven hours over nine days. He was still writing furiously and at length in his last years, even after his retirement from parliament. Interspersed with the many pages on these major preoccupations of Burke are interesting and valuable discussions of Burke's attitude to other issues that received less of his attention, but that were important to his contemporaries and modern students of his age. The most important of these is Burke's response to the Regency crisis of the late 1780s, but there are also useful discussions on Burke's views on such issues as crime and punishment, the advisability of parliamentary reform, the toleration of Dissenters, the abolition of the slave trade, the persistence of poverty, and the education of young men.

As befits a literary scholar, Professor Lock is excellent on Burke's prose style (I particularly admired his discussion of the merits of Burke's *A letter to a noble lord*) and on his abilities as a speaker in parliament. He is also persuasive in his analysis of Burke's arguments and in revealing why Burke's speeches and writings are still read with profit today by many who have no particular interest in the actual issues that provoked Burke into making his comments. Burke is shown repeatedly combining the particular with the general, the immediate with the universal, always embellished with a vast range of supporting evidence and delivered with

energy, power and passion. Professor Lock demonstrates why Burke's speeches and writings had such a powerful impact on many of those who heard or read his words and also why these words still resonate with anyone today who is still interested in such general issues as morality, justice, prescription, and human rights. Although Professor Lock does not subject Burke's arguments to the depth of analysis he would employ if he had been writing a monograph on Burke's thought, I found his judgments on his writings very persuasive. Much has been written, for example, on Burke as a utilitarian and on Burke on natural law. Lock, rightly in my view, maintains: 'In the contention between those who have interpreted Burke's ideas as emanating from his belief in natural law, and those who have counted him as a utilitarian, both sides have a persuasive case. Being a politician and a rhetorician, not a theorist, when these and other ideas and principles came into conflict, he sought to reconcile them according to circumstances, appealing to history rather than theory' (p. 331). Burke is rightly praised by Professor Lock for the power and profundity of his speeches and writings and Lock amply displays his enormous energy, his commitment, his need to be actively involved in great issues, and his readiness to sacrifice his personal advancement to those principles he undoubtedly held most dearly. He was undoubtedly shaped by his moral principles and his deep sense of natural justice. I would fully endorse Professor Lock's conclusions that Burke was probably the most talented British politician never to reach cabinet rank and that he is more read today than any of his political contemporaries, famous and admired though some of them still are. What helps to make Lock's favourable opinions of Burke so persuasive is his clear recognition of his subject's undoubted weaknesses. On quite a number of occasions he admits that Burke failed to convince his contemporaries with his spoken or written arguments and that he frequently betrayed failings that irritated and alienated those whom he wished to persuade to accept his opinions. He could be 'an irritating know-all' (54), 'incurably self-righteous' (97), 'inflexible and obsessive' (545), and 'his animosity to Pitt [was] so visceral that his usual wit and invention deserted him' (195). His rhetoric could become 'self-indulgent as well as intolerably long-winded' (469) and 'even Burke's friends and associates sometimes found him tiresome

and even impossible as a colleague' (546). Burke was never temperate in his antagonisms, was insensitive to the feelings of others, and almost always refused to compromise: 'his sense of rectitude prevented his seeing an opponent's point of view or accepting that different opinions might equally result from honestly held principles or values' (584).

The main strengths of this volume are the depth of Lock's scholarship, his decision to write a chronological study in great detail, and the soundness and persuasiveness of his judgments of the merits of Burke's great and numerous speeches and writings. His prose style is also attractive and his book is embellished with some excellent illustrations, especially some of the many caricatures that Burke's career inspired. There are some weaknesses that are the inevitable consequences of Lock's strengths. Because he has decided to write a chronological narrative this means that his comments on such long-running issues as the impeachment of Hastings and Burke's views on the French Revolution and the Revolutionary War keep appearing, disappearing and then re-appearing throughout hundreds of pages of text. Each time these subjects appear they are given quite detailed treatment, but the author then moves on to other subjects before returning to these important issues at a later date in Burke's life. At times this reader at least would have liked a sustained and continuous discussion on these issues until they had been fully covered. Lock's decision to write at such depth on Burke means that he often has no space to set his account in context. Thus, readers will learn much about Burke's views on the impeachment of Hastings, but will discover little about Hastings' views or what modern historians would make of the issues in dispute. Readers will also learn a vast amount about Burke's views on the French Revolution and the need to defeat Jacobinism, but will learn little about the views of Pitt or Fox on these questions, for example, or whether Jacobinism posed the kind of threat that Burke claimed. To profit fully from Lock's labours, a reader needs to possess a considerable amount of prior knowledge. Professor Lock's publisher has not asked or allowed him to provide his readers with a bibliography, and the index is inadequate, although Lock himself has provided the reader with numerous helpful footnotes. I detected a very small number of errors in his book (for example, it should be lodestone

not loadstone on p. 13, the Duke of Argyll not Argyle on p. 53, and Queen Anne did not employ the royal veto in 1709 and the Septennial Act was not passed in 1717, both on p. 67) and also a tiny number of typos (on pp. 310, 326, 404, 421 and 533). I also do not agree with Professor Lock's views on the elections and the electorate as expressed on pp. 16, 201, and 280). It would be unfair, however, to end on a carping note. Given the approach that Professor Lock has chosen to adopt, this is as definitive a biography of Burke as we are ever likely to get. Professor Lock has put all students of Burke and of later eighteenth-century Britain in his debt with this wonderfully detailed and enormously persuasive chronological study of Burke's life, political career, and achievements in the spoken and written word. It has been both instructive and pleasurable to read, long though it is. It simply has no competitors as a richly detailed account of Burke's life in chronological format. Despite its price, even in paperback, it should be in every academic library and on the shelves of anyone with a serious interest in a great political speaker and writer.

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Alan P F Sell, *Hinterland theology: a stimulus to theological construction* (Studies in Christian History and Thought), Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs, and Hyderabad, Paternoster, 2008, pp. 715; ISBN 978 1 84227 331 9, £39.95.

Professor Sell has organised this weighty volume into five sections, each of which is designed to illuminate his central theme of 'hinterland theology', a term which he defines with admirable succinctness in his introduction. To some extent, 'hinterland' signifies the less well-known; 'hinterland' thinkers 'are seldom dignified, or fossilized, in lists of "set texts", but their writings sometimes stimulated those of their better-known contemporaries and successors, either positively or negatively', while rarely appearing as 'the staple of general undergraduate courses' (2). It should not necessarily be assumed that their occupation of the hinterland means that they were 'second rank' thinkers; indeed, in their own lifetimes they were possibly just as influential as their contemporaries among the better-known (6). In effect, Professor Sell is engaging in conflict with an

excessively whiggish approach to his subject, an approach which all too often judges past thinkers in the light of later opinions and priorities. Furthermore, the widening access to eighteenth and nineteenth-century printed works provided by electronic resources renders it far more difficult for one scholar, or one school, to establish an authoritative corpus of 'set texts', and correspondingly easier to study in depth the work of authors whose publications may be held only by a small number of specialist libraries. As a result, a far more representative selection of authors' works may be consulted by a wider readership, and the 'hinterland' idea in principle and in practice convinces this reviewer.

The volume applies the hinterland strategy to the history and thought of English Protestant Dissent from the early eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries through ten biographical studies, which are arranged chronologically and thematically. The first of its five sections, 'In the wake of toleration', examines three dissenting ministers who all lived during the period of the Toleration Act (1689), the Revolution of 1688-89, the Hanoverian succession and the threat of Jacobitism. They are the Congregationalists Thomas Ridgley (1667-1734) and Abraham Taylor (fl. 1721-40) and the Presbyterian and 'moderate Calvinist' Samuel Chandler (1693-1766). Of Ridgley and even more of Taylor, little is known of their lives, but Professor Sell demonstrates that both were influential teachers in their respective academies, and effective theological writers. Chandler, by contrast, left sufficient evidence to allow a much more detailed account of his career, and he is accorded one of the longest chapters in the book, which will need further consideration.

Section two, entitled 'in the wake of enlightenment and revival', examines two Congregationalist ministers and theologians whose formative years were passed in the aftermath of the French Revolution. George Payne (1781-1848) was a minister at Edinburgh and teacher at Blackburn, Exeter and Plymouth, while Richard Alliot (1804-63) served as minister at Castle Gate, Nottingham, and at York Road, Lambeth, and was subsequently the president of Cheshunt College, and finally, professor of theology and philosophy at Spring Hill College, Birmingham. The theme of Section three is 'the wake of Modern Biblical

Criticism' and its case studies are the Congregationalist David Worthington Smith (1830-1909), the Baptist Thomas Vincent Tymms (1842-1921) and the Congregationalist Walter Frederic Adeney (1849-1920). Significantly, all three were far more concerned to defend the integrity, authenticity and authority of scripture against the 'higher criticism' than to respond to the problems for Christianity posed by evolutionary theories; there are only two references to 'evolution' in the index, and one to Charles Darwin. The fourth section is devoted to 'the wake of theological liberalism' and is exemplified by essays on Robert Sleightholme Franks (1871-1964) and Charles Sim Duthie (1911-1981), both of whom displayed high intellectual qualities in adapting and accommodating to the radical challenges of the age of Barth and Schleiermacher. In the fifth and concluding section, Professor Sell analyses the similarities and dissimilarities among his ten individuals, pointing out that all except Chandler were engaged in the theological education of prospective ministers who, in various ways, responded to and passed on the essence of their teaching. Theologians will pay particular attention to the nuances of the doctrinal debates in which all ten were involved. Historians, too, will benefit from the reminder that doctrine remained of paramount importance, that the dissenting tradition retained its emphasis upon spirituality, and that thinking, and re-thinking, about the supernatural continued to be of significance in periods which are often assumed to be characterized by secularization and the decay of belief. A particular merit of the book is the way in which the author seeks at all times to enquire into the extent to which the opinions of his ministers influenced, changed, or perhaps reflected, those of the congregations, and their students.

It is difficult in a single review to do full justice to a work of such width. Probably the case study of most interest to readers of *Enlightenment and Dissent* will be Samuel Chandler, a liberal Dissenter whose values mirrored the age of Watts and Doddridge, and whose devotion to the revolution settlement, the Protestant succession and the toleration which both had secured was unshakable. Chandler was clearly a man of the Enlightenment, convinced that genuine Christianity needed no coercive

powers in order to flourish and that the truth would always prove triumphant in free discussion. One of his most characteristic and influential works was *The case of subscription to explanatory articles of faith* (1748), in which he strongly re-asserted the Reformation principles that the scriptures alone, and not human formulae, should be the rule of faith, and that liberty of conscience was a divine gift. In this respect he bears a close comparison to Francis Blackburne, archdeacon of Cleveland and an eminent Latitudinarian, whose *The confessional* (1766) made very similar claims; indeed, George Harvest in defending subscription, replied both to Chandler and to Blackburne. It is easy to see why Chandler's cautious and open-minded style of polemical writing endeared him to some of the hierarchy of the established Church, all the more so as Chandler was fiercely loyal to the Hanoverian dynasty and vehement in his denunciations of Catholicism. Professor Sell quotes only a few of the milder passages from his *Great Britain's memorial against the Pretender and Popery*, composed hastily and with blood-curdling horror stories about Popery, at the height of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. Chandler ended with lavish praise for George II. Indeed, while historians of Jacobitism often explain that movement's failure largely in terms of its own shortcomings and inability to seize opportunities, there is ample evidence that a causal factor of at least equal importance was the strength of the Hanoverian regime. Those in search of evidence of that strength could do worse by taking full account of Chandler and his fellow-Dissenters and this chapter, apart from a factual slip concerning the Schism Act (it was passed into law in 1714 and repealed in 1719), provides a useful survey of his life and work.

Professor Sell's conclusion displays the variety of theological opinions held by his ten theologians. In one respect, however, they shared a fundamental similarity. All of them, even the eirenical Chandler, were orthodox over the doctrine of the Trinity. Abraham Taylor, for example, wrote firmly in its support and inflicted 'a hammering of the Arians' (45) in the process. None of them could be described unequivocally as a 'Rational Dissenter', although Chandler comes closest to that designation. However, Rational Dissent, for too long semi-observed by the shadow of

Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, also had its hinterland, a hinterland inhabited by such distinguished writers and teachers as Caleb Fleming, Joseph Fownes, Philip Furneaux, Thomas Jervis, Andrew Kippis, Abraham Rees, Joseph Towers, Micaiah Towgood, Hugh Worthington, and many others. Each of them made some contribution to the theological and cultural identity of Dissent; each is worthy of study in his own right. Amongst them may be included the female writers of Rational Dissent, whose work, thanks to scholars such as Gina Luria Walker, Felicia Gordon and Anthony Page, is receiving serious academic attention. Professor Sell deserves our thanks for an excellent exposition of his hinterland idea, as well as for the thorough biographical studies of some of those who have exemplified it.

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Alexander Dick and Christina Lupton, *Theory and practice in the eighteenth century: between philosophy and literature*, London, Pickering and Chatto, 2008, pp. ix + 313; ISBN 978 1 85196 938 8, £60.00/\$99.00.

All but one of the essays in this miscellany of essays discuss Enlightenment thinkers and writers. Apart from Shaftesbury and Rousseau, they are drawn from the empiricist canon: Locke, Reid, Hume, Smith. The collection is headed by a discussion of Derrida by Nicholas Hudson, who addresses Derrida's repudiation of Enlightenment empiricism as a philosophical chimera. Hudson offers a modification of Derrida in order to reclaim empiricism for the Derridean project. The empiricists, he claims, 'moved quickly and decisively towards the view that language does not merely reflect, but *constitutes* reason' (15). Their 'semiotic notion of consciousness' in effect keeps the empiricists on side. While this critical homage to Derrida accounts for the eschewing of the term 'Enlightenment' in the volume title, Derrida does not hold the theoretical key to the collection, which is not concerned with post-structuralism, deconstruction or the repudiation of the Enlightenment.

Not a single one of the essays which make up the volume takes Derrida as a point of reference. None of them has been selected with the Derridean ‘problem of Enlightenment’ in mind. Rather, they engage with an older picture of the Enlightenment where reason and empiricism dominate, albeit a picture which has now been modified by a gloss of sociability. The critical motifs running through most of the essays are either what might loosely be termed language theory or reflections on literary practice. The particular perspective brought by these essays is their focus on language and the role of literature in writings by eighteenth-century thinkers, as well as the use made by literary writers of technical or philosophical motifs. The ‘practice’ to which the volume title refers is the practice of writing, and writerly practice is taken to cover a wide range, from the material text, to rhetorical strategies, literary images, and modes of narrative – by any standards a very broad definition. Rather than French theory, the critical theme of the collection is to be found in John Richetti’s analysis of the literary aspects of the philosophy of the so-called ‘British Empiricists’, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Richetti’s observation (quoted by Mark Blackwell in his essay, ‘Preposterous Hume’) that ‘Philosophical writing in this period is self-conscious about the difficult relationship between thought and the expository necessity whereby thought acquires style and becomes persuasive by extralogical or rhetorical means’ (87), certainly applies to the papers on philosophers – Jonathan Kramnick discusses Locke’s distinction between will and desire through the prism of his correspondence with Molyneux, to claim it as ‘a benchmark in the Enlightenment’s production and differentiation of categories’ (46). Joseph Chaves finds a way of reconciling the apparent self-contradictions of Shaftesbury’s positions in *Characteristics* in terms of his idea of ‘self-conversation’ which Shaftesbury discusses in his essay ‘Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author’. Alexander Dick argues that John Reid’s critique of Hume is underscored by debates about how to represent nature in technological terms. Maureen Harkin discusses Adam Smith’s treatment of the figure of ‘the primitive’ in his writings, to suggest that the failure of his historical project may be explained in terms of unresolved tensions between contemporary historiographical models. The figure who

dominates is Hume, with no less than four essays devoted to him: Mark Blackwell ('Preposterous Hume'), Adam Budd on Hume's analysis of the power of language, and Eva M Dadlez on unexpected parallels between Hume and Jane Austen. In the fourth essay in the Hume group, John Richetti discusses Hume's *Dialogues concerning natural religion* in order to demonstrate how his understanding of the genre as literary form shapes his philosophical argument. If these essays on the empiricists collectively bear out Paul de Man's contention that philosophy 'is dependent on figuration', others confirm his corollary that 'all literature is to some extent philosophical' (to borrow words quoted by Jonathan Sadow in his essay on 'The Epistemology of Genre', p. 163). There are three essays on literary writing: Adam Potkay on Wordsworth, Brian Michael Norton on Novels and theories of happiness, Nancy Yousef's discussion of Rousseau's *Julie*. In different ways, the essays in this collection demonstrate that the rhetorical moves and literary choices of philosophers add to the richness of their texts, while literary authors responded to epistemological and ethical issues in contemporary philosophy. However, it is debatable whether these inter-relationships between literature and philosophy are what distinguish the eighteenth-century from other periods. Despite their common interest in blurring of the boundaries between eighteenth-century literature and philosophy, the interest of the volume is in individual essays on particular figures. There is plenty here to interest specialists in eighteenth-century literature and thought. But prospective readers would be better served by a choice of title that more accurately reflected the content of the content of the collection.

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Arianne Chernock, *Men and the making of modern British feminism*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. x + 257; ISBN 978 0 8047 6311 0, £53.50/\$60.

Major John Cartwright once argued that, 'Women know too well what God and nature require of them, to put in so absurd a claim for a share in

the rights of election. Their privileges and power are of another kind; and they know their sphere' (John Cartwright, *The legislative right of the commonalty vindicated; or, take your choice!* [1777], pp. 46-7). He was trying to rebut the claims of conservatives that the logical result of the argument that every man had a natural right to be represented in government was that every woman must also have that right. Such conservative writers clearly intended to ridicule the radical programme (or, as Cartwright put it, they had been 'driven to the sad expedient of attempting to be *witty* upon the subject'), and he, by his appeals to Scripture, 'nature' and the common law of England, just as clearly wished to make it plain that the radical programme did not aspire to achieve political rights for women. What Ariane Chernock has demonstrated, in *Men and the making of modern British feminism*, is that, by the 1790s, more male radicals than most of us have so far recognised drew exactly the logical conclusion suggested in derision by the conservative writers and disputed in 1777 by Cartwright.

This is a fascinating and important study, which shows convincingly that nineteenth-century male feminists such as William Thompson and John Stuart Mill should not be seen as 'isolated or exceptional male spokesmen for women's rights' (134), but, rather, that they were the successors to a surprisingly substantial cadre of male feminists arguing for reforms of various kinds in the 1790s and beyond. At the same time as the mainstream of British public opinion was vehemently rejecting the feminism of the early French Revolution and embracing the cult of domesticity, a determinedly masculine (even 'misogynist', pp. 108-9) political discourse predominated within radicalism in Britain. However, a significant branch of British radicalism in this decade recognised women's rights to be an essential corollary of the arguments for the rights to education and political participation for men – not only Mary Wollstonecraft, a handful of novelists and a couple of extreme radicals. For these men, the denial of women's rights equally with men's was 'an affront to enlightened principles' (135).

Admittedly, a substantial number of these male 'champions of the fair sex' did not go so far as to desire political rights for women. The book

begins by explaining the emergence of feminist sociability as a subset of radical sociability in the 1790s, not only in London, but also in towns such as Norwich, Manchester and Birmingham. It proceeds to trace the arguments made by male radicals in the 1790s for equal education for men and women, and the attempts made to put these aspirations into practice; the intellectual justifications made for women to be able to publish their writings, and the practical help given to them to do so; and the demands for reform of the marriage laws and the arguments for parity in marriage. Finally, Chernock ends her book with the small group of advanced radicals (including Thomas Starling Norgate, George Dyer, Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Spence, George Philips and Edward Christian) who wanted to extend the political franchise not only to most, if not all, men, but also to women.

In this well written and concise book (the endnotes take up more space than a third of the main text, and are an important part of the volume), Chernock argues persuasively for the importance of male feminism in the 1790s, while admitting its limitations – she quotes Mary Wollstonecraft as warning Mary Hays, witheringly, in 1792, that ‘Your male friends will still treat you like a woman’ (36). While none of the chapters discuss feminist positions and enterprises previously completely unknown to have involved men in the 1790s, she has clearly uncovered their participation and commitment to a far greater extent than is usually recognised in any of these areas (see Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* [1995], ch. 8). She has also discussed their contributions collectively where previously contemporary writers have been considered as individuals, thus demonstrating a combined male contribution to feminist concerns that has not normally been acknowledged. An appendix offers brief biographies of twenty-two of these men, drawing out particularly their involvement in feminist writing and/or activities. Suggestively, Chernock also contends that the emergence of male feminism in the 1790s was not a brief episode, but that, after a quiet period during the Napoleonic Wars (perhaps corresponding to Peter Spence’s ‘romantic radicalism’ of these years – *The birth of romantic radicalism: war, popular politics and English*

radical reformism, 1800-1815 [1996]), the feminist argument was picked up by male radicals including Henry Hunt, Matthew Davenport Hill, George Ensor, Samuel Ferrand Waddington, the *Black Dwarf*, and the Owenites, before William Thompson in 1825 – hence the significance of the definition of the voter as male in the 1832 Reform Act.

There are small hairs one might split at various points throughout. To the argument that the 1790s feminists were working against the tide of misogynist political rhetoric of the period (109-11), we should surely add that they were labouring against the enormous weight of assumption since the beginning of political representation in Britain and the western world that representatives and their electors would normally be male; and I would have liked to have seen some engagement with Matthew McCormack's *The independent man: citizenship and gender politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005). But these are at the level of queries provoked by a most enjoyable and profitable read, and certainly not doubts about Chernock's main thesis.

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E Derek Taylor, *Reason and religion in Clarissa: Samuel Richardson and 'The famous Mr. Norris, of Bemerton'*, Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 178; ISBN 978-0-7546-6531-1, £55.

The issues E Derek Taylor considers in his study of Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* will be familiar to students of eighteenth-century fiction: the novel's controversial tragic ending, Richardson's religious beliefs (or lack of them) as evidenced in *Clarissa*, and the author's possible feminism. Taylor's contribution is to bring out the significance of references to the Rev. John Norris of Bemerton in Richardson's second novel, and in doing so, view these subjects from a new perspective. John Norris was an Anglican clergyman and a follower of the French philosopher Nicolas Malebranche, who, like Malebranche, combined Cartesian-ism and Christian Platonism. He was also the author of one of the first detailed criticisms of John Locke's *An essay concerning human understanding*.

There are eleven references to Norris in *Clarissa*, beginning with Anna Howe's quotation of a line from Norris's poem 'Damon and Pythias, or, friendship in perfection'. Later, Anna offers Clarissa fifty guineas contained in a copy of Norris's *A collection of miscellanies*, leading to a series of letters where Clarissa returns her friend's 'Norris' and Anna worries that she might have need of it. Lovelace later infers that 'Norris' is a code for some subterfuge, and vows that he will not be 'out-Norrised'. Richardson also alluded to Norris in a letter to Elizabeth Carter, where he supposed (perhaps disingenuously) that her poem 'Ode to wisdom', which he incorporated into the second volume of *Clarissa*, showed her to be a descendant of 'the famous Mr. Norris, of Bemerton'.

Taylor argues that Norris's critique of Locke mattered to Richardson, and that Richardson, like Norris and Malebranche, resisted Lockean materialism: the senses almost always deceive in *Clarissa*. Clarissa herself, who is 'all soul', or 'all mind', combines the corporeal and the spiritual. Further, *Reason and religion in Clarissa* sees Richardson's brand of feminism, one which allowed him to encourage women to write and express their opinions *and* to laud the virtue of obedience, as Christian and conservative in its foundations, like that of Mary Astell – the (rather tenuous) connection with Norris being that he and Astell had a lengthy correspondence. Contemplating her own death, Clarissa, like Astell, turns to God and the after-life, and in Taylor's view, shows that women and men are equal in the sight of God.

One can accept that Norris's work formed part of the intellectual background to *Clarissa*, and that the references to John Norris serve as a pointer – one of many in the novel – to the principle of transcendence. Taylor is probably right to say that that Norris's value to Richardson lay in his mediation between the 'extremes' of Locke and William Law. However, when Taylor argues that it is more important to ask what theological system Richardson made use of in his 'religious novel', than it is to ask what theological system he believed in, he is close to granting the case made by Florian Stuber, namely, that divine providence does not inhabit *Clarissa*, but only exists as a rhetorical superstructure. It would be easier to believe that Norris mattered to Richardson if his work were a consistent presence in the author's *oeuvre* – but it isn't. As Taylor

acknowledges, Richardson's novels were shaped by the need to respond to criticism of the previous text, and always in a conservative and defensive direction. However, this consideration does not figure in his analysis of the ending of Richardson's second novel. There is no sense here of the effect on *Clarissa* of Henry Fielding's mockery of 'virtue rewarded' in Richardson's first novel, and how that might have pushed Richardson towards a heroine signally lacking in self-interest, and an ending with no tangible rewards.

This is not to say that the revival of Platonism in the late seventeenth century, rather than Norris specifically, has no bearing on *Clarissa*, or on Richardson's fiction, or indeed on that of Fielding. Taylor does not remark on Fielding's far more prominent use of 'a favourite image from Plato' in *The history of Tom Jones*, a work exactly contemporary with *Clarissa*. What is lacking in *Reason and religion in Clarissa*, is a sense of why, in the political, religious and philosophical climate of the late-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, Platonism was attractive, or what needs were served by it. Further, Taylor seems uninterested in the incongruous fact that references to Norris in *Clarissa* are most frequent when his Platonist work is used to convey a note for fifty guineas; but then the incongruity does not seem to have bothered Richardson either.

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Roger L Emerson, *Essays on David Hume, medical men and the Scottish Enlightenment: 'industry, knowledge and humanity'*, (Science, Technology and Culture, 1700-1945), Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 316; ISBN 9780754666288, £65.00.

Roger Emerson, Professor Emeritus at the University of Western Ontario, has put together a stimulating collection of previously unpublished conference papers that poses a range of important and unusual questions regarding the relationship between Enlightenment and eighteenth-century society. Rather like the enigmatic hero of his volume, Emerson enjoys nothing more than slaying the sacred cows of Scottish Enlightenment

scholarship. Chapter 6 is a direct reply to a recent essay by noteworthy Hume scholar M A Stewart on Hume's intellectual development, while Emerson also takes Andrew Skinner to task for omitting Hume's 'Idea of the perfect commonwealth' from his discussion of Hume's economic thought. More importantly, Emerson objects to the current thrust of Scottish Enlightenment studies, which to his mind unduly privileges the 'moral, political-economic and social theories' produced by a handful of luminaries in the years after c.1730. Indeed, Emerson criticises the prevailing assumption – identified most firmly here with Nicholas Phillipson, J G A Pocock and John Robertson – that 'one can consider in near isolation some aspects of Scottish life while ignoring others'. Instead, Emerson contends that the Scottish Enlightenment was 'a great improving, secularising movement, driven mainly by notions of utility and rationality' (226), a characterization that he believes derives directly from contemporary ambitions for its beneficial impact on society – not least in Hume's essay 'Of refinement in the arts', which duly provides the subtitle for the volume under review.

Emerson's insistence that we should 'look at [the Enlightenment] holistically and not see it as a movement of ideas only' (xiii) frames what is in truth a rather uneven collection. He is at his strongest in considering the Enlightenment in its social context, making a convincing case, for instance, for the influence of continental Europe in bringing Enlightenment to Scotland. Stressing the physical and geographical proximity of French and Dutch ports in the generations before parliamentary union fundamentally realigned Scotland's natural allegiances, Emerson argues that the aims and ambitions of the Scottish Enlightenment were already in place by the last decades of the seventeenth century, with the hordes of mercenaries, political exiles, bankers, merchants, factors, medical students and academics wandering between Scotland and the continent all treated as potential 'transmitters of new philosophical and scientific ideas' (2). Without a doubt, Archibald Campbell, Earl of Ilay and 3rd Duke of Argyll (who studied at Utrecht and also spent time as a young man in France, Hanover and Italy), was the most significant of these importers of intellectual capital. Chapter 2

reflects Emerson's long-standing belief that Argyll has 'a better claim to founding the Scottish Enlightenment than Francis Hutcheson' (xiv), and presents long lists of clergymen, academics and bureaucrats appointed by Argyll or his supporters to support his contention that the Enlightenment would not have worked out quite as it did in Scotland without the support of the political establishment – although readers will wish to consult Emerson's *Professors, patronage and politics* (Aberdeen, 1992) and *Academic patronage and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2008), as well as his much-anticipated biography of Argyll, to add further meat to the bare bones provided here. At the same time, Emerson considers the impact of Enlightenment on contemporary society, whether this be Hume's contribution to ongoing political debates concerning harvest failures and the problem posed by the Scottish Highlands after the '45, the influence of his *History of England* in continental Europe, or the dissemination of Enlightenment values in the minds of Scottish-trained medical students who travelled abroad. Indeed, 'Numbering the Medics' (Chapter 9) is undoubtedly the most substantial addition to the volume – and not simply because at 62 pages it is by far the longest essay in the collection. Emerson's prosopography of individuals who profited from the world-famous medical education of the Scottish Enlightenment feels rather more like work in progress than a polished piece of research, but it is still extremely suggestive in the light it sheds on the cultural allegiances medics took with them – taking the lead wherever they ended up in 'enlightened efforts to increase politeness, to advance knowledge, and to realise, in concrete changes, benefits to their society' (208).

On more than one occasion, Emerson's speculative spirit leads him onto decidedly shaky ground. It is by no means clear, for instance, that the involvement of some Scottish-trained medics in the associational life of colonial and post-revolutionary America reflects the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment *per se*. Rather, the rapid proliferation of clubs, societies, theatres, assemblies, museums and subscription libraries in colonial America mirrors closely the cultural development of towns throughout the English speaking world, and might therefore be more appropriately understood as part of a broader English Urban Renaissance

influentially elucidated by the likes of John Brewer, Peter Clark and Peter Borsay. Although Emerson traces the perpetuation of Scottish Enlightenment values in the appointment of a Scot (Thomas Moffat) as the Redwood Library's first librarian, the library – founded as a private subscription library in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1747 – predated every equivalent institution in Scotland. The Scottish heritage of early American associational life will therefore need to be worked out in a great deal more detail before the claims made here can be fully ratified. More provocatively, Emerson bluntly asserts 'the irrelevance of both the ideas and the thinkers to most of those who shared the world with the enlightened' (39), attempting by elimination a statistical measure of the social depth of the Scottish Enlightenment. He concludes that just 1,300 souls were sympathetic to the project of Enlightenment in Scotland, but in the process disqualifies many groups – including women, Gaelic speakers, country-dwellers, evangelicals and Episcopalians – on the grounds that 'they did not produce, or at least articulate, interesting ideas and theories' (39). A great deal more work will need to be done – in Scotland and elsewhere – before we can say with any certainty whether evangelicals and Episcopalians, 'whose various beliefs' Emerson contends 'would not allow us to class them as enlightened', should be so discounted, while the insistence here on intellectual production rather than consumption would seem to underestimate the extent to which women engaged in the Enlightenment as perceptive readers and conversationalists.

Quite apart from these problems of interpretation, the volume lays itself open to more prosaic criticism. Given the degree to which Emerson stresses the value of regarding the Scottish Enlightenment in its pan-European and social historical context, the bibliography is rather light on the kind of work that would provide a more detailed analytical framework – not least, Thomas Munck's *The Enlightenment: a comparative social history 1721-1794* (London, 2000). At the same time, Emerson's perceptive account of the importance of chap books, children's literature and oral culture as a backdrop to student's reading in eighteenth-century Scotland would clearly be enhanced by Jan Fergus's recent analysis of the profile of *Little goody two shoes* (one of Emerson's favourite

examples) in schoolboy's reading at Rugby School in Warwickshire (see *Provincial readers in eighteenth-century England* [Oxford, 2006], especially pp. 137-54). More irritatingly, it is a great shame that such a thought-provoking series of essays should be marred by so many typographical errors and chronological contortions (at one point we are told that Argyll 'functioned as Scottish Secretary until Walpole left office in 1749 and resumed that role c.1747, holding it until his death in 1761', p. 23). These distractions sadly enhance the sense – already conveyed by the highly speculative nature of some of the essays – that Ashgate have not quite succeeded editorially in bridging the inevitable gap between what was in conception a succession of informal conference papers and what now purports to be a coherent scholarly collection.

Nevertheless, *Essays on David Hume, medical men and the Scottish Enlightenment* will reward perseverance. Emerson not only presents a relatively unconventional way of understanding the origins and contemporary impact of the Scottish Enlightenment, he also has important things to say about the uniformity of the Enlightenment as a British and continental phenomenon. In the explicitly programmatic concluding essay, Emerson insists that his prescriptions for the future of Scottish Enlightenment scholarship can apply equally well to the study of Enlightenment elsewhere, drawing attention 'to the social contexts which made enlightenments possible and directed their concerns or contributed to their thriving and to the conditions in which enlightened thought could affect society' (227). These include the relationship between the various regional or national manifestations of Enlightenment; the process by which individuals became enlightened; the patronage which facilitated and sustained enlightened writers; the limits of Enlightenment (including censorship, intolerance and religious belief); and the timing of Enlightenment. In Emerson's perceptive analysis, these factors combine to explain why an Enlightenment on the Scottish model did not really take root south of the border. For Emerson's Scottish Enlightenment was dependent not only on the continental networks that were so necessary to the economic and cultural vitality of pre-Union Scotland, but also on the

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willingness of politics fixers (and Argyll above all others) to patronise Enlightenment – just as surely as the more stifling managerial priorities of ‘Henry Dundas killed it’ (247) in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

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