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THE LIGHT OF THE EYE: DOCTRINE, PIETY
AND REFORM IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS
SHERLOCK, HANNAH MORE AND JANE
AUSTEN

BY
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For my parents.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the ways in which three eighteenth-century writers, Bishop Thomas Sherlock, Hannah More and Jane Austen embody orthodox Anglican doctrine according to their individual perceptions of the enlightening properties of Protestant Christianity. After situating them in their respective gender, literary and ecclesiastical contexts, I examine some of their key doctrines and analyse excerpts from their works.

My selection of passages from Sherlock's works is fairly comprehensive, but in the case of More and Austen, where there is already a formidable body of literary criticism, it is more selective. Thus, I focus on doctrine in More's tracts, *Strictures on the System of Female Education*, *An Essay on St Paul* and most especially *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* and in the case of Austen, on her prayers and select passages from *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. I conclude that, although diverse in their particular kind of Anglicanism (High, Evangelical and Median) and in their choice of genre, transparency or obscurity (anonymity and pseudonymity) and the various narratological strategies some of them invoke to circumvent certain taboos, Sherlock, More and Austen champion the same central orthodox doctrines, defend them against current alternatives to orthodoxy such as Latitudinarianism, Deism and various forms of Freethinking, and promote similar moral and ecclesiastical reforms. However, indirectly (through female characters who resist male representation or control) the women writers subject their ostensibly authorially-endorsed male narrators/characters to scrutiny and sometimes (when the males objectify the women) subversion.

In essence, the thesis is bifocal; highlighting the similarity of doctrinal and ecclesiastical positions, but at the same time showing the gender-related problems, which result, perforce, in different approaches and embodiments. After examining their presentation of doctrine, piety and reform in various genres, I conclude that Sherlock's presentation of doctrine is more single in focus or mono-vocal than the women writers who look at doctrine from different angles and speak with many different 'voices'. Accordingly their moral vision sometimes seems split as they struggle to overcome traditional obstacles in order to contribute in a meaningful way to traditionally male-dominated debates. Yet, at the same

time, I recognise that Sherlock, patriarchal writer as he was, was disempowered politically and had to rely on female influence to help him achieve ecclesiastical promotion.

The particularly polyphonic nature of my texts makes an homogeneous theoretical approach inappropriate, hence my co-opting of heterogeneous methodologies and theoretical models as an attempt to deal with this problem. By looking at traditional texts from a variety of angles, by selecting, using and then discarding or adjusting a theoretical lens in order to arrive at the most appropriate one, I hope thereby to expose these texts to the maximum of critical light. Hence, chapters one and two are presented through a more or less literary historical lens, modified by a feminist perspective, whereas in chapters three and four I adopt a more overtly feminist approach, experimenting with models from both feminist narratology and gynocriticism, alongside with more traditional historical models, to offer a more nuanced interpretation of More and Austen, within the context of both Anglican and women's writing.

This thesis attempts to make the following contributions to scholarship. Sherlock's theological works have elicited very little literary criticism besides that of Edward Carpenter (1936) and William Sayres (1995). I not only provide more detailed readings of Sherlock's works, but differ from Sayres (who assigns him Latitudinarian leanings) and offer some new feminine insights. While demonstrating basic similarities in thought between Sherlock, Hooker, Law, Butler and Paley, I focus on Sherlock's all-pervasive polemic against Deism and show how this preoccupation leads him to devise innovative ways in presenting it. His originality of thought in his *Six Dissertations on the Use and Intent of Prophecy* has not received the attention it merits and I attempt to redress this. Similarly, I focus on his ground-breaking juridical drama, *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*, commenting on his use of this dramatic courtroom genre, his polemical use of legal rhetoric and his (hitherto uncommented on) more enlightened view of women. In his *Temple Discourses*, I discuss his demystification of doctrine, showing how he translates it into the legal lexicon of his Temple audience, without alienating his general readers. Finally, I attempt to recuperate Sherlock's *Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London* (1750) which has often been dismissed as a senescent anomaly, by showing that it is not only part of a continuous hortatory tradition, but a form of political protest.

Beginning with Hannah More's enlightened upbringing, I mention some of her political/moral tracts and religious writings, showing how she dexterously (but not always with impunity) transcends patriarchal generic boundaries. I then focus on her novel, *Coelebs*

in Search of a Wife, offering insights on passages which have received little critical attention. Apart from doctrinal affinities with Sherlock and Law, I discuss her representations of masculine piety which are sometimes decentralised or subverted by more stable female portrayals of piety. In my reading of the heroine, Lucilla Stanley, I show the way More invokes and then discards Puritan antecedents as she works towards a more autonomous late eighteenth-century feminist portrayal of piety, an ideal that is fraught with complexities and contradictions. More controversially, I deconstruct More's patriarchal narrator/focaliser (Coelebs/Charles) and other strident male characters, showing that they are not always reliable, as they often misread or misrepresent their more marginalized female counterparts, whose experiences or vocalisations of doctrine are usually more credible than theirs.

Thirdly, I argue that there is a great deal more doctrine in Austen and a keener interest in clerical and personal moral reform than is generally perceived. I examine Austen's prayers for their female portrayal of the orthodox doctrines of God, man, sin, grace and benevolence. On the basis of certain evidence in her novels, I argue that she should be more clearly placed than heretofore in contradistinction to contemporary Latitudinarianism and Freethinking. Although Austen's irony and ambiguous discourse (and in particular the conflict between patriarchal and feminist 'voices') make it difficult to distinguish her most stable or 'true' voice, it is clear that she remains committed to orthodox doctrine (showing curiously enough, affinities with both Sherlock and More) even though she appears to question or occasionally subvert patriarchal misrepresentations of it.

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SOURCES AND CONVENTIONS

In quoting from primary sources, I have not interfered with the punctuation or orthography of the texts I quote from, but follow the practices of the editors of my sources. In the case of Sherlock these editorial practices differ considerably. His early editors, John Whiston and Benjamin White, for example, capitalize the substantives (as in the 1755 edition of *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* and the 1764 edition of *The Temple Discourses*) whereas T S Hughes (1830), following modern conventions, reproduces them in lower case. Early editions of More's works (such as *The Search After Happiness* (n.d.) and the Cheap Repository Tracts (n.d.) and recent facsimile reproductions (such as *Strictures on Female Education*, rpt. 1976) also use outdated orthographic practice, whereas her *Practical Piety* (1811), *Christian Morals* (1813) and *Essay on the Life and Practical Writing of St Paul* (1825) reflect modern practices.

In the case of Sherlock and More, I have consistently used the earliest editions available to me, for example, in the case of Sherlock, I quote from the 1755 edition of *The Tryal of the Witnesses* and the 1764 edition of *The Temple Discourses*, but use Hughes' edition (1830) for the rest of his works. Similarly in the case of More, I use the earliest editions at my disposal and thereafter facsimile or other modern editions. With regard to Austen, I quote her letters from R W Chapman's edition of her *Letters to Cassandra and Others* (1932), her novels from his 3rd edition of *The Novels of Jane Austen* (1933, rpt. 1946) and her juvenilia and prayers from *Minor Works*, vol 6 of *The Works of Jane Austen* (1954). The quotations from the Bible are from the Authorized Version (1611) and those from the *Book of Common Prayer* from the 1662 version.

Documentation generally follows the conventions of the *MLA Style Manual* (1985), with some exceptions, aiming at consistency throughout. For the convenience of the reader I have in each chapter provided full bibliographical details in the first footnote citation of a given work; thereafter the author's name alone is given, unless a short title is needed to identify the work. Where details are given in the list of abbreviations, I have dispensed with bibliographical details in all citations.

ABBREVIATIONS

Bibliographical details for the following works are in the Bibliography.

Biographical Notice Biographical Notice of the Author [Jane Austen] by Henry Austen (1817).

CI *The Clergyman's Instructor Or A Collection of Tracts on the Ministerial Duties*, (Ed.) George Herbert (1822).

CM *Christian Morals*, by Hannah More.

Coelebs *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, by Hannah More.

CRT The Cheap Repository Tracts, (Ed.) Hannah More. Note that each is separately paginated.

E *Emma*, by Jane Austen.

Family Record *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, by W and R A Austen-Leigh Edited, revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye, 1989.

Hughes *The Works of Bishop Sherlock with Some Account of his Life; Summary of each Discourse*, (Ed.) T S Hughes.

L *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and Others*, (Ed.) R W Chapman.

MP *Mansfield Park*, by Jane Austen.

<i>Memoir</i>	<i>A Memoir of Jane Austen</i> , by JEA Austen-Leigh.
<i>MW</i>	<i>Minor Works, The Works of Jane Austen</i> , vol 6. (Ed.) R W Chapman.
<i>NA</i>	<i>Northanger Abbey</i> , by Jane Austen.
<i>ODCC</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> . (Ed.) F L Cross. 46th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957 rpt.1971.
<i>P</i>	<i>Persuasion</i> , by Jane Austen.
<i>PP</i>	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , by Jane Austen.
<i>Practical Piety</i>	<i>Practical Piety, Or the Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of the Life</i> , by Hannah More.
<i>Serious Call</i>	<i>A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life, Adapted to the State and Condition of All Orders of Christians</i> , by William Law (1728).
<i>SPCK</i>	<i>Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge</i> .
<i>SPCG</i>	<i>Society for the Propagation of the Christian Gospel</i> .
<i>SS</i>	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i> , by Jane Austen.
<i>St Paul</i>	<i>An Essay on the Life and Practical Writings of St Paul</i> . Hannah More.
<i>SP</i>	<i>The Spirit of Prayer</i> , by Hannah More.

<i>Strictures</i>	<i>Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, with A View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune</i> , by Hannah More.
<i>The Tryal</i>	<i>The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus</i> , by Thomas Sherlock.
<i>TD</i>	<i>Temple Discourses or Several Discourses Preached at the Temple Church</i> , by Thomas Sherlock.
<i>Use and Intent</i>	<i>The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the Several Ages of the World</i> . (1724).

PREFACE

The human eye as the organ of physical perception is used as an image of moral and spiritual discernment by Christ in St. Matthew's Gospel as follows:

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matt 6: 22-23; cf. Luke 11: 33-35).

Although Christ uses this image in relation to the individual receiving the Gospel, my use of the elliptic phrase, 'The light of [the body is] the eye' is a metaphor for the way in which Thomas Sherlock (1678-1761), Hannah More (1745-1833) and Jane Austen (1775-1817) present Christian orthodoxy as light which has the quality to transform the inner life and renovate the psychological, moral, social and political health of the individual.

In the words of the verse quoted above, the eye 'which is full of light' imparts illumination to the whole body. As the eye is thus an integral part of the body and not easily divorced from it, so it seems appropriate to examine the physical contexts or milieux in which Sherlock, More and Austen lived and wrote. In order to acquire a better 'sense of place', I propose to briefly examine the homes, work-places and genres of Sherlock, More and Austen, looking at them as a reflection of their person, privilege and position in life and literature, before going on briefly to site the women writers in the context of other female writing. I then proceed to sketch aspects of the ecclesio-doctrinal context of the seventeenth and eighteenth century which have relevance to my three figures.

Thereafter, separate chapters are devoted to the life, times and writings of Sherlock, More (whose more extensive *oeuvre* requires two chapters) and Austen, focusing on the literary works that best convey their respective 'attachments' within the framework of eighteenth-century Protestant piety: revelation in Sherlock's case, regeneration in More's and individual moral illumination in Austen's.

Sherlock wrote to defend doctrine, More to expound it and Austen to embody it in fictional form, but these tend to overlap in the case of More. The latter's attempts to defend the tenets of Evangelical doctrine in her religious handbooks as well as in her fictional *Coelebs*, set her apart from Austen, who does not engage in what might be called quasi-technical theological debate. Accordingly, the figures of this thesis represent three distinct discursive positions, with More occupying a place between the overtly polemical Sherlock who defends doctrine, and the novelist, Austen, who embodies it.

I have long had an interest in Jane Austen and the earliest conception of this thesis can be traced to a brief reference in her letters to her appreciation of Sherlock's sermons.¹ As this reference has not been the subject of much serious critical exploration, I embarked on a close examination of all Sherlock's theological works in order to ascertain what interest they would have held for Austen.² As my study progressed, I found more in common between Sherlock and Austen than I had hoped or expected. My research was broadened by the incorporation of Hannah More in the enquiry. Introduced ostensibly as a foil to Austen, a close examination of their works proved that Austen does *not* submerge her doctrine as much as is generally thought, but is simply more politic in camouflaging it. The question of concealment led to a further exploration, that of traditional gender/genre restrictions based on cultural and religious premises, which impel both More and Austen to devise various strategies for the circumnavigation of these embargoes.³

The similarity of their doctrinal stances and a common feminist imperative (with its concomitant problem of how to reconcile this with their orthodox attachments) became apparent. This is further complicated by the fact that writing in a close Anglican continuum, both women have no viable discourse available to them other than their inherited traditional Christian (patriarchal) discourse. Their attempts to find a legitimate female voice within this

¹ In a letter to her niece, Anna Austen (28 Sept 1814), Austen wrote: 'I am very fond of Sherlock's Sermon's, prefer them to almost any. –' (L 406).

² Besides William Sayres' doctrinal dissertation, 'The Discourse of Gratitude in the Works of Thomas Sherlock, Francis Hutcheson and Hannah More' (diss., University of New Hampshire, 1989), this well-known reference to Sherlock seems to have received only the most perfunctory and speculative treatment from other writers.

³ Based on St Paul's prohibition of women teaching men, in Tim 2: 11-13: 'Let the woman learn in silence and all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.'

framework, not surprisingly, result in a discourse riddled with ambivalence and ambiguity. Therefore, although the main focus of this thesis began as doctrinal, the exploration of eighteenth-century social constraints raised feminist issues that could not be ignored. The greatest challenge was how to contain both these enquiries within the restrictions of a work of this nature. In attempting to deal with the problematically polyphonic nature of my texts I decided to discard the more limited homogeneous theoretical approach and meld traditional historical approaches with models from feminist narratology and gynocriticism (in essence, a blend of the approaches of Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter, Ellen Moers, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Nancy K Miller, Robyn Warhol, Susan Lanser, and Kathy Mezei). And here, in resisting theoretical homogeneity, I am neither alone, nor a pioneer in hybridisation like Hannah More, as the works of feminist critics such as Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schwieckart and others demonstrate.⁴ Yet it seems that this combination model has not been applied to the works of Sherlock, More and Austen in the context of Anglican writing.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who helped me bring this thesis to completion. Firstly, I am grateful to the University of Cape Town's Postgraduate Scholarships Committee for awarding me a scholarship for 1999 and to the staff of the South African Library, the University of Cape Town libraries and especially the Inter-Library Loan department. I am particularly indebted to Tanya Barben, curator of *Rare Books and Special Collections*, at the University of Cape Town, for providing me with editions of Sherlock and other early writers. Her willingness to go the extra mile in procuring something of interest to me has been heart-warming. Thanks are also due to the staff at the Temple Church, London and the Chawton Cottage Museum, Hampshire. I am also grateful to Susannah Fullerton, President of the Jane Austen Society of Australia, Helen Malcher, editor of the Australian *Jane Austen Journal*, *Sensibilities*, and Debbie Watson, head librarian of the Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire who kindly sent me William Sayres's thesis on Sherlock. Dr Clare Rider, Archivist at The Temple Church, London, has also provided me with invaluable information and I thank her for researching old records on my behalf. I would also like to thank Dr John Newby of the George Whitefield College, Cape Town who allowed me to attend his lectures on Church history and use the College library. His insightful comments and constructive criticism on early drafts were much appreciated. I am also grateful to Mr

⁴ Cf. Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schwieckart in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Context* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1986) xxviii.

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CHAPTER ONE

A SENSE OF PLACE

This chapter, which introduces the writings of Sherlock, More and Austen, by siting them within an historical, but gender-related, literary and doctrinal/ecclesiastical framework, comprises three sections: ‘A Place of their Own’, ‘Separate Spheres, Separate Genres’ and ‘*Ecclesia Anglicana: A Place For Reason And Reform?*’

A PLACE OF THEIR OWN

Thomas Sherlock (1678-1761), Hannah More (1745-1833) and Jane Austen (1775-1817) all lived during the eighteenth century, but they fall within different epochs of it. Sherlock was born during the second parliament of Charles II and was ten years old when the Stuarts were driven from the throne, More was born during the reign of George II, in the year of the Rebellion of Forty Five and the Battle of Preston Pans and died four years before Victoria’s accession to the throne and Austen, the youngest, was born during the reign of George III, shortly after the commencement of the American war of Independence and fourteen years after the death of Sherlock.

Bishop successively of Bangor, Salisbury and London, Thomas Sherlock was a Tory High Churchman who defended Established Church privileges and resisted attempts at secularisation by upholding Laudian,¹ rather than Erastian,² principles. Similarly, he

¹ William Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury, enjoyed influence with Charles I, opposed Puritans by attempting to impose uniformity by force and promoted the material aggrandizement of the National Church. His efforts to extend her role beyond purely ecclesiastical matters resulted in its identification with one political party (the king's administration) (*ODCC*).

championed orthodox doctrine against Latitudinarians and Deists,³ striving to convince the literate part of the nation of the dangers of undervaluing revealed religion. Politically Sherlock was of the ‘wrong party’: the Hanoverian dynasty supported a Whig administration who consistently thwarted Sherlock’s Episcopal ambitions, compelling him to rely on his royal female ally, Queen Caroline, for his ecclesiastical preferments. Furthermore, as a Tory member of the Bench and House of Lords, Sherlock frequently found himself in opposition to the policies of his Whig counterparts, so that he had to swim upstream politically as well as ecclesiastically.

Hannah More, Blue Stocking, poet, dramatist, didactic writer, friend of politicians, bishops and social reformers, and founder of numerous social and religious institutions and upholder of the *status quo*, was born and brought up in an orthodox Anglican home with Dissenting (but not Radical) sympathies. Although she became progressively more Evangelical in later life, she never left the Anglican Church, nor ceased to defend it and its doctrines in her work.

Finally, Jane Austen, whose life and work needs no introduction, and whose milder political persuasions played a less dominant role in her religion, has been described as a Median Anglican, occupying a middle position between ‘High’ and ‘Low’ church.⁴

Though they lived during different political dispensations and occupied slightly different ecclesiastical positions within the Anglican Church, these three writers shared a common love of *Ecclesia Anglicana* or the English/Anglican Church, and strove to disseminate the light of its Gospel as enunciated in their Anglican dogma. The latter will be shown to allow a surprising flexibility of interpretation and expression, as it is adjusted to the politics of their respective contexts and modified by their gender and genres.

Sherlock wrote explicitly to defend doctrine, and More and Austen to embody it in tracts, religious handbooks, prayers and courtship novels respectively. Although they present

² Erastian: the ascendancy of the State over the Church in ecclesiastical matters. The Swiss theologian, Thomas Erastus (1524-83) held that the civil authorities, in a state which professes but one religion, have the right and the duty, to exercise jurisdiction in all matters, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to punish all offences; even such purely ecclesiastical matters as excommunication were subject to their approval (*ODCC*).

³ For an elucidation of these terms, see ‘*Ecclesia Anglicana: A Place for Reason and Reform*’.

⁴ Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1991) 3.

the same doctrine, their aims, approaches and styles are as diverse as the genres they use to clothe (in both senses of enhance and conceal) their doctrines. Whereas Sherlock privileges polemical prose, and only makes one incursion into drama, Austen and More (apart from some early poetry and drama) mostly utilise various forms of the prose narrative. Despite the diversity of their genres (the dissertation, sermon, juridical-drama and clerical letter in Sherlock; the political tract, didactic work and religious novel in More; private prayers, and the courtship novel in Austen), each writer consciously, or unconsciously subjects his/her premises or characters to the test of this orthodox Protestant ‘light’: truth/error is measured against it (often registered in light/darkness imagery) and individual conduct is interpreted according to one’s measure of this collective and individual ‘light’.

In addition to their ecclesiastic and doctrinal affiliations, all three writers belong to what can be broadly called the English elite or gentry, the critical orientation of which was patriotic, humanist and male-dominated.⁵ Although they are all strongly attached to the Anglican Church and self-consciously proud of their ‘enlightenment’, they nevertheless repudiate more liberal expressions of Enlightenment thought, both in its religious and social aspects, promoting (directly or indirectly) orthodox beliefs such as civil obedience to ‘God-ordained’ powers, natural depravity, the atonement and the need for divine grace. Furthermore, as members of upper-middle-class society, Sherlock More and Austen generally tend to support traditional social hierarchy, although Austen’s commitment is not always as strong as More’s and Sherlock’s.⁶

Yet, despite the commonalities of their Anglicanism, social status, political affiliations and literary talent, the adoption of disparate genres (impelled by gender-driven societal dictates) causes these writers to occupy very different places in the literary landscape. In attempting to understand the ideological positions behind their work, it therefore seems

⁵ Derek Longhurst (introd.), *Gender Genre and Narrative Pleasures* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 2.

⁶ Austen’s implicit critique of social hierarchy can be seen in *Persuasion*, where the protagonist Anne Elliot marries neither a member of the landed gentry nor a clergyman (as in Austen’s other novels), but a naval captain. Here the narrator’s sympathy for the hard-working and innovative sailor classes is contrasted with her ridicule of the effete aristocracy as represented by Sir Walter and William Elliot. See Nina Auerbach, ‘O Brave New World! Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*’, *ELH* 39 (1972): 112-128, and Claudia Johnson, ‘*Persuasion*: The Unfeudal Tone of the Present Day’ in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 144-166. By contrast, More has been seen as a ‘meliorist’, but her promotion of the poetry of the Bristol milk-woman, Ann Yearsley, although read by some as Tory patronisation, can also be seen as progressive. See Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1996) 11, 63 ff.

apposite to examine their physical habitations as well as the literary ‘spaces’ they have traditionally been accorded. Hence, this chapter attempts to explore the ‘places’ Sherlock, More and Austen inhabited and read them as a correlative of their writing, which in turn has been inflected by gender and genre constraints.

THOMAS SHERLOCK

A visitor standing in the original round part of the Temple Church, London, cannot fail to be impressed by the solidness and solemnity of this rather austere Norman building – a solidity that is reflected in the Christian orthodoxy that its carefully-chosen Masters have generally sought to uphold. Consecrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary on 10 February 1185 by Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Temple Church provided prestigious British headquarters for the Knights Templar, who had moved from an earlier site in High Holborn. These soldier monks, whose mission was to protect Christian pilgrims travelling to and from the ‘Holy Land’, boasted a long line of royal and ecclesiastical patronage, with Bernard of Clairvaux and Henry I and Henry II among their warmest friends and well wishers.

Barely fifty years after the consecration of the Temple Church, the ‘Holy Land’ passed into the hands of the Saracens. At the French sovereign, Philip IV’s instigation, a Papal decree was issued, abolishing the Order of the Templars. King Edward II gave the Temple Church to the Order of St John (the Knights Hospitaller), and later the Temple Church was rented to the two colleges of lawyers (later the Inner and Middle Temples) who required a college chapel. In 1540, as part of the Henrician settlement, the Hospitallers were abolished and the Temple Church became Crown property. Thereafter, it became the king’s prerogative to provide a ‘Master of the Temple’ – a much-coveted position that was held in the seventeenth century for more than fifty years by Thomas Sherlock, bishop successively of Bangor, Salisbury and London, and arch-defender of the doctrines, structure and privileges of *Ecclesia Anglicana*.

The Temple Church’s design is unashamedly symbolic: the Templars’ churches were always built to a circular design to remind them of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem – a round, domed building erected over the alleged site of the sepulchre in which the crucified Christ was buried. It is by no means fortuitous that in the same way that the

architecture of the Temple Church reflects the central concerns of the Christian faith (the atoning death and resurrection of Christ), so two of its greatest masters, Richard Hooker and Thomas Sherlock, make them the focus of their theological writings. Although writing in apology or defence of doctrines that Deism had rendered unfashionable, Sherlock is unapologetic (in the modern sense of the word), portraying rather a confident conviction that he is championing time-honoured truth.

The main entry to the Temple Church is the massy west door. Constructed in 1185, the succession of stone arches is encapsulated by an early Norman dogtooth carving keeping guard over the entry to the edifice. The original round Church with its circular stone wall-bench, its effigy-dotted floor and sombre black marble pillars opens into the spacious, pillar-guardianed thirteenth-century choir, the grandiose proportions of the latter reflecting Henry III's intention of using the church as his mausoleum.⁷

Behind the altar is the simple, but elegant, Christopher Wren reredos,⁸ on which is inscribed the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed – *exempla* of orthodoxy that Sherlock loved, and which served as the basis of many of his sermons. Soaring above the oak reredos are the new east windows (replacing those bombed during the second World War), the north-west section showing the arms of the Middle Temple, the Lamb and the Flag, and the south-east part the arms of the Inner Temple, the Pegasus. On the same window, below the mythological flying horse is a picture of the Templars' arms: a white horse, carrying two knights in full armour, overlaid with their hall-mark, the white mantle with the red cross on the breast. Traditionally regarded as a symbol of the poverty, or hospitality (or both) of the Knights Templar, it is now thought to have arisen in error: a poorly-drawn copy of the winged horse in an early Temple manuscript having been misinterpreted as a horse with two riders. Again, the images of both the Pegasus and the cross-emblazoned knights on the horse seem appropriate figures of Sherlock's ability to reconcile the richness of the classical world with the humility and generosity of the Christian Gospel.

⁷ He subsequently changed his mind and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

⁸ The Wren reredos was in place during Sherlock's Mastership, but removed from the church during the Victorian restorations of 1842 and housed in the Bowes museum, county Durham, thus providentially being preserved from the bombings during the Second World War.

Narrow wooden treads spiral up to the light, polished oak of the simple, unadorned pulpit, supported on a single, slender column, to the right of the altar.⁹ The narrowness of the steps at the top and the modest proportions of the pulpit come as a surprise after the capaciousness of the rest of the church. Yet, the simplicity and lack of ornament is in harmony with both the character and outlook of some of the Temple's most illustrious preachers, Richard Hooker, Walter Travers and William and Thomas Sherlock – men who, despite the diverseness of their theology, disdained pretentiousness of any kind.

The pulpit is a great deal higher than it appears from the flag-stoned floor. It is a reminder that the one who was elected to mediate the word of God was a figure of authority, a scholar and a pedagogue, yet a pastor and 'father' of the flock – requirements that by virtue of social decorum, education and Pauline stipulation only a male could satisfy. From the elevation of the pulpit, one looks over the pews, the south ones reserved traditionally for the Inner Temple worshippers and the north for the Middle Temple – an early Georgian tradition as yet unbroken.¹⁰ Apart from the sturdiness of its proportions and the simplicity of its decoration, there is a strong presence of yet-vibrant tradition in the Temple Church. In many ways this is an apt metaphor for the life-aims and work of Thomas Sherlock, who remained steadfastly committed to upholding venerable theological and ecclesio-political traditions, defending both tirelessly throughout his long life.

On 28 November 1705, William Sherlock bestowed the Mastership of the Temple on his son, Thomas. Accepting this Elijah-type mantle of the Mastership of so august a church at the tender age of twenty-seven years must have been a daunting experience, even for one

⁹ All the woodwork in the Church was destroyed by incendiary bombs during Second World War air-raids. The Temple archivist, Dr Clare Rider, explains the history of the pulpit prior to this: 'The pulpit from which Thomas Sherlock preached would have dated from the Wren restoration. I assume that it was made of dark oak to match the reredos. . . The pulpit was removed from the church in 1842, during the Victorian restoration, and found its way to one of the City of London churches – Christ Church, Newgate Street. Unfortunately Christ Church was bombed in the Second World War and the pulpit was destroyed. . . The current pulpit, in light oak, is quite possibly a replica of the Wren pulpit. Certainly in the 1950s, the post-war restoration architect Walter H Godfrey aimed, as far as possible, to reproduce the style of the church prior to its Victorian restoration (although the new organ was sited in its Victorian rather than 17th century position).' Therefore, the simple Wren pulpit would have been in stark contrast to the prominent, elaborate 'three-decker Georgian pulpits', described by N Sykes in *Church and State in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936) 236.

¹⁰ Dr Clare Rider observes: 'Not very many women were resident in the Inner Temple, but there is no reason to believe that they were not allowed to attend services. Inner Templars tend to sit on the south side of the church and the Middle Templars on the north side, according to the division of the church between the two inns by deed of partition of 1732. There is no written evidence about seating arrangements for women.'

bred to authority and tradition such as Thomas Sherlock. Yet there is no evidence that he felt unworthy of it or wore it uneasily.¹¹ In fact, he found it possible to combine this post with a royal chaplaincy to Queen Anne (1711), a prebendary at St Paul's (1713), the Vice-Chancellorship of Cambridge University (1714), the deanery of Chichester (1715), and the bishoprics of Bangor (1728), Salisbury (1734) and London (1748) successively.

As an aristocratic male with higher degrees from Cambridge, and positions of power and privilege (his bishopric carrying a seat in the House of Lords), Sherlock was a figure of authority, and, as such, he could write with confidence. And to boot, he had the patronage of Queen Anne and later, during the early Hanoverian period, that of Queen Caroline. Thus the image invoked of Sherlock, is that of a respected scholar, royal chaplain and dignified prelate, foregrounded against several venerable patriarchal institutions: Cambridge University, the Temple Church, the royal court, and the cathedrals of Bangor, Salisbury and St Paul's. The solid roundness of both the Temple Church (which has never had a female Master or woman preacher)¹² and St Paul's (of which Sherlock was a prebendary and later, bishop) can be said to typify strength and unassailability, an appropriate metaphor for the assurance with which Sherlock wrote and successfully staved off countless personal and doctrinal attacks, entrenching himself behind his position, privilege, learning and legal experience.

¹¹ Sherlock lived in the elegant brick triple-storey Christopher Wren Master's House adjoining the Church. According to Dr Rider: '[t]he 17th century Master's House was destroyed in the Second World War. When it was rebuilt in the 1950s, the external design was modelled on its 17th century predecessor with a few minor alterations (the interior was altered considerably). I assume that the garden remained the same size as before the War.' Two years after becoming Master of the Temple, Sherlock married and was therefore 'head of his home' as well. In 1715 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of St Catherine's Hall, Cambridge, and Dean of Chichester, in 1728 Bishop of Bangor, in 1734 Bishop of Salisbury and in 1748 Bishop of London. Throughout these preferments, he retained his Mastership of the Temple, and though he did not constantly reside there, it appears it was his preferred residence.

¹² According to Dr Rider, '[t]here has never been a female Master of the Temple and, as far as I know, no woman has ever preached in the church.' This is in stark contrast to many other churches in London, some of which opened their pulpits to women in the early decades of the twentieth century, for example, the Revd Miss Dorothy Wilson, who had a degree in theology from Mansfield College, Oxford (1928) and was invited in 1938 to preach at the (Congregational) City Temple, London and in May 1959, Miss Marjorie Inkster, the first woman called to the staff as assistant minister of the same church, preached her first sermon there. See Nellie Alden Franz, *English Women Enter the Professions* (Ohio: Cincinnati, 1965) 252.

HANNAH MORE AND JANE AUSTEN

There is a striking contrast between Sherlock's upbringing, education and subsequent habitation of the collegial and metropolitan spheres and that of the two female subjects of this thesis, who were both born in obscure country places and were largely 'home-schooled'. As women at that time were denied a university education, their comparatively deficient education is not surprising. What sets them apart is the wide extent to which they were encouraged to read and write by their schoolmaster fathers.

Hannah More, who came from the rising mercantile class, was born at the hamlet of Fish Ponds in the parish of Martock near Bristol, where her father was headmaster of a small school, and Jane Austen at Steventon, Hampshire, where her clergyman-father also kept a small, private boys' boarding school in his Hampshire rectory. Unlike George Austen, Jacob More had neither a full university education nor rich relations to bestow clerical livings and when his intentions to take orders were frustrated owing to a loss of family fortune, he settled for teaching as second best. He also lacked the social contacts and more leisured life the Austens enjoyed. However, what 'connections' More lacked at birth, she more than made up for in later life when she was taken under the wing of the Garricks, Johnson, Walpole, various bishops and the Blue Stockings.

Apart from receiving some formal tuition from their fathers,¹³ both More and Austen attended girls' schools for a short period of time.¹⁴ Both started writing young and despite their gender, received strong support from their families who tried to secure publication of their early works. Whereas Sherlock warned against the theatre as a site of immorality,¹⁵ both More and Austen were attracted to it. They enjoyed writing, acting in and producing plays in

¹³ Hopkins believes that More's later didacticism was prepared by her assisting as a 'pupil teacher' at her sisters' school in Bristol. Mary Alden Hopkins, *Hannah More and Her Circle* (New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947) 13.

¹⁴ More at her sisters' school in Bristol and Austen at small girls' boarding schools in Oxford, Reading and Southampton.

¹⁵ In his pastoral letter of 1750. The theatre in Sherlock's time was a great deal more licentious than in More and Austen's age, by which time Garrick had done much to purge it of its offensiveness.

their youth,¹⁶ but where Austen early discarded the dramatic genre, More pursued it and under the tuition and patronage of Garrick, won acclaim for her plays, only renouncing this form in later life. In contrast to More's professional productions at Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Haymarket, Austen's playlet *The Visit* (1789?) and her dramatic adaptation of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* were only played to family members in the Steventon barn and at Godmersham.¹⁷

Like Sherlock, both women lived to see most of their works successfully published and enjoyed a certain amount of recognition while they lived, although More's fame in her lifetime far eclipsed that of Austen. Both Austen's novels and More's didactic works attracted royal notice: More was commissioned to write an education manual for Princess Charlotte (daughter of George IV) and Austen was invited to dedicate *Emma* to the Prince Regent, who reputedly kept a set of Austen's novels at all his royal residences, and whose librarian entertained her at Carlton House.¹⁸

Although both More and Austen visited London repeatedly (More visiting London annually over a period of twenty-five years), neither travelled extensively in Britain nor went abroad. Unlike Sherlock, who showed a penchant for the metropolis (in which he resided most of his life), More and Austen spent the greater part of their lives in relative country obscurity, in houses shared with their sister/s and/or other female family members. Again, unlike Sherlock, who married early – Judith Fountain(e) in 1707 – More and Austen (who both received more than one proposal of marriage) preferred to remain single,¹⁹ regarding

¹⁶ More's first (verse)-drama, *The Search after Happiness; A Pastoral Drama* (1773) was produced privately in Bristol. Her tragedy, *The Inflexible Captive*, later called *Regulus* was written in 1774 and produced in Bath and Exeter, in April 1775 by John Palmer; her tragedy, *Percy*, produced by Garrick at Covent Garden (Dec and Jan 1777-78) and her *Fatal Falsehood* at Covent Garden in 1779. Mrs Siddons acted three times in the role of Elwina in *Percy* in Bath (1778- 79) and Bristol (1780-81), three times in Bath the following season and four times in Drury Lane (1785-86). More's *Sacred Dramas* (1789) were not intended for production. See Hopkins 81 and Demers 24.

¹⁷ For a complete list of the Austen amateur theatricals see Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* (London: British Museum, 1989) 64, 133-34.

¹⁸ L 429-30, 446, 451. See also *Family Record* 202-203.

¹⁹ More received offers of marriage from Edward Turner and Lord Monboddo. Austen received an offer of marriage from Harris Bigg Wither and possibly others.

their literary works as their offspring.²⁰ Sherlock, who was similarly childless, used his position to advance the interests of family and friends.²¹ Whereas More had her protégées²² and took an interest in her friends' children,²³ Austen took a lively interest in the affairs of her nieces and nephews.²⁴

Drawings of More and Austen's birthplaces show similarities. An 1834 drawing of the Free School, Fishponds, Gloucestershire, by the Revd Henry Thompson (one of More's earliest biographers) depicts a spacious, comfortable double-storey not unlike that of the sketch by Anna Austen of the Steventon rectory.²⁵ Despite some artistic licence and inevitable idealization, both bespeak a certain pragmatic country comfort without luxury. The settings of both childhood homes are verdant and the houses framed with trees. The muddy lanes, steep grassy slope behind the Steventon rectory and Austen's visits to her father's Cheesedown farm²⁶ were far removed from Sherlock's urban upbringing and contrast with the order and dignity of one of his favourite metropolitan dwellings: the Master's house and garden at the Temple. Undoubtedly their country upbringing caused More and Austen to valorise country life and its mores, often associating its perceived stability and wholesomeness with their doctrine.²⁷

²⁰ 'I have got my own darling Child (*PP*) from London', *L* 297. See also 'My Emma is now so near publication . . .', *L* 442.

²¹ Particularly espousing the cause of his brother-in-law Thomas Gooch and Charles Moss, nephew of Robert Moss, dean of Ely and bishop of St David's, Bath and Wells. See Edward Carpenter, *Thomas Sherlock 1678-1761: Bishop of Bangor 1728; Bishop of Salisbury 1734; of London 1748* (London: SPCK, 1936) 314 ff.

²² Such as the Bristol Milkwoman, Ann Yearsley ('Lactilla') and 'Mad Louisa of the Haystack', see Hopkins 121-135 and Demers 64-75.

²³ Zachary Macaulay.

²⁴ And in especial those of Anna Austen, Fanny Austen-Knight and James-Edward Austen.

²⁵ The Revd Henry Thompson, *The Life of Hannah More, with Notices of Her Sisters* (London: T Cadell, 1838). Like the latter it is flanked by trees (although not quite as many as at Steventon) but unlike the more rural approach to Steventon, it is bounded by a neat stonewall with a small gate. Neither house is typically Georgian in architecture, both having pitched roofs and clearly visible chimneys.

²⁶ On muddy lanes see *L* 96, 98; for references to Cheesedown Farm see *L* 57, 106, 110 and on a similar grassy slope see *NA* 14.

²⁷ See Austen's city/country polarisation in *Mansfield Park* and More's poem 'Florio' (dedicated to Horace Walpole) in which Florio, who is enchanted by rural scenes, looks on 'Nature's all instructive book' and

With fathers as headmasters, the young Hannah More and Jane Austen, even if they did not attend lessons with the boys, grew up with them in an informal ‘co-ed’ atmosphere,²⁸ which probably gave them a greater ease and sense of equality with the opposite sex than their more restricted counterparts. This, and the literary encouragement they received from their fathers, who placed their libraries at their disposal (granting them access to books other girls were denied) not only sharpened their critical faculties, but boosted their confidence in their own unusual writing abilities, stimulating them to enter the traditionally male-dominated literary field. In addition, Austen had the advantage of five brothers, with James, the eldest, reputedly directing Austen’s reading and forming her taste. As an aspiring poet and editor of the Oxford paper the *Loiterer*, his literary ambitions may well have stimulated Austen’s.²⁹ It is also noteworthy that, although family members stressed that both girls were excellent needlewomen and competent in the kitchen,³⁰ neither of them devoted themselves to domesticity, preferring to wield the pen which, for so long, as Anne Elliot in Austen’s *Persuasion* acknowledges, ‘ha[d] been in their [men’s] hands’ (P 234). More importantly, neither woman was content with her inherited generic ‘portions’ and strove, if not to deconstruct them, at least to reconstruct them to accommodate her writing desires.³¹

While still in her teens, More and her sisters started a school for girls at 6 Trinity Street, College Green, Bristol, moving later to 43 Park Street. Another ‘home’ for More was the Theatre Royal, also known as the King Street Theatre in which More’s early plays were produced – a lavishly painted, gilded building, ‘the pride of Bristol’, praised and patronized

confesses that ‘The simplest pleasures are the best?’ See *The Poetical Works of Hannah More, with a Memoir of the Author* (London: Scott, et al, 1853) 379.

²⁸ Austen does not seem to have been taught mathematics and Latin like More, whose quickness alarmed her father into ending the mathematics lessons. Neither does Austen appear to have learnt as much French and Italian as More. Her reading seems to have been mostly in poetry, novels, ‘history and *belles lettres*’. See *Family Record* 54-55.

²⁹ *Family Record* 54, 64.

³⁰ On More’s sewing and kitchen skills, see Hopkins 11 and on Austen’s being ‘adept at satin-stitch’ see *Family Record* 56. See also L 133.

³¹ Cf. the way twentieth century women reconstruct/deconstruct traditional genres for the same purpose, Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) 6-10.

by the famous Garrick.³² Under his patronage, More rose meteorically from backwater Bristol to metropolitan illustriousness. These London years are possibly the only part of More's life that approximate to Sherlock's. Here under the wing of the Garricks (in their stylish Adelphi Terrace house or gracious Hampton villa) she fraternised with bishops and peers,³³ writers, artists and politicians such as Dr Johnson, Horace Walpole,³⁴ the Sheridans, Sir Joshua and Frances Reynolds, William and Richard Burke, became a 'Blue Stocking'³⁵ and had her plays performed to full houses at Drury Lane, Covent Garden and the Haymarket, with the famous Mrs Siddons playing the lead roles. This is the 'metropolitan More' – the woman at ease in London society, attending gala openings of her tragedies, dining with MP's, bishops and archbishops, keeping late hours and receiving an offer of marriage³⁶ in the Garricks's Grecian Temple 'folly' on the banks of the Thames. Later, More was to renounce much of the 'worldliness' of this 'frivolous' time of her life, becoming more austere in her piety and more pontifical in her writings.

After leaving Bristol, the More sisters built a house in fashionable Pulteney Street, Bath, where they wintered in 1790. Yet More, like Austen, disliked Bath, and when she and her sisters removed to a thatched cottage at Cowslip Green, in the Wrington area, felt she had 'come home'.³⁷ Several years later they built the more commodious Barley Wood cottage,

³² Hopkins 42.

³³ Such as the Hebrew scholar, Dr Kennicott, Sir Charles (Baron Barham) and Lady Middleton, Sir Richard Hill, Dr Jonathan Shipley (Bishop of St Asaph's), Dr Charles Moss (Bishop of St David's and Bath and Wells), Bishop George Horne (Dean of Canterbury and Bishop of Norwich), Bishop Beilby Porteus (Bishop of London), Bishop Shute Barrington (Bishop successively of Llandaff, Salisbury and Durham) and the Bishop of Lincoln.

³⁴ With whom she corresponded and who sent her all his Strawberry Hill editions when she left London and settled in Wrington area.

³⁵ And was included in the painting of *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* by Richard Samuel (1779), now in the National Portrait Gallery, London. More was particularly close friends with Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Carter.

³⁶ This was her second offer of marriage. Edward Turner of Belmont Park, Wraxall, near Bristol, had previously proposed to More, been accepted by her, but later reneged. After this was repeated three times, she was persuaded to accept an annuity of £200 from him, and they remained on friendly terms. A few years later, Lord Monboddo (from Scotland) proposed marriage to More at the Garrick's villa at Hampton, but she refused him. See Hopkins 32-36, 83.

³⁷ In a letter to Mrs Kennicott (wife of the Hebrew scholar), More wrote from Cowslip Green in 1789: 'I hate Bath'. See William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, 4 vols

where they continued to entertain More's London friends, established Sunday schools, endured the Blagdon Controversy³⁸ and where More wrote her novel and the bulk of her didactic works. Although Barley Wood still stands today it has deteriorated from the flourishing, well-maintained country home it was in More's time. Now the home of *ADAPT* (Alcohol and Drug Abuse Problems Treatment) the house has been enlarged, the thatch replaced by tiles and the garden largely unkempt, with its statuary vandalized – although the bust and urns remain.³⁹

In the parish church of Wrington there is a north window in memory of Hannah More, depicting the trio of virtues, Faith Hope and Charity. It is a far cry from the almost reverent care lavished on Austen's last home, the mecca of Austen pilgrims from all over the world, Chawton Cottage, near Alton, Hampshire. Now, an immaculately kept museum, with gardens planted with Austen's favourite flowers, it is tended by well-informed women, who endeavour to recapture the original tranquillity by refraining from aggressive tourist techniques.

Austen was born and spent the first twenty-six years of her life in the rectory at Steventon (of which nothing remains). Her father's decision to bestow this living on his eldest son James and retire to Bath, apparently dismayed Austen, although there are no extant letters of this time.⁴⁰ In Bath they lived in a succession of lodgings: 4 Sydney Place, Green Park Building, and finally Trim and Gay streets. In between these sojourns in Bath, were intermittent trips to family and holidays to the southwest coast. Their next permanent abode was temporary lodgings in Southampton, followed by a house shared with Frank and his wife in Castle Square. Again Austen had no place of her own, living under her brother and sister-

(London: R B Seeley and Sons, 1834) 2: 212. See also More's letter to Wilberforce (1794) from Cowslip Green, Roberts 2: 404.

³⁸ The Blagdon Controversy was an unfortunate feud between the Evangelical wing of the Anglican Church which favoured Sunday Schools and a High Church faction who regarded them as 'dangerous Methodist propaganda'. The battle (which began at Wedmore, proceeded to Blagdon, and lasted from 1800 to 1804), elicited twenty-three letters/pamphlets, most of which were published and discussed in the press. See Hopkins 185-195 and Demers 106-107.

³⁹ One of the urns, dedicated to John Locke, whom More admired, was a gift from Elizabeth Montagu, Demers 2.

⁴⁰ Her sister, Cassandra, having destroyed them.

in-law's roof and visiting relatives and friends in various parts of the country.⁴¹ Austen's final home, Chawton cottage (originally the bailiff's cottage on the Chawton estate) belonged to her brother Edward Knight, who allowed his mother and sisters the use of it. Unlike Sherlock who, in his late twenties, became master of the Temple residence, demolished his Chichester Deanery and grandly rebuilt it, and was free to alter or redecorate his bishop's palaces at Salisbury, Bangor and London (Fulham), and unlike More (and her sisters) who had their last three houses in Bath and Wrington built to specification, Austen never had the opportunity to exercise this kind of authority. She never designed, built or lived in her own house. Similarly the physical constraints of her home are meaningful; the back bedroom she shared with her sister, Cassandra,⁴² the 'squeaky door' to the living-room providing proof of the necessity for privacy and protection, and the tiny table in the living room at which she sat and wrote 'under cover' of the blotter of her 'small sheets'. Unlike More and Sherlock, Austen had neither a house, nor room of her own – which is frequently read as a symbol of a lack of authority. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Bennet demands his traditionally male rights: 'I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room' (*PP* 112). Austen may not have had a room of her own, but she did have – and exercise – the free use of her own understanding, in matters not always traditionally 'feminine'.

Austen lived and died in 'other people's houses'. Like More, who died in a hired terrace house in Clifton, Bristol, Austen died away from her home, in rented accommodation in College Street, Winchester. It is ironic that this plain, yellow house on the street adjoins the renowned Winchester Boys' College – a bastion of boys' academic education that was denied women like More and Austen. Sherlock was buried in Fulham Palace churchyard,⁴³ and More beside her four sisters in the Wrington churchyard, but it is ironic that Austen's final resting place is in Winchester cathedral. Both the setting and significance of Jane Austen's simple grave now not only exceeds that of the erudite Bishop Sherlock and lionized

⁴¹ Such as Manydown, Steventon, Godmersham, Bookham, Adlestrop, Hamstall-Ridware, Bath and Stoneleigh Abbey.

⁴² Significantly too, although it has a pleasant outlook on the courtyard with its tubs of flowers, and beyond to the back garden, it is a 'back yard' view and not a 'prospect', as her mother's front room has of the rolling sheep-dotted fields and stream across the road.

⁴³ Where a tombstone containing a long epitaph by Edward Weston marks his grave.

'Mrs' More,⁴⁴ who were more highly esteemed than her during their lifetimes, but transcends them. Not only is Austen's tomb more 'visible' than More's and Sherlock's (whose only memorials are the Master's Roll in the Temple Church and his name, together with others, on a plaque in St Paul's), but whereas few now visit Sherlock's and More's graves, Austen's is a popular place of pilgrimage for Austen enthusiasts from all over the world.⁴⁵ Austen is buried under a simple black marble slab in the north-aisle floor of the nave of Winchester cathedral. The inscription composed by her brother Henry, is notorious for celebrating her piety and omitting mention of her literary works. Her tomb is simple and unpretentious. There is nothing to draw attention to it (apart from the stained glass and brass plaque added to the wall above it later), so that, fittingly, the unaware walk over it. It is an appropriate grave for one so deliberately private and unobtrusive as Austen. More inappropriate is the memorial window in Austen's memory. Like More's stained glass window in the north part of the Wrington parish church, Austen's window, also in the north aisle, is similarly sentimental. Erected by public subscription in 1900, the work of C E Kempe, it depicts among other things, St Augustine (often referred to as 'St Austin') and a picture of a smug King David holding his harp. Nearby is a brass memorial tablet ensconced between two pilasters. Capped by a drooping angel, the words of Proverbs 31:26 are engraved below: 'She openeth her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is the law of kindness.' Once cannot cavil at the wisdom; but the idealised kindness is undercut in Austen's fiction by the 'large fat sighings' of Mrs Musgrove mourning the death of her good-for-nothing son in *Persuasion*,⁴⁶ and in Austen's letters, by the acerbic personal criticism of her acquaintances. Here 'improper' remarks, pertaining to her delight in identifying an adulteress, methods of birth-control and even a joke concerning the stillbirth of an acquaintance's child, annul the cloying Victorian sentimentality of her ill-chosen memorials, and deconstruct the inappropriate hagiographic adulation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Although she never married, as was the fashion at the time, More later adopted the courtesy title of 'Mrs'.

⁴⁵ As early as the 1850's visitors to Winchester Cathedral requested the verger to show them Austen's grave. See *Family Record* 248.

⁴⁶ Chapman 68.

⁴⁷ The 'adulteress' [sic] Miss Twisleton, is referred to in a letter to Cassandra Austen, 12 May 1801, *L* 127. See also her frank assertion, 'I cannot anyhow continue to find people agreeable', *L* 129 and her

The contrasts in place, in both life and death between Sherlock, More and Austen are obvious. They are also symbolic of other differences. Apart from the educational discrepancies, there is the bigger gulf of gender. This necessarily affected what they wrote and how they wrote it. Sherlock could write what he did and as he did because, as a man, he had the necessary authority. This freedom was denied More and Austen. Had they wished to write polemical religious works or sermons they would have been ridiculed, censured or ostracised. Willy-nilly, their genres were circumscribed, the boundaries dictated by patriarchal custom and tradition. Yet, More was intrepid in essaying into grey areas such as the socio-political tract. Here her essays into the ‘holy land’ or all-male promised land were prompted and made possible by literary and Episcopal Templars, offering her protection along the dangerous way: literary giants such as Garrick and Johnson and ‘priests and Levites’ such as Bishops Beilby Porteous, Horne, Horsey and Jonathan Shipley. Later, when she entered further forbidden territory, voicing her opinions on education, her qualms were fully justified. Despite plaudits from Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu and Mrs Barbauld, and praise from Dr Burney, More’s *Strictures on the System of Female Education* (1799) was openly criticized by an Anglican clergyman and ‘friend’, Charles Daubeny from Christchurch, Bath, in a 56-page letter publicly denouncing her for daring to enter the masculine arena of religion and social order.⁴⁸ Neither was Austen immune from similar reproaches.⁴⁹ Thus, both women encountered male hostility when they moved beyond prescribed literary boundaries. Austen, however, is more careful than More when writing about gender-hedged subjects and covers her tracks more thoroughly when entering the doctrinal/ecclesiastical arena.⁵⁰ Unlike Sherlock, who saw himself as a crusader against Deism and rapidly eroding politico-ecclesiastical privilege and tradition, and unlike More, who conceived of herself as a public guardian of Christian morals and manners, Austen

exasperated suggestion that the sexually prolific Mr and Mrs Deedes resort to the ‘the simple regimen of separate rooms’, L 480. For further gossip or malicious observations on friends and acquaintances, see L 100, 102, 105, 106, 107, 110, 111, 118, 121, etc.

⁴⁸ See also Demers 82.

⁴⁹ By an Irish clergyman. See *Family Record* 210.

⁵⁰ Austen does not seem to have written sermons. She criticises her cousin Edward Cooper’s sermons to Cassandra Austen, Sunday, 8 Sept 1816, L 467 and refers approvingly to her brother Henry’s ‘superior’ sermons in a letter to Edward, 16 Dec 1816, L 148) but there is no reference (playful or otherwise) to anything that she might have written in this genre herself.

presents herself as neither crusader nor guardian of the banner. She, who notoriously joked about her precision work, ‘the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour’,⁵¹ had ambition, partiality and passion about her subjects, but could minimize them to fit her chosen genre so that unlike ‘dull elves’,⁵² her perceptive readers can recognise the code and invoke the ‘maximise’ device in order to obtain their full significance.

Her commitment to the Anglican Church, its doctrine, practices and reform, is clear from her prayers and passages in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. Yet, it is frequently so disguised that many traditional Austen critics have harped on the pleasure/escapist principle in her works to the exclusion of all else,⁵³ maintaining that pleasing, not preaching, entertainment, not exhortation is her aim, hence her choice of the courtship novel and not a didactic genre (like many of her predecessors and contemporaries).⁵⁴ There is some truth in this; Austen did not want to write conduct works, but she shows the desire to engage with deeper doctrinal and reform issues. More shared these desires, but Austen is more circumspect than More and generally pre-empts criticism. Although some claim it was her good taste that led Austen to disguise or submerge her religion in her texts,⁵⁵ it seems more likely that it was from fear of transgressing ‘proper woman’ boundaries by venturing into traditionally male-dominated topics like religion. Austen’s embodiment of doctrine, piety and reform has thus been so successfully submerged or camouflaged that few modern readers recognize them for the seriousness of their import. It is therefore one of the intentions of this thesis not only to discuss Sherlock and More’s contribution to doctrine and ecclesiology, but by contextualising the debates, draw attention

⁵¹ To James-Edward Austen, 16 Dec 1816, *L* 369.

⁵² The reference is to Scott’s *Marmion*: ‘I do not rhyme to that dull elf / Who cannot image to himself / Nor sing to that simple maid / To whom it must in terms be said...’ Austen slightly misquotes the above (‘I do not rhyme to such dull elves / As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves’) in a letter to Cassandra, 29 Jan 1813, *L* 298. See also Mary Lascelles’ comment, *The Art of Jane Austen* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939) 125.

⁵³ With the notable exception of Oliver MacDonagh.

⁵⁴ For example, the earlier moralizing works of Elizabeth Rowe, Jane Barker, Mary Davys and Penelope Aubin and during Austen’s time, Jane West, Mary Brunton, Laetitia Hawkins, Hannah More, Charlotte Lennox, Sarah Trimmer and others.

⁵⁵ Lord David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1978) 149.

to Austen's more carefully concealed comments, discussing some of the tactics the women writers had to exploit in order to achieve publication. Though highlighting Sherlock, More and Austen's shared Anglican heritage and common devotion to *Ecclesia Anglicana*, this thesis also attempts to address the gender differences, which perforce shaped their choice, and informed their use of genre.

SEPARATE SPHERES, SEPARATE GENRES

MORE AND AUSTEN IN THE CONTEXT OF SOME SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH WOMEN AUTHORS

Various literary theorists (such as Gramsci and others) have demonstrated the way in which over the centuries, literary and cultural studies have been successfully dominated by the hegemony, showing that the ruling class (white, capitalist male) maintained its control not only by coercion, but by the seeming consent of the subordinate (including female) classes.⁵⁶ By appropriating certain genres as 'male' and 'discouraging' (a euphemism for forbidding) women to use them by appealing to biological, religious or cultural reasons, the masculine elite ensured that women were effectively barred from entering traditional male professions and literary genres such as religion and politics.

Earlier annalists of eighteenth-century, and in particular women's, fiction have shown that there has never been a lack of women writers.⁵⁷ Since Elizabethan times, thousands of women have written prose fiction, with the eighteenth century witnessing a plethora of published female writers, many of whom remained respectable or 'proper ladies'.⁵⁸ Most women chose to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym, but some were audacious enough to

⁵⁶ See Longhurst 3.

⁵⁷ Such as George Sainsbury, Walter Allen and Barbara McCarthy.

⁵⁸ As Elizabeth Burton observes: '[W]omen in the Georgian era took to the pen as never before. They had begun writing in the late seventeenth century and they continued with increasing fervour in the eighteenth. Writing was the one profession other than the oldest, open to women'. Quoted by B G McCarthy, *Women Writers: Their Contribution to the English Novel 1621–1744* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1944) 195.

publish under their own names.⁵⁹ Although publishing for the unknown author was not as difficult to achieve as it is now,⁶⁰ it generally required diplomacy in negotiating legal and gender-related obstacles.⁶¹ Therefore, invariably, women's prefaces tend to be apologetic and solicitous of the goodwill of their reviewers. Yet, as evinced by the high number of women writers, these obstacles could be – and often were – successfully overcome. If, as it appears, women were allowed to write and publish without always having to be 'covert' about it, wherein lay the rub? And why did More choose a pseudonym for some (but not all of her works) and Austen anonymity?

It seems it was mostly a question of genre, not merely as literary nomenclature, but as a 'literary institution', a 'social contract', originated and controlled by the dominant patriarchal culture and 'voluntarily' submitted to by submissive females who had no option but to 'play by the rules'.⁶² Men, it appears, did not object to women writing poetry, biography, fiction and even drama, tolerating their efforts with bemused benignity, very much as an adult would those of a precocious child. Qualified and carefully-tempered praise was meted out, often condescending and usually comparative.⁶³ Renaissance women writers were allowed to try their hands at the pastoral or heroic romance, like the aristocratic Lady Mary Wro(a)th in her popular *Urania* (1621) or Anne Weamys in her almost equally popular *A Continuation of Sir Philip's Sidney's Arcadia* (1651). The 'matchless Orinda', the mid-seventeenth century female poet and translator of Corneille's *Pompée*, Katherine Philips, was held up as a model for other women to emulate, while other less elegant contemporary women writers were vilified.⁶⁴ Women were also permitted to write tasteful accounts of their

⁵⁹ Although Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen, A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 6, maintains that only dire financial need, a sick husband or the support of elderly parents warranted the waiving of anonymity, there seems to be evidence to the contrary.

⁶⁰ Whether by subscription, profit-sharing, selling the copyright or on the 'commission' basis.

⁶¹ Married women could not theoretically sign contracts and had to get the consent or signature of their husbands (no matter how ill-qualified the latter were to do so) when publishing. See Fergus 7, 9-10.

⁶² Cranny-Francis 5.

⁶³ Examples are the qualified praise of Austen's older brother, James Austen, the cautious praise of an anonymous reviewer in the *British Critic* of March 1818 and the backhanded praise of the anonymous reviewer in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* of May 1818. Cf. *Family Record* 232-234.

⁶⁴ See Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987) 83 and Philip Webster Souers, *The Matchless Orinda* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

husbands' memoirs – and even their own – as in the cases of Anne Clifford, the Countess of Pembroke, Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle and Lucy Hutchinson, wife of Colonel Hutchinson of Owthorpe and Anne Harrison, Lady Fanshawe. And generally speaking, these memoirs, despite the jeers of some of the more jaded and anti-feminist *literati* such as Horace Walpole, were well received.⁶⁵

Poetry, biography and later, even some forms of drama⁶⁶ were thus sanctioned as acceptable forms of writing for women (especially if they were of aristocratic or noble birth), but as the Duchess of Newcastle learnt to her chagrin, forays into natural science, astronomy, geography and philosophy were definitely not.⁶⁷ And the same applied to female incursions into theology, doctrinal dispute or hermeneutics. Women's literary attempts were permitted, at least from Elizabethan times onward, if they fulfilled the triple criteria of birth (noble) education (superior) and genre. Men thus prescribed appropriate or 'proper' genres for women: innocuous 'fancy' or moralistic works. Licentious subjects were taboo for women writers. Even during the Restoration, when men's bawdiness was tolerated and enjoyed, women's offerings in the same vein were severely castigated. Thus male arbiters of early fiction were outraged by the writings of the first professional woman writer, Aphra Benn and those who (often from economic necessity) followed in her pioneering footsteps, Mrs Manley, Mrs Eliza Heywood, the daughter of a London tradesman, Arabella Plantin and other authors of 'key novels' and sentimental novellas, whose lineage and subject-matter alike offended the masculine sensibilities of Swift, Walpole and Pope.⁶⁸

Attempts at self-justification such as those of Eliza Heywood, who replied to Pope in *The Female Dunciad* (1729) and launched the first women's periodicals the *Female*

⁶⁵ Horace Walpole, *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England*, 2nd ed. (London: 1759) 2: 12 ff.

⁶⁶ Such as the Duchess of Newcastle's *Plays*.

⁶⁷ As demonstrated by her infelicitous publications, the *Treatise on Optics* (dedicated to the Duke of Newcastle) and the highly imaginative works sharing one volume, *A Description of a New Blazing World* and *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1666). Admittedly, her personal knowledge of the polar regions and 'atomies' did not qualify her for such ambitious works, but she was denied the education that could have rectified this. Her incursion of academic realms 'beyond her ken', as well as her unconventional social behaviour, earned her the derogatory nickname 'Mad Madge'. See Barbara McCarthy 122 ff. for further insights on this fascinating figure.

⁶⁸ Swift's *Works*, ed. Scott 17: 430 and *The Dunciad II*: 2: 157 ff.

Spectator, (1744-1746) and the *Parrot*, were in vain. Her name had been so irrevocably sullied, that when she turned from her more licentious earlier writings to domestic manners and sentiment,⁶⁹ she could recover neither her reputation nor a respectable readership. It is difficult to say whether it was their lack of class ('birth and breeding') that caused the odds to be loaded against these Restoration women writers or whether it was simply owing to the 'scurrility' of their subject matter. If the latter, it is an irony of enormous proportions, because similarly prurient male writers were singularly exempt from large-scale reprobation.

In the mid-seventeenth century, when the moral tide turned against the 'licence, bawdiness and decadence' of popular fiction, didactic writers took the centre stage, with Jane Barker, Mary Davys, Elizabeth Rowe (seen as a fore-runner of Hannah More)⁷⁰ and Penelope Aubin, significantly recuperating the position of women writers. Having been reclaimed from its earlier 'lapse' into Restoration 'prurience', women's fiction was now re-established on solid moral ground, paving the way for the respectable Sarah Fielding,⁷¹ whose experimentation with realism has been said to anticipate the Irish novels of Maria Edgeworth,⁷² the 'domestic comedies' of Fanny Burney and the 'courtship novels' of Jane Austen. In between there were a host of eighteenth century women writers,⁷³ many of whom turned from the novel of sentiment to the Gothic Romance, often combining it with the 'historical' as did that 'mighty enchantress of Udolpho, the Shakespeare of Romance writers', Ann Radcliffe.

⁶⁹ Anticipating Fanny Burney in *The Fortunate Foundling* (1744), *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753).

⁷⁰ Rowe's dates are 1674-1737. B McCarthy (251) writes: 'When later Hannah More became the apotheosis of the Rowe tradition, she found her pedestal awaiting her.' Sylvia Harcstark Myers, less patronisingly, observes that Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter tried to imitate Rowe but found her too intense and other-worldly'. See Myers, *The Blue Stocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 155.

⁷¹ Although didactic and rambling, the moral essayistic work, *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), with its incipient realism and interest in motive and character has been described as paving the way for her female novelist successors. See McCarthy 56-262.

⁷² Sainsbury's estimation of Edgeworth was as high as Austen's. He maintains that, 'There are few more curious and interesting personages in the history of the English Novel than Maria Edgeworth. The variety of her accomplishment in the kind was extraordinary: and in more than one species she went near perfection.' George Sainsbury, *The English Novel* (1913; rpt. London: J M Dent and Sons, 1931) 181.

⁷³ Such as Miss Ballin, Frances Brooke, Hannah Cowley, Susannah Dobson, Ellis Cornelia Knight, Anne Fuller, Sophia Lee, Mrs A M McKenzie, Eliza Parsons, Clara Reeve, Miss Roger, Sarah Emma Spencer, Anne Skinn and Eliza Parsons.

As Tompkins notes, after the middle of the eighteenth century, women of all ranks were writing, from the Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Craven to the Bristol milk-woman (Hannah More's protégée, Ann Yearsley) and a farmer's daughter in Gloucestershire. In 1773 the *Monthly Review* noted that the novel genre was 'almost entirely engrossed by the Ladies' and Johnson observed that whereas women could hardly spell a letter in his youth, they now 'vied with men in everything'.⁷⁴ Although more or less accepted and even encouraged by men, who saw them as importing 'delicacy and purity' into the novel, and conversely chid by them when they wrote too much like them,⁷⁵ men made it quite clear that certain subjects were still taboo. Though respected, the Blue Stockings (Mrs Veysey, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffith, Catherine Macaulay, Hester Chapone, Hannah More and Fanny Burney) were watched warily. Elizabeth Montagu had forayed into literary criticism with an essay on Shakespeare in 1769,⁷⁶ but after Catherine Macaulay published on metaphysics and copyright, Lord Lyttleton announced, 'we want no more than *one* Mrs Macaulay'.⁷⁷

Thus, where sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women were permitted to write, they were hedged around by class and genre criteria, relegated to 'fancy', poetry, some forms of drama, moral, sentimental fiction or innocuous 'romance', and denied expression, censured or outlawed if they wrote 'indelicately' or discoursed on 'masculine' (scientific, political or religious) topics. Similarly, in More and Austen's time, a woman could write so long as she maintained the character of the genteel or what Mary Poovey calls the 'proper' lady⁷⁸ (and better still, if like Fielding she had a fraternal or like Edgeworth and Burney, a paternal literary passport) and most importantly, as long as she observed certain

⁷⁴ J M S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Constable, 1932) 120.

⁷⁵ The *Monthly Review* took Miss Aikin to task for this, Tompkins 124.

⁷⁶ As for example Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of... Shakespear* [sic], with some Remarks upon the Misrepresentation of Mons. De Voltaire (1769). Because they had internalised what Sylvia Myers calls 'societal injunctions against learned ladies, and in favour of modesty and self-abnegation', the Blue Stockings' essays into traditionally male literary preserves were not without 'ambivalence, diffidence and uncertainty'. See Myers 156-158.

⁷⁷ Lord Lyttleton to Mrs Peach, quoted by Tompkins 127.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Carter rejected Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters* (1762) for this reason. In 1775, she wrote: 'Her letters have wit, knowledge and observation, but there is such a defect of delicacy and of sentiment; that one could never wish such a writer either for a companion or a friend.' See Myers 154-55.

political and religious caveats. But woe betide if she, like Wollstonecraft,⁷⁹ and other intransigent ‘revolutionary’ or ‘anti-Jacobin’ women writers such as Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith,⁸⁰ overstepped the ha-ha and wandered not only into the park, but into the dark wood of politics, losing, like Austen’s Maria Bertram, her respectability.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, there was a further compression and devaluation of women’s experience and capabilities through the popularisation of the so-called ‘domestic ideology’. This rigid demarcation of roles into the private/domestic/feminine and public/social/masculine, which had its beginnings centuries before,⁸¹ was encoded and aggressively marketed in the eighteenth century through the burgeoning conduct industry,⁸² culminating in the ideological hallmark of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, the apotheosis of the woman as the ‘angel in the house’.⁸³

This domestic ideology was enunciated and reinforced by secular and religious writers of both sexes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century conduct writers. The Marquis de Halifax (George Savile) in his *Advice to a Daughter* (1688) preached the inequality of the sexes: ‘You must lay it down as a foundation in general, that there is inequality in the sexes, and that for the better economy of the world, the men, who were to be the lawgivers, had the largest share of reason bestowed upon them’.⁸⁴ However, he attempted to show its

⁷⁹ Wollstonecraft is ironically very close to the more conservative Hannah More in her ideals of domestic virtue and marital friendship. Demers observes that ‘[m]atters of expression, authority and restraint keep Wollstonecraft and More apart, but the underlying issues of excellence, capacities and duties of their sex bind them as cultural reformers and warriors’. See Demers 83.

⁸⁰ From whom Marilyn Butler distances Austen, aligning her rather with the conservatism of Burke. Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) 161 ff.

⁸¹ Cf. Elizabeth Grymeston, *Misceleneae* [sic] (1604), Dorothy Leigh, *The Mother’s Blessing* (1616) and Elisabeth Joceline, *The Mother’s Legacie to her Unborne Child* (1624), works in which the authors stress the value of gentle and virtuous upbringing. Cf. Demers 31.

⁸² See the introduction to *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library or Parental Monitor* (1790), ed. Vivien Jones (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995) v-xxxv.

⁸³ Cranny-Francis 5. See also Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, Press 1994) 17–42, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 262 ff., and Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979, rpt. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) 20.

⁸⁴ The Marquis de Halifax’s *Advice to a Daughter*, rpt. in *Halifax: Complete Works*, ed. J P Kenyon, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 272.

'compensations' by telling women that 'in the Nursery . . . you reign without Competition, and by that means have the advantage over us of giving the First Impressions'. Another sop to the 'fair sex' was his smug assertion that 'women have stronger influences, which well manag'd have more force in your behalf, than all our Privileges and Jurisdictions can pretend to have against you'. He sentimentally maintains: 'You have more strength in your looks than we have in our Laws, and more power by your Tears than we have by our arguments'.⁸⁵ These sentiments were echoed by Henry Home (Lord Kames) in 1781 when he wrote: 'He [the husband] governs by law, she [the wife] by persuasion. Nor can her influence ever fail, if supported by sweetness of temper and zeal to make him happy'.⁸⁶

Even more disturbing are Halifax's blatant sexual double standards, counselling his daughter and other young wives to overlook the philandering of their husbands, maintaining that 'next to the danger of *committing* the Fault your self, the greatest is that of *seeing* it in your Husband'.⁸⁷ And as will be shown in the chapter on Hannah More, these double standards were still perpetuated by some Churchmen in the early nineteenth century. It was precisely these double standards that Mary Wollstonecraft reprehended and which (together with her own brutally honest and unconventional lifestyle) prompted the caustic appellation the 'hyena in petticoats' (whereas More earned the equally dubious sobriquet, the 'bishop in petticoats').⁸⁸ Although the Evangelical movement with its propounding of the same moral law 'for man and for woman',⁸⁹ largely discredited moral double standards (or what Walter Allen calls a 'translation into morals of biological fact') ushering in a more consistent

⁸⁵ Halifax 278.

⁸⁶ 'Has a good woman no influence over her husband? I answer, that that very simple virtue of submission, can be turned to good account. A man indeed bears rule over his wife's person and conduct, his will is law. Providence however has provided her with means to bear the rule over her will. He governs by law, she by persuasion. Nor can her influence ever fail, if supported by sweetness of temper and zeal to make him happy.' He then quotes Rousseau in support of the above. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Loose Hints upon Education: Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart* (Edinburgh: John Bell and John Murray, 1781) 229-230.

⁸⁷ Halifax 279.

⁸⁸ *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W S Lewis, 48 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1937-84) 31: 371. Cobbett refers to More as the 'bishop in petticoats', see Demers 5

⁸⁹ Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (1954, rpt. London: J M Dent & Sons, 1969) 136.

'respectability' and 'raising the general moral tone', it is also true that separate moral codes for the sexes continued to be practised in private.⁹⁰

Deprecating de Halifax's odious moral hypocrisy, Dr John Gregory nevertheless endorses the separate spheres doctrine, insisting that '[t]he domestic oeconomy of a family is entirely a woman's province and furnishes a variety of subjects for the exertion both of sense and good taste'.⁹¹ This was reiterated in 1781 by Henry Home who, averred: 'All beings are fitted by nature for their station. Domestic concerns are the province of the wife.' He proceeds to remind the weaker sex that 'Women, destined by nature to be obedient, ought to be disciplined to bear wrongs without murmuring. This is a hard lesson, and yet it is necessary even for their own sake'.⁹² Similarly, 'for their own good', Dr Gregory advises his daughters to conceal their learning from men,⁹³ a prescription More challenged and Austen ridiculed.⁹⁴ Even more explicitly, in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), the Revd. Thomas Gisborne, whose aim was to 'mend' the errant female heart, magnifies the influence a woman has over her husband, but warns her most explicitly 'not to seek opportunities of displaying it, nor to cherish a wish to intrude into those departments which belong not to her jurisdiction'.⁹⁵

The department of a woman's jurisdiction was traditionally, of course, the domestic sphere, which effectively limited her in literary as well as in practical matters, by prescribing suitable 'feminine' genres. Decades of indoctrination resulted in public support for separate

⁹⁰ As opposed to the aristocracy (such as Viscount Bolingbroke, Robert Walpole and the Earl of Sandwich) who 'flaunted their mistresses', the Evangelically inclined Lord Spencer Perceval, Lord Liverpool, Lord Sidmouth, Lord Castlereagh and Robert Peel were known for their fidelity and uxoriousness. See Linda Colley 189, 262 ff. 189 and A Skevington Wood, who describes the libertinism of Walpole and other aristocrats in *The Burning Heart: Charles Wesley, Evangelist* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1967) 9. For a general discussion of adultery in fiction, see Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Press, 1979).

⁹¹ Dr John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) rpt. 1790 in *The Young Lady's Pocket Library or Parental Monitor*, ed. Vivien Jones (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995) 21.

⁹² Home 228, 230.

⁹³ Dr Gregory, ed. Jones 35-37.

⁹⁴ The narrator observes: 'A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can.' NA 111.

⁹⁵ Gisborne, Thomas, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), ed. Gina Luria (New York: Garland, 1974) 251.

genres by both male *and* female writers, proving Longhurst's point that it was with the 'consent' of the subservient ones.⁹⁶ In return for obedience (to separate spheres restrictions) subservience and 'proper' or 'feminine' behaviour, women received protection, respect and deferential treatment and were frequently the most vociferous in defending the system.⁹⁷ But they had little option other than to comply, for as Anne Cranny Francis puts it, '[W]omen had to play by the rules, and the roles were dominated by or produced by the patriarchal ideology which was endemic to society and its cultural products.'⁹⁸ The separate spheres doctrine was carried over from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century literary landscape, where men continued to monopolise certain genres. Thus, to adapt an image used by Derek Longhurst, while male authors were engaged in the important task of ploughing their political and religious furrows, women were expected to find fulfilment in preparing the picnic of romance on the other side of the hedge.⁹⁹

Various barely-visible mechanisms were in place to ensure that women were barred from traditional public 'masculine' spheres, with the Established church strenuously preventing women from direct participation in doctrinal and ecclesiastical affairs, and in some cases, even practical reform.¹⁰⁰ Non-conformists showed more laxity in this regard with Quakers recognising female moral autonomy in the seventeenth century and Methodists allowing women to preach and pray publicly in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ However, documentation of rigid reactionary attitudes in non-Establishment churches still prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century in America demonstrates the intransigency of double

⁹⁶ Longhurst 3.

⁹⁷ On the 'doctrine of separate spheres', Linda Colley (263) observes that 'Women refrained at least in theory, from invading the public sphere, the realm of action, on the understanding that their moral influence would be respected and recognised. They accepted a vulnerable position in life, on condition that men would maintain and respect them.'

⁹⁸ Cranny-Francis 5-6.

⁹⁹ Longhurst (4) observes: 'Male critics have clearly felt more at ease ploughing their furrows with the sharper edge of contemporary Marxist paradigm while gender can be "left to the women" preparing the picnic over by the hedge.'

¹⁰⁰ See Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987) 140-154.

¹⁰¹ Alice Browne 82.

standards within so-called Christian structures and the frantic desire to retain hold of traditionally masculine domains, by ridiculing or threatening women reformers.¹⁰² In an undated dissertation, a Georgian female Quaker challenged the prohibition of women preachers, maintaining that this embargo was initiated by the male fear of being rendered obsolete.¹⁰³ More and Austen do not appear to cherish desires to invade the parish pulpit, but were well aware of the suspicion with which progressive women writers/reformers were viewed and recognised the need for caution in addressing any traditionally male-dominated subject. They seemed only too aware of the risks they incurred by entering what male ‘guardians’ Gregory, de Halifax, and Gisborne warned were not the ‘departments of their jurisdiction’ – departments which were still jealously guarded in England and on the other side of the Atlantic until the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴

As late as 1878, in response to resolutions by Christian women reformers for greater spiritual autonomy, some clerics were still hysterically maintaining the divinely ordained inferiority and the total and ‘inevitable’ subordination of women.¹⁰⁵ The paranoia with which

¹⁰² Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State* (1893; rpt. New Hampshire: Ayer Publisher Inc., 1985) 470-72.

¹⁰³ ‘There is yet another prejudice against women’s preaching . . . and this no less than the united interest of the whole body of men called clergymen. For if, they say, the pastoral function may be exercised by laymen and even women, we shall be deemed no longer necessary, nay, perhaps down goes our trade, our pomp and revenues.’ Quoted by Franz 229.

¹⁰⁴ Women were warned in a pastoral letter issued in 1837 by the General Association of Massachusetts (Congregational Church) that ‘The appropriate duties and influence of woman are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties and that influence are unobtrusive and private, but the sources of mighty power. When the mild, dependent, softening influence of woman under the sternness of man’s opinions is fully exercised, society feels the effects of it in a thousand forms. The power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her as her protection . . . But when she assumes the place of man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defence against her; she yields the power which God has given her for her protection and her character becomes unnatural. Quoted by Gage 472.

¹⁰⁵ On 18 July 1878, at a public women’s meeting in Rochester, women demanded that they be allowed the use of their own reason and not subjected to the authority of the church. These and other mild resolutions were sternly answered by the Revd A H Strong DD, president of the Rochester Theological Seminary who argued that: ‘She [woman] is subordinate to man in office, she is to be helper, not principal. Therefore man has precedence in the order of creation, woman is made of man, and to supply the felt need of man. The race therefore is called the race of man and not of woman. For this office of subordination and whether they assert it or not, women are fitted by their very constitution and in the very creation of mankind in the garden of beauty undefiled by the slimy track of the serpent as it was, God ordained the subordination of woman and the differences of nature that make her subordination inevitable. The power of rule seems to me to have invested in the head of the family that he may act for them, or rather that they may act through him.’ See Gage 470.

reactionary American clergymen responded to women demanding that their spiritual autonomy be recognised, was not confined to America. In eighteenth-century England, women reformers (like the ‘unsex’d female,’ Wollstonecraft) were branded as ‘wicked’ and ‘unnatural’ and even the ‘proper’ and morally impeccable More was ridiculed and vilified for entering the traditionally male-dominated spheres of religious writing and social reform by a host of male writers who not only attacked her personally (like the Revd. Bere of Blagdon who called her a ‘Scipio in Petticoats’),¹⁰⁶ but cowardly sought refuge in pseudonyms like the infamous ‘Sappho Search’ (the perpetual curate of Butley, John Black), ‘Peter Pindar’ (John Walcot) and the ‘Revd Sir Archibald MacSarcasm’ (William Shaw). ‘Sappho Search’ (John Black) compares More’s brain to a pot and herself to a wild boar,¹⁰⁷ while Peter Pindar dismisses her verse and prose as ‘very bad’, portrays her as ‘a very Pygmy in the realms of Taste’,¹⁰⁸ and MacSarcasm ascribes her motives in writing to paltry revenge.¹⁰⁹

Yet progressive women writers persisted in making their voices heard, adopting various danger-limitation strategies such as anonymity or male pseudonyms and manoeuvring within the boundaries of paternally endorsed genre. More’s use of male pseudonyms for her political tracts, her Cheap Repository Tracts and her ‘dramatic sermon’, the novel, *Coelebs in Search of Wife*,¹¹⁰ was patently driven by gender-politics. Clearly, she only felt comfortable putting her name to fanciful verse¹¹¹ or moralistic prose¹¹² – the traditional demesnes of

¹⁰⁶ Bere calls her this in *An Appeal to the Public, on the Controversy between Hannah More, the Curate of Blagdon and the Rev Sir A Elton* (Bath: R Crutwell, 1801). Quoted by Demers 138.

¹⁰⁷ ‘To some it will seem most abundantly plain/ That a *pot*, not *alembic*, is Hannah More’s brain’; / But no timid hare, or poor stag is Miss More,— / with a fierce thund’ring tusk, she may prove a wild Boar’, ‘Sappho Search,’ *A Poetical Review of Miss Hannah More’s Strictures on Female Education In a Series of Anapaestic Epistles* (London: T Hurst, 1800) 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Somewhat has wounded thee, tis very plain, / Revenge I fear lies rankling in thine heart . . . ‘Nil Admirari, or A Smile at a Bishop,’ in *The Works of Peter Pindar* (London: Walker, 1794-1801) 5: 180- 82.

¹⁰⁹ Revd Sir Archibald MacSarcasm (William Shaw), *The Life of Hannah More with a Critical Review of her Writings* (London: T Hurst, 1802) 202.

¹¹⁰ So called by Sydney Smith in his disparaging review of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* in the *Edinburgh Review* 14 (1809): 146, 51.

¹¹¹ Such as ‘Sensibility’, ‘*Bas Bleu* or Conversation’, ‘Bishop Bonner’s Ghost’, ‘Ode to Dragon’ and ‘Florio’.

'proper' women writers. Austen's use of anonymity,¹¹³ which is more problematic, has variously been accounted for.¹¹⁴ Although it may have been simply owing to a personal predilection for privacy, it may have also stemmed from authorial anxiety and the related problem of finding a socially acceptable way of expressing her religious concerns. Although both women writers profited from a staunch circle of female support,¹¹⁵ unlike More, who enjoyed royal, Episcopal,¹¹⁶ aristocratic female and male *literati* support¹¹⁷ (which together with the conservatism of her socio-political stance helped prevent charges of indecorum¹¹⁸ and Jacobitism),¹¹⁹ Austen had no authoritative public backing.

¹¹² Such as her conduct works, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1778), *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790) and *Strictures on Female Education* (1799).

¹¹³ The first edition of *Sense and Sensibility* was 'By a Lady' and her subsequent novels 'By the Author of . . .', followed by a list of her previous published works. Although family and close friends knew the secret of her identity (and Henry frequently gave the game away) Austen always tried to conceal her name from the public, and it was not until after her death that her family thought fit to divulge it.

¹¹⁴ Older critics do not generally subscribe to gender-driven motives of anonymity. R W Chapman argues that Austen's desire for secrecy stemmed from personal reasons: 'the desire to conceal her sex was not a motive for anonymity. Women novelists were numerous and in repute: her natural ambition was to be classed with Miss Burney and Miss Edgeworth', R W Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948) 132. For a completely different point of view see Julie Carson, 'Characters: Mary Wollstonecraft and Germaine de Staël' in *Religion, Gender and the Writing of Women, Historicist Essays in Honor of Janel Mueller*', ed. Joshua Scodel and Katie Trumpener, *Modern Philology* 98: 2 (Nov 2000): 320-338. See also Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen, A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 1-27.

¹¹⁵ For Austen's support circle of Cassandra, Martha Lloyd and others, see Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) 101-102.

¹¹⁶ Bishop Beilby Porteous was More's greatest Episcopal champion, though Dr Shute Barrington, Dr Kennicott, Bishop Horne, Dr Richard Beadon, Dr Thomas Sedgewick Whalley and others stood behind her in various causes. Porteous suggested and financed More's political (anti-Painite) tracts such as *Village Politics, Addressed to all the Mechanics, Journeyman and Labourers in Britain* by 'Will Chip, a Country Carpenter'.

¹¹⁷ More's female patrons were Mrs Gwatkin, Mrs Boscowen, Mrs Garrick and later, Mrs Carter and Mrs Montagu. Her male patrons were Edward Turner, Dr James Stonehouse and David Garrick, with Dr Johnson, Horace Walpole, Richard Sheridan, the Burke brothers, Sir Richard Hill, Sir William Weller Pepys, William Wilberforce and the Clapham people providing moral or financial support for her many projects.

¹¹⁸ Such as the criticism of Charles Daubeny who claimed that her 'want of precision in language' could lead 'ignorant Christians' to 'dowright enthusiasm' in *A Letter to Hannah More on some Parts of her late Publication entitled Strictures on Female Education* (London: J Hatchard and F & C Rivington, 1799) 43, 52.

¹¹⁹ From her detractors in the so-called 'Blagdon Controversy', who accused her of disseminating 'dangerous Methodist propaganda', with its popularly conceived concomitant 'social levelling'. See Demers,

Having briefly examined the homes, workplaces of Sherlock, More and Austen and glanced at the literary position occupied by the women writers, I now proceed to situate them in their ecclesiastical context. This does not purport to provide a summary of eighteenth-century church history, but merely a framework for my figures, sketching only the ecclesiastical events, legislation or theological/philosophical thought that had any direct or indirect impact on them.

ECCLESIA ANGLICANA: A PLACE FOR REASON AND REFORM?

DOCTRINAL CHALLENGES

As is well known, since the Henrician foundation, the Anglican Church (referred to sometimes as *Ecclesia Anglicana* or the English Church) was the official church of the realm, claiming divine authority, but established and maintained by statutory law. However, during Hanoverian times the Anglican Church was faced with many unique challenges. As a state church it had been buttressed by explicit privileges and several notorious protective measures¹²⁰ which came under review and attack from the Whig administration of George I and II (particularly during 1733-36) and were strenuously defended by Sherlock. Doctrinally speaking, ‘movements’ such as Latitudinarianism and English Deism, which had their beginnings in the interregnum and grew out of seventeenth century rationalism, now became full-blown and in their challenge of divine revelation demanded the attention of orthodox apologists, such as Sherlock and his colleagues, who perceived them as seriously

99-128, Hopkins 185-195, and Ford K Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) 187-233.

¹²⁰ Such as the Acts of Uniformity of 1559 and 1662, the Test and Corporation Act of 1664, the Conventicle Acts of 1664 and the Five Mile Act of 1665. In 1718 the Occasional Conformity Act was repealed. From 1727 onwards the annual Indemnity Acts partially relieved Dissenters from past legislation. See Gerald Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (1960; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 118.

undermining orthodox doctrine. It is significant too, that Deism, which began in the early seventeenth century, was still countered by More and her contemporaries (such as Bishops Watson, Horsley and Horne) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Latitudinarianism, which appears to have had its roots in Richard Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1593-97), is thought to have come into being roughly around the end of the interregnum.¹²¹ Deriving from a form of Neo-Platonism, which re-surfaced at Great Tew, Oxford¹²² and during the mid-1600's at Cambridge,¹²³ its aims were essentially irenic: greater religious toleration and comprehensiveness. Although the main thrust behind the movement was philosophical, many were drawn to Latitudinarianism out of sheer weariness of schism or from political expediency.¹²⁴ Thus, the originally speculative thought of the Great Tew Circle and the Cambridge Platonists was appropriated by those with political aspirations and gradually, 'in its Anglican incarnation [Latitudinarianism] became the defining mode of the Whig settlement after 1688'.¹²⁵ Accordingly, the Church of England was challenged to act in a more 'reasonable' and conciliatory way, politically and ecclesiologically, by surrendering some of its privileges and giving more latitude with regard to its formularies in order to win over more non-Conformists, and theologically by accommodating its doctrine to the current demands of reason, 'nature' and moderation.

¹²¹ The genesis of Latitudinarianism is explored in a series of essays in *Philosophy, Science and Religion 1640-1700*, ed. Richard Kroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹²² A form of neo-Platonism had been current in England previously during the times of Erasmus and Thomas More. Later, at Great Tew, Oxford, another form of proto-Latitudinarian thought developed among scholars and divines such as Lucius Gray, John Hales (who influenced John More), William Chillingworth, Falkland, Jeremy Taylor, Edward Stillingfleet and Robert Boyle, who influenced Hannah More. Although they differed in derivation and emphasis (with some following Aristotle), they were united in their love of reason and toleration. Chillingworth's *The Religion of Protestants and a Safe Way to Salvation* (1638) became a seminal work, which influenced the subsequent direction of Latitudinarianism. See Joseph Levine, 'Latitudinarians, neoplatonists and ancient wisdom,' in *Philosophy Science and Religion* 234.

¹²³ Where a group of men met who were sympathetic to the 'Platonick and new atomical philosophy' giving primacy to reason, but stressing their commitment to the Church of England. Although Nathaniel Culverwel, Simon Patrick, George Rust, Edward Fowler, Joseph Glanvill, Henry More, Benjamin Whichcote, Joseph Mede, Herry Cudworth and John Worthington have been bracketed together as the 'Cambridge Platonists', their doctrinal stances were diverse.

¹²⁴ Norman Sykes, in *Johnson's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age*, 2 vols, ed. A S Turberville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 1: 34-35.

¹²⁵ See Kroll 2, 9 ff.

John Locke (1632-1704), who has been credited with shaping the philosophical and theological thought of the eighteenth century, had a wide and diffused influence on both Latitudinarians and Deists. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) popularly regarded as the foundation of enlightened eighteenth-century English theology, Locke argues that reason can enable one to know self-evident or demonstrable truths such as the existence of God and a moral law. Putative revelation is only acceptable if it does not contradict our clear and distinct knowledge.¹²⁶ More controversially, Locke claimed that there were no just and sufficient grounds for the acceptance of Church dogma to justify imposing an orthodoxy.¹²⁷ He maintained that the fundamental doctrines are few and plainly stated, finally positing that there is only one article of faith by which people should be judged believers or non-believers, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God. Locke has been credited with influencing the thought of Deists such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, Lord Bolingbroke, John Toland and the more radical Anthony Collins.¹²⁸

Although accepting that Christianity is not contradictory to Locke's rational criteria, Sherlock opposed his systematic philosophy, following Hobbes's political theory of absolute sovereignty as expressed in *Leviathan* (where individual rights are subsumed into society and subordinate to the Government). Sherlock held that although society is 'natural' to man, he needs laws to protect himself and his possessions against the unrestricted 'passions' of man.¹²⁹ Hannah More was a great admirer of Locke and Boyle, as her long youthful poem

¹²⁶ See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk 4 ch. 8 section 5. See also *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Bk 4 ch.18, *The Works of Locke* (London, The Strand: J Johnson, 1802) 124-137.

¹²⁷ John Marshall, 'Locke and Latitudinarianism', in *Philosophy Science and Religion* 247, 259-60.

¹²⁸ See C Abbey and J Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth-century*, 2 vols (London: Longmans and Green & Co., 1878) 1: 177-182, Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1969) 437-38 and Cragg 78, 118, 160.

¹²⁹ Sherlock writes: 'It is no uncommon thing for men to pursue their speculations till they lose sight of nature; the consequence is that they fall into notions contradictory to the experience of mankind, and absolutely impossible to be reduced to practice.' Hughes 3: 440-41. Nature for Sherlock, as Carpenter explains, 'was not an ideal notion arrived at by a process of deduction, but a concrete embodiment of experience; a thing is natural when it is in harmony with the rest of the natural world.' He continues, 'the starting point of Sherlock's political thought is not therefore the state of nature, but society, which he declares to be natural to man, "We are made by nature, that is by God to be sociable creatures and therefore in seeking society, in cultivating with each other, we follow the instincts of nature." Yet though a sociable, man is also a passionate animal, so that from this point of view, the end of government is "mutual defence . . . and protection in life and fortune." ' Hughes 3: 262, quoted and commented on by E Carpenter 265-66. On Locke see John Marshall, 'Locke and Latitudinarianism', *Philosophy, Science and Religion* 259-60.

The Search after Happiness: A Pastoral Drama (1773) testifies. Cleora, who is hungry for all kinds of masculine learning, begins by praising Euclid and Descartes and then eulogises Locke and Boyle, showing her desire to emulate them by saying: ‘I now with Locke tread metaphysic soil, / Now chase coy nature through the tracts of Boyle; / Sigh’d for their fame, but feared to share their toil’. However, Urania, a female version of Locke’s tutor (in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*) who knows the world well, reprimands her by saying: ‘Science for female minds was never made, / Taste, elegance and talents may be ours, / But learning suits not our less vigorous powers.’ Urania continues to preach the doctrine of separate spheres: ‘You might be dazzling, but not truly bright: / a pompous glare, but not a useful light; / A meteor, not a star you would appear: / For woman shines but in her proper sphere.¹³⁰ In later editions of her early work, More downplayed many of her encomiums on reason, but, significantly, quotes from or alludes to Locke and Boyle in nearly all her works¹³¹ and kept until her death, a bust of Locke (a gift of Elizabeth Montagu) in her garden at Barley Wood.

Robert Boyle (1627-1791), associated with the group at Great Tew and remembered for his insistence on the importance of ‘good proofs’¹³² and the law named after him, defended the existence of God against atheists by citing physiological principles and observations,¹³³ and argued for the necessity of revelation and the validity of miracles.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Locke’s tutor is described in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Section 94. More, *The Search after Happiness and Other Poems, Sacred Dramas and Essays on Various Subjects* (London: T Allman, n.d.) 17, lines 19 ff.

¹³¹ See her quotation from Locke in *Strictures on Female Education* (London: T Cadell, 1799; rpt. Oxford: Woodstock, 1995) 1: 213 on Boyle 1: 251 and references to Locke and Boyle in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* 5th ed. (London: T Cadell, 1809) 2:174.

¹³² ‘The Sceptical Chymist’ in *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle, in Five Volumes, to which is prefixed the Life of the Author* (London: A Millar, 1744) 1: 300-387. See especially 306.

¹³³ Apart from his valuable contributions to physical science and chemistry, Boyle wrote against atheism, an example being the following observation that man ‘by denying there is a God cannot free his understanding from such puzzling difficulties for instead of one God he must make an infinite number of atoms to be eternal, self-existent, immortal, self-moving, and must make suppositions, incumbered with difficulties... to him who has competently accustomed his thoughts to the second causes beneath them and contemplate these causes that have none’, Essay 5, ‘Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy, Proposed in a Familiar Discourse to a Friend by way of invitation to study it.’ See Boyle, *Works* 1: 459.

¹³⁴ Boyle defends revelation and especially the miracle of the resurrection as follows: ‘And indeed, methinks, the divines we reason with, may well allow these putefactions to be capable of evincing the existence of God, since they are sufficient, and for aught I know, the best argument we have to convince a natural man of

Sherlock, who assiduously studied science, as well as the classics at Cambridge,¹³⁵ may well have owed something to Boyle's empirical defence of miracles in *Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy*,¹³⁶ and More, who admired his refutation of atheism and his defence of revelation, seems to imitate his use of 'natural similitudes' in *A Discourse Touching Occasional Meditations*.¹³⁷

Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648) is popularly considered the pioneer of Deism. In 1624, he articulated rudimentary tenets of Natural Religion, declaring the superiority of natural ('universal') over revealed ('partial') religion.¹³⁸ Regarded as the first exponent of Deism, his view of traditional religion as corrupted by 'priestcraft' and his depreciation of Scripture later became Deist commonplaces.

Although they wrote according to no preconcerted plan and were bound by no common creed or form of worship, English Deists had certain tenets in common. Broadly speaking, they stressed the benevolence and fatherhood of God and the innate goodness of human beings. More daringly, they insisted that the Scriptures be criticised like any other book, and no part accepted as revelation from God unless compatible with unaided human reason. Though they admitted to a belief in a supreme Being, the Creator of the Universe, and our duty to worship Him, the necessity for repentance and the certainty of Divine

the truth of the Christian religion. For the miracles of Christ (especially his resurrection) and those of his disciples, by being works altogether supernatural, overthrew atheism; and being owned to be done in God's name and to authorize a doctrine ascribed to his inspiration, his goodness and his wisdom, permit us not to believe, that he would suffer such numerous, great and uncontrollable miracles, to be set as his seals to a lye, and delude men little less than inevitably into the belief of a doctrine not true. And as for miracles themselves (especially that of Christ's resurrection), so much and so deservedly insisted on by St Peter to the Jews and St Paul to the Gentiles, the truth of them is so ascertained to us by way of the solemnst, and most authentick ways of attestation . . . that it is hard to shew how these testimonies can be denied, without denying some acknowledged principle of reason or some other received notion, which these contradicitors [sic] opinions or practice manifest them to look upon as a truth, and upon this account, so much might be said to evince the reasonableness of assenting to the christian religion . . . that it must needs be no wonder, that as learned men as ever the world admired, have not only been many of them embracers, but some of them champions of it.' Essay 5, 'Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy, Proposed in a Familiar Discourse to a Friend by way of invitation to study it'. See *Works* 1: 459.

¹³⁵ E Carpenter 4.

¹³⁶ See footnote 134 above.

¹³⁷ Section 1, ch. 2, Boyle, *Works* 2: 147. See also More's tracts and her *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*.

¹³⁸ 'God exists, it is our duty to worship Him, the proper way to do so is to practise virtue; men ought to repent of their sins; rewards and punishments will follow death', Cragg 77. Cf. Walker 437.

punishments and rewards, they rejected the authority of the Church, special revelation (miracles and predictive prophecy) the atonement, the resurrection and the deity of Christ (hence the term Deists).

Three streams of Deism existed: the mild ‘rationalist supernaturalist faith’ (supplementing Natural Religion with divine) such as that of the popular preacher and leader of the Latitudinarian ‘party’, Archbishop Tillotson,¹³⁹ a more full-blown Deism as represented by Toland, Tindal, Collins and Woolston, and finally, a more radical anti-Christian Deism, such as that of Tom Paine, the latter being an example of political radicalism that turned from attacking the state to its twin pillar, religion.¹⁴⁰

Tillotson (1630-94) Master of Clare College, Cambridge and Archbishop of Canterbury (1691), ‘leader’ of the Latitudinarian party and one of the most popular preachers of the time, provides something of an overlap between Latitudinarians and Deists. His sermons were widely read in Austen’s time¹⁴¹ and even Paine mentions him with cautious approbation in his *Age of Reason*.¹⁴²

John Toland’s *Christianity Not Mysterious, or a Discourse showing that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason nor above it, and that no Christian Doctrine can properly be called a Mystery* (1696) claiming to be the logical outworkings of Locke’s philosophical principles, offered a rational explanation of Gospel ‘mysteries’. In it, the New Testament is brought to the bar of reason and everything not ‘agreeable to Reason’ rejected. Reason thus becomes legislative and Christianity, purged of its ‘mysterious’ doctrines, reduced to a set of moral standards. The work was pronounced seditious by the Grand Jury of Middlesex, burnt by the hangman in Dublin and condemned as heretical by the Lower House. Two of Toland’s main arguments with which Sherlock engaged were that (1) There is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it and no Christian doctrine can properly

¹³⁹ Like many other Latitudinarians, Tillotson argued that faith could not be divorced from works, but went further than Burnet and Sherlock in almost suggesting that sanctification preceded justification. For a discussion of this See John Marshall, ‘Locke and Latitudinarianism’, *Philosophy, Science and Religion* 259-60. On Tillotson as sermon writer, see Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994) 96-97.

¹⁴⁰ See E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Classes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 163.

¹⁴¹ Irene Collins 97.

¹⁴² Paine, *Writings* 3: 139-141.

be called ‘a mystery’ and (2) ‘Mysteries’ were imported into Christianity by Judaizers or by the heathen converting their old mysteries into Christianity. Toland attempted a rudimentary historical criticism of the Scriptural canon and in his later writings moved into a more atheistic position.¹⁴³

Anthony Collins (1676-1729) first attracted attention with his iconoclastic *Priestcraft in Perfection* (1709) followed by his anonymous *A Discourse of Freethinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of the Sect called Freethinkers* (1713). In the latter, Collins repudiated the authority of the church and vindicated the right of every individual to think freely for himself. Sherlock’s colleague, Daniel Waterland (1683-1740) defended the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ in *A Vindication of Christ’s Divinity* (1722). Benjamin Hoadley, George Berkeley, William Whiston and Jonathan Swift also answered Collins and the learned, controversial Richard Bentley of Cambridge demolished his claims in *Philoleutherus Lipsiensis*.¹⁴⁴ Collins retorted in 1724 with *A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* in which he rejected miracles as a proof of New Testament authority, argued against the literal fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies (positing that they were fulfilled in a ‘typical allegorical or secondary sense’) maintained that Christ was only the Old Testament’s Messiah, that the Old Testament ought to be the only canon and Christianity entitled ‘Mystical Judaism’. Among the thirty-odd replies this elicited, Sherlock’s *Use and Intent of Prophecy in the Several Ages of the World* (1725) was hailed as the most thorough and scholarly rebuttal.

The most persecuted Deist was probably Thomas Woolston (1669-1733), who ridiculed the literal interpretation of miracles in his *Six Discourses on the Miracles*, professing to base his allegorical interpretations on a (mis)reading of the Church Fathers. He was prosecuted by the King’s Bench for blasphemy, fined more than £4,000 and died in prison in 1731. Thirty thousand copies of *The Six Discourses* were rapidly sold; sixty orthodox writers responded, with Sherlock’s *Tryal of the Witnesses* eclipsing all others in originality and popularity. Peter Annet (1696-?) a more radical anti-Christian Deist, credited

¹⁴³ Abbey and Overton 1: 184-85, E Carpenter 232-33, Cragg 78, 160 and Walker 437.

¹⁴⁴ Abbey and Overton 1: 191.

with influencing Voltaire, opposed scriptural revelation and targeted the resurrection in his anonymous pamphlet, *The Resurrection of Jesus considered by a Moral Philosopher*.¹⁴⁵

In 1730, Matthew Tindal¹⁴⁶ (1657-1733) published *Christianity as Old As Creation*, a title borrowed from one of Sherlock's sermons, arguing that Christianity is merely a republication of the law of reason and only valid in so far as it can be apprehended by reason and is consistent with Natural Religion. He rejected most of the New Testament according to this *a priori* test, declaring dogmatic doctrines and the priesthood unnecessary. Arguing that revelation is rendered redundant by Natural Religion, he questioned the 'Divine Legislator's' wisdom in initiating and perpetuating such an 'imperfect Law' to which was later added some positive, arbitrary precepts. In *The Use and Intent of Prophecy* Sherlock argued that revelation is not an arbitrary postscript, but part of the original divine method of progressive illumination.¹⁴⁷ *Christianity as Old As Creation*, popularly viewed as the 'Deist's Bible', marked the zenith of Deism. It elicited 115 replies, among them Conybeare's *Defence of Revealed Religion against Christianity as Old as Creation*, and Law's *The Case of Reason* (1732) and George Berkeley's (1685-1753)¹⁴⁸ scathing reply. Finally, Pope immortalized Tindal (and Toland) in *The Dunciad* (1729).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Walker 442, Carpenter 232-36.

¹⁴⁶ Originally a pupil of the Non-juror, George Hickes, Tindal became successively a Roman Catholic, a 'Low Churchmen' and ultimately a 'Christian Deist'.

¹⁴⁷ Whereas Tindal identified Christianity with Natural Religion, as 'a Religion most perfect, which mankind at all times was capable of knowing', Sherlock argued that a religion which can be known without assistance (Natural Religion) is imperfect because, although it points to a powerful and beneficent Creator, it is insufficient to awaken the moral sense and to provide one with the requisite knowledge to win eternal salvation. At best, Sherlock maintained, Natural Religion is only the foundation of the revealed (religion). Tindal averred that orthodox Christianity does not deal with 'men as rational creatures' and that it forbids the use of one's reason in Scriptural interpretation. He maintained that all should be tested against 'the light of Nature and Reason of things'. As Sherlock counter-argued, Christianity does not forbid people to use their reason. God created us as rational creatures and revealed Christianity is essentially a rational religion, but owing to mysteries we cannot comprehend, it is above and beyond Man's Reason. See E Carpenter 234. Owing to formal constraints of space, this is necessarily a rather severe simplification of a complicated argument of Sherlock's.

¹⁴⁸ Law argued that reason is compatible with Christianity and that God, whose goodness is arbitrary, is above the comprehension of man (Walker 438). Furthermore, he 'exposed the preposterous absurdity of Tindal's assumption that must behave according to the strictest canons of human reason', Cragg 163. Law, who refused, at the accession of George I, to take the oaths abjuring the Pretender and accordingly forfeited his fellowship at Cambridge, became progressively more mystical and lived a life of retirement and meditation in the family of Edward Gibbon. His *A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life, Adapted to the State and Condition of All Orders of Christians* (1728), which has been regarded as second only to *Pilgrim's Progress* as the most influential religious work in English, not only shaped Wesley's, but More's thinking. See *A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life, Adapted to the State and Condition of All Orders of Christians* (1728; rpt. London:

‘Freethinkers’ such as Thomas Morgan (who reiterated the idea that Christianity was only a republication of the laws of Reason and Nature) and Lord Bolingbroke (who attacked the Old Testament and impugned the credibility of Christ, the Gospel writers and St Paul)¹⁵⁰ were superseded by the more politically radical Thomas Paine (1737-1809).

Paine’s *Common Sense* (1776) was followed by the more controversial *The Rights of Man* (1791) in which he adopted an aggressively anti-Burkean stance, passionately defending French Revolution principles, but reserving his most direct attack on Christianity for his *Age of Reason* (1795). In the latter, purportedly ‘An investigation of True and Fabulous Things in Two Parts’, he begins systematically with the Old Testament, where he disputes the authenticity of the first five Mosaic Books, disparages the prophets as frauds and their prophecies as ‘fortune-telling’,¹⁵¹ and proceeds to the New Testament, where he rejects the authenticity of the Gospels, the miracles, immaculate conception and virgin birth of Christ,¹⁵² the resurrection¹⁵³ and the doctrine of the redemption, which he dismisses as a ‘fabulous invention’ and ‘not the doctrine of the New Testament’.¹⁵⁴ Finally, in a grand dismissal of revelation, he declares that all necessary knowledge of God can be gained from creation and that both the Old and New Testament present nothing but ‘false and blasphemous ideas about him [God]’.¹⁵⁵ His *Age of Reason* and later writings were condemned as heretical and

Griffiths, Farran, et al, 1888). On Berkeley’s anti-Deist defence, his missionary endeavour and immaterialism see Cragg 164-65.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Toland and Tindal, prompt at Priests to jeer, / Yet silent bow’d to Christ’s No Kingdom here’, *The Dunciad* (1728) II: 355-56. The phrase, ‘Christ’s No kingdom here,’ referred to Benjamin Hoadley’s sermon which sparked the Bangorian controversy. In a footnote to the 1742 *Dunciad*, Pope describes Woolston as an ‘impious madman who wrote in a most insolent style against the Miracles of the Gospel’ (3. 212). *The Poems of Alexander Pope, A One-Volume Edition of the Twickenham Pope*, ed. John Butt (1963; rpt. London: Methuen, 1973) 415.

¹⁵⁰ Cragg 63, 161, Abbey and Overton 1: 201-09, E Carpenter 52, 109, 234.

¹⁵¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Daniel Edwin Wheeler (New York: Vincent Parkes and Co., 1908) 3: 197, 201.

¹⁵² See Paine, *Writings* 3: 126.

¹⁵³ Paine, *Writings* 3: 227.

¹⁵⁴ ‘A fabulous invention’ and ‘not the doctrine of the New Testament’, Paine, *Writings* 3: 131, 134.

¹⁵⁵ Paine, *Writings* 3: 134, 179.

blasphemous and his publishers (Eaton and Williams) prosecuted.¹⁵⁶ Denounced by Horace Walpole in his correspondence with Hannah More, as ‘a philosophizing serpent’,¹⁵⁷ Paine became a favourite target of More’s and is attacked, together with Voltaire and Godwin in her political and Cheap Repository Tracts, *Strictures on the Present System of Female Education* (1799) *Christian Morals* (1813) and her *Essay on St Paul* (1825).

From the aristocracy, Deism and Freethinking permeated to the working classes. The self-taught Thomas Chubb adapted Tindal’s ideas, attacking the New Testament and Sherlock’s *Tryal of the Witnesses*. Dr Charles Moss, Archdeacon of Colchester, defended the *Tryal in The Evidence of the Resurrection cleared from the Exceptions of a late Pamphlet* (1749), which was later reissued under the title, *A Sequel to the Tryal of the Witnesses*, and mistakenly attributed to Sherlock.¹⁵⁸

Other notable defenders of orthodoxy were William Law, Joseph Butler, William Paley and Richard Watson. The Non-juror, William Law (1686-1761), a fellow-disputant with Sherlock at Cambridge and later, tutor in the Gibbon family, replied to Tindal in *The Case of Reason* (1732), arguing that reason does not merely find truth in religion, but is ‘the cause of all the disorders of our passions, the corruption of our hearts’ and that God, whose Goodness is arbitrary, is above man’s comprehension.¹⁵⁹ His *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728) influenced not only Wesley, but More who refers to it, and his other works, throughout her writings.¹⁶⁰

Joseph Butler (1692-1752), Bishop successively of Bristol (1738) and of Durham (1750), is renowned for his painstaking *Analogy of Religion* (1736) regarded by his

¹⁵⁶ See Paine’s ‘A letter to Mr Erskine’ the counsel for the prosecution of his publisher, *Writings* 6: 107 ff.

¹⁵⁷ *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W S Lewis, 48 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1937-84) 31: 371.

¹⁵⁸ Whiston, a self-appointed editor of Sherlock’s works, also published Chubb. On Chubb and Moss, see E Carpenter 317.

¹⁵⁹ Once again, owing to space constraints, this is a severe simplification of Law’s argument. See also Walker 438.

¹⁶⁰ See for example *Strictures* 1: 210. Law is also a strong presence in her *Coelebs in Search of A Wife* as will be shown later.

contemporaries as the unanswerable answer to Deism.¹⁶¹ William Paley (1743-1805) Archdeacon of Carlisle (1782) vindicated revelation in his *View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794) and *Natural Theology* (1802).¹⁶² Although his watch-maker image (whereby he argued for the existence of an Almighty Designer) was not much more than a reiteration of Natural Religion's tenets, he argues that God made His Will the rule of human action and that revelation (which is attested by miracles) proves a future state of rewards and punishments. His earlier privileging of morality ('Virtue is the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the Will of God, and for the sake of everlasting Happiness' and his prudential estimate of virtue earned him charges of utilitarianism, which he counteracted in his later works.¹⁶³ Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, counteracted Deism and atheism (1795) and repudiated Paine (1806).¹⁶⁴ Finally in 1791, Bishops Horsley and Horne, and even Hannah More contributed to the Deist debate, attacking Natural Religion, the 'cult of reason' and Paine.

Thus, though Sherlock dominated the anti-Deist scene with his *Six Dissertations on Prophecy and Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*, as hinted above, More

¹⁶¹ Cragg 165-167, Walker 439. Adopting an empiricist methodology, and starting from premises shared by both Deists and orthodox, he undertook to answer *Christianity as Old As Creation* by arguing that Christianity, which is neither uncertain nor imperfect, is based on probabilities. If we are in a state of probation on earth (as Deists held) it is probable that we are on probation as to our future destiny. His cautious balance of probabilities gained popularity, partly because of its moral fervour in promoting the divine regnancy of conscience over human action. Both his *Analogy* and his *Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue* were widely read. In his *Charge to the Clergy of Durham* (1760), like Sherlock, he denounced ecclesiastical and social evils. Cf. *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed . . . to which are added Two Brief Dissertations . . . On the Nature of Virtue, together with A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Durham* (London: F & C Rivington, 1802) 383-408. Hannah More recommends Butler's *Analogy* for her more serious female readers in *Strictures on the System of Modern Female Education* (1799) in which she also quotes him on human depravity (*Strictures* 2: 260) reminding her readers that life on earth is only a 'state of probation and discipline'. See *Strictures* 2: 125.

¹⁶² In *Practical Piety* (1813), More approved of Sherlock's repudiation of heathen religions (*TD* 2: 65) and his arguments for the historical authenticity and superiority of Christianity above all other religions. Paley received a measure of qualified endorsement, for although she praises his style as 'vigorous and clear as pellucid crystal' in a letter to Sir William Pepys in 1805, she deplored his 'laxity' on certain doctrinal points which, she adds, he redressed in his later years. W Roberts, *Life of Hannah More with Notices of her Sisters*, 4 vols (London: R B Seeley, 1834) 3: 262-63.

¹⁶³ Although Paley insisted on the paramountcy of 'the love and practice of virtue' (Sermon 14, John 7:17) he explains that '[A] right faith is the source and spring of true virtue.' (Sermon 21, Jas 1:27) *Sermons on Several Subjects by the late Rev. William Paley*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman et al, 1809) 212, 313.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Watson, *A Defence of Revealed Religion in Two Sermons Preached in the Cathedral Church of Llandaff* (1795) 3rd ed. (London, 1806) and *An Apology for the Bible in a Series of Letters addressed to Thomas Paine*, 9th ed. (London, 1806).

(who admired Locke, Boyle and Sherlock) later played a very small, but lively part in the polemic, recommending the counter-Deist writings of Paley, Butler and Sherlock to her female readers,¹⁶⁵ and as will be shown in the chapter devoted to her, attempting a minor rebuttal of Natural Religion in her final work, an *Essay on the Life and Practical Writings of St Paul*. Austen, who approved of Sherlock's sermons¹⁶⁶ (and therefore, implicitly of his defence of revelation), yet seems nevertheless able to admire the Latitudinarian, Blair's, sermons and Hume's history (as we shall see in the section on *Mansfield Park*), though she says nothing of his sceptical essay on miracles. Her interest therefore was not so much in the Deist controversy perhaps, as the practical outworkings of excessive Latitudinarianism or Freethinking in the moral life of some of her characters, such as Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*.

ECCLESIASTICAL PROBLEMS AND REFORM

The polemic against Natural Religion and Deism sapped so much of the eighteenth century Church's spiritual energy that although celebrated for its outstanding apologetic, it has been traditionally berated for its lack of reform. In retrospect, the Hanoverian church has been notoriously described as 'lax and profane',¹⁶⁷ 'factious',¹⁶⁸ 'prosaic and calculating',¹⁶⁹ 'lethargic',¹⁷⁰ and 'unheroic in temper,'¹⁷¹ and it became increasingly embarrassingly clear to

¹⁶⁵ *Strictures* 1: 179.

¹⁶⁶ L 406.

¹⁶⁷ Abbey and Overton (1: 19) describe it as '[a]n age notorious for laxity and profaneness'.

¹⁶⁸ Sykes in *Johnson's England* 15.

¹⁶⁹ Sykes, *Church and State* 419, observes: 'It would be vain to pretend that churchmanship in the Hanoverian age was of a mystical or other-worldly character; or even that . . . it exalted the heroic virtues and called for asceticism and denial. Like the epoch of which it was born it was prosaic and calculating, conceived as a prudent investment, promising assured blessings, both temporal and celestial.'

¹⁷⁰ GLT Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1977) 6.

¹⁷¹ Cragg 117.

the Church that more thoroughgoing ecclesiastical reform was required in order for it to continue not only to maintain its supremacy, but to justify its *raison d'être*.

The Georgian church had inherited many administrative problems: the unwieldy and largely impractical parochial system was an infelicitous medieval legacy, which together with the system of (royal, Episcopal and lay) patronage and the grossly unequal wealth distribution (characterising both sees and livings) were partly responsible for the besetting eighteenth-century 'sins' of nepotism, pluralism, non-residence and parochial neglect.¹⁷²

While the inferior country clergy were either dependent on the precarious collection of tithes or were reduced to indigence by wholly insufficient stipends (amounting to little more than between ten to fifty pounds a year), their metropolitan counterparts, bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries, often lived opulently, drawing salaries of more than £7,000 per annum.¹⁷³ The stipendiary imbalance had not improved much by the time of Jane Austen (the reign of George III) with many country clergy having to subsist on £30 to £50 a year, or less.¹⁷⁴ G E Mitton cites £25 a year as the ordinary stipend for a curate and commends Jane Austen's father for residing 'all the time at Steventon',¹⁷⁵ but overlooks the fact that George Austen, like his son after him, was a mild pluralist (holding both the livings of Deane and Steventon).¹⁷⁶ Sykes maintains that until 1750, curates could expect an average of £30-£40 per annum,¹⁷⁷ but Virgin cites examples of curates in remote areas receiving stipends of only

¹⁷² See S C Carpenter, *Church and People 1789-1889* (London: SPCK, 1933) 49 ff., Cragg 117-121 and Peter Virgin, *The Church in an Age of Negligence* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1989) 1-27.

¹⁷³ Bishop Gilbert Burnet reprobated the insufficiency of rural clergy funds, lamenting that 'some hundreds of cures that have not of certain provision twenty pounds a year, and some thousands that have not fifty'. *The History of His Own Times* (1723) ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J M Dent, 1907) 398, 304. See also Machin 7 and Alex Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Age*, Pelican History of the Church 5 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 13.

¹⁷⁴ See Parson Woodford's careful computation of expenses in order to make ends meet, *The Diary of a Country Parson 1758-1802*, ed. John Beresford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 97, 115, 130, 193.

¹⁷⁵ G E Mitton, *Jane Austen and Her Times* (1905; rpt. London: Methuen, 1907) 26-7.

¹⁷⁶ James originally held the curacy of Overton and the livings of two parishes, Cubbington in Warwickshire and Sherborne St John nearer home. However, as Irene Collins observes, in both these parishes the 'great tithes' had been impropriated by the respective patrons, the Leights of Stoneleigh Abbey and the Chutes of The Vyne. See Irene Collins 51.

¹⁷⁷ Sykes, *Church and State* 206, 208.

£20 as late as 1780.¹⁷⁸ Although seen as a ‘blemish in our constitution’, it appears little was done to remedy it.¹⁷⁹

The inherent inequalities of the situation were further exacerbated by the impropriation of tithes, whereby the technical (usually non-resident) rector received all the tithes and his appointee (vicar or curate) only a stipend. By 1603 almost 4,000 of the 9,284 livings in the Church of England had been impropriated.¹⁸⁰ Added to this was the lucrative practice of the marketing of advowsons or the buying and selling of benefices.¹⁸¹ A further aggravation of the wealth-imbalance was the multiplicity of preferments bestowed on senior city clergy and royal chaplains. Rampant pluralism was a defining feature of the Georgian Church. Sykes maintains that in 1743, in the Diocese of York, 355 of 711 of the incumbents were non-resident and concludes that this was ‘typical of the kingdom’.¹⁸² Many of the indigent country clergy were compelled to augment their meagre earnings by taking more than one benefice (as was the case with Austen’s father) but as often the case, ‘pluralism was least widely practised where it was most easily justified’ with pluralists comprising 335 of 711 upper clergy (who did not need multiple livings).¹⁸³ The system of lay patronage, with its concomitant nepotism, was a hotbed of abuse with some lay patrons holding as many as six livings.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, ecclesiastical and especially archiepiscopal, patronage lent itself to

¹⁷⁸ Curates received stipends of £22 in the mountainous Welsh diocese of St Asaph’s, the counties of Denbigh, Merioneth, Montgomery and Flint and some places in Shropshire. As late as the 1780’s the average stipend for curates in Westmorland and Cumberland was as low as £20. Virgin 224.

¹⁷⁹ ‘It gives me a most affecting concern to think, that there are so many pious and worthy clergymen of the established Church struggling with poverty & want at the same time as they are rendering such services to their country & I must think it a blemish in our constitution . . . to have so many members living in penury & distress, while so great a number of others are wallowing in the greatest affluence and ease: for since they are all servants of the public and paid by the public, every man ought to have a share in the public rewards.’ *Lord Hervey’s Memoirs*, ed. Romney Sedgewick (1952; rpt. London: B T Batsford Ltd, 1963) 269.

¹⁸⁰ Collins 50-51 and Alan Gilbert, ‘The Rise of Evangelical Nonconformity’ in *Religion Society in Industrial England: Church Chapel and Social Change 1740-1916* (London and New York: Longman, 1976) 5.

¹⁸¹ Virgin 181.

¹⁸² Sykes in *Johnson’s England* 1: 27.

¹⁸³ For a discussion of the problem and some justification of pluralism, see Virgin 131-163. Cf. the case of George Austen, who found his first rectory at Steventon unfit for habitation and had to rent the Deane parsonage.

¹⁸⁴ Horace Walpole (1783-1858), Earl of Orford and MP for King’s Lynn was patron of six livings, one of which (Itteringham) was owing to nepotism. See Virgin 175.

malpractice, with the nepotistical practice of Archbishop Moore and Bishop Manners Sutton (in bestowing opulent livings on family and friends) reaching almost unprecedented proportions.¹⁸⁵ Even Sherlock, who inveighed against ‘unjustified’ pluralism and enforced residence in his Episcopal *Letter to the Clergy at Visitation for the Diocese of London* (1759), was not above Episcopal nepotism in his earlier days.¹⁸⁶

Austen was aware of these problems, for in her fiction, she is careful to provide sufficiently, but correctly, for her clergymen. When Colonel Brandon offers Edward Ferrars the rectory at Delaford, he implies that as incumbent Edward would receive the tithes.¹⁸⁷ In *Mansfield Park* where there are two family livings for the hero, there is an extended discussion on clerical duties, which comprises *inter alia*, a strong affirmation of residence. Hannah More, as will be shown in the chapter devoted to her, is more direct in her exposure of pluralism in her writings and more socially active in trying to lessen its evils. Although a staunch Anglican, she was appalled by the clerical negligence she saw in the Mendips area,¹⁸⁸ where there were reputedly thirteen adjoining parishes without a resident curate and where no clergyman had resided for forty years. According to her sister, Patty More’s *Mendip Annals*, a clergyman ‘rode over three miles from Wells to preach once on a Sunday; but no weekly duty was done or sick persons visited; and children were often buried without a funeral service’. Worse still, the incumbent of Cheddar resided at Oxford, while his curate, who lived twelve miles from the parish, was allegedly often too intoxicated to perform his weekly

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Virgin 91.

¹⁸⁶ In helping secure the bishoprics of Bristol and Norwich for his brother-in-law, Thomas Gooch of Cambridge, and in appointing Charles Moss (nephew of his friend, Robert Moss) as his private chaplain, presenting him to the prebendary of Warminster in Salisbury Cathedral, endeavouring (unsuccessfully) to procure a prebendary for him at Winchester and finally in taking him with him to London and presenting him to the arch-deanery of Colchester during his episcopate in London (1748-61). See E Carpenter, *Thomas Sherlock* 315-17. In his final years, Sherlock obtained the Deanery of York for his nephew, Mr Fountayne, a brother-in-law of Edward Weston, whom Sherlock had helped advance to the prebendary of Uffculme in 1730. Sherlock also showed ‘great kindness’ to Dr J Thomas, by letting him preach from the Temple pulpit and thereby assisting him to the bishoprics of Lincoln and Salisbury respectively. See E Carpenter 321.

¹⁸⁷ Collins 51.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. the Absenteeism in Lincoln, E R Norman, *Church and History in England 177-1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 51.

duty.¹⁸⁹ With the clerical backing of Bishop Porteous and the financial support of the Clapham Group, More established Sunday schools, initiated in response to insufficient Episcopal provision or abrogation of clerical duty and intended to supplement and not replace Church teaching.¹⁹⁰ And in her religious novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, More portrays a model clergyman, Dr Barlow who is not only an enlightened scholar, but a resident rector and conscientious overseer of the souls in his cure.

Sporadic self-reform measures were adopted by the Georgian Church. In 1713 a rudimentary and vague Stipendiary Curates Act was passed¹⁹¹ and after 1780 the board of the heretofore Queen Anne's Bounty made proposals for clerical relief and opened the Parliamentary Grants Fund.¹⁹² However, owing to reactionary elements within the church, coupled with the slowly grinding wheels of legislation, more than isolated efforts were required to bring about much-needed 'root and branch' reform, which from the 1780's onward, the Evangelical Movement did much to spur on.¹⁹³

In 1796 (the year Austen composed her first version of *Sense and Sensibility* in which Edward Ferrars requires a living) a Stipendiary Act was passed, but the amount was not considered high enough. Bills were introduced in 1803, 1805 and 1808 (supported by More's friend, the progressive Bishop Beilby Porteous) but they were all defeated. In 1812 Lord Harrowby attempted to introduce another bill¹⁹⁴ and in 1813, the year Austen wrote *Mansfield Park*, a progressive Stipendiary Bill was finally passed.

¹⁸⁹ Martha More, *Mendip Annals; A Narrative of the Charitable Labours of Hannah and Martha More in their Neighbourhood, Being the Journal of Martha More*, ed. Arthur Roberts (London: James Nisbet, 1859) 17.

¹⁹⁰ Henry Thompson, *A Life of Hannah More with Notices of Her Sisters* (London: T Cadell, 1838) 8-10; 107. See also E R Norman 35 and Demers 99ff.

¹⁹¹ Stipulating a minimum stipend 'not exceeding Fifty Pounds per Annum nor less than Twenty Pounds per Annum' (but leaving the final amount to the discretion of the bishops). Virgin 222-223.

¹⁹² Virgin 20.

¹⁹³ See Vidler 13. The Church Building Act of 1812 authorised the division of unwieldy parishes and the building of new parish churches in industrial areas. The 1836 Commutations Act revised the tithe system. For these and self-reform measures, see E R Norman 15-70.

¹⁹⁴ Warning the House of Lords that: 'Curates discharging the duties of four parishes, and galloping about from church to church, was what brought the church into contempt.' See Virgin 225.

In 1803 watershed legislation was achieved by the passing of Sir William Scott's Residence Act, which has been seen as the stimulus behind Austen's engagement with such issues in *Mansfield Park*.¹⁹⁵ Yet it took time to implement, for eight years after the Act's passage, one half of all Anglican benefices had no resident incumbent and as late as 1830, a third of all incumbents held a second living, with some still retaining a third, fourth and even fifth! The problem was only properly resolved in 1838 with the passage of the Pluralities Act, which forbade an incumbent to hold more than two livings (the joint value of which could not exceed £1,000 per annum). Yet, as Virgin shows, transformation was only visible in 1879, when 11,940 out of 12,695 livings had resident incumbents.¹⁹⁶

Ecclesia Anglicana was also required to respond to the phenomena of the burgeoning Methodist Movement and closer to home, the Anglican Evangelical movement. Insufficiency of funds and widespread apathy resulted in little Established Church expansion after the reign of Queen Anne. Few new churches were built (for example, of the fifty new churches approved by Parliament in Anne's reign, Machin quotes Halévy who claims that only ten churches were built in London after Queen Anne's reign) and many ancient ecclesiastical edifices and parsonages fell into disrepair.¹⁹⁷ This and the failure of the Anglican Church to keep abreast with the rising Industrial population and its lack of appeal to the working classes, resulted in unprecedented absenteeism and 'irreligion' (exploited by Paine and other revolutionaries). These *lacunae* were filled by the Methodist or Wesleyan Movement, which arose under the aegis of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield¹⁹⁸ and which did not seek secession from the Church so much as the recuperation of fundamental doctrines neglected by Latitudinarian preachers and the spiritual accommodation of the neglected working classes. The movement not only revitalised the Church from within by restoring the popular appeal of religion, but indirectly stabilised a society threatened by revolution (and

¹⁹⁵ Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991) 3-5.

¹⁹⁶ Virgin 102.

¹⁹⁷ Machin 51 and see also Butler's *Charge to the Clergy* at Durham (1751) rpt. in *The Analogy* (London: F and C Rivington, 1802)

¹⁹⁸ For an account of the rise of Wesleyanism, see A Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: Charles Wesley, Evangelist* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1967) 9.

even more indirectly, through the development of organizational abilities in its ‘Society’ members, broadened the base of power).

An indirect offshoot of Methodism was the Anglican Evangelical Movement, which took the form of a more academic and socially elite manifestation of the ‘religion of the heart’, which invigorated Anglicanism without moving out of the fold of orthodoxy. It has frequently been asserted that a distinction of the Evangelicals was their Calvinism as opposed to the Arminianism of other Anglicans.¹⁹⁹ Although this was true of some of the Evangelicals such as William Romaine (1714-1795) who was a strict Calvinist, there was the famous exception, John William Fletcher of Madeley (1729-1785), who was noted both for his Arminian stance and his great piety.²⁰⁰ Yet Madeley was hardly an exception, for others such as Henry Venn (1724-1797), who established a chapel at Huddersfield and wrote *The Complete Duty of Man*, James Hervey (1714-58), Bishop Henry Ryדר (1777-1836), Thomas Adam (1701-84), Charles Simeon (1759-1836), Joseph Milner (1744-1797), Isaac Milner (1750-1820), Cowper (1731-1800), John Newton (1725-1807), Thomas Scott (1747-821) and Hannah More all adopted the more ‘moderate’ Arminian approach.²⁰¹

Unlike Methodism, early Evangelicalism was predominantly an urban movement with centres of activity at Clapham, Cambridge, Cheltenham and Hull.²⁰² Contrary to what is commonly believed, Evangelicals continually stressed that they wished to remain within the Established Church, but owing to the ban imposed on them by many city pulpits, they were frequently forced to find other venues.²⁰³ They nevertheless repudiated itinerancy, and this,

¹⁹⁹ Calvinism, the theological system of John Calvin, stresses the doctrine of Scripture as the only rules of faith, the denial of human freewill after the Fall of Adam, justification by faith without works, the doctrine of the inadmissibility of grace, the certitude of salvation and absolute predestination. Arminianism is named after Jacobus Arminius the celebrated Dutch reformed theologian (1560 -1609). The Arminian doctrines formally set out in *The Remonstrance* of 1610, constitute a theological system against the deterministic logic of Calvinism. The Arminians insisted that the Divine sovereignty was compatible with a real free-will in man, that Jesus Christ died for all men and not only for the elect, and that both the supra-lapsarian and sub-lapsarian views of predestination were unbiblical. John Wesley held an Arminian position, in contradistinction to the Calvinism of George Whitefield (*CDCC*).

²⁰⁰ G R Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London, 1908) 91.

²⁰¹ Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734-1984* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) 66-75.

²⁰² Virgin 22.

²⁰³ Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England, Church and Chapel and Social Change 1740 –1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1976) 55, maintains that the Evangelicals were characterized by

together with their more moderate stance on Calvinism, were their main distinguishing features from Methodism. Most importantly, Anglican Evangelicals maintained their strong attachment to the constituted Church.²⁰⁴ They not only accepted the Thirty-Nine Articles and homilies, but regarded them as ‘a perfect summary of the Faith’, with William Grimshaw, like Bishop Burnet, taking portions from them for his sermons.²⁰⁵ Their love of the liturgy was yet another Evangelical hallmark, with Charles Simeon averring that, ‘the deadness and formality experienced . . . in worship arises far more from the low state of our graces than from any defect in the liturgy’.²⁰⁶ Besides their loyalty to the Thirty Nine Articles and the liturgy, the Anglican Evangelicals subscribed to all the doctrinal tenets accepted by the Established Church (as Hannah More reminds us in the character of Candidus in her *Christian Morals*). However, their privileging of regeneration and their zeal in the cause of missions (and *The British and Foreign Bible Society*) tended to set them apart and drew criticism from more conservative Anglicans such as Jane Austen.

Practically speaking, the Evangelicals were distinguished by their accountability to God (for their time, money and ‘talents’), strict Sunday observance and their zeal for the promotion of the Gospel, which led to the establishment of missionary endeavours and various moral and social reform societies.²⁰⁷ Influential lay people who were attracted to the Evangelical Movement were Selina Countess of Huntingdon, Cowper, William Wilberforce, John Thornton, Lord Dartmouth, Lord Teignmouth, Zachary Macaulay, James Stephen, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, John Shore and Charles Grant – most of whom were personal friends of Hannah More. They gathered at Battlesea Rise, the home of the wealthy banker and Member of Parliament, John Thornton, which faced Clapham Common. Together with the derogatorily named ‘Saints’ headed by Wilberforce in Parliament, they are renowned

their itinerancy; but as Abbey and Overton 2: 185, pertinently point out, Evangelicals *opposed* itinerancy, viewing it as insubordination to the Church.

²⁰⁴ Balleine 91, Hylson-Smith 74-75.

²⁰⁵ Frank Baker, *William Grimshaw 1708-1763* (London: Epworth Press, 1963) 48.

²⁰⁶ Balleine 91.

²⁰⁷ Hannah More started a branch of the Bible Society at Wrington in 1816. By contrast, Jane Austen mocked her cousin’s ‘zeal in the cause of the Bible Society’, *L* 467.

for their abolitionist efforts, the moral renovation of the gentry and far-reaching²⁰⁸ educational and social reform. Following Robert Raikes's models, Hannah More established countless 'Sunday Schools' (teaching basic literacy and the Catechism), Schools of Industry and various benefit clubs.²⁰⁹ But the Evangelicals' most spectacular achievement was doubtless the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. In 1772 the Quaker, Granville Sharpe agitated for the release of Negro Slaves imported into Britain. Wesley wrote an anti-slavery pamphlet in 1774 and Bishop Horsley spoke against it in parliament in July 1799. But Wilberforce, MP for Yorkshire, fought indefatigably for more than twenty years to carry the campaign through to its successful finale.

Despite being spiritual head of the 'American Plantations' as Bishop of London, Sherlock is uniformly silent on the subject of slavery. By contrast, More, who was a close friend of Wilberforce, challenges received bourgeois and hegemonic views of black people in a warmly abolitionist poem, 'Slavery' or 'The Black Slave Trade' and bequeathed the largest sum in her will to the anti-slavery cause.²¹⁰ Austen seems more reticent to participate in the debate, although modern post-colonial criticism has drawn many progressive inferences from some indeterminate references to Sir Thomas Bertram's Antigua estate in *Mansfield Park* and a passing reference to the slave trade in *Emma*.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Hylson-Smith 79-93.

²⁰⁹ The Sunday School Society was established in 1785. More started her schools in the Cheddar area in 1789, followed by others in Axbridge, Nailsea, Shifnal, Rowberrow, Wedmore, Weston, Winscombe and Yatton (Hopkins 172 ff). In 1796 Bishop Shute Barrington, William Wilberforce and Sir Thomas Bernard collaborated to form *The Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor*, with a similar society, enjoying the support of seventeen bishops in 1787, addressing other social evils. See E R Norman 25, 33. See also J Stratford, *Robert Raikes and Others: The Founders of Sunday Schools* (London: The Sunday School Union, 1880) 40.

²¹⁰ £500 and £50 to the Bristol and Clifton Female Anti-Slavery Society. See More's letters to sisters from London, Jan 1788, Roberts 2: 97-99 and Demers 146 n. 30. At the same time More's poem on slavery appeared, Sarah Trimmer published a regular feature in her monthly *Family Magazine* entitled 'Anecdotes of Negroes'. Here she idealized the Blacks in the same way that More presented her slave Quashi, who chooses suicide rather than self-defence retaliation against his master. See Demers 58-59.

²¹¹ MP 178-79 and E 300-301. See also Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire' in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Judy Simons, New Casebooks (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997) 107-123.

CHAPTER TWO

THOMAS SHERLOCK

SHERLOCK'S CAREER IN CONTEXT

Thomas Sherlock was born in London in 1678, ten years after the ‘Glorious Revolution’. He was the younger son of the well-known prelate, Dr William Sherlock (1641 -1707),¹ who lived during the politically troubled times of Charles II, James II and William III. As a staunch champion of the divine right of kings and passive obedience, William Sherlock maintained the rights of the Church in *The Case of Resistance* (1684) and resisted alterations to the Prayer Book to win back Dissenters. One of the early Non-jurors who was suspended from ecclesiastical government, he later reneged and took the required oaths in 1691. Although some attributed this reconciliation with the government to the recent Battle of the Boyne, it was popularly maintained that this alteration in political allegiance was owing to the influence of his strong-minded wife.² A prolific polemicist, William Sherlock engaged in controversy with Dr South of Oxford, when he was called upon to refute charges of Socinianism. Besides his *Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity* (1691), he was celebrated for *A Practical Discourse on Death* (1690), which ran through forty editions.³ He died in 1707, bequeathing his academic abilities, political persuasions

¹ Rector of St. George’s, Lower Thames Street and, successively, Prebend of St Pancras in St Paul’s Cathedral (1681), Lecturer of St Dunstan’s in the West, Master of the Temple (1685) and Dean of St Paul’s (1691). Most of the factual detail in this section is derived from T S Hughes (ed.), *The Works of Bishop Thomas Sherlock, with a Biographical Memoir*, 4 vols (London: A J Valpy, 1830) and Edward F Carpenter, *Thomas Sherlock 1678–1761* (London: SPCK, 1936).

² According to E Carpenter (2), ‘a bookseller seeing him [William Sherlock] handing her [his wife] along S. Paul’s Churchyard remarked: ‘There goes Dr Sherlock, with his reasons for taking the oaths at his fingertips’.

³ See C Abbey and J Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth-century*, 2 vols (London: Longmans and Green & Co., 1878) 1: 486-87.

and love of orthodoxy to his son, Thomas, whose defence of *Ecclesia Anglicana* and its doctrines and traditions was yet more prolific and brilliant than that of his father.

Thomas Sherlock was one of four children: two boys and two girls. His younger brother died in young adulthood and one of his sisters married Dr Thomas Gooch, Master of Caius College and later Bishop of Ely and Norwich. Following paternal precept, Sherlock went to Eton, where he distinguished himself academically as well as in ‘games’.⁴ His contemporaries, Henry Pelham, Lord Townsend and Robert Walpole admired his superior swimming ability, and his fearlessness in diving into the cold Thames, while his schoolboy peers shivered on the banks, earned him the alliterative description in *The Dunciad*, of ‘the plunging Prelate’.⁵ This courage, together with his reasonable approach and level-headed judgment, were to become Sherlock’s most prominent traits.

In 1693, after leaving Eton at the age of fifteen, Thomas Sherlock proceeded to St. Catherine’s College, Cambridge. Here he proved a keen student, applying himself so assiduously to his studies that his health was impaired. Here, too, he met his future opponent, Benjamin Hoadley, who was two years his senior. At Cambridge, Sherlock received the traditional masculine education – a good grounding in Greek, Latin, mathematics, grammar and rhetoric. He also had the opportunity to study the ‘modern’ scientific principles of Newton, of which he later made sparing, but judicious, use in his dissertations and discourses. According to Bishop Moss (1764) Sherlock ‘applied himself to grammatical studies under an able master; and laid the foundation of Classical elegance and correctness, which do so much honour to his compositions’.⁶ He was not only proficient in mathematics, logic and rhetoric, but ‘shone’ in the classics, with Warburton testifying to his profound knowledge, as well as exquisite taste, in Classical literature’.⁷

Sherlock took his BA degree in 1697 with his name appearing on the *Tripos*, following Benjamin Hoadley and Richard Bentley whose names appeared there two years before him – both eminent eighteenth-century scholars and Churchmen with whom he

⁴ In his Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeanery of Colchester 1764, quoted by E Carpenter 5.

⁵ *The Dunciad*, B version (1743) 2. 323.

⁶ E Carpenter 3.

⁷ Hughes 1: xvi.

would later cross swords. On 12 August 1698, Sherlock was elected Fellow of St Catherine's, and the same year, being of canonical age (the minimum age for ordinands being twenty-four) he was ordained to the ministry by Patrick, Bishop of Ely. In 1701 he proceeded to the degree of MA. In 1705, at the age of twenty-six, he succeeded his father as Master of the Temple Church. Although this preferment smacked of nepotism, Sherlock soon proved his worth. The appointment allowed him to mix with eminent young lawyers of the time – a society Sherlock greatly enjoyed and whose esteem and affection he soon won.⁸ It was this position, which he held virtually throughout his long life, to which posterity owes his renowned sermons, published as *The Temple Discourses*.

Sherlock's preaching ability was early recognised, for in 1704 he was invited to preach the 30 January sermon before Queen Anne (a High Church patroness) at St James. Sherlock was quick to recognise the value of such an opportunity to ingratiate himself with royalty and he seized this occasion to promulgate his Tory views, thus making this the beginning of his exploitation of royal favour to launch, and later sustain, his Episcopal career.⁹

Sherlock married Miss Judith Fountain(e) on August 8, 1707, described in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1773, as 'a most excellent, sweet tempered lady, and a very comely person', but had no children.¹⁰ Unfortunately little is known of Judith Sherlock, and all that can be ascertained is that she excelled in the traditionally feminine supportive role. On his marriage, Sherlock relinquished his fellowship, but soon gained ecclesiastical preferment, being made chaplain to Queen Anne in 1711 and a Prebendary of St Paul's in 1713. Sherlock did not seem to regard this pluralism as conflicting with his ideals, embarking on a long and involved case of litigation to prove his rights in the matter.

Sherlock's appointment as royal chaplain augured well, for it was common knowledge that the surest road to success lay through this office.¹¹ In 1714, as a further sign of royal favour, Sherlock was invited to preach the sermon in St Margaret's

⁸ Hughes 1: xix-xx.

⁹ E Carpenter 6-7.

¹⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine* 43 (1773): 385, quoted by E Carpenter 6-7.

¹¹ Sykes in *Johnson's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age*, ed. A S Turberville, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 1: 22.

Westminster (on the anniversary of Anne's accession) and again he used the occasion to air his Tory views and make an ally of the Queen. Like his contemporaries, Sherlock was aware of the value of royal patronage and did not disdain female influence. Indeed, it is ironic that women (Queens Anne and Caroline respectively) furthered Sherlock's career more than his *alumni*, who all, more or less, rose to political or Episcopal high-places and with whom Sherlock tried to 'network'.

In 1714, while still retaining the Mastership of the Temple, Sherlock was unanimously elected Master of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge. The same year, he took his DD degree, his public disputation on commencement being on Arian subscription and his opponent the much-respected scholar Daniel Waterland, author of the anti-Deist *A Vindication of Christ's Divinity* (1722).¹² The public debate 'excited an uncommon sensation' both within and without the university, on account of the controversial nature of the topic and the well-known erudition of both speakers.¹³

On 4 November 1714, Sherlock was unanimously elected Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, an office in which he reputedly conducted himself with 'fidelity, acuteness and diligence'.¹⁴ During his Vice Chancellorship, it was his unfortunate duty to have to examine the 'arrogant conduct' of Richard Bentley, Fellow of St Catherine's and archdeacon of Ely and to take steps to degrade him from office and deprive him of his degrees.¹⁵ Although essentially an academic dispute, it was heightened by opposing

¹² Arianism was a heresy which denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. It derived from Arius, who argued that Jesus was not eternal, but created by God the Father for the creation of the world and had the dignity of 'Son of God' bestowed on him on account of his foreseen righteousness (*ODCC*). The debate may have centred on the rights of Arians (who, like Socinians, were excluded from the Church).

¹³ Hughes 1: xxxiii.

¹⁴ E Carpenter 8.

¹⁵ Sherlock wrote a pamphlet, *The Proceedings of the Vice Chancellor and University against Dr. Bentley, stated and attested to a noble Peer*, arguing for the jurisdiction of the Vice Chancellor's Court and its right to determine personal contracts. By making Bentley's demand of a graduation fee of five guineas from Dr Conyers Middleton the main feature, Sherlock early showed the techniques of an experienced controversialist. Bentley retaliated and the affair dragged on, with Sherlock consulting university archival documents and Sir Philip Yorke (later Earl of Hardwicke). Despite evidence in their favour and animosity against Bentley, the judges ordered that Bentley be re-instated in his degrees and privileges on 26 March 1724. At the conclusion of this tedious affair, Sherlock declared that he bore Bentley no personal animosity, and thanked him for his scholarly contribution to revealed religion, and in particular his *Philoleutherus Lipsiensis* written against the Deist, Anthony Collins.

political views, for Bentley was a Whig.¹⁶ Thereafter, Bentley continued to regard him as an opponent and dubbed him ‘Cardinal Alberoni’, after the Spanish foreign minister who was notorious for political intrigue.¹⁷ It is significant that throughout this and other controversies, unlike some in other similar situations,¹⁸ Sherlock never sought refuge in authorial anonymity, neither, like Hannah More after the Blagdon Controversy, did he appear to have suffered from post-controversy psychosomatic symptoms of illness.

The death in 1715 of Queen Anne, Sherlock’s champion, was a personal blow for Sherlock, as well as boding ill politically. A Stuart restoration seemed imminent; there were bitter feuds between Whig and Tory at Cambridge, but the Toryism of Cambridge (in which Sherlock played a leading role) did not align itself with Jacobitism, as at Oxford. On the occasion of a few minor political disturbances at Cambridge, Sherlock allayed George I’s fears of Jacobitism by assuring him publicly of their allegiance. In response, the King donated the valuable library of the deceased Bishop Moore to the university.

As Vice Chancellor of Cambridge, Sherlock not only managed the affairs of office conscientiously, but showed his scholarly interest by reorganizing the university archives and ordering the compilation of a manuscript book on the property, rights, privileges and customs of the University. When his term of office expired, Sherlock’s promotion to the Deanery of Chichester in 1715 was largely owing to efforts of his old school-friend, Lord Townsend. Bishop Gibson (and other ecclesiastical Whigs) regarded this promotion with great disfavour and from then on began to eye Sherlock (the acknowledged leader of the young Tories) as a rival.¹⁹

¹⁶ Pope, who let no controversial opportunity slip his satiric pen, pilloried Bentley in *The Dunciad in Four Books* (1747) as follows: ‘Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport / In troubled waters, but now sleeps in Port’ (4. 201-2). Pope, however, justly acknowledges his contribution to the anti-Deist controversy in the following pun: ‘Plowed was his brow with many a deep Remark’ (4. 204), with the latter referring to Bentley’s *Remarks Upon a Late Discourse of Free Thinking* (1713). *The Poems of Alexander Pope, A One-Volume Edition of the Twickenham Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen, 1973) 777.

¹⁷ Guido Alberoni (1664-1752), Italian cardinal and statesman who, as *de facto* prime minister of Spain (1716-1719), helped reconstruct Spain after the War of the Spanish Succession. He was sent on various diplomatic missions (1706-1711) and, like Sherlock later, owed much to the protection of the new queen.

¹⁸ Such as the verbal warfare between the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More and Thomas Vaughan in the 1650’s, where both men hid under pseudonyms. See G A J Rogers, ‘Locke and the Latitude Men’, in *Philosophy Science and Religion in England 1640-1700*, ed. Richard Kroll, et al, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 237.

¹⁹ Hughes 1: xxvi-xxvii, xxxii; E Carpenter 8-11.

The next controversial affair in which Sherlock was involved was the so-called Bangorian Controversy. Although it centred on certain theological tenets and rules of discipline, it was essentially a power struggle between Whigs and Tories, or representatives of Low and High church respectively. Deriving its name from the Bishop of Bangor, Benjamin Hoadley (Sherlock's old academic rival at St Catherine's), it originated from a sermon Hoadley preached on March 1717 before King George I, effectively challenging the authority of the Church.²⁰ Not surprisingly, Hoadley's sermon elicited many impassioned replies. William Law replied in *Three Letters to the Bishop of Bangor* (1717-9)²¹ and the (Tory) Lower House of Convocation condemned Hoadley's sermon and appointed a committee under Sherlock to examine it. Their findings, that the sermon was subversive of Church government and that it impugned regal supremacy in ecclesiastical matters and the authority of the legislature in civil matters, so alarmed the ministry that they obtained an order from the King to prorogue Convocation (in order to pre-empt measures against Hoadley).

In the bitter paper-war that ensued, Dr Andrew Snape, Dr Arthur Ashley Sykes, Hoadley and Sherlock were the main participants, with Sherlock writing his *Remarks on the Lord Bishop of Bangor's Treatment of the Clergy & Convocation* in 1717.²² The controversy moved from church authority to privilege, centring on the Test and Corporation Acts. Hoadley argued that it was inappropriate to use a religious test (Holy Communion according to Anglican rites) as the means of a civil test as it encouraged people to prostitute the sacrament in order to obtain civil offices. In *A Vindication of the Corporation & Tests Acts in Answer to the Bishop of Bangor's Reasons for the Repeal of Them*, Sherlock argued against 'natural rights to office', maintaining that the Test and Corporation Act was necessary to prevent an overturning of the Church as during the

²⁰ In the sermon, 'The Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ', Hoadley asserted that Christ was the only lawgiver to his subjects, and the sole judge of their behaviour in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation. Therefore, to set up any authority in his kingdom to which the consciences of men were bound to submit, was to trespass on the authority of Christ. Hughes 1: xxxvi-vii; E Carpenter 99.

²¹ Law argued that if Hoadley's contentions were accepted, the Episcopalian constitution would disappear, 'the Church become simply a lay body of teachers, and Free-thinkers would triumph in a creedless organization.' George Sampson, *The Concise History of Cambridge Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944) 494.

²² Hughes 1: xxxiii-iv.

Commonwealth period. He contended that taking the Sacrament as a test was no different from taking an oath, as both were founded on religious principles, and that it was perfectly permissible to refuse the sacrament under the terms of the rubrics.²³

Although there were eleven replies to Sherlock, he stood firm, defending the politico-religious ideal of the state, and insisting that those outside the constitution, for political reasons (Jacobites) and for ecclesiastical reasons (Dissenters) could never expect more than tolerance – privilege was out of the question. Yet despite his formal and often warm opposition to Dissent, he attempted to remain on cordial terms with the leader of the Dissenters, Philip Doddridge.²⁴ Owing to Whig court influence, Sherlock's opposition to the alteration of the settled constitution in the state cost him dearly: he lost the royal favour he had worked so hard to acquire, and was removed from the list of royal chaplains.²⁵

COURT POLITICIAN AND BISHOP

Sherlock's attitude to politics was practical and authoritarian. He considered it unnecessary to enquire into the origins of civil power²⁶ or the prince's right to the obedience of the subject. Just as he abhorred Hoadley's speculative Latitudinarian approach, so he steadily opposed Locke's approach of systematic philosophy, following instead Hobbes's political theory of absolute sovereignty as expressed in *Leviathan*, where individual rights are subsumed into society and are totally subordinate to the Government.²⁷ However, Sherlock

²³ Carpenter 100, 102-03.

²⁴ As witnessed by extant letters from him to Dr Philip Doddridge, leader of the Dissenters. See E Carpenter 24-25.

²⁵ Together with his brother-in-law, Dr Thomas Gooch and Dr Snape. See E Carpenter 15-16, 104.

²⁶ Which he seems to have felt Hooker had more than adequately done in *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1583-1662). See *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr Richard Hooker in Eight Books of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie, to which are attached several learned Discourses* (London: R Scott, J Basset, J Wright and R Chiswell, 1705) 8: 468.

²⁷ Sherlock believed society to be 'natural'. Because God created us sociable beings, therefore in seeking society we follow the instincts of nature (Hughes 3: 262). During Sherlock's time, Locke's theories (that government is only a 'trust', that the rights of life, liberty and property are natural to all and that one is justified in employing revolutionary methods if these rights are violated) were associated with revolution.

maintained that this sovereignty must be exercised for the public good. ‘Government is a great trust; and the powers of it are not intended merely to do honour to those who have them, but must be used for the good of the community.’ Law and liberty are mutually supportive and good laws, prudently administered, constitute the happiness of the people. The temporal power and the peace and order of the nation are essentially the care and concern of the magistrates, but the clergy and heads of families ought to assist and support them.²⁸ Although the individual is permitted freedom of religion and conscience, if these principles become destructive of civil government, they must be punished by the civil authorities.²⁹ And here, Sherlock’s concept of political obedience is not that different from Paley’s, whose writings on the subject established a political and moral reference for Anglican clerics for more than a century.³⁰

Sherlock maintained that different functions in the state require different abilities, and although all have a right to peace and security, there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ right to hold office, as ‘Nature herself makes distinctions in the natural parts and abilities of people’.³¹ And here he was not alone, for many conservative clergy adopted a similar stance on ‘natural rights’, the nature of society and civil obedience.³² For them, as for Sherlock, it was God’s will that happiness be promoted and civil society (instituted by God and based on order) conduced to that end.

Sherlock opposed these ideas, maintaining that when people enter into ‘civil society’ they resign all personal ‘rights’ (of life and property, etc.) in the interests of ‘the public good’ which takes precedence over personal happiness. Thus, like Hobbes, Sherlock opposed ‘natural rights’ (*TD* 4: 443) and upheld the sovereignty of the government.

²⁸ *A Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London and Westminster on the Occasion of the Late Earthquakes of 1750*. See Hughes 4: 334.

²⁹ *TD* 4: 377.

³⁰ See E R Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770–1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 29.

³¹ Carpenter 269-270.

³² In January 1793, on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Charles I, Bishop Horsey preached a sermon ‘Let every soul be subject to the Higher Powers’. He attacked the belief that political power be based on natural rights and the notion of a ‘state of nature’, arguing instead that God made people for ‘civil society’. Paley agreed with this as did countless others. As Norman (30) points out, these were fairly staple ideas of the time.

His idealistic view of the state (or ‘Constitution’) was also that of a vast, delicately-balanced, harmonious organism, and in this he foreshadows Edmund Burke who developed this idea yet further.³³ Indeed, in his political writings, Sherlock’s unusually sentimental style and anatomical imagery could easily be mistaken for that of Burke.³⁴ All his life Sherlock remained opposed to any attempt to break the harmonious ‘whole’ into conflicting elements. This motivated his opposition to the establishment of an independent House of Commons, which he saw as dangerous as an independent king. As a staunch Tory (and yet not Jacobite) Sherlock’s ideal was thus a closer cooperation of church and state, which he perceived as two distinct manifestations, religious and secular, of one people. Throughout his life he tried to forestall the cleavage between them, on which the Whigs, engaged in their policy of constitutionalism and secularism, seemed bent.

Like most eighteenth-century churchmen, Sherlock considered politics as an extension of his clerical role. Although traditionally, English bishops have always had political functions (as a royal counsellor in state affairs) under Walpole and the Pelhams, their presence at Westminster, at least during the summer, became a necessary requirement. Sherlock soon recovered the interest he had lost at court when, on the accession of King George (again recognising the value of royal female patronage) he became the confidant and adviser to Queen Caroline. He needed royal protection more than ever, for his dogged Toryism and Laudian (rather than Erastian) ideals meant that he would always be out of favour with George I’s Whig ministry, the political leader of which was Sherlock’s old schoolfellow, Sir Robert Walpole.

Walpole’s policy of *quieta non moveare*, which, in the interests of ‘peace and prosperity’, exercised greater religious tolerance towards recusants and Dissenters and weakened traditional church privileges, was not calculated to please someone like

³³ E Carpenter 264, 269.

³⁴ Sherlock writes: “There is not a man in Church or State of so mean a consideration but that the public has an interest in having it supplied by a proper and in proportion to the duty of the office, an able man. When this is the case, when the work of Government is carried on regularly and steadily and the influences of it are duly communicated and felt in every part as in the blood which moves from the heart, cherishes and warms the extreme parts of the body as long as the vessels which convey it are in due order; but if these channels are obstructed or lose their proper tone, coldness or numbness will ensue and sometimes great evils not to be borne not to be cured, but by the loss of a

limb’. See Hughes 3: 414.

Sherlock. Nor was the ministry's advancement of Whigs in preference to Tories, whom they feared might (like the notorious Sacheverell) harbour Jacobite leanings.³⁵ Dr Johnson had complained of the factiousness of bishops, observing that bishoprics were granted not on account of piety and learning so much as political connection.³⁶ Sherlock had even more grounds for complaint, for as a Tory divine he was essentially of the wrong party and promotion under George I's Whig administration seemed highly unlikely. Walpole's right-hand ecclesiastical man, Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, who had charge of all ecclesiastical preferments, not only favoured Whigs, but consistently opposed all Sherlock's promotions and was particularly irked by his appointments to the Chichester deanery in 1716 and the Bangorian bishopric in 1728. Yet, despite the party-generated animosity between them, their Episcopal loyalty and masculine ties enabled them to put party politics aside, agitate for a resident bench of bishops in America and jointly oppose the repeal of an Act restricting the sale of gin in 1736 and other social 'evils'.³⁷

George I's death, and the accession of George II in 1727, augured well for Sherlock, for he soon found an ally in Queen Caroline of Anspach, a clever woman with strong ecclesiastical interests. Averse to the idea of the Hanoverian kings being considered exclusively 'Whig kings', this remarkable woman deliberately cultivated the friendship of

³⁵ Henry Sacheverell (1674 -1724) fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford (1701), and chaplain of St Saviour's, Southwark (1705) was a High Church divine who upheld the doctrine of non-resistance and violently opposed the Whig policy of toleration and allowance of Occasional Conformity, openly attacking them in an assize sermon preached on 5 Nov 1709. During this same sermon he attacked Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury. The House of Commons condemned the sermon as seditious. Sacheverell was impeached for high crimes and misdemeanour, but the sentence (suspension from preaching for three years) was so light as to be thought a triumph for the accused. In 1713 he was presented by Queen Anne, who had openly showed him sympathy, to the living of St Andrew's Holborn (*ODCC*).

³⁶ Bishops were part of the House of Lords (a small, but powerful political body) and their votes were often decisive as in saving Walpole in 1733. See Gerald Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (1960; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 120. See also Sykes in *Johnson's England* 1: 16 and Peter Virgin, *The Church in an Age of Negligence* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1989) 158.

³⁷ Cobbett records a parliamentary speech of Sherlock's in which he complained: 'You can hardly pass along the streets of this great city [London], at any hour of the day, but you may see some poor creatures mad drunk with this liquor and committing outrages in the street, or lying asleep upon laths or at the doors of empty houses.' Cobbett, *Parliamentary History* 12: 1206, quoted by Carpenter 276. On 26 April, 1735 Sherlock preached a sermon at St Margaret's Westminster on 'The Nature and extent of Charity', in which he lamented 'that so much art & skill has been shown of late years to make drunkenness the cheapest of all vices'. After the repeal of the Gin Act in 1733 (which both Sherlock and Gibson had opposed) Sherlock continued to lobby for stricter legislation. A petition by the Justices of the Peace brought to the House of Commons (20 Feb 1736), resulted in Parliament passing a Bill to impose exorbitant duties on and restrict the sale of gin (Carpenter 276-7, 280). See also Sykes's account of the problem in *Johnson's England* 1: 312-13.

Tory as well as Whig bishops, inviting them to her ‘philosophical tea-parties’, where she encouraged them to air their views. Sherlock was quick to seize this opportunity, and soon found a ready ear in Caroline, who, wishing to avoid further alienation of the Tory clergy (thereby driving them to the Jacobites) used her influence to promote them where her Whig ministry allowed it. Her power, however, was essentially limited, for as Carpenter observes, ‘although she might flirt with the Tories, she was married to the Whigs’.³⁸ Carpenter’s anti-feminist image highlights a problem that More and Austen were to face: the lack of authority. Yet, it is an undeniable fact that Queen Caroline, used her (albeit circumscribed) royal privilege and made her ‘separate sphere’ power work to the uttermost for a politically disempowered man who would in all probability never have risen to the Episcopacy without her.³⁹ Yet, as will be shown, he ultimately overplayed his hand with her.

The Whigs were a formidable force for Sherlock, for behind Walpole was Townsend, and behind him was Gibson, who feared that Sherlock (using his growing influence with the Prince of Wales) would rally the opposition to his standard. In the meantime, Caroline used what means she had at her disposal. She repeatedly presented lists of Tory clergy to Gibson for preferment (which he always successfully blocked) and tried to advance Sherlock to the see of Chester, and later the lucrative see of Norwich in 1724, but was either thwarted by the Bench or forestalled by Gibson. Eventually purely owing to her persistency, Gibson capitulated and Sherlock was advanced to the see of Bangor on 4 February 1728.

Although not neglecting his court interest, Sherlock was apparently conscientious in his internal administration of the diocese of Bangor. This remote Welsh see was regarded as a stepping-stone to a more prestigious diocese, and also served as a base for bishops to further their own interests in London, as exemplified by the notorious case of Hoadley, who as Bishop of Bangor, had failed to visit his diocese for six years! Determined not to

³⁸ E Carpenter 27-9.

³⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 262 ff. writes about the way in which some Georgian queens used their power or influence to re-shape society’s views of women: Queen Charlotte (wife of George III), Queen Caroline (wife of George IV) and Princess Charlotte (their daughter), but unfortunately she makes no reference to Caroline of Anspach for her contribution, her encouragement of mutually improving politico-religious debates within courtly/Episcopal circles.

emulate the splendid absenteeism of his predecessor, Sherlock made frequent visitations, held numerous ordinations and enforced the duty of residence upon his clergy, charging certain of his incumbents with non-residence.⁴⁰

Sherlock was still very much at ease at court, and on familiar terms with both Caroline and the young prince, with whom he seems to have had an avuncular relationship.⁴¹ During the election of 1734 when the Whigs were at loggerheads and Walpole was electioneering in Norfolk, Sherlock so ingratiated himself with the Queen, that Hervey took fright that he would supplant Walpole and accordingly sent a coded message to recall him. Knowing the Hanoverian dynasty needed the Whigs, Caroline played her cards carefully, humouring Walpole and tempering her championing of Sherlock, but nevertheless (despite the vociferous opposition of Gibson) facilitating Sherlock's translation to the see of Salisbury (where he succeeded Hoadley) that same year (1734). Finally, in 1748, Sherlock was translated to the prominent see of London, which he retained until his death.

Soon after his promotion to Bangor, Sherlock wrote his famous and 'ingenious' treatise, *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1729) in answer to the Deist, Thomas Woolston. At the same time Sherlock was actively engaged in politics. As a member of the House of Lords, his acute understanding and reasoning faculties were prized and despite (or because of) his 'gruff voice', soon became one of the most prominent speakers of the House.⁴² Sherlock, who has been described as 'a notable figure, with a mind essentially legal in outlook and a clear manner of speaking', used these abilities to oppose anti-ecclesiastical bills and defend Church rights.⁴³

During 1730-1736, there was a spate of aggressive anti-ecclesiastical bills⁴⁴ targeting Church privilege.⁴⁵ Walpole tried to support Sherlock by drumming up ministerial

⁴⁰ On Hoadley see Cragg 123 and on Sherlock's assiduity see E Carpenter 129-30.

⁴¹ Egmont remarks on seeing Sherlock take the young Prince as he passed 'in a familiar way by the button'. See Carpenter 38, 40, 59.

⁴² Sherlock's speeches were recorded by Cobbett in his *Parliamentary History*.

⁴³ E Carpenter 29.

⁴⁴ Such as the Tithe Bill (1731), which meant that the incumbent would have to prove his rights against the tithe-payer, who formerly had to prove his exemption, the Pension Bill (1731) which was designed to continue the bestowal of generous Whig pensions, a bill relating to the proceedings of

support to prevent these bills from being introduced into the House of Commons, while Sherlock wrote and distributed copious propaganda pamphlets (quibbling the issues with legal finesse), which successfully obstructed parliamentary proceedings and resulted in most of the bills being dropped. The first ten years of Sherlock's Episcopal career were therefore politically crowded. Apart from his own intricately involved political affairs, he proved to be an active member of the House of Lords and an able defender of the church and her privileges. Furthermore, these politico-ecclesiastical wrangles afforded him the opportunity to gain legal experience and sharpen his rhetorical powers, both of which would be used later in doctrinal polemics.

Sherlock gradually began to lose influence with Queen Caroline through his involvement in domestic court squabbles. He made the mistake of not only cultivating her friendship, but also that of the unpopular and extravagant Prince of Wales, who in agitating for a larger pension, began to play Sherlock off against the queen. The animosity between royal mother and son has been documented in Hervey's frank memoirs and Sherlock, who courted both for their interest, found himself unhappily embroiled in the dispute. Sherlock's fatal error was to side with the extravagant Prince Frederick and advise the Queen to persuade the King to increase his son's allowance. The motion, that the King settle £100,000 on his son, was lost by a majority of thirty votes – a defeat that delighted the Queen⁴⁶ and dismayed Sherlock.

He again incurred the Queen's displeasure over his intransigent stance on the John Porteous affair,⁴⁷ thus causing his power with her to dwindle further, and resulting in an ignominious interview and final estrangement. The opposition seized on this as means of stirring anti-Scottish feeling and 'hurried' Walpole into a penal bill against Edinburgh.

Ecclesiastical Courts (1733), the Quaker-motivated Tithe Relief Bill (1736), the Dissenter-motivated repeal of the Test Act Bill (1736) and the Mortmain Bill, challenging to the Church's right to property requests.

⁴⁵ E Carpenter 97-127.

⁴⁶ The exasperated Queen called the Prince of Wales (her 'Fretz') a 'hardened liar' and expressed the wish that 'the ground would open this moment and sink the monster [her son] to the lowest hole in hell!' *Lord Hervey's Memoirs* ed. Romney Sedgewick (London: Batsford, 1963) 167, 183.

⁴⁷ When John Porteous, captain of the Edinburgh City Guard, ordered his men to open fire on rioters without first reading the Riot Act to them, he was arrested on a charge of murder, condemned to death and then granted a reprieve from London. The mob intervened, taking him from custody and hanging him in the Grass Market. Edinburgh was reprimanded and fined £2,000. See George Carter, *Outlines of British History* (London: Wardlock, 1962) 101.

When the affair came before Parliament, the Lord Chancellor (Newcastle), Carteret and especially Sherlock were all against the Scots and in particular the Scottish judges, whose judgment they wanted nullified, but Lord Hervey swayed Queen Caroline, who advised Sherlock to drop the matter. His intransigence in the face of the Queen's disapproval, to nullify what he considered as the spurious decisions of the Scottish judges in the above affair, caused the final rupture between the Queen and himself and he had no option but to endure her berating of him, take her royal 'advice' and retire to his diocese.⁴⁸ Clearly, Sherlock's career as a court politician was over. Carpenter avers that the bitter lesson Sherlock learned was not to oppose 'the Court' in a public matter.⁴⁹ It seems more likely that Sherlock overestimated his power with Caroline – or underestimated hers. This intelligent woman, who had to walk a political tightrope between Whigs and Tories, did a great deal to promote Sherlock's interests, but pressure from the Whigs and perhaps a feeling of personal betrayal (exacerbated by his espousing her son's cause against her) finally made her lose patience with him.

Sherlock's aim, to replace the exclusive Whig administration of Walpole by a Tory one (which would have supported the Hanoverian dynasty) foundered. Yet even after his retirement from active politics in 1737, he remained a steady supporter of Walpole and a friend and confidant of the Duke of Newcastle. Sherlock continued to show an interest in state affairs and played a part in the Highlands Settlement of 1746. He also strongly opposed the anti-Scottish Episcopal clause of May 1748, which was an essentially Erastian measure and challenged the Church's right to create its own officers.⁵⁰

Although Sherlock had been raised with Caroline's help to the see of Bangor in 1728 and translated to Salisbury in 1734, he (and Gibson) were passed over when the

⁴⁸ Hervey renders the final interview as follows: 'And believe me, my Lord, this zeal for punishment does not become your profession and all this bustle about the Scottish law, how does it come *apropos* to your character, unless it is to show that you have lived so long at the Temple? You know I wish you well, and I am sorry you so often give a handle to those who wish to say how troublesome you make the King's business to those who are concerned in it; and I beg, my Lord, you would not make me, who am always ready to excuse your conduct, find it so often necessary to give you up.' See *Hervey's Memoirs* 3: 114 and see E Carpenter 56.

⁴⁹ E Carpenter 54-60.

⁵⁰ Which proposed the deprivation of all Scottish bishops (irrespective of whether they had been ordained by Juring or Non-juring bishops). One can understand Sherlock's heated opposition to this clause of the bill, for the Scottish clergy, against whom this bill was designed, were of the same High Church Anglican School as Sherlock.

archbishopric of Canterbury fell vacant in 1738. Finally, the coveted prize of York came, but too late. In 1743 on the decease of the Archbishop of York, Sherlock was offered the archbishopric, but refused it on grounds of infirmity. Although Newcastle and Hardwicke urged him to reconsider, Sherlock stood by his decision, yet, oddly, accepted the demanding office of Lord Almoner in the same year. Again in 1747 when Dr Potter, Archbishop of Canterbury, died, Sherlock was offered, and refused, the highest office in the Church of England. Newcastle pressed him twice to reconsider, but Sherlock stood fast, declining again on grounds of age and infirmity. Finally in 1748, Sherlock was translated to the see of London. Here, despite pressure to relinquish it, he retained his Mastership of the Temple, only resigning it in 1753.

One of the more interesting philanthropic incidents in Sherlock's long and varied career was the opportunity, as Bishop of Salisbury, to exert himself on behalf of two young 'felons'. The harsh treatment of young offenders in Hanoverian times (some of whom were sentenced to transportation or death for stealing apples or breaking a twig off a hedgerow) has been described as a 'dark page in eighteenth-century life'.⁵¹ Reprobating the appalling darkness of this system, Sherlock attempted to introduce some light. Although an upholder of civil law, and a decided champion of magistrates, he seems to have possessed a heart that could be softened by the plight of individuals as the following case demonstrates.

Edward Moore and John Andrews, aged nine and fourteen respectively, were sentenced to death for felony, but their sentence was later commuted to fourteen years' transportation. Sherlock requested Newcastle to 'stay' their transportation and provided the boys with apprenticeships, but found that a year after their reprieve, the boys had still not been released from Salisbury jail. Again Sherlock badgered Newcastle to obtain a warrant for their release and offered to take it to the judges himself. Sherlock appears to have been successful.⁵² The kindly concern and personal exertion shown by an eminent prelate such as Sherlock is telling. Although the Recorder of Salisbury also tried (successfully) to secure a reprieve for the fourteen-year old Andrews, whose parents were agitating for their son, no one but Sherlock seemed to care about the nine-year old fatherless boy, Edward Moore. This seems to testify to a practical attempt to follow St James's advice to 'visit the

⁵¹ J L and B Hammond, 'Poverty, Crime, Philanthropy', in *Johnson's England* 1: 308.

⁵² E Carpenter 132-33.

fatherless and widows in their affliction' (Jas 1: 27) and shows Sherlock's willingness to 'go the second mile'. It also demonstrates a more compassionate 'feminine' aspect to this otherwise ambitious, authoritarian figure.

One of the more puzzling affairs in Sherlock's life concerns his actions with regard to the church in the American 'Plantations'. As Bishop of London, Sherlock was also administrator and overseer of the American colonies, where the church suffered from badly defined Episcopal jurisdiction. It was, therefore, Sherlock's main task as successor of Gibson in 1748, to decide what policy to pursue with regard to the 'Plantations' church. Following his predecessor, Sherlock made vigorous efforts to secure a resident bench of bishops for the American church, but despite much persistence, continual opposition gradually reduced him to a policy of inaction, for which some condemned him. Only after all his attempts had failed, did he relinquish the cause by refusing to seek legal authority for his jurisdiction in America and washing his hands of the matter.⁵³

In 1750 Sherlock published his well-known letter to the clergy and people of London on the event of the earthquakes. This was followed by some prayers, a tract on the observance of Good Friday and his 1759 *Charge to the Clergy* in which he inveighed strongly against non-residence.⁵⁴ Despite failing health, Sherlock kept the Mastership of the Temple until 1753, when he was forced to relinquish it. Although troubled in later life by poor eyesight and gout, he remained comparatively healthy, until struck by a long and serious illness, which left him an invalid. His wit, however, remained unimpaired. Sherlock recovered enough to visit London as bishop in 1748 and, although infirm in 1753, he exerted himself to revise his *Temple Discourses* for a further publication. (Four volumes of *The Temple Discourses* were published in octavo in 1755 and 1756, with a fifth volume appearing posthumously in 1776).

Towards the end of his life Sherlock was still consulted by fellow divines, and writers who sought his advice on various matters. Apart from previously being a royal counsellor, Sherlock continued to be highly esteemed by the Earl of Hardwicke, Pelham, the Duke of Newcastle, Law, Butler and Paley (whose *Horae Paulinae* owes much to him),

⁵³ E Carpenter 91-230.

⁵⁴ *Letter to the Clergy at Visitation for the Diocese of London* (1759) was re-published in *Discourses Preached at the Temple Church and on Several Occasions*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1812) and reprinted in Hughes (1830) 4: 326-38.

Dr Charles Moss, Dr Thomas Gooch, Edward Weston, Dr Henry Stebbing, William Whiston (a self-appointed editor of his works) and the ecclesiastical historian, critic and author of *Erasmus*, Dr Jorton (1678-1770). Sherlock was also greatly venerated by William Warburton (1698-1779) author of *The Alliance of Church and State* (1739) and the *Divine Legation of Moses* (1749), with the latter being submitted to Sherlock before publication.⁵⁵ Although Sherlock and Secker always supported each other in the House of Lords, it appears that the two prelates were not close friends. And apart from his old enemies Hoadley and Conyers Middleton, Sherlock was also not on good terms with Archbishop Herring. By contrast, he was admired by Protestants as diverse as Doddridge and Wesley (and later More and Austen). Ironically, Sherlock was also included in many female conduct book reading lists, such as that of Lady Sarah Pennington (1761), with his name continuing to feature to the present day in ecclesiastical histories for his role in the Bangorian Controversy, his defence of revelation, and in particular his vindication of the resurrection in the *Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection* which is popularly seen as accounting for his theological renown.

Little seems to be known of Sherlock's final years, apart from the fact that he deteriorated rapidly until he was bed-ridden and almost totally dependent on others. He died on 18 July 1761 and was buried in Fulham Churchyard, where an elaborate tombstone (with an epitaph by Edward Weston) was erected. Dr Nicholls preached Sherlock's funeral sermon in the Temple Church, in which he described him as acting with great fortitude and rationality under his bodily afflictions.⁵⁶ This tribute, which testifies to great piety, forbearance and dignity in suffering, foreshadows those paid to Hannah More and Jane Austen by friends and family members. Sherlock left a fortune of £140,000, of which he bequeathed £3,000 a year to his wife, Judith, leaving a further £10,000 at her disposal. He left property to his brother-in-law, Dr Thomas Gooch, and generous donations to various charities, clerical societies, hospitals, the *SPCG* and *SPCK* to whom he had also previously donated 2,000 copies of *The Temple Discourses* (printed at his own expense) for 'the

⁵⁵ Eleven substantial letters bear testimony to his judicious criticism and advice, Carpenter 295 ff.

⁵⁶ 'Under all his infirmities, his soul broke through like the sun from the cloud . . . There was a dignity in his aspect and countenance to the very last. His reason sat enthroned within him; and no one could approach him without having his mind filled with that respect and veneration which was due to so great a character.' *Gentleman's Magazine* (1762) 24, quoted by Hughes 1: lxv.

islands and American Colonies'. He also left his valuable library to St Catherine's College, Cambridge and various estates to fund the librarian's salary, and a scholarship.

We conclude this section of Sherlock's life with a brief appraisal of his achievements. It is never easy to assess the moral and creative worth of so controversial, and yet so private, a public figure. His polemical and preaching prowess, philanthropy and tenacity in fighting for causes he believed in were probably his most outstanding features. Beginning with contemporary (Nicholls) and Victorian (Hughes) evaluations, I proceed to assess his work, showing that his approach was both typical of his times (in his repudiation of mysticism) and distinct from contemporary trends (in his appreciation of orthodoxy and the Fathers and his rejection of speculative thought) – and, as we shall see, highly innovative.

In Sherlock's funeral sermon, Dr Nicholls observed that his 'preaching was with power' and characterized by 'force and energy' so that although his voice was not melodious,

[h]is words uttered with so much propriety, and with such a strength and vehemence, that he never failed to take possession of his whole audience and secure their attention. This powerful delivery of words so weighty and important, as his always were, made a strong impression on the minds of his hearers, and was not soon forgot.⁵⁷

Although funeral orators were notoriously fulsome in their flattery, it seems that Nicholls was not exaggerating here, as Sherlock's reputation as a commanding preacher persevered for a century and a half after his death. What is striking is his description of Sherlock's 'never fail[ing] to take possession of his whole audience'. This bespeaks an enormous amount of authority, yet it is not the same type as that of Wesley and Whitefield who similarly enthralled their audiences. Here there is no mention of the Holy Spirit filling the speaker or moving among the hearers, but rather an exercise of human eloquence and an intellectual submission on behalf of the listeners to confident, superior mental and linguistic talents. Ironically, though Sherlock did not specifically address the 'Other' (Non-

⁵⁷ Abbey and Overton 2: 492-93.

conformists and women), they were amongst his warmest admirers. John Wesley (whom Sherlock did not permit to preach in the environs of London), was edified by his ant-Deist works, Hannah More admired his repudiation of heathen religions and both Jane and Anna Austen thought highly of his sermons.⁵⁸

With only models of gendered discourse at his disposal, T S Hughes struggles to account for Sherlock's difference, concluding that his *Temple Discourses* are marked by 'the variety of matter and judicious arrangement of it . . . the *strength and solidity* of his reasoning, the *force* of language and the flow of *natural and manly eloquence*' [my italics].

On a personal level, Hughes describes Sherlock as ambitious, but directing his ambition 'to noble purposes'. Although by nature 'irritable in temperament, he generally corrected this defect, oftentimes under circumstances of considerable difficulty, by the strength of his religious principles'.⁵⁹ This noble fight against the flesh is also a common feature of More's journals. Similarly, early biographers of Sherlock, More and Austen all tend to eulogise either their self-discipline or inherent good nature.

Now Sherlock is better remembered for championing a lost political cause and defending orthodox Anglican doctrine, which he regarded as the only true light, the only reasonable, time-honoured and true *depositum* of revealed religion, against Deism. As its defender he opposed not only the eroding of doctrine and privilege but moral 'standards', protesting against the repeal of the gin law and other social and moral evils. This same 'light' impelled him to resist Whig attempts to transform English society into a secular or 'pluralist' state. Although described as fighting for a politico-ecclesiastical state like that established by William Laud in the seventeenth century, Sherlock's ideals were not exactly those of Laud.⁶⁰ In championing a closer cooperation between Church and state, Sherlock

⁵⁸ On Wesley's appreciation of Sherlock see A Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: John Wesley, Evangelist* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1967) 42 ff. More approved of Sherlock's repudiation of heathen religions and endorsed his arguments for the historical authenticity and superiority of Christianity (*Practical Piety* 2: 65). Austen told Anna Austen (Sept 28: 1814) that 'I am very fond of Sherlock's Sermon's, prefer them to almost any. - ' (L 406).

⁵⁹ Hughes 1: lxx.

⁶⁰ Sherlock's political ideals were a closer cooperation of state and church, not a domination of the state by the church. Sherlock was less of a High Churchman than Laud (putting less emphasis on the sacraments), and whereas Laud was sympathetic towards Rome, Sherlock was always her strong opponent. Most importantly, Sherlock, who was characterized by an enlightened spirit, entirely lacked the spirit of bitter partisanship and intolerance that characterized Laud with regard to his avid persecution of Puritans and Non-Conformists.

might have been fighting for a lost cause, but he was successful in delaying the policy of secularisation. He was not simply reactionary, but intent on preserving what he saw as valuable from the past. Thus 'he did not stand in irreconcilable hostility to the eighteenth-century idea, but adapted himself to it, endeavour[ing] to pilot into his own period certain conceptions which he learnt from his father and which he considered of abiding worth'.⁶¹

His funeral orator, Dr Nicholls, torn between father and son, praised them both, but ultimately recognized the son's superiority:

The father [William Sherlock] lived in more difficult times, and had much to struggle with, and perhaps had more of labour in his constitution. The son [Thomas Sherlock] was more bright and brilliant, and a greater compass of thought and genius went along with him. The one wrote with great care and circumspection, as having many adversaries to contend with; the other with greater ease and freedom, as rising superior to all opposition. Indeed, the son had much the advantages of the father in respect to the time and other circumstances of his life, not to say what I believe must be owned by all, that his natural abilities and talents were much greater.⁶²

These superior 'natural abilities and talents' soon displayed themselves as Sherlock developed a name for himself as a popular preacher at the Temple Church, a reputation which despite the criticism of his bitter opponent, Dr Conyers Middleton,⁶³ Pope's partisan and uncomplimentary reference to him in *The Dunciad*,⁶⁴ and Paul Whitehead's scathing

⁶¹ E Carpenter 87.

⁶² Extract from Nicholls's funeral sermon on Sherlock, *Gentleman's Magazine*, 32 (1762) 23.

⁶³ Hughes 1: xliv. Cf. Walpole's reference to this animosity in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W S Lewis, 48 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1937-84): 20 and Walpole's *Letters to Mann* 4: 134.

⁶⁴ 'While Sherlock, Hare and Gibson preach in vain', *The Dunciad in Four Books* (1742) III: 204, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt 759. Pope disliked him because he consistently supported Walpole in the House of Lords. For more information on Pope's attitude to Sherlock, see James Sutherland (ed.), *Alexander Pope, The Dunciad* (London: Methuen, 1953) 312-313, note to *Dunciad* III: 323.

description of him in *The State Dunces*,⁶⁵ endured into Victorian times. One can suggest several reasons for this popularity, chief among them his practical, rather than contemplative approach, his orthodoxy and his idiolectic use of legal jargon.

Like a true son of the seventeenth/eighteenth century ('an epoch persuaded of the falseness of mystery'),⁶⁶ and of his father, who attacked John Owen in his first work, *The Knowledge of Jesus Christ and Union with Him* (1674), Sherlock shows a distaste for mysticism (though never criticising his colleague, Law, who became progressively more mystical),⁶⁷ promulgating instead a more 'action-orientated' holiness, which probably constitutes his appeal for Austen and More. Thus, Sherlock, in his exposition of Matthew 5: 48,⁶⁸ suggests that it is absurd to think that sinful people can ever think of attaining the perfection of the Godhead, but it is perfectly reasonable and appropriate for them to 'aim at a resemblance of the divine Perfection' (Hughes 2: 370). No asceticism is advocated and no promises of mystical union on earth are offered, but an eminently rational and pragmatic approach to 'righteous' living. Therefore, while advocating frequent, judicious self-examination as a means of spiritually taking stock, in his discourse on Psalm 19: 12,⁶⁹ Sherlock forbids morbid self-interrogation and prolonged moral chastening, urging his readers speedily to make confession, and appropriate God's forgiveness (*TD* 3: 44).

⁶⁵ 'Faithful to his Fee / Proving Parliament dependent to be free', *The State Dunces* (1733) II: 244-5. In his *Memoirs*, Whitehead sneeringly suggested that 'if the lawn'd Levite's earthly vote be sold, then Henley's shop and Sherlock's are the same.' (II: 63-4). For further unflattering references see Sutherland 454.

⁶⁶ Sykes observes that this impulse found outward expression in architectural purging: 'Not only cathedrals of the English Church, but that of Notre Dame, suffered whitewashing from the laudable desire to inculcate in the minds of worshippers the doctrine that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. To an epoch persuaded of the falsity of mystery and reacting from its cultivation of dim religious light, Gothic architecture seemed an abomination, the dark corners of whose buildings should be brought into the clear white light of day.' Sykes, *Church and State* 233.

⁶⁷ Sherlock's contemporary, William Law (1686-1761), who wrote against Hoadley during the Bangorian Controversy (1717-19) and Mandeville and Tindal in the Deist Controversy, was also renowned for *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life, Adapted to the State and Condition of All Christians* (1728). The latter, which enjoyed unprecedented popularity, is reputed to have influenced the Wesley brothers and sparked the Evangelical movement. Under the influence of Jacob Boehme's writings (1575-1624), Law produced two mystical treatises, *An Appeal to all that Doubt* (1743) and *The Way to Divine Knowledge* (1752). Sherlock does not mention these two works, which, given his distaste for contemplation, it is unlikely he would have endorsed.

⁶⁸ 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect'.

⁶⁹ 'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults'.

Likewise, with regard to the responsibility of wealth, Sherlock's sermon on Luke 12: 21⁷⁰ and the rich man and Lazarus (*TD* 2: 349 ff.), argues that not all riches are the result of 'Injustice and Oppression', but many are 'the Blessing of God on honest Labour and Industry' or the rewards of 'Contentment and Resignation . . . to the Providence of the Almighty' (*TD* 2: 349). Although neutral in themselves, riches only become dangerous if one becomes inordinately attached to them, for then '[t]hey beget an irreligious Confidence and Presumption in the Heart of Man, inclining him to forget God' (2: 358). Similarly, though wealth can make one comfortable, it cannot ward off accident, sickness or death. Using homely down-to-earth *exempla*, he observes that even the wealthy can be suddenly injured or killed by a falling roof-tile and that gout and kidney stones are no 'respecter of persons' (*TD* 2: 366).

Yet Sherlock's sermons offered more than cheerful morality popularly considered the preserve of Latitudinarians who, as conservatives complained 'forsook the Gospel for the philosophy of morality' and 'abandoned power and force' in favour of eloquent-sounding moral platitudes. Among those who deplored this tendency were Bishop Hurd, (endorsed by Archbishops Secker and other influential divines),⁷¹ who complained in 1761, that 'the common way of sermonizing had become most wretched, and even the best models very defective'. Sherlock not only recuperated orthodox doctrine in his discourses and dissertations, but true to his High Church sympathies, continued to venerate patristic literature of which Latitudinarians and Deists (in an effort to simplify and universalise their doctrine), were dismissive. Thus, Sherlock's use of the Fathers (especially Origen, Eusebius and Jerome) in conjunction with contemporary sources (such as Grotius and Helvétius), not only imparts an authoritative and scholarly air to his theological works,⁷²

⁷⁰ 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God'.

⁷¹ *Abbey and Overton* 2: 492-93.

⁷² Thus Sherlock invokes the opinions of the early Greek and Latin Fathers in his dissertation on 2 Peter. In taking issue with Grotius and Helvetius, he quotes Origen, Eusebius and Jerome on matters of canonical authority and Petrine authorship. Here, as elsewhere, he avoids their allegorical readings and consults them only on historical, textual or doctrinal questions. His conservatism is also evidenced by his consulting what he calls the 'original' Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old and New Testaments in an attempt to recover the 'true' meaning of Scripture.

but distinguishes him from the divines⁷³ who discarded the Fathers and other tools of traditional Scriptural exegesis. Yet opposition to mysticism and loyalty to orthodoxy and patristic literature are not sufficient to constitute popularity of Sherlock's kind. It was I suggest, owing largely to a development of his forceful, highly individual, legal idiolect.

Building on the classically elegant and correct style acquired at Eton and Cambridge, (yet distinguishing himself from the eloquence of Bishop Atterbury and approximating more to the plainness and simplicity of Bishop Fleetwood and Archbishop Sharp),⁷⁴ Sherlock early developed an individualistic juridical style. His practical polemical experience (garnered in the Bentley affair, 1715-20, the Bangorian Controversy, 1717 and his opposition to anti-ecclesiastical Bills 1731-38) provided him with a useful apprenticeship in argumentative writing and laid the foundation of his lucid, forceful and characteristically legal style – an appropriate one for addressing a congregation of eminent male lawyers at the Temple Church. His matter-of-fact practicality (which distinguishes him from the speculative approaches of the Latitudinarians Clarke and Hoadley and the more philosophical approach of his anti-Deist colleague, Joseph Butler) induced him to avoid ‘unnecessary’ enquiries into theoretical origins of government and doctrine, and focus on the ‘facts and evidence’ in Scripture. In demonstrating that these ‘facts’ are more valuable than ‘idle speculations’ and ‘Christian truths’ not antagonistic to philosophy and ‘Nature’, one of Sherlock’s favourite legal tactics is to introduce his propositions by appealing to assumptions shared by the opposition (Deists) and then proceed to argue his case. In this way he disarms his opponents from the start, by securing early agreement to key propositions, and then methodically, but speedily, reasons them over to his side, as we shall see in *The Tryal of the Witnesses* in the next section. Thus Sherlock innovatively embodies empirical exegetical approach in legal discourse.

⁷³ Among those who repudiated patristic authority were the celebrated preacher, Dr Samuel Clarke, Bishop Fleetwood, Dean Swift and Archbishops Potter and Secker, who all cautioned against an over-reverence for antiquity and urged people rather to use their own reason. By contrast, Sherlock, Bishop Stillingfleet and Lord Chancellor King, like the earlier divines, Bishops Bull, Emlyn and Leslie, quoted from ‘primitive sources’. The controversial Dr Conyers Middleton attacked the credulity of the fathers in *A Free Enquiry* (1740) and was answered by John Wesley.

⁷⁴ Described by Philip Doddridge as ‘the glory of English orators’ and who employed a language described by William Whiston as ‘honey sweet, as soft as heavenly dew’. See E Carpenter (236) on Sherlock, and Abbey and Overton (2: 492) on Doddridge, Fleetwood and Sharp.

Yet, careful not to let legal techniques and jargon alienate the general reader in his sermons, he balances this with an appealing pragmatism, which enables him to adapt his doctrine to every day living. A rigorous practicality and characteristic terseness of expression thus enliven the formal style of the discourse, distinguishing it from the periodic style of his predecessor Hooker,⁷⁵ the otiose style of Archbishop Herring and the sedate, leisurely style of Paley. Hence, Sherlock's sermons abound with many memorable, aphoristic sayings such as: 'Bread is the Nourishment of the Animal, but Knowledge the Food of Man', and 'Holiness is as necessary to our spiritual Life, as Eating and Drinking are to our natural'. And his penetrative insight and ability to weigh and judge competing merits, are used to sum up his arguments as in: 'the great End of Religion is future Happiness; and consequently the best Religion is that which will most surely direct us to eternal Life'.⁷⁶

SHERLOCK'S THEOLOGICAL WORKS

Before proceeding to an analysis of the polemical strategies of particular works, it seems appropriate to expound the main lines of Sherlock's defence of revealed religion as it can be inferred from his *corpus* as a whole.

DEFENCE OF REVELATION

With his customary clarity, Sherlock insists on reason and sound judgement as the chief criteria for assessing all propositions, yet at the same time he argues that where God's laws are never contrary to reason, they may frequently be superior to it. In this way, against

⁷⁵ Herring was Bishop of Bangor and later Archbishop of York and Canterbury. Sherlock was involved with him in a dispute over options in 1736. Herring's style in both his correspondence with Sherlock and his sermons is a witness to his prolixity.

⁷⁶ Hughes 3: 353.

'enlightened sceptics' of the eighteenth century and proponents of Natural Religion, Sherlock vindicates revelation, attested to by prophecy and miracles in the *Scripta Lex*, as a reasonable, historical and efficacious religion.

In order to appreciate Sherlock's ongoing debate between Natural Religion and revelation, it is best to consult his own clarification of the terms. In the first of *The Temple Discourses* he maintains that the most perfect religion is that which 'directs us in all Things to act according to the Will of God' (*TD* 1: 36). He avers that 'There are but two Ways by which we can possibly arrive at this Knowledge: One is by following the Dictates of Reason and Nature . . . and this is called Natural Religion. The other Way . . . is by having it declared to us, either immediately by God himself, or by others sufficiently authorized and commissioned by him to make such Declarations in his Name: And this is what we call Revelation.' (*TD* 1: 37)

Sherlock states his position clearly from the beginning: 'Between the two it is no hard Matter to judge, which is the safest and securest to rely on' (*TD* 1: 38) and the remainder of his works are dedicated to showing why this is so. Yet, he is no narrow dogmatist, for as Carpenter observes, his 'balanced rationalism enabled him as a writer of the Age of Reason, to admit the most extreme claims of reason, without compromising his orthodox position'.⁷⁷ Though championing revelation, Sherlock was concerned to show not only the differences between natural and revealed religion, but the affinities. From establishing the common basis he goes on to show the divergence between the two.

Although Sherlock agreed that the 'immutable Laws of Morality can be verified by the Reason' (*TD* 2: 121), he points out that it is one thing to verify them by reason and another thing to discover and maintain them by it. Thus he dismisses as irrelevant the Deist assumption that revelation is inconsistent with the wisdom of God who gave humans reason (*TD* 1: 30).

Similarly in vindicating revelation, Sherlock contends that if the laws of God are only declaratory of the original law of nature and reason and nothing more, then it is virtually impossible to claim that Christianity is unique or that it is much more than a set of rules of abstract morality. Intent on vindicating God against mechanistic charges (an

⁷⁷ E Carpenter 236.

extension of Paley's watchmaker) and arguing that although the 'Rule of Law' is the Will of God, and not merely some external law to which God is subject, he explains that

All Powers are the Gift of the Creator and every Being subsists not by the Law and appointment of Nature, but by the Law and appointment of God, Who is Master of His own Laws and Appointments, and can change them whenever He pleases . . . (Hughes 1: 274)

This argument of 'cause' is an important premise, for he uses it to vindicate both miracles and the immortality of the soul. Deists (who objected to the validity of the supernatural in the form of miracles) held that Old Testament prophecy was not only *sufficient* in itself, but *superior* to New Testament methods as a means of revelation. Anthony Collins argued that Old Testament prophecy (which he maintained was merely figurative and not literally fulfilled) was superior to 'the immediate Word of Christ' and Gospel miracles. (See the more extensive treatment of this point below, in the *Six Discourses*). Christ's resurrection, the most important of the New Testament miracles, was the Deists' chief target and Sherlock set himself to vindicate it in *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* where he argues, among other things, that if there is a cause sufficient to the undertaking, then miracles cannot be ruled out *a priori*.

Against those who maintained (1) that a future life cannot be verified by the senses and (2) that the soul cannot be immortal because it is beyond one's comprehension, Sherlock again invokes the argument of 'cause'. By using an illustration from nature, he argues that it is no case against it, that a human being is incapable of forming a conception of an unembodied soul:

We see many Productions and Works of Nature every Day, the Cause of which is secret and remote and not discoverable by the Senses; and yet, no Man doubts but that all these Effects have Causes . . . So then, a Thing's not being seen can be no Prejudice or Presumption against its Existence; since Things which are not seen are capable of being demonstrated. (TD 4: 280-81)

Sherlock consistently recognizes human beings as rational and accountable creatures who are given the freedom to assess which religion is the best. He argues that, looked at carefully from all angles, the revealed religion of Christianity, as contained in the Scriptures, fulfils all the positive requirements, being historically verifiable, reasonable, and proven by centuries of custom and use to be superior to all other religions.

In Christian countries where one's natural 'light of the eye' has been illuminated by Gospel revelation, one must test arguments against the truth of Scripture, and be guided by time-honoured orthodox interpretations of its doctrine. He warns against private or subjective interpretations/'judgements' of the Bible by some 'parties' who claim receiving specific 'messages' from God.⁷⁸ For Sherlock, revelation is sealed, and the historical 'Word of God', the *Scripta Lex*, the touchstone of all doctrine. Sherlock thus vindicates the means by which God chose to publish the Gospel, maintaining:

[t]hat writing is the best . . . Method of perpetuating the Testimony, and delivering down the Doctrine of Christ, uncorrupted to distant Ages and this Way has had the Consent and Approbation of all civilized Nations; for which it is that the *Scripta Lex* is used in the best writers to signify an instituted Law, as distinguished from the Law of Nature, arising either from Instinct or Reason. The Gospels then were published that they might be a standing Evidence to all Ages of God's Purpose to redeem the World by sending His Son to take our Nature upon Him, that he might die for our Sins and rise again for our Justification . . . (TD 1: 255)

He concludes that as it was 'absolutely necessary to convey this Knowledge to the World by a proper Authority', revelation was chosen as the most forceful, authoritative means of publishing and declaring it (TD 1: 255).

From validating revelation *per se*, Sherlock proceeds to vindicate prophecy and Gospel miracles. In *The Use and Intent of Prophecy* and *The Temple Discourse*, Sherlock

⁷⁸ Sherlock specifically attacks Quakers, but some Methodists also manifest this. Cf the following extract from *The Journals of John Wesley*, in which he gives an account of his visit to Georgia (1736): 'Sat. July 10. This evening we had such a storm of thunder and lightning as I never saw before in Georgia. This voice of God, too, told me that I was not fit to die; since I was afraid, rather than desirous of it.' *Journals of John Wesley* in 3 vols (London: J M Dent, n.d.) 1: 35.

argues that both Old Testament prophecy and New Testament miracles are valid and necessary means of revelation, in that they supply proof of the divine authority of the revelation and the divine commission of the agents. As regards the ‘mystery’ of the atonement, the main stumbling block to Deists, Sherlock argues that ‘the Rule is plain and simple’: as sinners, we are offered pardon which is both miraculous and incomprehensible, but that need not prevent us from enjoying it in the same way that a criminal is not barred from enjoying a pardon though he does not know why the Prince granted it (1: 59). Here, as Carpenter points out, Sherlock adopts a well-known argument of Butler’s, that before condemning any proceeding as unreasonable, we must know all the circumstances which condition the proceeding, but in the affairs of God this is clearly impossible.⁷⁹ Humans are unqualified to judge the fitness of the redemption because apart from relating to us, it is probably also designed to ‘answer the general Ends and Purposes of God’s Government in the universal and moral World’ (Hughes 1: 173). In thus demonstrating the limitations of human reason, Sherlock stresses that speculation must bow to fact.

Finally he warns that as the Gospel is ‘founded in the express Revelation of God, [it] carries with it such Authority as cannot with Safety be either despised or rejected; since it is the Word of God, it is Death to forsake it’. Thus, ‘Religion properly so called, admits of no Choice; in all the essential Parts of it we must obey it or perish. If indeed it comes from God, it is not safe to reject it.’ He concludes with the challenge: ‘The Light shines forth in the World, whether you will receive it or not, the Consequence is upon you and your Soul, and you must answer it.’ (*TD* 1: 31-32)

TWO-PRONG TACTICS

Sherlock impartially examines Natural Religion’s claims to authority, and then employs a dual or two-pronged tactic to confute them. Avoiding the speculative approach, he maintains that the questions of revelation and miracles must be addressed by examining facts, using first what Carpenter calls his ‘historic’ approach, and then going on to present scriptural evidence.

⁷⁹ E Carpenter 251-52.

Sherlock argues that ‘if Nature can instruct us sufficiently in Religion, we have no Need to go anywhere else, but whether Nature can do so or no, is in truth, rather a Question of Fact than of Speculation’ (*TD* I: 5). Thus by examining ‘facts and evidence’, he avoids any *a priori* speculation as to whether unaided human reason is sufficient. In examining his ‘evidence’ he begins with ‘heathen’ countries and their ‘barbaric customs’ and enquires whether ‘Nature has been sufficient to direct them’. Clearly ‘she’ has not, for the ‘Blindness and Ignorance of the Heathen World are too plain a Proof of the Corruption of Nature’. Reason is patently impotent to condemn their ‘follies and superstitions’ and to allow them to discover unaided the external rules of morality, and live up to them (*TD* 1: 7-15).

In a survey of ‘the State of Religion in the heathen World’, Sherlock shows that even ancient Greece, with its high attainment in philosophy and the arts, could not free itself from subjection to idols. If the wise Socrates was unable to emancipate himself from sacrifice to idols, what right have we to suppose that we can surpass him without knowledge of the Gospel? (*TD* 1: 166). Sherlock concludes that ‘[t]he State of Religion in the Heathen World [is] a manifest Proof of how much Nature stands in need of Assistance’ for it can neither redeem humans nor make them holy (*TD* 1:10-13). Only the Christian Gospel can illuminate humankind in their ‘universal Blindness, awaken the moral sense and lead the mind out of Error and Idolatry into Life and Immortality’. Therefore, ‘Since the Light of the Gospel has shown throughout the World, Nature has been much improving’ (*TD* 1: 4) and ‘in every Nation that names the Name of Christ even Reason and Nature see and condemn the follies which others still for Want of Help are held in Subjection to’ (*TD* 1:10).

In answering rationalist attacks on revelation, Sherlock proves that Christianity is, both an historical and a reasonable religion. He concedes that an irrational religion has no right to demand the allegiance of men and women, for intellect and revelation are the gifts of the same true God. If reason and intellect are opposed, one would have to resort to a blind, questioning faith or abandon revelation as Deists had done. Facts, he argues, may be *consistent* with reason, but not *discoverable* by it; they are *above* reason. In this way Sherlock establishes that Christianity is a *supra-* (and not *infra*)- rational religion and that finite minds are incapable of fully comprehending divine wisdom and mercy.

Sherlock's 'historical enquiry' reveals that Natural Religion, with its unaided reason (or 'unenlightened Nature') has been insufficient to impart crucial knowledge about the Deity and our salvation. Proof of this is that the nations whom the Gospel has not reached still live in ignorance and superstition. The historical argument is limited for it can only show the necessity of the Gospel to awaken a moral sense, but cannot prove the necessity of a positive religion, and here the 'religious' approach proves its usefulness. The Gospel is built on the supposition, 'That all are Sinners and are fallen short of the Glory of God'; to regard humans as self-sufficient is 'a splendid fiction, for there is both evidential and historic proof of a Fall' (*TD* 1: 55).

Appealing to shared assumptions, Sherlock argues that as Deists recognize God as a perfect Being, they must concede that He would not have created imperfect people. The latter presupposes a fall from an original perfect state. The heathen in their 'natural' state of 'superstition and folly' thus provide 'evidence' and attest to the necessity of a fact such as the Fall. In *A Dissertation on the Sense of the Antients before Christ upon the Circumstances and Consequences of the Fall*, Sherlock establishes the historical accuracy of Genesis by substantiating its account of the 'fall' of Adam and Eve from corroborative accounts in the oldest canonical book, Job.

As a consequence of the fall, he argues, humans are in a state of weakness and cannot meet divine standards. 'Reason teaches what is right; but alas! It wants no proof to show that the best of us fall short of Perfection. The most Natural Religion can do is to proclaim the law, but it cannot fulfil it' (Hughes 2: 288). Sherlock then asks the pertinent question: 'If reason is so powerful (as it is argued) why is it unable to assist fallen humankind?' Natural Religion is right in insisting on the purity and holiness of God's nature and on a corresponding pure and holy worship, but this is impossible for people who have lost their purity and holiness (*TD* 1:68). To illustrate this, Sherlock compares Natural Religion, which expects purity and holiness from corrupted nature, to the Egyptian task-masters who demanded bricks from the Israelite slaves without supplying straw. Similarly, in presenting a sinner with rules of conduct, Natural Religion is like a court of law which cruelly compels a criminal to study the laws that condemn him. (*TD* 3: 299)

Sherlock then concludes that Natural Religion is insufficient and Deistical logic contradictory. Although it stresses the righteousness of God and admits the necessity of repentance, it is unable to offer 'a remedy for the Terrors of Guilt', because it 'is founded

upon Reasons and Speculations too exact, and too refined, to be of common Use to Mankind'. He concludes that 'this last Reason alone will . . . sufficiently justify the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in proposing to the World a safe and general Method for the Salvation of Sinners' (*TD* 2: 326-27). He concludes by exposing the 'noble fictions' (self-sufficiency) and 'insubstantial hopes' (but no proof of salvation) of Natural Religion against the guaranteed promises of revealed religion.

Sherlock's maintaining that, constitutionally, humankind is prone to sin, that acceptance with God can only be achieved through the atonement and that Natural Religion can proclaim the law, but not fulfil it or deliver from it, elicited Charles Bulley's impassioned reply, *Observations upon Natural Religion* (1756). Yet, Sherlock is careful never to depreciate human reason. He admits that 'Religion is founded on the Principles of Reason and Nature' (*TD* 1: 17) and concedes that ' [t]is impossible that any true Revelation should contradict or evacuate any clear Dictates of *Natural Religion*; therefore the Principles of *Natural Religion* must be supposed for the Foundation of the Revealed.' (*TD* 1:76) In arguing that the Gospel is not antagonistic to Nature, but built upon its foundations, he avers that 'The Glory of the Gospel is that it has fulfilled the hopes of Nature' (*TD* 2: 383).

THE USE AND INTENT OF PROPHECY IN THE SEVERAL AGES OF THE WORLD

THE SIX DISCOURSES

Sherlock's first overtly anti-Deist publication comprises the six discourses entitled *The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the Several Ages of the World* (1725). These originated as a series of sermons delivered from the Temple pulpit in April and May 1724. They made such a favourable impression on the public, that Sherlock was persuaded to publish them a year later (1725) republishing them in 1749 with the addition of four dissertations and two appendices.

In demonstrating that the Gospel fulfils, yet is superior to the Mosaic law and the prophets in *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, Sherlock invokes the image of light in the form of a candle, the day-star, dawn, and eventually full daylight, to embody the idea of the progressive, but carefully-monitored, divine enlightenment of humankind over the ages. Finally he warns that all who have had the privilege of receiving the Gospel ‘light of the eye’ will be held culpable on the final day of reckoning if they reject it in favour of unaided reason, which he equates with spiritual darkness.

The Use and Intent of Prophecy was popularly regarded as a reply to the Deist, Anthony Collins’s work, *A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), in which Collins argued that the fulfilment of prophecy in the life of Jesus Christ was secondary, secret, allegorical and mystical and therefore not a valid proof of Christianity. *The Use and Intent* admirably answers these objections and as a form of proof, elaborates a consistent scheme of prophecy throughout the Old Testament to show that Christianity is rooted in Judaism. Yet, Sherlock was unwilling that it be regarded as a definitive rebuttal of Collins’s work, which, in his preface he maintained had already ‘been undertaken to the satisfaction of the public by a much abler hand’ (Hughes 4: iii). Instead, in his preface, he claims his work is designed to show the ‘Use and Intent of Prophecy in the several Ages of the World and the manifest Connexions between the Prophecies of every Age’ (4: iii). Thus he stresses that his purpose is not to refute Collins, but to enhance the understanding of God’s use of prophecy over the ages as part of His overall plan to enlighten humankind. Thus Sherlock offers a systematic and succinct overview of the continuity of prophecy, examining both predictions and historical fulfilment and explaining why God chose this means. In addition, there is an exciting aspect of originality in the fourth discourse on the Noahic covenant, which seems to have been overlooked by critics of his work.

Also in the preface, Sherlock warns against viewing prophetic predictions in isolation or independently of one another, as Deists did. In order to form a ‘right judgement of Christianity’, one must view the predictions and their fulfilment as ‘a chain of prophecies reaching through several thousands of years, delivered at different times, yet manifestly subservient to one and the same administration of Providence from beginning to end’ (4: iii). Therefore, prophecy was not intended solely for the sakes of those in whose time the events predicted are to happen, but for all people of all times (4: 26).

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At the outset, he deals with Deist charges of religious fraud, arguing that viewed historically, and as a logical and comprehensive continuum of the unfolding of previously predicted events, it is impossible that all the prophecies (especially the ones relating to Christ) are fraudulent. From a purely practical point of view, it is highly improbable that ‘over so many ages successively proper persons should be found to carry on the cheat’ (4: iii).

The six prophecy dissertations are based on a verse (2 Peter 1:9), which gave rise to the heated controversy concerning the importance of prophecy as against other kinds of divine revelation:

We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arises in your hearts. (4: 7)

Deists attempted to discredit the literal fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, arguing that it was only figurative and incomplete. It was also argued that on the basis of the phrase ‘more sure word’, what they regarded as ‘partial, secret and allegorical’ prophecy, was superior to Gospel revelation. Sherlock, representing orthodoxy, argues that Old Testament prophecy, which forms part of God’s overall scheme of redemption, is indeed consistent and literally fulfilled and, yet, finally superseded by the ‘more sure word’ of ‘Gospel Evidence’ (Christ’s and the apostles’ testimony and miracles).

Sherlock begins by clearing St Peter of fraud. He quotes the passages in which the latter appeals to the visual and auditory testimony of the apostles who had been with Christ on the mount of transfiguration. They were ‘eye-witnesses of the majesty of Christ and . . . heard a voice attesting to his Divinity from the excellent glory’ (4: 11). They *heard* God’s voice attesting to the divinity of His Son, Jesus Christ, and *saw* Christ transfigured in almost blinding glory before them. Thus, as both ear- and eye- witnesses of Christ’s transfiguration they contribute important evidence.

The eye is significant, for traditionally an eyewitness in a law-court bears testimony from personal observation. Sherlock argues that the disciples’ eyewitness testimony is incontrovertible proof to Christ’s miracles and resurrection, but there is also another dimension to the image of the eye, for the latter calls to mind Christ’s earlier words

concerning ‘the light of the eye’ (Matt 6:22) – the individual’s measure of spiritual enlightenment, heightened by the light of revelation.

On the mount of transfiguration the normal human vision of the disciples had been miraculously expanded to accommodate a supra-human vision of the glorified Christ. This was given in order to convince them of Christ’s unique power and authority as the Son of God – a proof superior to prophecy. Equally important, Moses, the first law-giver, and the great Old Testament prophet, Elijah, are seen together with Christ in the cloud of glory on the mount: thus, law and prophecy are not excluded, but fulfilled and eclipsed by Christ, the miracle-working Son. Through the physical eye, chosen people in the Bible perceived Christ’s glory, but through the spiritual eye, anyone who is receptive may receive Christ’s light, which is necessary for salvation.

Sherlock backtracks in order to set the verse in its historical context. He explains that Peter wrote his second epistle in order to encourage the Christians who were undergoing severe trials and persecutions, which he argues had been prophesied (4: 8). However, he encourages by telling them that they will be ‘kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed’ and that ‘a certain deliverance is at hand’. When taunted by ‘scoffers and their irreligious insult: Where is the prophecy of his coming?’ they were to remember how in times past God had honoured prophecies and would continue to do so and (at the right time) deliver them.

To demonstrate the power of God and embody this hope of deliverance in a meaningful way, St Peter shows that the ‘antient prophets and . . . inspir’d preachers of the Gospel’ can be seen as part of a chain of prophecies, extending from the Old into the New Testament. In extolling God’s wisdom and foresight, St Peter takes the image of light (used in Scripture to describe God and the written Word) and adapts it as a metaphor for the incremental quality of prophecy and revelation. Sherlock builds on this image, describing the divinely monitored, progressive spiritual enlightenment of the world through the ages, culminating in the full illumination of the coming of Christ in the New Testament.

Firstly, there is the partial light of Old Testament prophecy, the star-light glimmerings, which is followed by the dawn and full daylight of Gospel revelation. St Peter compares ‘the word of prophecy’ to a ‘light shining in a dark place’ and to ‘the brightness which is ushered in by the day-star’. Sherlock continues:

The ‘word of prophecy’, then, is here compared by St Peter to the glimmering light of a candle seen at a distance in a dark night; which, though it gives some direction, yet is nothing compared to clear day-light. Is not this now a choice account of the evidence of the Gospel? Are we still surrounded on all sides with darkness, assisted by one only distant glimmering light? Was it thus that Christ came to be a ‘light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Israel?’ St Peter, in his first epistle, tells all Christians that they ‘are called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light’. Ask St Paul what state Christians are in: he will tell you ‘that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, has shone unto them’: (2 Cor. iv. 4). Ask the Evangelists; they will tell you, ‘the day-spring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.’ (4: 13-14)

In contrast to the feeble ‘glimmering of a candle in a dark night seen at a distance’ (obscure Old Testament prophecies), the Gospel presents Christ clearly as the ‘day-spring from on high’. The double metaphorical force of the compound, ‘day-spring’, is conveyed by day (the acme of natural light) and ‘spring’, which suggests both origin (or fountain-head) and energy as in a jump or leap. New Testament revelation is therefore like a leap forward from the obscure and partial revelation of the Old Testament.

In the first discourse, Sherlock discusses the ‘candle glimmerings’ of Old Testament prophecy (such as that given to Daniel, Hosea and others) and concludes that prophecy was never intended to be a very distinct evidence and therefore inferior to the light or knowledge to be received ‘when the fulness of time comes’, that is, the coming of Christ (4: 30-31). Not all prophecies are of equal clarity and most of the literal prophecies relating to Christ are not always ‘the plainest’ (4: 33). Prophecies which transcended ‘nature and experience’ such as those relating to the virgin birth and the resurrection, were thus ‘obscure and dark’ to the Jews who laboured under seeming inconsistencies in them, but ‘the resurrection of Christ reconciled all these difficulties’ (4: 33-34,41). In distinguishing between prophecies fulfilled in the Old and New Testaments and arguing that Christ was greater than Moses, Sherlock observes that no one foretold the coming of Moses, the Old Testament lawgiver, as they did of Christ. Thus, the case of the Gospel is

unique (4: 36-37). Sherlock concludes by isolating the point to be tried on the evidence of prophecy:

Is there enough plain [evidence] to shew us that Christ is the person foretold under the Old Testament or no? If there is, we are at the end of our enquiry, and want no further help from prophecy; especially since we, to use St Peter's expression, have, in this case, 'seen the Day dawn and enjoyed the marvellous Light of the Gospel of God.' (4: 38)

The importance of this becomes apparent when one remembers that Christ's divinity was one of the chief tenets under Deist attack, and Sherlock's imaginative use of light imagery serves his purpose well in defending it. In essence he asks, 'Who can be content with the inadequate candle-glimmerings of Old Testament prophecy, when Christ, the predicted 'day-spring from on high' has come?'

In the third discourse, Sherlock argues that prophecies were given, not to entertain one or satisfy one's curiosity about the future, but for 'the promotion of virtue and religion, and the general peace and happiness of mankind' (4: 40). He then addresses the Deist argument that human reason is a sufficient and plain enough law to live by. Although he concedes that '[p]rophecy can never contradict or override this Light', humankind's sinful nature demonstrates the inadequacy of the light of mere reason. He then appeals to assumptions shared by Deists – that people were created perfect, and free moral agents, but fell from this state of innocence and could not attain it again:

For since man was created a moral agent, with freedom of will, it was possible for him to fall; and consequently, possibly he may have fallen. Let us suppose for the present this to be the case; and tell us now, from Natural Religion, what must such sinners do? Repent, you will say; for it is agreeable to the goodness of God to accept repentance, and to restore offenders to his favour. Very well; but how often will this remedy serve? May sin and repentance go on for ever in a perpetual round? (4: 46-47).

Whereas earlier Sherlock showed that under natural law there is no guarantee of a pardon to those who repent, now he stresses the tragic futility of a vicious circle of sin and repentance without positive hope of a cure.

It is clear then that ‘our hopes must flow from another spring’, thus Sherlock directs one away from the empty cisterns of Natural Religion to ‘the only fountain-head and true source of life, the promises of God which find their fulfilment in Christ’ (4: 48). Thus, gradually undermining the shaky premises of Natural Religion by eliciting agreement to fundamental premises and reinforcing these with powerful rhetorical questions, Sherlock vindicates God’s use of prophecy in the redemption scheme by using natural (light and water) imagery.

In his ‘historical’ survey of humankind, beginning with Adam and Eve, Sherlock argued that in pre-lapsarian times Natural Religion needed no other assistance, but after the fall, human beings needed some other form of hope. God supplied this in the form of the ‘sure word of prophecy, which, as the foundation of all that has ever been since, deserves particular consideration’ (4: 42). Here by means of linguistic transformation, fountainheads (or springs) become foundations – both sources for the future.

By examining the prophecies given to Adam and Eve immediately after the fall and, in particular, the one concerning deliverance from evil given to Eve in Genesis 3:15,⁸⁰ Sherlock explains that it is absurd to interpret this literally, for it clearly refers to a future deliverance through Jesus Christ, ‘but when, or where, or by what means, they could not understand’ (4: 54) and they were required to exercise faith in the meantime.

Throughout, Sherlock stresses the omniscience and foresight of God, who had pre-planned His method of the salvation and restoration of humankind. The incarnation of Christ in ‘the fulness of time’ implies that although God had devised his redemption plan long before the Fall, He waited until ‘the right time’ before sending Christ. Sherlock then examines prophecies from creation to Noah’s time, showing how they imparted progressive illumination. He also examines the institution of sacrifice, which was fulfilled and superseded in Christ (4: 48 ff).

In discourse four, Sherlock gives his original explication of the ante-diluvian prophecies given to Lamech, Noah’s father (‘in the eleventh century after creation’), and

⁸⁰ Where God tells the serpent: ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; and it shall bruise his head and thou shalt bruise his heel.’

suggests that they were fulfilled after the flood in a period that approximates to the Golden Age. He explains that God's curse on the earth after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:17) lasted 'in all its rigor' until the days of Lamech – a period comprising some thousand years (4: 61). Then Lamech, Noah's father, anticipating the birth of his son, prophesied that Noah 'should comfort them concerning the works and toil of their hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.' (4: 73). This fulfilled the expectation in Lamech's time, 'among those who had not quite forgot God, of a deliverance from the curse of the Fall'. This 'deliverance' was no new revelation or promise, but as a means of encouraging Noah, God fulfilled the 'covenant of temporal blessings', remitting the curse of the earth and restoring fruitful seasons restored as 'an earnest and pledge' of better things to come – that is, 'another Covenant, in another Age, and to be revealed by him, whose Province it was to bring Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel' (4: 79-80).

In his modest preface, Sherlock suggested that his unusual interpretation might be useful in extending one's understanding of Providential working: 'If you allow the account, it carries the series of God's dispensations towards mankind in a natural gradation, and opens a new Scene of Providence.' (4: iv) The last phrase, which is rich in visual connotations, suggests the later eighteenth-century 'improvers-of-the-estate' who felled trees to open up new scenes. Although anachronistic, it can be seen as opening up new vistas of orthodox Scriptural exegesis, which will have the effect of inciting one to increased trust in God and greater piety. Therefore, in support of his theory he argues:

— If you reject the account, there seems to be a great gap in the sacred history; and the new world sets out just where the old one left off; and yet who would not expect that so great a change should be attended with some new degree of light, to comfort and support the poor remains of mankind.
(4: iv)

In partially remitting the curse of the ground after the deluge, God is portrayed as the beneficent sender of encouragement, yet as Sherlock is careful to point out, it was not the first curse (human mortality) that God remitted, for only the coming of Christ, 'the Seed who should bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel' could remit that. Noah was merely an instrument of temporal relief and light, presiding over a 'Golden Age' (a

less hostile and more fruitful earth) designed to encourage those who survived the flood. Furthermore, in privileging his younger son when giving the paternal blessing, Noah was again the instrument of predictive prophecy, ‘for Noah foresaw that the greater blessing still behind, even the covenant that should restore man to himself and his Maker, should be conveyed through the posterity of Shem’ (4: 80-81). Thus ironically, God’s dealings can challenge traditional hierarchical institutions such as primogeniture.

From Noah, Sherlock proceeds to the call of Abraham in the fifth discourse, maintaining that, ‘We are now advancing to times of greater light, to clearer and more distinct prophecies, and more nearly relating to God’s great dispensation of mercy, manifested by the revelation of his Son.’ (4: 90) God’s dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob comprehended both temporal and eternal blessings. Therefore, when He promised Abraham in Genesis 12:2, that ‘in his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed’, it was not confined to Jacob’s right of primogeniture, but referred also to the deliverance of humankind from the curse of the fall, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his overview of the history of the ‘commonwealth of Israel’, Sherlock argues that Old Testament prophecies were not limited to temporal blessings for the Jewish nation alone; though the ‘great depositum’ of prophecy was originally entrusted to the Jews, the redemption subsequently extended hope and light to all humankind through Christ (4: 103 ff.).

Sherlock next displays his originality of approach when, moving on to the New Testament in the sixth and final discourse, he discusses St Paul’s imaginative preaching methods in Athens. Here again he demonstrates his finesse in reader positioning. Knowing that his lawyer-audience are interested in the Deist/Natural Religion debate, he recreates a topical version of St Paul as an eighteenth-century rhetorician. St Paul’s flexibility in dealing with the Jews and the Athenians is shown by the way he adapts his approach to their respective historical and cultural traditions. Thus, when addressing the Jews, St Paul invokes the authority of Old Testament prophecy, but, in the case of the Athenians, he appeals to ‘sound and clear principles of Natural Religion and the miracles of the Gospel, the truth of which as they were matters of fact, was capable of undeniable evidence and demonstrations’ (4: 124). Thus, Sherlock reads St Paul (anachronistically) as appealing to the popular eighteenth-century principles of Natural Religion, but when it comes to the resurrection and the remission of sins, St Paul has to go beyond Natural Religion – in the

same way that he had to go beyond the limitations of the Mosaic law when addressing the Jews: ‘To the Jew, prophecy was given as first proof, but to the Gentile it was the last’ (4: 125). Sherlock explains that the Jews lived under a divine law, whereas other nations (such as the Athenians) were appointed to live under a natural law. Ultimately however, both Jews and Athenians find their revelation inadequate and have to go beyond their cultural and religious boundaries and embrace the truth of the Gospel.

In this way, Sherlock argues that the Mosaic covenant (although useful in its time) was not, nor ever intended to be, perpetual, and ‘Gospel light’ was, and still is, necessary. This description of the Pauline methodology (using principles of Natural Religion to enlist the sympathies of the Athenians) is further proof of Sherlock’s originality, demonstrating his ingenious use of current philosophical ideas to make a well-known passage relevant. And as will be shown later, More picks up on this idea in her *Essay on St Paul*. Yet, Sherlock’s preface (unusual for its self-deprecation and solicitation of the reader’s goodwill) betrays some nervousness at this innovation.

In summing up, Sherlock’s historical exposition of Old Testament prophecy in each main period demonstrates the divinely-appointed and meticulously graduated illumination of revelation which finds its consummation in the incarnation, death, resurrection and second coming of Christ. Firstly, he establishes the superiority of Gospel revelation over Old Testament prophecy, showing that the latter, although ultimately superseded, is nevertheless useful as a stage in the incremental illumination of humankind. Secondly, his emphasis on Christ as the predicted ‘day-spring on high’, is not only in keeping with his Christocentric stance, but the way in which he uses it is both logically and stylistically satisfying, for Jesus, as the light of the world, marks the zenith of both natural and revealed illumination. Thirdly, here as elsewhere in Sherlock’s works, revelation (in this sense, illumination) is inextricably linked with moral action and accountability, for those who have had more light will have more to answer for.

Finally, apart from Sherlock’s avowed polemical purpose (in refuting ‘open ridicule of Scriptural prophecy by impartially considering general and specific prophecies throughout the Old Testament’) his particular exposition of prophecy can be seen as a large eighteenth-century canvas on which are depicted various ‘scenes of Providence’ over the ages. In these scenes Sherlock removes the brushwood of Deist objections, improving the view for revealed religion and demonstrating that all these prophecies (from Adam and Eve

to New Testament times) lead logically to God's ultimate purpose of redeeming humankind through Jesus Christ. He concludes with almost feminine humility by saying that *The Use and Intent* is his way of 'throw[ing] in one mite as an offering to the love of Christ and his Gospel, in which I hope to live and die' (4: 131).

THE TRYAL OF THE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

In 1729, a few years after the first publication of *The Use and Intent of Prophecy* (1724/5), Sherlock published his most famous apologetic work, *The Tryal of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, in answer to Thomas Woolston's sceptical *Discourses on Miracles and a Vindication of the Resurrection*. In this scintillating piece of writing, Sherlock employed his legal knowledge to the purpose of an advocate pleading the cause in hand (the truth of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection) before a judge and a jury who had to decide on the evidence. The novelty and ingenuity of this exercise 'excited great applause and the work ran rapidly through eighteen editions in a time when a taste for literature was far from being universally diffused'.⁸¹

Miracles were a crucial part of the anti-Deist debate. As Carpenter observes, Christian apologists of the nineteenth century adopted a similar defence to rationalist attacks as that used by the eighteenth-century orthodox, offering objective 'real knowledge' against the subjectivity of natural laws, which are mere generalizations of human experience.⁸² Woolston (and later, Hume, in his essay on miracles in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*) wanted to rule out miracles *a priori*, as incapable of providing proof, but Sherlock, in *The Tryal*, argues (1) that the Resurrection and Miracles are all facts which can be judged by reason and (2) that it is impossible to rule out any event as contrary to the laws of nature

⁸¹ Hughes 1: xl ix.

⁸² E Carpenter 261.

from circumscribed human experience. ‘Men form a Notion of Nature from what they see; and therefore in cold Countries all Men judge it to be according to the Cause of Nature for Water to freeze, in warm Countries they judge it to be unnatural; consequently, that is not enough to prove any Thing to be contrary to the Laws of Nature’ (101). Thus, by saying that things are contrary to nature, people mean contrary to their own experience of it, but not in fact contrary to the ‘real Laws of Nature.’ Finally, Sherlock argues (3) that miracles are not contrary to ‘Right Reason or Sense’ (108-09).

Here, as elsewhere in his discourses, Sherlock employs the argument of ‘cause’. He explains that: ‘A Miracle of itself proves nothing, unless this only, that there is a Cause equal to the producing of the Effect we see.’ (109) Therefore, if the Almighty God is an adequate ‘cause’ and can produce so great an effect as a miracle, then it follows that there is nothing irrational about miracles. In this way Sherlock moves the argument from speculation to fact. It is quite ridiculous, he says, to prove that miracles are *a priori* absurd. Yet, he admits that in the case of miracles more proof is required than for ordinary cases and in *The Tryal* offers a highly detailed examination of historical evidence, proving ultimately that Christ’s resurrection was indeed ‘a Matter of Fact, and an Object of Sense’ (108-09).

Instead of presenting this argument and its ‘proofs’ in a dry, academic dissertation, Sherlock hit upon the felicitous idea of adopting a juridical genre and creating a fictional court-case in which the evidence of Christ’s resurrection is stated against the claims of Woolston. Thus his counsel (Mr A) engages with the counsel for the apostles (Mr B) in what becomes an exciting verbal contest, with Mr B cleverly and systematically demolishing Mr A’s claims (taken from Woolston’s *A Discourse on the Miracles* and with some references to Toland and Collins)⁸³ and amidst great anticipation, the jury finally delivering their verdict.

Sherlock’s sophisticated narratological strategy is noteworthy. He creates a fictional narrator who contextualises the event and positions the reader. The narrator explains that ‘some Gentlemen of the Inns of Court’ were informally discussing Woolston’s controversial work. No names are given, but the two who had argued with the most ‘Mettle and Spirit’, and who appeared the most knowledgeable, are prevailed upon by the others to

⁸³ E Carpenter 261.

study their sources (Woolston, Toland and Collins and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John respectively), and adjourn for a fortnight to prepare for a formal court case. A judge is appointed and on the day itself, the spectators agree to act as the jury. Although primarily regarded as ‘entertainment’, the proceedings are conducted with strict court decorum and regularity and both sides present their cases with dexterity and acumen.

The Tryal is authenticated by highly technical legal phraseology and realistic ‘digressions’ (such as the counsel being called to order by the judge). The dialogue is also enlivened by frequent instances of Sherlock’s sharp wit and dry humour, largely from the mouth of Mr B, but most of all, animated by an impassioned absorption with the sifting of ‘true’ and ‘false’ evidence in an attempt to arrive at and finally establish ‘the truth’. Finally, the evidence is weighed by the jury who decide in favour of the counsel for the defence of the apostles, Mr B and the resurrection is established as historical fact. Before the case commences, Mr B is described by a colleague as one of superior abilities, who has been ‘bred to the Profession of the Law which teaches us to consider the Nature of Evidence and its proper Weight’ (4). Although the two main protagonists are pseudonymous (Mr A and Mr B), earlier critics attempted to identify Mr B (by far the more professional and logical reasoner of the two) with Sherlock himself. Although intended as a compliment, this attempt to find a portrait of the author in his fictional creations, does not do justice to Sherlock’s narratological innovation.

Characteristically, Sherlock limits the scope of the enquiry and lets the company agree to ‘bring the Matter within Bounds, and under one View, the Evidence of Christ’s Resurrection, and the Exceptions taken to it’ (5). In this way, they are not disputing the truth of the Christian religion, but only Woolston’s objections to the evidence of Christ’s resurrection (8).

The counsel for Woolston (Mr A) maintains that the evidence for Christ’s resurrection is spurious because it was based on handed-down tradition and not on ‘Reason and Common Sense’ (8-9) and that the new Testament revelation was based on a ‘history of Ancient Errors’ (the Old Testament) (10-11); that Christ was ‘an Enthusiast’ and a fraud who wished to overthrow the Roman government and institute a temporal Jewish kingdom; that all of his miracles (including the raising of Lazarus) were cheats (26-27), and that his twelve apostles were cunning tricksters (12-19).

He expatiates on the above by arguing that when the ‘Imposter Messias’ saw that his plans were doomed, he changed his tactics and foretold his death; that there was no resurrection; that the guards (although asleep during their watch) saw the disciples steal the body out of the tomb, that the witnesses (angels, women and apostles) were all false witnesses and that the disciples deliberately carried on the great deception after Christ’s death and constructed a reprehensibly power-hungry church and ‘kingdom of priests’ upon it.

With patience and dexterity, the counsel for the apostles (Mr B) takes these accusations one by one and exposes their false reasoning and lack of proof. As it is impossible to take each singly, only a few choice examples will be cited to demonstrate Sherlock’s keen logic, clear reasoning, precise and yet elegant use of language, his sense of humour and his progressive thinking.

Mr B delights to show how Mr A continually shifts his grounds and engages in repeated self-contradiction. Employing his dry sense of humour, Mr B’s merciless exposure Mr A’s inept reasoning sustains the reader’s interest in what could have become a tedious theological debate. An example of this can be found after a particularly long-winded and fanciful presentation of ‘evidence’ on Mr A’s part, when Mr B remarks tongue-in-cheek: ‘My Lord I was unwilling to disturb the Gentleman [Mr A] by breaking in upon his Scheme, otherwise I should have reminded him, that this Court sits to examine Evidence, and not to be entertain’d with fine Imaginations’ (19).

Further on, Mr B says in comic exasperation: ‘I know not how to bring the Gentleman’s Premises and his Conclusion to any Agreement, they seem to be at a great Variance at present’ (23). And as the case proceeds, the discrepancy between Mr A’s premises and conclusion widens to the point where he inadvertently trips himself up.

One of the most ridiculous contradictions that Mr B seizes on, is that Jesus as the alleged Imposter ‘made choice of Simpletons’ as His apostles, instead of ‘cunning dexterous Fellows’ to manage the fraud and ‘conduct his Contrivances’ (27). As Mr B sarcastically asks, ‘If Christ were the imposter he is alleged to be, why did he adopt such contradictory and self-defeating means to accomplish his fraud?’

Mr B, by recapitulating Mr A’s contention that Christ was really promoting a temporal kingdom ‘under disguise’, shows how contradictory the whole argument is:

But what Design, what real End was carrying on all this while? Why, the Gentleman [Mr A] tells us, that the very thing disclaim'd, the temporal kingdom, was the real Thing aim'd at under this Disguise; he told the People there was no Foundation to expect a temporal Deliverer, warn'd them against all who should set up those Pretensions; he declared there was no ground from the ancient Prophecies to expect such a Prince, and yet by these very Means he was working His way to an Opportunity of declaring himself to be the very Prince the People wanted. (27)

Then Mr B dryly observes that his opponent's reasoning is marvellous in its unlikeliness and improbability. 'We are still upon the Marvellous; every Step opens new Wonders.' By continuing to make clever use of 'miraculous' figures of speech in keeping with the theme and tenor of the whole case, Mr B ironically remarks:

Had Christ been charged with Enthusiasm, it would not have been necessary to assign a Reason for his Conduct; Madness is unaccountable; *Ratione modoque tractari non vult*. But when design, Cunning, and Fraud are made the Charge, and carry'd to such an Height, as to suppose him to be a Party to the Contrivance of a sham Resurrection for himself, it is necessary to say to what End this Cunning was intended; it was we are told, to a Kingdom; and indeed the Temptation was little enough, considering that the chief Conductor of the Plot was crucified for his Pains. (27-28)

As if the well-turned last sentence, with its stately, measured rhythm and undeniable fact, were not sufficient to disclose the improbability of Mr A's main premise, Mr B continues to expose further flaws in the argument.

In the next passage, he isolates his opponents' reasons and rapidly fires objections at them. He ridicules the charge that Christ was working towards a temporal kingdom, showing that there is not only a lack of evidence for this assumption, but direct evidence against it. Christ frequently eluded crowds who were intent on promoting this temporal advance (28) and rejected the opportunity provided by his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to 'seize the Kingdom, or at least secure himself from the ignominious Death he expected'. In

answer to allegations that Christ, foreseeing the inevitability of his death, contrived the ‘plot’ of the Resurrection, he asks scathingly:

For whose Sake did he contrive the Plot of his Resurrection? . . . Wife and Children he had none; his nearest Relations gave little credit to him; his Disciples were not fit even to be trusted with the Secret, nor capable to manage any Advantage that could arise from it. (29)

Such an unflattering appraisal of the disciples not only demonstrates Mr B’s objective approach to Scripture, but boosts his argument against Mr A, who held that the disciples were ‘cunning tricksters’.

Mr B then piles up Mr A’s arguments (which he has exposed as intrinsically hollow) and delivers a final *coup* to them at the end of the paragraph:

However, the Gentleman tells us, a Kingdom has arisen out of this Plot; a Kingdom of Priests. But when did it arise? Some hundred Years after the death of Christ, in opposition to his will, and almost to the subversion of his Religion. And yet we are told this Kingdom was the Thing he had in View.

(29)

Thus, by stating Mr A’s premises and asking pertinent questions, Mr B demonstrates the illogicality and absurdity of his opponent’s argument.

Mr A later examines the claims of three categories of witnesses of the resurrection; that of the angels, the women (among them Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Cleophas) and the Apostles and Evangelists. He summarily dismisses the angels as being not ‘proper Witnesses’ but mere ‘Apparitions’ (82) and the women, it seems, entirely on account of their sex. He disparages them as unreliable, silly or merely hysterical witnesses (56-57).

Sherlock then allows Mr B to answer these anti-feminist charges with customary wit, at the same time, using the opportunity to demonstrate his own progressive approach in insisting on women’s rationality and moral autonomy:

The Objection to the Women was . . . only that they were Women, which was strengthen'd by calling them silly Women . . . It was answered that Women have Eyes and Ears as well as Men, and can tell what they see and hear; and it happen'd in this Case that the Women, were so far from being credulous, that they believ'd not the Angels . . . (104)

The act of being a woman is conflated by Mr A with intellectual inferiority and unreliability, yet he feels he has to ‘strengthen his case’ by invoking the derogatory epithet, ‘silly’. Mr B perceives the illogicality as well as the injustice of this archetypal yoking (of ‘women’ and ‘silly’) and rebuts it on two counts: physical evidence of the possession of equal anatomical parts and powers (eyes and ears) and evidence of their equal intellectual abilities, their perfectly rational scepticism which led them to doubt the angels’ testimony. (In itself this is an irony, for Mr A prides himself on possessing this key rational quality, scepticism!). In this way Mr B demolishes the argument not only as illogical, but unfair, showing implicitly that such traditional anti-feminist attitudes (defended by both secular and lay people) are unfounded and therefore deserving of ridicule. By thus paying attention to the subtext, one can conclude that Sherlock seems to be challenging cultural commonplaces about woman’s identity and ‘place’.⁸⁴

In arguing for the veracity of the apostles’ testimony, Sherlock uses an argument of Paley’s that these early witnesses were prepared to suffer torture and even death in defence of the truth of the resurrection (105). Although Mr B agrees with Mr A that all religions have their martyrs (105) and that suffering need not necessarily be an evidence of truth (106),⁸⁵ he goes on to show that the apostles and Christian martyrs did not suffer for their *opinions*, but for the historically verifiable *fact* – the resurrection of Christ (106) – which

⁸⁴ In this regard it is useful to compare More’s comments on the women witnesses of the Resurrection, Christ’s female friends. She observes that: ‘They are the first remarked as having ‘ministered to him of their substance’. *Theirs* was the praise of not abandoning their despised Redeemer when he was led to execution, and under all the hopeless circumstances of his ignominious death, *they* appear to have been the last attending his tomb; and the first on the morning when he arose from it. *Theirs* was the privilege of receiving the earliest consolation from their risen Lord; *theirs* was the honour of being first commissioned to announce his glorious resurrection to the world. And even to furnish heroic confessors, devoted saints, and unshrinking martyrs to the Church of Christ, has not been the exclusive honour of the bolder sex’ (*Strictures* 2: 42).

⁸⁵ Hoadley had argued for the importance of sincerity in his controversial sermon on ‘the Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ’ (1717).

Sherlock's innovative courtroom drama, which won him almost unprecedented acclaim (running through eighteen editions during the next century) prompted the anonymous *Sequel to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. This work, conceived as a reply to Peter Annet (1696-?) the radical anti-Christian Deist, who opposed scriptural revelation and targeted the resurrection in his anonymous pamphlet, *The Resurrection of Jesus considered by a Moral Philosopher*,⁸⁷ was mistakenly attributed to Sherlock and sometimes published together with *The Tryal* in later editions.

In reviewing *The Tryal*, it can be concluded that Sherlock's treatment of the 'witnesses' demonstrates, among other things, that women are as capable of receiving light as men and that the apostles' 'light' is different from sects such as the Quakers, in that it is more objective. In this way Sherlock can be seen as laying down certain rudimentary principles for an enlightened Christianity that More and Austen also seem to endorse.

The Tryal demonstrates several of Sherlock's most outstanding characteristics: his rationality, wit and progressive approach. In contrast to the 'cloudy', often implausible and unnecessarily complicated reading of events by Deists, Sherlock adopts a pruned and lucid style to convey the simplicity and reasonableness of the Gospel, showing that contrary to what his opponents aver, theirs and not his, is the spurious form of light. The simplicity of *The Tryal* syntax, the superb use of dramatic dialogue, the celerity of the pace, sparkling wit and credible presence of the jury, make this Sherlock's *Pride and Prejudice*, enabling him, as a theological writer, to reclaim an appropriate kind of humour for orthodoxy. Pillaging the theatre for theological persuasion seems to be a novel idea and one that paid handsomely. It not only shows his ingenuity, but his latent powers as a dramatist. This generic innovation, together with his incipient feminism, point to a decidedly progressive strain in Sherlock that is often overlooked.

⁸⁷ Annet was credited too with influencing Voltaire. See Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1969) 442 and E Carpenter 232-36.

THE TEMPLE DISCOURSES

Apart from *The Tryal*, Sherlock's most popular works were his sermons. During 1754-58, he published a collection of these in four volumes, entitled *Discourses preached at the Temple Church*. A fifth volume, *Occasional Discourses*, was published posthumously. *The Temple Discourses* continued to be regularly reprinted throughout Sherlock's lifetime, with a consignment being shipped to America. Not directly aimed at the Deists (as were his dissertations on prophecy and miracles) they nevertheless 'bear the imprint of their attacks'.⁸⁸

An important consideration for modern readers is Sherlock's reader/audience positioning. Unlike More and Austen writings, Sherlock's sermons are intended for *oral* delivery to an exclusive, erudite (male) *audience* rather than the usual mixed parish *congregation*. But instead of fellow worshippers, they appear as students listening to an accomplished lecturer. At all times he appears acutely aware that they are the cream of (male) English intellectuality and as such positions them carefully in relation to his doctrine. Thus he can afford to be more precise and learned, but at the same time, he seems determined not merely to retail doctrine like any other pedestrian divine, but adapting it to a specific contemporary jargon! To this end, he employs a legal language with which they could not only identify, but which would impart a male club-like feeling of exclusiveness. It is as if he recognises that here he has the opportunity to present the case of Revelation to professional patriarchs-in-the making, who can then pass it on as the nation's legislators or interpreters of laws and as fathers to their future sons. In this way, Sherlock is not only conserving orthodoxy, but ensuring its perpetuation.

As he had devoted so much attention to the Old Testament prophets in *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, in *The Temple Discourses*, Sherlock turns to fresh sources for inspiration such as the Psalms, Gospels and Epistles. Yet exegeses of these passages still reveal the desire to counter Deist objections to the validity of revelation and its central tenets. Accordingly, the analysis that follows traces the development of four recurrent themes in the discourses.

⁸⁸ E Carpenter 235.

THE SUPERIORITY OF REVEALED RELIGION

Sherlock's first two discourses (*TD* 1: 1- 41), which form a pair, are based on texts from John 2:16 and Hebrews 7:25 respectively.⁸⁹ With his customary clarity, Sherlock states his premises and thereby lays the foundation for the subsequent discourses. He argues that 'If the great End of Religion is future Happiness, and consequently the best Religion is that which will most surely successfully direct us to eternal Life', then revealed religion, with its scheme of redemption is best. It is both distinctive and superior to other religions (based on speculation and probabilities) because it is built on the 'Authority and Word of God . . . the only sure Foundation of Religion and the only reasonable Ground for us to build our Hopes on' and the authority and divine commission of Christ, attested to by miracles (*TD* 1: 3, 2: 18-19). Revelation presents the only reasonable and viable way of salvation to sinful humankind for other options (like Natural Religion which +depends on 'human Reasoning or Inventions') properly explored, prove inadequate. (*TD* 1: 2)

Like a lawyer examining a witness, Sherlock asks whether Nature had been able to teach nations unreached by the 'glad Tidings of the Gospel' how to find redemption and eternal felicity. He replies: 'No . . . Alas! These Nations are held in Chains of Darkness, and given up to the blindest Superstition and Idolatry' (1: 6). It is ironic that to denote humankind's unregenerate state, Sherlock co-opts natural discourse to undermine it, using images of chains and darkness which were popularly appropriated by Natural Religionists and Freethinkers⁹⁰ claiming to free people from the 'restraints' and darkness of 'priestcraft' and orthodox religion.⁹¹

⁸⁹ 'Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.' (John 2: 16). 'Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.' (Heb 7: 25)

⁹⁰ Such as Voltaire (1694–1778) and Peter Annet (1693–?). Thomas Paine (1737–1809) was still in his twenties when Sherlock published his first *Temple Discourses* and had yet to publish his *Common Sense* (1761) *Rights of Man* (1791) and *Age of Reason* (1793).

⁹¹ The image of man enchain'd in the prison of sin is exploited by Protestants as diverse as the puritans Bunyan and Milton and the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, who writes: 'Long my imprisoned spirit lay / Fast bound in sin and nature's night:/ Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free, / I rose, went forth and followed Thee.' See *Hymns and Psalms* (1983; rpt. London: Methodist Publishing House, 1985), hymn no. 216.

In his first discourse or sermon, Sherlock argues that, left to their own reason, humans are unable to discover the principles of a life-saving religion, for before the coming of Christ, ‘their Philosophy, Oratory and Poetry were of the highest order, yet Nature and Reason [could not] furnish Men with just Notions and Principles of Religion’. Wherever people had to rely on reason and nature to direct them, as Sherlock observes, ‘they run into . . . Errors and Absurdities’ seeking ludicrously ‘to find a notion of the supreme Deity among the four-footed Beasts and creeping Things of the Earth’. Sherlock asks sarcastically, ‘Are you then still foolish enough to think that Nature is sufficient to direct you?’ (1: 10-12) Nature plainly needs the assistance of the Gospel, and Reason that of Grace, for the Gospel is the only ‘faithful Guide able to deliver [one] from Error and Superstition and from the Wanderings of human Reason’ (1: 14-15). In the above, revealed religion is portrayed as a guide through perplexity and obscurity into plainness, singleness and light whereas human ‘Inventions’ (Natural Religion) are linked with unnecessary complication, illogicality and obscurity – a polarity that Sherlock upholds throughout his works.

In the second discourse, Sherlock addresses those who reject the atonement. Here again he attempts to demystify (in the sense of make more comprehensible) this central Christian mystery by seeking to analyse the Divine rationale behind it. The method ought not to be objected to, he argues, because it is eminently reasonable, God having provided both the criteria (a perfect sacrifice) and the means (Christ) for our salvation. Thus, he maintains: ‘Had the Gospel required of us to expect from Christ the Redemption of our Souls and Bodies, and given us no Reason to think that Christ was endued with Power equal to the Work, we might justly have complained . . . [b]ut to expect redemption from the Son of God, the Resurrection of our Bodies from the same Hand which first created and formed them, are rational and well-founded Acts of Faith.’ (1: 90). It is thus fitting that the God who condemns sin, supplied expiation for it. This is ‘agreeable to Logic’ and constitutes a ‘rational and well-founded Act of Faith’ – a trump card Sherlock plays throughout his works, and one which deists are unable to match.

In another discourse, Sherlock furthers his case by appealing to an assumption shared by orthodox and Deists alike: ‘That the World was made by the Son of God, is a Proposition with which Reason has no Fault to find; That He who made the World should have Power to renew it to Life again, is highly consonant to Reason’ (1: 90). If Deists agree

to the first proposition, then why do they quibble at the equally reasonable proposition that God has the power to renew it? He proceeds to deconstruct the term ‘mystery’ (so abhorrent to Deists), explaining that, in effect, it is simply a great and incomprehensible kindness to us:

All the Mystery lies in this, That so high, and so great a Person should condescend to became Man, and subject to Death, for the sake of Mankind. But are we the fit Persons to complain of this transcendent mysterious Love? Or, does it become us to quarrel with the Kindness of our blessed Lord towards us, only because it is greater than we can conceive? No; it becomes us to bless and adore this exceeding Love, by which we are saved from Condemnation, by which we expect to be rescued from Death

(1: 90-91)

By using the rhetorical questions ('but are we the fit persons? / Does it become us?') combined with submerged alliteration ('quarrel, Kindness, conceive') he builds up to a climax embellished with parallelism and antiphony: 'Does *it become us* to quarrel? / No, *it becomes us* to bless and adore' [my italics]. In this polished piece of rhetoric, Sherlock maintains that Deists are quarrelling with God's wisdom (not fully comprehensible) and his kindness – an audacity for us in our 'blind' state of partial knowledge.

Although poles apart in other respects,⁹² Sherlock's authoritarian approach and respectful approach to the redemption 'mystery' is strikingly similar to that of the founder of Methodism, Charles Wesley, who in a well-known hymn also admits that no human can understand the 'mystery' of the atonement or fully 'explore His strange design'.⁹³ Whereas Wesley magisterially tells angels 'to enquire no more' into the mystery, Sherlock seems to be giving Deists the same advice. Although they reveal doctrinal affinities, it is ironic that in his capacity of Bishop of London, Sherlock clashed with Wesley and turned down a reasonable request to allow Fletcher of Madeley to preach to French prisoners on parole at

⁹² One being orthodox, and the other a Dissenter.

⁹³ 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies: / Who can explore His strange design? / In vain the first-born seraph tries / To sound the depths of love divine. / 'Tis mystery all! Let earth adore, / Let angel minds inquire no more. *Hymns and Psalms*, hymn no.216 (see n. 91 above).

Tonbridge in 1758.⁹⁴ It is worth noting though that (Bishop) Edmund Gibson could not fault Wesley on his doctrine and gave him permission to publish his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766).⁹⁵

Again, in his fourth discourse (based on 1 Corinthians 1: 21)⁹⁶ Sherlock vindicates divine wisdom. In appointing both the ‘End and the Means’ of our salvation, God’s wisdom ‘soars above the Reach of human Reason’ (1: 50). The superiority of revealed religion is furthermore attested by its promises (and not mere probabilities), which are valuable because God, the author of them, has the power and authority to fulfil them. Revealed religion is thus superior to natural for it promises to ‘take in all her [Nature’s] wishes and all her Hopes and are offered by a Hand that is able to make them good’ (1: 185-86).

This image of God’s hand as a source from which good things emanate (signposted by the discreet alliteration of ‘Hope’) can be read as a verbal echo of Michelangelo’s visual portrayal of the divine hand extending life to Adam. In this way, Sherlock is situating himself in the ‘true’ Enlightenment. Again, the bottom-line is the superiority of the divinely-orchestrated scheme of salvation. By contrast, Natural Religion provides ‘at best an uncertain Foundation’ which is ‘liable to Doubts and Misgivings of the Mind’.

In an earlier discourse, Sherlock demonstrates further limitations of the Deist argument, maintaining that ‘[t]he Promises of God have never borrowed Help from moral Probabilities.’ His contention is that God’s promises all related to highly improbable events and that the people concerned were required to exercise faith. He uses the example of Abraham, who was promised the land of Canaan, which was inhabited by warlike people,

⁹⁴ In *A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Revd John Fletcher* (London: 1786) 35-36, Wesley writes thus: ‘In the year 1758 there were many French prisoners on their parole at Tonbridge. Being desired to preach to them in their own language he readily complied. Many of them appeared deeply affected, and earnestly requested that he would preach to them every Lord’s day. But some advised them first to present a petition to the Bishop of London [Sherlock] for leave. They did so: and (who would believe it?) the good Bishop peremptorily refused their petition! If I had known this at the time, King George should have known it; and I believe he would have given the Bishop little thanks.’ Quoted by E Carpenter 160-161.

⁹⁵ Wesley enjoyed a good relationship with Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London. In 1741 Wesley felt encouraged to publish a sermon on Christian Perfection after a conversation with Gibson at Whitehall, during which the bishop cross-questioned Wesley concluding, ‘Mr Wesley, if this be all you mean, publish it to all the world. If any one then can confute what you say, he may have free leave.’ See Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart* 267.

⁹⁶ ‘For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe’ (1: 175).

and a child, when it was a biological impossibility, owing to his advanced age. Thus, against both probability and hope, Abraham ‘believed in Hope; that is, he hoped when humanly speaking, there was no Ground for Hope’. And his ‘Reliance on the Promises of God, against all the Presumption of human Experience and Probability, was the very thing, as St Paul tells us, that was imputed to him for Righteousness.’ (1: 222- 3) Compared to Abraham, Christians are much more fortunate, for we have more ‘light’. We have ‘Promises of a Resurrection and Life eternal’ made by God through Christ and confirmed by God raising Jesus from the dead and making Him the means of our justification. The resurrection is pivotal, for it ‘supplies the Authority and Credit’ required for a reasonable ‘Article of Faith’ (1: 223- 24).

In discourses on John 20: 30, 31,⁹⁷ and Acts 2: 22,⁹⁸ respectively, Sherlock explains why miracles are essential to revealed religion. Not intended to prove the being of God or the necessity for morality (which Natural Religion can prove) they were designed to demonstrate God’s unity and supremacy in the Old Testament (when Judaism had to be vindicated against idolatry) and in the New, to provide proofs of the authenticity of Jesus Christ and his new doctrine’ (*TD* 1: 252-71).

Although natural reason can teach us ‘that God is to be trusted and obeyed in whatever he promises or commands’, it is insufficient for a new revelation, which requires a proof that the new doctrine proceeds from God. Thus miracles are necessary to ‘the Introduction of a new Revelation. . . or Doctrine which cannot be known or knowable to the Reason of Man. . . [such] as the Doctrines of Salvation and Redemption by Christ, of Sanctification and Regeneration by the Spirit of God’ (1: 197-204). This is worth comparing with Boyle, who similarly defends ‘the miracles of Christ (especially his resurrection) and those of his disciples . . . owned to be done in God’s name and to authorise a doctrine ascribed to inspiration’.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ ‘Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.’ (John 2: 16) and ‘Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.’ (Heb 7: 25)

⁹⁸ ‘Jesus Christ, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves well know.’

⁹⁹ Boyle, *Works* 1: 459.

Finally, Sherlock warns in a discourse on John 3: 19, that there is no such thing as a system of religion which pretends to be an uncontrollable power to make free moral agents righteous ‘since there can be no morality without free will’ (*TD* 2: 387):

Hence it follows that religion designed for us as free agents, can only instruct us in such a manner that we may not err through ignorance, and so aid us that it may be in our power, whenever it is in our will, to obey. That religion must therefore be the best, which most fully enlightens our understanding, and is best calculated to remove those impediments to liberty and freedom which arise from the corruption of our nature. (Hughes 2: 387)

Contrary to Deists and Freethinkers, who argued that religion enchain humans, here Sherlock links the eighteenth-century watchwords, ‘Liberty and Freedom’ (which were to acquire more revolutionary overtones in the 1790’s) with the Gospel, ‘which most fully enlightens our understanding’. The only way to shake off the endemic impediments of our corrupt nature, he argues, is to embrace the liberating light of the Gospel. Sherlock thus shows the ‘excellency of the Gospel’ in comparison to other religions and concludes that if as argued, revealed religion is the only one ‘which most fully enlightens our understanding’ then we ought to accept it (Hughes 2: 388 -89).¹⁰⁰

Ultimately there are only two categories of people who can hope to escape punishment: those who avail themselves of Christ’s imputed righteousness and those who offend through ignorance. If the Gospel were less perfect or less known, sinners would have more to plead in their own behalf. As it is, they have no excuse for their disobedience, for it is not a matter of advice but of command. It is a ‘peremptory law’ given by God to His creatures, and refusal of this light results in one being condemned to permanent darkness (*TD* 2: 388-89). In the above it seems clear that Sherlock, contrary to what William Sayres avers, does not attempt to reconcile Latitudinarianism and the Gospel,¹⁰¹ by

¹⁰⁰ In this regard it is worth noting that in his Essay ‘On Faith and Reason’, Locke wrote: “In what I have said, I am far from denying that God can, or doth, sometimes enlighten men’s minds”, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 10th ed. (London, The Strand: J Johnson et al, 1801) 1: 144.

¹⁰¹ William Sayres, in his doctrinal dissertation, ‘The Discourse of Gratitude in the Works of Thomas Sherlock, Francis Hutcheson and Hannah More’ (diss., University of New Hampshire, 1989) 13, maintains: ‘Sherlock’s sermons argue for the reconciling of frequently opposing viewpoints, including the common basis of ‘Natural Religion’ and the ‘Gospel’.’

palliating the claims of the latter, but emerges as a clear champion of the gospel and its ‘peremptory law’, urging that it is to one’s advantage not to rationalize or evade the effects of natural depravity, but to avail oneself of the ‘Rational Act’ of faith and pardon offered through the ‘mystery’ of the Redemption.

JUSTIFICATION

Aware that he is entering the arena of a controversial yet pivotal doctrine, Sherlock is cautious, but clear. In a discourse, based on Ephesians 2: 18, ‘For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father’, he argues for the necessity of a divine mediator (1: 360 ff) and in a discourse on Ephesians 2: 8, ‘For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God’, he argues the case for justification by faith in Christ’s atoning death and resurrection (1: 372 ff), yet he gives reformed interpretations a wide berth. Sherlock’s concern is with rationalists who refuse to concede the reasonableness of atonement.

Firstly, Sherlock addresses those who object to the irrationality and unnaturalness of the redemption. Against those who hold that justification is irrational, Sherlock explains that the redemption is an historical fact and that the rationality of its application is demonstrated by the fact that people have to exert themselves to appropriate its benefits.¹⁰² Thus, although the redemption is accomplished through ‘means which soar above reason’, there is nothing supernatural about its application. In accordance with his attempt to demystify doctrine (by making it more readily accessible to his lawyer audience) Sherlock uses specific legal terminology, conveyancing terms, such as ‘Title and Interest and Purchase’, to show that unless appropriated by the individual, the redemption is inefficacious:

But as to ourselves, our Title and Interest in this common Salvation being grounded in Faith, our Justification, though purchased by the Blood of Christ, must be appropriated to ourselves through Faith in his Blood. (1: 213)

¹⁰² In a discourse based on Rom 4: 25: ‘[W]ho was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification.’

He argues that the redemption is built upon the truth of the resurrection, without which there could have been no justification, and consequently no hope. The resurrection (a ratification of God's promise) therefore makes the redemption a 'rational Act of Faith to hope for Life and Immortality from Him, who himself died upon the Tree' (1: 213-14). Lest some enlightened sceptics still doubt the rationality of this 'Act of Faith', Sherlock argues:

Lay these things together, the Promise of God to give us Life eternal; his Power to make good his Word, the Confirmation he has given of our Hope by the Resurrection of Christ; and what is wanting to make the Belief of the Article a rational Act of Faith? (1: 222)

Unlike the speculations of Natural Religion, through Christ's resurrection 'hope' becomes 'belief' and 'belief' becomes a rational and ratified 'Act of Faith'.

And, finally, in an exposition of John 3:16,¹⁰³ Sherlock argues that the redemption is not, as Deists mistakenly believe, contrary to the aspirations of 'Nature', but actually fulfils them (1: 175-78): 'The Gospel is no Enemy to the Hopes of Nature. By leading us to embrace that Mercy offered by Christ, Nature is fulfilled in what she has so long and earnestly sought for' (1: 178).

If we sin, Nature has no Refuge, but in Repentance; and how far that will go we know not; Nature has not, cannot teach us this Knowledge. From the Gospel we learn that true Repentance shall never be in vain; shall not only protect us from Punishment, but shall also set open to us the Doors of Life and Immortality. There you may view Religion once more restored to its Native Hope and Glory for evermore. You will no longer be obliged to wander in Mazes and Intricacies of Human Reason, and to speculate upon the Tributes of divine Mercy and Justice, the Limits and Boundaries of

¹⁰³ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

which are not to be determined by the Wit of Man, and the Condemnation of which abounds with Terrors as well as Hopes. (1: 183 -84)

Using images of doors, mazes, limits and boundaries, Sherlock contrasts the cul-de-sac quality of Natural Religion's alternatives with the door-of-hope solutions offered by revealed religion. Here he paints no light-hearted picaresque scene of comic wanderings, but a grotesque and surreal world of endless maze-like terror, which the unenlightened 'Wit of Man' itself has helped create. One of the inferences one can draw from this extended metaphor is that the 'enlightened sceptics' (Toland, Tindal, Collins, Woolston and Annet) and their devotees, will be obliged forever 'to wander in Mazes and Intricacies of Human Reason' unless they accept the light of revealed religion – the Gospel 'light of the eye'. This recalls the futile and essentially tragic roundabout of sin and repentance in *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*: 'May sin and repentance go on for ever in a perpetual round?' (4: 46-47)

In another discourse against those who maintained that Justification is 'anti-nature', Sherlock contends that 'the Gospel does exactly tally and correspond with the Hopes of Nature' and goes beyond the vague hopes of Natural Religion, providing definite assurance of forgiveness and pardon and 'Life and Happiness forevermore' which 'Nature craves . . . but cannot guarantee' (1: 184).

In graphic detail Sherlock sketches a surreal 'wasteland' scene of life without the hope that revealed religion offers:

She [Nature] sees all her Children go down into the Grave; All beyond the Grave is to her [Nature's] side one wide Waste, a Land of Doubt and Uncertainty . . . How different is the scene the Gospel opens! There we see the heavenly Canaan; the New Jerusalem; in which City of the great God there are many Mansions . . . for receiving them who through Faith and patient Endurance in well-doing, seek for Glory and Immortality. (1: 184-85)

Here Sherlock, generally no alarmist, graphically paints the horrors of a life beyond the grave, without hope in Christ: 'one wide Waste, a Land of Doubt and Uncertainty'. In

contrast to the terse monosyllabic alliterative ‘one wide waste’, revelation promises, through a fluid, polysyllabic movement (which suggests the land flowing with milk and honey) the alluring picture of plenty and peace in ‘the heavenly Canaan; the new Jerusalem; in which City of the great God there are many Mansions’.

Like most Anglican writers, Sherlock, while affirming a Protestant view of redemption, distances himself from Antinomianism, pointing out that no one will be wafted effortlessly along to the heavenly Canaan without some self-effort; that no doctrine (even salvation which is essentially a free gift of God) is of any avail unless appropriated by and acted upon by the individual. Therefore, using the analogy of food or medicine for the body, Sherlock maintains that ‘[t]he best Instructions are of no use while not attended to and the greatest Helps and Assurances yield no Profit as long as they are rejected and despised’ (Hughes 2: 387). This analogy is strongly reminiscent of Hooker who writes:

Christ hath merited to make us Just; but as a Medicine which is made of health, doth not heal by being made, but by being applied; so by the Merits of Christ there can be no Justification, without the Application of the Merit.¹⁰⁴

Sherlock had warned against Antinomianism in an earlier discourse (1: 212-13) and returns to it in the sermon on ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.’ (Phil 2: 12,13) Here he stresses the perpetual role of the individual in the scheme of salvation and sanctification (2: 63-86), thereby dissociating himself from any extreme reformed teaching on the subject.¹⁰⁵

This balance of faith with good works is again exemplified in the discourse based in Luke 13: 24,¹⁰⁶ where he argues that the Christian life which is a ‘strait’ way requires

¹⁰⁴ *A Learned Discourse of Justification, Works and how the Foundation of Works is Overthrown, in Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie in Eight Books to which are attached Several Learned Discourses* (London: R Scott, J Basset, J Wright and R Chiswell, 1705) 8: 494.

¹⁰⁵ Sayres’ doctrinal dissertation, ‘The Discourse of Gratitude in the Works of Thomas Sherlock, Francis Hutcheson and Hannah More’ (diss., University of New Hampshire, 1989) 62.

¹⁰⁶ ‘They said unto him, Lord are there few that are saved? And he said unto them, strive to enter in at the strait gate.’

continual personal exertion (2: 87). At the same time Sherlock points out the pitfalls of the ‘merely moralist’ approach – a point Sayres tends to over-look.¹⁰⁷ In an exposition of a favourite text of eighteenth-century moralists (‘On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets’, Matt 22:40), Sherlock admits that although ‘the love of God and the Love of Man, if carefully attended to, will easily grow into a complete System of religion’ (1: 341- 43), this system is not equipped to deal with deviations and is therefore ultimately impotent to help fallen humans.

MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY HEIGHTENED BY REVELATION

Deists agreed that human beings are morally accountable to God, but Sherlock argues that some are more accountable than others. Firstly, all are endowed with reason, which distinguishes us from animals and renders us accountable for the control of our appetites and passions. Secondly, those who have been exposed to revealed religion have more spiritual light than others in pagan countries, and are accordingly more accountable to God. Thirdly, those in moral authority (civil and religious) are especially accountable to God and therefore sovereigns, magistrates and parents have a greater moral responsibility than others.¹⁰⁸

In his exposition of the text ‘Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul’ (Heb 11: 13), Sherlock argues that reason, a rudimentary ‘light of the eye’, has been given to everyone to curb ‘Appetites and Natural Desires’ (2: 173-207) and when these are intemperately indulged ‘an Offence is committed against the Order of Nature as well as the Rule of Reason. The Excess therefore of these Appetites is not natural, but vicious.’ (2: 177) Sherlock then invokes a juridical image to make his point:

¹⁰⁷ Sayres surprisingly identifies Sherlock with Francis Hutcheson’s kind of benevolence. He writes: ‘By contrast, the so-called ‘latitudinarian’ doctrine insisted that people generally were well-motivated, and by their own efforts could lead both to a godly and happy life, pleasing to God and helpful to their fellow humans through charitable works and virtuous conduct. / Such views closely complement those of Francis Hutcheson and are also found in the writings and career of Thomas Sherlock, whose sermons Austen praises.’ See Sayres (doctrinal diss.) 8. This is in direct contradiction to the orthodox stance Sherlock assumes throughout his works.

¹⁰⁸ Sherlock’s strictures on this subject will be examined in the chapter on Jane Austen.

Since therefore the Desires of Nature are in themselves innocent, and ordained to serve good Ends; since God has given us Reason and Understanding to moderate and direct our Passions; it is in vain to plead our Passions in Defence or Excuse of Sensuality, unless at the same time we could plead that we were void of Reason . . . (2: 178-79)

He expands the image of the trial in a humorous way by saying: ‘Take away Reason, and bring a Madman or an Idiot into Judgement, and the Magistrate has nothing to say to him, whatever his Passions, or the Excess of them, may be.’ (2: 179) In this way Sherlock turns the argument against those who plead unbridled Nature as a sufficient ‘light of the eye,’ showing that they cannot use this to evade moral accountability, and if they do, they are no better than madmen or idiots – an idea that would have been anathema to eighteenth-century rationalists and perhaps amusing to his lawyer-audience.

Sherlock then proceeds from the general (accountability based on reason) to the specific (accountability based on revelation). In a discourse on Luke 12: 48, ‘Unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required,’ he argues that all those who have had the advantage of living in a Christian country and being exposed to revealed religion ought

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to bless God daily, that by His good Providence we have been born and educated in a Christian Country; that we have been admitted into the Church of his blessed Son, and have had betimes the Means of Knowledge and of Grace communicated to us, but let us take Heed that we do not turn those Blessings into Curses upon ourselves, abusing them. (2: 128)

Like More and Austen after him, Sherlock’s pride in being born in a ‘Christian country’ is tempered by the sobering realisation that this intensifies one’s moral responsibility. As he maintains, by rejecting the Gospel, individuals can ironically transpose the ‘Means of Knowledge and of Grace’ into their own condemnation. Sherlock develops this sombre theme further in another juridical image where all will be brought to the bar at the final judgment and where Christ will be the Judge ‘endowed with the Perfect

Knowledge of Men's Hearts'. In His 'court' the only standing Rule will be Luke 12: 48. Thus he writes:

In this Tribunal there will want no Evidence to convict the Guilty, no Advocates to defend the Innocent: There no pretended Excuse will be admitted, no real one excluded: There every Man with all his Actions, with all his Talents and Abilities, and with all his Opportunities of knowing the Will of God, will be weighed in the Balance; and unto whom much was given, of him much will be required.' (2: 108-09)¹⁰⁹

Those in 'Christian countries' who have been entrusted with the weight of revealed religion will be required to show a proportionate counterbalance of righteousness.¹¹⁰ Conversely, those who have no knowledge of the Gospel will be less accountable, but will not escape entirely, for they still have the light of Conscience and Reason (2: 112 -17; 122). In this way, God justly makes allowance for those who have not been exposed to revelation, and who will be judged according to their consciences or the 'light' they possess (1: 340).¹¹¹ Thus he explains that:

No Man shall be judged by a Law of which he had no Knowledge, but every Man shall stand or fall by the Light that was given him. . . It shall be accepted according to that a Man hath, and not according to that he hath not. (2: 121)

In the above, light takes on a new function. Previously imparting life, it is now capable of supporting, or conversely accusing, a person in the dock. As Adam and Eve 'fell' when they rejected the divine Light of God's initial command, so individuals

¹⁰⁹ Sherlock's image of scales recalls the story of the Persian King Belteshazzar, who, spurning God, trusted in his own reason and was 'weighed in the balances and found wanting' (Dan 5.27).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Boyle who comments on the accountability inherent in the verse (which he paraphrases as), 'he who improves his talents to good uses, shall be intrusted with more.' *Works* 1: 460.

¹¹¹ 'Of a truth I perceive God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.' (Acts 10: 34).

continue to ‘stand’ or ‘fall’ according to their response to revelation; the most tragic aspect being that many forfeit salvation by deluding themselves into believing they do not need it:

How foolish a Thing then it is to lose the Prospect of a Pardon by deceiving yourself into an Opinion that you do not want one? Such Sins may be forgiven through Repentance, but no Art, no Wit of Men will ever justify them. (2: 123)

Sherlock warns that the Gospel is not like ‘the Advice of a Friend [which] we may use or refuse as we think fit’. It is a ‘Law made by one infinitely Superior to us a . . . and therefore cannot be rejected at will’ (2:124). He explains that: ‘This Rule is Peremptory, that *All who know the Will of their Lord, but prepare not themselves, to do according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes*’ (2: 125). [Sherlock’s italics]

The word ‘peremptory’ is deliberate and double-edged: a legal term denoting something final and not open to challenge or denial. God, whose authority Sherlock repeatedly vindicates, institutes this fixed law, which admits of no refusal. The second sense of ‘peremptory’ as ‘destructive’ (from the Old French and the Latin, *empt-ere*, ‘take, destroy, cut off’) is latent, for those who refuse the Gospel light, can be said to have not only earned their ‘stripes’, but chosen to ‘self-destruct’.

Sherlock concludes the discourse on Luke 13: 48 in a sombre and hortatory vein, tying together all the strands of light and darkness imagery, urging his readers to apprehend this supra-rational, soul-saving light, lest it be turned against them:

Lay hold therefore, my Brethren, of the Mercy of God, while the Day of Mercy lasts; for, if you neglect or despise the Goodness of God, which calleth us to Repentance, this will be your Condemnation, that Light is come into the World and, and you chose Darkness rather than Light. (2: 129)

Finally, although true to his times Sherlock consistently uses the masculine generic terms ‘Man’ and ‘Brethren’ in all his works, it is clear from the contexts that he is addressing a public readership of both sexes, and that women are accorded the same moral responsibility as men. The peremptory law of the gospel, the choice between ‘Natural Religion’ and

revelation, darkness and light, applies equally to women as to men, but in the discourses on fathers and magistrates (which will be examined later) Sherlock makes it clear that from those who have more authority, more will be required.

SOCIAL CONCERN, THE 1750 AND 1759 CHARGES

During his term as Bishop of London, Sherlock took seriously what he saw as his Episcopal responsibility: the monitoring of the moral tone of the nation. He shrewdly realised that the ‘wholesome’ laws of the nation (which he saw as Scripturally based) can ‘have no effect, but as they are prudently administered and rigorously executed’.¹¹² Accordingly he used his position to ensure this by opposing the repeal of the Gin Act and calling for the enforcement of laws relating to the inhibition of drunkenness, heresy, pornography, prostitution and impiety.

Sherlock published a sermon (preached at St Margaret’s Westminster, 26 April 1735) on the adverse social effects of the unregulated sale of gin and in 1743, together with Secker, led the opposition to the repeal of the Gin Act, which would have made gin more freely accessible, thereby exacerbating immorality, poverty and child neglect.¹¹³ Sherlock, who opposed Deist ideas of leaving children to think for themselves, built on Locke’s *tabula rasa* theory by promoting religion, education and custom, maintaining in a parliamentary speech, that as ‘they [children] are yet innocent it is our province to take care of them that they may be virtuous.’¹¹⁴

In 1749 Sherlock used his influence with Newcastle to suppress the *Memoires of Fanny Hill* (a so-called ‘expurgated’ version of the *Memoires of a Lady of Pleasure*), which he described as a ‘vile book which is an open Insult to Religion and good Manners and a

¹¹² Hughes 3: 316.

¹¹³ Cf. W E H Lecky, who describes the passion for gin-drinking which affected the masses circa 1724 and which ‘spread with the rapidity and violence of an epidemic’. *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 7 vols (1878-92) 1: 479, 481.

¹¹⁴ Quoted from Cobbett’s *Parliamentary History* XII: 1362 by Carpenter 279. This was also summarised by Johnson and printed in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.

Reproach to the Honour of the Government and the Laws of the Country' and prosecute the printer and publisher (Griffiths and Owen).¹¹⁵

In view of the fact that these notorious fictional 'memoirs' describe the progress of a sexually liberated woman, with hindsight, it is tempting to draw anti-feminist conclusions. Sherlock's attempts to suppress them. This might have been a spur to Sherlock's denunciation of the work, but in view of his consistent opposition to all kinds of 'debauchery', it is unlikely to be the guiding motive. His commitment elsewhere to a consistent 'purity' in both men and women and the absence of antifeminism in his works argue against a gender-biased witch-hunt here. Moreover, if one accepts the Bartheisan definition of pornography or eroticism as a 'transgression of values', then Sherlock, who always championed traditional Christian values, is only being consistent.¹¹⁶

Similarly, Sherlock's objection to the licentiousness of the press and the theatre¹¹⁷ is not unusually prudish for its immorality had been criticised by Addison and Steele,¹¹⁸ and even Lord Hervey,¹¹⁹ and from Wesley¹²⁰ onwards was to become a particular concern of the Evangelicals. In 1753 Sherlock appealed to Lord Egmont to restrain escalating moral corruption and in 1756 used his influence with Newcastle to prevent a court masque from taking place at the Haymarket shortly before a national fasting day.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Carpenter 291-92.

¹¹⁶ In an essay devoted to *Histoire de l'oeil*, Barthes maintains that 'the transgression of values, which is the declared principle of eroticism, has its counterpart . . . in a technical transgression of the forms of language'. Quoted by Susan Suleiman, 'Pornography Transgression, and the Avant-Garde: Batailles's *Story of the Eye*' in *Poetics and Gender*, ed. Nancy K Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 119.

¹¹⁷ Lord Francis Jeffrey, in one of his *Edinburgh Review Essays* 1853: 656.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Addison, the *Spectator*, 1 August 1712, no. 446. 'It is one of the most unaccountable things in our age that the lewdness of our theatre be so much complained of, so well exposed and so little redressed.' See also Richard Steele, the *Spectator* 51 (28 April 1711).

¹¹⁹ Hervey's *Memoirs* 2: 341.

¹²⁰ Skevington Wood 10.

¹²¹ In 1756, a year of great misfortune at home and abroad, a day in early February was appointed as a general fast. But the government seemed bent on undermining their pious resolution by organizing a masque in the Haymarket theatre at the end of January, shortly before the fast. Sherlock, who together with Gibson and Egmont had opposed these 'degenerate forms of amusement', was appalled by the bad timing of this masque, which enjoyed full royal patronage. He wrote a letter for Newcastle to take to the King, requesting that such 'wanton levity' on the eve of the fast be stopped. The Archbishop of Canterbury also used his influence with Lord Grafton to make similar representations. See also Defoe's account of the

Sherlock's positive attempts to stem the tide of moral degeneration are best illustrated in his impassioned response to the London earthquakes of 1750, *A Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London and Westminster, on the Occasion of the Late Earthquakes*, which provides not only a 'manifesto' of eighteenth-century evils, but demonstrates the way Sherlock's presses hortatory rhetoric into the service of social reform.

Drawing from contemporary sources, Hughes describes the apocalyptic situation as follows:

In the month of February 1750, a violent shock of an earthquake which had been, as it were, announced by some remarkable coruscations of aurora borealis, with tremendous tempests of thunder and lightning, hail and rain, greatly terrified the inhabitants of the metropolis; and this terror was redoubled by a similar phenomenon, on the very same day of the following month, between five and six in the morning. The shock was immediately preceded by a succession of thick, low flashes of lightning, and a rumbling noise, like that of a heavy carriage rolling over a heavy pavement; its vibrations shook every house from top to bottom, and in many places church-bells were heard to strike; people started naked from their beds, and ran to their doors and windows in a state of distraction. . . . (Hughes 1: lxi)

The periodic recurrence of shocks and the magnitude of the second, made a deep impression on the people, which was exploited by a 'fanatical soldier' going through the streets of London, preaching repentance and prophesying that another shock on the same day in April would 'lay the city in ruins'. This 'illiterate enthusiast' caused such a panic that churches were crowded with penitent sinners and 'the sons of riot and profligacy were overawed into sobriety and decorum'. Furthermore, the prediction created such terror that thousands of people evacuated the metropolis and fled to the country with 'such hurry and precipitation, that the highways were encumbered with horses and carriages' (Hughes 1:

government appointing 'days of fasting and humiliation, to make public confession of sin and implore the mercy of God to avert the dreadful judgement' [of the plague]. Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722, rpt. London: Dent, 1936) 33.

lxi-ii).¹²² This account is extraordinarily reminiscent of Defoe's description of the hasty exodus into the country at the outbreak of the plague of 1665 in his *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), when 'the throng was so great, and the coaches, horses, waggons, and carts were so many, driving and dragging the people away, that it looked as if all the city was running away'.¹²³ During the London earthquakes, those who had no country houses to which they could escape, went out on the night before 8 April 1750 into the open fields and 'waited in the most fearful suspense until morning and the return of day disproved the dreaded prophecy'. With the immediate grounds for their fear suddenly removed, the sin-hardened part of the populace then resorted to their previous profligate ways, and 'once more bade defiance to the vengeance of Heaven' (lxii).

Yet, Sherlock determined to strike while the people's conscience was still malleable, published his *Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London* in which he interprets the earthquakes as an instance of special revelation designed to summon them back to God, from whom they have strayed. Positioning his readers much as he had his lawyer-audience in previous years, Sherlock adopts his usual juridical approach, marshalling the 'evidence':

If we consider the general government of the world by God, and upon what reasons and motives he acts, when he brings calamities and plagues upon any people; or if we recollect from history, sacred and profane, what state and condition, with respect to religion and morality, the people were in, who have been examples of justice; and then compare our own case with the general reason by which the Providence of God acts and with the circumstances of those by whose example we ought to take warning; we shall soon discover whether there be just reason for our apprehensions. (326)

¹²² Walpole corroborates this account: 'I had been awake, and was scarce dozed again . . . on a sudden I felt my bolster lift up my head; I thought somebody was getting from under my bed, but soon found it was a strong earthquake . . . there has been some [mischief done]; two old houses flung down, several chimneys and much chinaware . . . The bells rung in several houses.' Later he observes that he heard 'the women were all going out of town to avoid the next shock; and so for fear of losing his Easter offerings, he [Secker] set himself to advise them to await God's good pleasure in fear and trembling. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann* (London: Oxford University Press 1960) 4: 130, 133. Hereafter, 'Walpole to Mann'.

¹²³ Defoe 211.

With customary logic, he argues that in the past, if those ‘who were destroyed by fire from heaven, and swallowed up by earth, were sinners’ and we are not any better, what ‘consolation is there to be had against the just expectation of suffering after their example also?’ (326). His observation that ‘God’s general providence; which, though it is not daily exerted in punishing all men, or all vices that deserve it, yet is always armed with power to stop outrageous wickedness’ (326). In adopting this line, Sherlock is not being sensational ‘or as Walpole disparagingly puts it, ‘running a race with [Secker] for the old ladies’,¹²⁴ but simply following in the footsteps of an orthodox Anglican tradition. Defoe’s narrator also describes the 1665-66 plague as ‘a judgement of God’, ‘a scourge’ and ‘a particular season of Divine vengeance. . . on the abominable wickedness of certain people’. He portrays God ‘as it were [with] His sword drawn in his hand on purpose to take vengeance . . . on the whole nation’.¹²⁵ Archbishop Tenison, who previously interpreted the 1703 hurricane as a divine judgment, also proves that providentialism was not a sectarian phenomenon.¹²⁶

More than 10,000 copies of Sherlock’s letter were sold in two days. Two editions were rapidly exhausted and the stationers at the Royal Exchange printed a further 52,000 copies. Three editions were printed in London in 1750 and one in Glasgow, with another edition in London in 1755, and as late as 1800 and 1807 the letter was reprinted by the SPCK¹²⁷ Sherlock followed the 1750 Pastoral Letter with a tract on the observance of Good Friday and *A Form of Prayers for the Use of Private Families on Occasion of the Late Earthquakes and Other Judgements of God upon this Nation* which, with its stylistic similarities to the collects in the Book of Common Prayer, was also highly popular.

Sherlock’s 1750 letter seems to have at least temporarily stemmed the tide of immorality and increased popular piety.¹²⁸ One of the reasons for its prolonged popularity seems to be the simplicity and specificity of the letter. Characteristically, Sherlock limits

¹²⁴ *Walpole to Mann* 4: 133.

¹²⁵ Like the plague, cf. Defoe 23, 78.

¹²⁶ As Colley (48 ff.) argues, providentialism was a particularly British-Protestant phenomenon.

¹²⁷ Hughes I: lxiii; Carpenter 286.

¹²⁸ Defoe 30.

the enquiry (the appalling moral state of the nation), states his concerns with clarity and makes positive suggestions. Although specific, he is not accusatory, but clearly and sincerely sketches his concerns, identifying himself whenever possible with the people. He acknowledges that though some of the recipients are ‘faithful and chosen servants’, all will benefit by heeding this special providential warning (327).¹²⁹ By citing examples of historical calamities, Sherlock stresses the ‘just cause for apprehension’. He appeals to the people to hear him, not as their accuser, but as a faithful minister in Christ, and in Bunyan-like terms, warns them to ‘flee from the wrath to come’ (4: 303), observing that ‘[a] city without religion can never be a safe place to live in’ (4: 329).

Invoking the theme of accountability, Sherlock warns his readers that, as English people who possess the benefits of Christianity, they have no excuse for their conduct: ‘If this part of the world had less light and less knowledge there might have been some excuse, but they have had the Light of the Gospel of Christ’ (4: 303). It is then implied that in rejecting this light and wilfully embracing spiritual darkness, depravity and brutality, the inhabitants of London have been visited by another less auspicious form of ‘revelation’ (the earthquakes). Though Scriptural revelation is closed, God continues to reveal himself to people through the ‘signs and prognostications’ of natural events which are under His control.

Sherlock moves from impiety to immorality: everywhere people swear, blaspheme and indulge in ‘lewdness and debauchery’. He notes with horror the number of ‘lewd houses which trade in their vices’ and make sin so ‘convenient’. From fornication and prostitution he moves to sodomy – ‘the unnatural lewdness, of which we have so much of late, is something more than brutish’ and he warns that those engaged in such pursuits must remember God’s destruction of Sodom with fire from heaven (4: 305). Worst of all, these evil people, ‘not content with their own brutish Passions, take pains to corrupt others’. The defiant way in which they act ‘with such cool and diabolical Malice,’ presents ‘a challenge to the power and justice of God’ (4: 305) – which has been partially answered by the earthquakes.

¹²⁹ In reading the earthquake as a sign of providential displeasure Sherlock drew censure from both without and within religious circles: he induced not only the opprobrium of the sceptical Horace Walpole, but more surprisingly, that of a certain indignant Quaker who published his *Modest Remarks upon the Bishop of London's Letter by One of the People Called Quakers* (1750) 6.

Sherlock then attacks the press, which has ‘swarmed with books, some to dispute, some to ridicule the great Truths of Religion’; the ‘earnestness’ with which these anti-Christian publications have been sought after, being a further indictment of the ungodly spirit of the times (4: 304). He laments the ready availability of pornography on the street; ‘histories and romances of the vilest prostitutes’ which ‘display the most execrable scenes of lewdness . . . without disguise, and nothing omitted that might inflame the corrupt passions of the youth of this nation’ (4: 305). Like Hooker and Paley, Sherlock regards morally and theologically subversive works as not only transgressions against Christian morals, but against the ‘common laws of the country’.¹³⁰ Acknowledging that ‘government is a great trust; and the powers of it . . . must be used for the good of the community’ he urges the clergy to assist the magistrates in their watchdog capacity (4: 334-335). Thus despite his patriotism, Sherlock’s honesty impels him to criticise ‘this Protestant Country’ which ignores the holiness of the Lent season and tolerates riotous living, plays, cockfighting and prize-fighting (4: 307). Finally he reminds all those in secular and religious authority of their duties and responsibilities, urging them to help curb the rising profligacy and dissolution:

In a word let every man, whatever his station is, do his part towards averting the Judgement of God; let every man reform himself and others as far as his influence goes; this is our only proper remedy; for the dissolute wickedness of the age is a more dreadful sign and prognostication of divine anger than the trembling of the earth underneath us. (4: 311)

It is not surprising to find Sherlock concluding by referring to ‘the dreadful sign and prognostication of divine anger’, for in effect all his theological works are concerned one way and another with the ‘sign[s] and prognostication[s]’ of God’s revelation of Himself to humankind.

The sceptical Horace Walpole was amused by this letter, which he regarded as a naive response from so rational a scholar. He professed great astonishment that a man of

¹³⁰ See E R Norman 23.

Sherlock's talents 'should run a race with Secker for the old ladies'. In a letter to Horace Mann he wrote:

There has been a shower of sermons and exhortations: Secker, the Jesuitical Bishop of Oxford, began the mode . . . [b]ut what is more astonishing, Sherlock, who has much better sense, and much less of the popish confessor, has been running a race with him for the old ladies, and has written a pastoral letter, of which ten thousand were sold in fifty days; and fifty thousand have been subscribed for, since the two editions. You have never read so impudent a piece! This earthquake, which has done no hurt . . . is sent, according to the Bishop, to punish bawdy prints, bawdy books (in one of which Mrs Pilkington drew his Lordship's picture), gaming, drinking . . . and all other sins, natural or not; particularly heretical books, which he makes a principal ingredient in the composition of an earthquake, because not having been able to answer a late piece, which Middleton has writ against him, he has turned the Doctor over to God for punishment, even in this world.¹³¹

Walpole refers to an unflattering physical description of Sherlock by Laetitia Pilkington in her three-volume *Memoirs* (Dublin, 1748-54)¹³² and a retort to Sherlock by his former opponent, Conyers Middleton, *An Examination of the Lord Bishop of London's Discourses [sic] Concerning the Use and Intent of Prophecy*. An abusive jingle and other anti-clerical comments by Walpole¹³³ hardly incline one to take these criticisms seriously. Other rational orthodox theologians such as Secker, Paley and Watson who reacted just as

¹³¹ *Walpole to Mann* 4: 134.

¹³² 'An old man with a most unprelatical countenance – for it was full of burbuckles and knobs and flames of fire'. Mrs. Pilkington's *Memoirs*, ed. Barry (New York, 1928) 194, cited in *Walpole to Mann* 4: 134, note.

¹³³ 'When Whitfield preaches, and when Whiston writes,
All cry that madness dictates either's flights.
When Sherlock writes of canting Secker preaches,
All think good sense inspires what either teaches.
Why, when all four for the same Gospel fight,
Should two be crazy, two be in the right.' See *Walpole to Mann* 4: 134.

'impudently' in denouncing the prevailing moral/religious apostasy and offered similar providential interpretations of current events (from the 1750 earthquake to the Reign of Terror) prove that Sherlock was not an anomaly.¹³⁴ Certainly, Walpole, who was later appalled by the irreligion and atrocities of the French Revolution, underestimated the rhetorical power of Sherlock's clerical charge as indicated by his surprise at its influence and success.¹³⁵

There are several reasons for the success of this pastoral letter. This genre lends itself to the expression of more personal feelings which Sherlock exploits. Thus he writes, not as the cool and detached polemicist arguing the case of revealed religion against Deism, but as the concerned pastor to his 'flock' who, grieved by the general infidelity of his fellow humans, uses every opportunity to challenge them – and himself – to a more rigorously consistent piety.

Initially he achieves a tone of disarming humility by exploiting the fraternal salutation. In addressing his parishioners as My Brethren and Friends', he is not 'my lord, the bishop', but a 'brother and friend'. Similarly, though angered and concerned at the proliferating vice, he does not resort to arrogant accusation, but assumes solidarity with them as he includes himself in the warning: 'It will be blindness, wilful and inexcusable, not to apply *ourselves* to this strong summons from God to repentance' (4: 302) [my italics].

Secondly, although the style is hortatory, Sherlock refuses to discard reason. Taking examples from both secular and sacred history, he argues that our only hope is in repentance (4: 303). A third possible reason for the letter's popularity could be its bold specificity. Eschewing smooth-sounding generalizations, Sherlock audaciously provides a list of specific evils, which open him to ridicule. He does not scruple to attack the press (as Walpole sardonically noted) for making a profit from salaciousness. And as proof of his

¹³⁴ Cf. Walpole's anticlerical remarks concerning Secker: 'the Jesuitical Bishop of Oxford', 'bred a Presbyterian, commenced a man-midwife, was president of an atheistical club and lastly a popular preacher'. *Walpole to Mann* 4: 133. With regard to apocalyptic signs, Watson writes: 'There never was an age since the death of Christ, never one since the commencement of the history of the world, in which atheism and infidelity have been more generally professed.' See *A Defence of Revealed Religion* 399. See also E R Norman 22.

¹³⁵ See his letters to More, Roberts 2: 213, 209, 216. See also *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* 31: 371 and *Walpole's Letters to Mann* 4: 133.

sincerity, Sherlock maintains: ‘I have no pleasure in laying open the shame of my country’ (332). Then, with political acumen he pinpoints the home as the national moral nursery:

Next to those in public offices of power and trust, the happiness of the public depends upon those who have the government in private families. Here it is that the youth of the nation must be formed, and if they are suffered to be corrupted in their religion or morals before they come into the world, there is little hope that the world will reform them. (335)

‘The necessity of an early education to form the mind, whilst tender, to the principles of honour and virtue’ is a ‘duty for parents and a part of the obedience they owe to God’ (335). Platitudes are discarded as Sherlock warms to his protest. Anger and outrage cut through polished rhetoric as he exclaims with an oath when observing young children ‘seriously employed at the gaming table’: ‘Can you look on and be unconcerned? For God’s sake, and for the sake of your children, and your country, take the courage to act like parents and masters of families!’ (336).

Sherlock’s insistence that ‘reformation must begin in private families; the law and magistrates can punish your children when they become wicked; but you must make them good by proper instruction and proper government’ (336) anticipates More, who similarly reminds parents of the awefulness of their responsibilities and Austen, who echoes these sentiments in *Mansfield Park*, where Sir Thomas learns to regret his remissive parenting. It is not only ironic, but can be read as proof of their disinterested concern for the British youth that these three ‘reformers’, Sherlock More and Austen were childless. Finally, this letter points to a continuum of Anglican moral and social reform, demonstrating that rational protest against prevailing immorality was not the sign of sectarian fanaticism, but an integral aspect of the orthodox prerogative, enunciated equally by concerned High Church, Evangelicals and Median Anglicans alike.

Sherlock’s final publication, his Clerical Charge of 1759, addresses the clergy on ‘the obligation you are under to a constant attendance on your separate cures’ (Hughes 4: 269). Residence is ‘the foundation of all other duties’ and accordingly he gives it a twenty-page treatment. By examining tenets of both canonical and constitutional law, Sherlock provides statutory proof against a variety of excuses for the evasions of duty. Although

reprobating past ‘mischief’, he moves on, calling for a united effort to attempt to ‘retrieve this evil’ (4: 294) by fulfilling the requirements laid down by Christ and upheld by the law. This work, with its examination of legal minutiae is reminiscent of Sherlock’s earlier treatises against Hoadley and Snape. It provides not only a fitting close to his *oeuvre*, but in its juridical accuracy, Scriptural fidelity and public concern, provides evidence of a remarkable homogeneity of thought over more than a half century of his writing.

CONCLUSION

It is not easy to tease out the separate strands of Sherlock’s achievements as his political career was so finely intermeshed with his legal, doctrinal and ecclesiastical interests. Yet, the common denominators in these disparate zones are his stability and the ability to render brilliant defence, both of which derive from a peculiarly singleness of vision. As befits a Christian patriarch, his inspiration is both familial (in this case, paternal) and Scriptural. Deriving early inspiration from his father, William Sherlock, who maintained the Church’s rights in *The Case of Resistance* (1684) and opposed Prayer Book alterations (to win over Dissenters), Sherlock was nevertheless both more politically stable and yet flexible than his father, who reneged from his early Non-juring stance to take the required oaths in 1690. Sherlock early threw his weight in with the new civil authority, but more especially so after the Battle of Preston Pans in 1715, working incessantly all his life to strengthen the ties between Church and state, but strenuously rejecting any subservience of the former. Thus, despite Whig opposition from Hoadley, Walpole, Gibson and their followers, Sherlock never deviated from his political, doctrinal or ecclesiastical stance, which has been described as ‘enlightened authoritarian’, consistently presenting a positive steadfastness during a time of political factiousness and doctrinal expediency.

His term as Vice-Chancellor at Cambridge (1715-1719) showcased his incipient legal abilities, which began to develop after his appointment as Master of the Temple in 1705, and which were put to the test when he had to defend *Ecclesia Anglicana* against the redoubtable Richard Bentley, Archdeacon of Ely in 1712. In 1715, after the death of his former champion, Queen Anne, Sherlock’s singleness of vision with regard to his political

stability was again tested during the Jacobite risings. His efforts to divert Tory loyalties away from Jacobitism and steer them towards the Hanoverian cause, outstripped that of any other contemporary divine and won him the favour of George I. And here, as will be seen in a later chapter, there is a similarity between Sherlock and More who both employed their writing (and their religion) in the cause of political stability and God-ordained powers.

Sherlock's rapidly developing legal acumen, his love of *Ecclesia Anglicana* and his self-acquired knowledge of ecclesiastical and canonical law, were again pressed into the service of the Church, when he was called on to reply to Bishop Benjamin Hoadley in the Bangorian Controversy which, though purporting to be the advocation of the 'sincerity doctrine', really centred on the Church's traditional rights and privileges to formulate doctrine and exercise government. Here the singleness of his light directed him to defend the rights and ceremonies of the church 'by law established', yet without making a claim to a divinely inspired and infallible episcopacy.¹³⁶ This light also led him to defend the Test and Corporation Act as the outer bulwark of the repository of orthodoxy, *Ecclesia Anglicana*. Sherlock's energetic engagement with this and other Whig assaults on Church privilege between 1731 and 1736, helped hone his rhetorical skills, which since 1724, had been employed in the campaign against Deism.

Although much of his energy was deployed in defending the political and ecclesiastical rights of the church, the main force of Sherlock's energies were reserved for the source of his light, orthodox doctrine, thus causing him to be celebrated as 'one of the most brilliant eighteenth-century defenders of the orthodox Anglican faith'.¹³⁷ His resourceful engagement with the Latitudinarian/Deist erosion of doctrine caused him to develop new insights and imaginative embodiments of doctrine as displayed in his exposition of prophecy in the *Six Dissertations* (1724) written in answer to Anthony Collins's *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), his Temple Discourses and his *tour de force*, *The Tryal of the Witnesses* (1727).

Sherlock's biographers, Hughes and Carpenter, describe him as a highly successful writer, but while Carpenter praises him for being 'convincingly orthodox', he laments that he was 'not an original thinker', a charge that invites comparison with a similar criticism of

¹³⁶ Carpenter 258.

¹³⁷ Even the cautious Edward Carpenter acknowledges him as 'one of the most prominent of the Anglican Churchmen who opposed the criticism of the scriptural revelation'. See Carpenter 236.

Jane Austen by David Cecil.¹³⁸ While it is difficult to unite orthodoxy and originality in doctrinal exposition or defence, I believe Carpenter underestimates Sherlock's originality. In his fourth discourse in *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, Sherlock intrepidly advances an original interpretation on the Noahic covenant. In the same work, Sherlock's casting of St Paul as a rhetorician who uses the claims of Natural Religion as a springboard for its own demolition is also creatively innovative.

Sherlock's most spectacular achievement, however, is undoubtedly his appropriation of the courtroom genre for his *Tryal of the Witnesses*, a brilliantly conceived work which seems to have marked a significant departure in apologetic writing. Although Bunyan had used dramatic dialogue in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Sherlock carries this much further and in the absence of direct evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to conclude that he was a pioneer in developing a more sophisticated form of dramatic writing for religious purposes. The latter raises the questions: 'Did Sherlock take the courtroom setting from the theatre? Or, does the courtroom genre originate from *The Tryal*?' The paucity of evidence makes a conclusion difficult. Although his Classical education required him to read Greek and Roman dramatists, his disapprobation of contemporary theatrical productions (plays and masques which he objected to as sexually promiscuous), makes it unlikely that he would have patronised the theatre.¹³⁹ However, the consummate ease with which he co-opts dramatic dialogue to doctrinal purposes displays not only Thespian ability, but enormous creativity in the adaptation of genre thus alone providing sufficient proof of his originality. His brief defence of the rationality and intellectual ability of women witnesses in *The Tryal* is also an important concession for a man engaged in upholding conservative doctrine in an authoritarian, male-dominated profession and shows not only a willingness to challenge cultural commonplaces about women, their intellect and (implicitly) their place in society, but a readiness to adjust his lens to receive – and refract – the maximum light.

¹³⁸ Carpenter 236. Lord David Cecil writes: 'Her crisp deft style seems to have been hers almost from the first moment she put pen to paper. It was not an original spirit but as an accomplished mistress of her craft this parson's teenage daughter so easily and obviously surpassed her predecessors.' *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1978) 63.

¹³⁹ See Sherlock's letters to Newcastle 15 March 1749 (SPD George II, 112, 137); 20 Jan 1756 (BL Add MS 32862, f. 161) and 21 Jan 1756 (ML Add MS 32862. f. 175), extracts of which appear in E Carpenter 292-93.

His defence of orthodoxy was thus imbued with the confidence of one who was not only sure his eye was single, but convinced that his whole body was diffused with the light of the holy *depositum* of the Gospel. Yet, his imaginative faculty was continually disciplined by his enlightened authoritarian approach and legal bias. When eighteenth-century sceptics attacked orthodox dogma, Sherlock took them to the bar of reason and the *Scripta Lex* to test their claims. Without compromising on his orthodoxy, he acknowledged where possible the validity of his opponent's claims and this reasonable attitude, together with his rigorously logical, and yet practical, approach to doctrine distinguished him from contemporary speculative divines such as Clarke and Hoadley. Unconcerned to frame a philosophical system to support Christian truths (which he argues are not antagonistic to philosophy or human reason), in all his works, Sherlock focused on the 'facts and evidence' of history as against Deist speculations. Insisting on reason and sound judgement as the chief criteria for assessing propositions, he argued clearly and forcefully that where God's laws are never contrary to human reason, they are as yet so far above it as to be incomprehensible by it. Sherlock vindicated predictive prophecy, miracles and the atonement, maintaining that though the means of grace might be supernatural, there is nothing mysterious in the way we are required to appropriate it.

In enquiring into the more secular basis of Sherlock's confidence as a theological polemicist, we see that his masculine education at Eton and Cambridge, legal exposure at the Temple, position as chaplain to Queen Anne and Caroline and the polemical experience gained from the legal/ecclesiastical forays against Bentley and Hoadley (in which he usually came off best) qualified him for the role of defender of the church's doctrine by conferring added authority to his 'correct' gender, a basic requirement without which his crusade could not have been undertaken. Yet, his masculinity was insufficient to purchase him a position in the Episcopal hierarchy without the aid of a politically powerful woman. As a committed Tory in a Whig administration, Sherlock was politically disabled and, in a sense, this disempowerment (stemming from ideological attachments) aligns him with More and Austen who were traditionally (biologically) disempowered. Thus, although of the 'right' sex and class, Sherlock was of the 'wrong' party and in order to surmount these difficulties, he had to invoke the protection of women (Queens Anne and Caroline respectively) who brought about his Episcopal promotions, (his first one coming as late as 1728), which, in turn, lent credence to his literary stature. And in the same way, as we shall

see, More employed what influence she had, not to raise herself politically, but to enable her to share her light of her eye by venturing onto male turf in publishing her doctrinal and moral works.

Once firmly established, Sherlock's positions of authority in both church and parliament (on the Bench) added further weight and dignity to his writing. Yet, despite this, Sherlock seldom strikes one as pontifical. The light of his eye remains single: he holds fast to the faith he has been given and his whole body becomes light as he recognises the responsibilities of his 'embeddedness' in the power structures of the time (politics, theological debate and gender). This responsibility also assumed a social focus that is often overlooked. Adopting a Hooker-like stance on the divine sanction of 'Human Lawes'¹⁴⁰ and the necessity for the clergy to assist magistrates in upholding them, Sherlock's steady opposition to the irreligion and immorality of the time and his urging parents to play a more proactive role in the upbringing of their children can be seen as harbingers of the more thorough-going reforms of More, Wilberforce and fellow Anglican Evangelicals.¹⁴¹ As will be shown, More who similarly took her light seriously, conceiving of herself too as a disseminator and defender of the truth, also used her embeddedness in her more circumscribed power structures to disseminate and defend 'the glorious light of the Gospel'.

Thus one can conclude that Sherlock's apologetics are clearly informed by a confidence that derives from his gender, privileges and position, and spiritually from what he saw as the rationality, historicity, authenticity and moral power of his religion. As his sermons and 1750 Clerical Letter reveal, he saw Christianity (as More and Austen were to, as well) as not only a preservative against moral (and civil) corruption, but as a generally enlightening doctrine, with the power to reform and renew human beings.

¹⁴⁰ Hooker, *Works* 8: 468.

¹⁴¹ Cf. More's *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1778), *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790) and *Practical Piety* (1811), *Christian Morals* (1813); her Wilberforce's *Society for the Reformation of Public Manners* (1787) and his *A Practical View of the Prevailing System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797).

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CHAPTER THREE

HANNAH MORE EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES

Whereas early More criticism (such as that of Charlotte Yonge, M G Jones, Annette Meakin and Mary Hopkins) tended to be synoptic and expository,¹ more recent criticism has been from a sociological or gender studies angle and has either focused more positively on the ‘doubleness’ or contradictions in her life and writing (as in the case of Mary Poovey and Patricia Demers) or tended to be dismissive of her as in the case of Eleanor Ty, Moira Ferguson, Mitzi Myers, Felicity Nussbaum and others, who have variously described her as promoting domestic ideology, being paternal, anti-feminist or using religion to reinforce the *status quo* and support hegemonic patriarchal gender/class/racial structures.² Similarly, as we shall see later, More’s patronage of Ann Yearsley, the Bristol milk-woman-poet, has been the centre of much critical discussion.³

¹ M G Jones, *Hannah More* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), Mary Alden Hopkins, *Hannah More and her Circle* (New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), Annette M B Meakin, *Hannah More, A Biographical Study* (London: John Murray, 1911), and Charlotte Yonge, *Hannah More* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890).

² Poovey describes More as one of those women who ‘thought of themselves as textbook Proper Ladies even as they boldly crossed the border of that limited domain’. See Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984) 40. See also Moira Ferguson, ‘Subject to Others’: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834 (London: Routledge, 1992) 220, Mitzi Myers, ‘Hannah More’s Tracts for the Times: Social Fiction and Female Ideology’ in *Fetter’d or Free? British Women Novelists 1670-1815* ed. Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989) 45 and Eleanor Ty, *Unsex’d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790’s* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993) 17, 42, 71, 76, 119.

³ See a discussion of this in the section ‘Enlightened Beginnings’ below.

Therefore, although More was praised by her contemporaries and Victorians for raising the tone of the nation's morals,⁴ the twentieth-century tide has turned increasingly against her. She has been dismissed as a 'mild critic of her times, exposing domestic rather than large-scale social evils',⁵ and more recently accused of moral imperialism and collusion with the patriarchy by promulgating submission, or more confusingly, confining women to their separate spheres, while maintaining the importance of their influence in nurturing morality in an amoral world'.⁶ As a 'Tory abolitionist', More is attacked for using religion to re-affirming 'evangelical, gendered class values and their relation to racial subjugation'.⁷ Patricia Demers, who eloquently recuperates this 'evangelical cultural warrior', draws attention to the shift in reader positioning, and defends More's attempt 'to improve the habits, and raise the principles of the common people', at a time when it was commonly believed that their moral and political temptations were unprecedented. More's confidence that she was fulfilling her Christian duty in enlightening the poor might not enlist sympathy now, but Demers argues that her attempt to defeat what Bishop Taylor described as 'the most daring and open attack on religion that was ever made' in the face of both liberal and conservative attacks, deserves recognition.⁸

As invaluable as these contributions are, I believe that More has not sufficiently been recognised for her embodiment of Anglican doctrine and the role it plays in her promotion of political and personal reform, a contribution all the more remarkable considering the generic restrictions that she, as a late Georgian woman writer, had to negotiate. Accordingly, while briefly acknowledging her contributions to politics, female education and general moral and social upliftment of the lower classes, this chapter, which

⁴ Such as Mrs E K Elwood, *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1843), Helen Cross Knight, *A New Memoir of Hannah More, or Life in Hall and Cottage* (New York: M W Dodd, 1851) and Clara Lucas Balfour, *A Sketch of Mrs Hannah More and her Sisters* (London: W and E G Cash, 1854).

⁵ Hopkins 223.

⁶ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) 171.

⁷ Moira Ferguson 220.

⁸ Quoted by Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1996) 110.

is divided into two main sections, ‘The Context of More’s Piety’ and ‘Coelebs in Search of A Wife’, focuses mainly on passages from her works that best display her doctrinal, ecclesiastical and moral interests. Although Sherlock and More share common ground in their veneration of orthodox doctrine, More’s more distinctly Evangelical interpretation of it distinguishes her from Sherlock. Hence, while showing the similarities between the basic doctrinal concerns of the two writers’ concerns, I dwell more particularly on More’s divergences of emphasis.

ENLIGHTENED BEGINNINGS

Hannah More was born at Fishponds, Stapleton, in the parish of Martock, Bristol on 2 February 1745 – significantly, for someone as unconventional as More, during the ‘Year of the Rebellion of Forty-Five’. Although born during the closing years of George II’s reign and dying in the reign of William IV, More lived the greater part of her life during the reign of George III, who was noted for his piety, patriotism and love of domestic life,⁹ and whose own prolific family reinforced the conduct book domestic ideology with its valorisation of marriage and children, which dominated the writing of More and her contemporaries.¹⁰

More was the youngest of five daughters. Her mother, Mary Grace, was of ‘plain education’, but ‘vigorous intellect’, and her father, Jacob More, an unusually enlightened man for his times. Educated under the celebrated Dr Samuel Clarke at Norwich, when his clerical ambitions were thwarted, Jacob took to teaching and became at the age of thirty, headmaster of a foundation-school at Fishponds, Stapleton (near Bristol).¹¹

⁹ George III’s private piety was manifest publicly by the huge thanksgiving services organized at St Paul’s in December 1797, following naval victories over the Dutch, French and Spanish fleets. The only other British monarch who held public thanksgivings was Queen Anne. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 216.

¹⁰ On George II’s promotion of patriotism and domesticity see Colley 230, and on the domestic ideology see Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) 28.

¹¹ William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More* (London: R B Seeley and Sons, 1834) 1: 6-7.

Although Jacob was a staunch High Church Tory, diversity of religious and political belief during his childhood had made him unusually tolerant and sympathetic towards Dissent. His mother had come from a family of loyal Presbyterians, who, in obedience to their conscience, risked contravening the Conventicle Act, by boarding the Dissenting minister and holding clandestine midnight meetings in their home, with More's paternal grandfather guarding the entrance with drawn sword.¹² This High Church and Dissenting mix in More's spiritual lineage (like that of Wesley),¹³ not only laid the foundations of her enlightenment, but probably contributed towards her later Evangelical attachments. Yet, despite More's inherent sympathy for the spiritual principles of Dissent, she evinced no sympathy for the concomitant political radicalism of Price and Priestly, and was one of Tom Paine's bitterest enemies. Like Sherlock, Paley, Watson, Horsley and Horne she argued for the moral and practical bases of social hierarchy, insisting on civil obedience and the virtues of labour and 'godly contentment'.¹⁴ Yet More's friendship with the Bristol linen draper, Peach (Hume's friend), demonstrates a progressive attitude that is seldom recognised.¹⁵ While at Fishponds, Jacob More entertained French officers on parole, thus exposing his family to the differing viewpoints of Catholicism, and paving the way for Hannah More's long and intimate friendship with Eve Marie Garrick, the Catholic wife of the actor, David Garrick.

Jacob More's valuable library was lost in transit from Norfolk, but having an extremely retentive memory, he recounted to his young daughters Roman tales in Latin, thus giving More access to a language most girls were denied. As she was something of a child prodigy, repeating large sections of the Catechism at the age of three and writing her first poem at four, Jacob taught her mathematics and Latin, and her sister Mary (who had French lessons in Bristol) taught her French. Later, she acquired Spanish and Italian.¹⁶

¹² Roberts 1: 7-8.

¹³ The Puritan/High Church mix in Charles and John Wesley is seen as a shaping factor in their disciplined piety. See A Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: Charles Wesley, Evangelist* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1967) 43.

¹⁴ See also E R Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770 –1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 34-36.

¹⁵ Roberts 1: 17.

¹⁶ Roberts 1: 10, 11.

Generally her family nurtured the sensitive young More's talents, excusing her, when older, from domestic duties, which still formed a large proportion of female education.

In keeping with his enlightened views of women and education, Jacob not only encouraged his daughters to attend public lectures on astronomy, literature, philosophy and science, but trained them to earn a living so that in 1757, when Hannah was only twelve, the More sisters opened a boarding school at 6 Trinity St, College Green, Bristol. Although they had no capital, the school flourished on the subscription method, owing to the diplomatic way they handled their aristocratic patrons (Mrs Gwatkin, Lord Bottetourt, his sister, Elizabeth, Duchess Dowager of Beaufort and Mrs Boscawen, wife of the Admiral).¹⁷ The school, aimed at daughters of the burgeoning middle classes, soon became a respected academic establishment as well as profitable economic venture. At this time, the More's kindly mentor/counsellor, Dr James Stonehouse (later the Revd and Sir), perceiving their female solidarity, affectionately referred to them as 'the Sisterhood'.¹⁸ The astronomer, James Ferguson, and Thomas Sheridan (Richard Brinsley's father) lectured at the Mores' school and, together with Edmund Burke and his brothers, were frequent visitors at their home.¹⁹

In 1767 More became engaged to Edward Turner, twenty years her senior and owner of the Belmont estate, near Wraxall. Turner never married More, but embarrassed by dishonouring the contract three times, he offered her an annuity of £200, which Stonehouse persuaded her to accept. This enabled her to relinquish teaching and concentrate on her writing. The abortive engagement lasted from 1767-73, and More vowed never to marry after this fiasco, although she and her sisters remained on cordial terms with Turner, who reputedly adorned the trees in his wood with More's verses.

While recuperating from the stress of the broken engagement at the coastal resort of Weston-Upper in 1773, More met the vicar of Blagdon, the Revd John Langhorne, author of the Scottish pastoral, *Genius and Valour*, and an obscure translation of Plutarch. Although married (for the second time) he and More engaged in what Roberts calls a

¹⁷ Roberts 1: 6-7.

¹⁸ Roberts 1:28 and Hopkins 25.

¹⁹ More sent Edmund Burke some of her verses and a cockade of 'sublime and beautiful' colours on the day of his electioneering success. See Hopkins 26-28.

'lively intellectual discourse' and Hopkins 'a decorous flirtation',²⁰ which spawned many mutually flattering verses, until he declined into alcoholism and died, after his wife's death in childbirth.²¹

It is tempting to describe More's early rise to fame as 'meteoric'. Her first (verse)-drama, *The Search after Happiness; A Pastoral Drama*, produced privately at their Bristol boarding school, was written when she was eighteen, but published anonymously ten years later (1773), when it rapidly exhausted thirteen editions. Written in rhyming couplets, this poem celebrates the female intellect and a sequestered life of the mind, with the caesura and chiasmus conveying the contrasts between art and nature, wealth and wisdom, society and solitude, fame and happiness. A later revision (after her introduction to the Blue Stockings), includes apostrophes to 'moral Carter', 'faultless Aikin', 'accomplish'd Montagu', 'polish'd Brookes' and 'fair Macaulay' (1777: 144). It is noteworthy that in this juvenile work there are admiring references to Latitudinarians like Locke and Boyle, as well as Puritans and Nonconformists, such as Bunyan, Janeway and Watts.²² Although later editions of the poem reveal the downplaying of reason, this tension between rationality and Puritanism is still evident in *Coelebs* (1809).

The *Search after Happiness* was followed by a more ambitious, dramatic work, *The Inflexible Captive* (later called *Regulus*), produced in 1774 in Bath. Boasting a eulogistic epilogue on female literary achievements by Garrick (and a prologue by Langhorne), it was based on a lesser-known lyrical drama of Metastasio, and enjoyed a successful opening night with both David and Eva Marie Garrick present. They not only adopted More as their protégée, opening their homes in London and Hampton to her for the next twenty five years, but introduced her to Reynolds (who introduced her to Johnson) Walpole, Lyttleton and other writers, artists and people of note.

In 1776 More attracted literary attention when Cadell published her two ballads 'Sir Eldred of the Bower' and 'The Bleeding Rock', their instant popularity attesting to the

²⁰ The first definition is from Roberts 1: 18, the second from Hopkins 38.

²¹ On Langhorne, the 'spendthrift of the patrimony of genius' see Roberts 1: 18 and Hopkins 37ff. On Turner, who seems to have suffered from commitment phobia, and retained his admiration for More and friendship with her and her sisters, see Roberts 1: 17 and Hopkins 32-36.

²² Cf. Urania's advice in *Search after Happiness* (London: T Allman, n.d.) lines 22-29.

revived interest in old English legends.²³ Johnson's enjoyment of 'Sir Eldred' was so acute that he added a verse of his own, and at this time when their friendship was at its strongest, described More as 'the most powerful versificatrix in London',²⁴ observing that 'it is dangerous to say a word of poetry before her; it is talking of the art of war before Hannibal'.²⁵ Garrick delighted More by reading 'Sir Eldred' aloud to his guests after dinner when More was staying at *The Adelphi*. In return for their hospitality, she wrote *Ode to Dragon*, some verses on their much-loved dog, published in 1777, and in August the same year, defended Garrick in the *Monthly Review* against Frances Brookes's caricature of him in *The Excursion*.²⁶

In London, More moved with singular ease in various cultural, political and clerical circles, dining with *literati*,²⁷ artists,²⁸ politicians,²⁹ peers³⁰ and a host of prelates.³¹ During

²³ *The Bleeding Rock* (set near Turner's Belmont estate, but not to be read as an autobiographical catharsis) gives a legendary explanation of red marks on local sandstone. Sir Eldred is a retelling of the Gil Morice ballad. More's poems, in couplets and quatrains, are richly allusive both Classically and Biblically.

²⁴ The quotation is from Ford K Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) 76. On the More/Johnson friendship see Hopkins 56-58 who describes the friendly flattery between them and speculates on the type of older man to whom More was invariably attracted. Demers who also comments on the reciprocal adulation between More and Johnson, observes that Johnson's portrait in Pembroke College carries a motto from More's poem 'Sensibility'. See Demers 51.

²⁵ Roberts 1: 251-52.

²⁶ Because Garrick allegedly refused to produce her plays and opera, she pilloried him as a pompous theatrical manager in her novel. See Hopkins 73-4.

²⁷ Such as Baretti, Dr Burney, Garrick, Johnson, the Sheridans, Walpole, Lord Lyttleton and the Blue Stockings. More's letters from the metropolis to her sisters at this period 1775-1779 are happy, witty and 'worldly': she even boasts of 'making conquests' of Garrick and Johnson (Roberts 1: 76). The flippant tone, together with a catalogue of social activities and theatre visits, invite comparison with Austen's letters written while staying with her brother, Henry, in London.

²⁸ Especially Sir Joshua and Frances Reynolds.

²⁹ Notably Burke and Walpole.

³⁰ Lords Orford, Lord and Lady Pembroke, Lady Derby, the Duchess of Devonshire, Sir Ralph and Lady Paine, the Duchess of Kensington, Lady Bute, Sir Charles and Lady Margaret Middleton, Sir Richard Hill and Sir William Weller Pepys and Henry Wilmot, brother of the Lord Chief Justice. (Roberts 1: 82-84) At the Wilmots, More met Lady Juliana Penn wife of the second son of William Penn, with whom she became intimate (Hopkins 73).

³¹ See her letters home in Roberts 1: 68-70.

the period 1775-1779 and again in 1784-85, More's letters to her sisters abound with references to her London social life. She mentions breakfasting with Elizabeth Carter (who took a particular liking to More), enjoying Horace Walpole's quips at dinner, and hearing Sheridan (Richard Brinsley's father) reading Gray and Dryden.³² At Richmond, More met Joseph Barretti and enjoyed the 'hilarious' and 'patriotic' company of Edmund, Richard and William Burke, Gibbon, Elliot, Lord Mahon and David Garrick.³³ Here, too, she met Lords Pembroke, Lyttleton, Talbot, Townsend, Lord Chancellor Camden and Elizabeth Montagu, who defended Shakespeare against Voltaire's criticisms and contributed to Lyttleton's *Dialogues of the Dead*, and was affectionately known to those within the Blue Stocking Circle (or *Bas Bleu*) as 'Queen of the Blues'. More was welcomed into their ranks, becoming an active and respected member of this group, whose fame she celebrated in 1786 in her poems, 'Sensibility' and '*Bas Bleu, or Conversation*'. Although friendly with Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mrs Veysey, Hester Mulso Chapone, Mrs Delaney, Charlotte Lennox, Fanny Burney, Mrs Macaulay, Mary Hamilton, Fanny Burney and Hester Thrale Piozzi, More was to become particularly intimate with Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Montagu, with whom she continued to correspond after leaving London and who visited her in the country.

More also became friendly with Sir Richard Hill, Sir William Weller Pepys, the philanthropic barrister who was active in many Evangelical reform societies and Sir Charles and Lady Margaret Middleton, at whose home she was introduced to Wilberforce and Newton. In between fraternising with these Anglican Evangelicals, More was forming valuable contacts with the prelacy, many of whom remained her lasting friends. At Henry Wilmot's home in Bloomsbury Square, More dined with the Bishop of Worcester and at Bishop Porteous's home, she met Dr Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St Asaph's, Dr Shute Barrington, bishop successively of Llandaff, Salisbury and Durham, and the bishops of Gloucester, Bristol, Bath and Wells, Dr George Horne, President of Magdalene College,

³² Roberts 1: 310-1. In other letters she mentions Dr Burney, Lord Palmerston, Lord and Lady Bathurst and Roscius. She talks about Sheridan attacking Shakespeare, Garrick reading to them from *Paradise Lost* and Dr Lolme giving her his latest book 'a satire on the foolish austerities of the Church of Rome, something in Stillingfleet's way'. See Roberts 110-112.

³³ 'We dined at Richmond . . . with Mr Gibbon, Mr Elliot, Edmund, Richard and William Burke, Lord Mahon, David Garrick and Sir Joshua. We had a great deal of laugh, as there were so many leaders among the patriots and we had a great deal of attacking and defending with much wit and good humour'. See Roberts 1: 81, 395.

Dean of Canterbury and Bishop of Norwich, Dr Samuel Horsley, Bishop of Lincoln, Dr Lowth, Bishop of London and the Hebrew scholars, Dr Kennicott and his erudite wife.³⁴

Apart from Garrick and Johnson (with whom More remained friends until his death in 1784), More became particularly friendly with Beilby Porteus, Bishop of Chester and later London, whom she met when he was private chaplain to George III, and for whom she wrote the poem, ‘Bishop Bonner’s Ghost’ (1786). In this highly imaginative poem, which describes Porteus’s favourite retreat, a stone chair in the secluded, tangled garden recess of Fulham Palace garden, More depicts the gentle Porteus ousting his stubborn anti-Protestant prelatical predecessor from his stronghold. By clever use of light and dark imagery, she plays on the meaning of enlightenment, describing Porteus hacking away claustrophobic (papal) undergrowth and letting in literal and spiritual light where darkness had previously reigned.³⁵ This is an apt metaphor for More who, according to the ‘light’ of her ‘eye’, in her political and moral tracts, didactic works and religious novel, attempts to dispel the ‘darkness’ of impiety and introduce the light of Christianity. Similarly, like the pruning Porteus, More can be said to have reclaimed some generic territory for women writers. In turn, Porteus inadvertently established More as a respectable writer of socio-political tracts. His admiration of her talent, and his sympathies for the Evangelical cause, elicited the description of ‘an Evangelical, all but in name’.³⁶

Owing to her strong Dissenting legacy, More was concerned to keep Sunday quiet, and ‘as a day apart’, but some of her acquaintance exaggerated and ridiculed this tendency. Garrick, who affectionately called More ‘Nine’, is renowned for protecting her at a house-party where secular music was proposed on a Sunday afternoon, by saying, ‘Nine, you are a Sunday woman; retire to your room. I will recall you when the music is over.’³⁷ This concern is clearly visible in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, where the Stanleys teach the

³⁴ For example, in a letter home More mentions dining at Mrs Walsingham’s, with the ‘Montagus, The Lord Primate, Lord Walsingham, the Bishop of Salisbury, Laelius and others’. See Roberts 1: 82, 113.

³⁵ Hopkins 37.

³⁶ See Ford K Brown 31: ‘Porteus was indistinguishable from politics and morality from the Evangelicals, was an extreme and wholly unqualified admirer of Hannah More, had as chaplain a noted Evangelical, John Owen, steadfastly opposed the good sort of people, including his own clergy, steadfastly refused to take action against the Evangelical lecturers of his diocese though angrily attacked by the High Church clergy for not doing so, at once joined the Bible Society and was angrily attacked for that.’

³⁷ Roberts 1: 133.

Belfields to respect ‘the Sabbath’. More’s friendship with prominent London Evangelicals,³⁸ especially Newton and Wilberforce helped shape her religious persuasions. Although she gradually came to embrace many Evangelical tenets, she rejected the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace and divine election, becoming like Fletcher of Madeley (and most of her Clapham friends), an ‘Arminian Evangelical’.³⁹

Mention has been made of More’s first full-scale tragedy, *The Inflexible Captive*, later called *Regulus* (a free translation of Metastasio’s *Attilio Regolo*), which was written in 1774, premiered in Bath in April 1775 and played in Exeter shortly afterwards. More’s second tragedy, *Percy*, produced by Garrick at *The Theatre Royal* in Covent Garden in December 1777, ran for three weeks to full houses, with patrons threatening to storm the building for seats and a first edition of 4,000 selling out in two weeks.⁴⁰ The popular Mrs Siddons acted three times in the role of Elwina in *Percy* in Bath (1778- 79) and Bristol (1780-81), three times in Bath the following season and four times in Drury Lane (1785-86).⁴¹ This success resulted in More’s portrait being included, together with other more mature Blue Stockings, in ‘The Nine Muses’ in the *Ladies Pocket-Book* of 1778.⁴²

Garrick’s untimely death in January 1799,⁴³ (which seemed to affect her more deeply than the death of her father, Jacob More in 1787) caused More to withdrew from

³⁸ Sir Charles Middleton, Sir William Pepys, Wilberforce, John Newton, Henry Thornton, Thomas Clarkson, the Macaulays, James Stephens and John Newton.

³⁹ Henry Thompson, *Life of Hannah More, with Notices of her Sisters* (London: T Cadell, 1838) 337-39.

⁴⁰ Demers 24.

⁴¹ There were several other successful female dramatists at the time: Frances Brooke, Elizabeth Griffith, Frances Sheridan, Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Inchbald, Harriet Lee and Hannah Cowley, who were all respectable, well-known playwrights.

⁴² The other eight Muses were the Blue Stockings, Elizabeth Carter, Anna Barbauld, Angelica Kauffman, Mrs Sheridan, Charlotte Lennox, Elizabeth Montagu, Mrs Macaulay and Mrs Griffith. Peter Pindar in his vituperative *Nil Admirari* (1799), quips: ‘Indeed Miss Hannah has a so-so lyre, / So out of tune it murders all the Nine’. *Nil Admirari, or A Smile at a Bishop*, in *The Works of Peter Pindar* (London: Walker, 1794-1801) 5: 180- 82.

⁴³ More wrote to a friend in 1822, gratefully acknowledged what the Garricks had done for her: ‘I spent above twenty winters under her roof [Mrs Garrick] and . . . gratefully remember not only that personal kindness, but my first introduction through them into a society remarkable for its rank, literature and talents. Whatever was the most distinguished in either was to be found at their table, He [Garrick] was the soul of conversation.’ See Roberts 4: 9 and Annette Meakin, *Hannah More: A Biographical Study* (London: John Murray, 1919) 388.

society to keep Marie Garrick company in her year-long period of mourning. However, during this time, More was persuaded by the producer of her drama *Percy*, Thomas Harris, to revise the play on which she had been busy working in Bristol when news of Garrick's death reached her. First called *The Bridal Day*, More's revised tragedy, *The Fatal Falsehood*, was produced at Covent Garden in 1779. Although it was well produced and drew good applause on the opening night, tragedy struck when Mrs Hannah Parkhouse Cowley accused More of plagiarism. Outraged by the accusation, More denied the charge in the *St James Chronicle* (August 1779) and Cowley reiterated it. To More's distress, the *Gentlemen's Magazine* (September 1799) exploited the controversy by publishing verses on the quarrel. More, who was intent on making an affidavit, was persuaded against this by her publisher, Cadell. Her only other dramatic work, *Sacred Dramas*, published in *Sensibility and Sacred Dramas* in 1789, was not intended for stage production and received cool reviews from her critics.⁴⁴

Thus, after Garrick's death and the ensuing scandal of *The Fatal Falsehood*, More resolved never to patronise the theatre again, even when the famous Mrs Siddons played the lead role of Edwina in her *Percy* in London. More's 'light' of the eye convinced her that these two personal tragedies were signs that she must abandon writing for the theatre, leave London and retire to the country. Accordingly, she and her sisters (who had sold their school in Bristol), retired to Bath, and in 1785 built a cottage, Cowslip Green, in the Wrington area of Somerset, to which Porteous, Carter, Montagu, Zachary Macaulay, Wilberforce and Newton were frequent visitors. In this she was following the example of her fictitious Florio, who left dissipated town life for the innocent and instructive charms of the country, and 'with a sigh confess't / The simplest pleasures are the best'.⁴⁵ The poem 'Florio' (published in 1786 and dedicated to Sir Horace Walpole), therefore not only became prophetic of her own life, but provides a ground bass theme in *Coelebs* – the exaltation of 'innocent' country pleasures. Thus, Garrick's death and the *Fatal Falsehood* debacle, can be read as a watershed in More's social and literary life, marking the end of

⁴⁴ Hopkins 102. See Demers' insightful criticism of the *Sacred Dramas* 40-47.

⁴⁵ 'A thousand cheerful thoughts arise, / Each rural scene enchant his eyes:/ With transport he begins to look / On Nature's all instructive book; / Till Florio with a sigh confess't, / The simplest pleasures are the best.' See 'Florio, A Tale for Fine Gentlemen and Ladies' in *The Poetical Works of Hannah More, with a Memoir of the Author* (London: Scott, Webster and Geary, 1853: 379) lines 125-126.

her prolonged annual visits to London and her career as a poet and dramatist – and the beginning of her career as a didactic writer.

Walpole, who was the first to publish ‘Bishop Bonner’s Ghost’ at his Strawberry Hill Press in 1789, and the only one to whom More gave her portrait (painted by Opie), corresponded with More until his death, often referring to her as ‘Dear Holy Hannah’ or ‘Dear Saint Hannah’.⁴⁶ Their long and unusual friendship probably succeeded because More ‘with Christian prudence . . . did not perpetually obtrude on [him] the subject of religion as he would have most certainly laughed at her cant and vulgarity.’⁴⁷ It is my belief that Mr Flam in *Coelebs* is modelled on Walpole, and that like Milton’s Satan, she tried to punish her own too beguiling literary creation by allowing Stanley and Barlow to constantly berate him.

At the same time that More was fraternising or (in her absence from London) corresponding with Walpole, she was pursuing established friendships with Garrick, Johnson, the Reynolds, the Sheridans and Carter and Montagu of the Blue Stockings group, as well as developing new ties with a completely different group in London, the so-called ‘Clapham Sect’. At meetings at the home of the abolitionist, Sir Charles (Baron Barham) and Lady Middleton in London, More met Zachary Macaulay, Wilberforce, John Thornton and later, Newton.

Critics have noted More’s ability for maintaining extremely disparate friendships; hence her letters to Walpole are witty and ‘worldly’ in their discussion of current events, those to Sir William Pepys are literary, those to Newton concern spiritual matters and those to Montagu and Carter canvass a variety of literary subjects and later, frequently concern their protégée, Ann Yearsley.⁴⁸ More’s interaction with Porteous is based on mutual political and philanthropic interests, her bond with the Middletons is the slave trade, with Zachary Macaulay, foreign missions, and with Wilberforce, Sunday Schools and the abolition. More first met Wilberforce in Bath in 1786, and despite the fifteen-year age

⁴⁶ See Thompson 159-160. More introduced Walpole to Porteous and in a letter he thanks her for ‘pimping’ between them. In her correspondence with Walpole, More is vivacious, witty and relaxed, and not at all like her fictional creation, the serious Lucilla Stanley. On Walpole’s influence on More and his appreciation of her talent and benevolence see also Hopkins 139 and Demers 65, 67, 69.

⁴⁷ Thompson 159-160.

⁴⁸ See the mention of Yearsley and the footnote to it after the discussion of Newton, below.

discrepancy, they enjoyed a long friendship, cemented by their common humanitarian/ Evangelical projects.

Thus, More never really embarked on a definite ‘Evangelical period’ in her life. One can no more pinpoint a date for its beginning (although Garrick’s death was a catalyst) as separate this strand from her other varied interests, which were so intricately intertwined. Although it was not a sole interest, it became more of a controlling one later, but like the elegant fictional Stanleys in her *Coelebs*, she never obtruded it on those who were unsympathetic to it. However, as More’s name is often linked with that of John Newton, the African slave trader turned Anglican clergyman,⁴⁹ it is necessary to make separate mention of this friendship.

More and Newton’s friendship began in 1787 and lasted until his death in 1803. She met Newton, who had been rector at St Mary Woolnoth, London for several years, at Sir Charles Middleton’s London home. They began corresponding seriously in 1787, soon after More had read his *Cardiphonia* and recommended it to Stonehouse. Although celebrated for his fiery temperament, Newton’s letters to More are extremely affectionate and often filled with amusing details of secular topics. Three weeks after their first meeting, More invited the Newtons to Cowslip Green, their friendship proceeding with what Hopkins calls ‘rapidity as well as dignity’.⁵⁰ During his visit she consulted him about her fear that her love of gardening might be sinful as it took up so much of her time. This, as we shall see, is a similar preoccupation of her fictional Lucilla in *Coelebs*, 1809 (written about eight years later), but he allayed these anxieties, expressing the wish that he might live near her to enjoy her garden hermitage, and her ‘root house’, of which she was so fond.

After his wife’s death the widowed, fifty-six year old Newton spent some time with More at Cowslip Green, chaperoned by his adopted daughter, Miss Catlett. It is conjectured that he proposed to More during this time, but was refused. His visit was memorable as he counselled a sick servant who remembered him with great affection, and accidentally left his pipe in a blackcurrant bush. His next letter to More contained a verse extolling Cowslip Green and for months later he continued sentimentally to eulogise her cottage and peaceful

⁴⁹ The history of his ordination reveals his intransigence: as a converted slave-trader he taught himself mathematics and as Tide-Master at Liverpool, Greek and Hebrew. His first application to the Archbishop of Canterbury for ordination was unsuccessful, but after six years of persistence, he was ordained.

⁵⁰ See Hopkins 147.

garden.⁵¹ Newton's last letters to More (who came to regard him as her spiritual counsellor) were more homiletic and undoubtedly influenced her in her deeper, but intensely private, espousal of Evangelicalism. They continued to correspond until his death in 1803.

In 1784, More became involved in a widely publicised friendship – and eventual rupture – with Ann Yearsley, or 'Lactilla', the Bristol milkwoman/poet, whose poems More edited and caused to be published. In an overview such as this one cannot do justice to the social politics of this complicated quarrel involving two very gifted, but volatile women and spanning the years 1784-85, but it is sufficient to say that if More's actions and attitudes were sometimes controlling or tactless, her motives were honest and benevolent and without her tireless efforts to advance Yearsley and her work she would have remained unknown and indigent. A brief sketch of the events of this much-publicised interaction between the two women is provided in the footnote below.⁵²

⁵¹ He wrote sentimentally: 'Oh my dear Ladies! O Mendip! O root-house! O chamber of peace! O ye walks and seats! If I never visit you more, I shall think of you and pay you a mental visit often and often. Surely no pipe in Somersetshire is so honoured as that which dwells (long may it dwell!) in your blackcurrant bush!' At Patty More's request, he obtained a verse from Cowper for her autograph album. See Hopkins 147-48.

⁵² Ann Yearsley was a Bristol milkwoman who had extraordinary poetical talent. The gifted wife of an improvident man, whom she married against her will at seventeen, she had six children by the time she was twenty-seven. The starving family was found in a stable by Richard Vaughan and brought to More's attention. More threw herself wholeheartedly into helping Yearsley. With the help of Elizabeth Montagu, she raised money for the publication of some of Yearsley's better poems, and while Montagu organized the subscription list (which was dominated by the Duchesses of Athol, Beaufort and Rutland, the Gwaticns, Turners, Walpole and Blue Stockings), More edited the poems, liaised with the publisher, Cadell, and read the proofs. More not only 'cultivated her genius', gave her books on Ovid, Ossian and Dryden, but provided practical help by paying a maid to look after Yearsley's children while she sold her milk. The first leather-back and gilt-tooled edition which came out in 1784, sold well, netting £350, which was invested in the Five Per Cents, bringing in an income of about £18 per annum for the family and £20 extra spending money. At first, Yearsley venerated More, writing three poems about her (whom she called 'Stella'), but later there was a violent altercation over her earnings. In the meantime, the work went through a second edition and with Yearsley's agreement (and signature), More and Montagu established a trust fund of which they were the trustees. More considered the income generated by the investment of these two works, plus Yearsley's earnings from her milk-trade together with her husband's wages, sufficient for a family of low social status. Yet Yearsley, who wished to uplift her family and control her own finances, came to think differently. The crisis came when More was away and Yearsley applied to More's sister Mary for her money and was refused on the grounds that it would not be in her interests. Yearsley was furious and rejected Elizabeth More's attempts at making peace. Yearsley continued to demand the money she felt it was her due to control, and eventually after much bitter recrimination, with Yearsley publicly accusing More of tyranny and fraud, and More complaining in private of ingratitude and fecklessness, Yearsley obtained all her money (a total of £500) and found a new patron in Frederick Hervey, Earl of Bristol. She published two more volumes of poems and an historical play, *Earle Godwin*, which was acted in Bath and Bristol. She published an angry self-justifying narrative against More in the preface to the 4th ed. of her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1786) and reproduced in the preface of her next volume, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787). More never retaliated publicly, but expressed her feelings in her private letters to the sick and aging Walpole, Lady Boscawen and Mrs Montagu, all of whom warmly supported her. By contrast, Archibald MacSarcasm accused More of jealousy. See Hopkins 123-25 and Demers 63-72. Moira Ferguson, Elizabeth Kowalski and Demers (in a

In 1789, during a visit to Cowslip Green, Wilberforce (whom More affectionately called the ‘Red Cross Knight’ and whom he, in turn, referred to as ‘Bromart’) drew More’s attention to the plight of the neglected, illiterate poor in Cheddar and the surrounding mining areas of the Mendips Hills. Although a loyal Anglican, More was appalled by the insufficient Episcopal provision and abrogation of clerical duty there, and which her sister, Martha (‘Patty’) More, duly recorded in her *Mendip Annals*:

We have in this neighbourhood thirteen adjoining parishes without so much as a resident curate. No clergyman has resided in the parish for forty years. One rode over three miles from Wells to preach once on a Sunday; but no weekly duty was done or sick persons visited; and children were often buried without a funeral service. Eight people in the morning and twenty in the afternoon was a good congregation.⁵³

Patty More proceeds to describe the situation at Cheddar, where [in] the absentee incumbent employed a curate who not only lived twelve miles from the parish but was often too intoxicated to do the weekly duty.

Encouraged by Wilberforce, who ‘liberalized her views, and gave her a worthy outlet for her splendid zeal’,⁵⁴ and backed by John Thornton and the Clapham people, More set about establishing Sunday Schools based on the Robert Raikes model, (which taught basic literacy as well as religious instruction), and later, schools of industry and various self-help projects which provided maternity benefits and other financial aid.⁵⁵ Thus soon

separate study), discuss the More/Yearsley relationship with particular reference to class politics. See Moira Ferguson, ‘Subject to Others’: *British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (London: Routledge, 1992), Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace, *Their Fathers’ Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1991) and Patricia Demers, ‘“For Mine’s A Stubborn and A Savage Will”: “Lactilla” (Ann Yearsley) and “Stella” (Hannah More) Reconsidered.’ *Huntington Library Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1993) 135-50. See also Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Labouring-Class Women’s Poetry in Britain 1739-1736* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵³ Martha More, *Mendip Annals; A Narrative of the Charitable Labours of Hannah and Martha More in their Neighbourhood, Being the Journal of Martha More* ed. Arthur Roberts (London: James Nisbet, 1859) 17.

⁵⁴ Roberts 2: 213, 209, 216. See also Hopkins 158.

⁵⁵ Hopkins 173.

after Wilberforce's visit, More opened her first Sunday School at Cheddar in 1789, followed by others in Shiphэм and Roebarrow in 1790, in Congresbury, Yatton and Axbridge in 1791 and Nailsea in 1792. The schools necessitated much negotiation with representatives of both the Established Church and the local squires, and often More had to 'take horse' for some remote parish in order to persuade a landowner, or the cottagers themselves, that literacy (reading, but not writing) would be to their mutual advantage. Yet despite these demands on her time, More still found time to write and publish *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790) and, under Wilberforce's influence, the poem *The Slave Trade* (1790). In 1792 at Porteous's suggestion, More wrote and published *Some Remarks on the Speech of M Dupont* in 1792 and the same year, began her famous Cheap Repository Tracts. In 1795 More opened the Blagdon and in 1798 the Wedmore Sunday Schools, and in 1799 published her *Strictures on Female Education*.

In 1802 the More sisters moved to their newly-built home, Barley Wood, where they adopted the courtesy title of 'Mrs'. Here in her second country abode, More (like Jane Austen at Chawton) continued to write prolifically. However, her creativity was temporarily disrupted by the notorious Blagdon Controversy, or what the Mores called the 'The Blagdon Persecution' of 1800-04 – an unfortunate feud between the more Evangelical branch of the Established Church, which favoured Sunday Schools, and the conservative side, which saw them as 'dangerous Methodist propaganda' with Radical agendas.⁵⁶ Although More was always careful to distance herself from Calvinism, Methodism and Radicalism, some High Church factions, mistaking Evangelicals for 'levellers', suspected More's literacy endeavours of inflaming the proletariat (although a perusal of her tracts would have contradicted this) and accused her of 'being tainted with enthusiasm'.

The trouble began at the school More started at Wedmore, where there was no resident rector. The curate, William Eyre (who joined the farming faction opposing the schools) alleged that More and her schoolmaster, Mr Harvon, constituted a threat to the Establishment and accused her of contravening the Conventicle Act by allowing parents' classes in the evening in addition to children's classes by day.⁵⁷ Unwilling to appeal to the

⁵⁶ In this regard it is illuminating to compare Ford K Brown's unsympathetic account of the Blagdon Controversy in *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) 187-233, with the more partisan account of Hopkins (180 ff) and the more objective one of Demers (106 ff).

⁵⁷ Although the law was no longer enforced, it was used as a threat.

bishop (Moss) because of his age and infirmity, More felt she had no option, but to dismiss Harvon.

At the request of the curate of Blagdon, Mr Bere, More had opened her Blagdon school in 1795. During 1800, Bere and his wife took exception to the way in which the schoolmaster, Mr Younge (whom they alleged was Calvinistic) held evening prayer meetings for adults, during which he allowed extempore prayer. More was accused of being Methodistic, receiving the sacrament in Dr Jay's chapel in Bath and generally 'promoting Calvinism'. At first More tried to ignore the jibes, but eventually, owing to repeated public accusations in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, (especially during 1801-02), she felt compelled to justify herself publicly. A long and bitter paper-warfare, reminiscent of the Bangorian Controversy, arose during which copious letters and twenty-three vociferous pamphlets were written. Unlike her proactive role in the Hannah Cowley affair, More (whom Bere bitterly referred to as 'Scipio in petticoats')⁵⁸ seems to have felt she lacked the necessary authority to answer these male accusers herself, and therefore left her defence to male friends, with the lawyer, Sir Abraham Elton, and Sir Richard Sedgewick Whalley being her chief 'voices' in the controversy. Other friends in ecclesiastical 'high places', Bishop Moss's son, Dr Moss, Dr Crossman and Dr Richard Beadon, championed More's cause and ordered the 'truculent' Bere to resign. He refused and it was considered unwise to compel him to do so, as he had 'High Church interest in London'.⁵⁹ Here like Sherlock, More found to her chagrin, that politics reigned supreme. Thus, on the advice of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and 'in the interests of peace and stability', More closed the school to which Bere was opposed. However, the unfortunate affair, and no less the frustration of having no legitimate voice of her own, took its toll and she suffered a nervous breakdown in 1803, which persisted until 1805.⁶⁰

Yet More rallied and in between receiving guests from London and running her Sunday Schools, she wrote *Hints for Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805), *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), *Practical Piety* (1811), *Christian Morals* (1813), *Essay*

⁵⁸ Bere calls her this in *An Appeal to the Public, on the Controversy between Hannah More, the Curate of Blagdon and the Rev Sir A Elton* (Bath: R Crutwell, 1801), quoted by Demers 138.

⁵⁹ See also F K Brown 210 and Demers 106, who suggests that if More had answered her opponents early herself the affair would not have 'backfired'.

⁶⁰ Roberts 3:243, Hopkins 195 and Demers 107.

on the Character of St Paul (1815) *Moral Sketches* (1819) and *The Spirit of Prayer* (1825). After the death of her sisters (Mary in 1813, Elizabeth in 1816, Sarah or Sally in 1817 and Martha or Patty in 1819), More began to withdraw more from society, until she lived solely upstairs, waited on by her servants, who allegedly took advantage of her by stealing and having wild parties on the premises. During the last decade of her life she became more infirm and was eventually persuaded to leave Barley Wood and move to Windsor Terrace, Stapleton in 1827. On descending the stairs of her cottage for the last time, and entering the waiting carriage, she is reputed to have stopped and dramatically declaimed: 'I am driven like Eve out of Paradise, but not by angels.' She died on 7 September 1833, a few weeks after Wilberforce, whose vision and aims she had so closely shared. Her fortune of £30,000 was distributed among seventy religious societies and charitable projects, with the greatest sum bequeathed to the anti-slavery cause and various treasures left to friends.⁶¹

In this extended overview of More's life we see not only the importance of her enlightened upbringing, which was of inestimable value in defining her Evangelicalism, but to what extent she was concerned to keep apart the different strands of her secular interests (the theatre, literature and an interest in politics) and spiritual concerns (Evangelicalism with its associated reforms and Sunday Schools). Thus, like her favourite Apostle who was 'all things to all men' (Ref) she could socialise with extremely diverse people without compromising on her commitment to her particular attachments. Finally, the fact that her life involved several conflicts (the Hannah Cowley Parker debacle, the Ann Yearsley affair and the Blagdon Controversy) is also significant for it developed defensiveness as well as polemical acumen which is evident in her works and particularly *Coelebs*.

NEW DIRECTIONS

More's early writing (verse and tragedies) was very different from her later, more progressively tendentious work. Her forays into didactic writing originated with Bishop Porteous, who urged her to use her literary talent in the services of the Established Church to stabilise a society threatened by revolution. The 1790's were unsettled times at home and

⁶¹ Hopkins 249-251.

abroad, with the public executions of French Royalty and the ensuing Reign of Terror in Paris moving even the urbane, cynical Horace Walpole to unwonted alarm and fervent condemnation.⁶² In England the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus*, the state trials and acquittal of Thomas Holcroft and radical lecturer, John Thelwall in 1794, and the two new Parliamentary Acts restricting seditious meetings and ‘treasonable practices’ in 1795 were both symptomatic of and heightened public anxiety.⁶³

The year of February 1792 to February 1793 was the heyday of the London Constitutional Society and the London Corresponding Society, with Paine, Holcroft, John Horne Tooke, John Frost, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Cooper, Hamilton, Wilkes and Godwin aggressively campaigning for constitutional reform. It was also the acme of Painite propaganda, with sales of *The Rights of Man* (1791/92) written in response to Burke’s propagandist eulogy on the British constitution, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), far exceeding that of any other previous publication.⁶⁴ The first part of *The Rights* (sponsored by the Constitutional Society) was priced at only 6d, and More anxiously observed in a letter that ‘the friends of insurrection, infidelity and vice . . . load[ed] their asses with their pernicious pamphlets. . and dropped [them] not only in cottages, and in highways, but into mines and coal pits’.⁶⁵

Radicals, who had previously pitted themselves against the State, began to attack the twin pillar of the state, religion. It was forty-five years since the London earthquakes had prompted Sherlock’s clerical invective against irreligion, which had been followed by a

⁶² Up until now upper-class women had been largely protected from physical violence. Writers as diverse as Burke, Walpole and Wollstonecraft responded with horror to the rigged trial and brutal public execution of the French Queen, with Walpole observing: ‘The Queen of France is never for three minutes out of my head’. See *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W S Lewis *et al*, 48 vols. (1937-83) 12: 52. Wollstonecraft, not a royalist, feelingly portrayed the ‘murderous fury’ with which ‘the chaste temple’ (of the Queen’s bedroom) was invaded by the mob. Quoted by Colley 255-57.

⁶³ On Thelwall see E P Thompson *The Making of the English Working Classes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 179-182. On Pitt’s Sedition Bill and the effects of the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* Act (a period of eight years) see Thompson 161. For a comprehensive review of events see Thompson 144-203. Cf. Colley 250 ff. and Demers 109.

⁶⁴ Burke’s *Reflections*, priced at 3s, sold 30,000 in a year. Paine’s *Rights of Man* priced at 6d, sold over 50,000 copies in 1791 alone. By 1802 Paine claimed circulation of 400,00 - 500,00 of parts I and 2 and 1,500, 000 by 1809. Thompson reckons the circulation figures of the *Rights* (including abridged versions) were probably 200,000 in England, Wales and Scotland. See E P Thompson 117.

⁶⁵ Roberts 2: 424-25.

similar denunciation by Paley in 1773. Yet neither could have anticipated the ‘blasphemous’ onslaught of the ‘prince of pamphleteers’, the extremist Deist, Paine, in his *Age of Reason* (1794/5).⁶⁶ In 1795, Watson (who delivered a lengthy refutation of Paine’s principles in 1796) gloomily observed that ‘There never was an age since the death of Christ, never one since the commencement of the history of the world, in which atheism and infidelity have been more generally professed.’⁶⁷

At the height of the Painite propaganda in 1792, Bishop Porteous, perceiving something needed to be done to prevent the incitement of factory workers and farm labourers, urged More to write something in simple language to open the eyes of the uneducated, who were dazzled by the concepts of ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’. Initially reluctant to enter the political domain, More agreed, and composed a thinly disguised anti-Painite dialogue between a blacksmith and a mason, *Village Politics, Addressed to all the Mechanics, Journeymen and Labourers in Great Britain by ‘Will Chip, a Country Carpenter’*. Here More sidesteps the authorial authority problem by creating a (rough diamond) male construct, Will Chip, whom she empowers as the mouthpiece of the *status quo*. In this frankly counter-insurgent tract, More attempts to ‘write like a man’, invoking racy, colloquial dialogue to convey Establishment philosophy, urging restraint and reasoning the working classes through broad humour, dire warning and ‘sensible advice’ into accepting their lot. Her desire to counteract ‘error, discontent and false religion’ led her to imitate the techniques of ‘vile and execrable’ nonce or street literature. She then set out to be ‘as vulgar as heart could wish’, but significantly, sent her attempts, not to her usual publisher, Thomas Cadell, but to F and C Rivington. Porteous (assisted by Clapham) provided the financial means for these tracts and had them distributed, like *The Rights of Man* among ‘the restive folk’ or ‘malcontents’ in mines, coal pits and public houses across the country.

The phenomenal success of *Village Politics* surprised and delighted More and her friends⁶⁸ who assisted (financially or in the distribution) and prompted her next production,

⁶⁶ See George Sampson, *Cambridge Companion to English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1944) 564. See also Thompson 163.

⁶⁷ *A Defence of Revealed Religion* 399, quoted by E R Norman 22.

⁶⁸ Porteous, Walpole, Mrs Montagu, Mrs Boscawen and Hester Thrale Piozzi.

the lively anti-riot ballad, *The Riot: or Half a Loaf is better than no Loaf*, which was reputed to have restrained colliers at Bath, intent on attacking mills and private property.⁶⁹ Here, again, More appropriates a male voice in the racy, hyperbolic dialogue between the sensible patriotic Jack Anvil and the irrational, pliant Tom Hod, who has to learn that ‘duties are fixed, Tom – laws are settled’ and that envy is at the bottom of your equality works’. Similar messages exhorting the poor to accept their lot are conveyed through the *Cheap Repository Tract* tales such as ‘The Roguish Miller’, ‘The Newcastle Collier, Tim Jenkins’, ‘John the Shopkeeper turned Sailor’, ‘The Thunderstorm or The History of Tom Watson’ and ‘Black Giles, the Poacher’, who are lazy, dishonest, rebellious or impious and accordingly get their just desserts.⁷⁰

In ‘The History of Mr Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher and his Man, William’, More paints a thinly disguised caricature of Godwin’s Caleb Williams⁷¹ in Fantom, the discontented retail merchant-cum philosopher and also shows the harm he does when he imbibes Tom Paine’s ‘pernicious’ atheistic doctrines and accuses the Church of

⁶⁹ Henry Thompson 158.

⁷⁰ Cf. More’s humanitarian political philosophy with Paley’s odious complacence in his *Reasons for Contentment*. Here, he compares human life to spectators in a theatre: ‘It is only when the business is interrupted or when the spectator’s attention to it grows idle and remiss, that he begins to consider at all who is before him or who is behind him, whether others are better accommodated than himself, or whether many be not worse. It is thus with various ranks of society. So long as a man is intent upon the duties and concerns of his own condition, he never thinks of comparing it with any other. . . And by this means a man of sound and active mind has, in his very constitution, a remedy against the disturbance of envy and discontent.’ *The Works of William Paley*, 5 vols. ed. Robert Lynam (London: William Baynes and Son, 1825) 4: 391-93. He avers that Providence has appointed different ranks (394), that a ‘constant train of employment is an inestimable blessing’ (394) that riches are a ‘plague’ to the rich and ‘frugality is a pleasure’ for the poor (396) that all a poor man’s children require are ‘industry and innocence’ (396), that denial increases their enjoyment of unwonted pleasure (398), and that the rich envy the worker’s hard-earned rest after his labour (399). He concludes that ‘Religion smoothes all inequalities because it unfold a prospect which makes all earthly distinctions nothing.’ (402) Although More advocates the acceptance of one’s lot, she maintains that it can be improved and never advances such spurious arguments as Paley. Throughout her life she laboured to help the poor improve their physical as well as spiritual lot by teaching literacy as well as religion, establishing schools of industry, organizing benefit clubs, teaching primary health care and helping them grow vegetables on their own land or pieces of land she persuaded rich landowners to give them and devised healthy recipes which she distributed in *The Cottage Cook* published in the Cheap Repositories. More’s frequent mediation between landowners and cottagers is often overlooked; she negotiated low food prices and organized the distribution of food for them at wholesale prices. See Hopkins 176-77.

⁷¹ See also Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ‘Of Sincerity’, Bk 4 ch. 6 . Facsimile edition, ed. F E L Priestley, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946) 1: 350 ff. where he presents the ideal man ‘impressed with a sense of debt to his species’ (350), setting an example of industry’, ‘purity’, ‘real virtue’ and ‘unvarying sincerity’ (353). At the end of the section, he maintains that to render a man virtuous and confident he must be taught to ‘consult his own understanding’ (356).

'narrowness, bigotry, ignorance, prejudice and priestcraft'. Using hyperbole⁷² to caricature Fantom's benevolence she writes: 'Benevolence, he said, made up the whole part of Religion; and all the other parts of it were nothing but cant, jargon and hypocrisy.' She continues with heavy-handed irony to show the hollowness of his 'creed': he disparages money as 'trash' and 'dirt', but refuses to help the family of a tradesman imprisoned for debt. Similarly he watches a neighbour's cottage burn down while he writes 'a new pamphlet on universal benevolence'. More then indirectly exposes Fantom's patriarchalism: 'In his zeal to make the whole world free and happy, [he] was too prudent to include his wife among the objects on which he wished to confer freedom and happiness'.⁷³

More's only other piece of overtly political writing was another Porteous-prompted work – an impassioned response to the speech of Jacob Dupont in the National Convention of Paris, 14 December 1792, promoting the establishment of anti-religious public schools. Her publication netted £200, which she donated to John Wilmot's 'Committee for the Relief of the Suffering Clergy and Laity Exiled in England'.⁷⁴ Thus, More, impelled into politics by conflict, devised innovative ways of counteracting what the eighteenth-century writer, Thomas Taylor, describes as 'the most daring and open attack on religion that was ever made'.⁷⁵

⁷² Although the hyperbolic style of these tracts seems to invite comparison with Austen's juvenilia, their widely different intentions (didactic/serious versus comic) make it hardly worthwhile.

⁷³ 'The History of Mr Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher and his Man William', CRT 3-12, 15-16. This forms a companion piece to 'The Two Wealthy Farmers or the History of Mr Bragwell'. These two heavily ironic tracts are written for the 'Middle Ranks', but still rely on unsophisticated plots and crude contrasts between character and environment. Twenty years later More wrote a sequel, 'The Death of Mr Fantom, the Great Reformist', as an antidote to the 1817 poor crop riots, but the style is generally considered much inferior to the first. See also Demers' comments on 117. In 'The Two Wealthy Farmers, who educate their daughters differently, More anticipates her arguments in *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great and An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* and *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, revealing the evils of vanity, circulating libraries and boarding school affectation.

⁷⁴ The Right Honourable John Eardley Wilmot, Knight, Lord Chief Justice was brother to Henry Wilmot, a close friend of More's and with whom she often dined in London. See E R Norman 21 and Hopkins 72. Cf. More's interest in the French clergy with Jacob More's hospitality to French prisoners on parole in Fishponds during More's youth, and More's long friendship with the Catholic Eva Marie Garrick. See Roberts 1: 3 and Hopkins 209.

⁷⁵ Thomas Taylor, *Memoirs of Mrs Hannah More: With Notices of her Works and Sketches of her Contemporaries* 2nd ed. (London: Rickersley, 1838). Quoted by Demers 110.

Spurred on by the runaway success of the ‘Will Chip’ and ‘Jack Anvil’ dialogues, and encouraged again by Porteous, More embarked on what was to become her hallmark writings for the working-class families; The Cheap Repository Tracts. The latter, which comprised short Bible readings, prayers, moral stories and ballads for the newly-literate proletariat, were originally conceived as filling a much-needed gap by providing morally suitable reading for children and their parents in her Sunday evening schoolrooms. Underwritten by Clapham, these tracts were printed by Samuel Hazard (Bath) and Evans and Hatchard (London) and distributed among the rural and industrial poor. Printed on coarse paper and illustrated with popular contemporary woodcuts, these ballads and short moral stories of the vices and virtues of the English working classes were devised to counteract the appeal of the ‘vicious’ broadsides and chapbooks hawked about the countryside by pedlars. By studying the format, methodology and propagandist techniques of the popular anti-establishment chapbooks, More learnt that their secret lay in colourful and sordid details about everyday life, enlivened by gruesome accounts of fights and macabre deaths on the scaffold. More utilized some of these techniques, where sudden deaths and hangings became moral admonitions, or, conversely, the deaths of innocent children a maudlin incentive to piety.⁷⁶ The main appeal of these stories seems to have been that they were short, simple and so ‘true to life’ – at least local mining and rural life.

The stories and the occasional healthy stew-pot recipe from ‘The Cottage Cook’ (an intertextual recipe book) were interspersed with original ballads with catchy rhythms such as the Christmas hymn, ‘O How Wondrous is the Story’ and ‘The Noble Army of Martyrs or True Heroes’. Another ‘new song’ was the ‘The Gin Shop or A Peep into a Prison’, with its grim, lock-step couplets describing the downward vector created by drink. In this sombre description of the effects of the Englishman’s ‘self-inflicted curse’, More shows how ‘the kindest husband’ is transformed into ‘a tyrant’, a woman reduced to ‘a shivering female . . . a hopeless wretch, who plies her woeful trade’ (stanza 14) and the ‘harmless babes / are poorly cloath’d and fed / Because the craving Gin shop takes / The children’s daily bread’ (stanza 10). Her stanzas, describing the filthy cellars and debtors’ prisons

⁷⁶ As in the case of the servant girl, ‘Sinful Sally’, who robs her master and dies as a result. See also ‘The Disappointed Lover’ and ‘The Unhappy Husband’. For More’s morbid preoccupation with deathbed scenes see ‘Black Giles the Poacher’ and Mr Tyrrel’s death in *Coelebs*. Cf with More’s journal entry for 1 March 1798: ‘While attending on the dying bed of Mrs —, I did not feel my heart properly affected. Oh that I may lay to heart the lesson of mortality! Lord prepare me for this state of pain, weakness and imbecility if by thy will I should pass through it.’ Roberts 3: 57.

where ‘[t]hose little wretches trembling there, / With hunger and with cold; / Were by their parent’s love of Gin / To sin and misery sold’ (stanzas 15 –16), recall the sermons and Parliamentary speeches of Secker and Sherlock, in which they evoke similar scenes to stir the public conscience.⁷⁷

Some of these *Cheap Repository Tract* stories such as ‘Poacher Giles’, ‘Tawney Rachel, or The Fortune-Teller’, ‘The Two Shoemakers’ and ‘The Two Farmers, or The History of Mr Bragwell’ were written in two-, three- and even six- and seven-part form, which Pickering has argued constitute the fore-runners of the part-fiction exploited later by Dickens.⁷⁸ Newell suggests that More’s easy, yet polished style, brisk pace, brilliant economy and realistic particularization elevate her accounts of the lives of the lower and middle classes into literature.⁷⁹ But modern critics now privileging the multitude, recoil from More’s ‘narrow class-based views’, take umbrage at her prescribing what is right for the underdog and object to her appropriation of popular literature and her ‘redistribution of language, selfhood and authority’.⁸⁰ However, it must be remembered the More wrote during what were perceived by sober writers such as Walpole, Watson, Paley, Horsley and Horne as apocalyptic times, and in this respect she is closer to Sherlock than to Austen, whose mature works were written during more politically stable times.

The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, More’s best-known tract, which dominated the market for the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, describes the life of a poor, pious

⁷⁷ Secker observes: ‘Almost in every street we had two or three gin shops filled with such a company as no sober man could view without horror . . . yet this was not the worst: for they tell me that every one of these gin shops had a back shop or cellar, strewed every morning with fresh straw, where those who were drunk were thrown, men & women promiscuously together.’ According to Sherlock: ‘You can hardly pass along any street of this great city, at any hour of the day, but you may see some poor creatures mad drunk with this liquor, and committing outrages in the street, or lying dead asleep upon laths or at the doors of empty houses’. Cobbett, *Parliamentary History* 12: 1206, quoted by E Carpenter 275-76.

⁷⁸ Sam Pickering, ‘The Cheap Repository Tracts and the Short Story’, *Studies in Short Fiction* 12 (1978): 15-21.

⁷⁹ A G Newell, ‘Early Evangelical Fiction’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 38 (1966): 3-21.

⁸⁰ See Moira Ferguson, ‘Subject to Others’: *British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery 1670-1834* (London: Routledge, 1992) 215 and Gary Kelly, ‘Revolution, Reaction and Expropriation of Popular Culture: Hannah More’s *Cheap Repository*’, in *Men and Nature* 6 (1987): 147-159.

and hard-working Somersetshire shepherd, David Saunders.⁸¹ Here More's links simple piety with happiness, for when 'Mr Johnson' meets the shepherd, he comments: 'I have seldom seen . . . so happy a man. It is a sort of happiness the world could not give, and which I plainly see it has not been able to take away. This must be the true spirit of Religion.'⁸² The same idea is gentrified in *Coelebs* where the piety practised by the Stanleys is also shown to be the 'sort of happiness the world could not give . . . or take away'.

There were twenty Cheap Repositories in March 1795 and thereafter three a month, all edited by More. Of the 114 tracts in all, More wrote fifty herself.⁸³ This and her promotion of literacy and religion among the cottagers and her efforts to reform the 'Great', testify to More's firm belief in the spiritually and socially enlightening power of Christianity. Although she is often vilified for promoting hegemonic causes, More, like Sherlock, saw social hierarchy as divinely-ordained, that it was the duty of the rich to take care of the poor⁸⁴ and of the latter cheerfully and industriously to accept their lot. Accordingly, as befitting a transient world, all would be evened up in eternity, where rewards would be given to those who patiently endured. Thus, to both poor and rich alike, she warns against miscalculating the relative value of things,⁸⁵ reminding her tract readers in a ballad dominated by a weaving image that: 'This world, which clouds thy soul with doubt / *Is but a Carpet inside out*'. Jack continues to expound this transmuted Pauline

⁸¹ See Doreen Bosman, 'What has Christ to do with Apollo?' Evangelicalism and the Novel, 1800-1830', in *Renaissance and Renewal in Church History*, Studies in Church History 14 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977) 306.

⁸² 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain'. *CRT* 15.

⁸³ Other contributors were her sisters, Selina Mills, John Newton, William Mason, John Gilpin and Hester Mulso Chapone. One of Mason's stories was rejected as 'it had too much love in it'. Hopkins 213.

⁸⁴ Cf. Sherlock who averred: 'The rich can no more live without the poor, than the poor without the rich'. Envisaging a symbiotic relationship he argues, that the poor are obligated to work for the rich and the rich to employ the poor; however, the poor must not be 'kept down', for 'We ought to assist our poor neighbours not only to live, but to live comfortably' (Hughes 3: 367 -368). Moreover, 'Charity is the inheritance of the poor' and due them as their 'property'. See Hughes 3: 261.

⁸⁵ Cf. the eighth chapter of *Practical Piety* (1811).

image⁸⁶ to Dick: ‘But when we reach the world of light, / And view the things of God aright; / Then shall we see the whole design, / And own the workman is divine.’⁸⁷ Convinced, like Sherlock, that the essence of her philosophy was Scripturally derived, More urged Christian perseverance (illustrated touchingly in the story of the nine year old girl miner in *The Lancashire Collier Girl: A True Story*) striving to show that only the Gospel, which ‘holds out a living pattern to elucidate the doctrine and so illustrate the precepts’, can diagnose and remedy social and moral ills.⁸⁸

After the phenomenal success of her political and Cheap Repository Tracts, More turned her attention to address aristocratic vices. In *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1778) and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790), she not only reprobates the pervasive moral decline, but maintains that reformation ought to begin in high society and ‘trickle down’.

More published both these works anonymously. Hopkins suggests that she did so because she feared criticism from her more sophisticated London friends. Many professed to be ignorant of the true authorship (with Hester Mulso Chapone averring that she thought the works were ‘by the same good gentleman who sometime ago gave his excellent ‘Thoughts on the Great’) but Walpole and Newton (to whom she anonymously sent copies) guessed immediately.⁸⁹

In 1799 pleased by the reception of the above works, More confidently put her name to *Strictures on Female Education* (1799), which exhausted thirteen editions, selling 19,000 copies and earning her £200 that year. This seminal work, which will be discussed in greater detail below, shows More’s thoughtful engagement with female education. For

⁸⁶ ‘Now we see in a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully even as I am fully known’ (1 Cor 13:12). More does not mention this verse, but it is implicit.

⁸⁷ ‘Turn the Carpet’, or ‘The Two Weavers’, A Dialogue between Jack and John’, CRT 3-6.

⁸⁸ Cf. Which she describes as the ‘whole scheme of the Gospel . . . accommodated to real human nature, laying open its moral disease, presenting its only remedy, exhibiting its rules of conduct, often difficult indeed, but never impossible; and holding out a living pattern to elucidate the doctrine, and to illustrate the precept.’ *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, *The Works of Hannah More* New Edition, 11 vols. (London T Cadell, 1830) 11: 124.

⁸⁹ Walpole teased her for the Sabbatarianism of the ‘sly little book’. On Chapone, Walpole and Newton see Hopkins 222, 149.

political reasons, More adopted anonymity in *Hints Towards the Forming of the Character of a Young Princess* (1805) a solicited ‘college-course’ manual for Princess Charlotte, tactfully dedicated to Bishop Fisher, the Princess’s Preceptor.⁹⁰

More ranked the all above highly allusive, sophisticated didactic works for the upper classes as her best writing.⁹¹ They not only testify to her catholic reading, wide interest in history and equally intense interest in the details of everyday life, but together with *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), earned her the reputation of ‘gentrifying religion’. In addressing the social vices of ‘the Great’, such as gaming, repudiation of debts, a dissolute attitude towards women, drunkenness, gluttony, irresponsibility, telling white lies and breaking of the Sabbath, More targets popular aristocratic vices, some of which Sherlock (in his 1750 *Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London*) and other bishops addressed and more surprisingly perhaps, some (as we shall see later) discussed by Godwin. In *Coelebs*, More dramatically portrays some of these vices in Lady Mathilda Melbury, who learns not to incur debts, and Mr Carlton, who repents of his dissolute and rakish habits.⁹² Her denunciation of ‘baby balls’⁹³ and her repudiation of the ‘polite’ social deceit practised by the upper classes are undeservedly ridiculed.⁹⁴ Her exposure of what was essentially a polite form of child abuse was both necessary and courageous. More’s condemnation of the practice of teaching servants to lie (by telling visitors that their

⁹⁰ Bishop Fisher, who was appointed Precentor of the Princess’s education after More was commissioned to write this work. Clearly it was a politically driven move, as More did not wish to give offence by presuming to poach in his preserve. See Hopkins 224, 16.

⁹¹ *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* went through seven editions in a few months, with the third edition selling out in four hours. *Practical Piety* was sold out before publication and soon ran into ten editions.

⁹² Hopkins 223.

⁹³ On children’s balls, see the third chapter of the second volume, *Strictures* 2: 95-100. ‘The invention of baby-balls . . . is a sort of triple conspiracy against the innocence, the health and the happiness of children’ (95). ‘To behold Lilliputian coquettes, projecting dresses, studying colours, assorting ribands and feathers, their little hearts beating with hopes about partners and fears of rivals; to see their cheeks pale after the midnight supper, their aching heads and unbraced nerves . . . the next day and to hear the grave apology, ‘that it is owing to the wine, the crowd, the heated room of the last night’s ball’, would be, she avers, as amusingly ludicrous as Gulliver’s adventures were it not so ‘mischievously’ true (99-100).

⁹⁴ Peter Pindar mocks her in *Nil Admirari*, and even Hopkins is a little dismissive of these aspects of social criticism, see Hopkins 223 –24.

masters/mistresses are not at home when they really are)⁹⁵ was of equal concern to Godwin. In his an appendix to the fourth book of his *Enquiry into Political Justice*, he devotes four full pages to the subject, denouncing this venial sin in the same terms as More, yet eliciting no ridicule.⁹⁶

Like many prominent eighteenth-century woman writers, More was drawn into the debate on female education. In her lengthy *Strictures on Female Education* (1799) with its ponderous, Addisonian sentences leavened by her characteristically pungent, aphoristic style, she targets the ‘educated and leisured’ ladies. Like Wollstonecraft, More detests vanity and idleness and exposes the hollowness of accomplished-based female education (as in *Coelebs*, where Amelia Rattle is the butt of her satire). More’s insistence on the superiority of mental and spiritual cultivation over the acquisition of superficial (artistic or musical) accomplishments, together with her concern that women be trained to run households successfully and bring up infants correctly, has drawn comparison with Wollstonecraft.⁹⁷ Although separated by ideology, their focus on the woman’s sphere and their interest in female abilities and duties bind them as cultural reformers. Both employ a ‘hortatory public voice’, but where Wollstonecraft addresses the middle-classes, More appeals to the gentry in more polished and elegant style, exhorting them to become less irresponsible and selfish and to act more rationally and benevolently.⁹⁸ Similarly, both women emphasise the importance of marital friendship, with More’s fictional Charles in *Coelebs*, insisting on an intellectually equal ‘companion-wife’.

⁹⁵ *Strictures* 2: 137 – 182.

⁹⁶ ‘Let us then, according to the well-known axiom of morality, put ourselves in the place of the man upon whom this ungracious task is imposed. Is there any of us that would be contented to perform it in person, and to say that our father or our brother was not at home, when they were really in the house? Should we not feel contaminated with the plebeian lie? Can we then be justified in requiring that from another, which we should shrink from, as an act of dishonour, in ourselves? Whatever sophistry we may employ to excuse our proceeding, certain it is that the servant understands the lessons we teach him, to be a lie.’ Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Bk. 4 Appendix 2, ‘Of the Mode of Excluding Visitors’. See the facsimile edition of the above in 3 vols, ed. F E L Priestley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946) 1: 357-58.

⁹⁷ See Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Sussex: Harvester Press, N. J. Barnes and Noble Books, 1983) 49-50 and Demers 81-88.

⁹⁸ Demers 83. More inveighed against the same faults in the middle classes, targeting female vanity and extravagance in Mr Bragwell’s daughters in ‘The Two Farmers’, *CRT* 60, 62.

Although More fights for the renovation of female education, advocating a more intellectually equal education (but not going as far as Wollstonecraft in calling for co-education), her chief concern is Christian morals, which she sees as the basis of education. Thus, while preaching moral autonomy and campaigning for better opportunities for women, she nevertheless publicly upholds the separate spheres ideology – to which, ironically, she herself never adhered. Despite being a single woman and a published author, who successfully crossed traditional gender rubicons and moved freely in male-dominated London society, she seems to have regarded her own life as an anomaly, and seldom encouraged other women to follow her example, believing that there were more important indirect ways in which they could ‘influence’ society. Therefore, despite her trenchant observations on the inadequacy of current female education in *Strictures*, feminists have criticised More for not championing the women’s cause more strongly and insisting on greater gender and racial equality.⁹⁹ Although her early poems and essays augured well for feminism, her initially promising feminism became increasingly instrumental.¹⁰⁰ More’s Evangelicalism is frequently blamed for this, but as Colley shows, the French Revolution set back the clock of feminist reform. The way in which lower class French women attempted to seize power during the French Revolution¹⁰¹ aroused English upper class alarm and stimulated not only Gallic-phobia, but a reaffirmation of women’s ‘God-ordained’ place by Burke, Walpole, Richard Polewhele,¹⁰² Thomas Gisborne and a host of other politicians, preachers, conduct book and magazine writers, who showed the mischief wrought by women who overstepped the separate spheres boundaries to themselves, their

⁹⁹ More has generally been accused of being anti-feminist and promoting domestic ideologies. See Poovey 40 and Ferguson 220, who averred More used religion to entrench the *status quo*, described More as a ‘Tory Abolitionist who re-affirms evangelical gendered class values and their relation to racial subjugation’.

¹⁰⁰ Instrumental feminism promotes women’s education not solely for themselves, but in order to make them more responsible wives and mothers. See also Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987) 6-8, 173-176.

¹⁰¹ Cf. the storming of the royal apartments by the starving Parisian market women, denounced by Burke as furies from hell in the abused shape of the vilest of women’. See Colley 252.

¹⁰² Who came to More’s defence when she was attacked by Peter Pindar in *Nil Admirari*. See Hopkins 225-226.

country and their ‘civilisation’.¹⁰³ Those who continued to advocate a more socially active female role were as Margaret Kirkham (who refers to the Wollstonecraft Scandal of 1798) and Marilyn Butler show, branded ‘Jacobin’,¹⁰⁴ and thus inadvertently retarded female emancipation.¹⁰⁵ This may well account for More’s feminist regression after ‘*Bas Bleu* or Conversation’. Yet it is also true that according to More’s ‘light’ which narrowed and intensified in later life, temporal advantages were not as significant as spiritual, the rights of men and women not nearly as important as how to win salvation.

OVERSTEPPING THE BOUNDARIES

During the last three decades of her life, More published five overtly doctrinal works which complete her *oeuvre*: *Practical Piety or The Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of the Life* (1811); *Christian Morals* (1813); *An Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of Saint Paul* (1815), *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic, with Reflections on Prayer* (1819) and *The Spirit of Prayer* (1825).

These much-neglected works are important because they signal her attempt to essay into a previously male-dominated genre. More was acutely aware of this risk as her private letters and journal show. She laments that she is but ‘a poor divine’ and a ‘miserable theologian’,¹⁰⁶ but the fact that she appropriates the traditionally male appellation of ‘theologian’ is telling. Later, in adopting an archetypically female defence,

¹⁰³ Burke’s argument (implicitly endorsed by More in her works) that the quality of a civilisation can be gauged by its treatment of women, drew two major ‘proofs’ from the French Revolution; in the infamous way Marie Antoinette was treated and the undermining of French society by male and *female* plebeians. Thus as Colley observes, conduct books, sermons, novels and magazine articles all argued that political stability depended on separate spheres. See Colley 252-253.

¹⁰⁴ Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 160-65.

¹⁰⁵ After the hostile reception of Godwin’s *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft. See Kirkham 47-50.

¹⁰⁶ In letters to the Bishop of Bath and Wells (1801) and the Revd D Wilson (1825). See Roberts 3: 129, 4: 246.

she remarks with whimsical deprecation, in a journal entry, that ‘under the mask of religion’ she may indulge her ‘humours and resentments’.¹⁰⁷

Practical Piety (1811) deals specifically with the application of doctrine in a ‘worldly’ society. More not only shows herself aware of the ‘temptations and snares’ that she warns against, but like Sherlock, she reminds her readers that from those to whom much has been given, much will be required and that ‘people of rank and fortune’ have a greater moral responsibility.¹⁰⁸ Most importantly, she teaches practical holiness of life, insisting like Law that true piety is an inward thing, but manifest in ‘outward’ acts of Christian mercy and benevolence¹⁰⁹ – ideas she illustrated in fictional form in *Coelebs*.

Christian Morals (1813) prefaced by a quotation from Hooker,¹¹⁰ provides a thinly-disguised defence of Evangelicalism through More’s ideal construct, Candidus, whom most see as a portrait of Wilberforce.¹¹¹ Cast in traditional patriarchal terms, the lineage of her ideal Christian harks back to the Reformation; however, he is not schismatic, but firmly anchored in the dogma of *Ecclesia Anglicana*. She goes on to show the orthodoxy and practical benevolence of his faith:

Candidus is a genuine Son of the Reformation; but being a layman, he does not think it necessary to define his faith as constantly as some others do, by an incessant reference to the Liturgy, Articles or Homilies; though this reference would accurately express his sentiments . . . He gives, however, the most indisputable proof of his zeal for these formularies, by the invariable conformity of his life and language to these precepts. (265)

¹⁰⁷ Roberts 3: 357.

¹⁰⁸ ‘[S]urely the more important the station, the higher and wider the sphere of actions the more imperious is the call for religion . . .’ *Practical Piety* 2: 145.

¹⁰⁹ *Practical Piety* 1: 5; 2: 145.

¹¹⁰ ‘In moral actions, Divine law helpeth exceedingly the law of Reason to guide a man’s life; but in supernatural, it alone guideth.’

¹¹¹ See Demers 126–27 and Hopkins who maintains that Wilberforce (whom More and Elizabeth Montagu called ‘The Red Cross Knight’ after Spenser’s personification of holiness) was far superior to the ‘prig’, Candidus. Thus Hopkins writes: ‘Wilberforce’s righteousness was an engaging quality, and his passion for service was part of his amiability. He was undersized and delicate in health, but the amount of work he accomplished was more than most persons achieve with health and vigour.’ See Hopkins 159.

True to eighteenth-century form, More emphasises the rationality of his religious ties: ‘He adheres to [the church] not so much from habit as from affection’ and furthermore, ‘his adherence is the effect of conviction . . . founded in education, strengthened by reflection, confirmed by experience’ (267). He is ‘no fanatic’ for ‘the more he examines Scripture, the more he is persuaded that the principles of his Christianity are identical with the Word of God’, but he is enlightened enough to accept that there will always be an ‘incurable diversity of human opinions’ (270). Perhaps most distinctively, Candidus (like Dr Barlow in *Coelebs*) is ‘catholic, but not latitudinarian; tolerant not from indifference, but from principle’ and thus disapproves only of ‘the sect of Non-doers’ (268). Thus Candidus, with his feet on the rock of orthodox doctrine, the great ‘Doer’, exerting himself as concerned and active member of the Establishment, to counteract social and religious abuses and uplift people in every condition, can be seen not only as a picture of Wilberforce, but of More herself.

In her more groundbreaking two-volume work, *An Essay on the Character and Writings of Saint Paul* (1815), More shows herself aware of both older and contemporary scholarship, and despite the fact that some were considered of debatable authenticity, attributes all fourteen epistles to him.¹¹² This work also demonstrates an amazing catholicity of taste, which even outstrips her fictional Dr Barlow. Here (and in *Strictures*) More quotes from or refers to the works of Classical writers,¹¹³ Church Fathers,¹¹⁴ philosophers, ‘natural philosophers’ and theologians.¹¹⁵ She also alludes to a variety of contemporary secular writers,¹¹⁶ whom she either endorses or with whom she takes

¹¹² Thessalonians 1&2; Corinthians 1&2; Philippians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews, Titus 1&2, Timothy 1&2.

¹¹³ Aristotle, Juvenal, Horace, Plato, Seneca and Tacitus.

¹¹⁴ Especially St Augustine, St Jerome and St Chrysostom.

¹¹⁵ Such as Baxter, Beveridge, Boyle, Butler, Grotius, Herbert, Hooker, Jewell, Leighton, Hall, Horne, Horseley, Howe, Locke, McKnight, Owen, Paley, Pascal, Ridley, Sherlock, Taylor, Porteous, Usher and Soames Jenyns, whose *Internal Evidence of Christianity* she attempts to defend.

¹¹⁶ Like Burke, Lyttleton, Halifax, Chesterfield and Shaftesbury.

issue.¹¹⁷ More does not purport to offer a *Horae Paulinae* like Paley (or Benson or Lardner, whom he frequently quotes) nor detailed commentaries on St Paul's epistles like those of Locke,¹¹⁸ but as an amateur theologian, who had read these and other commentators, her survey of St Paul's doctrine is accomplished with characteristic creativity: there is a blending of both historical and contemporary references, some characteristic digression and above all, an overriding desire to accommodate her theology to practical concerns.

Like Sherlock, More recognises and celebrates St Paul's versatility of approach, at which she herself is adept. In her initial introductory chapters, she gives a Christian 'historical overview' of classical paganism, describing the darkness 'before the Light was fully revealed' (24) in a way that recalls Sherlock's first Temple Discourse in which he examines the 'heathen' countries and their 'barbaric customs' and concludes that 'the Blindness and Ignorance of the Heathen World' proves that unaided Nature has been unable to help them discover the external rules of morality and live up to them (*TD* 1: 7-15).

More then goes on to discuss Natural Religion. In contrasting it with revealed, she provides the most explicit female rebuttal of the former and defence of the latter of which I am aware. Not unsurprisingly for one who had read and admired Sherlock's approach, there are many Sherlockian undertones. Thus she observes:

Reason, even by those who possessed it in the highest perfection, as it gave no adequate view even of Natural Religion, so it made no adequate provision for correct morals. The attempt appears to have been above reach of human powers. 'God manifested in the Flesh' – He who was not only the true, but THE TRUTH, and who taught the truth 'as one having authority' – was alone competent to this great work. The duty of submission to Divine Power was to the multitude more intelligible than the intricate deductions of reason. That God is, and is a rewarder of them that seek him; and that Jesus

¹¹⁷ In *St Paul* More maintains that the Christian St Paul is superior to the heathen martyr Seneca, mentions Aristotle (94), Juvenal and Tacitus (187) Locke (3) Burke (67) ridicules Lord Chesterfield's *Advice to his Son* (82-83) and criticizes Shaftesbury's benevolence in his *Characteristics* (200).

¹¹⁸ 'An Essay on the Understanding of St Paul's Epistles', in *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 10th ed. (London: J Johnson, et al, 1801) 8: 1-449.

Christ came into the world to save sinners, make a compendious summary of both natural and revealed religion; they are propositions which carry their own expectations, disentangled from those trains of argument, which as few could have been brought to comprehend, perhaps it was the greater wisdom in the philosopher never to have proposed them. (*Life of St Paul* 23)

More's 'intricate deductions of reason' echo Sherlock's description of the Gospel as a 'faithful Guide able to deliver from Error and Superstition and from the Wanderings of human Reason' (*TD* 1: 14-15) and his assertion that if one accepts it, '[y]ou will no longer be obliged to wander in Mazes and Intricacies of Human Reason' (*TD* 1: 183-84). Her recognition of the shared basis of natural and revealed religion, and her proceeding to show the limitations of natural, are also highly reminiscent of Sherlock. She maintains that:

The most skilful dialectician could only reason on known principles; but without superinduction of revealed religion, he could only, with all his efforts, and they have been prodigious, furnish 'rules' but not 'arms. Logic is indeed a powerful weapon to fence, but not to fight with . . . it cannot pull down the strongholds of Satan. (*St Paul* 23-24)

This recalls Sherlock, who averred that 'that religion must therefore be the best, which most fully enlightens our understanding, and is best calculated to remove those impediments to liberty and freedom which arise from the corruption of our nature' (Hughes 2: 387). Thus More, like Sherlock, tests the claims of Natural Religion against what it is actually able to accomplish. Similarly, she describes the darkness of the world before 'that Light was fully revealed' and contrasts it with 'the clear illumination of evangelistic truth' when 'every precept becomes a principle, every argument a motive, every direction a duty, every doctrine a law.' (*St Paul* 25)

In summing up the practical efficacy of revealed religion as against 'Nature and Reason', More concludes with the following aphorisms that point the difference in parallelism: 'The reason philosophy is a disputing reason, that of Christianity, an obeying

reason', and 'The glory of the Pagans' religion consisted in virtuous sentiments, the glory of the Christian in the pardon and the subjugation of sin' (25).

In her second volume on St Paul, More's defence of St Paul is ingenious, but less felicitous than that of revelation. In her attempts to justify him against antifeminist charges, her zeal causes her to gloss over some of his inherent contradictions. She cites his friendships with women,¹¹⁹ suggests his views on celibacy were the result of 'present distress', but evades his prescriptions on female silence and submission.¹²⁰ And finally, upholding his authoritarianism in politics, she presses him into service against Voltaire and Godwin (*St Paul* 199).

In concluding these remarks on More's *Essay on St Paul*, one has to acknowledge that she takes no cognisance of his dilemma between Hellenism and Judaism,¹²¹ is doctrinaire in using him against Godwin and Voltaire and presents a disappointingly evasive feminist defence of St Paul. Yet, despite these deficiencies, More makes a small, but important, contribution to the Natural Religion polemic, which to my knowledge has not been recognised.

The importance of this 'discovery' is twofold. Firstly, it reveals another facet of More that has possibly been overlooked: she not only 'broke the rules' by writing overtly

¹¹⁹ 'It is obvious that he could not possibly entertain any prejudices against our sex, in which he counted so many valuable friends' such as Phebe [sic], Priscilla, Mary, Julia, Chloe, Tryphena, Tryphosa and last but not least, 'Claudia, our country-woman' (87-88). Here More is following the tradition ('of a learned, pious and laborious prelate') that Paul preached the Gospel in Britain, returning to it with the family of Caractacus'. See *St Paul* 88.

¹²⁰ St Paul, she maintains is concerned with women's 'highest interests' and his 'descending also to their minutest concern, is a proof surely that he thought nothing beneath his notice which might raise the dignity and add to the beauty of the female character.' Therefore his strictures rather ought to 'inspire gratitude than to provoke censure'. Sounding most unlike her earlier feminist self, More finds it difficult to believe that St Paul's 'injunction of submission to their husbands – of subordination *always* and of silence *sometimes*, – can possibly be the cause of the hostility of any Christian ladies' (85). As regards St Paul's strictures on feminine modesty, More suggests that his 'preference of sobriety to broidered hair and of good works to gold and pearls' are important for they are 'symbols of internal purity' and that he 'strongly prohibits certain personal decorations because they were the insignia of the notoriously unworthy females of the time (85-86). She explains that St Paul's advocacy of celibacy was only a temporary measure ('good for the present distress') motivated by compassion, and concludes with 'answerable' logic: 'Is it not absurd to suppose that this zealous Apostle would suggest as a permanent practice, a measure which must... inevitably occasion the entire extinction of Christianity itself?' This and her further eulogising of St Paul as one whose 'extreme sensibility of heart and rare delicacy in consulting the feelings of others... is never exercised at the expence of his integrity', is disappointing after the rational beginning. Yet, she recovers from this trough and proceeds to a more scholarly appraisal of his life and work.

¹²¹ Demers (119) points this out.

political works when she was younger, but in her last decades crossed the bigger divide into theology and was greeted not only with impunity but with adulation, with her first edition of her *Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of St Paul*, selling out on the first day. The proof that a respected woman writer such as More could not only publish her theological opinions without censure but with enormous popular appreciation, has important implications and suggests a significant stride forward for late eighteenth century feminism.

Finally, in *The Spirit of Prayer*, More proves her ability as a superior sermon writer. This work, a compilation of select passages on the subject from previously published works was prepared, as she explains in her preface, from ‘a sick and, in all probability, dying bed’.¹²² Yet, like Sherlock in his final publications, both her wits and wit remain unimpaired, and it presents a distillation of the theological and moral concerns that occupied her throughout her life.

In her exegesis of the Lord’s prayer she incorporates a bipartite disquisition (105-129) that in reality comprises two well-written sermons. Furthermore, More’s step-by-step analysis of this prayer reveals her predilection for literary criticism. Thus, she writes:

There is in the Lord’s Prayer a concatenation of several clauses; what in human composition the critics call concealed method. The petitions rise out of each other. Every part also is, as it were, fenced round, the whole meeting in a circle; and the desire is that God’s name may be hallowed, His will done and his kingdom come (*Spirit of Prayer* 113-114)

Her discussion of the prayer for deliverance of sin (with cross-references to Abraham, David and Hezekiah) is accomplished with intertextual aplomb and her probings of sin and temptation demonstrate a deep interest in human psychology. Thus, with rhetorical finesse she refers to the ‘close-bosom sins . . . to which the soul habitually returns with a fondness facilitated by long indulgences, and only whetted by a short separation’ (99). Yet her private journals testify that the attempt to recognise and root out

¹²² *The Spirit of Prayer, Selected and Compiled by the Author, from Various Portions Exclusively on that Subject in her Other Works* (London: T Cadell, 1825). Yet as Demers (125) observes, it is no ‘cut and paste job’.

'close-bosom sins' was not merely a matter of rhetoric, so much as the underpinning of her religious philosophy. Her digression into the nomenclature of the Divinity reveals technical theological knowledge (112), but above all, demonstrates her talent for penetrating to the principles behind the particular. Similarly her comment, 'when we pray, therefore, not to be led into temptation, we are asking God to deliver us from those sinful propensities which are likely to expose us to it' (112) explicitly avoids a superficial, side-stepping view of temptation as something from which we, as passive subjects, have to be delivered, but assumes an active responsibility in not giving reign to those 'sinful propensities' which make one particularly vulnerable. Here, and throughout her works, More honestly shows that following Christ's precepts is 'often difficult indeed, but never impossible'.¹²³

In summing up, More's final works, *Practical Piety*, *Christian Morals*, *An Essay on the Life and Practical Writings of St Paul* and *The Spirit of Prayer*, reveal what has been called 'the remarkable homogeneity of her thought over almost half a century'.¹²⁴ In this respect she is similar to Sherlock who, throughout his long writing career, never deviates from his original doctrinal stance.

MORE'S DOCTRINAL EMPHASES

Like other Evangelical reformers and writers who desired to help create a 'serious and moral public in England', More's philanthropism was based on fundamental orthodox doctrines such as natural depravity, which, as Ford K Brown observes, enabled Evangelicals to strike at the roots of social problems.¹²⁵ There is moreover a pervasive concern with accountability and the need to spend one's time wisely and this, together with the desire to spread the gospel of regeneration and fulfil Christ's command to love one's neighbour as oneself, constituted the mainspring of More's moral writings as well as of her practical reforms.

¹²³ *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, in *The Works of Hannah More*, New Edition. 11 vols (London T Cadell, 1830) 11: 124.

¹²⁴ Demers 119.

¹²⁵ F K Brown 261.

In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), More discusses what she calls ‘the leading doctrines of Christianity’, among them natural depravity, the doctrines of the atonement and regeneration (‘the necessity of a change of heart’) and the role of the Holy Spirit. She demonstrates their inter-relatedness and the way in which ‘the duties of Christianity may be seen to grow out of its doctrines’ (*Strictures* 2: 252). In *Christian Morals* More again defines these doctrines (called here ‘the doctrine of human apostasy, salvation by grace through faith . . . and the influence of the Holy Spirit in renovating the heart’ (*CM* 273). In effect, *Coelebs* is a fictional embodiment of all these fundamental doctrines.

In all her works More, like Sherlock, adopts the *a priori* assumption that all people have inherited Adam’s sinful propensity. She argues that this corruption is both general and universal and quotes various texts (as well as Butler) in its support (*Strictures* 2: 260-6). In answer to ‘modern philosophers’ (like Rousseau, who promulgated natural innocence), More quotes Jeremiah: ‘the heart is deceitful above all things’. She endorses the orthodox teaching that even infants are not born innocent, and in this regard quotes the Psalmist: ‘Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (*Strictures* 2: 262). In *Coelebs*, More dramatizes this tenet by censuring fond mothers such as Lady Belfield, who believe their children to be sinless.

Using darkness and light imagery, More depicts the unregenerate mind as at enmity with God and in spiritual ‘darkness’ or ‘death’. By accepting the light of the gospel, More like Sherlock, maintains that one is ‘called out of darkness into light . . . translated in the kingdom of God’s dear Son . . . and passed from death to life’ (*Strictures* 2: 267). Later in *Strictures*, More not only reiterates this theme of renewal or regeneration, but repeats another of Sherlock’s favourite verses: ‘You have been called out of darkness into His marvellous light’ (2: 285). While it is clear that More’s concept of regeneration is influenced by that of Wesley, unlike him she stresses the ‘gestation’ period preceding the ‘birth’ rather than the moment of the new birth itself.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ In ‘The New Birth’ (sermon XXIX), Wesley writes: It is that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life; when He raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the Almighty Spirit of God when it is created anew in Christ Jesus’. More avoids the chronological exactness with which Wesley tables the events of regeneration and justification. *The Works of John Wesley*, 2: 222-227, quoted by Skevington Wood 244 ff.

Like Sherlock, who devoted an entire discourse to it (*TD* 1:175-78), More promulgates the view that regeneration is only made possible through Christ's redemptive death. Similarly, she labours to promote a practical and attractive Christianity, arguing that as the redemption constitutes 'good news to sinners' it ought to induce great cheerfulness. She concludes: 'There is nothing surely in all this to promote gloominess' (2:278). This is particularly significant because 'gloominess' was popularly (but often inaccurately) considered the hallmark of Evangelicals.

Similarly in *Strictures*, More counters what she perceives as another inaccurate charge against Evangelicals – that they stand for 'faith' only and not works (2: 281-84). In this way, like Sherlock before her, More strongly refutes antinomianism and argues that good works are a very necessary proof of faith. She explains that although salvation is unmerited, the acceptance of it is no excuse for a 'lazy professional faith . . . which rests on the laurels of what Christ has done and suffered for us', thus emancipating the believer from 'all obligations to duty and obedience' (2: 281).¹²⁷ Thus, as More shows the inadequacy of mere benevolence, so she also shows the counter side of the coin, the insufficiency of pure, but unacted-upon doctrine. To show the fallacy of this indolent 'quit-rent' faith (2: 282),¹²⁸ More quotes Bible verses that stress personal obedience and duty as a necessary concomitant of faith and those that emphasize the active side of obedience, with verbs such as 'strive', 'fight' and 'work' (2: 282).¹²⁹ In *Coelebs*, More dramatizes faith without works in Mrs Ranby and the reprehensible 'quit-rent' faith in Mr Tyrrel, whose antinomian approach stands to rob him of eternal life.

In *Strictures* More also addresses the role and function of the Holy Spirit. Like Sherlock, More promotes the orthodox view that one of the chief offices of the Holy Spirit

¹²⁷ 'It is the more necessary to insist on this in the present day, as there is a worldly and fashionable, as well as low and sectarian Antinomianism; there lamentably prevails in the world an unwarranted assurance of Salvation, founded on a slight, vague and general confidence in what Christ has done and suffered for us, as if the great object of his doing and suffering has been to emancipate us from all obligations to duty and obedience; and as if because he died for sinners, we might therefore safely and comfortably go on to live in sin, contenting ourselves with now and then a transient, formal, and meaningless avowal of our unworthiness of *his* atonement.' From the section, 'Without Holiness no Man Shall See the Lord' in *Strictures* 2: 281-82.

¹²⁸ Just as freeholders paid rent *in lieu* of service, so Mr Tyrrel mistakenly believes that his 'faith' absolves him from the exertion of righteous living.

¹²⁹ 'Strive that you may enter in . . . Run that you many obtain . . . So fight that you may lay hold on eternal life . . . Work out your own salvation' (*Strictures* 2: 282).

is to bestow the blessings of repentance and forgiveness on helpless humankind and to assist us, ‘not only on account of our helplessness, but from the additional consideration of the powerful adversary [Satan] with whom the Christian has to contend’ (2: 287). Although Sherlock had acknowledged the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s help in repentance and achieving righteousness, in keeping with the tenor of his age, he laid more stress on the fatherhood of God, and that of the Son’s role as mediator and redeemer. By contrast, like Wesley, More shows a greater interest in the enlightening and life-imparting role of the Holy Spirit in the process of regeneration.¹³⁰ She emphasises the necessity of the Spirit’s assistance in the warfare against evil, and like other Evangelicals, frequently uses military metaphors in order to portray the struggle against sin and Satan. More stresses that Christians must be perpetually on guard against evil (2: 293), ‘fervent and sober’ and ‘unworldly and humble, uniting faith and works as they put their doctrines into practice’ (2: 294-5). Sherlock had also warned of the dangers of spiritual complacency and the necessity of constant vigilance, but More dwells more particularly on this aspect.

More, like Sherlock, addresses the topic of accountability from the twin angles of collective and personal accountability. The Evangelical attitude to collective accountability is virtually summed up in a sermon preached by the Cambridge Evangelical, Joseph Milner (18 October 1785). The sermon, entitled ‘The Various Degrees of Accountableness on the Day of Judgment’, was based on a text from Luke 12: 48: ‘For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required’, which Sherlock also expounded. Like Sherlock, Milner argues that much ‘light’ has been given to English people of all ranks:

There is not a nation under heaven, to whom the maxim may with more justice be applied. Even to the poorest of us God may say, Much is given to you, and therefore much will be required of you at my great day of account. The advantages we have in this country for light, for instruction, for

¹³⁰ Cf. Wesley: ‘While a man is in a mere natural state, before he is born of God, he has, in a spiritual sense, eyes and sees not; a thick impenetrable veil lies upon them; he has ears, but hears not; he is utterly deaf to what he is most concerned to hear. His other spiritual senses are all locked up... He has no knowledge of God; no intercourse with Him... therefore, though he is a living man, he is a dead Christian. But as soon as he is born of the Spirit, there is a total change. Eyes and ears, heart and mind are opened... He sees the light of love in the face of Jesus Christ.... He feels in his heart the mighty workings of the Spirit of God. Sermon XXIX, ‘The New Birth’, *Works* 2: 232-234. Quoted by Skevington Wood 246.

civilization, are equal, or more than equal, to what any nation under the sun enjoys.¹³¹

This is exactly in line with what Sherlock taught. Based on the above, in *Coelebs* More shows that Mr Tyrrel and Mr Flam reject the advantage of Christian ‘light and instruction’ while the Stanleys, Barlows and Charles turn it to good effect, being scrupulously aware of their accountability with regard to both their knowledge of the Gospel and their time and ‘talents’.

Although Sherlock and More’s ideas of collective or national accountability are the same (the national ‘light of the eye’), More’s interpretation of individual accountability (that is according to the individual ‘light of the eye’) differs from that of Sherlock’s. Generally considered Evangelical, More’s preoccupation with accountability manifests itself in a stricter, day-to-day and minute-by-minute accountability to God, exhorting one to make careful use of one’s time and one’s individual ‘talents’ for God and His glory.¹³² In *Strictures*, More devotes the whole of the fifth chapter (‘The Religious Employment of Time’) to this subject, while in *Coelebs* the authorially endorsed characters are hallmarked by their constant preoccupation with ‘redeeming the time’. This recalls one of More’s favourite writers, Boyle’s, strictures on idleness, as well as his delight in improving his God-given talents ‘intrusted to us’.¹³³

Finally, without compromising any of her essential beliefs in *Coelebs*, More is always careful to view all this doctrine through the lens of prudence, that much-admired eighteenth-century ‘self-government in the interests of the community’. Not self-regardful, it is (as Tompkins it) ‘the candlestick of the gospel, in which his virtue shines with a comely light, whereas without the candlestick it might be lost under a bushel or set the

¹³¹ Quoted by Brown 28.

¹³² Again by referring to Boyle (*Works* 2: 147) and others, the assumption that concern with idleness and the husbanding of one’s time, is peculiar to Evangelicals, is open to question.

¹³³ In warning against the ‘evil and danger of idleness’, Boyle observes that ‘our ghostly adversary is discouraged to attempt that soul, which he sees already taken up with something, that is at least innocent, if not good.’ Boyle, *Works* 2: 147. As regards accountability, Boyle writes: For it seems consonant to both God’s goodness and that repeated axiom of the gospel, which tells us that he that improves his talents to good uses, shall be intrusted with more.’ Boyle, *Works* 1: 460.

house on fire.'¹³⁴ Unlike ‘enthusiasts’ who set the house on fire, or like Mrs Ranby and Mr Tyrrel, whose lights are concealed under bushels, the light of More’s doctrine shines from the elegant candlesticks of the fictional Stanleys and Barlows in *Coelebs*.

Yet at the same time, More impresses on her readers the ultimate solemnity of her doctrine. As Sherlock warned his congregation/readers that the Gospel Law was a peremptory one and could not be safely ignored, so in a chapter headed ‘Insensibility to Eternal Things’ in her *Practical Piety*, More writes urgently:

Say not that the requisitions of religion are severe; ask rather if they are necessary. If any thing must absolutely be done, if eternal misery will be incurred by not doing it, it is fruitless to enquire whether it be hard or easy. Enquire only whether it be indispensable, whether it be commanded, whether it be practicable. The duty which is too imperative to be evaded, too important to be neglected, is not to be argued about, but performed. (2: 155)

¹³⁴ J M S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1740 -1800* (London: Constable, 1932) 141.

CHAPTER FOUR

HANNAH MORE *COELEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE*

In this chapter, I propose to give a detailed analysis of piety in *Coelebs*, partly because it is More's most substantial and innovative foray into the fictional embodiment of piety, and partly because it illustrates so well the complexity of her position as a woman writer who is both orthodox and progressive. The place of *Coelebs* is crucial. Coming as it does after her treatment of aristocratic vice (in *Strictures* and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*), and before her overtly theological works (*Christian Morals*, *St Paul* and *The Spirit of Prayer*), it provides not only a logical link between these two stages in her *opus*, but its encouraging reception indicates that the time was ripe for a work like this. More's previous exposure to the intellectual/social scene in London prepared her for this narrative about the gentry and her interaction with Newton, Wilberforce and others provided Evangelical stimulus. Contemporary pressures (such as the moral and political effects of the French Revolution on England and the increasing 'godless spirit of the times') prompted More to tap into the gentry and so start a trickle-down reform, and what better place than a fictional courtship narrative (a perfectly respectable form for a Christian and a woman writer) aimed at the upper classes? Thus impatient to embody her doctrine in a socially acceptable and yet effectual manner, More found in her *Coelebs* a much-needed way to mount the gender-genre fences.

I begin with the simple and move to the complex. First I embark on an examination of More's appropriation of the novel genre and the use of anonymity and a male narrator to disguise feminine authorship, ending this section with a brief précis of the plot of *Coelebs*. The next section commences with a discussion of negative piety as embodied in the characters of Mrs Ranby, Mr Tyrrel and Mr Flam, proceeding to positive piety in the form of Mr Stanley and Dr Barlow, the ambivalences of which More cannot hide as she pushes against patriarchal tradition. Thirdly, I trace the movement from the negative to the positive

in the regeneration of the Belfields, Mr Carlton and Lady Mathilda Melbury. Finally, the patriarchal/feminist tensions More experienced in her own life are most clearly embodied in the novel in the form of Lucilla, who is both orthodox and progressive.

FORM AND DISGUISE

In this section I explore More's adaptation of the novel genre as a vehicle for her doctrine, her protective use of anonymity and her imaginative construct of a male narrator to confer the authority she lacks as female writer.

In *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, More boldly chooses not only prose fiction, but the 'dissipated' novel as a vehicle for her doctrine. In this, More was not alone as Elisabeth Jay reminds us, citing Christian, Freethinking and atheist exponents of the *roman á these*,¹ however, Jay's coupling of More and Newman, who 'seized upon the fictional genre as the most favourable for the promulgation of their doctrine' is noteworthy, as he was a Tractarian, whereas she was an Evangelical. More's achievement was even more pronounced in that she co-opted a literary form that was considered anathema by her own 'party'. With her strict Evangelical scruples about the genre, heightened by her gender anxieties, More is therefore constantly at pains to distance herself from this notorious form of dissipation.

Like other Evangelicals, More deplores novels for rarely upholding Christian values, depicting wickedness sympathetically and effectively denying that sin, an affront to God, has dire consequences. Furthermore, she regrets that novelists do not evaluate the worthiness of characters according to God's criteria, nor do they actively promote Christian morals. For her it is insufficient for a novelist simply to avoid representing evil, s/he must actively delineate good. Thus she praises Scott's 'vigorous and versatile mind . . . charms

¹ Among these, Elisabeth Jay cites Bulwer's atheistic *Devereux*, George Eliot and Charles Kingsley and mentions Thackeray who pilloried them for their proselytizing tendencies. See Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 4-6.

of genius and marvellous invention', but laments, 'I rather see the absence of much evil, than the presence of much good'.² Though Jay feels that such criticism shows 'the according of little aesthetic respect for their tool that we might expect from a committed artist', More, as a conscious 'embodier' of doctrine, has different criteria.³

More (like other Evangelicals) believed that novels aroused false expectations in young people, filled them with a distaste for ordinary living and distracted them from serious studies. The latter, which exercise the intellect and the will, were aspects the Evangelicals valued more than the imagination and 'passions' to which the novels appealed. Thus More has to be careful to steer clear of these pitfalls in *Coelebs*. She not only does this by presenting her characters in ordinary situations, but by showing them controlling their potentially anarchic faculties or having them disciplined by someone else, as where Mr Stanley suppresses the imagination of his lively daughter, Phoebe, by setting her to study mathematics.

Above all, More and other Evangelicals regarded novel reading as a serious waste of time. This was an important consideration for those who were convicted that they were accountable to God for every moment. Although Wilberforce frankly delighted in reading Scott's novels, afterwards he felt guilty for squandering his time.⁴ In one of her letters to the Revd D Wilson, More also describes in mock-serious manner the inordinate amount of time spent in reading Scott's long novels, saying that had he written before the flood, 'a life of eight hundred years might have allowed of the perusal of the whole of his volumes . . . but for our poor, scanty three-score years and ten, it is too much'. She concludes on a more sober note:

² J M S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1740 -1800* (London: Constable, 1932) 141.

³ Elisabeth Jay 5.

⁴ Doreen Bosman, "What has Christ to do with Apollo?" Evangelicalism and the Novel, 1800-1830', in *Renaissance and Renewal in Church History*, Studies in Church History 14 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977) 303.

If indeed our time is to be accounted for as scrupulously as the other talents committed to us, how will this reckoning stand? In the case of some, it is the only talent they have. Such ought to be especially careful.⁵

More had to make quite sure her novel was not going to be a waste of time for either the writer or the reader; hence the proportion of doctrine to action and the absence of desultory conversation. True to type, the protagonists in *Coelebs* only read morally-worthy works. More's heroine, Lucilla Stanley, avoids romances, but enjoys the verse of Milton, Pope, Gay, Thomson and Cowper and the prose of Johnson, Swift, Steele and Addison. Fiction, however, is not absolutely banned from the Stanley household, for Mr Stanley permits Phoebe, the younger sister, to read 'the more delicate parts' of *Gulliver's Travels* (*Coelebs* 2: 238) and in *Strictures*, More refers twice to Swift's *Tale of Tub* (*Strictures* 1: 24, 99-100). Precept is added to example and there are many didactic conversations on the moral merits or conversely, the dangers of literature. Thus, in *Coelebs*, More uses Sir John Belfield to pillory contemporary sentimental literature, describing Sterne as the 'corrupt and . . . mischievous founder of the . . . vapid, puling school . . . of sentiment', which specializes in teaching selfishness. Sentimentality is furthermore described as a 'disease which spreads by infection' (*Coelebs* 1: 244).

In another conversation on the snares of novels and the unhappy effects of misguided passion, Mrs Stanley, 'lamented that novels . . . had done infinite mischief by so completely establishing the omnipotence of love, that the young reader was almost systematically taught an unresisting submission to a feeling, because the feeling was irresistible' (1: 245).⁶ Sir John picks up these theologically weighted words ('omnipotence, unresisting submission' and 'irresistible') and develops an elaborate anti-feminist conceit on the Sentimental doctrine of irresistible love, comparing it to the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace (*Coelebs* 2: 245).

Yet, More's views on novel reading were not always so strict. In her early London period, Johnson reprimanded her for quoting from Fielding's *Tom Jones*, saying: 'I am shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book. I am sorry to hear you have read it; a

⁵ See William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, 4 vols (London: R B Seeley and Sons, 1834) 4: 169-70.

⁶ More may have had in mind Mackenzie's *Julia de Robigne*, which taught the irresistibility of love.

confession which no modest lady should make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work.⁷ Naturally there is nothing vicious or corrupt in *Coelebs*, yet More felt she still had to justify her choice of such a tainted genre. A letter to Sir William Pepys proves that she was not only aware of what looked like a *volte-face*, but determined to justify it. Here she begins to explain that she wrote *Coelebs* in order to ‘wean subscribers from circulating libraries... raise the tone of that mart of mischief and to counteract its corruption’.⁸

Evangelicals were not alone in objecting to novels as a potentially dangerous form, as Sam Pickering shows, arguing that the French Revolution made the conservative English suspect the novel as a vehicle for sedition. Although Scott had done a great deal to raise the moral status of the novel, as Pickering observes, it was ultimately More who made the novel respectable with her *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*.⁹ It was More’s (and other Evangelicals’) ardent aim to beat the devil at his own game; to take the novel and, in the words of the *Evangelical Magazine*, to ‘restore it to the cause of Virtue and Religion’.¹⁰ This is exactly what More accomplishes in *Coelebs* by means of military-like tactics, turning a ‘rebel’ into an ‘auxiliary’, and converting an ‘enemy’ into an ‘ally’, to borrow the terms of her conceit with regard to the passions in *Strictures*:

If they are no longer rebels, they become auxiliaries; and a foe subdued is an ally obtained. And it is the effect of religion on the passions, that when she seizes the enemy’s garrison, she does not destroy the works, she does not burn the arsenal and spike the cannon; but the artillery she seizes, she turns to her own use, and plants its whole force against the enemy from whom she has taken it. (*Strictures* 1: 159)

In ‘seizing the artillery’ of the ‘enemy’ and turning it to her own use in *Coelebs*, More not only makes the novel ‘respectable’, but, as Pickering observes, ‘breaks down the

⁷ Hopkins 61.

⁸ Roberts 3: 313 ff.

⁹ Sam Pickering, ‘Hannah More’s *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* and the Respectability of the Novel in the Nineteenth Century’, *Neuphilologische Mittelungen* 78 (1977): 82-85.

¹⁰ Bosman 307.

nineteenth-century moral barriers between the novel and the sermon', which, he maintains, is the cause of both its success and the uneasiness of the periodical reviewers – an uneasiness, as Newell observes, which derives from More using 'a wholly secular form' for religious purposes.¹¹

More's anxieties concerning the novel's dubious moral reputation are apparent in the title, where she scrupulously avoids using the term 'novel', using instead the euphemism, 'observation', with the full title reading: *Coelebs in Search of A Wife, Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits, and Manners, Religion, and Morals*. Thus, in spite of her cramping use of the form, More deserves to be commended for entering the lists of what to her was a morally terrifying battlefield – the novel genre – and annexing it to the Evangelical cause.

Reviewers of religious publications were still suspicious, however, with the *Christian Observer* justifying *Coelebs* by saying, 'We cannot allow this work to be called a novel'.¹² Conversely, reviewers, who judged the work according to secular literary criteria, were dismissive of it. But, on the whole, periodicals were favourable to *Coelebs*, with the *Universal Magazine* believing *Coelebs* to be 'the first novel thought respectable by nineteenth-century religious readers'.¹³ More had already obtained one of her desires.

More might appropriate the enemy form, but took double precautions in publishing her work anonymously¹⁴ and assuming a camouflage male-persona, the genteel bachelor, Charles.¹⁵ The latter, who narrates events, but most importantly refracts More's doctrine

¹¹ A G Newell, 'Early Evangelical Fiction', *Evangelical Quarterly* 38 (1966): 9.

¹² Quoted by Newell 9.

¹³ Sam Pickering, 'Hannah More's *Coelebs*', 82-85. Although Richardson is traditionally hailed as recuperating the novel, it seems as if the Evangelical reading public found even Richardson wanting and the *Universal's* recognition of More's achievement requires to be read in this light.

¹⁴ More's anonymity in *Coelebs* invites comparison with Austen's more enigmatic desire for anonymity. Although as shown in the first chapter, there was already a long history of many thoroughly respectable or 'proper' women writers who confidently put their names to their works, Austen in her novels and More in her tracts and *Coelebs*, opted for anonymity. Though earlier critics saw this as a preference for privacy, it is now frequently read as a political move by women writers who feared repercussions for addressing issues outside their traditional 'spheres'.

¹⁵ By 'acting out a male metaphor in her own text', More can be said to show more than what Gilbert and Gubar call the usual female 'anxiety of competence'. See S Gilbert and S Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) 46, 49. See also Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Blue Stocking Circle: Women,*

through images of negative and positive piety, is patently a device to sidestep the gender/genre barriers (which tried to keep women out of political and doctrinal writing) and at the same time, command greater authority. But More's appropriation of a patriarchal point of view is so good that it becomes inadvertently subversive of her morality. Therefore, the complacency and pomposity of Charles, the focaliser, whose gendered interpretation of doctrine and piety induces him sternly to repudiate the feminist Miss Sparkes,¹⁶ idealise Lucilla (according to stereotypical male constructs of erotically-charged Puritan femininity) and sentimentally depict the submissive Mrs Carlton, render his reliability problematic. And thus, ironically, More's attempts to 'write as a man',¹⁷ almost sabotage her work.

Roberts records that the secret of her anonymity was so well kept that some of her friends begged her to read *Coelebs*.¹⁸ Zachary Macaulay was allegedly so deceived by More's disguise that it prompted his outspoken criticism for which (when enlightened as to her authorship) he expressed regret. However, though it was claimed most remained in ignorance, some of More's more perspicacious readers saw through her 'literary cross-dressing'¹⁹ or 'heavy disguise' (to borrow a phrase from Gilbert's and Gubar's unfavourable comments on Charlotte Bronte's austere male impersonation in *The Professor*)²⁰ and recognised her highly individual voice.

Friendship and the Life of the Mind in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 155 for general comments on this female tactic.

¹⁶ She has the most imaginative life of all the minor characters. She tries to shock Lucilla with her masculine ways, her frank references to animal husbandry and her desire to fight like a man in the wars. Above all she questions the separate spheres doctrine, challenging Stanley and Barlow so radically, yet rationally, that although they retort with patriarchal platitudes ('there are still nobler ways of exerting courage than even in the fields of battle . . . to sustain a fit of sickness may establish as true heroism as to lead an army') and though they think they have routed her, their reasoning is often inferior to hers and she goes away laughing broadly. See *Coelebs* [2: 182-183, 164] 2: 182-83, 164.

¹⁷ Catherine Macaulay is said to have once innocently (?) commended More for her ability to 'write as a man', that is, rationally. Reference untraced.

¹⁸ Annette Meakin, *Hannah More: A Biographical Study* (London: John Murray, 1919) 359.

¹⁹ Ruth Yeazall, *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 8.

²⁰ Gilbert and Gubar 372.

But More's disguise was not sufficient to protect her from criticism. Ironically, her Clapham 'friend', James Stephen attacked her in an extraordinary anti-feminist passage. He arrogantly writes that he knew all along that *Coelebs* was by a woman and goes on to point out the serious 'flaw' in her portrayal of 'female excellence', which he feels it his duty to 'correct'. Here he takes More to task for letting the long-suffering, severely persecuted Mrs Carlton find some relief in 'convers[ing] with her religious female friend on the faults of her husband'. He goes on smugly to observe that he immediately guessed it was written by a single lady, a 'stranger to the conjugal relation and the feelings of the proud sex'.²¹ Stephens's pious chagrin can be seen as masking a deep-seated fear of More's implicit female solidarity with the abused wife, Henrietta Carlton. Here, he seems to see More, a fellow Evangelical, as a more insidious foe than Wollstonecraft.

Yet, despite Stephens's attack, the notorious depreciation of Sydney Smith and the more subdued critical dismay of Zachary Macaulay,²² *Coelebs* was generally enthusiastically reviewed, and received sometimes with stupendous adulation. Sir William Weller Pepys was 'delighted and edified with *Coelebs*', in which 'the delineation of character . . . the beauty of the language and the frequent and always consistent metaphors stamp it as your own'. He further declares that 'I have not met with such writing. . . since the days of Burke'.²³ The *European Magazine* enthused that 'It's [sic] beauties are great and conspicuous', and the *Monthly Review* praised More for 'the skill, the discrimination, and the general taste with which the whole is executed'. The *British Critic* maintained that, 'We have not read a work which combines the *utile cum dulci* more completely',²⁴ and the London Evangelical preacher, the Revd John Venn, declared *Coelebs* 'one of the most useful books which was ever written'.²⁵ Others depreciated *Coelebs* as 'an extended tract...

²¹ See Roberts 2: 292. Apart from upholding the notorious 'double standard', Stephens clearly subscribes to the ideology that marriage is a woman's destiny and that those who don't fulfil it are lacking, inexperienced or inferior.

²² Smith, 'Coelebs in Search of a Wife', *Edinburgh Review* 14 April, 1809, 145-51; Macaulay, The *Christian Observer* 8 (1809): 109-21. He was a member of the Clapham Sect and editor of this 'mouthpiece' of the Established Church. As his comments reveal, he did not know that More was the author of *Coelebs*.

²³ Letter to Hannah More, 14 March 1809 (Roberts 4: 295).

²⁴ *Monthly Review*, 53 (Feb 1809); *British Critic* 33 (May 1809), quoted by Newell 9.

²⁵ Quoted by Newell 9.

a counterpoint to life', 'a lay sermon on the vanity of human wishes' and 'evangelical doctrine dressed up in the guise of fiction'. The latter is ironically the most apposite for one who had no option but to choose fiction as a cover for her doctrinal interests.

Although she creates a patriarchal narrator/male-persona in *Charles*, More's authorial anxiety manifests itself in his feminine modesty in the preface where he humbly avers that he offers (not a novel) but a collection of conversations written for a private country gentleman, his family and friends. With female self-deprecation he explains: 'The subject was all important, though there might be nothing particularly new or interesting in the discussion itself' (*Coelebs* 1: iii). Thus, like a good Evangelical, Charles distances himself from popular fiction and at the same time solicits the good will of the reader. Yet the fact that he presents an 'all important' subject does not escape us.

He goes on to warn his readers that those expecting intricacies of plot and character will be disappointed and vindicates the stilted dialogue by citing the seriousness of the subject (vii). Aware of the limitations of his hybrid genre, he pre-empts censure from both sides by saying: 'The Novel reader will reject it as dull. The religious may throw it aside as frivolous. The one will accuse me of excessive strictness; the other of censorable levity' (v-vi). As it is not his 'leading object' to amuse the 'Novel reader', but edify those like the 'country gentleman and his friends', he warns his readers that there will be no 'striking events, pathetic scenes or trying circumstances' (vi-vii). Readers of romances and sentimental novels are fore-warned that '[t]he texture of the narrative is so slight, that it barely serves for a ground into which to weave the sentiments and observations it was designed to introduce' (vi-viii).

Yet, the artist in More realized that something more than stark didacticism was required to make piety palatable to the gentry and here her debt to Johnson and the London days is most apparent. All the admirable characters in *Coelebs* are superior conversationalists like those of the Garrick and Blue Stocking circles. Frequently too, their conversations (contrived to arise naturally from visitors and their news at the different homes that Charles visits) are reminiscent of the *Rambler* and *Idler*. And when Charles arrives in London and is delighted by the polished, stimulating conversation, he shows his critical alignment by quoting Johnson: 'No pleasure on earth is equal to the fine, full flow of London talk.' (*Coelebs* 1: 37)

Although *Coelebs* also invites comparison with Johnson's *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (where there is also a quest for something perfect) with its slender story line and courteous edifying conversations, they differ considerably in scope and depth. Patently doctrinally tendentious, the *Coelebs* conversations are nevertheless revelatory of the characters' natures which are full of potential, but stunted. Afraid of Evangelical censure, More restricts her wit, keeps action to a minimum and severely nips off any promising buds of character in order to prevent her narrative from developing into a full-blown novel.

However, Charles's warnings and deprecating comments in the preface were not sufficient to prevent Sydney Smith from (ironically) disparaging *Coelebs* as a 'dramatic sermon',²⁶ whereas Austen's novels, with their tightly woven plots, complex exploration of character and motive and smoothly integrated, lively dialogue, could never be so mistaken. Yet, as will be demonstrated, *Coelebs* is much more than a dramatic sermon, for though the plot is thin and schematic, the dialogue often stilted and many of the characters allegorical types, it nevertheless frequently displays a thorough and sympathetic knowledge of human nature, depicted in a confident, urbane, and often ironic, style.

Eleven editions appeared in eight months and it was reported that *Coelebs* was printed simultaneously in three different locations. No other novel was so widely reviewed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, with most of the reviewers being favourable. In America it sold equally well, with four editions succeeding each other with unexampled rapidity. Thirty editions of a thousand copies each were printed in the United States during More's lifetime. *Coelebs* was translated into Dutch, and into French by Huber, and Mme de Staël gave it a favourable review in *The Constitutional*.²⁷ More must have been gratified by the success of her work, and no less by the success of her generic and narratorial disguise.

Other authors were quick to exploit its popularity and there was a plethora of *Coelebs*-related works, with each title becoming more preposterous: *Coelibia Choosing a Husband*, by Col. Robert Torrens (1809), *Coelebs Married* (1814), *Coelebs Deceived* (1817), *The Laws and Practices of Whist by Coelesb, MA* (1851) and *Coelebs in Search of a Cook* (1860).²⁸ Although reviewers initially wrestled with the dilemma of text-description

²⁶ 'Coelebs in Search of a Wife', *Edinburgh Review* 14 April, 1809, 145-51.

²⁷ Meakin 338, 389.

²⁸ Newell 7.

(was *Coelebs* a novel?), with historical hindsight, More has been recognized as a literary pioneer for, as Pickering puts it, ‘in her *Coelebs* a critical Rubicon had been crossed’.²⁹

THE PLOT OF *COELEBS*

As befits a didactic combination of the courtship novel and quest narrative, the plot of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, is schematic and almost allegorical. It is the story of the young man, Charles (no surname given) who adopts the pseudonym *Coelebs*, the Latin for ‘celibate’ or ‘bachelor’. He is an only child, ‘of respectable and ancient family’ (1:12) who has been brought up in the north by pious parents who have (unbeknown to him) since his infancy, planned a union for him with the eldest daughter of an old university friend, Mr Stanley of Hampshire. These plans are kept secret and the children kept apart until adulthood, when it is hoped that they will meet and voluntarily fall in love. Charles is sent to the university of Edinburgh and Lucilla (like her creator) is schooled at home by her father. Before his death, Charles’s father requests him not to choose a wife until he has visited Mr Stanley. Similarly, his mother gives him a blueprint of a perfect wife, stressing consistency above all things. After their death, the twenty-four year old Charles leaves the family home and sets out on his journey in quest of a wife.

He arrives first at Hampstead where he stays with Mr and Mrs Ranby and their daughters. Although Mrs Ranby enjoys a reputation for piety, Charles is disappointed to find a mean-minded, contentious polemicist, and superficial, ill-informed, harp-playing daughters who are ‘animated by trifles and indifferent on things of importance’ (1: 55) – comic demonstrations of the type of shallow, accomplishment-orientated education More deplores in *Strictures* and Austen ridicules in *Pride and Prejudice*.³⁰

The next stage of Charles’s journey brings him to Cavendish Square, London, where he stays with his father’s friends, the affable, generous Sir John and Lady Belfield and their young family. He feels more at home here, but is still not satisfied that he has

²⁹ Sam Pickering, ‘Hannah More’s *Coelebs*’ 78, 81.

³⁰ PP 39.

found true piety, for although well informed and benevolent, they are ‘too much of the world’. He reflects on their carelessness in Sunday observance, their indulgence of their children and their mixing with fashionable people of dubious morals. He also ponders the failings of their acquaintance, and reprobates the follies and vices of the *beau monde*.

Through the Belfields, Charles meets the ‘glass of fashion’, the thoughtless Lady Melbury who lives beyond her means and runs up enormous debts, the unhappily-married Stanhopes, and the hypocritical, snobbish Lady Fenthams, whose predatory manoeuvres to marry her daughters amuse and disgust Charles, as do the antics of her daughters, whose musical and artistic accomplishments he is forced to endure. He remains some weeks in London, sight-seeing and hearing the best orators and preachers (1:129) but, as befits a man with a mission to marry,³¹ he continues to scrutinize potential marriage candidates, but finds them all wanting in the combination of piety, sense and elegance. Feeling progressively more disillusioned, he moves on to the last leg of his journey, Hampshire.

On his arrival at Stanley Grove, Charles immediately senses that he is at the end of his quest. The atmosphere of true piety is almost palpable and Charles’s trusted valet sums up the situation by saying, ‘Oh sir, we are got into the right house at last!’ (1:178). Of the five lovely daughters, Charles is attracted to the eldest, Lucilla, a paragon of intellectual and domestic virtues. As their parents had hoped, Charles and Lucilla fall in love, but Lucilla is so bound by delicacy and feminine modesty that Charles is never sure of her feelings. Affairs are further complicated by rumours of her being engaged to Lord Staunton.

At Stanley Grove, Charles meets the exemplary rector, Dr Barlow, Mrs Barlow, their over-ambitious young curate and the redoubtable hypocrite Lady Denham and her daughter, Miss Amelia Rattle, another caricature of female accomplishments. Charles is also introduced to the aging feminist, Miss Sparkes, the charming, but careless, Mr Flam and the sordid, hypocritical Mr Tyrrel and his nephew, Ned. Every character is a living parable of some virtue, excess or vice and Charles duly learns from them and his two wise and pious mentors, Mr Stanley and Dr Barlow. Above all, Charles is impressed by the consistent and unostentatious piety, discipline and charity of the Stanleys. Certain that he

³¹ In a letter to Mrs Ruxton (1810), Maria Edgeworth contended that the supposed model for Charles/Coelebs, John Scandreth Harford of Blaise Castle, was ‘a much more agreeable man than Coeles’. Quoted by Demers 95. Hopkins suggests that the model could also have been Thomas Day Lewis, author of *Sandford and Merton*. See Hopkins 229.

wants to marry Lucilla, he asks Mr Stanley's permission. He grants it, but requires Charles to wait for a three-month 'weaning period'. Mr Stanley shows him the letters his father wrote him and Charles is moved by the pious care with which these patriarchs nurtured their respective children for each other, at the same time, making allowance for freedom of choice. Finally, Charles leaves Stanley Grove, and returns to The Priory, via Cavendish Square, to prepare for his marriage and the next phase of his life in which he will no longer be a 'coelebs'.

Thus, unlike many popular eighteenth century novels which were of the 'life and adventures' kind (from *Tom Jones* to *The Wrongs of Woman*) *Coelebs* approximates more to the 'life and opinions' work, which More considered a more fitting vehicle for the 'religion and morals' content advertised in the subtitle. Yet, though the plot is so rigidly schematic and Bunyan-like in its use of allegorical types, More's light of the eye frequently imparts a genuine imaginative life to a narrative (and its heroine) which have to be transparent enough to convey doctrine accurately.

PIETY IN COELEBS

Piety, both in its conceptual form and practical application, fascinated More. She repeatedly defines it throughout her didactic writings, and *Coelebs*, ostensibly concerned with Charles's quest for a wife, could equally be sub-titled 'a definition of enlightened orthodox piety'. In delineating this ideal, More introduces Charles to both positive and negative embodiments of it in his journey, reserving the best for last. While fundamentally the same as Sherlock's, More's concept of piety is more specifically adapted to the country gentry of late eighteenth-century England.

Taught to value consistence as the main criteria for piety, Charles uses it as the moral yardstick to measure not only possible marriage candidates, but everyone he meets, finally finding his (Evangelical) ideal embodied at Stanley Grove (2: 56). However, More, who was particularly sensitive to public opinion since the Blagdon debacle (in which her Evangelicalism was confused with Methodism) never once mentions the word

'Evangelical' and is always careful to distance herself from Methodism.³² As Elisabeth Jay observes, 'Although Hannah More's pattern of piety, the Stanleys, might accept the imputation of 'Methodism' in its earliest sense – the systematic practice of one's religion – they were well aware that their enemies used it to accuse them of schismatic tendencies'.³³ More was also painfully aware of Horace Walpole's contempt of 'enthusiasm', which was often wrongly associated with Evangelicals.³⁴ Thus Lady Mathilda Melbury's relief at finding that Lady Jane Melbury, 'the woman I had quizzed as a Methodist was a most entertaining companion' (*Coelebs* 2: 399). This desire to distinguish zeal from fanaticism, and the more serious concern to repudiate charges of antinomianism provides the rationale behind the creation of Mrs Ranby and Mr Tyrrel.

Similarly, although More has often been accused of advocating separation from the world, *Strictures* 2: 227 confutes this (Christian piety does not 'consist in living in retreat and railing at the practices of the world') as does More's letter to the Revd D Wilson, in which she endorses Wesley's advice to his sister ('Tell her to live in the world; that is her sphere of usefulness')³⁵ which More's own life so effectively exemplified. As a daughter of the enlightenment, More champions an attractive, intellectual and yet practical piety, setting herself to prove that '[p]iety maintains no natural war with elegance, and Christianity would be no gainer by making her disciples unamiable' (*Strictures* 1: 89). In *Coelebs*, where she begins by waging war against misrepresentations of piety, she sketches the unamiable 'piety' of Mrs Ranby, Mr Tyrrel and the spurious benevolence of Mr Flam. Always an integral element of Christian piety, benevolence, by virtue of its interpretation and centralisation by Latitudinarians and later, Godwin (who presented it as a substitute for

³² See the *Anti-Jacobin* (July 1801) 186, 291. See also Roberts 4: 40-41 and Ford K Brown 212.

³³ It was an open joke among Evangelicals, with More's friend, Sir Richard Hill, compiling a list of the scurrilous names applied to them in the early nineteenth century: 'Methodists, Enthusiasts, Schismatics, Evangelicals, Preachers, Disturbers of quiet Congregations, Calvinists, Puritans, Canters, Hypocrites, Fanatics and even Antinomians.' See Jay 20.

³⁴ On hearing Wesley preach at Lady Huntingdon's chapel in Bath (5 October, 1766), Walpole wrote to John Chute (10 October, 1766); 'Wesley is a lean, elderly man, fresh-coloured, his hair smoothly combed, but with a soupcon of a curl at the ends. Wondrous clean, but as evident an actor as Garrick. He spoke his sermon, but so fast and with so little accent, that I am sure he has often uttered it, for it was like a lesson. There were parts and eloquence in it, but towards the end, he exalted his voice and enacted very ugly enthusiasm.' *Letters of Horace Walpole* 7:50.

³⁵ Roberts 4: 148.

orthodox religion) became problematic for Evangelicals. Thus More argues for a doctrinal foundation for benevolence, also maintaining that humans are not innately good and that effort is required (more or less, according to one's temperament) to combat selfishness – a concern that is also evident in Austen's prayers and the portrayal of her fictional Marianne Dashwood.

In his 1755 *Dictionary*, Johnson defined piety as 'the discharge of one's duty to God'. Compared to this terse description, More's definition of piety, as diffused throughout her works, is ambitiously comprehensive and in *Coelebs* alone, expansive. Although accepting that duty is an integral component of piety, More explains in *Strictures* that Christian piety is:

neither a table of ethics, nor a system of opinions, nor a bundle of rods to punish, nor an exhibition of rewards to allure, nor a code of laws; but . . . a new principle infused into the heart by the word and spirit of God, out of which principle will inevitably grow right opinions, renewed affections, correct morals and holy habits with an inward desire of pleasing God and a constant fear of offending Him. (*Strictures* 2: 193)

The Augustan correctness of the prose reflects More's concern for accuracy in describing her ideal, which owes much to Law's *Serious Call* for the concept of a disciplined 'inward' piety with practical outward effects.³⁶ In *Coelebs* (and again in *Practical Piety*), More describes the foundational doctrines of this 'religion of the heart' (natural depravity, the atonement and regeneration) and discusses its manifestations (in devotions, consistent conduct, careful use of time, Sunday observance and an active social benevolence). As Charles frequently avers and as Mr Flam has to learn, 'true' piety is not mere assent to a

³⁶ Cf. More's qualified eulogy of Law in *Strictures*: 'If I might presume to recommend a book, which of all others exposes the insignificance, vanity, littleness and emptiness of the world, I should not hesitate to name Mr Law's "Serious Call to a devout and holy Life". Few writers, except Pascal, have directed so much acuteness of reasoning, and so much pointed wit to this subject. He not only makes readers afraid of a worldly life on account of its sinfulness, but ashamed of it on account of its folly. Few men perhaps have had a deeper insight into the human heart, or have more skilfully probed its corruptions; yet on points of doctrine, his views do not seem to be just; and his disquisitions are often unsound and fanciful; so that a general perusal of his works would neither be profitable nor intelligible. To a fashionable woman immersed in the vanities of life, or to a busy man overwhelmed by his cares, I know no books so applicable ... but even in this work he is not a safe guide to evangelical light; and in many of his others, he is highly visionary and whimsical.' *Strictures* 2: 210, n.

creed, but a state of heart and mind reflected in a way of life. This is of course not far removed from what the Latitudinarians sought (a personal goodness not dictated by creed or ceremony), but *Coelebs* fills in their doctrinal *lacunae* and also emphasises what More elsewhere calls ‘an inward devotedness of ourselves to his service’ (*Practical Piety* 1: 5).

To illustrate that true piety grows and develops and is not miraculously sudden in its genesis or development, Charles concludes ruefully after a discussion with the dogmatic Mrs Ranby (with its thinly-veiled allusion to an exaggerated phenomenon of Methodism):

She holds very cheap the gradual growth in piety which is, in reality, no less the effect of divine grace, than those instantaneous conversions, which she believes to be so common. (1: 49)

By way of positive contrast to the instant, painless but hypocritical piety of Mrs Ranby, More juxtaposes the slow, but steady, growth of honest piety in Sir John and Lady Belfield. This affluent, generous, warm-hearted and easy-going couple, who come to stay at Stanley Grove are taught to forsake their lax London ways and embrace a life of greater ‘seriousness’, but as Charles observes, do not become ‘unbalanced’.

More also stresses that her piety is not the miserable, condemnatory, mercenary kind of Mr Tyrrel, but a noble, generous quality that well becomes people of taste. Not inherited, but hard-won and can be acquired by both the genteel (such as Dr Barlow, Sir John and Lady Belfield, Lady Melbury and Mr Carlton) as well as the cottagers (Dame Alice) and working classes (the Stokeses). Yet here, as in her tracts, Christian poverty is idealistically and sentimentally portrayed,³⁷ for the surroundings are made picturesque (Fanny Stokes’s neat, attic-like lodgings and Dame Alice’s cottage with the pretty garden) and the people clean, industrious, cheerful and pious.³⁸

³⁷ Although Marxist/Feminist readers criticise More for her ‘control and vigilance’ in upholding a paternalistic hierarchy in which the poor have to know their place and exercise ‘temperance and self-denying moderation’ (see Demers 12, 112), More preaches a doctrine of consistence which does not exempt the genteel or great from the same criteria; in fact like Sherlock, she recognises a greater accountability and often applies more exacting requirements to them as exemplars.

³⁸ More was always a stern opponent of feckless improvidence as her Repository tract on ‘Black Giles the Poacher’ and his family illustrates. Justifying the teaching of reading in her schools (against claims of ‘levelling’) More wrote to the Bishop of Bath and Wells: ‘I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to make fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety.’ Letter from More to Dr Richard Beadon (1801). See Roberts 3: 133-134.

Finally, to give her work greater verisimilitude, More also presents those who refuse, or are unaffected, by her kind of ideal piety in *Coelebs*. These include Mrs Ranby, Mr Tyrrel, Lady Denham, Mrs Fenton, Miss Sparkes, Miss Amelia Rattle and sadly, Mr Flam – negative ‘types’, which exemplify common errors and popular misconceptions about true Christian piety.

NEGATIVE PIETY

MRS RANBY: RELIGIOUS PEDANDTRY AND ‘FAITH WITHOUT WORKS’¹

Sherlock More and Austen all confront the knotty problem of ‘faith and works’, seeking to create a living connection between doctrinal enlightenment and moral regeneration. Precisely because there is no easy formula for this, in *Coelebs*, More sometimes swings from homily to hyperbole in an attempt to find the best way to present the mean.

Piety is not, as More wittily shows, the acerbic kind of religiosity advocated by Mrs Ranby, whom Charles meets early in the novel. This censorious lady, the vociferous wife of meek, hen-pecked Mr Ranby and mother of several daughters, is a bad-tempered, illiberal woman, who misuses her Biblical knowledge and abrogates her duties as a Christian mother. A religious pedant, well versed in dogma and current religious controversy, she nevertheless lacks the true spirit of Christianity and approximates to ‘the female Machiavel, or warlike Thalestris’ More delineates in *Strictures* (1: 7). More damningly describes Mrs Ranby’s piety as one that is based on an ill-regulated mind and bad judgement, for it ‘was not that she did not read Scripture, but she interpreted it in her own way; built opinion on insulated texts and did not compare Scripture with Scripture, except as it concurred to strengthen her bias (1: 59). In maintaining the importance of ‘comparing Scripture with Scripture’, More endorses a conservative orthodox tradition

(followed *inter alia*, by Sherlock, Law, Paley, Barrow, Lyttleton and Wesley, who not only used Scripture inter-textually, but supplemented it with the Fathers).³⁹

Mrs Ranby's 'leaning unto her own understanding' results in antinomianism and the conviction that it is unnecessary to instruct her children spiritually. When Charles asks her about the latter, she 'looked displeased' and retorted sanctimoniously 'that she did not think it necessary to do a great deal in that way; all these things must come from above; it was not human endeavour, but Divine grace which made Christians' (*Coelebs* 1: 50).

In similar hypocritical vein, although she expatiates on charity, neither she nor any of her daughters is generous. Charles observes that:

Their charities were small and casual, and often ill applied, and often without a plan. They knew nothing of the state, character and wants of the neighbouring poor; it had never been pointed out to them that the instruction of the young and ignorant made any part of the duty of the rich toward them. When I ventured to drop a hint on this subject to Mrs Ranby, she dryly said, 'There were many other ways of doing good to the poor, besides exposing her daughters to the probability of catching diseases and the certainty of getting dirt by such visits.' (1: 67)

In contrast to this negative piety, Lucilla Stanley's charity is an organized, active and unselfish kind that challenges dirt and disease by going into the cottages of the poor and offering physical and spiritual relief. Charles thus dismisses the selfish, sanctimonious Mrs Ranby, who is not only a theologically misguided, but lazy parent. Thus Charles muses:

While she discovered much earnestness about her own spiritual interests, she had almost totally neglected the religious cultivation of her children . . . The daughters, in particular, had been suffered to follow their own devices,

³⁹ Wesley writes: 'Our common way of living was this: From four in the morning till five, each of us used private prayer. From five to seven we read the Bible together, carefully comparing it (that we might not lean to our own understandings) with the writings of earlier ages.' *The Journals of the Rev John Wesley* (London: Dent, n.d.) 1: 16; see also Wesley's recommendation of Law's 'Treatise on Christian Perfection' to a woman who requested spiritual help (1: 17).

and to waste their days in company of their own chusing and in the most frivolous manner. (*Coelebs* 1: 51-54)

Where More spells it out for the reader, Austen takes the same theme of poor moral education and dramatizes it in Maria and Julia Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, where the ‘excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt’ and the remoteness and severity of their father combine in an inadequate moral education which contributes to Maria’s moral downfall (*MP* 463).

Charles then ironically observes the contrasts between the stingy, sectarian Ranby and the generous Saviour she professes to follow:⁴⁰

As I suspected . . . she a little over-rated her charity. It was not that she gave nothing away, but she had a great dislike to relieve any but those of her own religious persuasion. Though her Redeemer laid down his life for all peoples, nations and languages, she will only lay out her money for a very limited number of a very limited class. To be religious is not claim sufficient to her bounty, they must be religious in a very particular. (*Coelebs* 1: 67-68)

Here the prose is wittily mimetic of Mrs Ranby’s pedantic thought processes. Her much-bruited charity is reduced to giving almost nothing away, for relief is only administered to those who subscribe to her narrow interpretation of Christianity. Thus she attempts to shrink the largesse of Christ’s atonement to a personal charity that is only for ‘a limited number of a limited class’.

Austen’s similar dislike of hypocritical parsimonious is conveyed in a more secular context through Mrs Fanny Dashwood’s attempts to reduce her husband’s financial assistance to his half-sisters to a mere travesty of his original intentions in *Sense and Sensibility*.⁴¹ And although Mrs Norris in *Mansfield Park* is no religious pedant, there is

⁴⁰ Although Austen’s Mrs Norris is not a religious pedant like Mrs Ranby, she is similarly frugal and illiberal towards Fanny and others, as in her begrudging young Dick Jackson two left-over bits of deal-board from the theatricals or a bit of dinner from the servants’ hall (*MP* 141-42).

⁴¹ From three thousand pounds to periodic presents of ‘fish and game’ (*SS* 12). For the whole passage see *SS* 8-13.

nevertheless a striking similarity between her boasted, but empty, benevolence and that of Mrs Ranby.⁴²

True piety, as More demonstrates, is therefore not polemical and mean-minded like that of Mrs Ranby, nor is it the pernicious pedantry of the warped Mr Tyrrel. Both are inexcusable in that they know the right doctrines, but persist in re-writing the Gospel according to their own predilections, thus ending in antinomian *cul-de-sacs*. These are precisely the people that Sherlock warned would be ‘beaten with many stripes’ for having more light than others, they disregard or obscure it (*TD* 2: 125).

MR TYRREL: THE INADEQUACY OF THEOLOGICAL JARGON

Mr Tyrrel is a professing Christian of mature years, who, like Mrs Ranby, knows all the ‘cant’, but not the essence of piety. A university graduate himself, Mr Tyrrel thwarts the clerical ambitions of his young nephew, Ned Tyrrel, by refusing to allow him to attend the university; stingily he begrudges him the cost of it and Pharisaically he maintains he would be ‘contaminated’ by worldly thought. With hindsight he admits:

As to Ned . . . I have neither fortified his mind for solitude, nor fortified his heart for the world. I foolishly thought that to keep him ignorant, was to keep him safe. I have provided for him the snare of a large fortune, without preparing him for the use of it I fell into the error of begrudging the expenses of an education for a relation for whom I designed my estate I thought it sufficient to keep him from actual vice, without furnishing him with arguments to combat it, or with principles to abhor it. (2: 384)

Mr Tyrrel’s judgement misleads him in other matters as well. He tries to impress Dr Barlow, Mr Stanley and Charles with his knowledge of technical theological terms and

⁴² Mrs Norris is ironically described by Austen as ‘thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others: but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends’ (*MP* 8). Besides their empty, hypocritical ‘benevolence’, Mrs Ranby and Mrs Norris share a similar penchant for control and domination, paternal qualities Austen roundly denounced in her strict Evangelical cousin, Edward Cooper (*L* 260).

spends hours debating fruitlessly with them on the doctrine of grace and the voluntary agency of humans (2: 214). He has ‘zeal and eloquence’, but no true grasp of the Gospel. The religion he adopts is ‘all talk of sin, but no renunciation of it’ (2: 324). His great delight is to quibble endlessly about the difference between religion and morality (2: 360) and the relationship between faith and works (2: 215). He complains that Barlow and Stanley attach too much importance to good works (2: 215), but it becomes clearer that sadly, his religion is only ‘a bundle of rods to chastize’ (2: 350) and so ineffectual that it cannot console him on his deathbed.

This, More’s most overt fictional attack on antinomianism, not only recuperates Evangelicalism, but shows that it is not entirely incompatible with some of the ideas of Locke, Fowler, Burnet and Tillotson whose similar repugnance of antinomianism cause them to maintain the importance of ‘the strenuous endeavours of a working faith’.⁴³

Moreover, Tyrrel, whose faith is unsupported by works, becomes the stereotype of the bad landed-gentry, who grossly neglects his duties to his tenants, only visiting his Buckinghamshire estate in order to collect rents (1: 291). Altogether, More represents a radical critique of a complacent Pharisee-patriarch, trying to keep control of traditionally masculine theological language, as well as the life of his nephew, Ned. At the end his spurious control over both the religious discourse of doctrine and Ned’s life collapses as the over-reacher is over-reached.

Tyrrel becomes progressively sicker and is visited by Dr Barlow, Mr Stanley and Charles who try to offer him spiritual comfort. In a final morbid deathbed scene (a favourite device of More’s) Charles, who visits Mr Tyrrel and finds the spiritual and physical wastrel now wasted by disease, reports:

I found him totally changed in all aspects, a body wasted by disease, a mind apparently full of contrition, and penetrated with that deep humility in which he had been so deficient before. (2: 383)

⁴³ Locke and Latitudinarians such as Fowler, Patrick, Glanvill, Burnet, Tillotson quoted the following verses as support from Scripture: Titus 3:14 and Gal 5:6. See Marshall, ‘Locke and Latitudinarianism’, in *Philosophy Science and Religion in England: 1610–1700*, ed. R Kroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 259.

Tyrrel confesses that he had professed Christianity as a mere subterfuge and that he really worshipped only at the shrine of mammon: ‘Money had always been my idol’ (2: 322). He also ruefully admits that his defective kind of religion has borne no fruit; ‘My religion had made no change in my heart; it therefore made none in my life’ (2: 334).

Still in his new character of candour, Mr Tyrrel explains that he ‘had lived for the largest portion of his life as if there were no God’. He acknowledges he had made a profession of Christianity, but ‘deceived my own soul, no less by the religion I had adopted than by my neglect of all religion’. With hindsight, he acknowledges: ‘My delusion was this, I did not chuse to be good, but I chose to be saved’. He goes on to explain that he wanted to live a ‘life free from moral rectitude’, and hence adopted a mere form or show of it (2: 385-87). In any other context these superb antitheses would be a source of humour, but the seriousness of the subject (the possibility of eternal damnation) renders such levity inappropriate. Such is More’s sympathetic delineation, that it is difficult to read the account of Tyrrel’s psychologically tortured end without feeling compassion for this miserable, self-deluded man. Thus with cutting irony as well as pathos, More debunks antinomianism, clearing Evangelicalism of any such charges.

Tyrrel then sinks into despair, and despite the counsel of Dr Barlow, who advocates self-examination, repentance and trust in the mercy and atonement of Christ, is convinced that it is too late to repent (2: 320-29). With sombre colours, More paints this frightening, Faustus-like scene of an intellectual, yet sin-hardened, person who has practised a deceptive Christianity for so long that he now seems unable to avail himself of divine grace, despite the fact that Barlow, Stanley and Charles all assure him it is *not* too late.

In this way, More explicitly avoids the Calvinist doctrine of reprobation, but at the same time warns that those who cling to their darkness and repeatedly refuse the ‘glorious light of the Gospel’, seem eventually to become incapable of receiving the light they have so steadfastly rejected. This narrative stands out as a dark strand that More does not tie in together with all the other happy endings of *Coelebs* (for example, the respective reformations of Mr Carlton and Mathilda Melbury).

The portrayal of Mr Tyrrel’s deathbed scene invites comparison with the sad end of the impious Black Giles the Poacher, who dies from injuries sustained from the collapse of an old wall, while stealing a nest. In fact, Tyrrel’s end is simply a ‘gentrified’ version of Giles:

The poor wretch could neither pray for himself, nor attend to the minister . . . He languished a few days and died in great misery: – a fresh and sad instance that people who abuse the grace of God, and resist His Spirit, find it difficult to repent, when they will.⁴⁴

Unlike the tract story of Giles, the Tyrrel-story is left open-ended, with a modicum of hope. In a last desperate bid to be accepted by Christ, Tyrrel attempts to make restitution for his previous injustice to God and his fellow humans by leaving more than two thousand pounds for various charities, and generous legacies to both Stanley and Barlow. Finally, in heart-rending manner, Tyrrel warns Charles not to be tempted to forget God as he has done (2: 86). Charles leaves the unhappy Tyrrel, but the reader is never told if Tyrrel is successful in appropriating God's grace.

One can speculate as to the reason why Tyrrel is not allowed to be converted or, if he is, as easily as Mr Carlton and Lady Melbury. Perhaps More, as an 'observer and imitator of real life', desired to present a case that was 'true to life', demonstrating that not all people avail themselves of God's grace. She seems also to illustrate that God's Spirit 'will not always strive with man' (Gen 6:3), and that those who persistently reject the light render themselves ultimately unable to receive it.

MR FLAM: 'NATURAL BENEVOLENCE'

'All morality which is not drawn from the Scriptural source is weak, defective and hollow.' (*Strictures* 2: 385)

By contrast with the unpleasant and unhappy Tyrrel, More paints a happy-go-lucky man of the world who feels he has no need of a Saviour – Mr Flam. A good-looking gentleman of about forty-nine years, with an excellent disposition and a wife and daughter of whom he is extremely fond, Flam is More's mouthpiece of Shaftesburian benevolence. Flam is also

⁴⁴ CRT 'Poacher Giles' 31.

affectionately attached to the Stanleys and Dr Barlow, despite their extremely censorious manner of treating him. Allegorically speaking, he is good nature and benevolence personified and his literary function is to show that they are insufficient to make up piety. In this he is slightly reminiscent of More's middle-class tract character, Mr Fantom, 'the New-Fashioned Philosopher', yet without the political overtones.

Throughout all her works More probes the nature of benevolence. In the *Rambler* 99, Johnson stresses that a vague kind of impractical benevolence is worthless: 'such a general tendency to congenial nature . . . not compressed into a narrower compass, would vanish like elemental fire, in boundless evaporation'.⁴⁵ However, unlike More, he is reluctant to publicly define it further or narrow its compass as she does to a purely Christian basis.

Yet, More was not the only one who was anxious to resite morality on Christian foundations. Respected Churchmen such as Bishops Horne and Horsley began as Norman puts it to 'rediscover' the doctrine of original sin and in his *Charge to the Clergy* (1791) Bishop Horne observes that 'mistakes about the nature of man are almost as dangerous as about the nature of God', going on to attack Natural Religion, which he sees as fuelling infidelity. Similarly in his clerical *Charge* of 1791, as Norman puts it, 'Bishop Horseye attacked not only the Deists, but the intellectual fashion of almost a whole age, when he condemned the proposition, 'That Moral Duties constitute the whole, or by far the better part of practical Christianity'.⁴⁶

In *Coelebs* More develops her benevolence thesis in prose fiction. In one of the many conversations Flam has with Stanley and Barlow, he reveals the inadequacy of the basis of his benevolence: for him it is personal 'decency' constructed on the foundation of 'inherited goodness'. He glories in the 'Christian' tenor of his country and heartily endorses his church's dogma. Even Sherlock could hardly quarrel with his subscription to orthodox beliefs, and his pride in the Church 'by law established' when he says:

Well doctor I never denied the truth of Christianity, as Carlton formerly did.

'Tis the religion of the country, by law established. And I often go to

⁴⁵ *The Rambler* 99 (26 February 1751; rpt. London: Jones and Co. 1825) 171-72.

⁴⁶ E R Norman 39.

church because that too is established by law, for which you know I have a great veneration. 'Tis the religion of my ancestors, I like it for that too. (2: 363-64)

Thus by letting Flam profess mindless assent to doctrine, and rest comfortably on the laurels of hereditary holiness (which is exposed as a hollow premise), More seems to be exploding not only doctrinal error, but certain patriarchal assumptions; namely, that unlike land, money and privilege, salvation is not patrilinear, and complacent males are more likely to miss this democratic gift by failing to recognise it, or by being unable to relinquish their pride and fulfil its criteria of humility. Flam then invokes another empty premise founded on a kind of religious patriotism, when he assures Barlow that he is 'no infidel for I take it for granted that the Bible is true' (2: 363). Here he is making the simple equation: British equals Protestant, equals salvation. He is not an infidel; he has been born and brought up in Protestant Britain; therefore he is 'safe'.⁴⁷

More's Evangelical (and spiritually egalitarian) predilections come through strongly in Dr Barlow's counter-argument that church attendance and general assent to the truth of the Bible are not sufficient, that Flam's notions of Christian piety are based on bad foundations, and that he needs to be rescued from the 'disorders of his own nature' and his 'whole character formed anew' (2: 363-64). Flam rejects this notion of spiritual renewal as smacking of inordinate 'seriousness' and cheerfully tells the rector that 'there are many worse men than he' (2: 364). He argues:

Well doctor . . . I must say that I think an ounce of morality will go further towards making up my accounts than a ton of religion, for which no one but myself would be better. (2: 354)

Stanley's and Barlow's attempts to convince him of the necessity of personal regeneration are to no avail. Naturally an openhearted man, Flam is, as Stanley sorrowfully describes him, one of rather infirm principles, but 'his natural good propensities religion

⁴⁷ See also Colley 53.

could have improved into solid virtues'. This, Austen implies, is what Fanny and her religion would probably have done for Henry Crawford.⁴⁸

More continues to show that although socially useful and personally attractive, virtues such as honesty and benevolence (what Flam stands for) may not be depended on for one's salvation (2: 349, 355). As Barlow sums up: 'One good quality can never be made to substitute for another. By trusting in his benevolence, he will lose his hope of eternal happiness' (2: 355). Dr Barlow explains that: 'good actions, performed on any other principle other than obedience are spurious . . . and defective in themselves' (359), and in this he seems copiously to be echoing the more economical Sherlock.

'Worldly' morality (which often stems from a naturally benevolent temper) is not required, but a change of heart with its resultant manifestation of Christian graces or 'fruit of the Spirit'. When Flam hears about the latter, he protests violently against this kind of 'cant' (using Mr Fantom's word), which he complains he cannot comprehend. He then deflects the argument, saying complacently that at least he never was a hypocrite like Carlton or Tyrrel. Dr Barlow and Mr Stanley try to convince him of the inadequacy of his arguments and the necessity of regeneration, but like King Agrippa,⁴⁹ half-persuaded, but procrastinating, he departs saying: 'Thank God I am in excellent health and spirits, and am not yet quite fifty. There is a time for all things. Even the Bible allows that!' (2: 366)

Barlow shakes his head at this misapplication of Scripture, but, bearing them no ill-will, with indomitable good nature, Mr Flam invites 'the good doctor' and all at Stanley Grove to dine with him the next day and partake of 'the fine buck he has killed and the best port in his cellar' (2: 367). Barlow regretfully declines, but nothing daunted, the irrepressible Flam assures him: 'Well doctor, seeing you won't come to the buck, one of his haunches will come to you; so tell madam to expect it!' (2: 366) As Flam goes home, Stanley, Barlow and Charles lament that 'the blessings of health and strength should ever be produced as arguments for neglecting to secure those blessings which have eternity for their object' (2: 369).

In this negative exemplum, More exhibits superior powers of characterization in presenting a sympathetic picture of an agreeable, but misguided, man. Her problem is that

⁴⁸ MP 369, 464.

⁴⁹ Acts 26: 28.

in illustrating ‘dangerous’ Latitudinarian views, she has unwittingly created too sympathetic a character. Suddenly perceiving this, she over-compensates by letting her mouthpieces, Barlow and Stanley, verbally stab him in the back after he has gone. It must be an obtuse reader who has not grasped the inadequacy of benevolence by now, yet with some anxiety, More returns to the subject in a discussion between Mr Stanley and Lady Belfield of one of Dr Barlow’s sermons, where true piety is shown to be much more than ‘mere benevolence’ (2: 363).

Finally with regard to Flam, Barlow highlights another doctrinal concern of More’s – accountability. In expostulating with the pleasant, but stubborn Flam, Barlow uses the image of light to endorse his warning: ‘Ignorance is no plea in a gentleman. In a land of light and knowledge, ignorance itself is a sin.’ (2: 365) Although Flam has enjoyed the ‘light’ of an upbringing in ‘Christian’ Britain and had the Gospel personally expounded to him by Dr Barlow and Mr Stanley, he rejects the light, preferring to continue in his comfortable spiritual darkness.

Flam’s endemic good nature itself is a stumbling block to his receiving the light, for as Barlow puts it:

Even his good qualities increase his danger. He wraps himself up in that constitutional good nature, which partly founded in vanity and self-approbation, strengthens his delusions and hardens him against reproof. (2: 371)

By using the image of a mantle or cloak, More portrays Flam as insulating himself against the calls of repentance and regeneration – another way of showing that he is wilfully blinding the light of his eye by appealing to his ‘constitutional’ good nature and benevolence. Although one cannot sympathise with his patriotic complacency (relying on being born in a ‘Christian land’ and inheriting a goodly entail of righteousness), Flam is much more attractive than his patriarchal colleagues and his engaging honesty and bluff generosity elicit far more sympathy than the smug correctness of Barlow and Stanley. Thus ironically (in direct contradiction to More’s intentions), Flam’s flimsy mantle of benevolence is far more attractive than the hardwearing greatcoats of Stanley and Barlow’s self-congratulatory patriarchal piety.

POSITIVE PIETY

MR STANLEY AND DR BARLOW

Tis mine to paint humility unfeign'd.

Enlighten'd zeal, without fanatic leav'n. (Sarah Trimmer)⁵⁰

The admirable piety of the two venerable patriarchs, Mr Stanley and Dr Barlow, in the novel is certain to alienate modern readers. Not only does More's zeal to illustrate the twin virtues of consistency and balance, result in her creating two 'coat hangers' for her two favourite concepts, but the self-congratulatory style of the proponents is not calculated to please. However, in between these rather forced conversations in which More attempts to sketch her ideal clergyman, she unobtrusively endorses the importance of positive revelation.

More is at pains not only to distance her piety from the antinomianism of Mrs Ranby and Mr Tyrrel, and to dissociate it from the tyranny of outward forms, but to show that it is uniformly devout, moderate, enlightened, benevolent and self-disciplined (2: 56). Now she labours consistency, a quality highly prized by John Wesley, who used it as his yardstick to measure the authenticity of the sects/parties he encountered in England, Germany and America.⁵¹

In *Coelebs*, Charles's mother so thoroughly instils consistency in him that after her death he uses it as his moral benchmark for every potential marriage candidate (and her mother). On his final arrival in Hampshire, he finds it personified in the Stanley family and bursts into the following eulogy:

Never, no not once, have I been disappointed in my expectation of consistency in Mr Stanley's character. Oh my beloved parents! how wise

⁵⁰ *Some Account of the Life and Writings of Mrs Trimmer* (London, 1825) 432. Although not an Evangelical, many of Sarah Trimmer's ideas coincide with those of Hannah More.

⁵¹ *Journals of John Wesley* 1: 177-183.

was your injunction that I should make consistency the test of true piety. (2: 38)

Besides the estate-owner, Mr Stanley, the kindly, intellectual, yet practical rector, Dr Barlow, is a role model in balanced and enlightened piety. It has been conjectured that he is modelled on More's father, Dr James Stonehouse, Bishop Beilby Porteous or William Wilberforce – or a combination of all four. More's model clergyman is not only well-read and well-bred, but unlike the remiss incumbents at Cheddar, Wells and Axbridge, a *resident* rector, conscientious in his cure of souls and highly-respected and much-loved in his parish. Mr Stanley praises his moderation to Charles, by saying: 'I never saw zeal without innovation . . . more exemplified than in Dr Barlow. His piety is as enlightened as it is sincere' (1: 197). Here he implies that Barlow is not 'enthusiastic', but a law-abiding member of the conforming (Anglican) clergy, who would nor dream of peripatetic preaching or holding 'conventicles'. His preaching is rational, appealing to the mind rather than the emotions. Moreover, he is no ascetic, but a 'normal' English rector who enjoys the good things of life (a comfortable rectory, good table and happy family life), while conscientiously discharging his parochial duties. He has inspiration and energy, but it flows through conservative channels. Mild, tolerant and learned, he nevertheless values orthodoxy (1: 197). Thus, although he has had the best of educations, and promotes logic and the spirit of free enquiry, Dr Barlow does not reject revelation, but insists that 'the natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit of God' (1: 307). Here and in the following discussion,⁵² More unobtrusively adds her voice to the Natural Religion debate.

As befits a clergyman who quotes from Longinus, Quintilian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Grotius, Pascal, Hooker and others (1: 303-09), Dr Barlow maintains a dignified and serious style, delivering rational, but simple, Scriptural truths from the pulpit and his 'hearers leave the church, not so much in raptures with the preacher, as affected by the truths he has delivered'. Here the enunciation of age-old Christian dogma, enlivened by sincerity and a judicious zeal is regarded as more important than stirring one's congregation to an enthusiastic response or 'religious revival' (1: 197, 306-307).

⁵² Dr Barlow maintains: 'Christianity did not come into the world by human discovery, or the disquisitions of reason'. However, he adds that 'Christianity does not supersede the use of natural gifts, but turns them into their proper channel' (*Coelebs* 1: 307-308).

Barlow is also balanced in that he ‘does not press any one truth to the exclusion of all others’ (1: 204), as does the hapless Mrs Ranby, who presents a lopsided view of orthodox doctrine. Barlow is no mere theorist, but a practically minded man. His classical education, his knowledge of history and Scripture are enriched by a similarly thorough acquaintance with human nature, ‘which enables him to accommodate himself to the various wants of his hearers’ and best fits him for being ‘the counsellor and friend of his parishioners’ (1: 313-14). ‘Accommodation’ without compromise of one’s personal beliefs, was a highly prized trait of Evangelicals and particularly exemplified by the gentle and uncritical William Wilberforce.⁵³

Like More’s wealthy, enlightened Clapham friends (especially her fictional Candidus), More’s generous and charitable Dr Barlow is fond of ‘innocent conviviality’ and politely tolerant of others’ viewpoints. As Mr Stanley remarks admiringly to Charles:

His charity, however, is large and his spirit truly catholic. He honours all his truly pious brethren who are earnest in doing good, though they may differ from him as to the manner of doing it. (1: 200)

Dr Barlow’s generous respect for those of the opposition, sums up the Evangelical ideal of enlightened piety, instilled in More by the tolerant Jacob More and developed further during her extended London visits which exposed her to ‘polished society’ and fostered tolerance for others’ points of view.

In common with other enlightened, yet conservative, Anglicans, More abhors ill-directed zeal. Paley describes its self-defeating propensities in a sermon preached at Greater St Mary Church:

There are dangers adhering to the very nature of our profession; but the evil is often augmented by our imprudence. In our wishes to convince, we are extremely apt to overstate our arguments. We think no confidence with which we speak can be too great, when our intention is to urge them upon

⁵³ F K Brown 62 -82.

our hearers. This zeal, not seldom, I believe, defeats its own purpose, even with those whom we address, . . . and robs it of its just value.⁵⁴

Dr Barlow's prudence prevents him from falling prey to this injudicious zeal. Mr Stanley extols his moderation in a geographical and meteorological conceit, where Barlow is portrayed as avoiding two distasteful extremes:

'How many men have I known,' replied Mr Stanley smiling, 'who from the dread of a burning zeal, have taken refuge in a freezing indifference! As to the two extremes of heat and cold, neither of them is the true climate of Christianity; yet the fear of each drives men of opposite complexions into the other, instead of fixing them in the temperate zone which lies between them, and which is the region of true piety.' (*Coelebs* 2: 256-57)

The mimetic effect of the balance, parallelism and antitheses are offset by the repetition of the present participles 'burning' and 'freezing', which like 'enthusiasm' and 'innovation', were recognisable code words, signifying extreme positions in religion. Pertinently, he observes that fear of one kind of excess often drives one (like a ship by strong winds) into the opposite extreme. Avoiding both the ice-locked harbour of empty formalities and the torrid zones of enthusiasm, Barlow directs his barque into the temperate zone of genteel, orthodox piety where there is sufficient warmth from the currents of a judicious and restrained Evangelicalism to keep 'freezing' High Church indifference at bay.

Although it is necessary to showcase these admirable virtues, it is unfortunate that More undercuts her doctrine by repetition and the wearisome 'back-slapping' of the pious patriarchs who unfortunately give the impression that they have the monopoly on practical and 'enlightened' piety.

⁵⁴ William Paley, *Sermons on Several Subjects by the late Revd William Paley* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808) 111-12.

PROGRESSIONS IN PIETY

In the following section, in portraying the reforms of the Belfields, Mr Carlton and Lady Melbury, More delineates the progression of negative/false piety, through the process of regeneration, to positive/true piety.

THE BELFIELDS' REGENERATION

More uses the Belfield family to ‘flesh out’ three main doctrines she had already outlined in bare-boned form in *Strictures*: natural depravity, regeneration and accountability. Lady Belfield has to learn that, owing to the natural depravity of humankind, her children require discipline and moral training, and Sir John has to be tutored in accountability and regeneration – partly through the sermons of Dr Barlow, the exemplary lives of the Stanleys and the contrasting negative example of Mr Tyrrel.

Sir John and Lady Belfield also learn the necessity of what More calls ‘holiness of heart’. As a result of this, they resolve to lead more consistent lives by a partial withdrawal from city life (spending more time with their family in the country and teaching them Christian values) by keeping Sunday more holy and by giving more of their money to projects for the poor.

Sir John, an affable, gregarious nobleman (similar to Sir John Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility*, but without his vulgarity), owns a fine country estate, Beechwood, but prefers to spend most of his time at his comfortable townhouse in Cavendish Square, where he entertains lavishly. Fond of good company and conversation, hospitable and generous, his main fault is that he is too careless in his choice of company. When Charles first stays with the Belfields, he meets Mrs Ranby and her daughters, Mrs Fenton and others, whose views are narratorially censured. When Charles asks him in a rather mystified manner why he keeps company with certain people whose morals are dubious, Sir John airily replies, ‘One cannot be singular. We must conform a little to the world in which we live.’ Charles smartly rejoins with; ‘Not if we follow Him, who declared His kingdom was not of this world’. But Sir John replies patronizingly: ‘You are a young man and the delicacy and the

prejudices will soon wear off.' (1: 122-23) Ironically they do not, and instead Sir John acquires many of them.

Sir John and Lady Belfield have also been careless about keeping Sunday holy. Charles is appalled to see that 'they seldom went to Church in London; in the afternoon never' (1: 27), referring to the practice of attending both morning and afternoon services. When challenged on their lack of 'seriousness', they attempt to defend it, but only further betray their misunderstanding of Christianity:

'Religion,' they said by way of apology, 'was entirely a thing of example, it was of great political importance; society was held together by the restraints it imposed on the lower orders. When they were in the country it was highly proper that their tenants and workmen should have the benefit of their example, but in London the case was different. When there were so many churches no one knew whether you went or not, and where no scandal was given, no harm was done.' (1: 27-28)

In reflecting to himself on these double standards, Charles remembers 'Mr Burke's . . . accusation of the English wanting humanity in India'⁵⁵ and saying 'that the humanity of Britain is a humanity of points and parallels'. Charles pensively applies this to Sir John:

Surely the religion of the gentleman in question is not less a geographical distinction. This error . . . arises from religion being too much considered as a mere institution of decorum, of convention, of society; and not as an institution founded on the condition of human nature, a covenant of mercy for repairing the evils which sin has produced. (1: 28)

Charles's maintaining that religion ought not to be affected by geographical conditions, that it is not simply a respectable custom or a matter of example to one's

⁵⁵ Like Warren Hastings (the Austen family friend), who was impeached for this by Burke, supported by Sheridan and Foxe. This points to an interest in the debate of the colonial exploitation of 'the native'. On the Hastings trial, see Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Viking, 1997) 57. See also *Family Record* 82-83.

inferiors (although this too is important), but a uniformly consistent ‘religion of the heart’ (1:28), clearly demonstrates More’s Evangelical concerns. Although she was close friends with Edmund Burke and his brothers (with their friendship dating from the early Bristol days),⁵⁶ she departs from his more utilitarian approach to religion, promoting the more ‘holistic’ Evangelical view. Thus Sir John comes to realise that religion is not a political tool, a means of keeping the lower orders of society in place (something which More has wrongly been accused of doing) or a means of refining society, ‘a mere institution of decorum, of convention, of society’ (*Coelebs* 1: 28), or to use Hooker’s phrase, simply the ‘glue and soder of society’. Instead, he comes to see that:

Christianity is an individual, as well as general concern; that religion is a personal thing, previous to its being a matter of example; that a man is not infallibly lost or saved as a portion of any family, or any church, or any community; but that, as individually responsible, he must be individually brought to a deep and humbling sense of his own personal wants, without taking refuge in the piety . . . around him, of which he will have no benefit if he is no partaker. (1: 29)

Here and elsewhere, More emphasises the personal aspect of religion, in contradistinction to the ‘collective’ or ‘hereditary’ holiness on which so many eighteenth-century English relied and which Linda Colley describes as ‘underpinning their national identity’.⁵⁷ A similar patriotic complacence is evident in Austen’s *Emma* in the eulogy of the Knightley brothers’ restraint (*E* 100), and in Henry Tilney’s complacent assertion in *Northanger Abbey*: ‘We are English, we are Christians’ (*NA* 197). Although also proudly English, as shown in the above quotations, More (through Charles correcting Sir John) articulates the dangers of equating Christianity with ‘Englishness’. Although those who live in England are privileged in having the light of Christianity, it is dangerous to depend

⁵⁶ See the section, ‘Enlightened Beginnings’ above.

⁵⁷ ‘Protestantism gave the majority of men and women a sense of their place in history and a sense of worth. It allowed them to feel pride in their advantages as they genuinely did enjoy and helped them endure when hardship and danger threatened. It gave them identity. . . . It gave them confidence and even hope. It made it easier for them to think of themselves as a people apart.’ (Colley 53, 55).

on the piety of ‘any family, or any church, or any community’ for one is ‘infallibly lost or saved’ according to how one personally responds to God and His claims (1: 28-29). In this way, More echoes much of what Sherlock says with regard to accountability, but as an Evangelical, she lays more emphasis on the aspect of personal regeneration.

Later, using a legal image which describes the handing down of property to male descendants, Charles observes that, ‘there is no such thing as hereditary holiness, no entail of goodness’ (1: 52), that piety cannot be ‘transferred arbitrarily like an heirloom’, but that certain ‘conditions and injunctions have to be fulfilled’ (1: 52). That this common patriarchal misconception is not gender-specific, is shown by Mrs Ranby’s mistaken belief that her daughters will (effortlessly) inherit piety and the Belfields realisation that being born in a ‘Christian’ country is not enough to get them to heaven.

There are, however, differences between the Ranbys and Belfields. Unlike the dogmatic and obdurate Mrs Ranby, Lady Belfield is ‘candid and teachable’ (1: 82), but her excess of kindness and candour’ leads ‘to the too great indulgence of her children’ (1: 82). Thus she excuses the riotous behaviour of her ‘innocent’ children until she comes to understand the doctrine of natural depravity, and learns from Mrs Stanley how to deal positively with her children.⁵⁸

More comically dramatizes Lady Belfield’s indulgence at an elegant dinner-party at her home in Cavendish Square – a hyperbolic narrative which teaches doctrine while describing a dinner table accident. The passage which incorporates both mythical, chivalric and Miltonic allusions and relies heavily on bathos for its humour, begins with a learned guest’s declamation on the pyramids and catacombs. He is peremptorily interrupted by the abrupt entry of the unruly children, which is described in mock-epic terms, with the opening sentence being a direct echo from *Paradise Lost*:⁵⁹

⁵⁸ More had dealt with this subject in *Strictures* (‘The Benefits of Restraint’), where she maintains: ‘It is an indisputable fact that children who know no control, whose faults encounter no contradiction, and whose humours experience constant indulgence, grow more irritable and capricious . . . and perhaps become more miserable than even those children who labour under . . . the tyranny of unkind parents.’ See *Strictures* 2: 51-52.

⁵⁹ Cf. ‘On a sudden open fly / With impetuous recoil and jarring sound / The infernal doors’ (*PL* 2. 880).

On a sudden opened, with imperious recoil and jarring sound, the mahogany folding doors, and in at once, struggling who should be first, rushed half a dozen children, lovely, freshly gay and noisy. (1: 43)

Just as the gates of hell are opened by the she-hag, Sin to unleash chaos and anarchy, so the dining room mahogany doors are dramatically flung open to admit ‘fresh, gay and noisy’ chaos in the form of the undisciplined Belfield ‘fiends’. Although these ‘pretty barbarians’ disrupt the conversation, the ladies fawn over ‘the little beauties’ and Charles, who is ‘passionately fond of children’, eyes ‘the sweet little rebels in complacency’ (1: 43). When the scholar attempts to return to his Egyptian topic, a little boy of six rolls an apple across the table and upsets a glass of port wine onto the ‘elegant drapery of a white robed nymph’:

All was now agitation and distress, and disturbance and confusion; the gentlemen ringing for napkins, the ladies assisting the dripping fair one; each vying with the other who should recommend the most approved specific for getting out the stain of red wine, and comforting the sufferer by stories of similar misfortunes (1: 44).

What More strives to accomplish in this mock-heroic⁶⁰ exemplum, with its strained nuances of classical mythology ('white robed nymph') and chivalric literature (the 'fair one', 'comforting the sufferer'), Austen accomplishes in a far more economical scene in *Sense and Sensibility*. Although she does not strive for epic effects, there is nevertheless some hyperbole. Here Lady Middleton, an exaggerated Lady Belfield, is yet another type of the wealthy, indulgent mother who allows her children to torment the sycophantic Misses Steele bent on ingratiating themselves with the family. Thus Lady Middleton excuses her boys as being 'in such spirits today', when they toss Miss Steele's handkerchief out of the window and pinch her arm. When the young Annamaria is accidentally stuck by a pin and throws a tantrum, she has her 'wound' bathed with lavender water and her mouth 'stuffed with sugar plums' and yet continues energetically to scream and kick (SS 143- 44).

⁶⁰ The style of this passage is reminiscent of *The Rape of the Lock* 5. 35-52.

Although Austen lets the passage speak for itself, Charles labours the moral, by adding edifying comment. Throughout *Coelebs* there is the ready ‘chorus’ of comment supplied either by Charles, Stanley or Barlow. After the Belfields’ dinner-party, with wisdom beyond his years, Charles sums up this situation (and other instances of her ladyship’s indulgence of her children)⁶¹ by applying the doctrine of natural depravity, observing that ‘[t]he fundamental error was, that she had no distinct view of the corruption of human nature’, and that she mistakenly attributed the ‘weaknesses and vices of individuals to the effect of thoughtlessness and casual temptation’, erroneously believing vice to be ‘an incidental rather than a radical mischief’ – using ‘radical’ with theological exactitude. An elucidation in typical eighteenth-century discourse ensues:

[Lady Belfield] talked with discrimination of the faults of some of her children; but while she rejoiced in the happier dispositions of the others, she never suspected that they had all brought into the world with them any natural tendency to evil; and thought it cruel to suppose that such innocent little things had any such wrong propensities as education would not effectively cure. (*Coelebs* 1: 82- 83)

Using strong antitheses such as ‘cruel’ and ‘innocent’ the narrator spells out that despite maternal illusions, all ‘such innocent little things’ do indeed have a ‘natural tendency to evil’.

In the second volume, when the Belfields meet up again with Charles at Stanley Grove, they are introduced to the pious rector, Dr Barlow, the impious Mr Tyrrel, the charming, flippant Mr Flam. From Barlow’s sermons, edifying conversations with the Stanleys and the inspiring example of the reformed Carlton, the Belfields gradually become convicted of their failings and decide to become more devout Christians. The salutary effects of Stanley Grove can be seen in the new serious tenor of their conversation and the active steps they take towards personal reform. Lady Belfield is impressed by Mrs Stanley’s child-rearing methods of giving them a healthier diet and letting them join the adults *after* dinner, where they play quietly or talk rationally with the guests (1: 177).

⁶¹ In effect, he summarizes *Strictures* 2: ch. 19.

Lady Belfield also learns from the Stanleys to be less selfish and offers to give up her ‘darling project’ of a conservatory so that the money can be given to charity (2: 320). Sir John resolves that on his returns to London he will ‘cut’ many of his former ‘worldly’ acquaintance, spend more of his money on the poor, spend less time in the frivolous metropolis (2: 334) and more in the morally-salubrious country:

On mature deliberation we agree that we have lived long enough to the world. We agree that it is time to begin to live to ourselves, and to Him who made us. We propose in future to make our winter in London much shorter. We intend to remove early every spring to Beechwood . . . We are resolved to educate our children in the fear of God . . . in the exercise of that fondness we will remember to train them for immortality. (2: 326 -27)

In the above passage, shortened winters in town and long springs and summers in the country can be read metaphorically, reflecting not only the country/virtue, city/vice polarity, but the analogical terms of *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Christian abandons the City of Destruction and sets off for the Celestial City. The winter/spring imagery is also reminiscent of the penultimate chapter of *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny Price returns to Mansfield. Here Fanny’s winter of trial, banishment and unhappiness is over and signs of spring in the countryside around bring hopes and promises of spiritual and physical renewal. Above all, this trope is echoed in More’s poem, *Florio*, addressed to Horace Walpole.

As part of their reform programme the Belfields resolve to imitate the Stanleys in practically pious things, such as regular church attendance and keeping Sunday holy. They also acquire some basic doctrine. After hearing one of Dr Barlow’s Sunday sermons, the newly enlightened Sir John’s maintains that:

I begin more and more to perceive the scantiness of morality which has not love of God for its motive. That virtue will not carry us far, which looks to human estimation as its reward . . . (2: 340)

He then mentions regeneration, using the discreet euphemism ‘mutation’ so as not to give offence – a prime example of the way in which More attempts to gentrify Evangelicalism:

Dr Barlow has convinced me that there must be a mutation of the whole man; that the change in our practice must grow out of a new motive; not merely out of an amended principle, but a new principle, not an improvement in some particular, but a general, determining change. (2: 341)

Mr Flam has demonstrated the ‘scantiness of morality which has not love of God for its motive’, and Sir John Belfield now acts out the doctrine of regeneration which More had expounded in *Strictures*, where she explains what it means to be transformed into ‘a new creature’ (*Strictures* 2:285). Unfortunately, Sir John is self-conscious and ill at ease in his new role of preacher. Although the whole scene lacks Austen’s subtlety, it demonstrates More’s strong desire to flesh out for her readers the bare bones of the central Evangelical doctrine of natural depravity, which had been overshadowed in the Latitudinarian age by the more palatable doctrine of innate benevolence.

Perhaps the most engaging attribute of the Belfields is their sense of humour, which is best illustrated when they tease Charles on his excessive reticence in announcing his engagement. With comic irony Sir John tells the over-serious Charles: ‘I own . . . there is some danger of your success.’ He continues: ‘You have everything to fear,’ replied he in a tone of grave irony, ‘which a man not four and twenty, of an honourable family with a clear estate of four thousand a year, a person that all ladies admire, a mind which all the men esteem and a temper which endears you to men and children, *can* fear from a little country girl whose heart is as free as a bird.’ (86) Apart from the patriarchal complacence and antifeminism in calling Lucilla’s ‘a little country girl’ and assuming that her heart is ‘free’, Sir John is doing his best to knock some of the stuffing out of Charles’s priggish scruples. With brilliant perceptiveness Lady Belfield predicts the progression of the courtship and at the same scathingly pillories Gothic novels and novels of Sentiment:

‘It will be a dull novel, however,’ said Lady Belfield, ‘all is likely to go on so smoothly that we shall flag for want of incident. No difficulties, nor

adventures to heighten the interest. No cruel step-dame, no tyrant father, no capricious mistress. . . no intriguing confidante, no treacherous spy, no formidable rival, not so much as a duel or even a challenge, I fear to give variety to the monotonous scene.' (2: 287)⁶²

Unwittingly, Lady Belfield proves a prescient critic of *Coelebs*, the novel.

'THE RAKE REFORMS': MR CARLTON'S CONVERSION

The story of Mr Carlton's regeneration in *Coelebs* is much more dramatic than the more gradual growth of piety in the Belfields. Henrietta, a gentle, pious woman has had the misfortune to marry, against her will and to please her parents, the tyrannical Mr Carlton. He drinks and has many extramarital affairs, while his unhappy wife stays at home with their infant daughter. Eventually, after several years of bad behaviour, he is won from his dissolute habits by the pious example and the persistent and fervent prayers of his long-suffering wife. In this Griselda-like tale, Mrs Carlton not only puts up with his bullying, abusive behaviour, but still contrives to save a little of her own pin-money in an attempt to pay some of his enormous debts (*Coelebs* 2: 255). Despite his indefensible treatment of her, Henrietta never upbraids him for his sexual immorality. Instead, she remains loyal and faithful to her rake husband, arranging good dinners for him and striving always to humour him.⁶³ Respecting his aversion to all things religious, she tactfully contrives to pray and read her Bible and other 'serious' books, while he is away at the club. Male conduct writers had pushed Christ's teaching of 'turning the other cheek' to their own advantage as evidenced by the quantities of conduct book advice on this head. De Halifax's warning 'next to the danger of *committing* the Fault our self, the greatest is that of *seeing* it in your

⁶² Cf. More's 'painful feelings' at Pitt's duel, as expressed in her journal entry for 21 May 1798, Roberts 4: 59.

⁶³ In compliance with the prescriptions of the conduct writers Halifax, Gregory, Gisborne, Pennington and Richard Allestree's *The Ladies Calling* (1673; 2nd impression called *Almeria or Parental Advice by a Friend of the Sex*, London 1775) 2: 30. See also Alice Browne 48, 140-154.

'Husband',⁶⁴ is now an historical item, but there were many others, like Henry Home (1781) who endorsed it, averring that 'Women, destined by nature to be obedient, ought to be disciplined to bear wrongs without murmuring. This is a hard lesson, and yet it is necessary even for their own sake'.⁶⁵ Henrietta internalises these injunctions for she refuses to have a female companion in the house for fear she will be tempted to discuss her husband's faults with her (2: 251-52). Instead of eliciting his compassion, Henrietta's tacit recognition of human weakness drew down the wrath of the stern Evangelical, James Stephens, on More's head and he wrote to tell her of this 'serious flaw' in More's 'picture of excellence'.⁶⁶ This kind of relentless (Evangelical) masculine policing of More's work makes it easier to understand her conservatism.

One night Mr Carlton comes home unexpectedly early and sees his infant daughter asleep in the bed with her blonde hair spread out on the white pillow, and his weeping wife, Henrietta, kneeling at the bedside. She is praying for her (undeserving) husband, 'for his welfare in both worlds and earnestly imploring that she might be the humble instrument of his happiness'. Furthermore, in her prayer, as if obeying Halifax's and Home's commandments, she 'meekly acknowledges her many offences; of his [Carlton's] she said nothing' (2: 255).⁶⁷ Thus she confesses her own (minimal) sins and in a Christ-like way, asks forgiveness for her persecutor. More heightens the dramatic and sentimental effect by explaining that: 'Thinking herself alone, her petitions were uttered aloud; her voice often faltering and her eyes steaming with tears.'

Mr Carlton is much impressed by this affecting sight of female piety which is reminiscent of the one described by James Hervey in his *Meditations and Contemplations*.⁶⁸ The sexual undertones of the way male gazers perceive the 'beauty of

⁶⁴ The Marquis de Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter*, rpt in *Halifax: Complete Works*, ed. J P Kenyon (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1969) 279.

⁶⁵ Home, Henry, Lord Kames, *Loose Hints upon Education: Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart* (Edinburgh: John Bell and John Murray, 1781) 228-229.

⁶⁶ Roberts 2: 292. See also 'Separate Spheres, Separate Genres' in Chapter One.

⁶⁷ Cf. Halifax's advice 'A woman must ignore her husband's infidelity. 'Next to the danger of committing the Fault yourself, the greatest is that of seeing it in your Husband. Discretion and silence will be the most prevailing reproof.' *Halifax: Complete Works*, ed. Kenyon, 279.

⁶⁸ Quoted by Margaret Kirkham, 'Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*', in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 233.

holiness' in their pious female subjects strongly suggests that they cannot break away from objectifying women, even during conversion moments. Carlton is so emotionally disturbed that he retires (unseen) to another room where he spends the remainder of the night in earnest self-examination – which his deficiently religious upbringing has not accustomed or trained him to do. The narrator tersely observes: 'This self-examination was the first he had practised; its effects were salutary' (2: 259). The next morning is similarly spent by a solitary Carlton in serious reflection, and at last the fruit of Henrietta's prayers and patience begin to be perceptible.

After dinner, a meal which Henrietta has taken pains to prepare, Carlton uncharacteristically rises to embrace her and tears 'spring' into everyone's eyes – including the servants. The narrator tells of Carlton's graduated growth from repentance to regeneration and piety – a progression paralleled by a growing regard for his wife which flowers into full-blown love (a description not unlike that of Elizabeth's of Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*):⁶⁹

The conviction of her worth had gradually been producing esteem; esteem now ripened into affection, and his affection for his wife was mingled with a blind sort of admiration for that piety which had produced such effects. (2: 259)

Carlton moves from a state of spiritual blindness to one of enlightenment. 'The blind sort of admiration for that piety which had produced such effects' gradually becomes enlightened until Mr Carlton voluntarily comes to see his own faults and feel the necessity of repentance. Here the narrator uses Henrietta Carlton's persistent prayers and the patient example of consistent and forgiving piety as the means to enlighten Carlton's moral darkness. In a sense it is taking female duty, which Austen controversially (or ironically) describes as 'no bad part of a woman's duty' (*P* 246), and pushing it to its conjugal limits,

⁶⁹ After Elizabeth receives Jane's letter telling of Lydia's elopement, Elizabeth belatedly begins to realize how much she esteems Darcy. In chapter 4 of vol. 3 the narrator explains: 'If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty.' Towards the end of the novel, Jane asks Elizabeth: 'Will you tell me how long you have loved him?' And Elizabeth answers: 'It has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it began' (373). Cf. with Darcy's acknowledgement that his falling in love with Elizabeth was also a slow and unmarked process: 'I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words which laid the foundation . . . I was in the middle before I knew I had begun.' (380)

but making it triumph by its sheer strength and persistence.⁷⁰ It is tempting to dismiss this tale as a vindication of Halifax's advice to the wronged woman, 'Discretion and silence will be the most prevailing reproof'.⁷¹ Yet Henrietta's piety goes a lot deeper than this: there is the incalculable contribution of her indefatigable prayers which strongly contests a mindless Halifax-like acquiescence to male philandering, but shows instead an active spiritual warring with unseen powers on behalf of herself and her husband in an effort to free him from bondage to illicit sexuality. Like her creator, Henrietta Carlton is no mealy-mouthed Griselda, but an active religious warrior.

Carlton is well and truly converted, and as he lets more and more light into his life he gradually becomes a model husband, father and landlord (2: 201-02). As a result of the totality of his conversion,⁷² and in emulation of his wife's habit of daily reading prayers to her maidservants in her dressing room, Mr Carlton decides to initiate family prayers for the whole household. He asks his wife to select the lessons which he will read as the 'chaplain' (2: 201-02), thus involving her in the exercise. The fruits of his regeneration cause her to say with tears in her eyes: 'Never . . . did I know what true happiness was till that moment' (2: 201).

Thus in acceptable patriarchal style, Henrietta is not only happy to hand over the reins of spiritual instruction to the 'head of the home', but is content to let him complete the reform she initiated. Here again, women's power or 'influence' is indirect, catalytic and once the object has been achieved, supportive.

In contrast, Austen's rake-resolutions are less simplistic. Willoughby and Henry Crawford are not shown as actively repenting, but less dramatically and less explicitly from a religious point of view, she does portray a picture of positive reformation in Tom Bertram. Indulged by his father, who omitted to teach him 'self-government' and 'a sense of duty which alone can suffice' (*MP* 448), his extravagance leads him into deep debt. Nevertheless, he is morally rehabilitated through the conventional device of life-threatening

⁷⁰ For a recuperative discussion on Austen's attitude towards female duty, see Anne Crippen Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995) 150ff.

⁷¹ *Halifax: Complete Works*, ed. Kenyon 279.

⁷² Like the Methodists, the Evangelicals always answered their accusers by pointing to the undeniable 'fruits of repentance'.

illness (brought on by a fall from his horse), which brings him to his ‘right mind’. Thus, Tom arrives at a position where he not only accepts accountability for his past actions, but repents of what the narrator explicitly calls ‘the thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits’ and becomes ‘useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself’ (*MP* 447).

LADY MELBURY’S ENLIGHTENMENT

Finally, there is the case of Lady Mathilda Melbury (hereafter referred to as Mathilda Melbury to distinguish from her aunt, Lady Jane Melbury) undergoes a painful process of spiritual enlightenment. One of the wealthy and influential ‘Great’, she abuses her position and privilege, obscuring the original light she possessed, until the darkness of her self-engrossment almost totally absorbs it. This moral darkness prevents her from seeing the sufferings of those around her, especially those caused by her careless and extravagant life-style. However, in a highly dramatic scene, her eyes are opened to her spiritual blindness and she is appalled by what she has (unintentionally) done.

Unlike Mrs Carlton, Lady Mathilda Melbury’s husband is generous in his allowances to her, but she is guilty of great carelessness in incurring enormous debts. By failing to pay her trades-people, especially her tailor and seamstress, she unwittingly causes their financial ruin and a death. She gambles in an attempt to recoup her losses, but loses only more money and resorts to pawning her jewellery and wearing ‘paste-board’ imitations in an attempt to keep up appearances (2: 162). Eventually, she is brought to a moment of self-confrontation through a highly dramatic encounter with Mrs Stokes and her daughter, Fanny, to whom she is introduced through her friends, the Belfields.

Mathilda Melbury calls on the Belfields and hears about a poor girl who makes and sells artificial flowers to support herself and her ailing mother. This case of ‘romantic’ industry activates the genteel benevolence of the Belfields who take their visitors, Charles and Mathilda Melbury along with them to patronize the woman and her daughter. There follows a *La Boheme*-like scene in which the garret-heroine is idealized as frail, pious and beautiful. The Belfield party traipse in and admire her handiwork, but for More’s purpose of sudden, dramatic disclosure, Fanny Stokes’s identity is only revealed at the end.

In this passage, there is evidence of More's earlier training as a dramatist: she not only sets the scene and supplies lively, almost racy dialogue, but provides appropriate, detailed 'stage directions'. This is a vivid and highly melodramatic scene that the strictest Evangelical readers could relish with a good conscience, for the ends are laudably didactic. Charles gives an account of it as follows:

We soon stopped at the humble door . . . Sir John conducted Lady [Mathilda] Melbury up the little winding stairs . . . We reached the room, where Fanny was just finishing a beautiful bunch of jonquils.

'How picturesque!' whispered Lady Melbury to me.—'Do lend me your pencil; I must take a sketch of that sweet girl with jonquils in her hand.'

Continuing her effusions of patronizing praise, Mathilda Melbury goes into an adjoining room to try some artificial geraniums in her hair:

As soon as Lady Melbury got into the room, she uttered a loud shriek. Sir John and I ran in, and were shocked to find her near fainting. 'Oh Belfield,' she said, 'this is a trick, and a most cruel one!' Why did you not tell me where you were bringing me? Why did you not tell me the people's name?'

'I have never heard it myself,' said Sir John, 'on my honour, I do not understand you. You know as much of the woman as I know.'

'Alas, much more,' cried she, as fast as her tears would give her leave to speak. She retired to the window for air, wringing her hands and calling for a glass of water to keep her from fainting. I turned to the sick woman for an explanation; I saw her countenance was much changed.

'This Sir,' said she, 'is the lady whose debt of seven hundred pounds ruined me and was the death of my husband.' (1: 163-64)

Mathilda Melbury is overcome with shock and hastens home. In the carriage Sir John speaks 'seriously' to her, little thinking that his words will have any effect. Yet as Charles hears months later (when he stops over at Cavendish Square on his way home to

Northampton) there has been a happy sequel: Mathilda Melbury's eyes were opened by the touching garret scene. Here, the ear and eye-imagery used to convey her spiritual enlightenment echo the imagery that Sherlock employs in his exegesis of the passage on the disciples on the Mount of Transformation (Hughes 4: 11). Mathilda Melbury admits that:

'I had *heard* distant reports of the consequences of my thoughtless expence [sic], but . . . at the flower-maker's I *witnessed* the ruin I had made – I *saw* the fruits of my unfeeling vanity – I *beheld* the calamities I had caused.' (2: 394) [my italics].

Here Mathilda Melbury allows the first rays of light to enter her spiritual 'eye', but as Charles observed earlier, conversion is not a sudden thing, but a slow and gradual process in which others also have a part to play. Sir John's severe words ring in her ears as she goes home. These, together with the affecting image of 'Mrs Stokes dying . . . and the sweet flower-girl pining', make Mathilda Melbury thoroughly 'guilty and miserable'. At home she is at liberty to reflect on her past conduct in solitude for her husband is at his club. The events of the momentous evening are later recounted to Lady Belfield with the benefit of hindsight:

I had scarcely passed a single evening out of the giddy circle for several years. For the first time in my life I was driven to look into myself. I took a retrospect of my past conduct; a confused and imperfect one indeed. This review aggravated my distress. Still I pursued my distracting self-inquisition. Not for millions would I pass such another night. (2: 393)

Her self-examination (dramatically called 'self-inquisition') leads to self-knowledge, and this, in turn, leads to acute distress. She comes to realize that her 'extravagance must have made others suffer', but she had been happily ignorant of this because 'their sufferings had not been placed before my eyes' (394). In these revelations one notes the frequency of the verbs of vision: she 'saw the consequences of her thoughtless expence', '*witnessed* the ruin [she] had made' and '*beheld* the calamities' she

had caused in the Stokes family (2: 394-95). Like St Paul, who was struck by blindness on the Damascus road and whose physical and spiritual sight was restored when he repented,⁷³ so Mathilda Melbury's eyes are opened to the suffering she has caused others. Her moral blindness is also similarly dispelled as self-examination is followed by repentance.

Newly enlightened, she begins positively, by making a clean breast of all her debts (which amount to thousands of pounds) to her husband. She then requests his permission to go to Melbury Castle in the country, for a period of reflection and withdrawal from the 'fast set'. She desires that her only companion be his pious aunt, 'the excellent Lady Jane Melbury'. The latter agrees to accompany her, but refuses to travel, as suggested, on Sunday. Lord Melbury, amazed at such scrupulousness, nevertheless kindly humours her. His comic response to her scruples is designed to point to his own lack of principles and the whole passage to promote an understanding of the Evangelical practice of strict Sunday observance.⁷⁴ He expostulates to his wife:

'There is no accounting for the oddities of some people! . . . Lady Jane told me she could not possibly travel on a Sunday. I assured her it was the only day for travelling in comfort, as the road was not obstructed by waggons and carts. She replied with a gravity that made me laugh, that she should be ashamed to think that a person of her rank and education should be indebted, for her being able to trample upon a divine law, to the piety of the vulgar she durst not violate it. Did you ever hear anything so whimsical, Mathilda?'
(377-78)

Through the incomprehension of Lord Melbury, More stresses again the consistency aspect of piety, insisting that rank does not excuse one from this imperative, but in view of one's superior education, makes one more accountable. In Austen's *Persuasion* there is a similar objection to Sunday travelling in the passage where Anne Elliot is alerted to the suspect character of William Elliot by this reprehensible habit:

⁷³ Acts ch. 9.

⁷⁴ Evangelicals were of course not the only ones to practise Sunday observance, but their almost uniform strictness with regard to this observance drew attention and it became a popular hallmark of the party.

She saw that there had been bad habits; that Sunday-travelling had been a common thing; that there had been a period of his life (and probably not a short one) when he had been, at least, careless on all serious matters (*P* 161).

Having agreed to travel on Monday, Mathilda Melbury, who is sincere in her repentance, still dreads the journey to Melbury Castle in the barouche with only Lady Jane as company, as she expects ‘thorns and briars of reproof’ from her companion. However, she is not only relieved, but pleasantly surprised to find that ‘the woman I had quizzed as a Methodist was a most entertaining companion’ (2: 399).

As part of her new education, Lady Jane introduces Mathilda Melbury to ‘serious’ writers and good conversation and favourably impresses Mathilda with her enlightened piety:

I found nothing but kindness and affection, vivacity and elegance. She strengthened my better purposes. Her conversation gradually revived in my mind tastes and principles which had been early sown, but which the world had seemed completely to eradicate. (2: 399)

Here More uses the image of weeds overgrowing and almost smothering the good seed of ‘tastes and [Christian] principles’. Conversation (the spoken word) is the means by which the Word of God is re-inculcated in Mathilda Melbury’s heart. This verbal instruction is followed by visits to the poor and sick in the village (the fruit of the seed), which teach her to be grateful for good health and a comfortable life, and strengthen and confirm her new self-chosen course of regeneration, which is not sudden, but of gradual growth like the ideal piety More advocates throughout *Coelebs*. More importantly, this is an example of one female tutoring or disciplining another; a spiritual kind of *Bas Bleu* practice.

PROGRESSIVE FEMALE PIETY: LUCILLA STANLEY

In this section we shall examine More's portrayal of Lucilla as the perfect embodiment of womanhood. There appears to be three distinct strands in her character: the Puritan/Evangelical strain, the new rational woman and the Sentimental, but owing to the way in which they are intermeshed it is difficult to keep them apart in the discussion. As will become apparent, Charles's implicitly patriarchal focalising or interpretative descriptions of her render an understanding of this complex character extremely challenging.

Both More and Wollstonecraft were profoundly interested in the role and education of women in society. Although both writers exhort upper-class women to set a good example, More's insists on a Christian orientation for her morality. In *Strictures* where More (like Wollstonecraft) energetically repudiates the idea of ornamental accomplishments in women, she goes further and exhorts 'women of rank and fortune' to use their power and influence, not only 'to polish, but to reform', but to actively promote Christian morals. She sums up by saying: 'Woman is called upon, not merely to suppress impiety, but to excite, to encourage, and to cherish every tendency to serious religion' (*Strictures* 1: 8).

More thus envisaged a pro-active role for Christian women, with her own life testifying to the extent this could be carried out without infringing societal constraints and Pauline injunctions. While affirming the traditional female role of support and ministration, More set great store by the didactic role a woman could play within her own family and community, yet nevertheless mindful of St Paul's caveat that women only teach children and other women (1 Tim 2:11) or the poor.

Mrs Barlow and Mrs Stanley exemplify the traditional female support system: both are pious, sensible, amiable women who make excellent helpmeets and tender mothers. In bringing her husband a good dowry,⁷⁵ which enhances his power of doing good (*Coelebs* 1: 205), and by 'raising his character by her piety and prudence', and supporting him so

⁷⁵ Like Sherlock, More argues that riches are not intrinsically bad, but if used correctly, can glorify God.

that he can ‘give himself wholly up to the duties of his profession’ (1: 205), Mrs Barlow (and Mrs Stanley) exemplify instrumental feminism. Although gilding the supportive female role (which Halifax, Home and others had promoted in an antifeminist way) by eulogizing the moral influence they exert over their husbands and children, More reminds women that they are answerable to God for this ‘power’. In *Strictures* (1: 161) her exhortation of wives to incite their husbands to good works and inculcate good principles in their children, recalls Law’s glorification of female influence in the *Serious Call* (1728),⁷⁶ where he avers that ‘[f]or this reason, good or bad women are likely to do as much good or harm in the world, as good or bad men in the business of life (*Serious Call* 203). In *Strictures* and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, More’s attitude to women is based largely on these ‘power-behind-the-throne’ assumptions, but in *Coelebs* she sets out to paint a more progressive portrait of female piety in Lucilla, who is less of an agent (like Mrs Stanley and Mrs Barlow) and more of an individual.

Yet More cannot break away entirely from her patriarchal anchorings. Her presentation of Lucilla is mostly accomplished through patriarchal discourse which insists that women comply with its ideological construct of femininity. As Demers points out,⁷⁷ Lucilla is only introduced in the thirteenth chapter of a forty-nine-chapter narrative and most of our information about her is mediated through her parents, sisters or Charles. Yet even if Lucilla is ‘more talked about than actually talking’, and often ‘an embodiment of the ideals of her mentors, gazers and creator’⁷⁸ she nevertheless makes her autonomy felt.

As befits an ideal eighteenth-century woman, Lucilla is the epitome of that highest grace of the female character, ‘delicacy’. In a description of her person and dress, More suggests her perfection through discreet abstractions:

The dress of Lucilla is not neglected, and is not studied. She is as neat as the strictest delicacy demands, and as fashionable as the strictest delicacy permits;

⁷⁶ ‘As [women] are mothers and mistresses of families, they have for some time the care of the education of both sexes, they are entrusted with that which is of the greatest consequence to human life. For this reason, good or bad women are likely to do as much good or harm in the world, as good or bad men in the business of life.’ See *Serious Call* 203.

⁷⁷ Demers 90.

⁷⁸ See Cranny-Francis 2.

and her nymph-like form does not appear to less advantage, for being veiled with scrupulous modesty. (1: 187)

In this epigrammatic, Johnsonian piece of writing, More perhaps unconsciously seems to be positioning herself for patriarchal approval by replicating time-honoured sexist abstractions such as ‘strictest delicacy’ and ‘scrupulous modesty’; and the hackneyed ‘nymph-like form’ shows that despite her jeers elsewhere at the ‘doctrine of Sensibility’, she is unable to free herself from partial enthrallment to it.

There is a parallel passage in Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, where Henry Crawford uses similar conventional abstractions to encode gender ideals. Here again as in *Coelebs*, the beholder is a male who attempts to describe the charms of his beloved (Fanny Price):

Fanny’s beauty of face and figure, Fanny’s *graces of manner and goodness of heart* were the exhaustless theme. The *gentleness, modesty and sweetness* of her character were warmly expatiated on, that *sweetness* which makes *so essential a part of every woman’s worth* in the judgment of man. . . Her *temper* he had good reason to depend on and praise. . . Her *affections were evidently strong*. Then her *understanding* was beyond every suspicion, strong and clear; and her *manners* were the *mirror of her own modest and elegant mind*. (MP 294) [my italics]

Both Charles’s and Henry Crawford’s strongly patriarchal discourse affirms traditional feminine ideals of purity, modesty, gentleness and sweetness. Yet Henry’s mercurial and unreliable character invites a latitude in interpretation that More’s stable and virtuous Charles does not.

Right at the outset, the reader is alerted to an implicit ambivalence in Charles’s representation of Lucilla. It is true, however, that Charles is consistently moving towards a more progressive view of womanhood (as we shall see in his promotion of female intellectuality and his recognition to some extent of female autonomy). His view of Lucilla, which is a complicated blend of the Puritan and the Sentimental, tends to fluctuate so that, with hindsight, she frequently appears to be merely the object of his gaze. And here in one of his first attempts to portray Lucilla, in his eulogy of her modesty, his paternal

complacency seems to undermine the very virtue he celebrates. Thus early in the novel, the reader becomes aware of an ambivalence or inherent tension that continues to make itself felt throughout the narrative. It is impossible to tell how far More was herself aware of this contradiction: her art seems to be pushing her in the direction of a critique that is not yet fully formulated.

It is significant, however though, that despite Charles's frequently sentimental view of her, Lucilla Stanley does not conform to the popular eighteenth century feminine pattern or 'myth' of the ornamental, delicate, helpless female, but resembles Wollstonecraft's ideal woman who is physically strong and rational and desires a more equal education. And ironically, Charles is attracted to this element and shows himself fairly progressive in endorsing what was a rather revolutionary idea of woman.

Thus, unlike Austen's Fanny Price, who is constitutionally delicate and gets a headache from much walking and cutting roses in the sun (*MP* 72), the more robust Lucilla rises at six and still has the energy after a full domestic and academic schedule (including running the house-hold and schooling her younger sisters) to work energetically in the garden, visit the sick in the evening, draw plans for gardens and conservatories and engage in intellectual debate.

Despite her strong constitution (not usually associated with upper class women), Lucilla is elegant, well read, a superior conversationalist, an amateur architect and a connoisseur of music and art. In fact she ironically approximates to what Charles's mother told him was an impossibility: 'super-human excellence':

Do not indulge romantic ideas of super-human excellence. Remember that the fairest creature is a fallen creature. Yet let not your standard be low. It is absurd to expect perfection, it is not unreasonable to expect *consistency*. Do not suffer yourself to be caught by a shining quality till you know it is not counteracted by the opposite defect. (*Coelebs* 1: 13-14) [More's italics].

Charles's mother thus cautioned him against women who entrap men by their superficial captivating exteriors, reminding him that good sense, correct conduct and consistency will communicate rational happiness. This early passage serves to anticipate Charles's meeting of the Misses Fenton, the Misses Ranby, and Miss Rattle, descriptions of whom echo

More's earlier animadversions on accomplishment-orientated education in *Strictures*, which portray fashionable women, who are clad in the gaudy 'shreds and patches of useless arts'⁷⁹ as sadly deficient in rationality, virtue and domestic capabilities – unlike the properly educated and truly accomplished Lucilla.

Although More (through Charles) desires to advance the ideal of a friendly, egalitarian marriage,⁸⁰ she never approaches the equity of an Austenian marriage. Thus, in *Coelebs*, despite Charles's talk of companionship, it is clear he is going to be 'the senior partner' in the marriage, and equally clear that his desire for perfection is selfish. His bride must be as perfect as possible, for as he announces early in the novel, she will not only be his 'prime comfort' on earth, but a 'companion for life, but . . . the companion for eternity' (1: 23).

Austen's Mr Knightley can jokingly say that he has been selfish in forming Emma for himself ('The good was all to myself, by making you an object of the tenderest affection to me', *E* 462), but Charles seems to be incapable of either a self-critical or a teasing spirit. In a piece of pompous male rhetoric, he uses an accumulation of pontifical parallel constructions in legislating his piece of female perfection. She must be:

elegant, or I could not love her; sensible or I should not respect her; prudent or I could not confide in her; well-informed, or she could not educate my children; well-bred, or she could not entertain my friends; *consistent* or I should offend the shade of my mother; pious or I should not be happy with her, because the prime comfort in a companion for life is the delightful hope that she will be a companion for eternity. (1: 23) [More's italics]

If one can see past the plethora of personal pronouns 'I' and 'my', one can hear echoes in Charles's disquisitions of Law's *Serious Call*, where a daughter brought up

⁷⁹ 'The education of the present race of females is not very favourable to domestic happiness. For my own part, I call education not that *which smothers a woman with accomplishments*, but that which tends to consolidate a firm and regular system of character; that which tends to form a friend, a companion, and a wife. I call education not that which is made up of *shreds and patches of useless arts*, but that which inculcates principles, polishes taste, regulates temper, cultivates reason, subdues the passions, directs the feelings, *habituates to perfection*, trains to self-denial, and more especially, that which refers all actions, feelings, sentiments, tastes and passions to the love and fear of God.' *Strictures* 1: 14 [my italics].

⁸⁰ See Alice Browne (49) on the increasing importance attached to this ideal.

piously ‘would be a blessing to any family that she comes into, a fit companion for a wise man, and make him happy in the governance of his family and the education of his children’ (*Serious Call* 218). But, ironically (for More seems to be unaware of this), Charles’s self-absorption spoils the pictures of Lucilla’s perfection, and instead of eliciting applause here for his high ideals and sagacity (for which he implicitly seems to call), he reveals his own egotism more than anything else.

When Charles arrives at Stanley Grove and meets Lucilla, the object of the homosocial plot, the one his fond parents hoped he would marry (1: 4 -6), he is delighted to find her ‘a fit companion’. Moreover there is an element of the supernatural or predetermination in discovering ‘[t]wo minds formed with a view to each other’ (2: 306). Although Lucilla seems to fill his long list of almost impossible criteria, Mrs Stanley (significantly, a woman) tries to prick his bubble idealism, reminding him in words of homely female advice that Lucilla is not naturally perfect; ‘she is no prodigy from the skies dropp’d down’ (2:309), but has worked hard to acquire both her learning and her piety.

Lucilla Stanley has always bothered critics of *Coelebs*. Early nineteenth-century readers both admired and criticized her, with the Revd Henry Thompson describing her as ‘that beautiful and perfect creation of Mrs More’. Although he admits that Lucilla’s very perfection, ‘acknowledged by all, has by some been urged as a fault, being unnatural and impossible’, he hastens to defend More by reminding the reader that she was ‘drawn for a model’ [Milton’s Eve] and, as an artist, More ‘attained that perfection at which she avowedly aimed’.⁸¹

More’s heroine is a complicated fictional character and her complexity is heightened by More’s unconscious ambivalence in her portrayal. At first she appears (as Thompson recognised) as a Puritan or Evangelical heroine, but with rational and enlightened emendations. This challenge (to many of her time, a seemingly contradictory combination) is rendered further problematic by Charles’s occasional almost prurient casting of her as the sentimental ‘angel of innocence’, which depreciates the very rationality for which he elsewhere celebrates her. Firstly, we examine the rational and then the Puritan components, before going on to explore the ambivalences adumbrated above.

⁸¹ Henry Thompson, *The Life of Hannah More, with Notices of Her Sisters* (London: T. Cadell, 1838) 241-42.

As a new rational woman, Lucilla enjoys robust physical health which allows her to accomplish more than a dozen women put together: she runs the household, keeps the accounts, works in the garden, studies mathematics, Latin and literature, teaches her younger siblings, visits the sick and poor, keeps a depot of old clothing and books for the needy, appreciates art and music, drafts plans for a conservatory for Lady Belfield and is known as the local landscaper (1: 229-30). Further instances of her rationality (as we shall see later) are evinced by her insightful discussion of literature with Charles.

The Puritan component is signalled at the outset, before the novel starts, with an epigraph from *Paradise Lost*.⁸² (Incidentally, More quotes more frequently from *Paradise Lost* in *Coelebs* than any other work). In the preface, Charles not only acknowledges his debt to Milton, but proceeds to defend him against anti-feminist charges by arguing that although she is submissive, Eve is *morally* equal to Adam, that Christianity makes no *spiritual* distinction between the sexes and that Christ and Christianity raised the status of women⁸³ (my italics). He then invokes the more spurious argument that a woman who acts rationally, discreetly and yet submissively will always be treated honourably by her husband and other men.

Later Lucilla herself tells Charles: '[t]hat she considered Eve, in her state of innocence, as the most beautiful model of delicacy, propriety, grace and elegance of the female character which any poet ever exhibited' (*Coelebs* 2: 284-85). However, it is emphasised that it is Eve, in her prelapsarian state, and not in her role as archetypal seducer/temptress. This is significant for Lucilla's chaste demeanour is often commented on, but at the same time it is also highly ironic, for Charles, despite his harping on Lucilla's 'innocence', is so preoccupied by her sexuality that he has to continually contradict, deny or rationalise it, as we shall see later.

In the preface, Charles not only defends Milton's sexual politics, but later Lucilla herself maintains that he inspired her love of horticulture. In a conversation with Charles on landscape gardening, Lucilla acknowledges that 'Milton both excited the taste and supplied the rules. He taught the art and inspired the love of it.' Lucilla not only enjoys

⁸² 'For not to know at large of things remote / From use, obscure and subtle, but to know / That which before us lies in daily life, / Is the prime wisdom.' *Paradise Lost* 8: 191-194.

⁸³ Standard Christian arguments at the time invoked against the more radical feminism of Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft.

gardening like Milton's Eve (*PL* 4. 205), but seems to replicate her other attributes and virtues. Eve is beautiful and physically desirable (4. 634, 714-15), perfectly virtuous (4. 846-48) and pious and devout in her worship of God (4. 22-23, 737-79; 5. 144 - 45). She accepts her place in the spiritual and social hierarchy, for although God is her first allegiance and Adam second, to Adam she pledges her full obedience: 'My author and disposer, what thou bid'st / Unargued I obey; so God ordains...' (4. 635-36) – obedience More dramatizes later in Henrietta Carlton, yet which she almost seems to question in her presentation of Lucilla's more daring autonomy.

Eve is a good homemaker (4. 710), an economical housewife (5. 324), generous and hospitable (5. 331-32; 343-44) and not above preparing food with 'her own fair hands' (5. 34 -35). She is addressed by Raphael as a rational creature and allowed to participate in the discourse (5. 395), but is naturally modest and reticent – a reticence which makes her all the more desirable to Adam for her 'innocence and virgin modesty' are '[n]ot obvious, not obtrusive, but retired, / The more desirable' (4. 501-05) – a modesty evinced by her blushing (4. 510-11) – a physiological phenomenon, with cultural connotations, frequently read as a sign of moral delicacy and scrupulousness.⁸⁴

In almost every respect, Lucilla seems to conform to the Eve template: physically beautiful, chaste, virtuous and suitably submissive, a good housekeeper and cook, generous, hospitable and enjoys gardening. Furthermore, as a product of both the eighteenth century and More's enlightened education, Lucilla is taken a step further than Milton's Eve in that she converses especially well, possesses the much-coveted eighteenth-century quality, innate taste, and has had the benefits of a Classical education – presumably to enhance her as a 'helpmeet' for her husband and educator of their children,⁸⁵ although

⁸⁴ In this connection it is helpful to see John Wiltshire's discussion of the 'pathology' of blushing in *Jane Austen and the Body* *Jane Austen and the Body: The Picture of Health* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 77-80. He observes that, 'Blushing seems to be communicative without being instrumental: one is not in control of one's blushes, which seem to indicate some involuntary physiological process, and yet blushing is a cultural sign, understood by others, as a language and therefore akin to gesture.' He goes on to remark that in sentimental fiction 'virtuous femininity is legible when unable to speak', and cites Richardson's and Burney's use of the blush as a mode of communicating sensibility and heightening drama (77). A symptom of modesty, pride or embarrassment, the blush often connotes the consciousness of sexuality and can be used to divulge motive to the reader, as in Austen (78). Archetypically the realm of the female (men only colour or redden) the blush can be said to signify (among other things) in More and Austen, a highly prized moral scrupulousness or delicacy.

⁸⁵ In *The Female Advocate*, the author who uses the pseudonym, 'Eugenia', mocks the male character Sprint, who maintains that it is much 'nobler comfort' to have a female companion than a female

there are hints that her education is self-fulfilling and enjoyed *per se*. Despite the fact that she is so academically accomplished, unlike the dreaded ‘Female Philosophers’ debunked elsewhere by More, Lucilla is properly modest, and shows this by blushing frequently: for example, ‘Lucilla made no answer, but cast down her timid eyes, and out-blushed the roses on her head’ (*Coelebs* 2: 289) – a legible sign of her moral delicacy.

Other antecedents of Lucilla’s Puritan type of feminine piety are found in John Bunyan, whose depiction of the ideal Christian woman in *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1668) is refracted through the three virgins at the House Beautiful: Discretion, Piety, Prudence and Charity, and their mother, Discretion, who lodge and teach Christian. They are kind, tender and hospitable, refreshing him physically and succouring him spiritually. More’s ideal woman, Lucilla Stanley, seems to embody these qualities too.⁸⁶

Another Puritan-like influence on More appears to be that of William Law. His *Serious Call* seems to have shaped many of her traditional ideas of ‘feminine’ piety. His fictitious Eusebia is ‘a pious widow, well born, well bred; and who strives to bring up each of her five daughters ‘for the kingdom of Heaven’ and also as the ‘fit companion of a wise man’ (*Serious Call* 215, 218). Accordingly, her education of them is directed not to frivolous ‘arts and ornaments of dress and beauty’, but to the acquisition of piety.²¹⁸

Besides Bunyan, Milton and Law, More probably owes debts to early eighteenth-century periodical constructs of the ideal bourgeois woman. Addison and Steele’s *Spectator*, as Vivien Jones shows, did much to shape eighteenth-century bourgeois morality, valorising honour in men and chastity/modesty in women – ideas that were similarly articulated by advice literature as diverse as that of de Lambert, Allestree, de Halifax, Pennington, Gregory and Fordyce.⁸⁷ Thus, Lucilla’s Puritan/rational lineage is tempered by strains from the constructs of popular journals and conduct books.

In order to convey some of Lucilla’s spiritual and domestic virtues, More employs the conventional eighteenth-century device of the trusty old family housekeeper (Mrs

slave (London 1700: 26), implying that the ‘companion’ is only there to minister to his and his children’s needs. This work was first published as *The Female Preacher* in 1699. See Alice Browne 89.

⁸⁶ Gilbert and Gubar trace the idea of the type of ‘female purity/angel in the house’ to Dante and Milton, but do not mention Bunyan, Law (or More) in their discussion. See Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979; rpt. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) 20.

⁸⁷ *The Parental Monitor*, ed. Jones xvii.

Comfit) to describe Lucilla and her daily regime – a device used by Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*, where the housekeeper at Pemberley, Mrs Reynolds, praises the absent Darcy to Elizabeth Bennet (PP 270). In *Coelebs*, Mrs Comfit tells Charles that ‘Her mistress . . . was a pattern for ladies, so strict and yet so kind!’(1: 180) – a succinct summary of the ideal Evangelical woman. She goes on to explain that: ‘In summer, sir, Miss Stanley rises at six, and spends two hours in her closet, which is stored with the best books’ (1: 180). This early rising is reminiscent of More’s exemplary Presbyterian maternal grandmother, who rose at four every morning in both summer and winter.⁸⁸

William Law recommended early rising as a means of ‘self-denial, as a method of renouncing self-indulgence, as a means of redeeming your time, and fitting your spirit for prayer’ (*Serious Call* 144). John Wesley, who was inspired by Law, also rose at four every morning, spent an hour in prayer and then read the Bible from five until seven.⁸⁹ More does not say that Lucilla spends the full two hours in spiritual devotion (though in an Evangelical household they obviously form a good part of it) and some of the ‘best books’ may be serious secular works. Lucilla’s early rising not only implicitly invokes orthodox and Dissenting practices, but suggests a discipline typical of many secular scholars,⁹⁰ as well as reflects the prescriptions of contemporary conduct books.⁹¹ In conformity with the latter, which also stress household duties, Lucilla’s piety has a domestic bias: she devises nutritious and tempting menus, which the housekeeper and cook approve as ‘sensible’ (1: 180 -81).

Nevertheless as a Morean construct, Lucilla is also a new rational woman with an active intellect and an independent ‘life of the mind’. After preparing the family breakfast

⁸⁸ Roberts 1: 7.

⁸⁹ *Journals of John Wesley* 1: 18, 77.

⁹⁰ Such as Locke and Boyle whom More particularly admired.

⁹¹ Such as Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling* (Oxford, 1673), J Burton, *Letters on Female Education and Manners*, 2 vols (Rochester and London, 1793), H Cartwright, *Letters on Female Education* (London, 1787), John Essex, *The Young Ladies Conduct* (London, 1722), James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (London, 1766) and *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex* (London 1776), Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London, 1797), Dr John Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughter* (London, 1774) and Lady Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to her Absent Daughters* (London, 1761).

(as did Austen)⁹² she supervises the formal schooling of her younger sisters and then retires to read ‘learned books’ with her tutor-father (as did More). Throughout this catalogue of rational (practical and yet intellectual) industry, the Evangelical stress on cheerfulness is apparent:

After her morning’s work, sir, does she come into company, tired and cross,
as ladies who have done nothing, or are but just up? No, she comes in . . .
fresh as a rose, and as gay as a lark. (1: 182).

Lucilla, who is good at mathematics, is equally ‘skilful at [household] accounts’, writes her father’s letters and nurses him when he is ill (1: 181). Nursing (and visiting the sick) are archetypically feminine provinces and Austen shows her conservatism in upholding this in *Persuasion* where not only the good Mrs Harville’s exertions as a nurse to Louisa are commended (*P* 121), but Anne’s nursing of Charles and Mary’s eldest son.⁹³

In addition to these routine domestic duties, Lucilla keeps a storeroom of supplies for the needy, and assiduously visits the poor and sick as recommended in James 2 and Psalm 41. Again, this invites comparison with Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. Here the heroine ignores paternal displeasure (risking what her father terms ‘paltry rooms’ and ‘foul air’), and persists in visiting a sick old school friend, Mrs Smith, who has fallen on hard times, (*P* 157)⁹⁴ – yet Austen rescues her from priggishness by letting her derive pleasure (and profit) from her visits.

Less subtly and more directly, Mrs Comfit bruits Lucilla’s good Samaritan qualities abroad. The loyal housekeeper tells Charles how Lucilla and her sisters devote a whole day each week to sewing for the poor, and two evenings for visiting them in their cottages (1: 182). This recalls Law’s fictitious Eusebia, who tells her five daughters: ‘Your hands have

⁹² *Family Record* 158.

⁹³ Mary tells Charles that Anne’s nerves are steadier than her own (56) and Anne is happy ‘know[ing] herself to be of first utility to the child’ (58). Cf. also John Wiltshire on women as nurses in ‘Persuasion and the Pathology of Everyday Behaviour’ in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, ed. Judy Simons (London: Macmillan, 1997) 183-203.

⁹⁴ Cf. Gilbert and Gubar’s more radical suggestion that Austen’s Nurse Rooke subversively exposes the ‘sickness’ in society, and Roger Sales’ discussion of the social importance of female nursing in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1994) 194-196.

not been employed in plaiting the hair, and adorning your persons, but in making clothes for the naked' (*Serious Call* 213). In the second volume of *Coelebs*, in reminding the gentry of their duty to take care of the poor, More again echoes Law's Eusebia who tells her daughters: 'Instead of the vain, immodest entertainment of plays and operas, I have taught you to delight in visiting the sick and poor' (*Serious Call* 218).

We come now to a scene in which the narrator forgets his highly-prized rationality and employs the saccharine style of the very doctrine he deprecates earlier – the Sentimental. He portrays the ministration of Lucilla and her sisters to sickly old Dame Alice, in not only Mackenzie-like language, but interestingly enough, in language that is redolent with fairy-tale (and, perhaps, with hindsight, Freudian) undertones. Here, in a Grimm-like cottage surrounded by roses, More inadvertently presents Lucilla as an angel and Charles as *voyeur* (and thief).

After dinner, one summer's evening Lucilla slips out of the drawing room. Charles goes for a solitary ramble and comes across a small, neat cottage with a flourishing orchard behind and a pretty flower garden in front. As befits this fairy-tale setting,⁹⁵ he is struck 'by a beautiful rose tree in full blossom which grew against the house, and almost covered the clean white walls' (2: 275). Knowing this rose to be a particular favourite of Lucilla's, Charles picks some blooms, but, feeling guilty, goes to the door to acknowledge his theft. The neat kitchen is deserted, but on hearing Lucilla's voice from above, he goes up the narrow stairs and stoops to pass under the low doorframe at the top. He continues:

What were my emotions when I saw Lucilla Stanley kneeling by the side of a little clean bed, a large old Bible spread open on the bed before her, out of which she was reading one of the penitential Psalms to a pale emaciated female figure, who lifted up her failing eyes, and clasped her feeble hands in solemn attention!

Before two little bars, which served for a grate, knelt Phoebe, with one hand stirring some broth which she had brought from home, and with the other fanning with her straw bonnet the dying embers, in order to make the broth boil; yet seemingly attentive to her sister's reading. Her

⁹⁵ Cf. the combination of the sentimental and the picturesque in his description of his home, The Priory, and its environs in *Coelebs* 1: 15-18.

dishevelled hair, the deep flush which the fire, and her labour of love gave her naturally animated countenance, formed a fine contrast to the angelic tranquillity and calm devotion which sat upon the face of Lucilla. Her voice was inexpressibly sweet and penetrating, while, faith, hope, and charity seemed to beam from her fine uplifted eyes. (2: 279)

Here, More relies on sentimental, cliché-ridden descriptions of blooming youth and withered old age, but in keeping with her Augustan prose style, antitheses are used in a stylised way. Dame Alice's 'pale emaciated female figure' is contrasted with the healthy (but almost subversive) sexuality of Phoebe with her 'dishevelled hair and 'deep flush''. To make amends for his wandering eye or detract from his aberrant desires, Charles fixes on the almost desexualised 'angelic tranquillity and calm devotion' of Lucilla, casting her as a lovely, but sexless 'plaster-saint'.

The setting is the archetypically clean, neat cottage, replete with the 'dying embers' in the grate. With hindsight, this conventional set-piece detail can be read as the barely concealed embers of Charles's prurient passion, casting a lurid light on this Puritan-like scene. Charles's ensuing erotic description of Lucilla's 'innocent' sexuality is such a blatant example of undisguised male desire that it is surprising that it went unnoticed. More unconsciously seems to over-write her stereotype here, as Lucilla's body almost becomes a parody of male objectification.⁹⁶ The apparent ease with which More appropriates traditional male/sexist discourse like this raises many questions beyond the scope of this thesis. If she was (as I think) unconscious of the way in which she was undermining Charles's reliability, it points to the limitations of the attitudes implicit in Charles's view of Lucilla and also endorses the way in which women unwittingly internalised, condoned or even collaborated with the way men perceived them as objects. Yet, conversely, Lucilla seems to refuse to accept the passive and demeaning role as mere object of Charles's desire, as I will show shortly. Charles continues to describes Lucilla with strong overtones of 'innocent' sexuality:

⁹⁶ As in the feminist science-fiction work *The Women Men Don't See*, by James Tiptree Jr. (1975). See Anne Cranny-Francis's comments in *Feminist Fiction* 37.

On account of the closeness of the room, she had thrown off her hat, cloak and gloves, and laid them on the bed; and her fine hair, which had escaped from confinement, shaded the side of her face which was next the door and prevented her from seeing me. (2: 280)

There is a parallel passage in Austen's *Mansfield Park* where Henry Crawford finds Fanny Price's escaped hair similarly alluring: 'her hair arranged as neatly as it always is, one little curl falling forward as she wrote' (*MP* 296-97), but the eroticism here is not nearly as overt as in *Coelebs*. That this was not an atypical male response, is evidenced by an unsigned article in 1852 in an edition of the *New Monthly Reviewer* in which the reviewer describes Fanny Price as 'a bewitching little body'.⁹⁷

In *Coelebs*, Charles describes the unaware Lucilla almost voyeuristically:

I scarcely dared to breathe, lest I should interrupt such a scene. It was a subject not unworthy of Raphael. She next began to read the forty-first Psalm, with the meek, yet solemn emphasis of devout feeling. 'Blessed is he that considereth the poor and needy, the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.' Neither the poor woman nor myself could hold out any longer. She was overcome by her gratitude, and I by my admiration, and we both at the same moment involuntarily exclaimed, Amen! I sprang forward with a motion I could no longer control, Lucilla saw me, started and up in confusion

"and blushed

Celestial, rosy red."

Then eagerly endeavouring to conceal the Bible, by drawing her hat over it, 'Phoebe,' said she, with all the composure she could assume, 'is the broth ready?'

⁹⁷ Quoted by Margaret Kirkham in 'Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*', *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Janet Todd, *Women and Fiction*, New Series vol. 2 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 233.

. . . It was an interesting sight to see one of these blooming sisters lift the dying woman in her bed, and support her with her arm, while the other fed her, her own weak hand being unequal to the task. (2: 281)

The implications of Charles's inability to restrain himself ('hold out any longer') and his '[springing] forward with a motion I could no longer control' hardly need be spelled out. They are immediately recognised and repelled by Lucilla, who perhaps sensing the implicit (figural) rape-attempt, covers her Bible with her hat and herself with composure.

The physical relish with which male writers viewed female piety is further demonstrated by an excerpt from the 'devout' James Hervey in his *Meditations and Contemplations* (1745-46):

Never, perhaps, does a fine woman strike more deeply than when composed into pious recollection, and possessed with the noblest considerations, she assumes, without knowing it, superior dignity and new graces; so that the beauties of holiness seem to radiate about her, and the bystanders are almost induced to fancy her already worshipping among the kindred angels.⁹⁸

If Charles, in keeping with many other 'devout' males of the day, gives the wrong impression with his description of Lucilla, she proves by her response that she is not a mere object of male desire, but a person of strong moral autonomy. Not only does she repel his advances, but she consistently refuses to connive at the construct of male objectification and later reprimands Charles for flattering her for her charitable deeds.

It is also highly significant that More portrays more than simply 'soup kitchen' charity here, for Lucilla ministers to the spiritual, as well as physical, needs of Dame Alice.⁹⁹ By reading psalms to the infirm old woman, Lucilla offers comfort and instruction, taking on a pastoral and pedagogical role which is in line with that of Bunyan's virgins at

⁹⁸ Quoted by Kirkham, 'Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*', in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Todd 233.

⁹⁹ In this More seems to be following Paley's advice, where he urges people to try to alleviate poverty and misery. See *Sermons on Several Subjects by the late Revd William Paley* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808) 350.

the House Beautiful and anticipates the scene in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* where Dinah visits Hetty in prison and counsels her to confess her sins and open her heart to the Saviour.¹⁰⁰ But More is careful to obey the Pauline injunction that women 'are not to usurp authority over men', and are only 'suffered to teach children and other women' (1Tim 2:12) and accordingly, Lucilla only teaches females (her sisters and Dame Alice).

During supper that evening, Charles tries to allude to the evening's events at Dame Alice's, but is silenced by Lucilla's and Phoebe's looks and body language. This is not only a repudiation of the parade of piety, 'the left hand must not know what the right hand does',¹⁰¹ but evidence that Lucilla possesses true and not dissimulated modesty: a quality that Charles ironically persistently tries to undermine. It shows that ultimately Lucilla's strength is not only far below his, but that he is actually incapable of fully recognising or appreciating the extent of it. Charles recounts:

When we joined the party at supper, it was delightful to observe that the habits of religious charity were so interwoven with the texture of these girls' minds; that the evening which had been so interesting to me, was to them only a common evening, marking nothing in particular. It never occurred to them to allude to it; and once or twice when I was tempted to mention it, my imprudence was repressed by a look of the most significant gravity from Lucilla. (2: 288)

More's readers would immediately have recognised this as not only an encomium on unfeigned Christian modesty, but a further description of a deep and thorough-going piety or charity which is not merely appliquéd or tacked onto one's life, but 'interwoven with the texture of the girls' minds'. In *Persuasion*, the sensible, discreet William Elliot (a duplicitous version of Charles) is impressed with Anne Elliot's charitable visits to Mrs Smith and conveys to Lady Russell his conviction that Anne, with her elegance and her charity, is 'a model of female excellence' (*P* 159).

¹⁰⁰ In ch. 35. See *The Novels of George Eliot*. (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1878) 2: 244-46.

¹⁰¹ See Matt 6:3, 'But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.'

In *Coelebs* the passage under scrutiny also highlights More's conviction that the welfare of the poor of the parish was the responsibility of the family of 'the Great House'.¹⁰² Similarly, in Austen's novels where her fictional landowners do not take an interest in the welfare of their tenants, they are shown as inadequate.¹⁰³ Austen's brother Edmund Austen-Knight seems to have taken seriously his duties as owner of both Godmersham and Chawton estates and Austen inadvertently reveals that she herself was as active as her heroines in *Persuasion* and *Emma* in charitable deeds her heroines.¹⁰⁴ Although we have seen how More starts by casting Lucilla in the archetypically Puritan woman role, More signals her departure from her more rigid antecedents in that she allows her heroine more independence of thought and action. In the same way that Lucilla quickly rebuffs Charles's inappropriate viewing of her as a sexual object at Dame Alice's cottage, so she silences his attempts to flatter her afterwards. Later, as we will see, she ventures to disagree with him on the received view of Milton's portrayal of the repentance of Eve, and in another passage she suggests that reason and the will can conquer 'ill-placed' attachments. However, Charles, the focaliser, so successfully dominates the rest of the narrative (including the proposal scene, which will be analysed later), controlling the views we have of Lucilla, that it becomes virtually impossible to access her objectively.

Besides her acts of charity, Lucilla finds time for gardening, a harmless pleasure she shares with Eve in *Paradise Lost*. In *Coelebs* gardening is a stabilizing, domestic hobby and Lucilla encourages poor women to stay at home and garden instead of gadding about. In this way they will keep out of mischief and make home more attractive for their husbands (2: 283). Lucilla is more than the average gardener and her landscape abilities

¹⁰² '[A]s firmly as she believed in the duty of the employees to be submissive, and she scolded the gentry for neglect as vigorously as she got after their dependents.' See Hopkins 173. Lucinda Cole observes that 'In fact by making the relief of suffering not only a duty, but a disciplined vocation that necessitates thoughtful public action, More helped to dispel charges that compassion is a self-indulgent, negative, and therefore feminised virtue', 'Anti-feminist Sympathies: The Politics of Relationship in Smith, Wollstonecraft and More,' *ELH* 58 (1991): 118.

¹⁰³ Cf. Sir Walter Elliot's remissness as a landowner in *Persuasion* 9-10, 126.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Austen's letter dated 24 Jan 1813: 'Dame G. is pretty well, & we found her surrounded by her well-behaved, healthy, large-eyed children. I took her an old shift, & promised her a set of our linen, & my companion left some of her Bank Stock with her' (*L* 295). In her novels, Emma visits a 'poor and sick' family outside Highbury and sends the child with a pitcher for broth to Hartfield (*E* 72). Anne Elliot tells Mary that before leaving Kellynch Hall she visited the tenants: 'And one thing I have had to do, Mary, of a more trying nature; going to every house in the parish as a sort of take-leave. I was told that they wished it. But all these things took up a great deal of time' (*P* 39).

earn her the description of ‘the little Repton of the valley’ (1: 229-30). Here the feminising diminutive ('little') acts as a judicious disclaimer for one who does not want to be seen as poaching in male preserves or trying to appropriate a ‘male’ profession. The innocent pastime of gardening is also enjoyed (on a much smaller scale) by Austen’s Fanny Price, who also loves plants (*MP* 312). Yet, even innocent pastimes have their snares and Lucilla (like More at Cowslip Green) is careful not to spend an inordinate amount of time on this hobby, thereby converting it into a sin.¹⁰⁵ Here as elsewhere, she does not rely on anyone else to monitor her, but shows her independence and control in policing herself. As in *Strictures* (where More devoted the whole of the fifth chapter to ‘The Religious Employment of Time’) in *Coelebs* there is the constant preoccupation of having to account for the use of one’s time. This anxiety, together with the fact that she herself was not a musician, may constitute the reasons for More’s disapproval of the cultivation of musical accomplishment, for as Charles observes of Lucilla, ‘although she has a correct ear, she neither sings nor plays’ (1: 187) – and in this respect Austen’s Fanny Price is reminiscent of Lucilla.

Here again, there is evidence of More’s ambivalence, the warring demands of men-pleasing and the more rational impulse towards academic study and behind this, pervasive anxiety of accounting for one’s time.¹⁰⁶ Mr Stanley, Sir John and Charles all privilege learning above musical accomplishments, which Mr Stanley observes takes up such a ‘gulph of time as rarely to leave room for solid accomplishments’. Although music is innocent in itself, ‘the monstrous proportion . . . of life which it swallows up, even in many religious families . . . has converted an innocent diversion into a positive sin’ (1: 342). Stanley deplores the fact that the morning, ‘the prime, the profitable, the active hours when the mind is vigorous and the intellect awake and fresh’ (1: 343), is wasted in four hours practice of ‘an instrument which most will probably never learn to master’, when this time could be more profitably spent in serious reading or study’ (1: 345-46). Yet Stanley desires not so much to promote female self-realisation, as to create a better companion wife (2:

¹⁰⁵ Compare More’s journal entry: ‘This innocent relaxation which Providence seems kindly to have provided for me . . . is in danger of becoming a snare, by fixing me too much in that world, from which I am in other respects, trying to free myself.’ See Roberts 2: 288.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Zephon, who reminds Satan in *Paradise Lost*: ‘For thou, be sure, shalt give account / To him who sent us’ (*PL* 5. 841-42).

344). More seems implicitly to be showing that excessive musical accomplishment (spending hours practising an instrument to impress men with a superior performance) can be antifeminist. However, it soon becomes apparent that the patriarchs encourage intellectual pursuits to make more rational helpmeets, and allow a moderate amount of music solely for the amusement of parents and husbands. Thus, what begins as promising progressiveness regresses into instrumental feminism, with the impulse towards self-realisation (intellectual study for its own sake) being turned back into a patriarchal tool (to enhance the women as interesting companions). Charles continues piously to describe 'the positive duty of being agreeable at home', and Mr Stanley endorses it as 'the absolute morality of being agreeable, and even entertaining, in one's own family circle'. He maintains that most marriages founder because of too much familiarity and too little willingness to please one another. Although the husband must exert himself to be courteous and agreeable, the onus is on the woman to make the home pleasant and to provide stimulating and enjoyable entertainment at home. Thus, she herself will be safe from other 'snares' and her contented husband will not be tempted to look elsewhere for 'pleasure'.

There is a surprisingly similar antifeminist moralistic strain in *Emma* where the narrator observes rather paternalistically that one of the advantages for Harriet on her marriage to Robert Martin is that she would be 'retired enough for safety, and occupied enough for cheerfulness. She would never be led into temptation, nor left for it to find her out' (E 482). Thus in both More and Austen, marriage and domesticity are shown to be (at least for the morally frail) a safeguard against depression and sexual temptation.

Therefore, as one who neither wants to waste time nor 'catch' a husband, Lucilla does not cultivate the usual superficial feminine accomplishments. She does not play a musical instrument or sing, but, as befits a heroine of More's (who was once a member of the illustrious London 'Conversation Parties'), she is well read, and an excellent conversationist. In highly stylised Johnsonian language, that makes use of syntactic parallels and inversions, the observant Charles approvingly notes:

Her conversation, like her countenance, is compounded of liveliness, sensibility, and delicacy. She does not say things to be quoted, but the effect of her conversation is that it leaves an impression of pleasure on the mind, and a love of goodness on the heart. She enlivens without dazzling, and

entertains without overpowering. Contented to please, she has no ambition to shine. There is nothing like effort in her expression, or vanity in her manner. She has rather a playful gaiety than a pointed wit. Of repartee she has little, and dislikes it in others; yet I have seldom met with a truer taste for inoffensive wit. (1: 186)

Determined to show that Lucilla is neither dull nor improper, Charles resorts to verbal gymnastics to point the nice distinctions: ‘enlivens’ is contrasted with ‘dazzling’ and ‘playful gaiety’ with ‘pointed wit’, thus pre-empting any hint of unseemliness. Lucilla’s intellectual ‘charms’ (like her physical) are artless and she is free from the demon ‘ambition’ – something of which her creator was not.

It is easy for modern readers to overlook More’s enlightenment with regard to allowing Lucilla to participate in ‘mixed’ conversation. Earlier More had mocked the stereotypical silent female listener, the ‘[m]ute angel’ whose ‘looks dispense / The Silence of intelligence’),¹⁰⁷ and here in *Coelebs*, although more censorious than when she was younger, More nevertheless presents Lucilla as sometimes articulating opinions independently of the males who enjoy authorial endorsement. Thus, Lucilla ventures to disagree with Charles concerning Adam and Eve’s grief at their expulsion from the Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost*. Charles remarks with pious paternalism that ‘there is something wonderfully touching in her [Eve’s] remorse and affecting in her contrition’. However, Lucilla boldly observes that Milton portrays Eve as only sad about leaving her flower garden and not her Maker, and argues with some spirit that women are capable of as much spirituality as men:

I am a little affronted with the poet . . . [for] the sorrows of Eve seem too much to arise from her being banished from her flower garden. The grief, though never grief was so beautifully eloquent, is rather too exquisite, her substantial grounds for lamentation considered. (2: 285)

¹⁰⁷ ‘Mute angel, yes; thy looks dispense / The silence of intelligence; Thy graceful form I well discern, / In act to listen and to learn.’ *Bas Bleu or Conversation* (addressed to Mrs Vesey) 383-394, *The Poetical Works of Hannah with a Memoir of the Author* (London: Scott, Webster and Geary, 1853) 393.

In this criticism, in which Lucilla justly objects to the feminising of Eve's grief, and implicitly contests the idea that her sorrow over the loss of her garden renders her incapable of recognising what she has lost theologically (fellowship with God), More shows just how daring she is in allowing Lucilla to be even 'a little affronted' with such a highly-esteemed Puritan poet. Yet she covers herself by not making Lucilla too progressive. Lucilla is not only a far cry from Wollstonecraftian women, but she lacks the impertinence of Austen's heroines, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse.

Lucilla is usually mediated through Charles's eyes; importantly so, for we see her in the way he wants her to be seen. Hence Charles, who seems to fear Lucilla's autonomy, hastens to represent her as clever, but not witty. Thus unlike Austen's 'cheeky' heroines, Lucilla eschews wit: although she may not 'say things to be quoted, but the effect of [her] conversation is that it leaves an impression of pleasure on the mind and goodness on the heart' (1: 186). Here Lucilla, of whom it is said: 'Taste is indeed the predominant quality of her mind' (1: 186), is akin to Austen's Fanny Price and Anne Elliot.

This taste is linked to good literature, which helps form it, and of which (fortunately for Lucilla), Mr Stanley grants a cautious, qualified approval (1: 297). Although Lucilla reads and discusses all the 'good authors' (significantly none of them female) with her father and Charles, such as Pope, Swift, Dryden, Cowper, Steele, Addison, Johnson, Shakespeare, Milton, as well as Classical authors (2: 284-85), she is careful to heed the conduct writers' advice and not parade her learning.

In discoursing on Milton, Charles and Lucilla find to their delight that even more of their 'tastes' concur most fortuitously. Earlier, Charles had observed with approval their mutual taste in nature and gardening (2: 283), and concludes that similarity of taste is an essential prerequisite of marriage – an idea that went hand in glove with the companionate marriage.¹⁰⁸ Yet similarity of taste can also be seen as a sentimental proposition; one that Austen lampoons in *Love and Friendship* and one which, more seriously, the idealistic Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* shows can be misleading and even dangerous. After a discussion with Lucilla on *Paradise Lost*, Charles enthuses:

¹⁰⁸ For the importance of this in eighteenth-century domestic ideology see Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (1992; rpt. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1994) and on the 'friendly egalitarian marriage' see Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987) 46-51.

If any thing had been wanting to my full assurance of the sympathy of our tastes and feelings, this would have completed my conviction. It struck me as the Virgilian lots formerly struck the superstitious. Our mutual admiration of the *Paradise Lost*, and of its heroine, seemed to bring us nearer together than we had yet been . . . (2: 286).

More's phrase 'the sympathy of our taste and feelings,' not only reflects the current eighteenth-century ideal of 'the friendly egalitarian marriage',¹⁰⁹ but suggests a romanticism that is often traditionally thought of as alien to More, the champion of sense and prudence. Here it is ironic that it is the male, and not the female, who talks of Virgilian lots and being brought 'nearer together than we had yet been'. This hints at a reversal of the traditional binary masculine (rational) versus female (emotional, sentimental) stereotype.

Charles's insistence on the criterion of mutual taste for a successful love-relationship smacks very much of Marianne Dashwood, who loftily avows: 'I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own' (SS 51). Thus, while intent on promoting her 'companion-spouse' theory, in which the partners must be matched morally, intellectually and aesthetically, More seems ironically unaware of her promotion of sensibility which she elsewhere debunks. Always opposed to the insincere protestations of sympathy in the fashionable Novels of Sentiment, a 'rage' begun by Mackenzie in his *Man of Feeling* (1771), through the Stanleys' talk, More grimly shows the potentially fatal effects of an overdose of 'Poetry and Romance' in the unhappy young Laura (2: 284 -289). More's noble characters not only limit this dangerous ingredient in their reading diet, but strenuously avoid the maudlin tear-jerk reaction to the suffering of others.¹¹⁰ In *Coelebs* this 'sympathy' with others finds a positive and pragmatic outlet in assisting people like Dame Alice and the Stokeses.¹¹¹ Thus, More urges that social sympathy is not a constitutional, class or 'feminised' quality, but an essential Christian virtue based on the firm foundation of Evangelical values.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Alice Browne, 49, 51.

¹¹⁰ Lampooned so amusingly by Austen in her juvenile *Love and Freindship* (1790).

¹¹¹ Sir John and Lady Belfield go to the Stokeses to buy their handcrafted artificial flowers.

¹¹² In this regard, see Lucinda Cole 107-141.

On further discussion, Charles is delighted to find that Lucilla is an amateur literary critic and can discuss ‘the richness of the imagery, the elevation of the language . . . the artful structure of the verse, and the variety of the characters’ intelligently, showing that she ‘had imbibed her taste from the purest sources’. She is modest for ‘[i]t was easy to trace her knowledge of the best authors, although she quoted none.’ There follows a burst of fine anti-feminism, which is all the more ironic because it was totally undercut by More’s own example (at least of ‘citing learned names or adducing long quotations’):

‘This,’ said I exultingly to myself, ‘is the true learning for a lady; a knowledge that is rather detected than displayed; that is felt in its effects on her mind and conversation; that is seen, not by her citing learned names, or adducing long quotations, but in the general result, by the delicacy of her taste, and the correctness of her sentiments.’ (2: 287)

This idea that a woman’s learning must be safely within the prescribed patriarchal boundaries (that is, unobtrusive, delicate and deferential) differs distinctly from More’s earlier views as expressed in an essay, *Thoughts on Conversation*, dedicated to Blue Stocking friend, Elizabeth Montagu (1755). Here More indignantly writes:

It has been advised, and by very respectable authorities too, that in conversation women should carefully conceal any knowledge or learning they may happen to possess. I own, with submission, that I do not see either the necessity or propriety, of this advice.¹¹³

Clearly, More is taking issue here with Dr John Gregory, who advises his daughters to conceal their learning lest it appear unseemly and provoke male anger.¹¹⁴ In her essay, More says warmly:

¹¹³ *Thoughts on Conversation in Search After Happiness and Other Poems and Essays* (London: T Allman, n.d.) 208-09.

¹¹⁴ *Dr Gregory’s Letter to his Daughters* (1774) in *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library, Or Parental Monitor, For her Own Good Series* (1790), ed. Vivien Jones (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995) 1-53.

I am at a loss to know why a young female is instructed to exhibit her skill in music, singing, dancing, taste in dress . . . while her piety is to be anxiously concealed and her learning affectedly disavowed, lest the former should draw on her the appellation of an enthusiast, or the latter that of a pedant.¹¹⁵

More continues to vindicate ‘learned’ women and attack sexist traditional education by saying that it is perfectly ridiculous for women guiltily to hide their knowledge: ‘In regard to knowledge, why should she for ever affect to be on her guard, lest she should be found guilty of a small portion of it?’¹¹⁶

The above essay (written in 1755) is a far cry from Charles’s strictures in *Coelebs* (1809). Although it is true that Charles does not require Lucilla to conceal her learning (and seems to be proud of it), it is clear that he wants it to be as unobtrusive as possible. Similarly, though Lucilla might indulge in amateur literary criticism (2: 285-86), a woman’s academic interests must always play second fiddle to her religious and domestic duties. Good humour and industry, cheerfulness and the serving of wholesome and elegantly served food, are just as important as a cultivated mind, Charles maintains pontifically, although More seems to have cheerfully left the serving of food to her servants and sisters while she indulged in professional writing. Strangely though, More seemed perfectly unaware of this slippage between her persona/focaliser and herself; or what critics call the ‘doubleness in her life and writing’. Although promoting autonomy, she nevertheless feels bound to uphold separate spheres: hence, the unresolved tension between the Puritan/Evangelical requirements and her rational longings.

In *Coelebs* Flam, who has a selfish daughter, Fanny, who will not play her instrument to soothe his gout (2: 188), wistfully eulogizes Lucilla:

She is a pattern daughter and will make a pattern wife . . . I never saw a bad humour, or a bad dinner in the house. She is always at home, always employed, always in spirits, and always in temper. She is as cheerful as if

¹¹⁵ *Thoughts on Conversation* 208-09.

¹¹⁶ *Thoughts on Conversation* 209.

she had no religion, and as useful as if she could not spell her own receipt book. (2: 381-82)

Pressing rhetoric into didactic (and unfortunately, anti-feminist) service, Flam uses balance and parallelism to convey the idea of a perfectly balanced female, with her demeanour as good as her dinner and her household skills as good as her orthography.¹¹⁷

Lucilla is silently modest about her solid accomplishments, unlike the caricature of false female education, Miss Rattle, who visits the Stanleys and, in a Hogarthian-type vignette, rattles off all her superficial accomplishments. She boasts to Charles that she learns French, Italian and German, paints flowers and shells, draws ruins and begins (but never finishes) countless fire screens (2: 333-34). Too superficial a creature for complicated thought patterns and embedded clauses, she continues her catalogue of accomplishments (which include ‘varnishing, gilding, japanning, engraving in mezzotinto and aquatinto’, Irish and Scottish dancing, singing and piano lessons), in a breathless flow of co-ordinate clauses, pausing only long enough to add another ‘then’ or ‘and’ (2: 333-37).

This female butterfly who flits from one subject to another, crosses class barriers by fraternising with the coachman with whom she frankly enjoys ‘low’ gossip. She not only yells ‘like a little hoyden’ to him out of the window, but leaps up unassisted, to join him on the carriage box (2: 388). As Charles gravely and snobbishly reflects, ‘Here is a mass of accomplishments . . . without one particle of mind, one ray of common sense or one shade of delicacy! Surely somewhat less time, and less money, might have sufficed to qualify a companion for the coachman.’(2: 338). By contrast, Lucilla who has had a good solid education (without the tinsel of modern accomplishments) has enhanced it by innate discretion and Christian virtues and Charles, believes, would not forget herself so far as to be on such familiar terms with her social inferiors or act in such an unladylike manner.

But at the same time, More is careful to distinguish Lucilla from the stereotypical ‘proper lady’ promoted by conduct books. Whereas the former study to please men, More’s ideal woman aims to please God. Accordingly her conduct stems from a ‘dedication, an

¹¹⁷ Cf. the remissive ‘Miss’ who takes her intellectual abilities too seriously in *Coelebs*: ‘The sober duties of a family had been transferred to her sisters, as far beneath her attention of so fine a genius, while she abandoned herself to her studies . . . ’ Of course, ‘her lover drew off’ and her private verses to him were ‘read at clubs and taverns, and the unhappy Sappho toasted in derision’ (2: 245) Apart from her protagonist’s sorry end, More seems singularly innocent of the irony created by the similarity of her (misguided) scholar and herself.

inward devotedness of ourselves to His service'. Her modesty, in covering her Bible with her hat in Dame Alice's cottage, stems from a sincere desire not to draw attention to her piety. Similarly, her forbidding Charles to mention her good deeds at tea is not false modesty, derived from self-interested motives of gender subservience, but from pure 'motives of the heart' (*Practical Piety* 1: 5).

This 'unfeigned' Christian modesty is further demonstrated in Lucilla's earnest conversation with Charles on how to cope with flattery, which she finds distressing. She tells Charles that compliments make her feel 'like an imposter', explaining her dilemma: 'If I contradict the favourable opinion I am afraid of being accused of affectation and if I silently swallow it, I am contributing to the deceit of passing for what I am not' (2: 347). Here Lucilla, in her quest for true humility and self-respect, conveys not self-abasement, but a right-minded self-possession.¹¹⁸ What makes More's 'modesty unfeign'd' different from run-of-the mill conduct writers is that it is rationally driven.

In rejecting empty male gallantry, Lucilla adopts a proto-feminist stance, which Charles simply cannot do justice to in his conventional praise and thus resorts to unctuousness: 'this humble renunciation of pride could only proceed from that inward principle of genuine piety and devout feeling' (*Coelebs* 2: 103-04). Here 'inward, genuine' and 'devout' are reminiscent of the tenor of Law's *Serious Call* and dispel any suggestions of studied modesty to please men. Lucilla's ardent desire to remain humble also echoes the sentiments of More's journal entries of 1790, where, amidst much literary success, she strives to fight against pride.¹¹⁹

In addition to her sincere humility, Lucilla possesses the restraint or 'self-control' that her younger sister, Phoebe, lacks. When Miss Rattle comes to the end of her saga of accomplishments, Lucilla delicately conceals her amusement, but 'Phoebe, who had less self-control, was on the very verge of a broad laugh' (2: 335) – an immodest, almost indecent, carnivalesque element that has to be suppressed.

¹¹⁸ See Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace's criticism of Lucilla in *Their Father's Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 52 and the response of Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* 93.

¹¹⁹ The journal entries of 1798 in particular reveal an awareness of the sin of vanity as the following demonstrates: ' May 21 1798: 'A present of Lord Orford's (Walpole's) work – my picture in the book – I laboured to hinder it – Lord keep me from self-sufficiency and humble me under a deep sense of the emptiness of earthly honours'. See Roberts 4: 59.

Like More, who compares and contrasts the behaviour of the two sisters, Lucilla and Phoebe, Austen employs a similar (but less crude) polar schematisation in Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, but in greater depth and with greater complexity, for she shows that these qualities are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. In *Coelebs* the opposites are not balanced: Lucilla's almost stoic control is universally endorsed, whereas Phoebe's frequently appealing impetuosity and lack of restraint are constantly censured or used as a means of humour. When Charles takes leave of the Stanley family at the end of volume two, he notes approvingly that Lucilla conceals her distress, but Phoebe, who knows no restraint, 'wept outright' (2: 387- 88). This not only shows Charles's blind and naïve egotism (for he is clearly delighted at Phoebe's tears), but endorses Lucilla's maturity by pointing up Phoebe's 'childishness'. Again, in *Lucilla*, More is aiming at a portrait of a rational woman who is not the slave of uncontrolled emotion.

Lucilla again displays her rationality in her high esteem of reason. In More's youthful verse-drama, *The Search after Happiness*, she extolled Reason, lavishly praising Locke and Boyle. In later editions, while retaining the allusions to Locke and Boyle (and quoting from both in her *Strictures*, *Coelebs* and *Essay on St Paul*), More downplayed the role of reason. In *Coelebs* (where she also mentions Locke and Boyle on 1: 274 -75) the tension between rationality and Evangelicalism is even more evident. Like Sherlock, More's own rationality will not allow her to disparage or underestimate the God-given power of reason, yet she is concerned like Sherlock, to show its limitations. Thus in a rare moment, during a discussion on the popular novelistic idea of the 'invincibility' of love and the power of religion in 'subduing the passions' (2: 246), Lucilla is allowed to frankly admit that religion is often credited with achieving that which is actually accomplished by reason. She goes on however, to show that occasionally something more than reason is required to extinguish a 'well-founded affection, a justifiable attachment'. Note however, the way Charles carefully encapsulates Lucilla's observations in his own interpretative 'stage directions'. Thus, she not only blushes on cue, but he reads his desires into her blushes, entirely disallowing her own motives (which might not have had anything whatsoever to do with his arrogant attribution of her fearing that she had said too much).

With a little confusion she [Lucilla] said, 'to conquer an ill-placed attachment, I conceive, may be effected by motives inferior to religion.'

Reason, the humbling conviction of having made an unworthy choice . . . may easily accomplish it. But to conquer a well-founded affection, a justifiable attachment, requires the powerful principle of Christian piety; and what cannot that effect.' She stopped and blushed, as fearing she had said too much. (1: 246-47)

Although there are echoes in Lucilla's speech of the Cambridge Platonists and her 'dear Dr Johnson', Blue Stocking voices are also distinguishable. Was it perhaps a subject canvassed by More, Montagu and Carter, and sedimented by More's own reading, observations and experiences over the years?

The proposal scene reproduced below, is disappointing as Lucilla herself is completely written out of the narrative, unlike Austen's proposal scenes in which the female is always the focaliser. The reader seldom has the opportunity to see her without the egotistic mediation of Charles, who wants her to conform to his pattern of chaste, self-effacing feminine delicacy. Note Charles's obsession here with Lucilla's modesty and innocence. Note too, the way in which he asserts his male dominance, forcing her 'gently' back into her seat, and the smugness that accompanies his proposal. Like Mr Collins in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles never doubts his success. This is underscored by the complacence with which he contrasts the reception of Lord Staunton's overtures with his. With parental approval on his side, Lucilla becomes like Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, a mere counter in the homosocial courtship plot.

Lucilla is sitting with her little sister, Celia or 'Rosebud', Lady Belfield and Charles in the breakfast room one morning shortly before his departure. On Lady Belfield's going out to fetch her conservatory plans, followed by Celia's running out, Lucilla rises to exit, but is detained by Charles:

The impulse was too powerful to be resisted; I gently replaced her in her seat, and in language, which if it did any justice to my feelings, was the most ardent, tender, and respectful, poured out of my whole heart. I believe my words were incoherent; I am sure they were sincere.

She was evidently distressed. Her emotions prevented her replying. But it was emotion of surprise, not of resentment. Her confusion bore no

symptom of displeasure. Blushing and hesitantly, she at last said – ‘My father, Sir – my mother.’ Here her voice failed her. I recollect with joy, that on the application of Lord Staunton, she had allowed no such reference, nay she had forbidden it.

‘I take your reference joyfully,’ said I, ‘Only tell me that if I am so happy as to obtain their consent, you will not withhold yours.’ She ventured to raise her timid eyes to mine, and her modest, but expressive, look encouraged me almost as much as any words could have done (2: 293).

Thus, as senior partner and sole spokesperson in the relationship, Charles not only feels fully entitled to interpret Lucilla’s mute looks (according to his patriarchal expectations), but feels it unnecessary to elicit any comment from Lucilla. He continues to observe that there is nothing frivolously ‘romantick’ in their happiness: ‘I experienced the truth of Phoebe’s remark that happiness is a serious thing.’ It is serious (in both senses of grave and religious), because as Charles observes, the highest human happiness, ‘the most exquisite human pleasures are not the perfection of his [sic] nature, but only a gracious earnest, a bounteous prelibation of that blessedness which is without measure and shall be without end’ (2: 389).

In this way, the contemplation of temporal, conjugal felicity (which is their reward for their piety and self-restraint), leads Charles (and Lucilla) to the contemplation of eternal felicity. And so More concludes her portrayal of enlightened (but essentially Evangelical) piety by raising the focus from worldly to heavenly happiness. This not only underscores the structurally cyclic nature of *Coelebs*, but supposedly demonstrates its progression. Although purportedly the story of a man’s quest for a wife (a reversal of the usual marriage quest in which a woman looks for a husband), it reinforces the idea that one’s earthly goals must always be seen in the light of eternity. Thus, Charles sets out in volume one, looking for a wife, and maintaining that ‘the prime comfort in a companion for life is the delightful hope that she will be the companion for eternity’ (1: 23). At the end of the second volume, he is satisfied that he has found her with whom he can share the ‘blessedness which is without measure and shall be without end’ (2:389) – a companion with whom he is not

merely ‘joined’ but ‘matched’.¹²⁰ Significantly, although we are led to believe that Lucilla shares this transport, we never hear her voice.

CONCLUSION

More’s complexity as a critical subject is demonstrated by the weightier biographical section. I have sought to explain the basis of her enlightenment through her mixed spiritual lineage (of orthodoxy and Dissent), her unusually progressive education (with tuition in the classics as well as modern sciences and languages and exposure to Catholicism) and most importantly, her introduction to the intellectual Garrick/Johnson circle in London. These factors not only developed her mind and personality, but determined the style of her writing and gave rise to an incredible social elasticity that enabled her to fraternise equally with prelates, peers, poets, playwrights and Blue Stockings in sophisticated London circles and rural cottagers and mining folk in the Mendips, whom she tried to uplift spiritually and physically. They also enabled her to bend almost every genre to share with her late eighteenth-century readers, both the proletariat and ‘the Great’, her particular ‘light of the eye’.

In tracing her literary career, we saw how More turned from sentimental verse and drama to fashionable tragedy and after the death of her patron, Garrick, to the political and moral tract, the didactic work, the novel and finally to works devoted entirely to doctrine and morals, as her spiritual awareness and sense of responsibility deepened through her interaction with Porteous, Wilberforce and Newton.

More not only lived during politically unstable times (the revolution in France and associated unrest in England) but her own life was characterised by several conflicts such as the Hannah Cowley Parker affair, the Ann Yearsley altercation and the Blagdon Controversy. These, as in the case of Sherlock, encouraged a defensiveness, while honing

¹²⁰ The words ‘joined’ and ‘matched’ are from More’s *Strictures*. See also Demers ‘More is thus deeply concerned to demonstrate the way in which a couple become . . . ‘matched’ as opposed to merely joined’ (97).

her polemical powers. Consequently, both of these elements characterise her writing. Thus her presentation of Christian doctrine and piety is not only characterised by its rational and enlightened interpretation, but by its defensive denials of charges of gloominess and antinomianism.

In addition to defensiveness, as a doubly marginalized person (a member of a ‘socially suspect’ party, the Evangelicals, and as a woman writing about doctrine) More perforce develops further protective or camouflage strategies which involve the assumption of anonymity or pseudonymity in the *Will Chip* dialogues and Cheap Repository Tracts, apology and self-deprecation in the preface to *Coelebs* and in her religious works on prayer, piety and St Paul. Most significantly, she assumes the guise of a male narrator or ‘focaliser’ in her novel *Coelebs*, thereby hoping to disarm patriarchal criticism, but at the same time, owing to Charles’s implicit narratorial unreliability, creating complicated problems of interpretation. We have also seen that owing to her gender, More’s forays into politics, doctrine and the Blagdon polemic, necessitated the exploitation of male ‘patrons’ such as Garrick, Johnson, Walpole, Sir Abraham Elton, Bishop Porteous and Wilberforce, many of whom acted as a go-between or more radically, as her ‘voice’ when, as a woman, she was unable to speak for herself. We have also traced her growing confidence in writing on religious subjects to the point where in her works on prayer and St Paul, she tacitly assumes the right to address doctrinal issues.

More’s talent for transforming doctrine into everyday fictional situations was politically exploited by Porteous, who encouraged her during what they saw as apocalyptic times to commandeer the political pamphlet (evading gendered embargoes by assuming the male personas of ‘Will Chip’ and ‘Jack Anvil’) in order to counter irreligion and stabilise a society threatened by the revolutionary writings of Rousseau, Paine, Voltaire, Godwin and others. Similarly she appropriates popular culture in her Cheap Repository Tracts in which chapbook-like moral stories teach salvation and the benefits of social stability. Here she presses her ‘poetical powers’ into the service of didacticism (ballads) and her narrative creativity explores and develops the idea of part fiction.

In her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* and *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, and her novel, *Coelebs*, More invokes a more elitist rhetoric to not only persuade her more sophisticated readers to a positive and enlightened piety but to recuperate Evangelicalism by gentrifying it. Here, though she exhorts upper class women

to use their moral influence in their ‘separate spheres’ (trusting it to trickle down in society), she ironically steps out of *her* traditional sphere to discourse on doctrine (particularly in ‘Leading Doctrines of Christianity’ in *Strictures*). Here as in her later doctrinal works, her allusions to classical, patristic writers, Cambridge Platonists, moralists and respected writers of divinity (which are indicative of her enlightenment and intellectual catholicity) not only further her arguments, but practically ensure her acceptance in a patriarchal world. At the same time, her debt to the Blue Stockings and especially Montagu and Carter (with whom she found solidarity in writing in a male dominated literary world) is particularly evident in *The Search after Happiness*, *Bas Bleu or Conversation* and parts of *Strictures*, where she posits a more equal, rational education for women.

From the beginning More’s commitment to moderation is evident in her youthful work, *The Search after Happiness*. Like Sherlock and other orthodox writers, she privileges this classical quality showing how necessary it is to a positive practice of Christianity. Thus in Candidus in *Christian Morals* and especially in Stanley and Barlow in *Coelebs*, More propounds an enlightened and sincere orthodox piety that avoids the two ‘distasteful extremes’ of ‘freezing indifference’ and ‘burning zeal’. Yet, she shows, this traditionally male virtue is equally (and more consistently) in evidence in her heroine, Lucilla Stanley.

Like Sherlock, More stresses a collective and personal accountability to God. While rejecting fashionable Latitudinarian-type benevolence, she argues for the foundations of divine grace, but carefully distances herself from antinomianism in both *Strictures* and *Coelebs* and her stressing that faith without works is dead, is borne out by her own life with its vigorous social involvement.¹²¹

We have noted that in *Coelebs* that negative *exempla* of piety, Mrs Ranby, Mr Tyrrel, the Belfields and particularly, Mr Flam are far more grippingly presented than her cardboard cut-outs of positive piety, the Stanleys, Dr Barlow and Charles. However, her graphic dramatic portrayals of the regeneration of the Belfields, Mr Carlton and Lady Melbury most nearly realise her desire to flesh out the ‘doctrines of the heart’. Apart from the tedious Stanleys, Barlows and the mealy-mouthed narrator/focaliser, Coeles/Charles, of whom little positive can be truly said, there remains Lucilla, the most frustrating and promising of More’s protagonists.

¹²¹ See the discussion on antinomianism in *Strictures* 2: 281-82, referred to in ‘More’s Doctrinal Emphases’.

Here More had a golden opportunity to present her feminist ideal of ‘the new rational woman’. Although there are faint echoes of her earlier audacious promotion of female autonomy in *Thoughts on Conversation*, her Evangelical fears (and male monitors like Stephens) conspire to abort what promised to be an exciting conception. Nevertheless, she manoeuvres as best she could in the constricted space her society and her doctrine permitted. Her pictures of male piety might be stilted and pontifical, but her portrayal of female piety in *Lucilla* is a brave attempt at the reconciliation of Puritan with proto-feminist ideals. Her piety is rescued by its rationality and intelligence and if one can sweep aside the clutter of Charles’s insidiously filtrative comment and allow her own light to shine through, *Lucilla* is as much a feminist as a moralistic creation. Nevertheless, one is left with an unresolved tension between Charles’s interpretation of *Lucilla* and the elements in her characterisation that qualify or undercut his limited, patriarchal view. However, it is impossible to tell to what extent (if any) More was aware of this inherent tension.

More’s final practical explications of doctrine, her *Practical Piety*, *Christian Morals* and *The Spirit of Prayer* provide (among other things) a defence of Evangelical principles through the construct of ‘Candidus’, a discourse on prayer and an insightful exegesis of the Lord’s Prayer. In her more intrepid *Essay on St Paul*, More attempts to defend her subject against antifeminist charges and provides a short but cogent defence of revelation against Natural Religion. If one reprimands the gender and class ‘shutters’ that sometimes restrict her ‘light of the eye’, one must also celebrate the ‘light’ that inspired her to leave ‘the picnic on the other side of the hedge’, sharpen her plough and add her furrows to the male-dominated field of doctrine.¹²² Thus, whereas More has been seen as a purveyor of obsolete patriarchal piety, the above chapter argues for recognition of her innovative attempts to rewrite doctrine as an eighteenth-century woman writer. Though she never seems to question the authority, form or manner in which her doctrine has been handed down, she seems to have been uneasy about some of its more sexist embodiments. Through the occasional deconstruction of her male narrator in *Coelebs* and through an analysis of her portrayal of female piety, I hope to have shown that More is more progressive and actively feminist than generally thought in her representation of doctrine, piety and reform.

¹²² Derek Longhurst 4.

CHAPTER FIVE

JANE AUSTEN

This chapter is divided into four sections which are generally self-explanatory: firstly, ‘Jane Austen’s Piety: The Historical And Biographical Evidence’, which functions as a general introduction to all the subsequent sections, secondly ‘Austen’s Prayers’, which is prefaced by some general comments, followed by an analysis of some aspects of Austen’s three personal prayers, thirdly a close reading of Marianne Dashwood’s repentance in *Sense And Sensibility*: Marianne Dashwood’s ‘Atonement To My God’, and fourthly, a bipartite section devoted to *Mansfield Park*. The latter, which is divided into two subsections, ‘A Clergyman Constantly Resident’ and ‘Starched up into Seeming Piety, or The Mind which does not Struggle against Itself’, respectively, explore Austen’s concepts of clericality and the contest of ideologies (between Mary Crawford and Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram) which are exposed during the visit to Sotherton. The main findings are then summarised in a conclusion.

JANE AUSTEN’S PIETY: THE HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE

Unlike that of the less well-known Hannah More, Austen’s popularity renders a biography and review of works otiose. Apart from the fact that the events of Austen’s life are mostly common knowledge, for the purposes of this thesis they have less relevance for her writing than More’s, whose works were more urgently politicised, and whose various new directions and conflicts (each with its own particular ‘burden’) elicited a more opportune or topical response and, in many cases, the exploration of a new genre. By contrast, Austen’s

comparatively less eventful and more private life (lacking for example, More's intimate involvement with the cultural and intellectual life of London), provided fewer distractions, thereby enabling her to hone her craft more deliberately.

Beginning with some observations on Austen's personal piety, I proceed to a brief reminder of some of the salient religious issues of her time, concentrating on the putative impact of Evangelicalism on her family. I then proceed to examine some doctrinal aspects of her prayers, and some applications of these according to the 'light' of her 'eye' in her novels. Constraints of space induce me to be highly selective in my choice of excerpts from Austen's novels and thus I limit my enquiry to *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*.

Countless critics have offered moral and sometimes overtly Christian readings of Austen,¹ yet I believe these have never been adequately contextualised within the framework of current theological and ecclesiastical issues. Although I focus only on passages in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, my analyses inevitably entail references, where pertinent, to her other works as well.

In contrast to what some detractors describe as More's constrained use of the cramping 'religious novel', with its 'unmixed characters', its model hero and virtuous (but more complex) heroine and abundance of edifying conversations, Jane Austen employs the form of the secular courtship novel to present, in more varied rank and circumstances than More, psychologically and morally developing women and men, who move not only towards marriage, and a greater understanding of themselves and others, but more often than not, towards a greater piety.² Interest in the latter has been virtually superseded during the last forty odd years by an increasing absorption with female self-assertion, and the clash between

¹ For example, C S Lewis, 'A Note on Jane Austen' in *Essays in Criticism* No. 4 (Oct 1954) 359-71, rpt in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963) 25-34.

² Marianne Dashwood will be the focus of my exploration in the chapter devoted to *Sense and Sensibility*. In *Mansfield Park*, where I concentrate on Mary Crawford, and Edmund and Fanny's response to her moral challenges, Austen also presents Sir Thomas Bertram and Tom, as those who develop morally. Here the old and young patriarchs are weighed in the moral balances and found wanting. Adopting the language of feminine sympathy to ameliorate her criticism, the narrator observes: 'Sir Thomas, poor Sir Thomas, a parent, and conscious of errors in his own conduct as a parent, was the longest to suffer. He felt that he ought not to have allowed the marriage, that his daughter's sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable in authorizing it, and that in so doing he had sacrificed the right to the expedient, and had been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom.' (*MP* 461) Similarly, his eldest son, Tom, repents of his typically patrilineal sins of extravagance and selfishness, but as he is only a young patriarch, Austen can afford to be more direct: 'He was the better for ever for his illness. He had suffered and he had learnt to think, two advantages that he had never known before. . He became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself.' (*MP* 462)

individual desire and patriarchal/class values. The form of the novel has also been subject to critical scrutiny. Writing within the predictable courtship novel form, with its firm, but fairly flexible structure and inevitable romantic closure, Austen has come in for some criticism (and defence) from those who see her as perpetuating bourgeois myths.³ As one who had been previously celebrated (by predominantly male critics) for her polished ironic style and incisive comments on society, these rhetorical tools have been re-interpreted in a more subversive light. Thus, the late eighteenth-century societal mores of Austen's landscape become more darkly patriarchal, and her criticism, although still subtle, is construed as more powerfully undermining than previously perceived.

Yet, apart from this plethora of subversive criticism, there have been some recent attempts to recuperate Austen as a moralist.⁴ Anne Ruderman argues that it is often overlooked that Austen supports and promotes the traditional 'pleasures' of virtue based on a combination of Aristotelian and Christian principles.⁵ What is more often overlooked is the fact that Austen directly, as well as indirectly, uses the novel to convey her ideas of Anglican doctrine, piety and reform.

In my preface I quote from *Pride and Prejudice*, where Mr Bennet demands his traditionally male rights; 'that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room' (PP 112). As I argue, Austen may not have had a room of her own, but she did have – and exercise – the free use of her own understanding,

³ Susan Fraiman in her chapter, 'The Humiliation of Elizabeth Bennet' in her work, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia, 1993) 59-87, maintains that, despite the promises of power that bourgeois romance holds out, marriage is ultimately a betrayal, a passing from one patriarch to another, and Elizabeth Bennet becomes nothing but Darcy's wife. See also Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984) 241-46. She focuses on 'the discrepancy between the promises of bourgeois ideology and the satisfactions that life in bourgeois society actually yields' (241). Cf. Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 166, who maintains that 'Austen persistently subjected conservative fiction's most cherished mythologies to interrogations from which it could not recover.' (166)

⁴ Previously articulated by Howard Babb, *Jane Austen: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1966), W A Craik, *Jane Austen: The Six Novels* (London: Methuen, 1965), Robert Liddell, *The Novels of Jane Austen* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963), Elizabeth Jenkins, *Jane Austen: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz 1938), Darrell Mansell, *The Novels of Jane Austen: An Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1973) and others.

⁵ Anne Crippen Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). In effect this is a modification and expansion of Gilbert Ryle's argument in 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', rpt. *Jane Austen: Critical Essays* ed. Ian Watt (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963) 106-122.

in matters not always traditionally ‘feminine’. As I will show, although Austen’s focus is not doctrinal like that of Sherlock and, to a lesser extent, More, her desire to contribute to current religious debates is sufficiently strong to enable her to find creative ways of circumnavigating traditional gender/genre restrictions on these topics. However, unlike More, Austen is not visibly concerned to defend doctrine (as More does throughout her works) or revelation (as More does briefly in *Coelebs* and in her refutation of Natural Religion in her *Essay on St Paul*), neither does she engage in technical theological debate (such as More’s discussions on antinomianism in *Strictures* and *Coelebs*). Furthermore, the ecclesiastical reform Austen promotes is moral, rather than structural. Yet, nevertheless, Austen patently shows her desire to explore the way in which doctrinal, moral and ecclesiastic issues impinge on everyday life, whether in her private prayers, or in the conduct of her courting protagonists.

CURRENT RELIGIOUS ISSUES

R W Chapman observed that Austen’s time was ‘not an age of religious ferment’, but nevertheless he maintained that ‘religious observance took up a great deal of people’s time and of their thoughts.’⁶ If it were not, as Chapman avers, an ‘age of religious ferment’, what was it? Or, more appropriately, what were some of the more outstanding theological, philosophical and ecclesiastical issues?

The ‘heyday’ of Deism might have passed, but the rational/sceptical tradition begun by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, significantly furthered by Locke, and developed along more specifically Deist lines by Tindal, Blunt, Morgan and Hume (who ruled out cause and effect in his essay on miracles in *The Natural History of Religion* and *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, thereby cutting the ground from what many orthodox saw as revelation’s prime proofs) was by no means over. Sherlock had answered Hume and Woolston in his *Tryal of the Witnesses*, but Hume’s works on Natural Religion, for example, continued to elicit a response

⁶ R W Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948) 111.

from both orthodox and some Latitudinarians during More and Austen's time, and his name continued to be strongly linked with scepticism.⁷

Latitudinarianism, as Cragg avers, had tended to veer in the direction of Socinianism and Unitarianism, with the Feathers' Tavern Petition (1771) and Archbishop Blackburne's *The Confessional* (1776), pleading for the clergy to be allowed to interpret Scripture according to reason and the individual conscience.⁸ Yet there was still a strong desire among some Latitudinarians to counteract scepticism and vestigial Deism, which was taking on a decidedly more political hue. Thus, the liberal theologian, Richard Watson, who had announced his lack of concern for 'the opinions of councils, fathers, churches, bishops and other men as little inspired as myself', defended revelation against Natural Religion (in 1797) and courageously undertook to refute Gibson's sceptical account of the growth and spread of Christianity in his second volume of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁹

Besides Watson (1797), others, including Paley (1795) Horsley (1791) and Horne (1791), who continued to publish against Natural Religion in the 1790's, proved that these debates were still very much alive. And the avowedly Tory *British Critic*, under the combined helm of Joshua Watson and Henry Norris (and the 'Hackney Phalanx') from 1812 onwards also strenuously countered the 'Jacobin opinions' of Paine and his followers as well as French Deists/philosophers.¹⁰ Through the efforts of More's friend, Bishop Beilby Porteus, and the Proclamation Society, Daniel Eaton (publisher of Paine's *Age of Reason*) and Thomas Williams (Paine's publisher for the London Corresponding Society) were prosecuted.

Austen does not mention any of the above in her works or extant letters. Neither does she refer to any of the many philanthropic societies initiated by the Evangelicals,¹¹ or make

⁷ See Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* and *Dialogues on Natural Religion*. See Cragg 168, Carpenter 246-47 and Walker 440-41 for their discussion of Hume and the effect of his works on orthodoxy.

⁸ Cragg 169.

⁹ See Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, A new edition in eight volumes (London, Strand: T Cadell, 1838) 2: 155-246.

¹⁰ See E R Norman, *Church and History in England 177-1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 23.

¹¹ Such as The Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor (established by Wilberforce in collaboration with Bishops Shute Barrington and Porteus, and Sir Thomas Bernard in 1796), the Society for Enforcing the King's Proclamation against Immorality and Profaneness (established by Wilberforce and seventeen bishops in 1787), the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and many others devoted to the

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any overt reference to the various Establishment missionary organs such as the SPCK, SPCG, Porteous's plan for the 'Civilisation and Conversion of the Negroes in the West Indies', Horsley's 1799 Bill to regulate the slave trade or Granville Sharp's efforts and Wilberforce's extended campaign against both the trade and slavery itself.¹² The only remarks we have in this connection are a disparaging reference to Edward Cooper's interest in the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1816,¹³ some veiled allusions to the slave trade in *Emma* and an even more indirect allusion to Sir Thomas's estates in Antigua in *Mansfield Park*.¹⁴

Similarly, apart from the well-known references to Sherlock's and Blair's sermons,¹⁵ Austen makes no mention of other earlier or contemporary sermon writers or preachers (other than the Revd. John Rawston(e) Papillon, rector of Chawton and the Revd Joseph Sherer, vicar of Godmersham,¹⁶ or family members such as Edward Cooper and her brothers, James and Henry). Yet, as Irene Collins argues, Hoadley's, Clarke's and Tillotson's sermons were probably the staple fare of country pulpits in Austen's time.¹⁷

On the ecclesiastical front, much needed reform was accomplished when Sir Thomas Scott passed his Act of Residence in 1802 and during the Evangelically-influenced Spencer Perceval administration (1812-1813) when the Stipendiary Bill was passed for graded curate increases (proportionate to the size of their parishes). As we have seen in the first chapter,

improvement of conditions of the poor, establishing hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, places for the homeless and destitute pregnant women and societies for preventing cruelty to animals. See E R Norman 25.

¹² Norman 26-27.

¹³ L 467.

¹⁴ MP 178-79 and E 300-301. See also the remarks of Edward Said in his post-colonial essay, 'Jane Austen and Empire' in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion: Contemporary Critical Essays*. New Casebooks ed. Judy Simons (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan) 1997: 107-123.

¹⁵ On Sherlock, see L 406. On Blair's *History*, see NA 109 and on his sermons, see MP 92-93.

¹⁶ On Papillon see L 134, 139, 142. According to Austen, Mr Sherer was 'a little too eager sometimes in his delivery, but that is to me a better extreme than the want of animation'. See L 339.

¹⁷ There was a great demand for the sermons of Benjamin Hoadley (Sherlock's old opponent from St Catherine days), Dr Samuel Clarke's (1675-1729) and Archbishop John Tillotson's (1630-1694), the leader of the Latitudinarian party, dubbed the 'Apostle of Morality'. The fact that all three were Latitudinarians and Clarke an Arian, does not seem to have mattered. Strict orthodoxy does not seem to have been a necessary requirement in an age that did not regard originality in the pulpit as necessary, or even desirable: a well-written sermon by some learned divine was considered infinitely superior to the efforts of the local parson who might well be deficient in learning and rhetoric. See also Collins 97.

multiple incumbency had been an issue for a long time but was most pertinently and urgently addressed during the first decades of the nineteenth century when Evangelicalism made its effects felt. Or, as Fleishman puts it, ‘the issue of multiple incumbency was therefore a *cause célèbre* of English national life during the time Austen was composing *Mansfield Park*.¹⁸ Neither of these Parliamentary Acts are mentioned by Austen, yet there is evidence in her novels of the effects of this legislation.

Austen not only refrains from commenting on the above, but with one or two slight exceptions such as the fleeting and ambiguous reference to Godwin¹⁹ in a personal letter, makes no overt mention of current philosophical trends. That she, and her family, were aware of the works of Price, Priestly, Tooke, Wilkes, Holcroft, Wollstonecraft, Paine and Voltaire has been argued cogently by several critics.²⁰ And it is equally probable that she was aware of the works of Butler, Paley, Watson, Horsey, Horne and especially Burke, who wrote against them.²¹ However, as we shall see later in the chapter on *Mansfield Park* where we pay particular attention to Mary Crawford’s ‘smart talk’, we shall see that Austen shows greater awareness of current philosophical thought than is often recognised.

¹⁸ Avrom Fleishman, ‘*Mansfield Park* in its Time’ in *Jane Austen Critical Assessments* ed. Ian Littlewood (East Sussex: Helm, 1998) 118-132. See especially 120.

¹⁹ Austen writes: ‘The Pickfords are in Bath & have called here... He is as raffish in his appearance as I could wish every Disciple of Godwin to be’, L 133. Chapman suggests that Jane Austen was probably acquainted with *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St Leon* (1799). L 133. On Godwin and Austen, see Peter Knox-Shaw, ‘Sense and Sensibility, Godwin and the Empiricists’, *Cambridge Quarterly* 27: 3 (Nov/Dec 1998): 183-208.

²⁰ See, for example, Kirkham 47-50 and Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), who argues that Austen’s works, and in particular *Mansfield Park*, are anti-Jacobin.

²¹ Paley, Watson, Horsley and Horne responded to Paine’s *Age of Reason* (1795). Earlier, Burke had answered Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791) in his *Reflections on the Revolution*, a work of which the Austens would have had some knowledge, even if they were not personally sympathetic to him after his impeachment of their friend Warren Hastings. (It will be remembered that the Austens looked after Warren Hastings’s young son who died, and that Warren Hastings was godfather to Austen’s cousin, Eliza Hancock/Feuillide/Austen). On the putative influence of Burke on Austen, see Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (cited above), who reads Austen’s works as a Burkean defence of conservative morality against Jacobin writings. See also David Monaghan, ‘*Mansfield Park* and Evangelicalism: A Reassessment’, in *Jane Austen Critical Assessments* ed. Ian Littlewood (East Sussex: Helm, 1998) who argues that Austen’s allegiance is with Burke rather than Wilberforce and Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971) 55; see also 46, 111, 128. See also Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London, 1979) and Anne K Mellor, ‘English Women Writers and the French Revolution’, in *Rebel Daughters, Women and the French Revolution*, ed. S E Melzer and L W Rabine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Yet, while the above theological or philosophical issues claimed attention during the 1790's, the main ecclesiastical issue when Austen was publishing her novels (1811–1817) seems to have been Evangelicalism. The Austen family, at least at first, consciously distanced themselves from this movement, although family tradition alleges that later (after 1816), when he was presented to the Steventon living, Henry became 'a zealous Preacher of the Gospel, according to the religious Views of the Calvinistic portion of the Evangelical Clergy, and so consistently remained to his life's end'.²² The reason for the Austen family's initial dissociation from Evangelicalism could have stemmed from the fact that Austen's father and brothers were Oxford men, and Cambridge (under the spiritual aegis of Joseph and Isaac Milner) was the academic Evangelical stronghold. Furthermore, the incumbents in the Austen's neighbourhood and other clergy with whom they socialised, were mostly Oxford graduates.

Although the Austens may have appreciated the Evangelicals' defence of orthodox doctrine and concurred with Joseph Milner's distaste for 'introducing a pompous display of reasoning into religion', they nevertheless disliked the reforming 'zeal' of some of the more vociferous Evangelicals and their centralization of regeneration.²³ The Evangelicalism of Austen's cousin, the Revd Edward Cooper, particularly irritated her. In separate letters to Cassandra, she calls the young Edward a 'pompous sermon-writer & a domineering Brother' (*L* 260) and likewise disparages his more mature sermons and missionary zeal: 'We do not much like Mr Cooper's new Sermons, — they are fuller of Regeneration and Conversion than ever – with the addition of his Zeal in the Cause of the Bible Society' (*L* 467).²⁴ This dislike of 'zeal' may have been owing to the Austen constitution, their pragmatism, high estimation of 'balance' and 'good sense' and their entail of high Churchmanship.²⁵ Or, in the case of Austen herself, it may have arisen simply from a personal aversion to her arrogant cousin Edward Cooper. One cannot be sure of Austen's attitude to Evangelicalism when she died,

²² Lefroy MS., quoted in *Family Record* 236. See also Alistair MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991) 3.

²³ Irene Collins 44.

²⁴ The sermons were probably *Practical and Familiar Sermons* (1809) and *Two Sermons Preached at Wolverhampton* (1816). See *Family Record* 140-41.

²⁵ *Memoir* 231.

but one can surmise that, given her favourite brother, Henry's, recent predilection towards it, it must have been somewhat softened. His Evangelical tendencies (from 1816 onwards) seem to demonstrate that family views can and do change. It is also testimony to the way in which Evangelicalism percolated through society, reaching even the previously Oxford strongholds of Hampshire and affecting members of the most matter-of-fact and unemotional families.

Henry's insistence in his *Biographical Notice* of Austen's orthodoxy and her tendency to be 'thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature',²⁶ although possibly exaggerated, provides further hints of increased seriousness, perhaps even anxiety. This induces MacDonagh to speculate that later Austen 'also respected and even envied the Evangelical school in the Church of England, whose salvation seemed the more secure for the totality of their conversion'.²⁷ Certitude of salvation may have been one of the things Austen lacked in her Christian life, and the positive certainty with which Evangelical Anglicans viewed their salvation may well have been a source of admiration, or even envy, for Austen who was apparently 'fearful of giving offence to God'. In this matter of spiritual diffidence she was not alone, for her 'dear Dr Johnson' also suffered from feelings of unworthiness. Doubting that he had 'fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted', he confided to Dr Adams that he feared he would be 'Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastinglly'.²⁸

On the other hand, perhaps the Evangelical assurance of salvation irritated Austen and her family. As a conservative median Anglican, at one time, Austen might well have regarded such certitude as 'enthusiastic' and presumptuous. Earlier, Austen disparaged Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of A Wife* in her youthful work, *Catharine or the Bower* (1792), where she amends 'Bishop Seccar's [sic] *Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England, with a*

²⁶ 'On serious subjects she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation, and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church.' Henry Austen, *Biographical Notice of the Author* (written Dec 1817) prefixed to the first edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (1818), rev 1833, rpt. in R W Chapman, *The Novels of Jane Austen* (1934, rpt. 1965) 5: 1-9.

²⁷ MacDonagh 7.

²⁸ JOHNSON: "As I cannot be sure that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned. DR. ADAMS: What do you mean damned Sir? JOHNSON (passionately and loudly): Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastinglly . . . BOSWELL: But may not a man attain to such a degree of hope as not to be uneasy from the fear of death? JOHNSON: A man may have such a degree of hope as to keep him quiet. You see I am not quiet, from the vehemence with which I talk; but I do not despair . . ." See Boswell's *Life of Johnson* in 6 vols. ed. G B Hill, rev. L F Powell, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) 2: 299-300.

Discourse on Confirmation' (1770/ 89) to More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) and allows Mrs Peterson to mock overly strict Evangelical notions.²⁹ In January 1809, in a letter to Cassandra, Austen states categorically that she dislikes both *Coelebs* and Evangelicals: 'You have by no means raised my curiosity after Caleb [sic]; – My disinclination for it before was affected, but now it is real; I do not like the Evangelicals.' (L 256)

Although there is no direct evidence that Austen changed this conservative (median Anglican) stance, she not only demonstrates a greater concern with religious things in her last years, but appears to re-evaluate the Evangelicals. Her earlier suspicion of them seems to have given way to a slightly more sympathetic assessment. In November 1814, five years after her disparaging comment about *Coelebs* and the Evangelicals (L 103, 256), Austen advises her niece, Anna Austen, not to be put off by the religiosity of her would-be suitor, John Plum(p)tre, admitting that those who are Evangelical 'from Reason and Feeling must be happiest and safest'.

And as to there being any objection from his *Goodness*, from the danger of his becoming even Evangelical, I cannot admit *that*. I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest & safest. – Do not be frightened from the connection by your brothers having most wit. Wisdom is better than Wit, & in the long run will certainly have the laugh on her side; & don't be frightened by the idea of his acting more strictly up to the precepts of the New Testament than others. (L 410)

As Chapman dryly observes, 'This is not the language of apathy'. And as he further remarks, this quotation indicates a difference in the understanding of Austen and her niece concerning the word 'Evangelical'.³⁰ Perhaps Austen felt that the scrupulousness of the way in which she practised her religion was no different from the Evangelicals, but *sans* their terminology and missionary zeal.

²⁹ Chapman, MW 232; see also the reference to *Practical Piety* in Austen's Letters 287. This reference implies a similar dislike of Secker, whom Walpole disparagingly called a 'Jesuitical bishop' See *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann* (London: Oxford University Press 1960) 4: 133.

³⁰ *Facts and Problems* 115.

One cannot be sure of Austen's attitude to Evangelicalism when she died, but one can surmise that given her favourite brother, Henry's, recent predilection towards it, Austen's earlier hostility towards it must have been somewhat softened. Henry's Evangelical tendencies (from 1816 onwards) seem to demonstrate that family views can and do change. Moreover it is quite probable that the fun-loving Henry's Evangelicalism would have been of an entirely different cast from that of their pompous, narrow-minded cousin, the Revd. Edward Cooper of Hamstall Ridware.³¹ The very fact that various forms of Evangelical principles were manifesting themselves in diverse median Anglican households throughout the country, is testimony to the way in which Evangelicalism percolated through society, reaching even the previously Oxford strongholds of Hampshire, and affecting members of the most matter-of-fact and unemotional families such as the Austens.

Ultimately one can only speculate on this perceived change of attitude³² in Austen (if it does signify a change) but if it does, and if she experienced a rethinking of attitudes and opinions on an important spiritual subject, it may help one appreciate a possibly similar change in Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. Marianne does not become Evangelical, but she 'repents' and shows a greater preoccupation with 'serious' things towards the end of the novel, endeavouring (or so it seems) to 'act more strictly up to the precepts of the New Testament' (*L* 410).

More significantly, Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, has been seen by many as fulfilling all the requirements for an Evangelical heroine: a strong sense of rectitude with a particular purity of mind and almost excessive modesty, a lack of wit, a conspicuous lack of female accomplishments (music and drawing), a dislike of amateur theatricals, personal display and flirting, a suspicion of Henry's rakish tendencies, frequent recourse to quiet reflection and mediation and her quoting more than once from the Evangelical Cowper's poetry (although neither of the references are to religious or devotional poems).³³

³¹ *L* 410 (to Cassandra Austen, 8-9 Sept 1816).

³² This ambiguity has also intrigued feminists, see for example, Poovey 173; 265 n.

³³ Fanny refers in *MP* 56 to the following lines from *The Task*: 'Ye fallen avenues! Once more I mourn / Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice / That yet a remnant of your race survives (Bk 1, 'The Sofa' lines 338-40). Many of Cowper's poems, including *The Task*, are said to testify to Newton's influence. See Lord David Cecil, *The Stricken Deer: The Life of Cowper* (London: Constable, 1933) 111-122. In *MP* 431, during mention of Fanny's homesickness for Mansfield Park there is an allusion to Cowper's *Tiriconium or A Review of Schools* (1785), where the relevant lines are: 'Th' indented stick, that loses day by day / Notch after notch, till all are smoothed away, / Bears witness, long ere his dismission came, / With what intense desire he wants his home.'

AUSTEN'S 'PRACTICAL PIETY'

As a Median Anglican (a middle position between 'High' and 'Low' church)³⁴ Austen's earlier critics praised her for presenting a submerged form of Christianity in her novels and for adopting a policy of discreet reticence to distance herself from politically and morally tendentious writers.³⁵ Even earlier, Austen was commended for what Archbishop Whateley (one of the celebrated 'Noetics' of Oriel College, Oxford)³⁶ described, in an unsigned review in the *Quarterly Review*, as a 'deep and enlightened piety'— a sincere, but unzealous, Anglican piety. Whateley's carefully chosen 'enlightened' (with its connotations of eighteenth-century rationalism) is intended to distinguish Austen's 'tasteful' piety from the more overtly (and in his opinion, 'tasteless') piety of Hannah More. Later he makes the comparison explicit:

Miss Austen has the merit (in our judgement most essential) of being evidently a Christian writer; a merit which is much enhanced, both on the score of good taste, and of practical utility, by her religion being not at all obtrusive. She might defy the most fastidious critics to call any of her novels (as *Coelebs* was designated, we will not say, altogether without reason) a 'dramatic sermon'. The subject is rather alluded to, and that incidentally, than studiously brought forward and dwelt upon.³⁷

The phrase 'dramatic sermon' refers to the unfavourable review of *Coelebs* by Sydney Smith in the *Edinburgh Review* in which Smith flayed More, and then apologized in a left-handed way, saying that 'if Mrs More had not belonged to a trumpery gospel faction, and had

³⁴ MacDonagh 3.

³⁵ Such as the 'Jacobin novelists' such as Inchbald, Bage, Holcroft and Godwin. See Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 162-66.

³⁶ Alec Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Age*, Pelican History of the Church 5 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 40.

³⁷ *Quarterly Review* 24 (January, 1821) 352-76. On Whateley, see Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) 162.

not degraded the human understanding to the trash and folly of Methodism, she would have been one of the most valuable writers of the day'.³⁸ As a Latitudinarian, Whateley was no friend of the Evangelicals, yet, while showing his distaste for 'dramatic sermons', he was careful to maintain that he still regarded the Christian component in literature as 'most essential'. Austen's distinction (in his eyes) is that she manifests this essential requirement with 'good taste' and 'practical utility'. Her draw-card is not that she has religion, but that she has it unobtrusively.

Perhaps the female obtrusiveness of More in traditionally male-dominated religious demesnes bothered Whateley, and his objection to her lack of 'taste' is only a red herring to conceal this. Although he cannot fault her decorum (as she never abandons her 'properness'), perhaps her frank essays into politics, doctrine and moral reform irritated him, and he attempts to use aesthetic arguments to conceal his peevishness. On the other hand, Austen is subtler than More, and can be said to hoodwink her patriarchal critics so that even the most fastidious cannot fault her, and indeed praise her for not 'being fanatical' and not 'writing dramatic sermons'. Claudia Johnson similarly detects a gender-driven discomfort in Whateley. She observes that, 'In 1821 Archbishop Whatley praises Austen for declining the didactic posture – which assumes the ambition as well as the authority to teach the public – and for opting instead to hint at matters of serious concern unobtrusively and unpretentiously.' She concludes that Whateley thus 'unwittingly began a tradition of praising Austen for what she did not do.' In a way, this chapter attempts to show what Austen *did* do doctrinally – but of course, under cover.³⁹

Various critics have advanced reasons for Austen's 'cover'. QD Leavis, who describes Austen's moral outlook as 'a deeply religious outlook, even if concealed', suggests that she camouflaged it for fear of family ridicule, 'and with such a family code of unfailing jesting to live up to, her tendency would be to conceal it from her coevals as far as possible'. DW Harding and Gary Kelly also suggest reasons for Austen's much-bruited 'religious reticence'.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, few besides Johnson (and myself) recognise that Austen's cover

³⁸ *The Edinburgh Review* 14 (1809): 146, 51.

³⁹ See Johnson (introd) xv.

⁴⁰ Q D Leavis, *Collected Essays, The Englishness of the English Novel*. vol 1, ed G Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 116. See also D W Harding, *Regulated Hatred and Other Essays in Jane Austen*, ed. Monica Lawlor (London: Athlone Press, 1997) 71 and Gary Kelly, 'Religion and Politics', in *The*

was occasioned by a perceived lack of authority, although they enquire into her theological stance.

Thus, Marilyn Butler comments on the fact that Whateley deliberately couples such ostensibly different writers as Austen and Hannah More, suggesting that in his association of Austen with the Evangelical More, ‘he [Whateley] makes no overt theological difference between them’.⁴¹ As Butler pertinently observes, this raises the issue of what kind of Christian Jane Austen was taken by her contemporaries to be. Among other things, this chapter takes up this challenge, and goes further in probing the ways in which she forayed into overtly ‘male’ religious areas.

Comments in Austen’s letters, passages from her prayers and excerpts from some of her novels are adduced to show that she was not only interested in contributing to current religious thought, but that she questions certain key Latitudinarian assumptions, promoting an enlightened orthodox piety, which, by nature of its attempt to contain oppositional (paternal and proto-feminist) ‘voices’, often comes across as ambivalent. As one writing in a strong Anglican continuum, it is not surprising to find echoes of the High Churchly position of Hooker, the exactingness of Law, the expediency of Paley, the personal rigour and urbanity of Johnson and the rationality and clarity of Sherlock. At other times there are some surprising (and less popular) Evangelical nuances which cannot be ignored.

Gary Kelly argues that Austen indirectly signals her Anglican dogma by her choice of narrative method. By eschewing the first-person mode (which he maintains was favoured by Jacobins), Austen avoids the ‘promotion of reforming agendas’ and pursued what Kelly calls the ‘middle way’ offered by the Church of England, which made ‘salvation the responsibility of the individual, though guided by priest and church doctrine’. Thus Kelly contends that when political, social and religious reformers were all clamouring to be heard, Austen adopts a narrative structure her readers would have understood as ‘a secularised homology for the Anglican position’.⁴² Although these assumptions (in particular, the ‘narratorial signals’ have

Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen, ed. E Copeland and J McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 149-67, who argued that Austen’s moral standards were intrinsically superior to the rest of her society.

⁴¹ *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* 162.

⁴² Gary Kelly 152-53, 161-62.

subsequently been challenged) Kelly's observation is telling for it foregrounds what is usually forgotten, Austen's Anglicanism and its importance to her.

Although feminists (such as Johnson and Poovey and others) rightly praise Austen for being bold enough to allow her heroines the freedom of choice to pursue their own happiness, the danger of this approach is that it can become too exclusive or simplistic. As I argue, Austen endorses this autonomy and champions the individual's exertion of her right to personal happiness, but at the same time shows that this impulse needs to be tempered by self-discipline or it will result in selfishness. The control she seems to advocate, which is, significantly, voluntary and free of patriarchal constraint, is sometimes expressed in traditional Christian discourse, and other times concealed in euphemisms such as 'duty', 'inner guide' or 'serious reflection' – stock terms from the lexicons of people as diverse as Addison, Johnson and other eighteenth-century moralists, conduct book writers and Latitudinarians.⁴³ Occasionally Austen rejects these 'safe' and acceptable modes of euphemistic, patriarchal or sometimes Latitudinarian-connotative abstractions and signals her own highly individual yet orthodox-based, theological position in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. In the former, through Marianne's invocation of Evangelical-type discourse, Austen probes the nature of personal, female atonement and in the latter, through Edmund and Fanny's orthodox paternalistic discourse, she repudiates ultra-Latitudinarian or Freethinking tendencies in Mary Crawford and advocates formal daily devotions.

That Austen escaped censure for venturing into such traditionally male-dominated demesnes and criticism for what could be construed as Evangelical discourse, bears testimony to her subtle submerging of these issues in a matrix of domestic-dramatic comedy, and the clever and often ironic use she makes of different discourses to disguise her own voice.

'A HUMBLE, BELIEVING CHRISTIAN'

Jane Austen's personal piety, documented by family members, has drawn much comment. There have always been those who have doubted not the truth, but the extent of her personal piety, and by extension, the spiritual depth of the clergymen portrayed in her novels.

⁴³ See Babb 6-32; Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), Myra Stokes, *The Language of Jane Austen: A Study of Some Aspects of her Vocabulary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) 35, 49, 165-66. On 'duty' (and its link with 'rationality') see Stokes 147. See also Ruderman 150 ff.

Defending the latter, Chapman (also quoted in the section above) avers that, ‘It was an age in which religious observance took up a great deal of people’s time and their thoughts. It is impossible to suppose that the practice of religion, by good and thoughtful people, was either insincere or merely formal’.⁴⁴ Chapman’s indirect validation of Austen’s piety (through a defence of her fictional clergymen) indicates an important concern that has attracted critics as diverse as G E Mitton, Elizabeth Jenkins, Mary Lascelles, Frank Bradbrook, D D Devlin, Q D Leavis, Marilyn Butler, Irene Collins, Oliver MacDonagh, David Monaghan, Gary Kelly, Avrom Fleishman, Bruce Stovel and others. Yet there have always been those, like Gilbert Ryle, who argue for the secular rather than the Christian basis of Austen’s philosophy.⁴⁵ And a cursory glance at the written body of Austen family tradition provides ample documentation of the sincerity and depth of Austen’s Anglicanism.

In *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, claims that the Austen family were sincere and devout Christians, that the Revd George Austen and his sons, James and Henry, were conscientious clergymen, that Frank (Francis) was ‘a very religious man’ and drew attention to himself by kneeling at church, and that Cassandra and Jane were devoted, if reserved, Anglicans.⁴⁶ Furthermore, his description of Austen’s personal reserve is virtually a commonplace:

I do not venture to speak of her religious principles; that was a subject on which she was more inclined to *think* and *act* than to *talk*, and so I shall imitate her reserve; satisfied to show how much of Christian love and humility abounded in her heart, without presuming to lay bare the roots whence those graces grew.⁴⁷ [Austen-Leigh’s italics]

⁴⁴ R W Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948) 111.

⁴⁵ Ryle (106-172) maintains that Jane Austen’s moral system was a secular, Aristotelian ethic-cum aesthetic’ and that her ‘moral Weltanschaung was akin to that of Lord Shaftesbury’ and Knox-Shaw mentions Ryle approvingly in ‘Sense and Sensibility, Godwin and the Empiricists’, *Cambridge Quarterly* 27: 3 (Nov/Dec 1998): 183-208.

⁴⁶ J E Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen London* (Richard Bentley: New Burlington Street, 1870) 23.

⁴⁷ *Memoir* 125-26.

He suggests (much like More's Mr Stanley) that the reserve with which Austen treated her religious principles was entirely in keeping with her Median Anglican background, which, though not necessarily 'lukewarm', regarded 'enthusiasm' with distaste.⁴⁸ Austen-Leigh persuades his more exacting Victorian readers that Austen's religious reticence did not imply a lack of sincerity or depth, but was an essentially practical religion in which her humility and consideration of others was demonstrated in many thoughtful and charitable acts:

She was a humble, believing Christian . . . She had always sought, as it were by instinct, to promote the happiness of all who came within her influence, and doubtless she had her reward in the peace of mind which was granted her in her last days. Her sweetness of temper never failed her . . .⁴⁹

Although her nephew idealistically claims this philanthropy was instinctive, Austen's letters and novels seem to show that it is due to self-exertion. While generally sceptical of natural benevolence, her attitude towards self-discipline and self-denial is complex. She endorses the right of women to seek happiness and self-fulfilment (as Johnson and Poovey argue and as discussed in an earlier paragraph)⁵⁰ so long as this is not merely selfish. This is endorsed by the frequently ignored fact that Austen's heroines seem to be rewarded for their unwavering commitment to Christian principles (or 'virtue') as much as for their quests for meaningful happiness in 'equal' marriages.⁵¹

Judging from the evidence of her prayers, letters and novels, Austen who was no prude, and who portrays heroines who are more than amply rewarded in their quests for

⁴⁸ MacDonagh writes: 'By its very origin and nature, Anglicanism was a median religion. By upbringing, disposition and reflection alike, Jane Austen . . . a median member of the Church of England in her day. 'Median' was far from 'lukewarm'. Hooker and Butler, to look no further, were archetypes of the median, finders of the middle ground.' (4).

⁴⁹ *Memoir* 226.

⁵⁰ Claudia Johnson 73 -93.

⁵¹ Using Aristotle as her basis, Ruderman reads Austen as advocating the Classical principles of duty and moderation, suggesting that virtue and not individualism leads to personal happiness. Thus she maintains: 'Happiness depends on a firmness of principle, which is not an insistence on one's "right", but a broader conception of how to behave' (Ruderman 22).

happiness in marriage, nevertheless maintains a fine distinction: she does not herself appear to be have been bent on the *wholesale* pursuit of her own happiness, nor does she portray her heroines as entitled to do so. In fact the opposite seems true, for, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen is severe on Marianne Dashwood who is presented as selfishly promoting her own happiness at the expense of others and approving of Elinor who is prepared to forfeit hers for the good of others. Similarly, Mary's charming selfishness in *Mansfield Park* is deprecated and Fanny Price's less attractive notions of duty held up for our approbation.

Austen's private letters to family members, friends and acquaintances corroborate the pictures of sincere, yet unostentatious, piety sketched above. Most of these religious references in Austen's letters date from 1813-1814, during the composition and publication of *Mansfield Park* – a period seemingly characterized by a greater devoutness, which persisted until her death on 18 July, 1817. These remarks refer, *inter alia*, to an appreciation of a painting of Christ by Benjamin West (L 507), a eulogy on Swedish Protestantism (L 508), disappointment that Sir John Moore did not testify to his faith in his dying moments (L 261) and the censure of an adulterous acquaintance's partaking of the sacrament (L 197).⁵² Despite a flippant comment in an earlier letter (L 127), Austen's attitude to adultery seems to have been one of reprobation and, perhaps for this reason, she refused to continue reading aloud to the family Mme de Genlis's *Alphonsine*, where a married woman is found in the arms of a page (L 173).⁵³ Moreover, unless one reads it as an implicit and ironic criticism of patriarchal double standards, the severity with which Austen seems to treat Maria Bertram's adultery in *Mansfield Park* seems to corroborate this idea.

As Austen's health declined, her letters reveal a greater awareness of God's presence and the imminence of eternity. She refers to God's providence and the final judgement ('but the Providence of God has restored me – & may I be more fit to appear before him when I

⁵² Austen writes: 'This is a sad story about Mrs. Powlett. I should not have suspected her of such a thing. – She staid the Sacrament I remember, the last time that you and I did.' (L 1: 197) As Communion was taken less frequently in the eighteenth-century Anglican Church (sometimes only once a quarter), it was approached, as Sykes observes, with 'a sense of awe, and upon occasion with a haunting fear lest unworthy participation should provoke not a blessing but a curse upon them'. The 'curse' refers to the Pauline warning: 'For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body' (1 Cor 11: 29). Accordingly, many communicants 'examined themselves' or even fasted before they partook of the Sacrament. Johnson is recorded as being particularly distressed about his unworthiness on one occasion and seeking advice from Bishop Hume, the Duke of Newcastle's chaplain. See Boswell's *Life of Johnson* 2: 299-300.

⁵³ Unless she was merely deferring to Mrs Austen's, Cassandra's and Martha's scruples.

am summoned, then I should have been now!' (*L* 495) and in May 1817 expresses a calm resignation to the will of God: 'But I am getting too near to complaint. It has been the appointment of God, however secondary causes may have operated' (*L* 498). On her tombstone in Winchester Cathedral, her brother Henry emphasises her patience and Christian hopes and eulogises the 'benevolence of her heart, / the sweetness of her temper'.⁵⁴ If these descriptions of Austen have been heightened into hagiography by brotherly or family affection, as is now generally believed, MacDonagh reminds one that 'however superficial or marmoreal, this particular judgement on religion can scarcely have done much more than exaggerate or simplify the reality' [that she was privately a deeply religious person].⁵⁵

An acquaintance from Chawton from 1813-16, endorses Austen's sincere yet reticent piety, but puts her finger on a hidden problem:

She had on all the subjects of enduring religious feeling the deepest and strongest religious convictions, but a contact with loud and noisy exponents of the then popular religious phase made her reticent to almost a fault. She had to suffer something in the way of reproach from those who believed she might have used her genius to greater effect . . . but . . . think I see her now defending what she thought was the real province of a delineator of life and manners, and declaring her belief that example, and not 'direct preaching' was all that a novelist could afford properly to exhibit⁵⁶

Perhaps Mrs Barrett means a *female* novelist and the adverb 'properly' is not accidental. Austen 'exhibits' her religious interest and retained her 'properness', but at the cost of not pleasing some contemporary fanatics. Her personal distaste of the 'loud and noisy' exponents of religion; the pompous orthodox Revd Samuel Blackall of Emanuel College, Cambridge⁵⁷ – and the equally distasteful loud Calvinism of her cousin Edward Cooper⁵⁸ are

⁵⁴ Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Viking / Penguin, 1997) 272.

⁵⁵ MacDonagh 5.

⁵⁶ *Family Record* 210.

⁵⁷ In a letter to her brother Francis Austen (3-6 July 1813), Austen describes Blackall who had recently married Susannah Lewis and succeeded to a rich living at Cadbury, Somerset, thus: 'He was a piece of Perfection, noisy Perfection himself, which I recollect with regard.' *L* 86, Le Faye 216.

not only well known, but may be partly parodied in the odious Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* and far from admirable Mr Elton in *Emma*, pictures of clerical insufficiency that drew criticism from some of her more scrupulous acquaintance.⁵⁹

Without gainsaying the strong personal Christian convictions that her family, and in particular Henry, stresses, Austen never remotely approaches the later-life austerity of More, who seemed bent in her last decades on renouncing nearly all secular pleasures. Until the end, Austen retained not only a lively interest in earthly pleasures, but an incorrigible sense of humour that refused to exempt even the bones of holy men from her satire. Thus two days before her death, on 15 July 1817, Austen scribbled some frivolous verses on the occasion of the St Swithun's Day Races in Winchester, entitled *Venta*⁶⁰ Although a stanch upholder of *Ecclesia Anglicana* and her doctrine, Austen was nevertheless mischievous enough to poke fun at the venerable prelate, William of Wykham of Winchester, the 'old Saint' who makes 'but one spring from his shrine to the roof / of the Palace' in order to harangue his 'subjects rebellious' and curse them with rain on their race-day. Although privately religious and never ridiculing 'what is wise and good'⁶¹ one can infer from hints in her letters and novels that in outward, less important things Austen was herself a 'subject rebellious' (her subtlety and indirection saving her from detection) but that inwardly she attached a great deal of importance to the doctrines and teaching of her church.

This might not have always been reflected in her secular reading,⁶² which has elicited much more comment than her more shadowy religious (or related) reading of which there is

⁵⁸ L 145 (8-9 Sept 1816): 'We do not much like Mr Cooper's new Sermons, – they are fuller of Regeneration & Conversion than ever – with the addition of his zeal in the cause of the Bible Society – '.

⁵⁹ In her *Opinions of Emma*, Austen records that Mr Sherer was 'Displeased with my pictures of clergymen' Chapman, MW 437 and in her *Opinions of Mansfield Park*, that Mrs Wroughton 'Thought the Authoress wrong, in such times as these, to draw such Clergymen as Mr Collins and Mr Elton', Chapman, MW 439.

⁶⁰ *Minor Works* 451-52.

⁶¹ Elizabeth says to Darcy: 'I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies *do* divert me, I own . . .' PP 57.

⁶² See Mary Lacelles, 'Reading and Response' in *The Art of Jane Austen* 41-83; Chapman, *Facts and Problems* 37-40; Frank Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), D D Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1975), Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994) 97, 145, 169, 190, Margaret Kirkham, *Feminist Fiction*, ed Janet Todd, David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1982) and *Family Record* 54-56, 90-91, 102, 104, 116, 127, 135, 141, 148, 158, 163.

unfortunately little record. Thus one is forced to piece together various stray references in her letters, novels or memoirs, such as to her cousin Edward Cooper's sermons (*L* 467), her brother, Henry's sermons (*L* 468), the Revd James Fordyce's *Sermons* (*PP* 68), Hugh Blair's *Sermons* (*MP* 92), the Liturgy' (*MP* 340) and the Psalms (*E* 174). Attention has been paid to Austen's references to Buchanan and Clarkson,⁶³ Godwin,⁶⁴ Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, (*L* 1690), Secker's *Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England, with a Discourse on Confirmation*' (1770/ 89), disparaging remarks about More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (*L* 256; 259), a reference to 'More's latest work' (probably *Practical Piety*: *L* 287), a devotional work by William Vickers,⁶⁵ Dr Thomas Percival's *A Father's Instructions consisting of Moral Tales, Fables and Reflections, Designed to promote the Love of Virtue*, 1768 (*L* 219)⁶⁶ Ann Murray's *Mentoria*⁶⁷ and the works of other conduct writers such as Mary Brunton, Elizabeth Hamilton, Laetitia Hawkins and Elizabeth West.

Irene Collins and D D Devlin argue that Austen, as an Anglican clergyman's daughter and a self-confessed Christian, would have read prominent divines such as Butler, Paley, Secker, Hoadley, Tillotson, Samuel Clarke and Hugh Blair.⁶⁸ Although Austen never mentions Butler, Devlin argues that Austen's works reflect his influence and that her notions of virtue and benevolence are based on his *Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue*.⁶⁹ Collins maintains that as ordinands, Austen's brothers would have been required to have read

⁶³ Possibly Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia* (1811) and possibly Clarkson's *The Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (1808). See *L* 289 and the comments of Le Faye 198 and Chapman, *Facts and Problems* 115.

⁶⁴ See Peter Knox-Shaw, 'Sense and Sensibility, Godwin and the Empiricists', *Cambridge Quarterly* 27: 3 (Nov/Dec 1998): 183-208.

⁶⁵ See Bruce Stovel, 'A Nation Improving in Religion': Jane Austen's Prayers and Their Place in Her Life and Art', *Persuasions* 16 (1994) 189.

⁶⁶ Given to her by her brother Edward. See Deirdre Le Faye, note to letter no. 56, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 392.

⁶⁷ Austen gave her childhood copy of Ann Murray's *Mentoria* and her copy of *Elegant Extracts*, to her niece, Anna Austen. See *Family Record* 116.

⁶⁸ Collins 43 and Devlin 67-68.

⁶⁹ Devlin 58-75, 127-35. Cf. William Sayres's discussion of Butler's putative influence on Austen in his doctoral dissertation, 'The Discourse of Gratitude in the Works of Thomas Sherlock, Francis Hutcheson and Hannah More' (diss., University of New Hampshire, 1989) 70.

William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) at Oxford, and that *Mansfield Park* shows Paley's influence, for Edmund Bertram's defence of the clergy is 'as utilitarian as spiritual'.⁷⁰

Against these speculative observations, one can confidently assert Austen's specific mention of Bishop Thomas Sherlock in a letter to her niece Anna Austen (28 Sept 1814). Here in reply to a (no longer extant) letter of Anna's in which she appears to be considering mentioning them in a novel, Austen affirms: 'I am very fond of Sherlock's Sermons, prefer them to almost any. –' (L 406). Her warm admiration for Sherlock may have been insincere; she might have been attempting to ingratiate herself with her niece, but the frank relations that existed between them make this unlikely. I believe that Austen would have found Sherlock particularly congenial. Besides their similar Tory loyalties and Royalist sympathies,⁷¹ she must have found his lucid, yet profound, exegesis intellectually stimulating, and appreciated his clarity and common-sense approach. His cogency, directness and animated style (in contrast to the more philosophical and prolix Butler and Paley) and his dry wit, must have appealed to one who inherited her mother's 'Sprack Wit'.⁷² Furthermore, Austen seems to endorse his conservative (orthodox) stance on natural depravity (as evinced in her prayers and novels), the atonement and the idea that true benevolence is only made possible by divine aid. Yet not being a divine, she does not see the necessity of expounding these issues.

Unlike Sherlock and More, who had definite targets (Natural Religion and Deism in Sherlock, and irreligion, atheism, Natural Religion, but mostly 'Nominal Christianity' in More), Austen has no doctrinal axe to grind. Similarly, unlike Sherlock's 1750 letter and More's tracts and works for the 'Great', Austen's novels have no explicit reforming agenda and could hardly (like More's *Coelebs*) be described as 'dramatic sermons'. Yet, sometimes

⁷⁰ Irene Collins 43.

⁷¹ Cf. William Sayres: 'Jane Austen's Tory family may well have approved Sherlock's record of early resistance to the Hanoverian Whigs, and discounted his later compliance as the practical recognition of political pressure to conform' in 'The Discourse of Gratitude in the Works of Thomas Sherlock, Francis Hutcheson and Hannah More' (diss., University of New Hampshire, 1989) 14.

⁷² In a letter to Mary Lloyd, who was about to become her daughter-in-law as James's second wife, Mrs Austen wrote: Tell Martha, she too shall be my Daughter, she does me honor [sic] in the Request – and Mr W: shall be my son if he pleases – don't be alarm'd my dear Martha, I have kept & will keep your secret as close as if I had been entrusted with it; which I do assure you, I never was, but found it out by my own Sprack Wit.' *Family Record* 92.

seriously, sometimes light-heartedly, and nearly always in dramatic dialogue, Austen seems to be concerned to counteract insufficient doctrinal or ecclesiastical positions and not only expose ridiculous concepts of clericality, but present a positive one.

In this chapter I concentrate on Austen's doctrine in her prayers, her ideas of personal moral reform in *Sense and Sensibility*, the devotional bases of Christian conduct and her clerical ideal in *Mansfield Park*. In my preface I mentioned that Austen might not have had the use of her own room like Mr Bennet, but nevertheless she continually exercises the right to the 'free use of [her] own understanding' (PP 112): this chapter explores to what extent she does so in traditionally non-feminine areas.

Austen's most visible documentation of her doctrine is in her prayers. These demonstrate her tacit acceptance of natural corruption and the necessity for grace as well as the individual's part in striving for self-control, charity and tolerance. In her novels she works more covertly. Through Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, she shows the need for keeping one's eye single and not allowing it to become clouded by selfish rationalization. Here, under cover of an attack on excessive sensibility, Austen portrays the necessity for self-scrutiny and sincere repentance for everyday failings. Yet, at the same time, her feminisation of these failings and Marianne's self-directed severity suggest the problems encountered when trying to rewrite doctrine without a gender-bias. Austen's struggle to break free from gendered discourse and her uneasy resolution therefore raise several far-reaching questions which this thesis can only raise, but not hope to answer.

In *Mansfield Park*, employing the patriarchal mouthpieces of Sir Thomas and Edmund Bertram during a convivial card-game, Austen covertly contributes to the debate on pluralism, non-residence and the role and efficacy of the country clergyman. And during a pleasure party to Sotherton Court, she uses Mary Crawford as the alluring embodiment of incipient Freethinking.

We begin by analysing her prayers, which are closely linked with the historical and biographical material above. They not only function as a link between her private life and her novels, but are of greater importance than generally recognised, for in them the moral issues of the novels are brought to greater theological definition.

AUSTEN'S PRAYERS

Three undated devotional prayers are attributed to Jane Austen. They survive in two manuscripts originally owned by Austen family members and later acquired by the Californian collector, William Matson Roth.⁷³ There is some speculation as to the hand, but it is now agreed that it does not signify who copied out Austen's prayers, the manuscripts of which seem to have been a family production. The more important issue is authorship, but on the basis of the inscription, 'Prayers composed by my ever dear sister Jane', most editors and critics seem content with this attribution.⁷⁴

Most critics agree that the three prayers were probably written some time after Austen's father died (21 January 1805), for Austen family devotions. It has been debated whether or not the Austen family held regular, daily family prayers or whether they were written for special occasions or Sunday evenings when the family did not attend divine service. As Austen seems to defend family prayers in *Mansfield Park*, and as there is a reference to the reading of prayers and sermons (at least on Sunday evenings) in her letters, it is probable that the Austens held daily, or at least weekly, prayers.⁷⁵ The most important thing, however, is that these prayers were composed by a devout individual to portray a collective, probably family, voice. Stovel describes the voice as that of 'the common generic

⁷³ The prayers are written on two sheets of paper of quarto size, each folded into four octavo pages. The inscription, 'Prayers composed by my ever dear sister Jane', appears on the outside of the folded quarto sheet of the first prayer which has been headed 'Evening Prayer' and under which in light pencil is the name 'Charles Austen'. The sheet has a watermark dated 1818 (the year after Austen died). R W Chapman, who edited the prayers in 1954, believed the first prayer to have been copied in Cassandra's hand. The second sheet, which has no watermark and contains no other clue to its date, comprises the unnumbered and untitled second and third prayers which Chapman thought to be in Henry Austen's hand, but other Austen experts claimed was in Austen's (Chapman, *MW* 453). At her death, Jane Austen's sister, Cassandra, left two sheets of paper containing the prayers to her niece Cassandra Esten Austen (daughter of her brother, Charles). Charles' granddaughters sold them, together with other Austen papers and memorabilia at Sotheby's in 1927 for £127, where they were acquired by the California collector, William Matson Roth. He published them, at his private press, the Colt Press, in a limited edition of a hundred copies in 1940 and donated the manuscripts to the Mills College, Oakland, where they are at present in the Rare Book Room. See Bruce Stovel, 'A Nation Improving in Religion': Jane Austen's Prayers and Their Place in Her Life and Art', *Persuasions* 16 (1994): 185.

⁷⁴ In their edition of Austen's *Catharine and Other Works* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1993), which includes the prayers, Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray accept the prayers as Austen's own, as does Stovel (185-86).

⁷⁵ 'In the evening we had the Psalms and Lessons, and a sermon at home, to which they [her nephews] were very attentive.' *L* 227.

believer, not the idiosyncratic individual',⁷⁶ and although I agree with this description in the main, the personal religious intensity, which intermittently surfaces, seems to give the prayers a more individual stamp.

Austen's three prayers are similar in structure, style and more or less the same length (one and a bit printed pages), with the third and last prayer being longer than the other two by half a page. As can be expected, her prayers are composed in an entirely different register and style from her novels. Her famous tongue-in-cheek critique of her own style in *Pride and Prejudice* ('too light, and bright, and sparkling') and her clarity, celerity of pace and incisive irony have become such critical commonplaces in Austen⁷⁷ that they have generally been taken as reliable indices to all her works. Her nephew, J E Austen-Leigh, described her novelistic style as 'clear and generally animated, while a vein of humour generally gleams through the whole'⁷⁸, and the first phrase can be said to apply equally to her prayers, for they are characterized by lucidity, succinctness and simplicity of construction. 'Animated' is also an apposite epithet for her prayers which are not dull, but obviously do not possess the same liveliness of her novels (which would be inappropriate in prayers). Here the original sense of animated, 'breathing life into' is evident, for in her prayers Austen can be described as 'breathing life into' the conventional formulation of traditional doctrines.

Not unexpectedly for an Anglican born and bred, Austen's prayers demonstrate many stylistic similarities to the 'Authorised Version' of the Bible, the Litany, the General Thanksgiving, the Order of Holy Communion and miscellaneous collects in *The Book of Common Prayer* (hereafter to be referred to as the *BCP* or occasionally, Prayer Book). A 'collect' was defined by Johnson (1755) as 'a short comprehensive prayer used at the Sacrament'— succinct prayers which collected together the 'supplications of the multitude' and purport to 'speak for the people with one voice'. As Bruce Stovel observes, a collect consists of five parts: Salutation, Ascription, Petition, Reason for Petition and Conclusion and he maintains that the same general form can be found in Austen's prayers.

However, the above needs some qualification, for, whereas almost all the *BCP* collects consist of one long sentence (containing as much doctrine as possible), Austen's

⁷⁶ Stovel 190.

⁷⁷ Letter to Cassandra, 4 February 1813, *L* 299.

⁷⁸ *Memoir* 79.

prayers consist of many shorter sentences with greater doctrinal focus. Austen's style also differs from the rounded periodic style of Cranmer in that it is simpler, more 'modern' and concise.

Stovel remarks on the general similarities between Austen's prayers and Johnson's *Prayers and Meditations* (1785) cited in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, with which Austen was familiar. However, whereas Johnson's prayers are more personal, Austen's are more general in tone. Stovel also suggests that Austen was influenced by a book she owned, *A Companion to the Altar: shewing the Necessity of a Sacramental Preparation in order to our worthy receiving [sic] the Holy Communion, to which are added Prayers and Meditations*. Written by William Vickers and published in 1793, this work, according to Austen's great-niece, Florence Austen, was frequently used by Austen.⁷⁹ The stylistic similarities to the *BCP*, the *Companion to the Altar* and Johnson's prayers in Austen's prayers could simply be the reflection of a common, inherited religious discourse deriving ultimately from Cranmer, and modified by Johnson's influence (seen in the syntactic control and balance) thereby tempering the rhythms of the Prayer Book with a more eighteenth-century tone.

Austen's prayers, like those of Sherlock, Johnson and Bishop Hume and most Protestant eighteenth-century writers, consciously perpetuate the archaic diction of the 1552 Prayer Book (or the revised Prayer Book of 1662) and the Authorized Version of the Bible of 1611. Thus they deliberately employ archaisms such as the obsolete second person pronominal forms, 'thee' and 'thou', and the corresponding verbal forms, such as the second person singular present tense form of 'art' (as in 'Thou art everywhere present' in Austen's first prayer) and the second person singular present tense form with the suffix 'st' ('Thou knowest the infirmity of our nature' in the second prayer), and the third person present tense form with the suffix 'th' and the preterite 'hast' (as in 'Thou hast bountifully bestowed' in her third prayer).

One of the more overt differences between Austen's prayers and the *BCP* is Austen's comparatively scrupulous conceptual and non-figurative language, which points to the fact that she is an Augustan, and not a Renaissance, prayer-composer. The *BCP*, as Stovel remarks, contains more poetic and metaphorical language than Austen, with her Augustan

⁷⁹ Stovel 189.

background, cared to use.⁸⁰ She may well have endorsed Johnson's sentiments (written in connection with *Lycidas*), that 'trifling fictions' ought not to be used to convey 'the most awful and sacred truths'.⁸¹ Accordingly, Austen's prayers are pared of all figurative language.

THEMES AND DOCTRINES

The three prayers are not only similar in structure and style, but in content. The concerns are very much the same in each prayer, with the general pattern being as follows: (1) praise and thankfulness, (2) confession of sins and requests for forgiveness and requests for spiritual assistance and finally (3) supplication (for spiritual and physical needs) for others and requests for safety.

The first two prayers directly and indirectly express brief thankfulness for the 'blessings of life and the many comforts of our lot' (first prayer, third last paragraph) and for 'our health of body and mind and for every other source of happiness' (second prayer first paragraph), at the same time 'imploring their continuance from thy fatherly goodness, with a more grateful sense of them, than they have hitherto excited' (same paragraph). In the first paragraph of the third prayer there is a brief reference to God's 'goodness which has brought us in safety to the close of the day.'

All three prayers contain requests for forgiveness for sins and for spiritual help. There is the request for help against vanity and pride, for assistance to recognise and resist evil inclinations (first prayer) and kindness and charity towards others (second paragraph of the second prayer). In the third prayer there is also the request for forbearance, patience and 'a true Christian spirit'. And in the last paragraph of the third prayer, the speaker asks with particular devoutness, 'grant that we may rise again with every serious and religious feeling which now directs us'.

The third element, supplication, is always conventionally general. In the second prayer, the 'sick and afflicted', 'orphan and widow', 'those who travel by land or sea' and 'all

⁸⁰ Although Stovel does not mention it, a good example might be the St Luke's Day Collect.

⁸¹ Quoted by Stovel 190.

captives and prisoners' (whom she requests may be shown pity) are commended to God's care. In the penultimate paragraph of the second prayer, she remembers 'those in danger and distress' and the request for comfort, relief and patience for them. Similarly in the last paragraph of the third prayer she prays for God's truth 'to awaken the impenitent, touching the hardened' and to 'look with compassion on . . . and assuage the pangs of disease, comfort the broken in spirit'. All three prayers conclude with a prayer for the general safety and welfare of family and friends 'wheresoever dispersed' (last paragraph of third prayer) and a request for general safekeeping for all, whether 'friend and connection', and 'all we value', for them to be kept from 'material and lasting evil of body and mind' and for all to be kept safe during the 'darkness and dangers' of the night (last paragraph of the second prayer). In the third paragraph of the third prayer she also prays: 'Keep us O! Heavenly Father from evil this night!' Unlike the others though, the third prayer concludes with a reference to eternity, looking forward to a life 'together in thy heavenly kingdom'.

It is difficult to isolate a separate focus in each prayer, as they are so similar in their concerns (with thankfulness being overshadowed by penitence), but the over-riding concern is probably, in her own words, the desire for 'a true Christian spirit' (third prayer). Although Austen does not deal systematically with doctrinal matters, for the ease and convenience of the reader, my discussion makes use of traditional doctrinal categories.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Doctrinally, Austen's prayers show the influence of traditional, orthodox Christian creeds such as the Thirty Nine Articles, the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds. There are also some striking parallels between Austen's prayers and a prayer composed by Bishop Hume (not to be confused with the Scots philosopher, David Hume) for the personal use of the Duke of Newcastle.⁸²

⁸² Bishop Hume composed several prayers for private use of the Duke of Newcastle, ten of which are reproduced by Norman Sykes in Appendix B of his *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934) 437. It is noteworthy that the Duke of Newcastle also received letters of advice from Bishop Thomas Sherlock (Sykes 84-86). The Duke of Newcastle, 'whose affection for the Church which owed him so many ornaments of its Episcopal bench was sincere and profound' was described posthumously in the *Annual Register* of 17 November 1768, as 'affable and religious, having divine service constantly performed twice a day, in his family, both in town and country, and at stated times the Sacrament was

As can be seen from the concluding part of the above section, Austen's prayers seem to be modelled on the *BCP* pattern, where all the services are constructed on the tripartite 'Sin—Grace—Faith' principle (modified by Cranmer's additions to the 1549 Prayer Book in 1552). These modifications were made to the daily services and in particular to Morning Prayer, which began in the 1549 version with the Lord's Prayer. In 1552 Cranmer introduced the penitential aspects, commencing with the 'sin' component, where sentences from Scripture (the Coverdale version) are taken, followed by the Exhortation, the General Confession and the Declaratory Absolution,⁸³ followed by the Lord's Prayer. These are followed by the 'grace' component, which consists of the Psalms and Canticles and the Old and New Testament Lessons. Finally there was the 'faith' component, consisting of the Confession of Faith (The Apostles' Creed) and demonstrating the exercise of faith in prayer.⁸⁴ As mentioned, Austen follows this general pattern in all three of her prayers, beginning with praise and thanksgiving, devoting the middle part to reflection and confession and ending with supplication for daily needs and prayers for safety. In this thesis, as intimated above, I concentrate only on the penitential aspects of Austen's prayers.

Austen deals with doctrinal issues in a characteristically orthodox way: for example, following *BCP* practice, Austen addresses God the Father, prays through the name of Jesus Christ and asks for the help of the Holy Spirit. Her prayers attest to belief in the orthodox doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the Trinity, the incarnation, original sin, the atonement and redemption, heaven, hell and the final judgement.

In my analysis of parts of Austen's prayers, I focus on her representation of two salient doctrines; the doctrine of God, and what is traditionally called the 'doctrine of man'. Unlike Sherlock and More, Austen is not concerned to defend revealed religion, but everywhere there is evidence that she tacitly accepts it. This is borne out by her assumption of orthodox Trinitarian views, that although there is only one God (the Trinity), there are three persons of the Trinity (The Father, Son and Holy Spirit), who are 'uncreate, co-equal, co-eternal, invisible and incomprehensible'. Austen's grasp of the above would probably have

administered, at which he constantly communicated' (Sykes 276-77). For the prayers, see Sykes (Appendix B) 437 ff.

⁸³ Note that the Declaratory Absolution is distinct from the Judicial Absolution of the Roman Church.

⁸⁴ I am indebted to Dr John Newby of the George Whitefield College, Cape Town. For further information, see Dom Gregory Dix, *The Sense of the Creed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945) 27.

derived from the exposition of this doctrine in the Athanasian Creed (the *Quincunque Vult* in the *BCP*).⁸⁵

As orthodox usage required that one address one's prayers to the first person of the Trinity, the Father, Austen accordingly invokes God as father in the opening sentence of her first prayer: 'Give us grace Almighty Father, so to pray, as to deserve to be heard, to address thee with our hearts, as with our lips.' After this initial supplication, in conventional orthodox fashion, Austen goes on to acknowledge certain basic divine attributes; God's omnipresence, ('Who art every where present') and omniscience ('from whom no secret can be hid'). This knowledge, as Austen implies, ought to lead one to 'reverence and devotion':

Give us grace Almighty Father, so to pray, as to deserve to be heard, to address thee with our hearts, as with our lips. Thou art every where present, from thee no secret can be hid. May the knowledge of this, teach us to fix our thoughts on thee with reverence and devotion that we pray not in vain. (*MW* 453)

The metonymy ('hearts' and 'lips') signals Austen's perpetuation of conventional religious discourse. The general ideas, register and style of the above seem to echo that of the first collect (the 'Collect for Purity') in the Order of Communion, following immediately after the Lord's Prayer in the *BCP*, in which the omniscience of God is also affirmed:

⁸⁵ Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. And the Catholick Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three eternals: but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensible, nor three uncreated: but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three AlUITIES: but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God. (*Quincunque Vult*, At Morning Prayer, *BCP*).

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit . . . (*Holy Communion*: ‘The Collect’).

There are also similarities between the opening paragraph of Austen’s first prayer and a prayer composed for the private use of the devout Duke of Newcastle by Bishop Hume, where as we shall see later, he refers to God’s omniscience and human frailty together.⁸⁶

In her first prayer, Austen also conventionally acknowledges God’s providential care and requests grace to pray in an acceptable way: ‘May the knowledge of this teach us to fix our thoughts on thee with reverence and devotion that we pray not in vain.’ Most of all she recognises the importance of focus and discipline in prayer as demonstrated by the word ‘fix’. Without divinely-aided concentration, prayer becomes meaningless, or ‘in vain’.

THE ‘DOCTRINE OF MAN’

It would be anachronistic to expect Austen to question the patriarchal and authoritarian discourse of orthodox Christian theology, but although deploying its terms in her prayers and subscribing to the doctrine embodied in its tenets, she nevertheless retains her characteristic moral autonomy in the way she uses or interprets them, justly acknowledging the individual’s sinfulness and need of a Redeemer, but eschewing a craven self-loathing often disparagingly associated with women, or extreme instances of Non-conformity or Evangelicalism. Thus, in Austen’s prayers, though the Godhead is described in conventionally authoritarian (masculine) terms which denote due respect, the speaker never positions herself with abject servility. Despite the fact that the speaker frequently acknowledges her sinfulness she does so without sentimentalising or ‘feminising’ it. Thus in the first prayer she asks God ‘to look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed and make us feel them deeply’, and in the second prayer refers to ‘the infirmity of our nature’, acknowledging in the first paragraph that ‘we are conscious of many frailties’ and later in the same prayer, that we are ‘helpless and dependent’. These, and other frank and responsible acknowledgements of her sinfulness and

⁸⁶ ‘See the section ‘Human Insufficiency’.

general inability to ultimately resolve it, repudiate any remotely sentimental or Rousseauistic notions of natural innocence or Deistic human perfectibility. Similarly, in her third prayer, Austen observes that ‘we have been blessed far beyond anything that we have deserved’ and humbly, but not abjectly, avers, ‘we acknowledge our unworthiness of them’ [the blessings] (third paragraph).

In her prayers, and especially in the first paragraph of the first prayer which will be examined later in the sub-section, ‘Self-reflection and Confession’, the speaker not only acknowledges her innate imperfectability and the need for a redeemer (see also the closing sentence of the first prayer where she refers to Christ, ‘who has redeemed us’), but firmly rejects romantic palliation –or self-justification – of sin. As we shall see later, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen shows most clearly her repugnance of the emotional self-indulgence of sentimental novels and Rousseauistic ideas of inherent innocence to shrug off personal responsibility.

Although Austen seldom uses the word ‘sin’ in her novels, it occurs in *Mansfield Park*, where the patriarchal Edmund pontifically denounces his sister’s adultery as a ‘horrible evil’ and ‘sin of the first magnitude’ (440–41). Although this idea is echoed by Fanny, the extreme severity of this judgment is not unequivocally endorsed by the narrator, who while reprobating it, nevertheless mentions later the double standards of society. (See for example the observation: ‘In this world the penalty is less equal than could be wished.’ [MP 452]). In *Sense and Sensibility*, although sin is not mentioned, Marianne talks of her ‘atonement’ to God and admits that she has ‘wronged’ certain people (346). Sin, confession and forgiveness are implicit in Austen’s novels, where they are linked with personal accountability. In her prayers this link is shown more clearly.

MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Although Deists (and some Latitudinarians) acknowledged a general accountability to one’s Creator, they did not always recognize Christ, the second person of the Trinity, as equal to God.⁸⁷ By contrast, orthodox Anglican teaching upheld not only the divinity, but the co-

⁸⁷ Many Latitudinarians moved into Socinian or Arian positions, which denied the equality or coeternality of the Son with the Father.

equality of Christ with God, and therefore, in accordance with New Testament teaching, a personal accountability to Christ, appointed by God as the redeemer and judge of humankind. Austen's concept of Christ the judge (shared by Sherlock and More) derives, *inter alia*, from a tenet in the *BCP* version of the Apostles' Creed, which describes Christ coming for the second time 'to judge the quick and the dead'. St Paul extrapolates from this eschatological summary, the warning: 'So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God' (Rom 14:12).

In this relation, Sherlock also expounds Christ's words in Luke 12:48: 'Unto whom much is given much will be required'. In his exposition, Sherlock calls this a 'peremptory Rule', maintaining that all who know God's will, or possess the light of the Christian Gospel, are more accountable than those who lack these advantages (*TD* 2: 123-24). He warns that one cannot think 'it an indifferent Matter whether you receive or reject this Law, or that it matters not by what Light you walk, since you expect so much Equity from God that he will judge you according to the Light you have' (*TD* 2: 124-25). As shown in the chapter on More,⁸⁸ the Cambridge Evangelical, Joseph Milner and More herself reiterate these sentiments and, in a more understated way, Austen seems to follow suit.

In her prayers and novels, Austen presents the individual as spiritually personally responsible. As inhabitants of 'Christian England',⁸⁹ her characters not only have the benefits of revealed, but also of natural 'light'. As most of Austen's protagonists are churchgoers, it can be inferred that they have implicit knowledge of the former (basic doctrine), in addition they have what is referred to as an 'inner guide' (*MP* 404). With the exception of Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen seems to view the conscience predisposed, or sharpened by revelation (explicated in Anglican church dogma),⁹⁰ as generally trustworthy. Although theregnancy of the conscience was often seen as one of the defining features of

⁸⁸ See the sub-section, 'More's Doctrinal Emphases' in Chapter Three.

⁸⁹ See Henry Tilney's encomium on 'Christian England', NA 197. See also Austen's eulogy on Swedish Protestantism, *L* 508. For further (English) patriotism see *L* 477 and *L* 465.

⁹⁰ To make doctrine accessible to the people, it was traditionally embodied in the reciting of creeds, the reading of prayers, the administration of the sacraments and preaching. And for the literate, this 'light' (which imparted critical differentiation between the finer shades of right and wrong) could be supplemented by family or personal devotions.

Latitudinarianism, Locke showed its subjectivity and cautioned against undue trust in it.⁹¹ In *Sense and Sensibility*, where Marianne's conscience differs from her sister, Elinor's, Austen shows herself aware of this problem by questioning its validity as an independent and infallible guide.

However, the conscience, in conjunction with reason, was still seen by many orthodox as a divine instrument of communication and control. In consonance with Sherlock and More, Austen stresses the need for a day-to-day-accountability to God in one's private or family devotions. In her third (evening) prayer she expresses this concern by embodying it in the light of personal review: 'Another day is now gone, and added to those, for which we were before accountable' (*MW* 455). Again in the third prayer, Austen remarks on the 'solemn truth' of accountability, culminating in the eager request to feel the significance of every passing day and hour and thereby 'to make a better use of what thy goodness may yet bestow upon us':

Teach us Almighty Father to consider this solemn truth . . . that we may feel the importance of every day and every hour as it passes, and earnestly strive to make a better use of what thy goodness may yet bestow upon us, than we have done in times past. (*MW* 455)

This acute awareness of time as a loan or gift, with its implicit opportunities to serve God and one's fellow humans, is reminiscent of the Methodists and Evangelicals with whom Austen ostensibly had little sympathy. Nevertheless, as the prayers of Sherlock, Law, Johnson and Bishop Hume show, it was also a solemn preoccupation of devout High Church people.⁹²

⁹¹ In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk 1, ch 3, section 8, he shows how it is affected by custom, education and company and cites various examples of cannibals, victors sacking a city and raping and murdering innocents and seventeenth-century duellists who owe allegiance to different 'consciences'. See *The Works of Locke* (London, The Strand: J Johnson, 1802) 1: 380-340. See also the comments of G A J Rogers, 'Locke and the Latitude Men', *Philosophy Science and Religion in England 1640-1700*, ed. Richard Kroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1996) 247.

⁹² And of course, not the sole property of the orthodox, but that of Freethinkers such as Godwin, see H N Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* (1913; rpt. London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1930) 82.

One is accountable, moreover, not only for time spent, but for one's words and even thoughts.⁹³ In keeping with the principles of the 'General Confession' in the *BCP*, Austen adopts the time-honoured practice of reviewing each day in the evening and calling to mind both sins of omission and commission.⁹⁴ In writing 'and we have perhaps sinned against thee and against our fellow-creatures in many instances in which we have no remembrances' (*MW* 455), Austen shows not only an orthodox grasp of the pervasiveness and insidiousness of sin, but a thoughtful perception of the complex way in which sin is often subconsciously blurred by the memory.

Although she submerges the foundation of divine grace in her novels, Austen recognizes the necessity of self-effort and self-discipline by using current conceptual phrases such as 'exertion' and 'regulation'. Yet in her novels, it is implied that failure to avail oneself of God's grace and the exercise of self-discipline results in the disruption of both personal lives and society, as borne out by the examples of Wickham (*PP*) Willoughby (*SS*) and the Crawfords and Maria Bertram (*MP*).

In this way, accountability, which dominates her prayers, is strongly present in her novels as well, for Austen brings most of her characters to a stage where they perceive their accountability and assume responsibility for it. While this is usually expressed towards their fellow humans, Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* goes a step further and expresses accountability to God as well as her 'neighbour'. She comes to the painful realization that in many small ways she has failed to act in a responsible or sensitive way towards God, her family and society and, as a result of her subsequent enlightenment, vows to make amends.

Thus the foundation of divine grace, submerged in the novels, is made explicit in the prayers, which demonstrate the progression from an awareness of human insufficiency to an acknowledgement of sin and confession which, in turn, prepare the heart for the reception of God's forgiveness and grace to live a better life.

⁹³ In Matt 12: 37, Christ warns: 'by thy words thou shall be justified, and by thy words thou shall be condemned'. For a more secular view of moral accountability in Austen see Ruderman: 'Austen always stresses the element of choice in virtue. A man's duty is what he can always *choose* to do (*E* 146); humans are responsible for their actions. This is why the women's choice to accept or refuse an engagement is so important'. (174).

⁹⁴ *MW* 453-7: Prayer 1:13-21, Prayer 2: 3-13, Prayer 3: 3-7 (My line references).

SELF-REFLECTION AND CONFESSION

Austen's prayers are Christocentric in that they demonstrate the centrality of Christ the redeemer and His work, the atonement. In the first prayer she asks God to 'quicken our sense of thy mercy in the redemption of the world . . . that we may not, by our own neglect, throw away the salvation thou hast given us'. In her second prayer, she tacitly accepts the role of Christ as mediator when she asks God to accept her prayers 'through the mediation of our blessed saviour'.

Confession and forgiveness are only the first steps in the process. Austen goes on to pray for grace to sin less frequently, to be grateful for God's provisions and blessings, and to be patient and tolerant towards others. She implies that this kind of Christian conduct, while requiring much personal exertion, is ultimately only made possible by the grace of God, or the help of the Holy Spirit. Thus in her third prayer she writes, 'may we, by the assistance of thy Holy Spirit, so conduct ourselves on earth . . .' (MW 456-57).

In her prayers, Austen deals with confession and forgiveness in typically *BCP* manner. In the passage below the opening sentences both address God with terse monosyllabic verbs: 'Look' and 'Teach':

Look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed and in mercy make us feel them deeply, that our repentance may be sincere, & our resolution steadfast of endeavouring against the commission of such in future. Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls. (MW 453)

Although beginning conventionally; 'Look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed', her sincerity over-rides convention, manifesting itself through the (alliterative) words 'sincere' and 'steadfast': here the sincerity of the believer seems to ensure that her repentance will be stable and permanent. Throughout the above passage, the sentiments seem to echo those in the collect for Ash Wednesday, which petition God to 'Create and make in us new and contrite hearts'.

Austen's awareness of the way in which sin seeps into both conscious and unconscious levels of one's life ('our prevailing thoughts, words and actions') demonstrates not only a thorough knowledge of human nature, but a consciousness that one's own nature is too constitutionally defective to generate an acceptable contrition. Instead of despairing at this depressing realisation, Austen sensibly and practically asks for help to 'feel them [the sins] deeply, that our repentance may be sincere'.

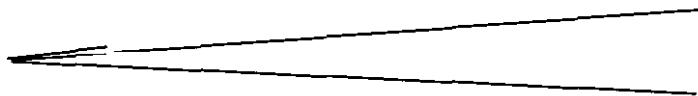
In this same passage one can see a blending of the (sixteenth-century) Prayer Book (*BCP*) style with eighteenth-century, and particularly Johnsonian, features. The latter are demonstrated by her measured tones and careful balance, ('Look with mercy . . . / Teach us to understand. . .') and the mirror phrases ('that our repentance may be sincere. . . and our resolution steadfast'). Austen continues in a reflective mood:

May we now, and on return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil. *Have we* thought irreverently of thee, *have we* disobeyed thy commandments, *have we* neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being? Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves from pride and vanity. (MW 453-54) [my italics]

Although the opening sentence seems cumbersome, lacking Austen's customary elegance of construction, it is an appropriate vehicle for her matter, for by the end of the day the accumulated weight of remembered sins is cumbersome to the conscience, and confession and God's forgiveness come as resolution and relief. In the phrase, 'how far we can acquit ourselves of evil', the word, 'acquit', with its juridical connotations, calls to mind Sherlock's image of humankind brought before the bar to give account to the divine judge. Her orthodox legacy has bequeathed the knowledge that one's 'fallen' nature makes human acquittal impossible. Yet the arrogance and deceit of human nature further incline one to believe one has not sinned, or not seriously. With this insight, Austen prays: 'Incline us to ask our hearts these questions', thereby pre-empting this self-deception.

In order to assist one in confession, Austen provides a useful opening 'inventory' of conventional sin-types, based on *BCP* models, modified by her individual (and more

eighteenth-century) stylistic treatment. The repetition of the interrogative phrase, ‘Have we?’ as in ‘Have we thought irreverently of thee? / have we disobeyed thy commandments? / have we neglected any known duty?’ imparts a quality of chant-like intoning, which builds up to a fitting climax that is like a crescendo mark in music. It reaches its zenith with the exclamation ‘oh! God’ and then, through a process of diminuendo, is brought down to a quiet and sober concluding cadence:



Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God,



and save us from deceiving ourselves from pride and vanity.

The above, which probably unconsciously echoes the rhythm and cadences of the well-known lines in Psalm 50: 27: ‘Make me a clean heart O God / And renew a right spirit within me’ (reformulated in the *BCP* in the versicle in the Morning Prayer in the ‘Lesser Litany’: ‘O God make clean our hearts within us’ and the congregational response: ‘And take not thy holy spirit from us’)⁹⁵ demonstrates Austen’s debt to both the Authorized version and the *BCP*, and shows the creative way in which she reformulates traditional prayer requests.

HUMAN INSUFFICIENCY, HABITS AND SELF-DECEPTION

Austen’s prayers, and in particular the excerpt quoted above, attest to an awareness of human inadequacy. This is implicit in the final paragraph of the second prayer, where she writes: ‘We are helpless and dependent; graciously preserve us’ (lines 29-30). Other expressions of

⁹⁵ The responses following *The Lord’s Prayer*.

insufficiency in her prayers point to a tacit acceptance of the doctrine of natural depravity. The admission that humans need divine help to perceive their sins and to feel contrite, implies that neither ability inheres in human nature. Thus as expressed in the second paragraph of the first prayer, it behoves one to ask God for help ‘to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts’ and rely on the Holy Spirit ‘to bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit’, for these capabilities are beyond us as fallen creatures.

The above observations gain point by the philosophical context in which Austen wrote. Although she lived in the eighteenth century which is traditionally seen as exalting human reason and although she prizes highly the rationality evinced by her favourite authors (among them Locke, Hume, Robertson and Johnson),⁹⁶ she is nevertheless willing to allow the circumscription or insufficiency of human perception; for example, in *Mansfield Park* (19) she admits that ‘knowledge of ourselves and of our duty’ is not a common acquisition. The adherence of an intelligent person like Austen to orthodox dogma (conveniently formulated for the lay person in the *BCP*),⁹⁷ which formally recognise that human limitations require divine enlightenment, is telling. It shows that her family’s comments on her orthodox piety were not void of meaning, implying that like Sherlock and More, she made a conscious, intelligent choice of orthodoxy.

Austen soberly acknowledges human insufficiency (or what Ruderman calls ‘the unmodern doubt that humans can be anything they want to be’)⁹⁸ and the necessity for divine illumination in the request, ‘Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts’. These words seem to echo Psalm 19:12 ‘Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults’ (Ps 19:12), a verse Sherlock exegetes in his *Temple Discourses* (TD 3:44). In Sherlock, More and Austen there is the understanding that only God’s Spirit can pierce the inscrutable area of one’s heart. It is significant that in an age when humans exulted in their

⁹⁶ See Devlin 7-28 and Irene Collins 47-48; 157-158 for the putative influence on Austen of these writers.

⁹⁷ In the fifth prayer in ‘Prayers and Thanksgiving on Several Occasions’ (*BCP*), we find the following: ‘O God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive, receive our humble petitions; and though we be tied and bound with the chain of our sins, yet let the pitifulness of thy great mercy loosen us; for the honour of Jesus Christ our Mediator and Advocate. Amen’. [my italics] Cf. also the reiterative response ‘O God . . . have mercy upon us miserable sinners’ in ‘The Litany’, which is further evidence of the conviction of endemic imperfection.

⁹⁸ Ruderman 5.

unaided ability to acquire knowledge, these three writers take it for granted that only God can give *perfect* self-knowledge and that ‘natural light’ is insufficient to instruct humankind for both salvation and life on earth.⁹⁹

Again, in her second prayer Austen’s concern with human insufficiency and consciousness of endemic human ‘frailties’ impels her to ask God’s pardon for sins committed during the past day:

Pardon oh! God the offences of the past day. We are conscious of many frailties; we remember with shame and contrition, many evil thoughts and neglected duties; and we have perhaps sinned against thee and against our fellow-creatures in many instances of which we have no remembrance. Pardon oh! God whatever thou hast seen amiss in us, and give us a stronger desire of resisting every evil inclination and weakening every habit of sin. Thou knowest the infirmity of nature and the temptations which surround us. Be thou merciful, oh heavenly Father! to creatures so formed and situated. (*MW* 455)

The inescapability of sin in the human condition makes frequent confession and pardon necessary. Further, there is the continual need for grace, together with personal exertion, to avoid further sin and temptation (‘give us a stronger desire of resisting every evil inclination and weakening every habit of sin’). Yet, comfort can be taken from the fact that God knows one’s weakness and is able to sympathise and help: ‘Thou knowest the infirmity of our nature and the temptations which surround us.’ Thus, God is asked to be ‘merciful to creatures so formed and situated’ (*MW* 455).

The idea of endemic weakness in the clause, ‘Thou knowest the infirmity of our nature’, echoes a request in the General Supplication of The Litany, which begins, ‘We humbly beseech Thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon our infirmities’. A variation of it is found in one of Bishop Hume’s prayers for the Duke of Newcastle, where he writes: ‘Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of my heart, the weakness of my understanding and the instability

⁹⁹ Again this shows a marked deviation from what Irene Collins, especially on 188, argues.

of my best resolutions.¹⁰⁰ Like Sherlock and More, Austen endorses this doctrine (so unpalatable to Deists) that human nature is incapable of thoroughgoing self-reform and requires divine aid to liberate it from the constraints of sin.

Austen's grasp of this constitutional human weakness as shown in the opening sentence of her prayer quoted above ('Pardon oh! God whatever thou hast seen amiss in us, and give us a stronger desire of resisting every evil inclination and weakening the habit of sin') is noteworthy for several reasons. In writing 'give us a stronger desire', Austen alerts one to the importance of the desire – no matter how feeble – for divine assistance both to recognise and combat sin. On the basis of this desire, an important distinction can be made with regard to two types of characters in Austen's novels – those who wish to improve morally and those who do not. Sadly, the charming Willoughby (in *SS*) and Crawfords (in *MP*) have no genuine desire to 'resist every evil inclination' and 'withstand the temptations that surround [them]' and therefore fall into the morally debilitating or 'weakening habits' of sin (*MW* 455).

'Habits' are mentioned in Austen's first prayer where, using the collective voice, she petitions God to 'bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls (*MW* 453). These habits are shown as operating on both temporal as well as eternal levels, by bringing 'discomfort of our fellow-creatures' and 'danger [to] our own souls' (*MW* 453). Paley had expostulated on the formation of bad habits, warning that '[t]he violations of God's laws are in truth . . . no other than the regular effect of sinful habits'.¹⁰¹ In her novels, Austen shows that bad habits are the result of both a morally poor upbringing and a lack of self-discipline or continually unchecked venial sins. (See also Ruderman) It is always implicit that it is each one's responsibility to guard against allowing these faults such as excessive drinking, extravagance, gambling, carelessness of others' feelings, malicious gossip,

¹⁰⁰ See Bishop Hume's Prayers in Appendix B of Sykes's *Church and State* 437 ff. The above quotation comes from the first of ten prayers from Hume that Sykes reproduces. Although Austen's sentiments are shown to be in keeping with Bishop Hume's prayer, her prayers differ from his in that, being written for a group and not an individual, they are slightly less personal and at times more stylised. This is borne out by the last line of the excerpt from Austen's prayer above, which begins with the traditional collective exclamation 'Be thou merciful oh! Heavenly Father', and closes with the utterly conventional, but nevertheless pleasing, cadence, 'creatures so formed and situated'.

¹⁰¹ *Sermons on Several Subjects by the late Revd William Paley* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808) 253.

dishonesty, deceit and moral or sexual carelessness to become ingrained habits as in the cases of Willoughby (*SS*), Tom Bertram and the Crawfords (*MP*).

Apart from habits, Austen mentions ‘every fault of temper’ in her prayers. In her novels, Austen regards this as a serious defect and is critical of those who are bad-mannered, irritable, censorious or deficient in ‘candour’, those who do not bother to exert themselves to be pleasant and therefore suffer from ‘lack of address’, ‘want of spirits’ and ‘cheerfulness’. Although she recognizes differences in temperament (as in the Dashwood sisters in *Sense and Sensibility*), Austen does not permit Marianne to use her sensitive or more melancholic temperament as an excuse, and she comes to realize that she too has to acquire the restraint and control of the exemplary Elinor.¹⁰²

Finally, the petition, ‘Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our hearts’, reiterates the concern or desire for self-knowledge. Although the latter is frequently regarded as a cornerstone of every Austen novel, it is usually secularised by critics such as Poovey and Johnson, who argue that Austen deliberately promotes individualism and the pursuit of personal happiness.¹⁰³ Without negating personal desire, Austen shows, in both her prayers and novels, that self-knowledge is not an end in itself or merely a means to self-fulfilment, but meant to be subordinated to the higher purpose of pleasing God and other people. A by-product or indirect result of self-knowledge is personal happiness. Thus in her prayers Austen requests self-knowledge so that she might not unwittingly sin against God and her neighbour: ‘to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures and the danger of our own souls’ (*MW* 453).

In the concluding paragraph of her first prayer, Austen also requests God to save us from the self-deception that pride and vanity engender: ‘Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves from pride and vanity’ (*MW* 453-54). Although, the orthodox believer understands the futility of trying to ‘acquit’ oneself from sin before the righteous divine judge, yet human nature is both sufficiently vain and

¹⁰² It is interesting to compare Elinor’s (authorially endorsed) sense of self-restraint with that of Anne in *Persuasion*. Unlike Ruderman (62-67), who posits Austen’s idea of restraint as both a classical virtue and a form of social prudence, I see more evidence of a Christian basis for it.

¹⁰³ Poovey 194-207, maintains that Elizabeth Bennet was an ‘outspoken champion of the prerogatives of individual desire . . .’ and moreover, that she ‘was Jane Austen’s special favourite’ (194). She justifies Elizabeth’s so-called ‘pursuit of individual gratification’ and ‘desire’, by maintaining that it is ‘purified of its defensiveness’ (200-01) and ‘stripp[ed] of egotism’ (205). Claudia Johnson argues that Austen makes ‘the desire for and experience of happiness and pleasure central to her novel’ (78). She vindicates Elizabeth’s pursuit of her own happiness because it is not materialistic or sordid (unlike Lydia’s unbridled passion), but safely within moral and societal boundaries (97).

foolish to deceive oneself into believing that one has not sinned or that one has not sinned seriously. Accordingly, with this insight, she prays: ‘Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves from pride and vanity.’

In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen dramatizes this self-deception in both Marianne and Willoughby who tend to excuse or exonerate themselves by blaming others, circumstances or their own natures. (Improper) pride and vanity are shown to be dangerously deceptive shortcomings, for they gradually obscure the light of one’s eye, and dull one’s moral perceptions and conscience.¹⁰⁴

BENEVOLENCE

Austen clearly admired toleration and benevolence, for all her heroes and heroines either exemplify these virtues or are brought to the point where they see the necessity to acquire them. Conversely her most acerbic character, Mrs Norris, lacks both forbearance and tolerance. These were qualities to which Latitudinarians and Deists also attached great importance, for practical Christianity was both their talent and delight. Tillotson’s catch-phrase ‘Charity is above rubrics’, became a favourite maxim of this more liberal wing of the Hanoverian Church, and the ‘gospel of benevolence’ conveniently summed up by Paley as ‘Virtue is the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness’, was propounded by Samuel Clarke, Benjamin Hoadley, Richard Watson, John Tillotson and others.

In many ways Austen upholds the above Latitudinarian-like ideals, but unlike some Latitudinarians and full-blown Deists, she insists on the necessity of divine grace to enlighten, inspire and make possible such benevolent impulses, for true good can only come from the author, God. Thus, as shown earlier, she recognizes that it is neither natural to think humbly of oneself, nor to desire always to be kind to one’s neighbour, but these are Christian virtues that have consciously to be nurtured by means of supra-human or divine grace.

In her second prayer, Austen asks God to give her a ‘benevolent spirit toward every fellow creature’ (MW 455). By benevolent Austen may have meant literally ‘well-wishing’ (from the Latin, *bene volens*) and promoting others’ well-being in a Latitudinarian kind of

¹⁰⁴ For a defence of ‘proper pride’ in Austen, see Ruderman 99-112.

way, but her prayers show clearly that her use of the word comprehends ‘charitable’, in the Christian sense of kind and forgiving. Austen also shows that benevolence, which ought to be built on an unfeigned humility, can easily be nullified by an arrogant and domineering spirit.

In her model clergyman, Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, Austen delineates an enlightened, yet orthodox, benevolence, which is both tolerant and yet insists on the importance of retaining orthodox foundations such as divine service and daily chapel prayers. Unlike those who gave benevolence a poor name by practising it in a patriarchal and arrogant way, the essence of Austen’s benevolence is sincerity and humility. This is a logical consequence of redemption, for in order to accept forgiveness from God and to be able in turn to extend it to others, one has to be of a humble disposition. Thus in *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy has to be humbled in order to have his benevolence (towards his sister, his tenants and later, Elizabeth and her family) refined by being purged of improper pride and arrogance.

In her prayers Austen stresses humility by asking in her first prayer for deliverance from self-deception and vanity (*MW* 454) and in her third prayer for a realistic and humble self-assessment: ‘Incline us oh God! to think humbly of ourselves’ (*MW* 456). There is a parallel in the Litany, which reads, ‘From all blindness of heart; from pride, vain-glory and hypocrisy, from envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness, Good Lord deliver us.’ Realizing that constitutional human weakness renders one incapable of acquiring self-knowledge and humility, Austen asks for the help of the Holy Spirit: ‘that by the assistance of thy holy spirit we may so conduct ourselves on earth’ (*MW* 456-57).

Austen’s prayers propound the view that the Holy Spirit brings enlightenment (self-knowledge, a knowledge of God’s will and general spiritual discernment) to the receptive individual. When enlightened, the individual acquires humility. The latter is part of a triumvirate of fundamental moral virtues that Q D Leavis maintains is embodied in all Austen’s female protagonists, for all her heroines ‘ultimately criticize themselves for lacking humility, generosity and self-knowledge, qualities which always turn out finally to be what Jane Austen considers the most essential’.¹⁰⁵ This is endorsed by David Cecil, who observes that all her characters are brought to the triple bar of ‘virtue, common-sense and taste’.¹⁰⁶ This triumvirate of virtues keeps the humility of Austen’s protagonists from degenerating into the

¹⁰⁵ Q D Leavis 29.

¹⁰⁶ Lord David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1978) 149.

reprehensible sycophantic grovelling exemplified by Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. As Austen clearly demonstrates in her novels, there is always a place for proper pride or self-respect: Mr Darcy ‘has no improper pride’ (*PP* 376) and Elinor Dashwood has ‘a reasonable and laudable pride’. It would thus seem as Ruderman points out, Austen would not have agreed with Johnson that ‘All pride is mean and abject’.¹⁰⁷

Sherlock also emphasized the importance of a proper or tasteful humility in the lives of professing Christians. In a discourse on Philippians 2: 8: ‘And being found in the Fashion of a Man, he humbled himself’ (*TD* 4: 471), he argued that, as humility was a hallmark of Christ, so it should mark all believers. As no one is likely to be won over by an arrogant and over-bearing spirit, so ought all Christians to conduct themselves humbly and graciously in relation to non-believers. In similar vein, Sherlock pointed out that submission to one another is a duty, by quoting 2 Peter 5:5: ‘Owe no man anything but to love one another’ (*TD* 4: 370).

Like Sherlock, Austen’s idea of humility is not that of an abject attitude, but rather the correct Scriptural estimation of oneself, which excludes both thinking too meanly, or too highly, of oneself. An acknowledgement of one’s spiritual ‘infirmities’ and one’s need of a Redeemer cannot allow one to think too highly of oneself. In following Christ’s example one ought therefore to show deference to others, without demeaning oneself or lowering one’s principles. Neither Sherlock nor Austen suggest that this is a gender-specific quality or connives at the pernicious attempts at various times by some parts of patriarchal society to keep the female sex or lower classes in seemly submission – a charge from which More was at pains to exonerate St Paul in her essay on him. Significantly, Austen refuses to show even her most outwardly submissive female, Fanny Price, abjectly obeying the behests of Sir Thomas with regard to the choice of a marriage partner. She not only eschews the kind of false humility that tries to suppress female desire and fulfilment, but is rewarded for recognising the validity of these legitimate desires by obtaining fulfilment of them.¹⁰⁸

In her third prayer Austen couples grace and humility:

¹⁰⁷ Ruderman 122.

¹⁰⁸ See Poovey 212 and Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) 59.

Give us grace to endeavour after a truly Christian spirit to seek to attain that temper of forbearance and patience of which our blessed saviour has set us the highest example and which while it prepares us for the spiritual happiness of the life to come, will secure for us the best enjoyment of what this world can give. Incline us oh God! to think humbly of ourselves, to be severe only in the examination of our own conduct, to consider our fellow-creature with kindness and to judge of all they say and do with that charity which we would desire from them ourselves. (MW 456)

Contrary to Deists who promoted benevolence or morality as a religion on its own, Austen teaches that the ‘truly Christian spirit’ and qualities of divine ‘forbearance and patience’ are unfortunately neither endemic nor acquired by self-effort. They are, paradoxically, virtues one only desires after one has been morally enlightened. Although often overlooked by readers, these qualities of forgiveness and forbearance are exemplified by Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, when ‘with a good humoured smile’, she says: ‘Come, Mr Wickham, we are brother and sister, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past. In future, I hope we shall be always of one mind’ (329).

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne’s acts of forgiveness are even more pronounced, and more astonishing in the light of her previous character of decided views, strong dislike of certain people and uninhibited judgements of them. She admits that she has wronged many people; her mother, Elinor, Colonel Brandon, Mrs Jennings and even her odious brother and sister-in-law – attitudes of almost extreme forgiveness and forbearance which stem from her newly acquired ‘light’ and reflect the vehemence of her character.

In her third prayer, Austen suggests that ‘forbearance’ consists in greater severity towards oneself and charitable latitude towards others. Thus, she asks God to [i]ncline us . . . to think humbly of ourselves, to be severe only in the examination of our own conduct, to consider our fellow-creature with kindness and to judge of all they say and do with that charity which we would desire from them ourselves’ (MW 456). The use of the generic singular here (as throughout her prayers) suggests a striving towards not self-effacement, but control. Austen uses strong linguistic contrasts, juxtaposing antithetical terms such as ‘severe’ with ‘kindness’ and ‘charity’, with the former for the self and the latter for others. As we shall see, at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood painfully tries to ‘think humbly’

of herself and in her kindness to others is severe only ‘in the examination of [her] own conduct’.

Therefore, according to orthodox dogma, Austen presents her petitions in a way that takes for granted God’s omniscience and power to forgive and save, and the human’s ongoing need for grace to live virtuously. Furthermore, Austen seems to be interested in the idea of personal accountability to God and active Christian benevolence towards one’s fellow creatures. This dual obligation (to God and people) fits into a bipartite structural scheme: whereas the earlier parts of Austen’s prayers concentrate on the vertical relationship (between God and self) the latter parts focus on the lateral relationship with others. This pattern is echoed in the strong logical progression, which demonstrates that the individual, having obtained divine forgiveness and forbearance (through the vertical relationship), is now under constraint to show the same qualities to his/her fellow humans. This is in accordance with the principle enunciated in the Lord’s prayer: ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we have forgiven those who have trespassed against us’, in which Christ teaches that one has no right to expect forgiveness or forbearance from Him unless one exercises the same to others. Those who do not act consistently in this manner are blinded or deceived by ‘pride and vanity’ (*MW* 454).

Austen’s third and final prayer concludes by reverting to the vertical relationship and focusing on hopes of being with God in eternity. As in *Mansfield Park*, where she writes, ‘Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery; I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can’ (461), at the end of her prayers she relinquishes the odious subject of sin and struggle and directs her eyes to being united with God in ‘the eternity of happiness’. Significantly, the latter is a communal pleasure (with strong undertones of family togetherness). Thus Austen petitions God: ‘May we, by the assistance of thy Holy Spirit, so conduct ourselves on earth as to secure an eternity of happiness *with each other* in thy heavenly kingdom’ (*MW* 457).

Perhaps the most startlingly obtrusive element in Austen’s fairly conventional three prayers occurs in the final paragraph of the second prayer, where she writes:

Above all other blessings, we implore thee to quicken our sense of thy mercy in the redemption of the world, of the value of that holy religion in which we have been brought up, that we may not by our own neglect, throw away the salvation thou has given us, nor be Christians only in name.

Beginning conventionally (as would Sherlock and most orthodox prayer composers) by referring to the distinguishing feature of Christianity (the redemption) and expressing thankfulness for the traditional ‘holy religion’ of her upbringing, she goes on in More-like tones to signal her antinomianism stance (that salvation can be lost) and more importantly that salvation is a gift and not earned. Lastly, and most surprisingly, in expressing the desire to be more than merely ‘a Christian only in name’, she seems to allude to a particular concern of Evangelicals, that danger of being merely a ‘nominal Christian’. The earnestness with which she asks to ‘rise again [the next day] with every serious and religious feeling which now directs us’ (penultimate paragraph, second prayer), endorses the idea that her religion is not only a matter of outward form and ceremony, recitations of creed and prayers balanced by acts of justness and benevolence, but like More and her associates, an all-pervading ‘religion of the heart’.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

MARIANNE DASHWOOD’S ‘ATONEMENT TO MY GOD’

In this section, I begin by presenting Marianne’s reflection and atonement in the context of perspectives offered by Sherlock, More, the *NED*, John Newton’s experience, the *BCP* and Scripture, before proceeding to a close analysis of it, based on the Anglican moral and doctrinal categories to which Austen subscribes. However, the analysis of Marianne’s atonement reveals that Austen does not endorse it unproblematically, but betrays an uneasiness with regard to Marianne’s ‘enthusiasm’ (or romantic excess) and the fact that she emerges as too submissive to patriarchal discourses that seek to tame women’s wills. Thus, my first analysis deals with the text at face value, whereas the second provides an against-the-grain reading, with the conclusion suggesting a reconciliation between the two.

Sherlock had argued that revealed religion (unlike natural) furnishes one with the perpetual means of ‘positive repentance’. Although one continues to sin after one has been exposed to the light of salvation, provision has been made for the frailty of humans and the guilty can receive pardon – something Natural Religion cannot confer. In this regard Sherlock quotes 2 Corinthians 7:10, ‘Godly sorrow worketh salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death’, arguing that Deists can offer no hope through their ‘natural’ scheme, for although it stresses personal accountability, it can provide no positive means of forgiveness and salvation, but only ‘certain death’ (*TD* 4: 374).

Hannah More reiterated the power of ‘positive’ repentance in the case of Mathilda Melbury and, as I shall proceed to show, although Jane Austen does the same with regard to Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, she views her subject through a more enlightened feminist lens and proves that, while showing all respect to the seriousness of the subject, the more ridiculous human excesses within it can be satirised.

Several of Austen’s protagonists (notably Fanny Price, Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth) have recourse to quiet, sober and implicitly Christian reflection. In *Persuasion*, after Louisa Musgrove’s accident, the surgeon relieves them by pronouncing it ‘not a desperate case’. The anxious Wentworth offers a ‘few fervent ejaculations of gratitude to Heaven’ but remains sitting ‘near a table, and leaning over it with folded arms, and face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul, and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them’ (*P* 112). Once Wentworth and Anne are reunited and Anne returns home, ‘[a]n interval of meditation, serious and grateful, was the best corrective of every thing dangerous in such high-wrought felicity; and she went to her room, and grew steadfast and fearless in the thankfulness of her enjoyment’ (245).

Not only does Marianne Dashwood turn to serious reflection or meditation in a way unprecedented by any other Austen heroine, but Austen’s portrayal of Marianne’s significant personality change after her illness can be read in terms of a repentance or ‘atonement’,¹⁰⁹ and in this regard invites comparison with More’s dramatization of Mathilda Melbury’s repentance in *Coelebs*. The latter, with its melodramatic movement from one extreme position to another (a life of extravagance, callousness and gambling to one of earnest

¹⁰⁹ In my reading of Marianne’s ‘repentance’ it will be seen that I am arguing in direct opposition to Irene Collins, who maintains Austen’s heroines ‘develop their own potential rather than by undergoing some cataclysmic change’. See Collins 188.

'seriousness') is a stock one for a religious novel. Although much less theatrical and didactic, Austen's portrayal of Marianne's sickness seems still surprisingly conventional, with the attractive, vivacious heroine making mistakes of judgement and falling desperately ill after an abortive love affair. This near-fatal illness is described in an unusually dramatic way for Austen, but contrary to current sentimental novel expectations, where illness nearly always culminates in death, in *Sense and Sensibility* there is a turning point and Marianne recovers. She not only regains full health, but repents of past conduct and determines to embark on a more sober life-style. Thus, Austen invokes, and then departs from, the *topos* of the young heroine dying from sensibility,¹¹⁰ positing a less romantic and as I argue, more 'Christian' sequel. Marianne's decline and illness has also attracted the attention of feminists such as Claudia Johnson¹¹¹ and Robyn Warhol,¹¹² who analyse her as 'the fading heroine', who is merely the object of the gaze of others who weep over her, regarding not her feeling, but their own. Although legitimate and enriching, such a view has its limitations. I argue that she is more than an object, indeed a powerful subject, and that her gaze is not merely delirious, but both lucid and empowering, as it enables her to regain the spiritual autonomy she lost during her obsession with Willoughby. Therefore, I read this passage not simply as a kind of traditional 'repentance text' seen through paternal eyes, but as an empowering female version of sight, not only lost and lamented, but ultimately, proactively regained. And in this respect it is useful to begin by comparing Marianne's to Mathilda Melbury's 'conversion narrative'.

It goes without saying that Austen's representation of Marianne's self examination and repentance is presented in much greater depth and complexity, and from a psychological point of view is much more subtly executed than More's. Firstly, their narratorial strategies set them apart. Unlike Mathilda Melbury's reported version (mediated firstly through the male narrator Charles), Austen chooses a more immediate way of presenting Marianne's story, letting it unfold (through omniscient narration) in the dramatic present tense and then re-visiting it, through Marianne's eyes, when she discusses it with Elinor. Where More

¹¹⁰ Claudia Johnson 64-68 and John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body: The Picture of Health* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 34, make the same observation about Austen's defiance of sentimental conventions.

¹¹¹ See Claudia Johnson 65.

¹¹² Robyn Warhol in *Ambiguous Discourse, Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 26.

conservatively allows Mathilda Melbury's shocked reactions to the plight of the Stokes family to be refracted through the male narrator, Charles's eyes (and only much later, summarised in her own speech to Mrs Stanley), Marianne largely interprets her own story.

After Marianne has seen Willoughby in London and been publicly snubbed, she and Elinor leave for Barton and break their homeward journey at Cleveland, the home of the Palmers. Here, Marianne catches a bad cold by walking in long wet grass. In this incident, Austen (like More who disliked the novel of sensibility)¹¹³ mocks this genre, by allowing her heroine to suffer for roaming in wild, wet 'romantic' places and neglecting to change her shoes and stockings. Accordingly, Marianne develops serious complications, a 'putrid throat' and high fever. Austen then writes a suspense-filled account of Marianne's illness, which is characterized by her lacking the will to live. Her sister, Elinor, is selfless and indefatigable in nursing her (nursing, as Wiltshire points out, being an archetypically feminine occupation)¹¹⁴ and Colonel Brandon in true romantic style, demonstrates his love for her by riding through the stormy night to fetch her mother. Marianne deteriorates further, eventually sinking into delirium. When all hope seems gone, there is a slight amendment in her pulse, and Marianne comes out of her delirium and 'fixed her eyes on her [Elinor] with a rational, though languid, gaze' (309). She becomes materially better and is eventually pronounced out of danger by the time Brandon returns with her mother.

Later, when back at Barton Cottage, Marianne explains to Elinor that the turning point came when she felt the need to exert her will to live. She begins by saying: 'My illness has made me think. It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection.' (345) She continues, shouldering the blame for her self-destructive illness:

My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself, but such negligence of my own health, as I had felt even at the time to be wrong. Had I died, – it would have been self-destruction. I did not know my danger till the

¹¹³ See *Coelebs* 1: 244-245.

¹¹⁴ See John Wiltshire, 'Persuasion and the Pathology of Everyday Behaviour' in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, ed. Judy Simons (London: Macmillan, 1997) 183-203. He quotes Gisborne, *The Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), who talks of 'the unassuming and virtuous activity' of the female character which develops while 'contributing daily and hourly to the comfort of husbands, brothers, sisters, and other relations . . . in the intercourse of domestic life, under every vicissitude of sickness and in health, of joy and affliction', Wiltshire 190.

danger was removed; but with such feelings as these reflections gave me, I wonder at my recovery, – wonder that the very eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God, and to you all, did not kill me at once. (345–46)

There are startling similarities to Marianne's illness and that of John Newton during his slaving days. His subsequent recovery and dramatic change of life particularly impressed Cowper, whom Austen admired. While not suggesting that Austen had this consciously in mind when describing Marianne's illness and recovery, it might have contributed subconsciously and the parallels between their ardent natures and their exerting the will to live in extreme illness and delirium are extraordinarily similar.¹¹⁵

Marianne's conscious choice to live identifies her as a heroine rather different from several heroines of contemporary fiction who find themselves in similar situations. As Claudia Johnson observes, Marianne's phrase, 'self-destruction', indicates that *Sense and Sensibility* is a 1790's novel, for the betrayed, but penitent, heroines of the Sentimental novels of this (and an earlier) period either commit suicide or decline gradually into death.¹¹⁶ As we shall see later, Austen deviates from the expected convention, though, for instead of dying, Marianne lives to repent.

We have already seen how Austen's protagonists have recourse to prayer and meditation during times of stress and happiness, but now we examine this in the context of sickness. Like Tom Bertram's sickness in *Mansfield Park*,¹¹⁷ Marianne's illness affords her the opportunity for self-scrutiny in the Anglican tradition of Sherlock, Law, More, Johnson and a host of other writers. In *The Rambler* (no 8), Johnson maintained that:

¹¹⁵ For an account of Newton's illness (on the West Coast of Africa) with its raging fever and delirium, his exerting the will to live and turning to God, see Lord David Cecil, *The Stricken Deer: The Life of Cowper* (London: Constable, 1933) 111–114 and for his later conversion see 115–116.

¹¹⁶ She points out that in his *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft, Godwin virtually celebrates Wollstonecraft's suicidal tendencies as appropriate in a heroine of exquisite sensibility'. See Claudia Johnson 64.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Roger Sales who takes a more subversive view of Tom's illness. He believes that this passage is a 'revenge fantasy against an eldest son' and Austen 'takes pleasure in locking him away in the sick-room for as long as possible'. He also feels that Austen 'compromises' this 'conservative message by the fact that there is no direct representation of this event' (105).

The serious and impartial retrospect of our conduct is indisputably necessary in the confirmation or recovery of virtue, and is therefore recommended, under the name of self-examination, by divines as the first act previous to repentance. It is indeed, that without it we should always be . . . seduced forever by the same allurements, and misled by the same fallacies.¹¹⁸

Predictably for a male eighteenth-century writer, Johnson uses the ‘male language’ of seduction (with the feminist connotations of allurements) to portray the lapse from virtue to sin, although the sin in question is not necessarily a sexual one. And here, unfortunately, the idea of personal surveillance carries with it connotations of metaphoric paternal monitoring against sins that are portrayed as ‘feminine’ in their wiles.

This kind of retrospective appraisal (with or without the implicit gender imagery of seduction) is of course standard fare in devotional eighteenth-century writers. It is therefore not surprising that in his *Temple Discourses*, Sherlock advocates the personal practice of self-examination as a prelude to repentance, suggesting that one should frequently ‘enter into oneself and converse with one’s own heart and . . . search out the Evil’ (*TD* 3: 343). Austen seldom allows her authorially endorsed protagonists to lapse into what Sherlock calls ‘evil’ (their faults being mainly misreading evidence, negligence, self-delusion or an inappropriate pride in their own judgement), but waiving the appellation of ‘sin’, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood seems bent on following Sherlock’s advice.

In her *Practical Piety* (1811), More devotes a whole chapter to ‘Self-Examination’. Using the image of the assiduous, business-conscious estate owner she argues thus cogently: ‘To have a flourishing estate and a mind in disorder; to keep exact accounts with a steward, and no reckoning with our Maker, to have an accurate knowledge of loss or gain in our business, and to remain utterly ignorant whether our spiritual concerns are improving or declining is making a wretched estimate of the comparative value of things.’ Quoting Barrow on the powers of reflection (which distinguish humans from animals), she invokes eye imagery: ‘This inward eye, this power of introversion is given us for a continual watch upon the soul’ (*Practical Piety* 2: 263–4). More also warns that self-love can cloud the issue, as can a spurious self-examination, ‘which does not serve to enlighten but to blind’. The latter

¹¹⁸ Saturday, 14 April 1750, *The Rambler in Two Volumes*, (London: William Tegg, n.d.) 1: 32.

(which is not based on Scripture but other subjective standards) usually results in a ‘shallow reformation’ (*Practical Piety* 2: 271). Shrewdly More recognises the psychological dangers inherent in the ‘perplexing windings’ of moral self-inspection.

And lest we should, in our pursuit, wander in uncertainty and blindness, let us make use of that guiding clue which the Almighty has furnished by his Word and by his Spirit for conducting us through the intricacies of this labyrinth. (*Practical Piety* 2: 165-66).

Although her repentance is complex, the principles of Marianne Dashwood’s Anglican dogma seem to steer her through her tortuous repentance. Reviewed in the *BCP* confession scheme, Marianne’s failings have been mostly those of negligence and indiscretion, or ‘sins of omission’. Nevertheless, they seem to require ‘serious and impartial retrospect’, ‘repentance’ and ‘atonement’.

Marianne’s phrase ‘atonement to my God’ is significant, for it is unusual for Austen to introduce theological concepts into her novels. One can speculate as to why Austen allows this small, but significant protrusion of dogma (more appropriate in *Coelebs* than an Austen novel) to ripple the smooth stream of her polished secular style. Is it to stress that like herself, her heroines have religion, but have it unobtrusively, and that at times of crisis or illness one is permitted, within the confines of a close family circle, to be overtly ‘religious’? Does it point to a greater ‘seriousness’ in Austen than is generally acknowledged? Might it signal a deeper engagement with theological issues, and a desire to voice her ideas on a perennially controversial doctrine, than is usually recognised? Or is it to be read against the grain?

Taken at face value (as against the grain seems inappropriate in this context), the first person pronoun ‘my’ (in the phrase ‘my God’) suggests that Marianne is not using it in a meaningless formulaic manner, but in a personal way, to signal that she is a believing Anglican.¹¹⁹ Yet, it is oddly unlike Marianne, who is extremely sensitive to taste and good

¹¹⁹ My argument, as will be seen, is in direct opposition to that of Angela Leighton, who maintains that Marianne’s recovery in *Sense and Sensibility* posits a reassertion of what she calls ‘the ethical sense’ against ‘unlimited toleration’ and sympathy; [f]or Austen . . . the ethical sense is no more [and no less] than conformity to a certain public language.’ See ‘Sense and Silences, Reading Jane Austen Again’ in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives: Women and Literature*. New Series 3, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 138. I argue that Marianne’s is a meaningful ‘conversion’ and not simply a wearied ‘conformity’ to a ‘public language’ of middle class morality.

breeding, to use such overtly religious terminology (what More's Mr Flam would have called 'cant') even in conversation with her sister. She says that she wonders that 'the eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God and to you all did not kill me at once'.

The term 'atonement' derives from the M E adverbial phrase, *aton*, *atooon*, *atone*, *attone* and the verb *at(t)one*. The adverbial phrase, in its first sense, denotes 'in a position of unity of feeling; in harmony or concord or friendship, opposed to *at variance*, *at odd*, and was so used by Tyndale, Coverdale and Cranmer. The verb, which could be used transitively or intransitively, was an abbreviation for the phrase 'to set or make at one', signifying: (1) to set at one, bring into concord, reconcile, unite in harmony; (2) to unite; (3) to reconcile or restore to friendly relations [one who is alienated]; (4) to make reconciliation or propitiation [for an offence]; (5) to make expiation or amends for a fault or loss; (6) to join in one, unite together. The verb *at(t)one* although used frequently in everyday speech and by Wycliffe and Coverdale, was not admitted into the 1611 version of the Bible, though the substantive *atonement* was used by Tyndale.¹²⁰ The first two senses of the noun *at(t)onement* related to one's dealings with one's fellow humans and denoted: (1) the condition of being *at one* with others; (2) the action of setting at one after discord or strife; restoration of friendly relations between persons who had been at variance; reconciliation. The third sense of *atonement* is theological and denotes (3) 'reconciliation or restoration of friendly relations between God and sinners'. The fourth sense can be used both theologically and in a secular context: 'propitiation of an offended or injured person, by reparation of wrong or injury; amends, satisfaction, expiation'.

Obviously in the context of *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen is not attempting to rewrite one of Christianity's central orthodox doctrines, the atoning death off Christ on the cross. She is therefore not using the term in its theological sense, but in one (or more) of its secular senses. Yet, she was still sufficiently close enough to the many (now archaic) senses of the word to have inherited many of its now obsolete nuances. In 1799 Sheridan used 'atone' as a verb without a preposition in *Pizarro* (5. 4); 'I will endeavour to atone the errors' and in 1809, the Duke of Buckingham uses it similarly in a letter to signify 'to reconcile or restore to a friendly relationship'. It seems that Marianne desires to 'atone' for her errors by making

¹²⁰ Cf. 'We praye you in Christes sted, be atone with God', the1522 Geneva New Testament (NED).

reparation to others and restoring ‘friendly relations’ with her Maker. The unusual grammar seems to signal this: instead of the usual preposition ‘for’ (as in ‘to make atonement *for*’) Austen deliberately uses the preposition ‘to’ (‘atonement *to* my God’). Marianne first directs herself to God, implying there was a previous beach of concord or harmony, and then addresses her fellow humans in an attempt to *at(t)one or restore* a ‘position of unity . . . harmony, concord or friendship [as] opposed to, at variance, at odds. . . implying a previous state of dissension, and that agreed, reconciled’. As later as 1830, Coleridge, invoking this obsolete sense, asks: ‘Am I at-one with God and is my will concentric with that holy power?’ (NED)

It seems that Austen is attempting to show that where Marianne had previously deviated (as least in conduct) from certain of Christ’s teachings, she now desires to obey them and become *at-one* again with her God. This becomes increasingly clear as she continues to unburden herself to Elinor. By her occasional uncharitable conduct and subsequent rationalization of it, Marianne seems to have abrogated Christ’s summary of the law (to love God and one’s neighbour as oneself) causing discord between her and her Maker and thereby obfuscating the ‘light’ of her ‘eye’. Her subsequent ‘confession’ of these sins to Elinor (a female confessor) and her plans to make reparation and instigate personal reform are steps she takes to become *at one* again with God and her fellow humans. This new *at-one-ment* will not only re-instate concord (with God and with people), but restore the singleness of her moral light, which Willoughby has gradually obscured.

It is difficult to tell whether Austen wholeheartedly endorses Marianne’s atonement or reserves some ironic detachment. In particular, the unfamiliarity and peculiarity of the phrase (atonement to my God), makes interpretation especially difficult. Unlike the more simplistic conversion narrative of Mathilda Melbury, for instance, the complexity of the character of Austen’s protagonist complicates the issue. At the same time this crux also suggests a solution, because Marianne’s very desire to ‘atone’ derives from her *leitmotif*-like ‘eagerness’: as she confides to Elinor: ‘It is a wonder that the eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God and to you all did not kill me at once’ (337).

Earlier Austen mocks Marianne’s ‘eagerness’ in regard to the ‘doctrine’ of Sensibility, (with its demands for intenseness in opinions and emotions, especially joys and sorrows), gently satirising her ardour for the doctrine of nature, even though she is intelligent enough to

reject the jargon of the picturesque.¹²¹ Here though, a more serious tone signals Austen's intention to distinguish between cultural 'fads' and enduring Christian dogma. Although Marianne's immoderate eagerness might have led her into foolish excesses with regard to the 'doctrine' of sensibility, this same (traditionally 'feminine') quality is capable of leading her to a 'right' frame of mind and a benevolent course of action. However, the same eagerness, when directed towards laudable ends, causes her not only to correct, but to overcompensate for her past follies (the unguarded relationship with Willoughby and undue censure of others). Yet although her nature is 'ardent' Marianne is not 'hearty' (usually linked with 'vulgar' in Austen) like Mrs Jennings and Sir John Middleton. Thus one can infer that she would have equally recoiled from 'vulgar' religious 'enthusiasm'. Yet surprisingly, the aesthetically sensitive Marianne uses the highly personal, Evangelical-like phrase, 'atonement to my God'. Either Austen is signalling serious intentions or writing tongue-in-cheek.

In her first prayer, Austen petitioned God to help her to feel her sins 'deeply, that our repentance may be sincere' (*MW* 453). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen seems to make Marianne feel her 'sins' almost too deeply for a median Anglican, so much so that she seems unnecessarily harsh in her self-condemnation when she says, 'I cannot express my own abhorrence of myself' (337). Similarly, her implying that had she died it would have been a kind of suicide, seems almost ludicrous. (345) Yet, it can be argued that her taking ownership of her illness (even if it is in hyperbolic terms) shows to what extent she has matured. It demonstrates a turn-about from her earlier attempts at self-justification in the novel.

When Elinor had challenged her for visiting Allenham unchaperoned with Willoughby, she defends this 'imprudence'¹²² by appealing to her conscience; 'for we always know when we are acting wrong' (68). While such an argument, which appeals solely to the subjective power of the individual conscience, seems innocuous, as the novel progresses it is shown to be dangerous, for orthodox Christianity offers more than this 'light of nature'. It was an argument that some Latitudinarians, Deists and Freethinkers used, hence Wiltshire's description of this as Marianne's 'Shaftesburian' moment.¹²³ At the same time, rational

¹²¹ On sentiment see *SS* 27, 47; on the picturesque see 97-98 and the indulgence of feeling after Willoughby's departure, see 83-84.

¹²² See More's views of this folly in *Practical Piety* 1: 274.

¹²³ See Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1992): 34.

writers like Locke, showed the arbitrariness of the conscience and ridiculed its safety as a guide.¹²⁴ Here Austen (who seems to align herself more with the rational Elinor) appears to reject Marianne's idea of the sovereignty of the conscience, showing how this 'voice' can be repeatedly silenced, and this 'light' progressively darkened.

If one does not read against the grain, one struggles to empathise with the severity with which Marianne castigates herself for flouting the social taboos of eighteenth-century society by visiting Allenham unchaperoned and by carrying on a relationship without the official sanction of an engagement. Yet, it seems as if Austen is arguing that it is not the trivial acts so much as the *principle* underlying them that is suspect. For as Edmund reminds us in *Mansfield Park*, ideally 'manners' result from 'the influence of religion' (*MP* 92). Here, in probing the principles behind social conduct, Austen seems to pinpoint a basic selfishness. She shows that Marianne's repeated rationalization of these (societal rather than moral) 'transgressions' leads her to a dulling of moral perceptions, such as basic respect and courtesy due to others. Thus, conduct is ultimately the outcome of a series of moral choices.¹²⁵ And in a sense, Marianne's story, which is in some ways a *bildung* or narrative of moral and psychological development, can also be read as an inversion of the traditional heroine's text with its 'grammar of seduction'.¹²⁶

However, instead of being the object (of male seduction), Marianne is the subject (of her own delusions). Acting on the partial evidence she has, she can be said to seduce her sense into believing that Willoughby is virtuous; misreading charm for honour, chivalry for virtue. Furthermore, figuratively speaking, she places herself trustingly in his protection, giving the outside world assurances of this by visiting Allenham with him, giving him a lock of her hair and corresponding with him as if engaged. Invariably her trust is betrayed. It is tempting to read Marianne's story as a kind of parallel to that of Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe. However, this needs qualification, for although Clarissa acts against propriety and out of love for an unworthy man, she never allows the light of her eye to be dimmed like that

¹²⁴ In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk 1, ch. 3, section 8, Locke sceptically maintained that 'Conscience is nothing else, but our own Opinion or Judgement of the Moral Rectitude or Pravity of our own Actions.' *Works* 1: 340.

¹²⁵ See Ruderman 10, n. 39, on moral choices.

¹²⁶ For her use of the phrase, see Nancy K Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 7.

of Marianne. And unlike Clarissa and other eighteenth-century feminocentric texts, in *Sense and Sensibility* the heroine neither loses her virginity nor dies; she only loses her naiveté, imprudence, lack of candour and selfishness.

Perhaps unusually restrictive in her standards of social propriety, Austen seems to be making the point that it is better to err on the safe side of social and moral decorum, thereby not only maintaining one's 'proper' reputation, but avoiding moral confusion (which links virtue with 'properness') and not giving occasion for offence. Seen this way, what Christine Roulston says of *Emma* seems equally apposite here: 'This new feminine model is less static and yet potentially more conservative than its eighteenth-century counterparts, because it is fully answerable to the existing social order'.¹²⁷ [my emphasis]

On the other hand, a cynical Austen could simply be warning her female readers that they cannot afford (yet) to cross the social ha-ha in case they lose their essential 'properness'. Although drafted in 1795, *Sense and Sensibility* was published in 1811, after the Wollstonecraft scandal (1798).¹²⁸ It is therefore probable that Austen is warning her female readers to 'play it safe'. But such a reading undercuts and virtually contradicts her keen doctrinal interest.

The troubled surface of the writing possibly registers a subconscious awareness that Marianne may be the victim of a patriarchal interpretation of Christian repentance. Therefore, although her repentance seems authorially endorsed, one could read it against the grain. At one level, Austen subscribes to (but is uneasy about) typically gendered and implicitly class based (in her dislike of vulgarity) discourse, and presents Marianne as repenting from particularly feminine failings (egocentric sentimentality and misdirected ardour).¹²⁹ Desirous of showing her Anglican doctrines in action, Austen is nevertheless torn between gender, class and doctrine in a way More and Sherlock never seem to have been. In this way it seems apposite to describe even Austen's 'Christian' discourse as 'gendered', as she struggles

¹²⁷ Christine Roulston, 'Discourse, gender and gossip: Some reflections on Bakhtin and Emma,' Christine Roulston in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 54.

¹²⁸ See Kirkham 48-50.

¹²⁹ On the question of the sentimental novel as a site of gendered power struggles, see Christine Roulston, 'Discourse, gender and gossip: Some reflections on Bakhtin and Emma' 40-65.

unsuccessfully to break away from such ingrained stereotypical ways of viewing the (venial) lapses of women.

It seems as if one can really only reconcile the different interpretations by accepting that there are basic, inherent contradictions in Austen: the orthodox Anglican, writing within the traditional patriarchal tradition (which consistently reads women in terms of a gendered discourse) at war with the incipient feminist, who desires to break loose from stereotype and assert (both a religious and a secular) female autonomy. Because the discourse of religion is traditionally gendered, the result is a conflict, and Austen's loyalties seem to shift, depending on the subject, the characters and the mood. Ultimately however, she seems, like More, to cast her vote, conservatively, on the side of Christian 'duty'.

Although the light of Marianne's individual eye never becomes really dark, she does, with Willoughby's help, enter a 'twilight zone' by means of moral rationalization. He is not only adept at this art, but tutors Marianne very effectively in it. When Brandon is called suddenly to London (to rescue his ward, Eliza, from the effects of Willoughby's seduction) and the pleasure party is cancelled, Willoughby maliciously remarks to Marianne that 'He [Brandon] was afraid of catching cold, I dare say, and invented this trick for getting out of it. I would lay fifty guineas the letter was of his own writing.' Such is his influence that Marianne agrees, saying 'I have no doubt of it' (94). Marianne is presented as weakly allowing Willoughby to darken her originally more candid judgment of others by infecting her with his opinions: something More warned against in *Practical Piety*, where she exhorts her readers to 'examine not only our conduct, but our opinions'.¹³⁰

Here as elsewhere in her novels, Austen seems to put a high premium on candour. Although the word has changed meaning since the eighteenth-century, Austen herself provides a definition of it in *Pride and Prejudice*: 'candour without ostentation or design – to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better and to say nothing of the bad' (PP 4).¹³¹ In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne (who learns to take the more restrained Elinor as her guide) is not required to be as generously enhancing of the good as suggested in the above quotation. Here only plain truth is required. It is significant therefore, that Willoughby's

¹³⁰ *Practical Piety* 2: 227.

¹³¹ I am indebted to Chapman, *Facts and Problems* 94, for this insight. Chapman also points out (94) that Henry praises Austen for this same quality of candour in his *Biographical Notice* (90 - 92) 'The affectation of candour is not uncommon, but she had no affectation.'

gossip about Brandon is not only malicious, but untrue. More ironically, his maligning of Brandon is a cover for his own sin. Brandon does not cancel the pleasure party for fear of catching cold, but in order to go to London to rescue Eliza (a socially and economically disempowered woman) from the effect of Willoughby's sexual misdemeanours, of which her pregnancy is the most glaring result.

Later, in her self-inquisitorial passage, Marianne confesses to her previous carelessness of speech. In *Emma*, Mr Knightley also takes a dim view of this failing. In his discussion of Frank he observes; 'He has had great faults, faults of inconsideration and thoughtlessness' (*E* 448). Significantly too, Frank is reprobated by Knightley and Emma for failing to take due cognisance of social decorum (by entering into a clandestine engagement with Jane and corresponding with her and by flirting repeatedly and publicly with Emma), which had he obeyed, would have materially lessened the sufferings of his fiancée.

Marianne's failings are not nearly as serious as Frank's, yet with hindsight, she reprimands her attitudes to and appraisals of others as 'insolent and unjust', which previously under Willoughby's influence, she rationalized as being simply frank. Marianne is consistently presented as an apostle of frankness,¹³² and as is well known, 'sincerity' was a highly prized Freethinking tenet, as evinced by Godwin's valorisation of it in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793).¹³³ In a sense this clutter of Freethinking rationalization has to be cleared away from Marianne's inner lens to facilitate a return to the single light of the eye. And it is remarkable that in so doing Marianne never blames Willoughby, although she blames herself for trusting him.

¹³² 'Marianne abhorred all concealment' (*SS* 53). Cf. ch 21: 'What a sweet woman Lady Middleton is' said Lucy Steele. / Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell' (122).

¹³³ For Godwin, 'Sincerity is '[I]ntimately connected with the general dissemination of innocence, energy, intellectual improvement and philanthropy' (328). He goes on idealistically to claim that: 'The effects of sincerity upon others, would be similar to its effects upon him that practised it [that is, liberating]. How great would be the benefit, if every man would be sure of meeting in his neighbour the ingenuous censor, who would tell him in person, and publish to the world, his virtues, his good deeds, his meanness and his follies', *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. F E L Priestley, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946) 1: 329 (Bk 4 ch. 6, 'Of Sincerity'). The trouble with Willoughby and Marianne is that (if they were intent on following Godwin's advice) they not only ignore Brandon's good deeds, but talk behind his back instead of telling 'him in person' his faults!

Marianne's 'selfish' disregard for her own health can also be read as a further step in obscuring her own 'light'. She becomes so self-preoccupied that she loses perspective. When Willoughby publicly rejects her, thus dashing all hopes of a permanent relationship, Marianne became careless of her health and even her life. Later she confesses this as a 'sin', explaining that even during her emotional trauma, she was aware of her conscience inciting her to rouse herself to exertion, but in her self-pity, she silenced it. (Here, to complicate issues, her conscience seems to be more reliable!) Thus, she admits to 'such negligence of my own health, as I had felt even at the time to be wrong'. She does not say why it was wrong, but apart from the more obvious social transgression (with its moral undertones) there is the underlying orthodox assumption that one's body is not one's own, but the 'temple of God', and that one has no right to neglect or destroy it (1 Cor 1:16). Marianne's confession of these wrongs eliminates the moral debris that has cluttered her inner eye, thus clearing the way for further light.

This light increases as Marianne turns her attention to people she believes she has wronged. From confronting the 'injury' to God and herself, Marianne focuses on others whom she has disregarded or 'injured': family members and friends, such as the Middletons, Mrs Jennings, Brandon and even the devious, self-seeking Steele sisters. In all these instances she dwells warmly on her selfishness, which she regards with 'abhorrence', using strong epithets such as 'insolent' and 'unjust' to describe her conduct and dramatically juxtaposing the 'unceasing kindness' of Mrs Jennings with her own 'ungrateful contempt':

I cannot express my own abhorrence of myself. Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing indulged. Every body seemed injured by me. The kindness, the unceasing kindness of Mrs Jennings, I had repaid with ungrateful contempt. To the Middletons, the Palmers, the Steeles, to every common acquaintance even, I had been insolent and unjust; with an heart hardened against their merits, and a temper irritated by their very attention . . . (346)

In the above passage Marianne uses rhetorical language in an almost extravagant way, as if her generosity of spirit is carried over into her 'atonement', where she seems unduly harsh in her own condemnation and over-accommodating towards others.

Her accumulation of rhetorical questions, ‘Was I . . . ? Did I . . . ? Did I . . . ?’, builds up to a crescendo of self-castigation in which she deals with her past attitudes and actions in what seems unnecessarily severe (and More-like) language. By showing the lavishness of her atonement, Austen may be making the point that her ardent heroine requires appropriately emotionally heightened language to convey her feelings.

Even if Austen were mocking Marianne’s ‘eagerness’ in her characteristic hyperbolic language, she is careful not to undercut her didactic purpose, that is, of showing that Marianne was remiss and needed to change. One can surmise that this excessive self-castigation and remorse will, in time, soften to a more reasonable regret in the same way that her violent effusions of grief for Willoughby were replaced by a more restrained sadness, but that she will not lose the valuable spiritual insight she has gained.

Most importantly, Marianne recognizes that Elinor’s example heightened her own accountability and this alone testifies to the fact that unlike others, she does not suffer from what Margaret Kennedy calls ‘moral astigmatism’: ¹³⁴

Your example was before me: but to what avail? – Was I more considerate of you and your comfort? Did I imitate your forbearance, or lessen your restraints, by taking any part in those offices of general complaisance or particular gratitude which you had hitherto been left to discharge alone? – No; – not less when I knew you to be unhappy, then when I had believed you at ease, did I turn away from every exertion of duty or friendship; scarcely allowing sorrow to exist but with me . . . (346)

When the light of one’s own eye is darkened, it is implied that one still has the example of others to lighten one on the way and that one ought to value this. In accusing herself of unkindness to others and neglect of her own sister, Marianne demonstrates an understanding that she previously lacked, recalling Austen’s prayer to understand the ‘sinfulness of our own hearts’. Similarly, Marianne confronts what Austen calls in her prayers the ‘fault[s] of temper and ‘every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of

¹³⁴ Margaret Kennedy, *Jane Austen*, The Novelists Series (1950; rpt London: Morrison and Gibb, 1957) 73.

our fellow-creatures and the danger of our own soul' (*MW* 453). Marianne's 'faults of temper' have been not only insensitivity, but irritability towards others,¹³⁵ and her selfish indulgence in her personal sorrow, resulting in her illness, causes untold 'discomfort' to her family and friends.

Finally, it costs Marianne a great deal to admit that the object of her grief, the one '[who] deserted and wronged me' (Willoughby) was by comparison with others, grossly undeserving of her whole-hearted attention.¹³⁶ She admits that her self-preoccupation prevented her from seeing her sister's unhappiness, for she 'regrett[ed] only *that* heart which had deserted and wronged me' (346). Thus Marianne seems to echo Clarissa's words to Mrs Norton: '*I will own to you that once I could have loved him – ungrateful man! had he permitted me to love him, I once could have loved him.* Yet he never deserved my love. And was not this a fault?'¹³⁷ [Richardson's italics]. Marianne's words suggest however, not only an acknowledgement of an error of judgement (in assessing Willoughby's character), but a feminist recognition that she allowed an unworthy male to divide her from her sister. But Austen lifts this into a Christian context: she seems to be arguing that in privileging the claims of the worthless Willoughby over those of the much more deserving Elinor (and the rest of the family), Marianne muddled her priorities and darkened the 'light' of her 'eye'. In her repentance passage she reverses these priorities and as part of her *at-one-ment* with God and her sister, she recognizes afresh the claims of sisterly affection.

In admitting that she had not imitated Elinor's forbearance and restraint, and lacked charity towards others, Marianne confesses to an abrogation of 'duty'. Thus dexterously, Austen proceeds to steer Marianne's impassioned 'atonement to my God' away from the Scylla of Evangelism and the Charybdos of Methodism, into the smoother waters of genteel, socially-acceptable morality, by employing safe, conceptual terms such as 'duty', 'failing'

¹³⁵ Cf. David Cecil: 'Nor is Jane Austen's view rendered less penetrating by the fact that, as a rule, she shows him [sic] not in moments of crisis, but in the trivial incidents of every day. Human nature discloses itself as fully in little things as in big ones; a tea-party reveals selfishness, kindness, self-control, ill-temper as much as does an air-raid.' *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1967) 147.

¹³⁶ Marianne nevertheless feels relieved and somewhat justified for having loved him after his admission to Elinor that he did love her and was not merely trifling with her. See SS 347-348 and Willoughby's narrative on 319-330.

¹³⁷ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady in Four Volumes* (London: Everyman, 1968) 3: 345.

'merits' ('a heart hardened against their merits'), 'forbearance' and 'offices of general complaisance', thereby deflecting any hint of fanaticism and reinforcing her median Anglican stance. The concept of Christian neighbourliness as a duty was beloved by High and Broad Church. Sherlock had shown how contradictory it is to pretend to love God and abuse one's neighbour:

No man who thinks himself bound to love and obey God can think himself at liberty to hurt or oppress those whom God has taken under His care and Protection . . . [One] must likewise believe it his Interest and Duty to be kind and tender towards those who are the Children of God, and in whose happiness he is not an unconcerned Spectator. (*TD* 1: 356-57)

In her prayers Austen asked God to help her remember 'any known duty' or the way in which she had 'willingly given pain to any human being' (*MW* 453-54). In the second prayer she requested forgiveness for 'evil thoughts and neglected duties' (*MW* 454). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne twice refers to duty / duties: 'Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected or some failing indulged' and 'turn[ed] away from every exertion of duty or friendship' (*SS* 346). It is difficult to say to what extent Marianne's concept of 'duty' incorporates the multifarious 'female duty' so beloved of conduct writers, but apart from earlier regret at the lapses from social decorum, Austen seems to use it here in a singularly ungendered way.¹³⁸

What is more problematic is the way in which Austen uses the term 'duty' in *Persuasion*. Here she subjects this term, laden with both ethical and societal connotations, to more direct scrutiny. Although Poovey, who discusses the aspect of 'traditional Christian self-denial' in female duty, rightly recognises that 'no one but Anne adheres to the morality of which it is a part',¹³⁹ I believe her theory of moral relativity is incommensurate with Austen's orthodox outlook, as is her more utilitarian suggestion that 'Anne is driven to

¹³⁸ Cf. *Persuasion*, where Anne says to Wentworth: 'And if I am not mistaken a strong sense of duty is no bad a part of a woman's portion'.

¹³⁹ Poovey 226.

Christian virtue at least partly out of personal need'.¹⁴⁰ While it is true that virtue often brings its own reward (in the form of personal happiness)¹⁴¹ Austen never presents this as the driving motive behind her heroines' desire to do their moral or Christian duty. Such would simply be a modern revisiting of Paley's earlier utilitarianism.

In the only complete conversation between Marianne and Willoughby,¹⁴² they demonstrate how unneighbourly or uncharitable they can be towards the unwitting Brandon. Here it is superbly ironic that the male indulges in the archetypically female sin of gossip. Gossip is something 'real' men are usually above: in *Persuasion*, the lower-class woman, Nurse Rooke, trades in gossip and in *Emma*, as Roulston points out, 'the language is explicitly gendered – female speech is called 'gossip' and male speech 'conversation'. She goes on to remind us that at the end of the novel after a wedding, Mr Knightley says to Emma, 'this is all that I can relate of the how, where and when – your friend Harriet will make a much longer history when you see her. – She will give you all the minute particulars, which only women's language can make interesting. – In our language we deal only with the great' (453).¹⁴³

In *Sense and Sensibility* Willoughby leaves the male domain of 'the great' and stoops to the female language of gossip. Although cruel, gossip can sometimes be true, but here it is clearly false. Without foundation, Brandon not only speculates on the reason why the pleasure party was cancelled, but remarks maliciously to Marianne that: 'Brandon is just the kind of man . . . whom every body speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to.' (50) How would eighteenth-century moralists see this? In criticizing a friend, acquaintance or 'neighbour', in whose 'happiness one is not an unconcerned Spectator', they show a lack of the much-admired eighteenth-century virtue, 'candour'¹⁴⁴ – a quality both male and female writers valorised. In her chapter on 'Self-

¹⁴⁰ Poovey 227. Cf also her assertion that Austen leaves unanswered 'the question of how the selfless definition of duty can be distinguished from its self-serving twin', 228.

¹⁴¹ Which is basically what Anne Ruderman argues throughout *The Pleasures of Virtue*.

¹⁴² W A Craik, *Jane Austen: The Six Novels* (London: Methuen, 1965) 43.

¹⁴³ Christine Roulston, 'Discourse, gender and gossip: Some reflections on Bakhtin and Emma' 44.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Leavis (30), who maintains that in contradistinction to the Brontës, Austen demonstrates 'the advantages of a code of conduct based on politeness and forbearance, instead of brutal plain-speaking and aggressive individualism'.

Examination' in *Practical Piety*, More shows the necessity of transposing this virtue from the public to the private realm, and thereby implicitly from the traditionally male to the traditionally domestic or female domain, as it were. For her it is simply an expansion of her 'consistency' theme. She writes: '[w]e should watch ourselves whether we observe a simple rule of truth and justice, as well in our conversation, as in our ordinary transactions' (*Practical Piety* 1:274) This is exactly what Marianne and Willoughby fail to do. In a subsequent denigration of Brandon as a dour, mosquito-slapping old man in a flannel waistcoat, they not only abrogate this 'simple rule of truth and justice', but lack what Austen calls in her second prayer a 'benevolent spirit toward every fellow creature' – ideally, a non-gender-specific virtue that Marianne strives to attain as part of her 'atonement'.

As one who could not 'love by halves' (SS 367), Marianne does not repent 'by halves' either. The pendulum swings with such violence that she, who was formerly so fervent in her self-justification, is now equally ardent in her self-condemnation. This same excess is evident in her idealistic new programme of reformation. As part of her campaign for self-improvement, Marianne proposes a new Evangelical-like daily regime,¹⁴⁵ which apart from the large musical component, More would have enthusiastically endorsed. Marianne maintains:

I mean never to be later in rising than six, and from that time till dinner I shall divide every moment between music and reading, I have formed my plan and determined to enter on a course of serious study . . . By reading only six hours a day I shall gain in the course of a twelve-month a great deal of instruction which I now feel myself to want. (334-35)¹⁴⁶

Although so close to general Evangelical and Methodist ideals, it differs from them significantly in that there is no time earmarked especially for prayer (for which strict Evangelicals reserved three hours a day).¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, Marianne's regimen also shows

¹⁴⁵ Although not of course exclusive to Evangelicals.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G B Hill, rev. L F Powell. 6 vols (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1834) 1: 303.

¹⁴⁷ See also S C Carpenter, *Church and People 1789–1889* (London: SPCK, 1933) 100, who mentions the Evangelicals' early rising and reproduces one of Wilberforce's personal timetables, which had a column for

affinities with the high-churchly Dr Johnson's proposed scheme for a Sunday, as noted in his journal, 13 July 1776:

- (1) To rise early, and in order to do, to go to sleep early on Saturday.
- (2) To use some extraordinary devotion in the morning.
- (3) To examine the tenour of my life, and particularly the last week; and to mark my advances in religion, or recession from it.
- (4) To read the Scriptures methodically with such helps as are at hand.
- (5) To go to church twice.
- (6) To read books of Divinity, either speculative or practical.
- (7) To instruct my family.
- (8) To wear off, by meditation, any worldly soil contracted in the week.

Whereas Johnson limits his strenuous regime to one day a week, Marianne idealistically desires to implement it on a daily basis. In relation to moderation and virtue, Aristotle observes: 'It is easy to miss the mark but hard to hit it'. ¹⁴⁸

Although Marianne's virtuous scheme shows that her underlying motives are good, the amusing excess of it is recognized by Elinor who:

honoured her for a plan which originated so nobly as this, though smiling to see the same eager fancy which had been leading her to the extremes of languid indolence and selfish repinement, now at work in introducing excess into a scheme of such rational employment and virtuous self-control. (335)

'Early rising, rational employment and virtuous self-control' are also typically female, conduct book virtues and Marianne seems bent (as part of her punishment) on appropriating the role of a conduct book heroine. Fortunately only 'dull elves' would believe that she could

'squandered time'. They were equally disciplined in their giving as an excerpt from Henry Thornton's ledger testifies. This is not to claim that Evangelicals had the monopoly of such virtuous personal regimens; Godwin rose early to read a portion of Greek or Latin before breakfast each day and his diary, recorded in a English/French/Latin shorthand, reveals his 'anxious use of time'. See H N Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* 82.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted by Ruderman 116.

sustain such a burdensome ideal. Thus Austen (unlike More with regard to her characters) ironically views Marianne's arduous atonement, without too seriously undercutting it. One senses too, that as mistress of Delaford her initial, reformed zeal (rising at six in the morning, reading for six hours a day and living solely for her family) will give way to a more genteel, socially acceptable and practical 'middle' way of expressing her Christianity. But if the outward rigour evaporates, the inward virtues that she has struggled to acquire, remain.

Although cast in romantic terms and then partially (but not wholly) ironically undercut, Marianne's illness, contrary to what some critics argue,¹⁴⁹ remains morally empowering. Marianne has not only matured, but has become a better person, a more enlightened Christian. She has not only learned the importance of self-control, but toleration ('forbearance') and charity. These virtues not only safeguard the individual's happiness and oil the wheels of society, but have more serious, lasting effects. Formative of good character, their serious lack results in Mrs Ranby-like intolerance or the uncontrolled sexual appetites of Willoughby, Lydia Bennet, Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford, who may be storing up 'no small portion of vexation and regret in a 'juster appointment hereafter' (MP 452-453).

Yet Marianne's repentance remains problematic. Austen seems to be unable to break away from a traditional stereotypically gendered discourse, which presents Marianne's failings and her reform in typically feminised form. Lack of self-control¹⁵⁰ or stubbornness is traditionally presented as a specifically feminine failing (hence many conduct books on the subject) and Marianne's refusal to heed Elinor's words or example can be read as an example of wilfulness that requires punishment. But *Sense and Sensibility* is not an exception. There are vestiges of this traditional anti-feminism in *Emma*, where in a passage of free indirect speech we are told that 'Emma grieved . . . over one of the worst of her *womanly follies* – her wilful intimacy with Harriet' (E 475). As 'womanly' and 'follies' are linked in *Emma*, so in *Sense and Sensibility*, 'wilfulness' seems to be linked with femininity. This is unsettling,

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Angela Leighton who maintains that in *Sense and Sensibility*, 'Austen's irony forbids the reader to take any act or speech at face value'. 'Sense and Silences' in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 139.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Mary Brunton's (1778-1818) conduct novel, *Self-Controul* (1810), where the heroine, Laura, is an exemplum of this virtue. She not only resists seduction and marriage proposal from dashing Colonel Hargrave, but undergoes many hardships, ending in America, where she finally escapes down a river in an Indian canoe. In 1813, Austen, who was three years younger than Brunton (who died in childbirth), read it dismissively, as highly improbable. See L 278, 344, 423. Cf Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Viking, 1997) 325 n.

perhaps all the more so, because this curiously anti-feminist stance may be wilfully overlooked by Austen critics. Surprisingly, this tendency was recognised by Trollope, who avers that *Emma* ‘is severe on the little foibles of women with a severity which no man would dare to use . . . but nowadays we would not dare to make our heroines so little’.¹⁵¹

Another disturbing element in Marianne’s repentance is the blurring of moral and social boundaries. Marianne’s struggle to reconcile religious with societal imperatives not only culminates in what some critics see as an aesthetically dissatisfying resolution,¹⁵² but seems to point to the inherent contradictions underlying eighteenth-century female Christian ethics: the confusion between morality (in this case, foundational Christian principles) and ‘propriety’ or existing social order¹⁵³ (flouted by Marianne in her unchaperoned visit to Allenham and her correspondence with Willoughby). And bound by eighteenth-century (female) decorum or appropriateness of behaviour,¹⁵⁴ which often claimed to be based on principles of Christian morality (such as chastity, modesty, submission), struggle as she may, Austen seems powerless to untie this Gordian knot.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in *Emma: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed David Lodge (1968; rpt London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978) 51. Trollope wrote these comments in 1865 on the end papers of his copy of *Emma*. Trollope’s last comment implies either that society’s attitude towards women was changing and that anti-feminism was less tolerated, or that novelists were expected to create characters of greater ‘moral stature’.

¹⁵² See for example Tony Tanner in his chapter, ‘Secrecy and Sickness’ in *Jane Austen, Critical Studies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986) who feels that Austen ‘betrays’ Marianne and Leighton 128-168, who believes that Austen effectively ‘silences’ Marianne, robbing her of her autonomy and her particular female ‘voice’.

¹⁵³ See Roulston, ‘Discourse, gender and gossip: Some reflections on Bakhtin and Emma’, who, on similar grounds, describes Austen as conservative.

¹⁵⁴ See Stokes 96-97.

MANSFIELD PARK

Mansfield Park is frequently seen as Austen's most psychologically complex novel. Through her use of 'free indirect style' by which she explores the inner life of her protagonists or takes us within the minds of her heroines', subtly probing their psychological complexities, she has been said both to anticipate the techniques of Henry James and furthermore, 'pinpoint the essence of feminist narratology'.¹⁵⁵

Yet, *Mansfield Park* is also regarded as Austen's most problematic novel. Unless one adopts a subversive approach, reading it as a radical critique of the patriarchy¹⁵⁶ or variously 'against the grain' (using structuralist, Marxist, anthropological post-colonial¹⁵⁷ or frankly subversive feminist models,¹⁵⁸ this is a sombre novel with its seeming repudiation of the attractive, lively Crawfords and their amateur theatricals,¹⁵⁹ its endorsement of the dull, priggish Edmund Bertram, and its promotion of the modest, retiring heroine who, according to Marian Fowler, displays many conduct book and Evangelical characteristics.¹⁶⁰ Yet, as

¹⁵⁵ Q D Leavis 19-20; John Burrows: 'Style' (170-89) in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* ed. E Copeland and J McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 171. See also Kathy Mezei 1-20 and Robyn Warhol 31-39 in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996) 1-20, 31-39.

¹⁵⁶ There are a variety of such readings based on different models. Mary Poovey, who provides a feminist materialist study of *Mansfield Park* based on the classic Marxist critique model, explores the complicated codes of eighteenth-century female propriety and shows the inherent contradictions between apparent 'proper lady' status and real (economic and political) power. See Poovey 212-24.

¹⁵⁷ Nina Auerbach in 'Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm'; in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, New Case Books, ed. Judy Simons (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan 1997) 39-66, reads Fanny as an isolated observer, a Romantic outcast or spirit of anti-play, like Shelley's Frankenstein, or the monster in *Beowulf*. Ruth Bernard Yeazall 'The Boundaries of *Mansfield Park*', in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, 107-123, offers an anthropological reading of the novel based on spatial imagery. She examines the 'dirt imagery', relating it to narrative tropes (of anxiety concerning the transgression of ritualised codes or boundaries) in the text, which she argues derive from archetypal tropes reflecting the conflict between Christianity and paganism.

¹⁵⁸ Such as S Gilbert and S Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

¹⁵⁹ Space does not permit an examination of Austen's highly ambiguous attitudes towards the propriety of private theatricals or her apparent disapproval of the morally vitiating effects of German drama (in the form of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*) or the denunciation of Maria Bertram's adultery by Sir Thomas Bertram, Edmund and Fanny.

¹⁶⁰ Marian Fowler concludes that: 'Fanny Price is the natural product of the climate of Evangelical piety and propriety prevailing in England at the time of her conception, and the natural progeny of a long line of

John Wiltshire, counter-argues: 'It is a great simplification to see her as modelling a 'conduct book', a Christian, or an Evangelical heroine.'¹⁶¹ It is not my intention here to try to do justice to the plethora of interpretations of the character of Fanny Price, who has attracted both an unusual number of supporters such as Chapman, Jenkins, Q D Leavis, Marilyn Butler, David Spring, David Monaghan, Joseph Donahue, Oliver MacDonagh and Lionel Trilling, detractors such as Kingsley Amis, Marvin Mudrick, Nina Auerbach, D A Miller and Ruth Yeazall or feminists like Margaret Kirkham, Mary Poovey, Claudia Johnson, who variously find Fanny's piety ironic, problematic, repulsive or only comprehensible in terms of feminist, Marxist or anthropological models.¹⁶²

This divisiveness among critics with regard to the interpretation of Fanny's character is symptomatic of a deeper uneasiness about Austen, for whichever way we see it, in *Mansfield Park*, as almost every critic observes, Austen appears at her most uncharacteristically moralizing or at her most deeply ironic and subversive. If the first, the

fictional courtesy-book girls' (165). See Marian Fowler, 'The Courtesy-Book Heroine of *Mansfield Park*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments* ed. Ian Littlewood (East Sussex: Helm, 1998) 152-165.

¹⁶¹ Wiltshire, 'Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion' (58-84) in *Cambridge Companion* 60-1. Some of the Evangelical traits critics have detected in Fanny include her excessive modesty, her reprehension of Kotzebue's play, her dislike of acting, her lack of wit and the usual female accomplishments (playing, singing, drawing) disapprobation of flirting, her refusal to marry a 'rake' such as Henry Crawford and finally, her love of Cowper, the Evangelical poet. See Fowler 152-165 and Butler 236 ff., who talk of Fanny's three 'temptations'.

¹⁶² Amis describes Fanny as 'morally detestable' and 'a monster of complacency and pride' in 'What Became of Jane Austen?' in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen* ed. Ian Watt (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963) 142, 144. Elizabeth Bowen (*Saturday Review of Literature* XIV, 15 Aug, 1936) and Lord David Cecil in his Leslie Stephen lecture on Jane Austen, both refer to Fanny as a 'failure'. G B Stern asks if she is ever human, 'The Mansfield Park Quartette', *Speaking of Jane Austen*, 50 and Marvin Mudrick describes Fanny as full of 'complacency and envy, perhaps; certainly an odd lack-lustre self-pity' in *Irony as Defense and Discovery*, (Berkeley: California UP, 1968) 161. Edwin Muir concludes that Fanny is 'a moral cliché' in 'The Problem with Mansfield Park, Jane Austen: Critical Assessments' ed. Ian Littlewood (East Sussex: Helm, 1998) 90. Cf. Joseph Duffy, 'Moral Integrity and Moral Anarchy in *Mansfield Park*', in *ELH* 23 (March 1956): 71-91. Margaret Kirkham, who rebuts Trilling's assertion that Austen abandoned irony in *Mansfield Park* (see Lionel Trilling, 'Mansfield Park' from *The Opposing Self* (1955), rpt. in *Jane Austen: A collection of Critical Essays* ed. Ian Watt (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963) 124-140, avers in 'Feminist Irony and The Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*', ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 231-247, that there are definite ironic intentions behind the creation of an apparently exemplary conduct book heroine such as Fanny Price. Reading *Mansfield Park* in conjunction with Wollstonecraft, Bishop Butler and Richard Price, Kirkham maintains that Austen is directing criticism at the conduct book ethos and Rousseauistic notions of women. Cf. Nina Auerbach, 'Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm: Feeling As One Ought About Fanny Price', in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* ed. Janet Todd, op cit., 208-24, who argues that Austen felt ill at ease with Fanny, whom Auerbach reads as a Romantic outcast, a monster-like exile from the domestic comedy. See also D A Miller, 'Good Riddance: Closure in *Mansfield Park*' (37-48) and Ruth Bernard Yeazall, 'The Boundaries of *Mansfield Park*' (67-92) respectively in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion: Contemporary Critical Essays*, New Casebooks, ed. Judy Simons (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

reader is uncomfortably confronted with an unwonted tendentiousness, that seems more characteristic of More, than of Austen. Yet, the second approach seems too facile a solution and lacks sufficient proof.

Some critics suggest that Austen's greater preoccupation with 'serious things' in *Mansfield Park* testifies to an interest in Evangelicalism. Sheila Kaye-Smith was possibly the first to suggest this, and from then on, a steady war has raged between those who support the thesis that *Mansfield Park* is an Evangelical novel and those who do not.¹⁶³ David Monaghan,¹⁶⁴ argues against the Evangelical influence, while Marilyn Butler, Gary Kelly, Oliver MacDonagh, Marian Fowler and Avrom Fleishman¹⁶⁵ argue more positively for it.¹⁶⁶

In an attempt to explore Austen's moral didacticism in this chapter I propose to focus not so much on the heroine, than the anti-heroine, Mary Crawford).¹⁶⁷ The narratorial

¹⁶³ Sheila Kaye-Smith writes: 'No, a shadow has fallen over *Mansfield Park* which does not lie over the three earlier novels and has passed away before the next appears. I wonder if I am guessing very wildly when I suggest that that shadow is the Evangelical Revival. I have no external evidence; though it might be a change from the usual supposition that the letters which Cassandra destroyed were connected with some secret love affair to imagine that they revealed instead a religious experience . . .' Sheila Kaye-Smith and G B Stern, *Talking of Jane Austen* (London: Cassell, 1943) 108.

¹⁶⁴ See Monaghan 167-178.

¹⁶⁵ Fleishman 118-132.

¹⁶⁶ See for example her discussion of the Mansfield theatricals: 'By 1814 the increasingly strong Evangelical movement had sufficiently publicized the link between upper-class morality and its rage for private theatricals.' She goes on to show that 'play-acting which tempts girls especially into an unseemly kind of personal display' is reprobated by the Evangelical Thomas Gisborne in his *Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) 'which Jane Austen read with approval'. See Butler 231 and Gary Kelly, who argues that '*Mansfield Park* . . . contains Austen's most extensive discussion of the clergy, and indicates her sympathy with Evangelicalism, 'Religion and Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion* 156.

¹⁶⁷ Space does not permit an examination of the complex and ambiguous attitudes to the amateur theatricals nor to Fanny's and Edmund's attitudes toward adultery. However I do not think that Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 116 -131, does justice to Fanny's motivation for not acting in *Lovers Vows*, and that John Wiltshire similarly misreads her reasons for refusing to act in the play. His explanation, that her refusal is a result of her timidity and not 'moral righteousness' (Wiltshire, *Cambridge Companion* 61) is problematic in that it does not do justice to the moral strength she derives from her principles. While it may be partly true that 'Fanny Price is an interesting psychological study in the manners and attitudes of a radically insecure and traumatized personality', she is also portrayed as having the moral stability to retain her individuality under enormous psychological stress. It is implicit that this moral strength, although honed by adversity, derives from her Christian principles, which enable her to survive Mrs Norris's continual persecution (without letting it warp her psychologically) and Henry Crawford's unwelcome advances, as well as supplying her with the strength to oppose Sir Thomas's coercion to marry Henry. This moral stability also enables her sometimes to differ from her mentor, Edmund, in his views and rise above the squalidity of Portsmouth and 'tutor' Susan (but not necessarily as the next 'moral custodian' of *Mansfield Park* as averred by Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Image, Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Mercury, 1961). See also Roger Sales (105) who rebuts this view.

repudiation of the lively feminist Mary, another major source of critical uneasiness, is complex, but I suggest it can be better understood if we read it in the light of current religious and philosophical debates. Without these contexts, Edmund's sermonising tendencies and Fanny's sharp, shocked reactions to Mary's liberal opinions appear as heavy misfortunes. Edmund and his piety, which is frequently repugnant to modern readers, is the second subject of enquiry in this chapter. Here I suggest that like More with her Charles / Coelevs, Austen is faced with the vexed problem of making traditional masculine piety in the form of the incipient clergyman Edmund, palatable. Austen's attempt to deal with this, I suggest, can also be read in terms of traditional and current clerical expectations which if they do not resolve the problem, at least cast light on it.

'A CLERGYMAN CONSTANTLY RESIDENT': CLERICAL REFORM IN *MANSFIELD PARK*

Beginning with a discussion of Austen's attitudes to clerical corruption (with a backward glance at Sherlock), I analyse her views on the clerical office (which assume a slightly nostalgic character in view of contemporary loss of status) and the vocation of the clergyman to raise spiritual awareness and doctrinal knowledge (which is a response to Evangelical pressure), focusing finally on her concept of the ideal country clergyman.

The Established Church, traditionally vilified for its ultra-conservatism and fear of change,¹⁶⁸ began nevertheless to undergo subtle and far-reaching changes in the eighteenth century, resulting in positive clerical legislation in the early nineteenth. Although there were

¹⁶⁸ See S C Carpenter 49 ff., Sykes, *Church and State* 41, Vidler 13 and GLT Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1977) 7, who all frankly admit the reactionary attitude of the Established Church to reform, while Peter Virgin, *The Church in an Age of Negligence* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1989) 1-27, argues that this notion arose from propaganda from the three notorious 'Black Books' and other anti-clerical bodies.

some isolated attempts at self-reform in the Georgian church, many ecclesiastical historians¹⁶⁹ recognise the catalytic effect of Methodism and its Establishment offshoot, Anglican Evangelicalism, on this process.

Oliver MacDonagh, who traces the ‘transformation in Middle Anglicanism’ to its culmination in the early nineteenth century ‘literature of principle and Church of Conscience’, frankly admits the importance of the role of Evangelicalism in Anglican ecclesiastical reform. In his discussion of the clerical reforms and their practical outworkings, including the revised expectations of the Anglican clergy, of the period 1775–1817, he avers that: ‘Evangelicalism was at once a cause and effect of this transformation’.¹⁷⁰ In particular he highlights Sir Thomas Scott’s Act of Residence of 1802 which (although not initially effecting any visible change in clerical training or their perfunctory ordination requirements) had far-reaching effects and which he argues, sparked Austen’s engagement with pluralism in *Mansfield Park*.

Here in this novel, which professes to deal with ordination, (and whose patriarch has the name Sir Thomas), Austen shows that she is aware of current clerical debates.¹⁷¹ Before we examine them, it is pertinent to question the propriety of her engagement with such traditionally male issues. Either the discussion of clerical concerns was not as forbidden a subject as is commonly thought, or Austen was aware of the risks she ran and confident that she could carry off her enquiry, embedded in the midst of a fictional narrative, with impunity.

Austen might not have been aware of the alarming insufficient Episcopal provision in the Mendips area recorded by Patty More in her *Mendip Annals*, where there were allegedly

¹⁶⁹ Such as Sykes, Norman, Vidler, Machin and Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734- 1984* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) 66-75. Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England, Church and Chapel and Social Change 1740 –1914* (London and New York: Longmans, 1976) 78, observes that ‘the compound dislocation of English society in the Industrial period presented the Established Church with an inescapable dilemma’.

¹⁷⁰ MacDonagh 2.

¹⁷¹ The reference is a letter from Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24-29 Jan 1813, L 294, 298. Many critics take this at face value though there are those who believe this is misleading or a ‘plausible mistake’. Joseph W Donohue, Jr., maintains that ‘ordination’ here means the ‘restoring to order’ of ‘a disordered society’; see ‘Ordination and the Divided House at *Mansfield Park*’, *ELH* 32 (1965) 169-178. Cf. Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971) 61. By contrast, see Joseph Duffy, who finds it a ‘didactic and unsatisfactory’ novel which has as much to do with ordination as with marriage or education, ‘Moral Integrity and Moral Anarchy in *Mansfield Park* in Jane Austen: Critical Assessments’, ed. Ian Littlewood (East Sussex: Helm, 1998) 58. See also the remarks of D W Harding, *Regulated Hatred and Other Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. Monica Lawlor (London: Athlone Press, 1997) 106-107 and MacDonagh, who does not believe it deals overtly with ordination in *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds*, 169.

thirteen adjoining parishes without a resident curate, or of the gross clerical negligence where in the absence of the rector, the curate at Cheddar was frequently too drunk to do the weekly duty,¹⁷² but *Mansfield Park* (1813/1814) shows cognisance of clerical expectations being generally higher than during George Austen's youth, with clerical recalcitrance countenanced in the mid eighteenth-century no longer being tolerated. Hence she makes a point of letting her squire-patriarch, Sir Thomas Bertram and his ordinand-son, Edmund, strenuously uphold permanent residence and the conscientious discharge of all clerical duties.

In this respect, Austen's ideal clergyman is like More's resident rector, Dr Barlow, who lives an exemplary life among the flock he teaches. This invites the questions: 'What was Austen's idea of a model clergyman? To what extent was it shaped by her family outlook? And how do her ideas differ from those of More and earlier writers and divines of the Established Church?'

From an early age Austen seems to have taken a keen interest in the clerical profession and its duties. In a letter to Cassandra dated January 1799, Austen informs her that their cousin Edward Cooper (who had been at Harpsden) had been presented with the rectory of Hamstall-Ridware, and commends him for his 'wisdom' in deciding to reside there (*L* 55). This early strict view of residence (Austen was still in her twenties) is confirmed and strengthened by her later stance in *Mansfield Park* (1813/1814). Here, Edmund Bertram, as the second son, is destined for the family living and also a life of mild pluralism, for in addition to Mansfield, his father (Sir Thomas) also owns a second living at nearby Thornton Lacey. Unfortunately (or fortunately, from a spiritual point of view), Edmund's elder brother's extravagance causes his father to sell the next incumbency of Mansfield, rendering immediate pluralism after ordination impracticable.

Austen's ideal clergyman's duties are not limited to preaching, administering the sacraments (holy communion, baptising, marrying and burying his parishioners) and attending parish meetings,¹⁷³ but include living permanently among one's parishioners,

¹⁷² Martha More, *Mendip Annals; A Narrative of the Charitable Labours of Hannah and Martha More in their Neighbourhood, Being the Journal of Martha More*, ed. Arthur Roberts, (London: James Nisbet, 1859) 17.

¹⁷³ This was a necessary, but tedious business involving the physical repair of the church as well as social issues. Collins mentions Mr Knightley in *Emma*, who, as local squire, assiduously attends the parish meetings, and Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, who rides over to his cure at Woodston and is detained longer than he anticipates by parish business. She also cites examples of James Austen's parish meetings dictating his travel arrangements. See Collins 97-98.

consistently setting them a good example and being constantly available for advice, counsel and comfort. Austen presents these criteria in the form of conversation during a card evening. Sir Edmund's whist table has broken up and he draws up to watch the game of Speculation played by his wife, Fanny, Edmund, William (Price), and Henry Crawford. Thus, Austen introduces serious topics in what would ordinarily have been desultory conversation. Showing great policy, Austen selects Sir Thomas Bertram as her mouthpiece (much like Mr Stanley in *Coelebs*), who provides the following elegant exposition of the country parson's role and duties:

But a parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident, and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent. Edmund might, in the common phrase, do the duty of Thornton, that is, he might read prayers and preach, without giving up Mansfield Park; he might ride over, every Sunday, to a house nominally inhabited, and go through divine service; he might be the clergyman of Thornton Lacey every seventh day, for three or four hours, if that would content him. But it will not. He knows that human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey, and that if he does not live among his parishioners, and prove himself by constant attention their well-wisher and friend, he does very little either for their good or his own. (*MP* 247-48)

The passage with its stately Johnsonian cadences begins in a beguiling Addisonian tone,¹⁷⁴ develops surprisingly into a more uncompromising and devout direction. Austen's clerical expectations not only exceed those of Addison's of 1711, but hark back to the more stringent ones of Sherlock and his devout High Church school. In his *Charge delivered to the Clergy at Visitation held for the Diocese of London in 1759*, Sherlock concentrates on the obligation of residence, which he stresses is 'the foundation of all other [clerical] duties'. He begins by explaining that '[t]he duties of the pastoral office are to be learned from the general rules and directions of the Gospel' and from 'the 'particular laws and constitutions of

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Addison's belief in the country parson as social and moral exemplar. He maintains that 'country people would soon degenerate into a kind of Savages and Barbarians' without the civilizing influence of the Established Church and her representative, the parson, the *Spectator*, 9 July, 1711.

this Christian Church and Kingdom'. 'These', he maintains, 'are the lights by which we must walk'.¹⁷⁵ Using an extended rhetorical question, he asks sternly:

Tell me now, which of these duties can be discharged from one who absents himself from his cure? Can you deliver the message of Christ, as his ambassador, to persons to whom you have no access? Can you oversee the flock, or feed the Church, which you have forsaken? Can you dispense the mysteries of God to those whom you neither see nor speak to? Can you watch for their souls, to whose Persons, as well as to their spiritual wants, you are a stranger?¹⁷⁶

By maintaining that the clergyman must 'live among his parishioners, and prove himself by constant attention their well-wisher and friend'. Austen seems to be underscoring Sherlock's high ideals.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, this increased clerical conscientiousness characterised the writings of the Anglican Evangelicals, and Sherlock's words could equally have been found in the mouth of More's fictional Dr Barlow.

Sherlock insists that church 'mysteries' ought not to be divorced from everyday interaction ('Can you dispense the mysteries of God to those whom you neither see nor speak to?') and that a clergyman ought to take just as much interest in the bodies (persons) as the souls of his parishioners ('Can you watch for their souls, to whose Persons, as well as to their spiritual wants, you are a stranger?') In the same way, Austen comprehends much more than physical permanent residence in her clergyman's duties: he must also take an active and benevolent interest in his parishioners as the word 'well-wisher' (the Latin for 'benevolent') signifies. Edmund promises to fulfil these criteria, even if curiously, the question of his mild pluralism is not resolved.

¹⁷⁵ *The Works of Thomas Sherlock*, ed. Hughes 4: 277.

¹⁷⁶ *Sherlock, Works*, ed. Hughes 4: 278.

¹⁷⁷ Sayres also comments on this congruence. William Sayres, in his doctoral dissertation, 'The Discourse of Gratitude in the Works of Thomas Sherlock, Francis Hutcheson and Hannah More' (diss., University of New Hampshire, 1989) 43.

As mild as the above reformist views of Austen are (and they were certainly not ‘root and branch structural reform’)¹⁷⁸ they nevertheless attracted criticism. The censure came from an Irish dignitary, who according to Mrs Barrett (a friend of the Austens from the Chawton period 1813-16) preferred a comfortable residence at Bath to residing in his own ‘sphere’.¹⁷⁹ He may of course have taken especial umbrage to the fact that the one advocating residence was female. Thus, like More, Austen did not escape unscathed for venturing (however tenuously and fictitiously) into the masculine realm of ecclesiastical reform.

This idea of clerical conscientiousness or what MacDonagh calls ‘individual rectitude and earnestness in one’s station’¹⁸⁰ in *Mansfield Park* is further corroborated by Edmund’s ideas of the appropriate style of living for a country rector. During ‘a little languor in the [Speculation] game’, the narrator creates a further opportunity to discuss these issues. It is clear that Edmund is going to improve the rectory and the farmlands (or glebe) as befits a responsible incumbent¹⁸¹ and that he wishes to live as a gentleman (not contradictory to his calling as it provides a ‘good example’ to his flock); however, it is equally clear that he is not going to indulge in unjustifiable luxury – which was seen by many as increasing the alienation between ‘squarson’ and poor parishioner in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.¹⁸² For these reasons, he good-humouredly, but firmly, rejects Henry Crawford’s suggested fanciful and elaborate ‘improvements’ to the Thornton Lacey parsonage (proffered in between bidding for cards on behalf of Lady Bertram), namely, clearing away the farmyard, shutting up the blacksmith’s shop, turning the house around, transforming the

¹⁷⁸ Cf. MacDonagh 14.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in *Family Record* 210.

¹⁸⁰ MacDonagh 14.

¹⁸¹ As Collins (54-55) points out: ‘[t]he dependence of the clergy on tithe and glebe had the advantage of integrating them into the agricultural community in which they lived’. George Austen’s glebe at Steventon was small, but he leased 200 acres of farmland at Cheesedown from his wealthy kinsman landowner, Thomas Knight. George Austen proved himself a shrewd farmer; although he employed a steward, John Bond to keep the accounts and carry out daily supervision, he kept abreast with market values, comparing notes on these with his son, Edward. From Jane Austen’s own vague and imprecise use of the term ‘glebe’ which she uses to refer to meadow land we infer she was less interested in endowment technicalities than in clerical ideology.

¹⁸² Enclosure, the impropriation of tithes and the buoyant nature of tithes during the Napoleonic wars meant that parsons and especially ‘squarsons’ enjoyed not only an increase in the standard of living, but in many cases as Gilbert points out, this greater affluence widened the gap between them and their parishioners and increased the alienation and hostility between them and peasant proprietors or labourers. See Gilbert 80.

meadows into a garden and ‘doing something’ with the stream (*MP* 242). Henry’s improvements (doled out in between advice to Fanny and playing for Lady Bertram) are designed to transform the house from a ‘mere gentleman’s residence’ into that of ‘a great land-holder of the parish’, a squire’s seat. But Edmund, whose intention it is to live more plainly, but comfortably, replies:

I must be satisfied with rather less ornament and beauty. I think the house and premises may be made comfortable, and given the air of a gentleman’s residence without very heavy expense, and that must suffice me . . . (*MP* 242).

Alistair Duckworth, who reads the estate as ‘a metonym of an inherited culture’, suggests that Edmund opposes Henry’s ‘improvements’ because he embraces Burke’s ideas of the sanctity of tradition.¹⁸³ Although as will be shown later, Edmund seems to subscribe to some Burkean notions, I do not think there is enough proof to read his rebuttal of Henry’s suggestions of parsonage improvement as ideologically motivated. Here Edmund simply shows he has the financial good sense to know what he can afford and the moral discipline to stick to it. And apart from spiritual ideals, there could be the implicit desire not to arouse the envy and hostility of his poorer parishioners.

As he means to eschew selfish extravagance in architecture and home comforts, it is equally clear that Edmund’s style of preaching (in contrast to the hypothetical preaching style of Henry Crawford¹⁸⁴) will be plain, to the point, and free of bombast and self-display. If we are to infer Austen’s personal predilections of good preaching from Mr Watson’s eulogy of Mr Howard’s sermons in her unfinished novel, *The Watsons*, she set a high premium on ‘propriety’ and ‘an impressive manner’, disliking ‘theatrical grimace or violence’, ‘much action in the pulpit’ and ‘a studied air and artificial inflexions of voice’, advocating instead ‘a simple delivery [which] is better calculated to inspire devotion’.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ ‘In his conversation with Edmund, no less than at Sotherton and Thornton Lacey, Crawford shows his attitudes to be potentially destructive of inherited structures.’ Duckworth 55, see also 46, 111, 128.

¹⁸⁴ See *MP* 340.

¹⁸⁵ *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, Sanditon, Penguin, 1974: 134. It is often overlooked that David Cecil (100) draws attention to this.

Austen slips her discussion on sermon delivery into a scene in which Henry Crawford reads Shakespeare aloud to Fanny, Edmund and Lady Bertram (334 ff.) From there it is an easy step to the discussion of pulpit eloquence. Crawford shows that he is not incapable of appreciating ‘the beauties of our Liturgy’ (340). He has the taste and sensitivity to recognise that its ‘redundancies and repetitions’ (in itself a telling criticism) require good reading ‘not to be felt’ (340) and is perceptive in observing that ‘[a] sermon well-delivered is more uncommon even than prayers well read’. Yet, as becomes more evident, the motivation behind his pulpit eloquence is not conversion or edification of his congregation, so much as self-aggrandisement: ‘I never listened to a distinguished preacher in my life without a sort of envy. But then, I must have a London audience. I could not preach but to the educated, to those who were capable of estimating my composition.’ (Clearly he would relish Sherlock’s Temple Congregation). Finally he maintains that he should not like to preach often. But ‘now and then, perhaps, once or twice in the spring’ (341). Fanny shakes her head involuntarily in dismay or outrage, but although Edmund laughs, it is clear that he does not share Crawford’s flippant and solipsistic attitude to preaching.

Neither (it is implied) will Edmund succumb to the selfish gourmet tendencies of Mary and Henry’s brother-in-law, Dr Grant.¹⁸⁶ On the basis of her observations of the latter, Mary arrives at the jaundiced conclusion that ‘[a] clergyman has nothing to do, but be slovenly and selfish – read the newspaper, watch the weather and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work and the business of his own life is to dine’ (*MP* 110).

In all respects, Edmund promises to be the opposite: an assiduous, but genteel clergyman, similar to More’s model rector, the sensible and enlightened Dr Barlow, who maintains the estate and air of a gentleman, without Puritanical self-denial and yet without corresponding self-indulgence.¹⁸⁷ Thus Edmund shows that he embodies both the Aristotelian

¹⁸⁶ *MP* 171, 469. It may be remembered too, that the Clapham Evangelicals were renowned for their good tables and hospitality.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. with Burke’s idea that a decent standard of clerical living will inspire respect. ‘The people of England know how little influence the teachers of religion are likely to have with the wealthy and powerful of long standing, and how much less with the newly fortunate, if they appear in a manner no way assortable to those with whom they must associate, and over whom they must exercise, in some cases, something like an authority. What must they think of that body of teachers, if they see it in no part above the establishment of their domestic servants?’ *Reflections on the Revolution*, ed. Charles Eliot (New York: Collier and Son, 1969) 238.

and Christian advocacy of self-restraint and ‘moderation in all things’¹⁸⁸ – virtues that both More and Austen seem to value.

In regard to the clergy as both moral and social exemplars, Austen and More agree, but in some other points, Austen is less fastidious than More and, at times, even appears to uphold utilitarian views. Earlier in the novel, when Edmund is required by Mary Crawford to vindicate his choice of the church as a profession, he does so most properly, but as MacDonagh points out, the ‘concept of spiritual vocation is . . . absent from Edmund’s exposition’.¹⁸⁹ Edmund says:

There was no natural disinclination to be overcome, and I see no reason why a man should make a worse clergyman for knowing that he will have a competence early in life. I was in safe hands. I hope I should not have been influenced myself in a wrong way, and I am sure my father was too conscientious to have allowed it. I have no doubt that I was biassed, but I think it was blamelessly. (*MP* 92)

It is not surprising to find Austen expressing such traditional, time-honoured views of a profession, which still depended to so large an extent on lay patronage, as her father, George Austen had benefited precisely from this. As a penniless young Oxford ordinand, George required rich relations to help him secure a living. His second cousin Jane Monk,¹⁹⁰ had married Thomas Knight of Godmersham in Kent, who offered the living of Steventon to him.¹⁹¹ Perceiving this living to be insufficient on which to marry and raise a family, George Austen, then appealed to his rich uncle, Francis Austen, for further assistance. Francis bought

¹⁸⁸ See Ruderman 9, 14, 18-19.

¹⁸⁹ MacDonagh 8.

¹⁹⁰ Granddaughter of Jane Stringer (nee Austen) of Goudhurst.

¹⁹¹ Thomas Knight had previously presented the Steventon living to a certain Henry Austen of West Wickham, and on the latter’s resignation of it, he offered it to George Austen, who accepted it with alacrity.

two livings adjacent to Steventon, Ashe¹⁹² and Deane, so that his nephew, George, could have whichever fell vacant first.¹⁹³

Initially George Austen continued to reside as a Fellow at Oxford, and only shortly before his marriage to Cassandra Leigh, did he resign his fellowship and move to Hampshire to take up residence in his cure. Here, owing to the dilapidation of the Steventon rectory, he was able to rent the Deane rectory, which was not only ‘a low damp place with small inconvenient rooms, and scarcely two on the same level’,¹⁹⁴ but subject to flooding. From the spring of 1764 to the summer of 1768 the Austens lived at Deane, two miles north of Steventon. The close proximity made it easy for George to ride the short distance down the lane to do duty in both churches. In January 1768 when George Austen’s stepmother died, the £1,000 he inherited from Tonbridge property enabled him to repair and take up residence in the more commodious Steventon rectory – Jane Austen’s first home.

In March 1773 when the incumbent of Deane (Mr Hillman) died, the living that George’s rich uncle, Francis Austen, had purchased earlier, reverted to him. Then George Austen, now officially rector of both Steventon and Deane, became a mild pluralist. As the extra Dean income would only appear gradually over the next twelve months and perhaps still be insufficient, George Austen decided like many other financially-straitened clerics, to take in boarders and prepare them for university entrance by teaching them the classics.¹⁹⁵ When he finally retired to Bath, he presented the Steventon living to his eldest son, James, who had been his curate at Steventon. James, who still held the living of Deane,¹⁹⁶ moved into the Steventon rectory as his father’s curate and engaged a curate (Henry Rice) at £50 a year for

¹⁹² As Deane fell vacant first, Francis Austen later sold Ashe to another kind uncle, Benjamin Langlois who presented it to his nephew, I P George Lefroy, whose wife was Austen’s particular friend ‘Madam’ Lefroy. It is significant that their son, Benjamin Lefroy, later married James’s daughter, Anna Austen (one of Austen’s favourite nieces). In this way several generations of Austen’s benefited from this kind of mild nepotism or simony! See *Family Record* 43-44 for further details.

¹⁹³ *Family Record* 6.

¹⁹⁴ *Family Record* 11.

¹⁹⁵ In 1773 the first pupil, Lord Lymington, arrived followed by Vanderstegen, Stuart, East, Deane, George Nibbs (the son of Austen’s old Oxford friend James Langford Nibbs) and the Craven-Fowle boys from Kintbury, one of whom was to become engaged to Cassandra. *Family Record* 17, 23, 42.

¹⁹⁶ Having lived at Deane from 1797 to Spring 1801, *Family Record* 101.

Deane.¹⁹⁷ Yet, it appears that James was never rich. Thus objectively assessed, George Austen (like Sherlock, but on a much smaller scale) benefited from and exercised nepotism, and both he and his son James were at some time non-resident pluralists, although it has been argued that their motivation was not greed.¹⁹⁸

George Austen does not seem to have been conscience-stricken concerning his pluralism. Chapman observes the difference between him and his children: ‘We know nothing certainly of his [George’s] theological views and tone, but the impression gained is of a sound median High-Churchman. His clerical children however bore some of the marks of the later generation.¹⁹⁹ One of the marks seems to be a greater scrupulousness. The Austen family pluralism seems to have bothered their Victorian descendants, for in his *Memoir* of Austen, James Edward Austen-Leigh insists that his father, James Austen, refused a further living that he was offered on the grounds that it ‘smacked of simony’.²⁰⁰

The prudential real-life practices of George and James Austen are therefore not incompatible with the generally punctilious fictional Fanny Price’s commendation of genteel patronage and the benefits of mild nepotism: ‘Nobody wonders that they should prefer the line where their friends can serve them best’ (*MP* 92). As the fictional Dr Grant retained the Mansfield living after succeeding to the Westminster stall, relinquishing it only on his death, it is assumed that Edmund will either let Thornton Lacey, or sell the second living for the lifetime of some clerical speculator. And as MacDonagh observes, all this appears ‘as if they were the most ordinary, even inevitable, proceedings.’ Yet, curiously ‘the sacerdotal doctrine which *Mansfield Park* preaches is implicitly corrosive of the *ancien régime*'.²⁰¹ The novel’s insistence on residence, which is essentially incompatible with pluralism (including the mild type practised by the Austen family and implicit in the fictional Edmund’s future plans) points to contradictions in Austen that defy complete understanding or tidy resolution. One

¹⁹⁷ *Family Record* 136.

¹⁹⁸ Yet as Collins observes, ‘it was not dire poverty that drove [James Austen] to accept three parishes at a combined income of £1,000 a year. See Collins 28.

¹⁹⁹ Chapman *Facts and Problems* 3.

²⁰⁰ *Family Record* 136.

²⁰¹ MacDonagh 17.

could argue that by the time *Mansfield Park* was written (1813/14), Evangelical ideas with their more uncompromising stances on pluralism and their ideas of spiritual avocation were not yet as pervasive as they were to become later, but their effects were beginning to be felt (as we have seen), if not all consistently followed. It would also be anachronistic to expect Fanny to demur at the lack of what More, other Evangelicals, Methodists (and Roman Catholics before them) refer to as ‘a spiritual calling’.

There was still need for reform in another area: preparation for ordination was still a remarkably perfunctory affair, years in a college chapel followed by a week or so of ‘ordination’ combined with a visit to friends at Peterborough’ (*MP* 88, 225).²⁰² However, as James Edward Austen Leigh is anxious to remind potential critics, Austen merely recorded ‘the opinions and practice prevalent among respectable and conscientious clergymen before their minds had been stirred, first by the Evangelical and then the High Church movement’.²⁰³ He seems to have overlooked the fact that Austen’s other reforms demonstrate that minds in the Austen family were already showing evidence of Evangelical stirring.

Here then is a contradiction. Although Austen presents higher clerical expectations, in some respects, in practice Edmund and Fanny seem still prepared to adopt the prudential line, winking at mild pluralism and exploiting political or social interest for clerical advancement. Thus complacently observing the advantages of having ‘friends’ who can ‘serve’ them, Fanny seems to echo Edmund’s sentiments: ‘and I see no reason why a man should make a worse clergyman for knowing that he will have a competence early in life’ (*MP* 92). This prudential, and perhaps even worldly, view of holy orders (which no doubt Whateley would have endorsed as sensible) might not have appealed to certain Evangelicals, but obviously did not jar with Austen’s immediate family nor wider family readers such as the Cookes (from Bookham) and (more strangely) even the Evangelical Coopers; for all expressed their unqualified admiration of *Mansfield Park*. Austen records with pleasure that

²⁰² MacDonagh 17.

²⁰³ *Memoir* ch 10.

Mr Cooke regarded *Mansfield Park* as ‘the most sensible novel he has ever read’,²⁰⁴ and ‘the manner in which I treat the clergy delights them very much’.²⁰⁵

Fanny’s utilitarian observation might not have been absolutely gainsaid by More’s genteel and prudential Dr Barlow and Mr Stanley. Yet, there is an important distinction between this kind of prudentiality and the blatant self-seeking of some clerics such as the notorious C J Blomfield, who according to his son, and biographer, charged his private pupils exorbitant rates and regarded ordination as ‘rather as affording means and leisure for literary pursuits than as offering in its own peculiar duties that wide field of usefulness which ere long opened upon him’.²⁰⁶ Austen is content to let the matter rest there, leaving it to Trollope, nearly fifty years later, to satirise the pluralistic opulence and splendid absenteeism of the clergy in the person of Dr Vesey Stanhope, who for twelve years resided away from his three English cures, pursuing his scholarly interests in Italy.²⁰⁷

Intertwined with Austen’s sacerdotal reform ideas are evidences of traditional and conservative attitudes towards the role and requirements of a clergyman in *Mansfield Park*. When challenged by Mary Crawford to defend the significance of the clergy by her assertion, ‘A clergyman is nothing!’ (*MP* 92), Edmund shows his High Church roots and comes forward with Hooker-like arguments which present religion as ‘the glue and soder of society’, and Burke-like arguments for its validity and indispensability.²⁰⁸ Thus Edmund (like Sherlock and most conservative Anglicans, including Addison, whose *Spectator* 1717 observations have become an ‘item’) explains that the clergyman is a guardian of the morals and manners of the parish.²⁰⁹ Whether he were a parson or ‘squarson’, the cleric ‘in theory was an exemplar to

²⁰⁴ As Myra Stokes (125) observes, the eighteenth-century connotations of *sensible* and *good sense* included propriety and integrity, thus embracing a moral dimension that is absent in the modern denotation of the word.

²⁰⁵ JA to Cassandra, 14 June 1814, *L* 389.

²⁰⁶ Quoted by Virgin, 88.

²⁰⁷ Trollope, *Barchester Towers* (1857) rpt. in *Barchester Towers, Miss Mackenzie and Cousin Henry*, The Great Classics Library (London: Chancellor Press, 1995) 46.

²⁰⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Eliot 234-5.

²⁰⁹ ‘[T]he country people would soon degenerate into a kind of Savages and Barbarians were there not such frequent Returns of a stated Time, in which the whole Village meet together with their best Faces, and in their cleanliest Habits, to converse with one another upon indifferent Subjects, hear their Duties explained to

the lower orders of morality, propriety and patriotism' thus binding them together under Christ and King.²¹⁰ Even Evangelicals did not quarrel with such a notion, but invested the moral aspect of the exemplar with more 'religion of the heart'. Thus Edmund, in a Mr Stanley-like voice, protests:

I cannot call that situation nothing which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally or eternally – which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence. (92)

Austen's choice of an authorially endorsed male mouthpiece for the articulation of these sentiments is politic, for it pre-empts criticism for trespassing into traditionally male areas. Moreover, Edmund's defence is conducted through paternal discourse, the High Church lineage of which can be traced to Hooker. Secondly, by carefully choosing inoffensive, Johnsonian generalities and conceptual terms, which are nicely balanced ('Of first importance to mankind. . . individually or collectively. . . temporally or eternally'), Austen covers all the salient aspects of religion, without becoming too embarrassingly personal or zealous. Edmund's assiduity in the discharge of his duty can never be mistaken for 'innovation', indeed the tone and signifiers of this are reminiscent of Burke, who maintained that the 'august fabric of state' [and church] requires 'provident proprietors to preserve the structure from 'prophanation and ruin'.²¹¹

Yet, Edmund also implies that clergymen can assist people 'individually or collectively' to increase the 'light' they have. Like More's benign Dr Barlow, Edmund will exercise a benevolent influence on his parishioners, the only notable difference being that Edmund will not preach regeneration. Although he seems to privilege morality, Edmund nevertheless recognizes the importance of teaching correct 'doctrines', which it is the clergyman's 'duty to teach and recommend'. The 'morals' Addison's parson are required to

them, and join in Adoration of the Supreme Being', the *Spectator*, 9 July, 1711. This is quoted by and commented on by S C Carpenter 171 and Gilbert 75.

²¹⁰ Gilbert 77.

²¹¹ Burke 228.

teach have become ‘doctrines’ in Mansfield Park, a linguistic shift that seems to reflect a greater ‘seriousness’, which may be a result of the Evangelical influence.

And with regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend . . . (*MP* 93). [Austen’s italics]

By identifying manners more precisely with conduct, Edmund implicitly steers away from the more superficial Chesterfield-like connotations of ‘manners’ to the more weighty or ‘serious’ Johnsonian-like denotations of conduct. From there it is but a step to their base, the doctrines, the traditional orthodox *depositum* ‘which it is their duty to teach and recommend’. Thus discreetly, and almost imperceptibly, Austen, through her male mouthpiece, Edmund, shifts religion from the domain of secular benevolence or genteel morality²¹² to sound doctrine, without attracting attention or labouring the point. Unlike More, who operates overtly, Austen indirectly shows that she is on the side of orthodoxy with words like ‘doctrines, duty, teach and recommend’ acting as sign-posters.

The above passage also demonstrates Austen’s distance from the more secular early/mid-eighteenth-century Addisonian idea of the clerical profession which is conceived of almost entirely in terms of social or cultural influence. Austen’s clergyman has not only moral, but spiritual obligations; he is not *only* the parochial arbiter of manners and taste, but the dispenser of correct doctrine; not only a priest, but a pastor. Not only the ‘constant well-wisher and friend’ of his parishioners, he has, as Austen more soberly reminds us, the responsibility to teach the right doctrine; the ‘religion’ of which he is ‘guardian’ is ‘of first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally or eternally’ (92).

Here, by putting doctrine back into the picture (or prerogatives) of the parson, like both Sherlock and More (and less like Addison and Burke), Austen shows herself aware that the clergyman’s influence carries more aweful eternal implications than is generally

²¹² Cf. Marvin Mudrick’s assertion (155) that Austen’s is simply a genteel morality.

comprehended in eighteenth-century ideas of this genteel profession. In this regard, MacDonagh observes:

Root and branch reform of structures is never canvassed [in *Mansfield Park*]; but individual rectitude and earnestness in one's station are most strongly urged. The clergyman remains central to the order and government of the countryside, but both in and beyond this, he is to be a true Dispenser of the Word of God. Full-blown Evangelicalism and emotional indulgence in religion are implicitly rejected, but not the great doctrines which infuse them – sin, hell, atonement and redemption.²¹³

Finally, it is significant that Austen's model clergyman, like that of More's, is a *country* clergyman. Neither of them attempts to portray an influential, yet pious, city clergyman. Mary seems to think that such a thing would be an anomaly, for she observes:

'*You* assign greater consequence to the clergyman than one has been used to hear given, or than I can quite comprehend. One does not see much of this influence and importance in society, and how can it be acquired where they are so seldom seen themselves? How can two sermons a week, even supposing them worth hearing, supposing the preacher to have the sense to prefer Blair's, do all that you speak of? govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation for the rest of the week? One scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit.' (MP 92-93)

Here, incidentally in the debate on country versus city clerical influence, Mary drops a further clue of her critical alignment. In mentioning the obligatory 'two sermons a week', she inadvertently further betrays some knowledge of sermons and sermon-writers by citing Blair ('supposing the preacher have the sense to prefer Blair's to his own'). The significance here is not the fact that she presents a preacher as relying on the sermons of others (a perfectly acceptable practice for Anglican parsons as we have seen), but her citation of the example of

²¹³ MacDonagh 14.

the apostle of the Scots Enlightenment, Hugh Blair (1718-1800), who was a close friend of the freethinking David Hume, author of the *History of England*,²¹⁴ and a sceptical essay on miracles which Sherlock rebutted in his *Tryal of the Witnesses*. Although Mary might strike one as merely Broad Church, with distinct Sydney Smith sympathies, her mention of Blair (and indirectly that of Hume) could be intended by Austen as a further subtle signpost of her incipient scepticism.

Mary's empirical interrogation of the putative 'influence and importance in society' of a clergyman whom she claims is scarcely seen 'out of his pulpit' (*MP* 92-93) can be taken as a fair sample of the just and rational enquiries of a Freethinker such as Godwin. It demands a thoughtful response from Edmund, who decides to take the analytical tack, and with typical Sherlockian legal-like precision replies: 'You are speaking of London, I am speaking of the nation at large'. In a sense he can be seen as tacitly reprimanding Mary for a feminine fault, that of broad and shallow generalisation. Yet Mary is not so easily unseated, and rejoins smartly with further empirical evidence drawn from her own experience. 'The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest' (*MP* 93). Then follows Edmund's grave reply:

Not, I should hope, of the proportion of virtue to vice throughout the kingdom.

We do not look in great cities for our best morality. It is not there, that respectable people of any denomination can do most good; and it certainly is not there that the influence of the clergy can be most felt. A fine preacher is followed and admired; but it is not in fine preaching only that a good clergyman will be useful in his parish and neighbourhood, where the parish and neighbourhood are of a size capable of knowing his private character and observing his general conduct, which in London can rarely be the case. (*MP* 93)

²¹⁴ It will be remembered that Austen's urbane, but generally conscientious clergyman in *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney, mentions Hume's (and Robertson's) history in glowing terms to Catherine Morland, yet the context does not render this allusion so critical as the more ideologically-positioned issue in *Mansfield Park*. Henry avers: 'I am fond of history – and am very well contented to take the false with the true. . . If a speech be well drawn-up, I read it with pleasure, by whomsoever it may be made – and probably with much greater, if the production of Mr Hume or Mr Robertson, than if the genuine words of Caractacus, Agricola or Alfred the Great.' See *NA* 109.

Edmund's defence (in contrast to Mary's incisively rational thrust) is disappointingly sentimental and moralistic. Yet, Sherlock would have endorsed the first statement. His denunciation of the sins of London following the earthquakes of 1750, and his trenchant Bunyan-like observation that '[a] city without religion can never be a safe place to live in',²¹⁵ seems to be shared, in a more sophisticated way, by Austen.

Yet, it can also be argued that Edmund's Addisonian-like proposition (that a clergyman's example is only rarely felt in the metropolis), which seems to be endorsed by Austen, seems rather naïve for one writing during a time of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, when there were unprecedented opportunities for reaching the masses by both preaching and personal example.²¹⁶ Apart from Methodists (whose merits More and Austen would have been less inclined to admit, and yet who devised the 'Society system' precisely to prevent preachers losing contact with their parishioners and to ensure consistent 'discipling' of new converts), there were many successful Anglican city preachers who exercised profound influence over their parishioners.²¹⁷

However, the point that Austen seems to be making through Edmund (and one that More seems tacitly to endorse in her portrayal of a country clergyman), is that *example* is more important than *precept* (or preaching), and the country clergy, who have smaller parishes can exercise a greater personal influence on the lives of their parishioners than their city counterparts, whose interaction with them is limited to a weekly 'appearance' in a Georgian three-deckered pulpit. Here, like Burke, Austen shows her faith in the familial and parochial unit as a place of formative morality. For this reason, he abhors the French 'confound[ing] of territorial limits', glorying in the importance the English attached to family

²¹⁵ Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London on the Occasion of the Earthquakes of 1750 in *The Works of Thomas Sherlock*, ed. Hughes 4: 329.

²¹⁶ Chapman observes that Austen's experience hardly touched that of 'great cities and the neglected industrial poor', *Facts and Problems* 112. Apart from the Evangelicals (and Spencer Perceval's plan to build more churches in London before he was assassinated), there were other Established Church attempts to reach the industrial masses. Thus, Austen may, or may not, have been aware of the work of the Revd Richard Yates, author of *The Church in Danger* (1815) and Chaplain to the Chelsea Hospital, to foster religion among the metropolitan working classes. Citing both Hooker and Warburton he argued (like Sherlock) that 'Religion is necessary to civil Society'. See E R Norman 52.

²¹⁷ In particular William Romaine, whose church was filled to over-flowing twice a Sunday and who exercised an enormous influence for good over his congregation, Rector John Venn, and More's friend, John Newton, Rector of St Mary Woolnoth, London. Among the Episcopacy, Bishops Porteous, Horne, Shute Barrington, Bishop Henry Ryder, Bishop Charles Sumner, Archbishop John Bird Sumner, the Milner brothers and John Newton also exerted a strong influence over their parishioners or people in their dioceses.

and parochial units.²¹⁸ Burkean traits in this passage in *Mansfield Park* support the widely-held view that Austen reflects his religious conservatism, inducing critics such as Monaghan to maintain that Austen's allegiance here is 'clearly with Burke rather than with Wilberforce'.²¹⁹

As both Bishop (of Bangor, Salisbury and London successively) and Master of the Temple, Sherlock's example seems to endorse Austen's argument. As a clerical ambassador, he might well have (in the words of Burke) 'exalt[ed] her [the church's] mitred front in courts and parliaments'.²²⁰ Yet, apart from his positive involvement with the two young felons of Salisbury, there is little or no evidence that he was closely involved in the lives of his parishioners, either at the Temple Church, or elsewhere in his three sees. Instead of personal contact with his parishioners, Sherlock's power as a city prelate (like that of other metropolitan divines) lay in his eloquent preaching and scholarly defence of the Gospel against Deism.

As Collins also points out, Edmund's glowing account of the country clergyman's influence is based on the assumption that the hearts of country people are more 'fruitful soil' (more receptive to the Gospel) than those of their more jaded, sophisticated city counterparts. This essentially conservative idea, borne out by the Crawford's ultimate resistance to thoroughgoing moral renovation, was propounded in many novels of the time (including *Coelebs*) which, using a form of simplistic polarity, frankly privilege the country over the city.²²¹

In concluding this section, we have seen that Austen's attitude to the clergy, though complicated and full of seeming contradictions, is basically progressive and shows the

²¹⁸ Burke, *The Reflections*, ed. Eliot 315.

²¹⁹ Monaghan 167-178, especially 170. See also Warren Roberts, who argues that Austen shares Burke's organicist political theory as against the radical revolutionary ideology *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London, 1979) 6 and Collins (169), who in her discussion of the importance of the family rehearses the Burke/Austen affinities.

²²⁰ 'For these reasons, while we provide first for the poor, and with a parental solicitude, we have not relegated religion (like something we are ashamed to show) to obscure municipalities or rustic villages. No! We will have her to exalt her mitred front in courts and parliaments', Burke, *The Reflections* ed. Eliot 239.

²²¹ W A Craik was one of the earlier critics to comment on this in *Jane Austen the Six Novels* (London: Methuen, 1965) 55, since when it has become a critical commonplace. Irene Collins quotes Pitt the Younger's arguments and Cowper's poetry heightened the popular idealization of the country and its people. See Collins 99 ff. Austen's enjoyment of Goldsmith and Crabbe probably contributed to her valorization of the rural world.

influence of Evangelical efforts to rejuvenate the clergy, but can hardly be called overtly Evangelical.²²² Her censure of pluralism, yet her justification of patronage (in the awarding of preferments and emoluments to family or friends), the conspicuous lack of vocation and yet, at the same time, her more rigorous expectations of the office and duties of a clergyman, seem to point to High Church piety leavened by Evangelically-spurred reform. Thus, while her ecclesiastical roots are still bound up with Hooker, Sherlock and Paley (modified by Addisonian and later, more sentimental Burkean views), there are Evangelical-type off-shoots that reveal a greater ‘seriousness’ in personal religion and urge a more conscientious attitude towards the clerical role and duties. In fact, Austen’s very ‘inconsistencies’ (Fanny’s prudential attitude to patronage and Edmund’s lack of spiritual ‘calling’) are reminiscent of More’s Dr Barlow, who, though a conscientious, benevolent resident rector who teaches sound doctrine, nevertheless does not disdain patronage and never once refers to his profession as a ‘vocation’. Again, this endorses the complexity of More’s and Austen’s clerical expectations which although enlightened, orthodox and occasionally Evangelical-like, ultimately defy categorisation.

‘STARCHED UP INTO SEEMING PIETY’ AND ‘THE MIND WHICH DOES NOT STRUGGLE AGAINST ITSELF’

Having discussed Austen’s ideas of clerical efficacy and reform, focusing on her attitudes to pluralism and the role of the rural clergy in the previous section, I now proceed to an exploration of her ideas of personal piety as they emerge from desultory conversation during a day’s pleasure outing. In the ninth chapter of *Mansfield Park*, Austen dramatically uses a visit to a disused chapel in Mr Rushworth’s house at Sotherton, to introduce and discuss certain aspects of domestic piety and general clerical expectations and to expose the cleavage between the ideologies of the more traditional Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price and the more liberal Londoner, Mary Crawford, whom they attempt to ‘read’. The setting of the scene

²²² Cf. Fleishman (118-132), who argues strongly that while *Mansfield Park* is not ‘missionary’, Austen owes a great deal to the religious ideology of Evangelicalism in this novel.

may have been suggested by Austen's visit to Stoneleigh Abbey, where the Revd Thomas Leigh introduced a strict regimen of morning and evening prayers in the family chapel, which was draped in black on account of the previous owner's death.²²³

In Austen's fictional representation, the lively, attractive, witty Mary Crawford is assigned the role of devil's advocate.²²⁴ Here she puts forward the liberal notion that the termination of daily family prayers is a progressive innovation, only to be sternly countered by Edmund and Fanny, who advance various arguments for the retention of a still meaningful pious tradition. One of the arguments put forward by Edmund is that an active piety requires consistent personal discipline, and there will always be those who are willing to find excuses or distractions. As Edmund argues, 'The mind that does not struggle against itself under one circumstance, would find objects to distract it under another' (*MP* 126).

In this passage, Austen seems to argue for the importance of family or household prayers, and personal spiritual discipline: elements of piety privileged by all types of devout Christians. Through her mouthpiece, Edmund Bertram, Austen shows that these strict ideas are not easy to put into practice, as his word 'struggle' (incidentally, a favourite word of More's) implies. Although the discussion is based on received patriarchal practices, what begins as a seemingly ordinary conservative Sherlockian-Burkean-Morean defence of the household, becomes progressively a rebuttal of incipient Freethinking tenets.

In the Sotherton-chapel passage Austen, as More had done before (in her presentation of the Stanleys and the reformed Carlton), stresses the need for the gentry and in particular, heads of households, to set a high moral tone which is to be emulated by children and servants. In *Coelebs*, to counterbalance the selfishness of the reprehensible Mr Tyrrel, More presents a picture of a benevolent landowner/head of the house, Mr Stanley, who maintains a

²²³ Irene Collins 12. See also *Family Record* 138. Revd Thomas Leigh had commissioned Humphrey Repton to carry out improvements to his estate and this probably influenced Austen in the suggested improvements at Sotherton and in Henry's Crawford's advocacy of improvements to Edmund Bertram's Thornton Lacey.

²²⁴ For a discussion of the problem of Mary's engaging the reader's sympathy to the detriment of her subsequent rejection, and other so-called implausibilities in her final postures of 'wickedness', see Laurence Lerner, *The Truth-tellers: Jane Austen, George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967) 158-160.

benign, yet strict religious decorum, which includes regular attendance at divine worship and family prayers.

Although Austen seems to endorse this general idea in *Mansfield Park*, there is a more realistic ambivalence about her portrayal of the far-from perfect father of the house. Although he has high ideals, Sir Thomas is materialistic and lax in his parental duties. He might teach his children correct principles, but leaves them uncertain of how to follow them. As a result, Tom ruins himself through his extravagance, and Maria loses her virtue through her adulterous liaison with Crawford. When Sir Thomas's inner eye is finally diffused with light after Maria's elopement with Crawford, as a Christian patriarch responsible for the spiritual welfare of his household, he rightly blames himself for his children's errors.²²⁵

The necessity for a head of household to instruct his family and dependents in religion was an important concern of Sherlock's. In a discourse on parental authority based on text from Genesis 18:19: 'For I know him, that he will command his Children and his Household after him; and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him' (*TD* 4:374), Sherlock maintains that God's command to Abraham, to teach his children and household the 'Way of the Lord', still offers 'the very best Instruction by what Means we may render ourselves acceptable to God, and draw down a Blessing upon ourselves and our Posterity' (*TD* 4:374).

Sherlock argues that as head of a family and household, a father derives his authority from God and is therefore particularly accountable (377). A father 'out of natural Affection to his Children, has to guard them against Vice and Immorality' and is responsible for his children's 'Welfare and Prosperity' in the same manner as magistrates and 'Princes' are for that of their people (376). Parents and magistrates have the God-given authority to instruct and correct (379), and if they do so properly, this will result in the 'punishment of Wickedness and Vice, the Preservation of Virtue' and the establishment of 'Happiness and Tranquillity' in both family and nation (which was to become a favourite tenet of Burke's). However, he cautions that this paternal authority must not be abused, but 'Correction must be administered within proper Restraints' (4: 381).

Most importantly, Sherlock argues for the necessity of formal religious instruction in a family. Just as households cannot be left to discover their duties and the 'Principles of

²²⁵ See *MP* 461-62.

Religion and Morality' through reason, but require specific instruction in 'the Rules and Precepts of Scripture', so do nations, and the smaller unit, the family, of which nations are made up (4: 382). He argues that impiety in private households leads to national impiety. Thus the magistrates require early cooperation from parents. 'Next to the Magistrates, the Chief Care of Virtue and Religion lies upon the Fathers and Mothers of Families' (4: 388). He warns that if they fail to correct and instruct their children, they will have to answer to God for it:

This God requires of you; his Creatures they are, and it is his authority which you exercise over them; and if they perish for want of timely Instruction and Correction, he will require their Souls at your Hands (4: 389).

This specific parental accountability is the area in which Sir Thomas Bertram, as he later admits, has been remiss. In the final chapter of *Mansfield Park*, in a well-known passage of free indirect style, Sir Thomas muses on his failings as a parent and deprecates his lack of personal involvement in their spiritual instruction:

Here had been grievous mismanagement He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been personally taught to govern their inclinations and tempers by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice . . . (*MP* 463).

One of the ways in which households can be instructed in 'active principle' and 'sense of duty' (apart from attendance at church and private devotions – all of which have their own place) is at daily family prayers. Here reverence for God is taught, sins corporately confessed, thanksgiving offered and one's duties made plain so that one can 'bring [the theory] into daily practice'. This would appear to be the foundational reasoning behind Fanny's and Edmund's espousal of family prayers.

In the passage from *Mansfield Park* quoted below, we have an evacuation of piety in the form of the chapel, empty and ornamental and no longer used for its purpose. Mrs

Rushworth, the hostess and guide, explains that the family chapel²²⁶ was fitted up during the reign of James II and since that time it had been in constant use both morning and evening, until the late Mr Rushworth terminated this practice:

'Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many. But the late Mr Rushworth left it off.'

'Every generation has its improvements,' said Miss Crawford, with a smile to Edmund . . .

'It is a pity,' cried Fanny, 'that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer, is fine!'

'Very fine indeed!' said Miss Crawford, laughing. 'It must do the heads of the family a great deal of good to force all the poor housemaids and footmen to leave business and pleasure, and say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away.'

'*That* is hardly Fanny's idea of a family assembling,' said Edmund. 'If the master and mistress do not attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom.'

'At any rate, it is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects. Every body likes to go their own way [sic] – to chuse their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time – altogether it is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes: and if the good people who used to kneel and gape in that gallery could have foreseen that the time would ever come when men and women might lie another ten minutes in bed, when they woke with a headach [sic], without danger of reprobation, because chapel was missed, they would have jumped with joy and envy. Cannot you imagine with what unwilling

²²⁶ The fact that this private domestic chapel for the reading of daily or weekly prayers for the genteel manor house family dates from the times of James II raises the question of whether it was built originally as a Protestant or Catholic chapel.

feelings the former belles of the house of Rushworth did many a time repair to this chapel? The young Mrs. Eleanors and Mrs. Bridgets – starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different – specially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at – and in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now.' (*MP* 86-87)

This excerpt is surely a key passage, for it opens dialogue on a time-honoured devotional Christian practice, which seems to have fallen into abeyance among the English aristocracy/gentry, prompting Fleishman's observation that this passage (and the whole novel) implies a criticism of the 'weakness of the gentry and . . . the barrenness of that class's 'High and Dry' Anglicanism'.²²⁷ This passage also begs other questions of a more theological/philosophical nature. In essence, Mary can be said to be subjecting the traditional Anglican stance on matters pertaining to public and private worship to radical questioning. As one who believed marriage to be merely a 'take in' (*MP* 46), Mary seems to see religion or more specifically, Christianity, in much the same light. And the iconoclastic discourse she employs is redolent of Natural Religion, with Freethinking undertones of Anthony Collins, Voltaire and Godwin. Close attention to Mary Crawford's 'smart talk' in *Mansfield Park*, her approval of Blair's sermons and her implicit incipient Painite/Godwinian arguments in favour of freedom in worship can be read as further endorsements of her familiarity with liberal or sceptical traditions. And as we shall see later as a Londoner, she is not only *au fait* with the latest fashions, but with trendy liberal thought in the line of Sydney Smith (canon of St Paul's, famous for his *Edinburgh Review* articles and notorious for his reprobation of Methodism).²²⁸

More surprisingly, Mary has earlier English Establishment precedents: one being Sherlock's opponent from St Catherine's College, Benjamin Hoadley, the Whig bishop of Bangor with strong Latitudinarian leanings. In the sermon, which sparked the Bangorian

²²⁷ Fleishman 121.

²²⁸ Smith opposed many of the Evangelically-spurred philanthropic societies and attacked the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice' in the *Edinburgh Review* (1809), observing sarcastically: 'A man of ten thousand a year might worry a fox as much as he pleases – may encourage the breed of a mischievous animal on purpose to worry it and a poor labourer is carried before the magistrate for paying sixpence to see an exhibition of courage between a dog and a bear'. See Sydney Smith's *Works*, 3rd edn. (London, 1845) 2: 335. Quoted by E R Norman 26.

Controversy, *The Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ*, preached on 17 March 1717, Hoadley unleashed a religious and political furore by questioning both the temporal and eternal authority of the church.²²⁹ For a bishop of the Church of England to declare that no one has more authority than others (under Christ) to make new laws or impose old ones, to judge, censor or punish others in matters relating to the conscience or salvation; that the church was in effect an invisible society of sincere believers in Christ, their sole lawgiver and judge in matters of salvation; that professions of Christianity should not be associated with temporal rewards and that the Church should not invoke the state to support it, was alarming enough to Establishment supporters. Yet Hoadley went on to maintain that in matters of belief, it was sufficient for Christians to privately read the New Testament. As Sykes points out, '[i]t was evident that from the tenor of this sermon that Hoadley had reduced the visible church to ruins, and enthroned in its place the principle of private judgement'.²³⁰

As we shall see, Mary is yet another champion of private judgement. It does not matter that she might not have read Hoadley (one of the more controversial of the earlier Anglican propounders of private judgement in religious matters)²³¹ because by the late eighteenth century the idea was common currency – not only in reincarnations of Natural Religion or the more aggressive French Deism, but as the driving force behind Paine's radical questioning of Establishment foundations. Seen this way, Mary becomes an embodiment of the clever, freethinking modern woman: rational, autonomous and daringly different. However, as such she poses a huge threat to supporters of the Established Church like Edmund and Fanny. Their reactions to Mary document both their fascination and horror.

Therefore, in this chapter in *Mansfield Park*, Mary, who is something of an enigma throughout the novel, opens herself to a better understanding. However, I suggest that this

²²⁹ Hoadley laid down two basic principles: first, that in the kingdom of Christ 'He is Himself sole lawgiver to His subjects; and Himself the sole judge of their behaviour in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation' and secondly, that the *differentia* between his kingdom and the kingdoms of the world lay in the circumstance that 'He had in those points left behind Him no visible human authority, no vice-regents who can be said properly to supply His place, no interpreters upon whom His subjects are absolutely to depend; no judge over the consciences or religion of His people.' Hoadley, 'The Nature of the Kingdom or the Church of Christ', *Works* 2:404. See also Sykes, *Church and State* 292-293.

²³⁰ Sykes 293.

²³¹ Non-conformists, had more or less, always maintained the regnancy of private judgement in matters of Scriptural interpretation, in conjunction with some external regulation. However the claims of some of them to private illumination elicited Locke's vehement condemnation of this in his section entitled 'Enthusiasm' in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Bk 4, ch. 19, section 13; Locke, *Works* 2: 137.

disclosure is more meaningful if we contextualise the debate and recognise the signs of the eighteenth-century ‘ecclesiastical/doctrinal linguistics’. Although his model, approach and conclusions are radically different from mine, D A Miller observes that Edmund and Fanny are fascinated by Mary and pride themselves in ‘reading’ her correctly. He argues that Mary keeps them in intrigued Barthesian-type ignorance throughout, but finally as the narrator reduces or simplifies her in closure, Edmund complacently finds her perfectly legible. The fascination she exercises over Edmund and Fanny is indisputable, but I disagree with his assertion that her discourse is usually ‘opaque’ to Edmund and Fanny. Edmund’s assessment of Mary Crawford’s mind as ‘a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so: darkened, yet fancying itself light’ is particularly insightful and, as C S Lewis observes, ‘the New Testament echo in the language underlines the gravity of the theme’.²³² There are many occasions on which Edmund and Fanny *are* able to ‘read’ Mary, and the Sotherton visit alone presents an unprecedented opportunity to enlarge their understanding of her through the terms of her discourse which is often opaque to modern readers who are distanced from eighteenth-century doctrinal and political polemics. These incremental disclosures of Mary’s way of thinking (similar to the way in which Sherlock sees Old Testament prophecies), prepares the way for the *dénouement*. Thus, instead of meaning ‘evaporating’ at the end of the novel as Miller maintains, it becomes a great deal clearer, as the reader has been well prepared for Mary’s final reactions to the Maria/Henry debacle.²³³

As a prospective ordinand, Edmund might well have read Hooker’s sermon on public worship, where he explains why Christians ought to meet together in designated places. Public worship not only supplies necessary ‘conference’ and ‘commerce’ with God (what Non-conformists call ‘fellowship’), but vital instruction for the saving of one’s soul:

Places of public resort being thus provided for, our repair thither is especially for mutual conference, and, as it were commerce to be had between God and us. Because therefore want of the knowledge of God is the cause of all iniquity

²³² C S Lewis, ‘A Note on Jane Austen’, rpt. in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963) 32.

²³³ In examining the novel’s narrative strategies, D A Miller (‘Good Riddance: Closure in *Mansfield Park*’, in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, New Casebooks, ed. Judy Simons, 37-47) scrutinizes textual discourse to show that at the end of *Mansfield Park*, ‘meaning evaporates rather than solidifies’ (47).

amongst men, as contrariwise the very ground of all our happiness, and the seed of whatsoever perfect virtue groweth from us, is a right opinion touching things divine; this kind of knowledge we may justly set down for the first and chiefest thing from which God imparteth unto his people, and our duty of receiving this at his merciful hands for the first of those religious offices wherewith we publicly honour him on earth. For the instruction therefore of all sorts of men to eternal life is necessary, that the sacred and saving truth of God be openly publicised unto them. . . .²³⁴

Meeting together for ‘commerce’ with God and other Christians is for mutual edification and felicity, for here one receives the saving ‘knowledge of God’,²³⁵ (‘the very ground of all our happiness’), which, it is implied, private study and judgment are insufficient to give. Lastly, Hooker, who probably had St Paul’s injunction of Hebrews 10: 24-25 in mind,²³⁶ maintains that it is ‘our duty of receiving this at his merciful hands’ and not a matter of personal preference, to meet for corporate worship.

While Hooker’s exhortation may only relate to weekly divine service (which Mary might not have impugned), other Anglican divines, such as Butler, Secker and Paley, argue the need for weekday prayers, either in the church or at home.²³⁷ In his *Charge to the Clergy at Durham* (1751), Butler stresses the importance of ‘[a] public call to recollect the thoughts of God and religion from one Sunday to another’. He laments the way weekday church services have fallen into disuse and affirms the importance of family prayers:

But since the body of the people, especially in country places, cannot be brought to attend it [church] oftener than one day a week; and since this is in no sort enough to keep up in them a due sense of religion; it were greatly to be

²³⁴ *Works of Hooker*, ed. J Keble, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1841) 2: 61-62.

²³⁵ Cf. with the second half of the opening tenet of the Shorter Westminster Catechism: ‘The chief end of Man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.’

²³⁶ ‘Forsak[e] not the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some.’

²³⁷ Secker particularly deplored the decay of weekday religious observance in the church, and called for clergymen to read prayers more frequently during the week. See Sykes, *Church and State* 248.

wished they could be persuaded to anything which might, in some measure, supply the want of more frequent public devotions or serve the like purposes. Family prayers, regularly kept up in every house, would have a great and good effect.²³⁸

Butler goes on to mention the necessity of ‘secret prayer’ as well and suggests fixed times of day for these personal devotions.²³⁹

Earlier in a *Serious Call*, William Law had argued specifically for the usefulness of a set time and place for private devotions.

If you were to use yourself (as far as you can) to pray always in the same place; if you were to reserve that place for devotion, and not allow yourself to do any thing common in it; if you were never to be there yourself, but in times of devotion . . . this kind of consecration of it as a place holy to God, would have an effect upon your mind, and dispose you to such tempers, as would very much assist your devotion. For by having a place thus sacred; it would in some measure resemble a chapel or house of God. This would dispose you to be always in the spirit of religion, when you were there; and fill you with wise and holy thoughts, when you were by yourself. (*Serious Call* 146)

If Austen were not familiar with any of the above passages, she might well have been with Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* and his *Evidences of Christianity* (1794), a set-book ordinands (such as her brothers) were required to read and which continued to be used until the twentieth century at Little-go, Cambridge.²⁴⁰

In a chapter entitled ‘The Duty and Efficacy of Prayer’, Paley first discusses private prayer. He writes:

²³⁸ Butler, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Durham* (1751) in *The Analogy of Religion*, etc. ed. Samuel Halifax (London: F and C Rivington, 1802) 400.

²³⁹ Butler, *Charge in The Analogy* 400-01.

²⁴⁰ Vidler 39.

Private prayer, in proportion as it is usually accompanied with more actual thought and reflection of the petitioner's own, has a greater tendency than other modes of devotion to revive and fasten upon the mind the general impression of religion. Solitude powerfully assists this effect. When a man finds himself alone in communication with his Creator, his imagination becomes filled with a conflux of awful ideas concerning the universal agency, and invisible presence of that Being; concerning what is likely to become of himself; and of the superlative importance of providing for the happiness of his future existence, by endeavours to please *him* who is the arbiter of his destiny, reflections which, whenever they gain admittance, for a season overwhelm all others; and leave when they depart, a solemnity upon the thoughts that will seldom fail, in some degree to affect the conduct of life. (46)

Austen seems tacitly to endorse the above by presenting most of her protagonists as engaging at some time or another in private reflection, meditation or prayer – either in times of distress or thankfulness. Furthermore, this trait can be seen not only as an integral part, but the mainspring, of their conduct. In *Persuasion*, after Louisa Musgrove survives her accident and the surgeon pronounces it ‘not a desperate case’, a ‘few fervent ejaculations of gratitude to Heaven’ are offered and the still-distraught Wentworth ‘sat near a table, and leaning over it with folded arms, and face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul, and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them’ (112). Once Wentworth and Anne are reunited, Anne returns home and retires to her room because ‘[a]n interval of meditation, serious and grateful, was the best corrective of every thing dangerous in such high-wrought felicity; and she went to her room, and grew steadfast and fearless in the thankfulness of her enjoyment’ (245). And in *Emma*, after the *denouement*, even the more flippant Emma is ‘serious, very serious in her thankfulness, and in her resolutions’ (475), although, as befitting a more light-hearted novel, meditation and prayer are not mentioned. If Austen tacitly endorses private or ‘secret’ prayer and meditation in her novels, in *Mansfield Park* she more explicitly defends the practice of family devotions.

In the same chapter in his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, Paley proceeds from private prayer to ‘The Family Prayer’. This passage could well have been articulated by Sir Thomas or Edmund, and endorsed by Fanny. Paley is both practical in

explaining that family prayers are an important outward sign of an inner piety and (like, Sherlock and other orthodox writers) patriarchal in his defence of the rationale behind family prayers:

The peculiar use of family piety consists in its influence upon servants, and the young members of a family, who want sufficient seriousness and reflection to return of their own accord to the exercise of private devotion, and whose attention you cannot easily command in public worship. The example also and authority of a father and master act in this way with the greatest force; for his private prayers, to which his children and servants are not witnesses, act not at all upon them as examples; and his attendance upon public worship they will readily impute to fashion, to a care to preserve appearances, to a concern for decency and character.²⁴¹

Jane Austen might never have read any of the above passages, but Edmund's and Fanny's views on the importance of family prayers seem to echo these sentiments. By contrast, Sir Thomas stands as a negative warning of a patriarch who provides precepts, but not pious example. Edmund promises to be a more consistent patriarch and already seems to practise what he preaches in this respect, if not reading prayers, at least reading sermons aloud of a Sunday evening to the family in his father's absence (*MP* 453) – a similar practice of the Austen household.²⁴²

In the Sotherton passage, Austen appears not only to support formal daily prayers (in a chapel or place where one's thoughts have less occasion to wander), but through Edmund and Fanny, reprobates the liberal or Freethinking tendencies of Mary Crawford. Mary's views strongly suggest a Natural Religion approach, characterized by its impatience with the restraining methods of orthodox, organized religion, which prescribe frequent public divine offices. Like Paine, other Deists and Freethinkers, Mary argues that formal worship or instruction is unnecessary – one can hold one's own devotions anywhere and anytime. In his reflections 'On the Sabbath Day in Connecticut' Paine, who elsewhere impugns the church

²⁴¹ William Paley, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: J Faulder, et al, 1811) 2: 47.

²⁴² L 227.

and the priesthood,²⁴³ maintains that it is far better to contemplate the works of God in the woods and fields than to be ‘entombed within the walls of [a] dwelling on a Sunday’.²⁴⁴ The trouble is that Mary is not generally susceptible to the charms of nature, for as the narrator observes earlier, ‘She had none of Fanny’s delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and the lively’ (*MP* 81). Thus one infers that Mary’s suggestion that chapel prayers be done away with, is not so that she may commune with God in nature, as much as to afford more time for her own self-determined pursuits.

Mary’s rejection of chapel prayers can also be seen as an implicit, low-key ‘revolutionary’ attempt to exercise the right of her own judgment. In the fifth chapter (‘Of Rights’) in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), Godwin upheld the right of individual discretion, a right which ‘flows from the very nature of man’. Moreover, he maintains as ‘all men are fallible, no man can be justified in setting up his judgement as a standard for others’.²⁴⁵ Godwin also argued cogently for the necessity of ‘sincerity’ (of which same ‘doctrine’ Hoadley had been accused earlier), insisting that if followed properly ‘Sincerity would liberate the mind’.²⁴⁶ This was an appealing sentiment and one that Mary seems to employ. Her hypothetical Misses Bridgets and Eleanors and their maids, are presented as insincere in their devotions (as evinced by their ‘gaping in the gallery’ and ‘with heads full of something very different – especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at’) because they are forced to practise them against their will. Mary implies too that the insincerity starts at the top and trickles down, with the ‘heads of the family’ themselves, ‘inventing excuses for staying away’ from the twice-daily prayers (*MP* 87). Therefore a concern with sincerity can be seen as yet another motivation

²⁴³ *The Life and Writings of Thomas Paine*, 6 vols, ed. Daniel Edwin Wheeler (New York: Vincent Parkes, 1908) 3: 131, 134.

²⁴⁴ ‘One of the finest scenes and subjects of religious contemplation is to walk into the woods and fields and survey the works of the God of Creation. The wide expanse of heaven, the earth covered with verdure, the lofty forest, the waving corn, the magnificent roll of the mighty rivers and the murmuring melody of the cheerful brooks, are scenes to inspire the mind with gratitude and delight. But this gloomy Calvinist of Connecticut may not behold on a Sabbath-day. Entombed within the walls of his dwelling, he shuts from his view the Temple of Creation’, Paine, *Writings* 3: 138.

²⁴⁵ Bk 2, ch 5 of Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Priestley 1: 167.

²⁴⁶ Bk 4, ch 6 of Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Priestley 1:329.

behind the abolition of prayers, the unwholesome compulsory nature of which is implied by ‘obligation’, ‘formality’, ‘restraint’, ‘length of time’ and ‘formidable’ (87).

Thus, while Mary does not seem to evince undue interest in overtly political concerns, as an observant and liberal young Londoner, she could not have been unaware of Godwin’s and Paine’s notions of the individual’s rights and inherent ‘freedom’, or at least ‘buzz phrases’ culled from the more popular sections of their works. And for someone like Mary, who is markedly more politic than sincere (as shown in her deceiving Fanny into accepting Henry’s gold chain),²⁴⁷ contemporary philosophical ideas could give éclat to one’s ‘image’ or arguments, without requiring one to follow their doctrines consistently.

Although Mary’s arguments in favour of sincerity and individual discretion/judgement (in allowing one to hold one’s own devotions when and where one will) are appealing and seem both rational and plausible, Edmund courteously shows how naïvely idealistic and clearly unorthodox they are, as they fail to take one’s flawed nature into consideration. As Law explains, human nature requires a set, sacred place to ‘dispose you always to be in the spirit of religion’ and to help ‘fill you with wise and holy thoughts’. And as Paley pertinently observes: ‘Solitude powerfully assists this effect’ (46). Mary’s Freethinking arguments seem to imply that all this is unnecessary, as human nature is innately benevolent and strong enough not to require such assistance.²⁴⁸ And yet unlike Fanny (who quotes Scott in the chapel and discourses sentimentally on the stars)²⁴⁹ Mary is no romantic or sentimentalist. If anything, her upbringing under her immoral and worldly uncle, the Admiral, in the metropolis, has taught her a pragmatic and sophisticated cynicism that informs most of

²⁴⁷ MP 262-264.

²⁴⁸ Freethinking does not necessarily comprehend Latitudinarianism. It is not to be inferred that Latitudinarianism was characterized by levity towards traditionally sacred things. While frequently retaining a reverent attitude, they nevertheless postulated dispensing with ‘outward fences’ in matters of form, ceremony and doctrine.

²⁴⁹ ‘This is not my idea of a chapel. There’s nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here are no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions, no banners. No banners, cousin, ‘to be blown by the night wind of heaven.’ No signs that a ‘Scottish monarch sleeps below’ (MP 85-86). And see also chapter 32: ‘Here’s harmony!’ said she. ‘Here’s repose! Here’s what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry can only attempt to describe! Here’s what may tranquillize every care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature would be more attended to and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene!’ (MP 113). The irony of this is that were there not evidence elsewhere of Fanny’s orthodoxy, one would be forgiven for thinking her to be advocating *Natural Religion* here!

her talk in the novel. Thus, it is unlikely that Mary is appealing to the Deistic/Sentimental idea of innate benevolence here. And the motivation behind her implicit Collins/Paine/Godwin-like iconoclasm, with its privileging of human rights, hardly seems in her case to be the espousal of the ‘sincerity doctrine’, so much as the desire to abolish a tradition that she sees as inconvenient, exacting, repressive of individual freedom and ‘what nobody likes’.²⁵⁰

Yet Mary is careful not to appear too radical, as witnessed by her adroit use of rhetoric in her lively Freethinking discourse.²⁵¹ Here she cleverly avoids taking a stance that is starkly and radically critical of orthodox traditions, employing instead a smooth, subtle and more socially acceptable universalisation to undercut traditional religious practices gently. Here the latter are not attacked as *wrong*, but merely portrayed as *unnatural*, disagreeable and most probably unnecessary: ‘The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time – altogether it is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes’ (*MP* 87).

In a sense, Mary had already shrugged off the restraints of orthodoxy, or to commandeer the words of Julia Prewitt-Brown; ‘Compared to her [Fanny] the Crawfords seem ‘free’, as indeed they are, because they have released themselves from the struggle.’²⁵² Although Prewitt-Brown is discussing alienation and ‘the difficulty of maintaining the connection between interiority and reality’, her words seem apposite in regard to my reading. The Crawfords find no difficulty in releasing themselves from any unpleasant struggle, and

²⁵⁰ Cf. Anthony Collins’s (1676-1729) iconoclastic *Priestcraft in Perfection* (1709) and his *A Discourse of Freethinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of the Sect called Freethinkers* (1713). In the latter, Collins repudiated the authority of the church and vindicated the right of every individual to think freely for himself.

²⁵¹ See Fleishman (118-132), who also draws this parallel. Referring to Mary’s observation: ‘Every generation has its improvements’ he comments: In such passages, Jane Austen parallels the Evangelicals’ efforts to save England’s ruling class from the politically dangerous growth of sceptical enlightenment doctrine’. However, I disagree with his statement that, ‘It should be clear that her [Fanny’s] values are only tangentially religious: domestic worship is to be viewed not for the saving of souls, but for the fulfilment of a social ideal’ (121). As I explain, there is more to family prayers than the mere ‘social’ value.

²⁵² Julia Prewitt-Brown, ‘The Radical Pessimism of *Persuasion*’, in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion: Contemporary Critical Essays* ed. Judy Simons, *New Casebooks*. Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997: 125. Prewitt-Brown who sees *Persuasion* (and *Mansfield Park*) as a novel of alienation or a ‘dislocation of consciousness’, reads Fanny as one who ‘struggles to maintain the connection between interiority and reality’ and whose ‘piteous integrity’ is finally rewarded. By contrast the Crawfords relinquish the struggle to ‘continually probe’ (125).

more often than not, from the moral one.²⁵³ Seen this way, they typify the sloughing off of inconvenient practices of orthodoxy in much the same way that some radical Latitudinarians, Deists and Freethinkers advocated a greater personal freedom and tolerance in religion. In Mary's suggestion that formal family prayers are obsolete, there are echoes of Natural Religion, Deism and Freethinking, with the voices of Anthony Collins, Rousseau, Voltaire Paine and Godwin blending in a demand for the 'right' to follow that which is deemed best or 'natural' (in this case, less arduous and generally more pleasant) – voices considered by the orthodox as dangerously insidious.

Mary can also be said to try to 're-write' the past, by interpreting it in the light of the present more liberal age. Thus, in a somewhat anachronistic manner, she attributes (her) 'enlightened' sentiments to young women of previous times and cleverly uses negative abstract signifiers such as 'obligation, formality, restraint' and 'length of time' in presenting her case. Altogether, she paints a bleak picture of orthodoxy. By contrast, the *laissez-faire* philosophy she promulgates in its place is intended by her to be innovative and alluringly 'agreeable' to human nature. Therefore, in support of her 'doctrine', Mary consciously and vividly evokes an imaginative situation in which the young women of the past are sympathetically presented as every bit as modern and liberated as her London friends and acquaintance (like Lady Stornaway and Mrs Fraser) and as united in rejecting the unnecessary, outmoded and stifling practice of family prayers, for according to Mary it is 'what nobody likes'.

Mary's attack on formal prayers (or public corporate worship) does not end there. It is not only the precept and practice she is rejecting, but what she regards as the 'stiff and starched morality' that accompany them. This is shown by the moral assumptions which emerge from her appraisal of conduct. The conduct she underscores is plainly not that of the sober kind advocated by traditional, conservative Anglican morality. Thus, characteristically of a pretty young London woman who professes no exacting standard of piety, Mary suggests a bold, yet subtle, sexual levity, in which she dares to hint that the married ladies' only consolation in chapel is ogling the parson. The hypothetical young female worshippers' heads are of course 'full of something very different' from the prayers and readings, and the chaplain's person is one of the points of focus. With Freethinking levity Mary asks what can

²⁵³ As witnessed by the way they escape when Sir Thomas comes home from Antigua (177) and Henry's easy capitulation to Maria's renewed charms in London (450).

support and entertain the young ladies if the ‘poor chaplain were not worth looking at’, and then impudently adds ‘– and in those days I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now’. Thus, Mary speaks lightly not only of the pious tradition (which she exposes as a meaningless and hypocritical one) but of marriage (implying the young married ladies are already bored with their husbands and need the titillation provided by ogling the parson) and significantly, also of the clergy. Mary’s subversive ideas of marriage appear throughout the novel,²⁵⁴ and invoke the vociferous resistance of Fanny and Edmund, who variously condemn or palliate her waywardness by appealing to a lack of instilled principle or example.²⁵⁵ Earlier, although he cannot approve Mary’s conduct, Edmund attempts to justify, or at least understand it, by appealing to ‘[t]he right of a lively mind, Fanny seizing whatever may contribute to its own amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when untinctured by ill-humour to roughness; and there is not a shadow of either in the countenance or manner of Miss Crawford, nothing sharp, or loud, or coarse’ (*MP* 64).²⁵⁶ At Sotherton, Edmund is confronted again by the play of this same liveliness ‘untinctured by ill-humour [or] roughness’, and yet, he cannot condone it. Mary’s dismissal of orthodox practices and the levity with which she treats the clergy cannot pass without a check.

It is frequently held that Evangelicals were more austere than their Established counterparts with regard to inappropriate levity on ‘sacred’ or spiritual matters. In his *Rules and Advices to the Clergy* (reprinted in the *Clergyman’s Instructor*) Bishop Taylor discusses the dignity invested in the clerical role and honour this ought to invoke.²⁵⁷ Paley is even more forthright in his exposition of propriety with regard to religious matters:

Mockery and ridicule when exercised upon the Scriptures, or even upon the places, persons and forms, set apart for the ministration of religion, fall within the meaning of the law which forbids the profanation of God’s name. . . They are

²⁵⁴ See *MP* 45–46, 63, 213.

²⁵⁵ *MP* 94–95, 456.

²⁵⁶ He goes on to admit however, that in speaking ill of her uncle the Admiral, ‘There she cannot be justified’ (*MP* 64).

²⁵⁷ *The Clergyman’s Instructor or A Collection of Tracts on the Ministerial Duties*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1827) 117 ff.

moreover inconsistent with a religious frame of mind; for, as no one either feels himself disposed to pleasantry or as capable of being diverted by the pleasantry of others, upon matters in which he is deeply interested; so a mind intent upon the acquisition of heaven, rejects with indignation every attempt to entertain it with jests calculated to degrade or deride subjects which it never recollects but with seriousness and anxiety. (97)

Mary's moral levity with regard to what Paley calls 'persons and forms of religion' thus not only offends the 'nice' sensibilities of Edmund and Fanny, but shocks and angers them in a way almost surprising to modern readers. Yet, if the disrespectful way in which William Elliot speaks of Anne's inadequate father, family and estate in *Persuasion* can evoke so much righteous indignation ('shock and mortification', P 204) in the heroine, then Fanny and Edmund's disapprobation of Mary's levity on (to quote Paley's words) 'subjects which it never recollects but with seriousness and anxiety', cannot astonish.

Accordingly, Mary's speech elicits a stern response from Edmund who, as a patriarch, upholder of the Establishment *and* a prospective clergyman, is the appropriate spokesman for orthodoxy, while Fanny is described merely as 'too outraged to speak'.²⁵⁸ Thus it is clear that Edmund and Fanny are not only dismayed by Mary's lack of respect for the cloth, but equally distressed by her lack of comprehension of true notions of piety – a failing Edmund later attempts to palliate by attributing it to her faulty moral education: 'Hers are faults of principle, Fanny, of blunted delicacy, and a corrupted, vitiated mind.' (MP 456). And for one who never abuses language, the strength of the epithets 'corrupt and vitiated' is telling.

Fanny and Edmund's response to Mary's challenge must have presented a problem to Austen, who does not seem to be able to resolve it with her customary elegance. It is true that we have been prepared for their strictures by many previous hints, and later these are endorsed by Fanny's reactions to the proposed theatricals. The responses are also perfectly in keeping with aspects of Fanny that even the irreligious Crawford can nevertheless recognise and appreciate, for example, the fact that she is 'well principled and religious' (MP 294). Yet here, in this scene, where the protagonists employ a most uncompromising discourse, Austen

²⁵⁸ This is mimetic of More's silent role during the Blagdon Controversy, letting her male friends represent her.

ironically comes closest to the kind of explicit, bare-boned didacticism of More, a priggishness she so stridently deplores in her personal letters to Cassandra.²⁵⁹ As the following passage stands, with perhaps a few minor alterations, it could be a depiction of Charles and Lucilla Stanley opposing the liberal, yet lively and likeable Miss Sparkes in conversation. Fanny's reaction ('coloured and looked at Edmund, but felt too angry for speech') is typical of the modest, retiring Lucilla, and Edmund's courteous response, urbane at the outset but growing in seriousness as he proceeds, until it reaches an unequivocally 'no compromise' position, is very similar to what we find in More's Mr Stanley or Charles. Even the rhetorical question at the end of Edmund's speech ('Do you think the minds . . . ?') with its calculated, measured, progression of adjectival clauses, ('which are suffered, which are indulged'), resulting in a final crescendo of sarcasm pointed by alliteration ('would be more collected in a closet?') is typical of the 'unanswerable' patriarchal piety of Mr Stanley and Charles. Edmund means it to be unanswerable, but Austen allows Mary an intrepid attempt at a reply and this sets her apart from More:

For a few moments she was unanswered. Fanny coloured and looked at Edmund, but felt too angry for speech; and he needed a little recollection before he could say, 'Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects. You have given us an amusing sketch, and human nature cannot say it was not so. We must all feel *at times* the difficulty of fixing our thoughts as we would wish; but if you are supposing it a frequent thing, that is to say, a weakness grown into a habit from neglect, what could be expected from the private devotions of such persons? Do you think the minds which are suffered, which are indulged in wanderings in a chapel, would be more collected in a closet?' (MP 87)

Yet, after this convincing display of male rhetoric, Mary gamely attempts a reply, only to be finally silenced by Edmund, who argues that those who so wish will find distractions everywhere. A regular place and time of worship are aids to self-discipline, a key

²⁵⁹ L 103, 256.

concept as already shown in the vocabulary of ‘serious’ Church people as diverse as Hooker, Sherlock, Law, Wesley and More.

‘Yes, very likely. They would have two chances at least in their favour. There would be less to distract the attention from without, and it would not be tried so long.’

‘The mind which does not struggle against itself under *one* circumstance, would find objects to distract it in the *other*, I believe; and the influence of the place and of example may often rouse better feelings than are begun with.’ (MP 88)

Without retracting any of his principles, or renegeing from his position, Edmund then tries to soften the harshness of his preceding discourse in a way neither More’s Mr Stanley nor Charles would have done, by saying:

The greater length of the service, however, I admit to be sometimes too hard a stretch upon the mind. One wishes it were not so – but I have not yet left Oxford long enough to forget what chapel prayers are. (MP 88)

Perhaps here Austen is unconsciously echoing the words, or at least the sentiments, of James and Henry, who were required to attend obligatory daily chapel prayers at Oxford.²⁶⁰ From a literary point of view, Edmund’s gracious attempt at being understanding and non-judgemental is shown in his argument by his descent from the general level to the specific, the ‘law’ to the personal application. This is demonstrated by his use of the personal pronoun followed by a verb of concession, ‘I admit’, in which he allows that she has a point. This imparts sympathy, but not too much, for Edmund qualifies it by adding the cautious modifier ‘sometimes’. Thus Edmund is polite and sympathetic, but clearly not prepared to budge from his principles, which maintain among other things, that household prayers are necessary for the corporate worship of God and the instilling of good principles in the family. Here Edmund, whom Collins portrays as sympathetic to some of the principles of Natural

²⁶⁰ Irene Collins 40.

Religion,²⁶¹ clearly adopts an orthodox stance that cannot possibly be confused with Latitudinarianism or Natural Religion for it rigorously counters the merest suggestion of them in Mary.

In summing up the effect of this passage, it might be noted that Edward is not anti-feminist as More's heroes often are, unfortunately. One thinks particularly of Sir John Belfield's, Mr Stanley's and Charles's disparagement of Miss Rattle and Miss Sparkes (*Coelebs* 2: 182-3). It is significant that Edmund does not say that long prayers are sometimes too hard upon the *female* mind – a qualification More's Mr Stanley may well have introduced. Thus even at her most tendentious, Austen softens the blow as best she can, without undermining her argument or compromising her principles. And ultimately, like Sherlock, she shows that she is capable of objectively scrutinising traditions, and bold enough to select and conserve from the past that which she believes to be of value for the present and the future.

Whereas some critics have lamented that the attractive, but pre-doomed Mary, who is cast in the archetypical female siren/Satan role is ultimately implausible, or simply problematic because 'the more attractive she is the harder it is to make the rejection convincing',²⁶² it is no error on Austen's part so much as design. Perhaps here she is showing just how very attractive, but seriously suspect, Freethinking ideas can be. More importantly, the narrator ultimately overrides the female focalisation (Mary) merging her voice with those of Fanny and Edmund at the end to show that Mary's attractive and trendy ideas are not conducive to rational temporal or eternal happiness, but practically and spiritually suspect.

It may seem unfortunate that a patriarch like Edmund seemingly subjugates a freely-thinking woman, but the struggle is not strictly speaking a gender, so much as a doctrinal one. In delineating a conscientious clergyman, Austen, like More, was hedged around with traditional expectations, most of which claimed divine (Scriptural) sanction. And this, I believe, is what imparts such solemnity to *Mansfield Park*. Although the novel can be said to deal in clashes between solemnity and levity, piety and impiety, it nevertheless is an oversimplification to assume that Austen is promoting universal solemnity, but she does seem

²⁶¹ 'Unfortunately, as Edmund Bertram points out, not everyone has been taught the lessons of Nature.' Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* 189. Collins then goes on to quote from Sherlock's defence of the atonement, and then without explanation, links Sherlock and Locke.

²⁶² Laurence Lerner 158.

to be showing how necessary this is in a clergyman. Her delineation of the grave Edmund Bertram is a far cry from that of the urbane and generally more light-heated Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* (a novel that was drafted much earlier, before the effects of Evangelicalism were felt by Austen's family). The increased solemnity of the later-conceived *Mansfield Park* can thus be taken as yet another indication of the influence of Evangelicalism on Austen.

Although it is commonly believed that ordination in Austen's time was a perfunctory affair, there was a formidable body of Episcopal charges and clerical advice literature to assist the ordinands. These writings were later collected and issued in the form of manuals such as the *Clergyman's Instructor or A Collection of Tracts on the Ministerial Duties*, which ran through several editions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.²⁶³ This clerical advice, dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, was garnered from divines as diverse as Bishops George Herbert, Jeremy Taylor, George Bull, Gilbert Burnet, Edmund Gibson and Thomas Wilson. George Herbert has particularly exacting standards of personal piety for his clergyman. In the subsection, 'The Parson's Life', in *A Priest to the Temple; or the Country Parson, His Character, and Rules of Holy Life*, Herbert enumerates his basic criteria: 'The country parson is exceeding exact in his life, being holy, just, prudent, temperate, bold, grave in all his ways.' (CI 39) In his dealings with others he is expected to be courteous, pious, learned, humble and peace-loving, eschewing luxury, public commerce and the frequenting of taverns and alehouses, and in the governance of his own house 'a copy and model for the parish' (CI 46-49). Jeremy Taylor cautioned his divines to eschew 'light, immodest and ridiculous expressions (CI 105) and to remember that as Christ's 'ambassador' he was to be 'solicitous to maintain the dignity of his character' (CI 119). Bearing these solemn (and other more or less similar injunctions in the compendium) expectations in mind, it is a wonder that Austen even hazarded a portrayal of a clergyman. More surprising is the fact that she was able to create one as fallibly 'human' as Edmund. As one who has to be suitably dignified, grave and serious, Edmund has the mandate not only to avoid 'light, immodest and ridiculous expressions' (CI 105) in himself, but to censure this in the Crawfords and especially Mary, who speaks lightly, and as she herself acknowledges, sometimes disrespectfully, of the clergy: 'If I had known this before, [his intending to take

²⁶³ *The Clergyman's Instructor*, hereafter intertextually as CI.

orders] I would have spoken of the cloth with more respect' (*MP* 89). As I have tried to show, Edmund attempts the unpleasant task of remonstration with a minimum of arrogance and a generous amount of sympathy for the errant female. And whenever she can, Mary gets her own back, for example, at the end of the novel when she mocks Edmund by overtly linking him with Methodists. And this, her parting thrust in her final interview with Edmund, which is a more polite version of Smith's 'trash and folly of Methodism' discourse clinches her alignment with the liberal tradition:²⁶⁴

At this rate, you will soon reform every body at Mansfield Park and Thornton Lacey, and when I hear of you next, it may be as a celebrated preacher in some great society of Methodists or as some missionary into foreign parts. (*MP* 458)

Perhaps more surprising is Austen's boldness in another way. Although Edmund is narratorially endorsed, it is frequently observed that he is subtly presented as morally inferior to Fanny throughout the novel.²⁶⁵ Even although outwardly conforming to the more severe expectations of the Anglican clergy, Edmund is not proof against an attractive and intelligent woman's 'charms', which temporarily unsettle his judgement. By contrast, his female counterpart, Fanny, although not called to the priesthood, preserves hers even when assailed by both the sexual onslaughts of Henry Crawford as well as his implicit appeals to her 'duty' and 'gratitude' for procuring William Price's naval advancement.²⁶⁶

Thus, the Crawfords, but most especially Mary, challenge the received piety of Edmund and Fanny and implicitly expose the weaknesses of Edmund, while Fanny's stability and the tradition they both defend remain basically intact. And while Edmund and Fanny finally come to a better understanding of Mary at the end, Austen nevertheless leaves something unread or undetermined in her complicated, implicitly unorthodox position.

²⁶⁴ In a review of More's *Coelebs* in the *Edinburgh Review* 14 (1809): 146, 51, he maintains that 'if Mrs More had not belonged to a trumpery gospel faction, and had not degraded the human understanding to the trash and folly of Methodism, she would have been one of the most valuable writers of the day'.

²⁶⁵ See for example *MP* 129, 155, 187. Finally he admits to having been the dupe of Mary: 'how have I been deceived!' (459).

²⁶⁶ Cf. 'While her heart was still bonding with joy and gratitude on William's behalf' (*MP* 302). Sir Thomas also uses the argument of gratitude (to him for her upbringing) when he tries to persuade Fanny to accept Henry: 'But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of *ingratitude* –' (*MP* 319).

CONCLUSION

Austen's prayers, especially those parts which demonstrate her treatment of the doctrines of God and 'man', and her notions of accountability, confession, repentance and benevolence, contain her most explicit expression of Anglican doctrine. Although clothed in conventional (patriarchal) Anglican discourse and demonstrating similarities to Cranmer's style in the *BCP*, they nevertheless bear Austen's stamp of individuality. Here her 'light of the eye' causes her to choose simple, clear phraseology and precise terminology to express these doctrinal concerns. Her orthodox acceptance of human depravity, her shrewd grasp of human psychology and her awareness of the subtleties of self-deception and self-excuse, make her economical and yet well-phrased treatment of sin, self-examination, confession and forgiveness unwearying and trenchant. While opposing vanity and (improper) pride and conveying her conviction of the necessity for divine grace to lead an acceptable life, she nevertheless avoids traditional gendered self-abasement, positing an unostentatious humility that is not devoid of self-respect. At the same time, Austen's benevolence, while not based overtly like More's on the principle of regeneration, presupposes a Christian spirit and divine assistance for the acquisition of the strenuous qualities of forgiveness, tolerance ('forbearance') and a basic, but unnatural, selflessness that she deems integral to it.

In her novels, Austen embodies these doctrines in fictional form. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne, whose eyes are opened to the moral inappropriateness of her previous conduct, suggests a highly individual interpretation of 'atonement', showing that as part of her new *at-one-ness* with God and her fellow humans she will strive to be less selfish, and generally more candid, tolerant and benevolent towards others. Although the light of her eye was darkened under Willoughby's 'tutelage' or influence, she takes responsibility for her own actions and resolves to strike out in a new direction described in Evangelical-like terms. Despite the ironic undercutting of her hyperbolic earnestness, the moral lesson remains intact.

However, the gendered discourse in which Marianne surveys and repents of her lapses prompts one to ask if these are specifically feminine failings and if her harsh responses to her 'sins' are culturally conditioned. The impression given is that Marianne's sentimentally-driven excess that results in the flouting of social conventions (and here it is true, there seems to be some blurring of moral and cultural parameters), the selfish indulgence of her grief and the neglect of her family and friends, are particularly female weaknesses. However,

carelessness of decorum and faults of thoughtlessness are also shown to be a male failing in Frank in *Emma*. Similarly, Willoughby's weaknesses (lack of sexual restraint and avarice) are treated more seriously as worse 'sins' and not permitted to be exculpated, for he lacks the strength and resolution to truly repent. More positively from a feminine point of view is Austen's implicit suggestion that the undermining of a good life through malicious gossip is not a specifically feminine failing. Here a male, Willoughby, is the instigator as well as purveyor of unkind gossip. And ironically, it is not he who starts it, but the female he 'infects', who repents.

It is also ironic that Austen, who was so vehemently opposed to Evangelicalism at one time, seems to valorise certain of its tenets. As part of her 'atonement', Marianne seriously proposes the implementation of an Evangelical-type daily regime; yet a judicious use of irony on the narrator's part prevents these sentiments from becoming priggish or tendentious. Although one can speculate that the rigorous outward forms of Marianne's newly-acquired piety may in time be weathered away, it is not unreasonable to believe that the inner core of essential Christian virtue will remain. As her eye adjusts to the new light it has received, so it is implied, all distortion will eventually be rectified as she adapts to her new more influential role as 'mistress' of Brandon's estate.

In *Mansfield Park*, Edmund Bertram, Austen's ideal clergyman, adopts an 'enlightened' prudential approach to holy orders, which is endorsed by the Christian heroine, Fanny Price. Through conversation the nature, obligations and influence of the country clergy are juxtaposed with their city counterparts, with the suggestion that the country clergy are more effective as parochial examples and pastors. Although conducted through the medium of restrained Median Anglican discourse (which utilizes conceptual terms such as 'morals', 'principles' and 'duties') doctrine is introduced into the clergyman's 'job description'. He is therefore to be not only a resident pastor who lives in a comfortable but sober way, a genuine 'well-wisher and friend' of his parishioners, but a conscientious dispenser of true doctrine. These expectations of the clergy outstrip those of Addison and Burke (who regard the clergy primarily as a social adhesive) and hark back to the devout High Church school of Sherlock, Law and Paley, yet also show similarities to the 'new' Evangelical expectations embodied by More and her 'school'.

The above, and the debates on structures (formal devotions) and traditional expressions of piety as against more modern, individualistic approaches (as in the discussions

in the Sotherton chapel where Fanny and Edmund maintain the importance of regular family devotions) imply that Austen privileges conservative values and traditions, questioning the validity and safety of Freethinking attitudes. Although Austen seems to tread in the broad tradition of conscientious Anglican devotion expressed by Hooker, Butler, Law, Paley and Sherlock, her interpretation of meaningful family and personal piety is elastic enough to accommodate the ‘devout seriousness’ of the more restrained Anglican Evangelicals. Thus, in accordance with their ‘light of the eye’, Edmund and Fanny counter Freethinking or Latitudinarian attitudes to orthodox piety. As conservators of doctrine and meaningful tradition, Fanny and Edmund seem to deliver stern comment that is reminiscent of More. Austen nevertheless, allows Mary to challenge Edmund in what is potentially mutually-improving debate and winnow him of the chaff of possible patriarchal arrogance.

These manifestations of doctrine, piety and reform constitute an essential, though often over-looked, aspect of Austen and provide evidence of her desire to contribute to current religious debates. They not only testify to an appreciation of the worth of a long Anglican tradition, but a willingness to borrow ideas where she feels something new or fresh may be gained from a contemporary revitalising movement such as Evangelicalism. However, Austen does not restrict herself to strict sobriety and precision-like gravity: she maintains the comedic novelist’s right to use irony to deflate unreasonable pious expectations or laugh at enthusiastic excesses in *Sense and Sensibility* and challenge the bases of orthodox piety through the attractive, witty Freethinking Mary in *Mansfield Park*. Through this and the gendered discourse in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen shows that she is not afraid to submit traditional ideas of ecclesiastical correctness and personal piety to interrogation. Unlike More in her tracts, Austen does not pre-weight her argument on the side of orthodoxy, but allows free, fair and lively debate of these issues. However, despite her ambivalence, at the end of the day, she leaves one in little doubt of her ultimate commitment to the twin pillars of orthodoxy and a sincere personal devoutness. Most importantly, as a gender-disabled late eighteenth/early nineteenth century woman writer, Austen’s circumscribed, but powerful contribution to debate on quasi-doctrinal matters, personal piety and clerical reform can be said to challenge Bakhtin’s assumption that ‘the private realm of the domestic novel cannot adequately engage with the external world’.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Roulston, ‘Discourse, gender and gossip: Some reflections on Bakhtin and Emma’ 60.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to demonstrate the ‘glue and soder’ effect of Anglicanism and more particularly, the doctrinal affinities and common interest in piety and reform in Sherlock, More and Austen. Yet, it would be both vain and futile to deny their differences, which as we have seen, have been those of time/context, gender, genre and focus. In this chapter therefore, we begin with the differences and proceed to the similarities (which includes their respective achievements), arriving at a final conclusion of our findings.

Although they all lived during the eighteenth century, they lived during different political dispensations: Sherlock during early Hanoverian times when a Stuart invasion and Jacobite risings were feared and More and Austen mostly during the more settled reign of George III, which was characterised nevertheless by fears that the French Revolution would spread to England. The effects of the unstable political climate are more evident in Sherlock (whose politics were a cautious blend of Toryism and Hanoverian allegiance, and whose ecclesiastical alignment was Laudian rather than Erastian), and More (whose Toryism led her loyally to counteract ‘sedition’ and uphold the *status quo* in both her literary and social works), than in Austen, whose works are less urgently politicised, but whose highly-nuanced novels nevertheless bear testimony to an acute, but implicit, awareness of current political and philosophical thought.

The gender differences are the most stark. Apart from determining their professions, as shown, it necessarily affected their choice of genre which, in the case of the women writers, was much more limited. Here tradition and contemporary convention were legislative, allowing men free range while prescribing suitable genres for women, such as ‘fancy’, poetry, drama, conduct books and the novel. As we have seen, this posed considerable problems for women writers such as More and Austen who wished to explore

ground (politics, doctrine or ecclesiastical reform) on the other side of the fence and who had to devise a variety of strategies to do so.

We have seen that as bishop, member of the Bench, royal chaplain and personal adviser to George II and Queen Caroline, Sherlock was a powerful figure. He took for granted his right to instruct people in religion or disseminate the light of the Gospel, yet at the same time he took these responsibilities and prerogatives seriously, defending *Ecclesia Anglicana* against a host of Whig-driven anti-clerical Bills, resisting the erosion of her privileges, and her authority in the Bangorian Controversy and most importantly, her doctrine in the protracted Deist debate. His political side-lining (owing to his dogged Toryism) which made him more vulnerable than other men, caused him to exploit his influence with Queen Caroline in order to attain preferments and this political disempowerment as we have seen, brings him a little closer to the discrimination More and Austen had to endure from their gender. Justly celebrated for his scholarly and yet accessible defence of orthodoxy against Deism, popular for his Temple sermons, yet undervalued for his originality in *The Tryal* and the *Six Dissertations on Prophecy*, Sherlock's fleeting, but nonetheless sympathetic, portrayal of women in *The Tryal* and his resistance to moral decay in his 1750 Clerical Letter bind him closer to More and Austen and in particular to More, a fellow warrior of 'truth' and tradition.

As a woman, More, who was politically and socially more visible than Austen, did not nearly approach the public stature of Sherlock. Yet she was hailed in her time for her versatility as a poet, playwright, Bluestocking and later, as a female moral reformer. Like Sherlock, she enjoyed a measure of public exposure in the Garrick and Johnson circle, the theatre, and later in her Sunday school work and connection with Wilberforce. Like Sherlock, she was embroiled in public controversies (but smaller ones), but unlike Sherlock, she was reliant on male voices in the Blagdon affair, yet speaking for herself in the Cowley and Yearsley controversies, supported in the latter by Montagu and Carter.

Unlike the celebrated polemicist/preacher Sherlock and the lionised 'Mrs' More, Austen was at once the most secluded and private of all three writers, known only as the writer of six novels and much later, some juvenilia, other novel fragments and her letters.

Lacking Sherlock's power and authority, More and Austen nevertheless unobtrusively present doctrine and discuss clerical reform in their works (and in a sense their portrayal of model fictional clergymen in their fictional Dr Barlow and Edmund Bertram, can be said to play out the male pastoral role that Sherlock was able to fulfil), but the public reaction was

different for these components in their work have been either missed, glossed over or treated dismissively. Thus More, despite her hard-won reforms and her literary prowess, was undermined through the sarcasm of Sydney Smith and Peter Pindar or patronisingly dismissed by Cobbett as the ‘bishop in petticoats’.¹ And Austen, who received some encouraging reviews, drew praise that was paternalistically qualified, such as that of Scott who, while lauding her miniaturistic talent, nevertheless was pleased to excuse her from the ‘Bow-Wow strain’.² More was only recognised as a writer of poetry, plays, tracts for the poor and conduct books for the middle classes, and one ‘odd beast’ of a religious novel, and Austen for her six secular novels. Thus, the picture has remained of Sherlock ploughing his doctrinal furrows, Austen preparing the picnic of romance on the other side and More energetically clipping the moralistic hedge dividing the male from the female preserve.

In attempting to overturn these received views, the More chapter showed her beginning conventionally (like other women) with poetry and drama, later essaying more intrepidly into the political tract and overtly religious/doctrinal works. In the former, she articulates her opinions on socio-political issues, although not without Episcopal protection. In her religious novel in which she dramatises doctrine, she invokes the triple protection of an innocuous form (religious courtship novel), anonymity, a male persona (Charles) and an anxiously solicitous preface. But in her final works she frankly entered the theological domain with her works on doctrine, prayer and a life of St Paul. Thus, despite all the criticism that More has attracted for her ‘reactionary’ or ‘narrow’ Evangelical attitudes, she nevertheless exacts admiration for daring to cross several cultural and religious ‘rubicons’ in addressing predominantly ‘male’ issues in her fiction and in her life (where she did something positive about clerical negligence), but maintaining her ‘properness’ in so doing.³

Yet, like Sherlock, who had to defend Deism and parry collegial attacks from Bentley, Hoadley and Conyers Middleton, More was also assailed externally and internally,

¹ See p 24 above.

² Almost ten years after her death, Scott wrote of Austen: ‘That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I have ever met with. The Big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary common-place things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me.’ For Scott’s reviews see B C Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London 1968) 58–69.

³ Cf. Poovey 40.

ridiculed by secular critics such as Sydney Smith and 'Peter Pindar' (John Wolcot) and censured by fellow Evangelicals like James Stephens. Hence her use of male protectors as in her Episcopally-endorsed political and Repository Tracts, her sewing of doctrine into the folds of *Strictures*, tucking a defence of revelation into her *Essay on St Paul*, bending of genres in *Coelebs* and the exploitation of authorial and narratorial cover. Recently criticised by Marxists/Feminists as hegemonic, patriarchal and melioristic in her approach, and although recuperated by Demers, who pleads for her placement among women reformers like Astell and Wollstonecraft, More is still largely neglected as a doctrinal writer and her exposure of clerical negligence in the Cheddar area and indirectly through Dr Barlow in *Coelebs* is often overlooked. This study, I hope, is a small step in the direction of showing that More also merits a place as in the male-dominated doctrinal/ecclesiastical continuum among her male contemporaries Porteous, Horsley and Horne.

Similarly I have argued for a reconsideration of Austen's position. Disdaining the moral-didactic genre popularised by Elizabeth Rowe, Eliza Heywood, Mary Brunton, Hester Chapone and Sarah Trimmer, Austen nevertheless makes her voice heard in socially-acceptable ways. Although her doctrine is transparent in her prayers, which were not intended for publication, in her public works she embeds her doctrinal and ecclesiastical interests in comedic fictional narrative (the courtship novel). Here they are woven into the folds of a feminocentric text in Marianne Dashwood's story in *Sense and Sensibility* and in *Mansfield Park* the discussion of clerical duties and non-residence is achieved under cover of genteel conversation during a card-game. Her rebuttal of intrinsically Latitudinarian or Freethinking views is embodied in desultory discourse at Sotherton. Here too, Austen chooses a patriarchal focaliser (Edmund Bertram) supported by a woman (Fanny Price) tacitly to affirm the conservative position against its lively and trendy erosion by Mary Crawford.

In moving towards a conclusion, we see that the crucial link between my three figures is their veneration of Church dogma as the *depositum* of truth, a love of the liturgy which embodies it, and respect for ecclesiastical and devotional tradition. The latter ensures a rich polyphonic texture as we hear the voices of Hooker in Sherlock, and in More and Austen, those of Hooker, Locke, Boyle, Law, Sherlock, Butler, Paley and others sometimes pitted against the revolutionary voices of Paine and Godwin. As enlightened writers (all more or less influenced by Locke), Sherlock, More and Austen all recognise that revelation is compatible with rationality, but that human reason and sincerity are not sufficient to discover

doctrine, renovate human nature or maintain right living. Thus, they all more or less expose the dangers of relying too heavily on unaided human reason and argue that sincerity (whether expressed by Natural Religionists, ‘Benevolists’ or Freethinkers like Paine and Godwin) is not in itself sufficient to guarantee a discovery of the truth. Conversely they show the dangers of antinomianism. Consistency is one of the main benchmarks all three writers use to implicitly test the unorthodox claims. Thus Sherlock shows there is consistency in the way in which Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in the New. In *The Tryal of the Witnesses*, the inconsistency and spuriousness of the opponents’ arguments are revealed and in their place, Sherlock offers objective and consistent evidence. Similarly he exposes the inconsistency in Natural Religion which can diagnose the fault, but not provide the cure for sin, and shows that human benevolence, no matter how sincere, is inadequate without divine grace which in its enlightening capacity provides the way of salvation and a successful moral blueprint. Therefore, though recognising the enlightening qualities of human reason and the need for sincerity, Sherlock shows (through images of mazes and darkness and light) that both qualities can obscure the light of truth.

More similarly shows the inadequacy of mere sincerity in Mr Flam in *Coelebs* and more crudely in Mr Fantom in a *Cheap Repository* tract. Like Sherlock, she distances herself from antinomianism by reprobating it in her fictional Mrs Ranby and Mr Tyrrel and labours to show in all her works that true piety is enlightened and consistent and that reason is never incompatible with revelation.

Austen, who seems to takes all this for granted in her novels, reveals her grip of doctrinal issues in her prayers where we have seen her presentation of depravity, need for grace, natural benevolence and moral accountability. The latter is carried over into *Sense and Sensibility* where beginning with what looks like another Sensibility topos of the dying heroine, Austen diverges from it by showing the process in which Marianne struggles to make atonement and regain the spiritual autonomy she lost during her obsession with Willoughby. Juxtaposing Marianne’s with More’s much more simplistic ‘repentance text’ in *Mathilda Melbury*, we went on to acknowledge that the troubled surface of Austen’s writing (particularly the uneasiness with which she uses gendered discourse to portray her heroine’s lapses) possibly registers a subconscious awareness that Marianne may be the victim of a patriarchal interpretation of Christian repentance. Similarly, Austen’s lampooning of the

excesses of Marianne's 'sensibility', together with the ambivalence in her attitude to her Evangelical-type reforms, fractures the surface of her text and renders it difficult to interpret.

Again there is tension in *Mansfield Park* where Austen portrays the patriarchal Edmund exposing plausible, but suspect Freethinking ideas (with Hoadley's and Godwin's among the many voices we hear) in Mary Crawford. Here again the text is fractured with ambivalence as Austen struggles to separate patriarchalism from orthodoxy. The narrator's final overriding of Mary and her support of Fanny and Edmund, designed to show that attractive and trendy ideas are not conducive to rational temporal or eternal happiness, is uneasy. Yet, Austen allows Mary's intrepid challenge to purge Edmund somewhat of his paternal complacency. This, and Austen's implicit desire to show us that the struggle is a doctrinal rather than a gender one, rescues the infelicity of a young patriarch (apparently) subjugating a freely-thinking young woman.

Thus, we trace an increasing complexity in the way in which Sherlock, More and Austen present their doctrine. Although their doctrine makes the spiritual eye single, the way in which the individually-enlightened body refracts it is complex because of gender-related problems. This is never a problem in Sherlock, who as a male feels comfortable with religious, traditionally male discourse. However, it presents a problem with More and Austen: hence the fracturing of texts in More's *Coelebs* where the male focaliser undervalues and misreads his female subject, Lucilla Stanley, the tensions in Marianne's repentance in *Sense and Sensibility* and Mary Crawford's repudiation in *Mansfield Park*. This proves that though they all agree that nothing can surpass 'the glorious light of the Gospel in which they all hope to live and die',⁴ yet it was, and still is, extremely challenging for women to write about doctrine without feeling ambiguity and tension about the patriarchal discourse in which it has been traditionally handed down.

⁴ At the end of *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, Sherlock says that this work is to be regarded as his way of 'throw[ing] in one mite as an offering to the love of Christ and his Gospel, in which I hope to live and die' (Hughes 4: 131).

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