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Drawn Out In Love: Religious Experience, The Public Sphere, And Evangelical Lay Women's Writing In Eighteenth Century England

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**DRAWN OUT IN LOVE:
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND EVANGELICAL LAY
WOMEN'S WRITING IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND**

by

ANDREW O. WINCKLES

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2013

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

*For Christy,
who continues to fight for religious women's voices to be heard.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have happened without the support of numerous individuals at three institutions over the course of ten years. First, many thanks go to Marsha Daigle-Williamson, Brent Cline, Paul Patton, Robert Woods, and Mary Darling at Spring Arbor University for fostering my passion for learning during my undergraduate years and encouraging me to go to graduate school in the first place. Laura George, at Eastern Michigan University, taught my first ever graduate seminar – on British Romanticism – and I have never looked back. Thanks to Laura for being such an accommodating advisor and friend during my two years at Eastern Michigan and for amply preparing me for my Ph.D. Studies.

At Wayne State University I would first and foremost like to thank Michael Scrivener for guiding me through my course of study and the dissertation project. From the moment I stepped on campus, Michael has been a constant source of support and encouragement, always providing thought provoking feedback on all of my work. Thanks as well to Lisa Maruca for providing invaluable expertise on eighteenth-century print culture and assisting me in seeing my first article to print. Simone Chess and Colin Jager (Rutgers University) also provided ample and useful feedback on my dissertation draft. Many thanks also go to Ellen Barton, who has been a constant source of encouragement to me during my time at Wayne State. Thanks to the Graduate School at Wayne State University for providing me with Rumble Fellowship during the 2012-13 school year to assist with dissertation completion and the English Department for awarding me the Terrance King Memorial Scholarship. Both greatly assisted in completing my dissertation in a timely manner.

Finally, thanks to my family – to my parents, Larry and Katie Winckles, who have always supported me no matter what I chose to pursue and especially to my wife, Christy

Mesaros-Winckles, an excellent scholar in her own right who has put up with my quirks and obsessions now for seven years and who is always there as a knowledgeable and erudite sounding board for my ideas.

A portion of Chapter Four appeared in the Spring 2013 issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* under the title “Excuse what difficiencies you will find’: Methodist Women and Public Space in John Wesley’s *Arminian Magazine*.” Thanks to the Johns Hopkins University Press for allowing it to be reprinted here and to Cathy Fortner and Kate McGinn at the Marston Memorial Historical Center in Indianapolis, IN for allowing me access to their copies of the *Arminian Magazine*.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

JWW: The Works of John Wesley. 14 Vols. Ed. Thomas Jackson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.

AM: The Arminian Magazine

MM: The Methodist Magazine

WMM: The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine

AJR: The Anti-Jacobin Review

CHAPTER 1: REASONABLE ENTHUSIASM: EVANGELICAL WOMEN'S WRITING AND THE LITERATURE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In December of 1785, an extraordinary disturbance occurred at the house of William Mallit of Long Stratton, just outside of Norwich in East Anglia. Mallit was a respectable tailor and local Methodist preacher whose niece, Sarah, had come to visit the previous May and had taken ill. Later, in an account of the event published in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*, Mallit recalled that her condition worsened until December 15th when "she was seized with an uncommon fit" (XI:92), which from that time on recurred every twenty-four hours and continued for hours at a time. According to Mallit these fits would come suddenly – in the middle of a conversation his niece "leaned back in her chair, and lost her senses, her eyes were wide open, her face like that of a corpse, her hands quite cold, all her limbs stiff and immoveable" (XI:92). She appeared to be dying but on December 18th everything changed, and during one of her fits she began to speak, saying "Father, turn to God," and "earnestly exhort[ing] her sisters to seek God in their youth" (XI:92). This behavior continued for days until on the 25th she began to preach from full texts of scripture during her fits. Her uncle records that, on several occasions she "thought herself to be in the preaching-house at *Lowstoft*, before a large congregation; and that she took her text from Rev. iii. 20. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock....* The next day she preached again in Mr. *Byron's* hearing, on John vii. 37" and that "She continued to preach in every following fit, speaking clear and loud, though she was utterly senseless" (XI: 93). As might be imagined, word of this behavior got around the small community of Long Stratton, and by December 30th over 200 people were gathering to here Sarah Mallit preach during her fits.

However, the story is more complicated than William Mallit's rather straightforward narrative would have us believe. We also have Sarah Mallit's recollections of these events appended to her uncle's account in the *Arminian Magazine*. Her narrative of what occurred,

while corroborating her uncle's story, also testifies to the tremendous internal struggle that precipitated these extraordinary events. Sarah had frequently been ill in her youth and yet she traces the reason for her affliction in September through December of 1785 to events that happened in March when, as she writes, "the Lord set my soul at full liberty, by applying those words, *I will, be thou clean!*" (XI:186). This tangible feeling of salvation was relatively common during the evangelical revival in Britain and marked the experience of what Methodists called justification, or being made right with God. Yet Sarah's experience was different in that, almost immediately after her justification, she felt called to preach publicly – she writes that "those words were continually before me. *Reprove, rebuke, exhort!* Nor could I by any means drive them out of my thoughts" (XI:187). This was an extraordinary calling for the time period. Though there were precedents in women like Margaret Fell, very few women in England preached during the eighteenth century and, as Sarah notes, she was "no friend to women's preaching" (XI:187). Though a few Methodist women like Sarah Ryan, Sarah Crosby, and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher did preach during this time period with John Wesley's explicit approval, it was in fact rare and many lay people shared Sarah's apprehensions about women's preaching.

Nevertheless, the call to preach continued to haunt Sarah in the months leading up to her visit to Long Stratton in September of 1785. She writes that during this time her "soul was filled with darkness and distress: while I was more and more convinced, that I ought to speak for God" (XI:188). Eventually, the strain was too much and she began to fall into her preaching fits, during which she was "utterly senseless: [...] when I came to myself I could well remember, the place where I had been preaching, and the words I had been speaking from" (XI:238). Finally there was some kind of breakthrough, where Sarah accepts her call to preach publicly despite possible public disapproval:

And in this affliction God made known, notwithstanding all my resistance, the work he had called me to do; and not to me only, but to all that were round about me, by opening my mouth, whether I would or no. While every sense was locked up, the Lord prepared me for the work which he had prepared for me. And I thought, if He should restore me, I would spend my latest breath in declaring his dying love to sinners. From this time my strength continually increasing, my uncle asked, "Have you any objection to speaking in public?" I answered, "Whatever is in your mind concerning me, I consider as appointed of God." (XI:238).

Sarah Mallit went on to become one of the most active and prominent preachers of early Methodism. She was a friend and correspondent of John Wesley and became the only woman ever to obtain an official license to preach from the Methodist Conference. She remained active in East Anglia long after the official ban on women's preaching was handed down in 1803. She died at the age of 82 in 1843.

It would be easy to read Sarah Mallit's strange experience as a psycho-somatic reaction to a repressed desire to speak. Restricted by societal norms she simply sublimated what she felt was her calling until it expressed itself during her senseless fits. There is likely some truth to this interpretation; after all Sarah's behavior most closely resembles that of Anna Trapnel, the seventeenth-century Fifth Monarchist prophetess who, in 1654, fell into a long trance and produced a prophecy that was recorded as *The Cry of a Stone*. Thus there was a tradition of religious women using trances or fits as a means of addressing a public otherwise closed to them. And there is undoubtedly an element of the psycho-somatic and of the enthusiast in Mallit's actions.

Yet within the overall context of the Methodist movement the story is far more complex. Her preaching fits may have had a direct precedence in the enthusiastic preaching of a Civil War prophetess, but her narrative was printed in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*, the official mouthpiece of the Methodist movement. Though critics often tried to paint Wesley as an

enthusiast, in reality he was a child of the Enlightenment – educated at Oxford and deeply suspicious of any supernatural experience that did not bear up to scrutiny. The fact that he judged Mallit's experience authentic indicates the fine line between enthusiasm and enlightenment that Wesley and the movement he spawned tread from its inception. That Mallit's account appeared in print is itself evidence of the enlightened forms of discourse that John Wesley used to propagate his enthusiastic message. It was by appropriating these public sphere forms that Wesley was able to influence people across the nation, and the world, but it was also the circulatory nature of the discourse that opened him up to bitter criticism and opposition.

In addition to the opposition between enthusiasm and enlightenment, Mallit's story exposes some of the broader tensions that came to define the evangelical movement and British society at large during the eighteenth century – tensions between public and private, experience and action, faith and works, individual and community. Her account is based on private experience and yet it results in public action that contravened societal norms. It is profoundly individual and yet it is nurtured in and then works outward into a defined religious community. It is profoundly personal and intimate and yet it ends up printed and circulated in one of the most popular evangelical periodicals of the day. In this she is representative of the shifts that were occurring in notions of the self and public space during the eighteenth century, and points to some of the ways in which religion was still a crucial part of how the eighteenth century subject defined the self and the self in relation to the world. In particular, Mallit's experience points to the importance of women's involvement in the Methodist movement from the very beginning. Until 1830, nearly 57% of Methodism's membership was made up of women (Hempton 137) and, though in most cases barred from positions of power, they inalterably shaped the character of Methodism. Women's experiences within Methodism differed from men's experiences;

women like Sarah Mallit were able to develop a complex fusion of experience and action, private and public that defied many of the eighteenth century's most cherished ideas of womanhood.

By taking women's experience as our starting point, we can begin to expose some of the false oppositions that dominate our thinking about evangelicalism, enlightenment, romanticism, and the secular that characterize their age and ours. Evangelicalism has most often been characterized as the anti-self of enlightenment, a reaction to enlightenment principles that returns to an enthusiastic past.¹ Likewise, first enlightenment and then romanticism have been posited as part of a secularization process, a progressive movement away from the religious – partly as a reaction to evangelicalism.² Evangelical women's writing reveals that the lines are not so clear. Evangelicalism, enlightenment, and romanticism are bound up in many of the same processes – processes that in turn work together to make the secular and the modern conceivable in the first place. Far from being a movement away from the religious, romanticism and secularism were in large part made possible by it. To better trace how this transformation took place in this chapter I will first more clearly define what I mean by evangelicalism and Methodism and then turn to a more careful examination of how the critical discourses on enthusiasm, enlightenment, romanticism and secularization have shaped our understanding of evangelical literature. Finally, I will define the role of evangelical women's writing within this discussion before laying out the structure of this study.

Evangelicalism and Experience

The experience that women like Sarah Mallit had within Methodism was indicative of a larger religious trend in British and American society during the eighteenth century. Though George Whitefield along with John and Charles Wesley today get much of the credit for establishing a reform movement known as "methodism" within the Church of England, in reality

the movement was more broadly based and had its origins in the wider piety movements of the early eighteenth century. In fact a combination of factors, including the influence of continental pietism, the rise of latitudinarianism, and local parish and congregational circumstances combined to spawn what has become known as the Evangelical Revival. Definitions of “evangelicalism” itself are notoriously difficult as the movement was not monolithic and different branches believed different things. However, in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, David Bebbington offers a widely accepted definition that identifies four key characteristics of evangelicalism: 1. conversion, 2. the Bible, 3. activism and service to God, and 4. crucicentrism, the belief that Christ’s death literally atoned for sin (1-17). Though different evangelical groups place different emphases on each element or interpret them differently (for example some evangelicals argue that the Bible is inerrant, others assert that it is only infallible), nevertheless each of these characteristics can be found in some form across evangelical groups.

Nevertheless there were distinct conditions in the eighteenth century that allowed for the rise of the evangelical movement. Perhaps the most distinct element that made the Revival possible was the increase in circulation of all kinds over the course of the century – circulation of capital, print, and people across multiple boundaries. Just as the capital economy was constructing a market based upon free enterprise and free choice so for the first time were individuals free to choose and alter belief. In 1689 the Act of Toleration codified what was already a growing reality – removing the most onerous restrictions on Protestant Dissenters (though not Catholics) and allowing them to worship with relative freedom. As I will discuss in Chapters Three and Five, there were limits to this toleration, and toleration itself could serve a regulatory function, but for the first time people were free to move between belief systems with relatively few restrictions.

The rise of this capital economy also coincided with the rise in the circulation of print. As I will discuss in Chapter Three this helped create the discourse conditions for the development of an evangelical public sphere in Britain during the eighteenth century. Men like George Whitefield and John Wesley consciously used the technologies of print to circulate their message around the country and around the world. The ubiquity of print made it possible to, for the first time, reach a massive audience with a well-defined message. In this context, Jonathan Edwards' *Faithful Narrative* could quickly cross the Atlantic and go through many editions in both England and Scotland. The circulation of evangelical print could thus have an impact far beyond a relatively defined locale like Northampton.

Furthermore, the increased circulation of people across local and international borders directly contributed to the conditions that made the Revival possible. Transatlantic travel was becoming easier and faster, within England the roads were rapidly improving with turnpikes springing up that dramatically reduced travelling times while increasing safety. Though the vast majority of people still remained in their own parish and in their traditional occupations during the century, this was starting to change by 1800. More and more people were moving to large industrial cities that were ill-served by the existing Church parish system. In short, people were beginning to circulate in ways that would have previously been inconceivable – John Wesley's itinerant preachers, for example, utilized the newly developed system of roads to cover immense distances – bringing the Evangelical message to a broad portion of the population.

Finally, the Revival in all of its iterations was characterized by an emphasis on felt or “heart” religion – a belief that it was not enough to observe the outward forms of religion but that Christ could sensibly transform the heart through faith during conversion. This transformation was then expected to work outward in the convert's life, prompting him/her to work to transform

society. Thus the individual conversion experience fundamentally altered the convert's life in ways that came to transform who s/he was and how s/he interacted with the world. In this sense the Methodism of evangelical Anglicans like the Wesleys and George Whitefield, the American Great Awakening and the work of Jonathan Edwards, and the continental piety promoted by Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians, were all strands of the same evangelical piety that swept the Western world during the eighteenth century – fundamentally transforming the landscape of Western Christianity.

However it is the evangelical movement within the Church of England that is most pertinent to this study. At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were two key trends within the Church of England which led directly to the Evangelical Revival – latitudinarianism and the rise of religious societies. Following the Civil War and the religious settlement of 1689, the growing sentiment within the Church establishment was towards toleration and latitudinarianism. Coinciding with this move was a growing sense within the Church of England that it was best to avoid the types of doctrinal controversy that led in part to the Civil War. It was within this context that John Locke wrote his influential *Letter on Toleration* and important bishops like Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761) began to articulate a version of Christianity that emphasized agreement with a basic set of Church doctrines and adherence to prescribed rituals as a means of salvation. This had the effect of not only privatizing belief (something the evangelicals would later pick up), but it also attempted to reduce controversy based on belief. This development had a direct impact on the type of conversion John Wesley preached; for, as W.M. Jacob has illustrated, lay participation in the Church of England remained high throughout the eighteenth century.³ For Wesley latitudinarianism was a problem in that it promoted a least common denominator Christianity based on social adherence instead of personal heart change.

The second crucial development that acted as a precursor to the Revival was the development of Religious Societies within the Church of England during the Restoration. Anthony Horneck (1641–1697), for example, began forming religious societies in 1670 to counteract what was perceived as the moral profligacy of the Stuart court and society. By the turn of the century one of the most influential of these societies, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was formed and worked to distribute educational materials for the reformation of manners and correction of immorality around the country. Both Samuel Wesley Sr. (1662–1735) and the young John Wesley were corresponding members of the SPCK though it is unclear how involved they were in its activities. Nevertheless societies like the SPCK were clearly part of the model for John Wesley's Oxford "Holy Club" which met regularly for the purposes of moral improvement and discussion during the 1720's and was active in charitable endeavors in the Oxford community. Furthermore, the existence of these societies indicates that there was a relatively broad lay interest in moral improvement and personal piety as early as 1670.

In this context the shifting social conditions in England around 1730, along with the developments in America and on the continent operated to create a kind of critical mass within the Church establishment. By the early 1730's there were already stirrings of revival within the Church of England. Howell Harris (1714-1773) and Daniel Rowland (1713-1790), two Welsh Anglicans, experienced conversion and began preaching justification by faith in the open air. Independent religious societies, mostly under Moravian influence, were formed in major cities and began to attract growing crowds both from within and without the established Church.⁴ George Whitefield (1714-1770), an ordained Anglican priest and member of the Oxford Holy Club, experienced evangelical conversion in 1736 and began preaching to massive open air

crowds in London and Bristol. In 1738 John and Charles Wesley, also ordained Anglican priests, returned from their mission in Georgia, where they had been first exposed to Moravian piety, and experienced conversion within weeks of each other. They, along with other like-minded individuals from the Church, Dissent, and Moravianism, began to meet at the independent Fetter Lane society, thus laying the groundwork for further evangelical work.⁵

At its inception the evangelicalism preached by Harris, Whitefield, and the Wesleys was posited as a movement for reform and purification within the Church of England. Indeed the Wesley brothers never left the Church and the Methodists did not informally separate from the Church until well into the nineteenth century. Nevertheless the Church establishment was intensely suspicious of the evangelicals and their activities during the early years of the Revival (see Chapter Three). Of particular concern was the evangelical insistence on knowing that one's sins were forgiven in this life and the "irregularity" of ordained priests like Wesley preaching beyond the bounds of their own parish. Wesley himself was called before various bishops multiple times for these irregularities but was always able to show the consistency of his practices with the Thirty-Nine Articles and the *Book of Homilies*. As he so famously put it, "the world is my parish," and he used this as a license to travel and preach throughout his life.

Though the evangelical activities of men like Wesley and Whitefield may have aroused suspicion among the Church establishment, there were many Anglicans – clergy and lay – who sympathized with the broad goals of the evangelical movement. Some of the most prominent of these early evangelical Anglicans included Vincent Perronet of Shoreham, James Hervey of Northampton, Samuel Walker of Truro, John Berridge of Everton, and William Grimshaw of Haworth. Though these men never became Methodists they maintained friendly relations with Wesley and incorporated many evangelical practices into their ministry. Even Charles Wesley

remained much closer to the Established Church than many of his peers in the Methodist movement. In fact early in his career Charles ceased itinerating and instead became the more or less regular pastor of congregations first in Bristol and then in London. Contrary to much subsequent portrayal, there was a sizable faction of Methodists, especially in London, who maintained close ties to the Church of England.

These early evangelicals were followed by influential men like John Newton of Olney, the former slave trader turned Anglican priest and hymnist, who in turn had a tremendous influence on laypeople like Hannah More and William Wilberforce, both of whom were influential in the evangelical Clapham Sect. These evangelical Anglicans not only embraced the personal conversionism of the Revival but also worked to translate it into social action. Thus Newton and Wilberforce especially were influential in abolishing the slave trade and combating other social ills. This shift within the establishment towards evangelicalism also indicates the extent to which the Revival, which early on emphasized equality regardless of social rank, was transformed by the end of the century into a largely middle class movement in favor of established social relations. Thus, not only did the Revival have some of its roots within the Church of England, it also worked to fundamentally transform the Church – shaping its mission and direction well into the nineteenth century.

This international and interdenominational context helps explain the explosion of evangelical fervor in England during the 1730's. At its inception the revival was not about one person or religious group, but about a general movement for renewal in church and society. Much of this fervor was focused in independent religious societies, like Fetter Lane, which drew from a variety of religious traditions without breaking from any. It was only as the Revival grew and spread that differences began to develop and factions began to emerge under the leadership

of a few charismatic individuals. Though Whitefield was one of the dominant faces of the Revival in its early years, he was in America for long periods of time and, though unmatched at preaching, was poor at consolidating gains and organizing a movement. John Wesley, on the other hand, was a skilled organizer, but had a tendency to alienate those who disagreed with him. Controversies were still brewing on the one hand between the Wesleys and the Moravians over “stillness,” (the idea that humans can do nothing for their own salvation but must remain “still” and wait) and on the other between Wesley and Whitefield’s followers over Calvinism. Eventually these groups would break into distinct branches of the revival, with Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon, and the Welsh Methodists forming various Calvinist Methodist connections, the Moravians their own societies, and John and Charles Wesley consolidating what we know as Methodism within the Church of England. Thus the term “Methodist,” could refer to any of these different groups and was often even applied to evangelical Anglicans. Throughout this study, then, I will use the terms Methodist and evangelical almost interchangeably, as the divisions between groups were not so clear cut then as they are now. Someone like Hannah More could be considered both an evangelical Anglican and a Methodist, while Agnes Bulmer maintained formal ties to both groups throughout her life.

In sum, the Evangelical Revival was a broad-based movement for change within established religious structures that powerfully shaped how religion was perceived and enacted in England well into the nineteenth century. Though much derided at its inception, the broader evangelical movement prompted reform within established churches and spawned a new type of religious discourse that would come to powerfully shape modernity. In individualizing the salvation experience and making conversion the locus point for spirituality, the evangelicals set the stage for a form of religious differentiation that characterizes the modern experience with

religion. As I will illustrate, this move was subtly contested by many evangelical women through their writing and social action and in many ways evangelical women characterize a type of embodied spirituality that stands in stark contrast to religion based solely on belief. In this they offer an alternative narrative of evangelicalism. A narrative that is not based on inevitable progress away from an unenlightened past towards true and vital religion, but one that appropriates the disciplines and practices of the past as a means to furthering experience and action. In this print became one of the primary forces for change in religious structures in that it allowed women like Sarah Mallit to easily access the stories and narratives of earlier religious women and appropriate them into their own spiritual experiences. The evangelicals may have seen themselves as representing something wholly new in British religious life, but women like Sarah Mallit understood that they were a part of a far older religious tradition.

Enlightenment and the Evangelical Public Sphere

That women were drawn to this new evangelicalism more than men was as much a recognized fact in the eighteenth century as it is in scholarship today, though for different reasons. In the eighteenth century women were considered far more susceptible to religious enthusiasm due to their supposedly greater sensibility and emotional spirits (Mack 19-20). In fact, a humoral theory of physiology even specified that women's bodies were more prone to "irrational" influence. This affective and embodied representation of women's religious experience serves to highlight the deep anxieties that undergirded public perception of such religious "enthusiasm" (especially by women) throughout the eighteenth century. The memory of the havoc enthusiastic prophets wreaked during the English Civil War still lingered in the collective psyche of the British public and they were deeply suspicious of religious emotion, especially by women. For this reason many of the attacks that were directed against

evangelicalism focused on the fact that it was supposedly driven by women's "irrational" sensibility. As Leigh Hunt wrote in his *Attempt to Shew the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, "We may see directly what influence the body has upon this kind of devotion, if we examine the temperament of its professors. The female sex, for instance, are acknowledged to possess the greater bodily sensibility, and it is the women who chiefly indulge in these love-sick visions of heaven" (55). Women's experience, then, was inherently more suspect than men's. Due to their supposed reliance on bodily sensibility they were considered more susceptible to dangerous religious emotionalism. Especially in the over-heated political atmosphere of turn of the century Britain, public expression of religious emotion often was perceived as inherently destabilizing. The fundamental worry that underlay the concern over *female* enthusiasm was that such uncontrolled emotion would end up spilling over into and disrupting public space. As such there were many attempts throughout the century to regulate women's sensibility (in arenas from religion to novel reading) and by extension control their very bodies.

This criticism of Methodism as inherently dangerous and repressive in fact came to dominate critical assessments of Methodism and Methodist women well into the twentieth century. Beginning at least with Elie Halevy's famous assertion in 1913 that Methodism prevented a working class revolution in England, subsequent historians and literary critics have further developed the thesis that British evangelicalism was a fundamentally middle class repressive force that stifled social change based on enlightenment principles. In *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966), for example, E.P. Thompson follows Marx and famously excoriates Methodism, arguing that John Wesley "rarely let pass any opportunity to impress upon his followers the doctrine of submission, expressed less at the level of ideas than of

superstition.... Thus, at this level Methodism appears as a politically regressive, or ‘stabilizing’, influence (40-41).

This line of thinking remains influential today among neo-liberal secularists like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins who have no investment in Marxism but use similar arguments to assert that the type of religion spawned by the evangelical revival has hindered the aims of the enlightenment and secular modernity. For these “new atheists,” religion is an oppressive force that prompts individuals to act in ways that harm secular society in the name of religion. Belief, by this narrow definition, is simply a regulating principle and not a principle that dictates a radical engagement with the world and its problems. However not only do these assumptions about the revival largely misunderstand its origins as a movement of the poor and marginal they also endorse a project of secularism and modernity that evangelicalism itself was helped shape. In many ways evangelicalism helped to create the idea of the secular by making religion a matter of right belief instead of embodied action. As we will see, the lives and work of female evangelicals in many ways call into question the binary between enthusiasm and enlightenment – arguing for a unity of experience and action that radically subverts ideas of modernity.

These fears – both in the eighteenth century and today – over religious enthusiasm becoming uncontrolled and unstable within a public space and subverting the aims of enlightenment and the secular state thus fundamentally misunderstand what is meant by evangelicalism *and* enlightenment.⁶ As Colin Jager has recently pointed out in “Shelley After Atheism,” arguments for an expulsion of religion and a return to the supposed enlightenment principles of secularism overlook the fact that the secular was in fact made conceivable by the religious.⁷ The enlightened secular state is not void of “enthusiastic” fervor, it is simply

transformed into a regulatory function. Thus secularism is “not simple neutrality but the active intervention in religious life by state, civic, and cultural actors. As a way of life... secularism validates a particular organization of the human sensorium; by remaking religion as a primarily epistemological concern, a matter of minds rather than of bodies, it reorders the hierarchy of the senses in accord with its own goals” (630).

As I will illustrate, the enlightenment was *not* inherently a project of secularization, a movement away from religion based on scientific empirical knowledge.⁸ In fact John Wesley based his theory of evangelical experience largely on “enlightenment” principles and especially on the idea that all we can know about the world is based on sense. Furthermore the fears over enthusiasm spilling over into the public sphere overlook the fact that evangelicalism was itself a *part of* a developed public sphere and that the norms of evangelical discourse in large part acted as a regulating force. As Michael Warner points out:

Far from being simply a reaction against an already congealed ‘Enlightenment,’ eighteenth-century evangelical practices came into being through many of the same media and norms of discourse. What we now call evangelicalism can be seen as the transformation of older strains of pietism by public sphere forms.... Indeed, it is not clear that enlightenment and evangelical religion were recognizable to contemporaries as opposing forces (Preacher’s Footing 368).

By tracing these evangelical discourse practices as they manifested themselves in public we can thus gain a firmer grasp on what exactly is meant by both evangelicalism and enlightenment in this period and within the context of the evangelical revival. As Siskin and Warner have recently argued, in many ways “Enlightenment is an event in the history of mediation” (1). If this is true, as I believe it is, then we need to better understand how evangelicalism – so bound up in the history of enlightenment – fits into the history of mediation as well. The evangelical revival did not happen in a vacuum and, by examining how Methodists used print to spread their message, we are able to shed even more light on the intimate connection between evangelicalism and the

public sphere, especially how evangelical texts circulated through a variety of locales and discourse conditions.

In particular evangelical women's writing and the way it circulated challenges the assumption that an excess of religious feeling represents a form of uncontrolled enthusiasm which cannot easily be disciplined or productively channeled. For example Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, one of the earliest and most important woman preachers of Methodism, used her own evangelical conversion experience as the impetus to preach, found orphanages and Sunday Schools, and create a network of active and disciplined women who used modes of evangelical discourse to encourage one another and prompt further action. These women utilized the built-in single sex Methodist small group structure to form bonds of affection that were then maintained through both manuscript letters and print production – writing that circulated among other women throughout Britain (see Chapter Three). Likewise the women's conversion narratives that were published in the *Arminian Magazine* mapped out the terrain of evangelical experience and illustrated the proper public channels for this experience (see Chapter Four). Thus the public sphere worked to discipline experience, to mold it into something that was assimilable into the individual consciousness and easily transmissible to a wide audience. In this writing itself became a type of spiritual discipline whereby women were able to establish an evangelical sense of self that was both formed by the but made God and not the individual the ultimate object of experience.

Romanticism and Secularization

As these examples show, evangelical women's patterns of sociability and writing help expose some of the cracks in the assumption that enthusiasm and enlightenment were polar opposites. Furthermore, if we can no longer draw a straight line away from enthusiasm to

enlightenment, neither can we draw a line from evangelicalism to romanticism and secularism. For a variety of reasons, ranging from critical neglect of religious writing in general to a critical context that is itself informed by Romantic assumptions, Methodist writing has been largely excluded from discussions of romanticism. This neglect in large part continues despite the recent focus on religion as crucial to the formation of the movement.⁹ This critical attitude reflects not only a misunderstanding of Methodism and how it interacted with the public sphere, but also a relatively staid conception of romanticism largely based on the “romantic ideology,” so aptly laid out by Jerome McGann. Indeed, not only did Methodism contribute to the larger social milieu within which romanticism arose, but romanticism itself incorporated many of the central ideals of evangelicalism – personal spiritual experience, religious emotion, community, and clear language and diction into its very core. Finally, by dismissing evangelicalism as an important literary movement in its own right, this critical attitude reifies false binaries between body and mind, emotion and reason, religion and secularism that continue to dominate public discussions of religion and women’s place in society.

A good example of the type of interplay between evangelical writing, romanticism, and some of the critical assumptions that have been made about both is the conversion narrative genre which I will explore at length in Chapter Four. Richard Brantley has already noted the clear parallels between the types of narratives which were published in the *Arminian Magazine* and poetry by Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular. There is in fact good evidence that both Wordsworth and Coleridge were familiar with both the conversion narrative form and the type of evangelical publication in which they were commonly found. In an early autobiographical letter to Thomas Poole, Coleridge writes that he “could inform the dullest author how he might write an interesting book. Let him relate the events of his own life with honesty, not disguising the

feelings that accompanied them”, and adds that he has “never yet read even a Methodist’s Experience in the “Gospel Magazine” without receiving instruction and amusement” (*Letters* I:302). Coleridge’s interest in Methodist biography is confirmed by the fact that he contributed notes to an annotated edition of Robert Southey’s *Life of Wesley*, a book that includes not only Wesley’s conversion account, but the accounts of several of his most prominent preachers as well. Southey’s book was the first biography of Wesley published by a non-Methodist and while Southey is critical of some of the excesses of Wesley’s followers – the enthusiasm of the open air meeting – both he and Coleridge generally admire Wesley. Indeed, one of Coleridge’s annotations notes: “That Arminian Methodism contains many true Christians God forbid that I should doubt!... it has been the occasion, and even cause, of turning thousands from their evil deeds, and that it has made and tends to make bad and mischievous men peaceable and profitable neighbours and citizens” (I:132). We have no record of Wordsworth’s opinion of Southey’s biography, though it was found in his library upon his death.¹⁰

Wordsworth’s relationship to evangelicalism may be unclear, but what is clear is that many of the critics of his later poetry found it far too evangelical in tone. One of Francis Jeffrey’s many criticisms of *The Excursion* in *The Edinburgh Review* was that it repeated the “mystical verbiage of the Methodist pulpit” (509). What Jeffrey objects to most is the didactic character of the text – a criticism that is also frequently leveled against evangelical writing. However, in both types of writing personal experience and emotion are taken as the basis for the expression of some transcendental truth. In *The Prelude*, for example, Wordsworth uses the “spots of time” to represent moments of transformation, when the world comes into focus for him and he is able to make sense of it. Similarly the conversion experiences of Methodist women use similar clear bursts of emotion to make sense of their world and their relationship to God. In

both cases the result is writing, a clear articulation of the connection between inner experience and the outer world. This is not to say that the two genres are necessarily comparable, but only that similar cultural and religious influences seem to be at play in both types of work.

Likewise Agnes Bulmer's poetry, which I will examine in Chapter Six, takes creation as its main subject and, by arguing from analogy, works its way to the Creator. This represents not only a nuanced understanding of shifting theories of natural theology, but an internalization of what was by then a romantic commonplace – the use of landscape representation as a means to expressing the transcendent. In this her poetry is reminiscent of Shelley's who, most notably in *Mont Blanc* uses the space of the mountain itself as a canvas upon which to inscribe a relationship between the real and the unreal. As Earl Wasserman has pointed out, "In effect, *Mont Blanc* is a religious poem, and the Power is Shelley's transcendent deity" (232). I give this example not to argue for Shelley's influence on Bulmer or vice versa, but to illustrate that both are operating from similar assumptions, albeit from opposite ends of the religious spectrum. Agnes Bulmer was a major poet and intellectual in her own right, but largely because she was a Methodist her poetry has been forgotten while Shelley's has been canonized.

In pointing some of the points of congruence between evangelicalism and romanticism I don't want to simply argue for a theory of influence or implicitly privilege the Big Six by constantly comparing these writings to them as if only they are the standard of the literary. Nor do I want to implicitly endorse a Romantic canon, no matter how widely expanded, by attempting to pinpoint a specific set of features that mark a work as "romantic." Instead, for the purposes of this study I want to define romanticism more broadly, as encompassing a general emphasis on emotion, feeling, and nature as an impetus for different types of action – including writing. Doing so allows me to examine evangelical women's writings on its own terms. Thus I

will focus on canonical romantic figures only so far as they help us understand the broader context of evangelical women's writing. Indeed my entire argument rests on the fact that a wide range of discourses in Britain during the eighteenth century gave birth to the social, religious, and cultural milieu that spawned a wide range of innovation in literary genres at the end of the eighteenth century by both men and women. My hope is that this study will help us expand our knowledge of the types of writing that were occurring at the end of the eighteenth century so that we can broaden our critical and cultural horizons – thus properly assessing the role of the evangelical in the construction of what we have come to think of as secularism and modernity.

Indeed, the tendency to read evangelicalism as merely a stopping point on the way to Romanticism or, more charitably, as a cultural movement that reached its apotheosis in great “Literature” has tended to cloud our assessment of the works of evangelicals themselves and reified a progressive narrative of secularization. Instead of religion being a mutually constitutive category with romanticism, it is often completely subsumed by it. Perhaps the most prominent exponent of this thesis is M.H. Abrams who, in *Natural Supernaturalism*, influentially argues that romanticism represents “the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking” (12), and that the process “has not been deletion and replacement of religious ideas but rather the assimilation and reinterpretation of religious ideas, as constitutive elements founded on secular premises” (13). Likewise Jon Mee in *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation* provides a more comprehensive and nuanced overview of eighteenth century enthusiasm, reading works by evangelicals in their own terms, but in the end he too argues for a type of secularization through the “regulation” of the religious impulse in Romantic poetry. The fact that this argument has persevered in the scholarly imagination is a testament to its persuasive force and the extent to which romanticism itself has become bound up in modern criticism.

On the other side of the argument are those who take evangelicalism and evangelical writing seriously but also argue that evangelicalism was essentially a precursor to Romanticism, an expression of the Romantic spirit in religious form. Though their readings are very useful, evangelicalism still becomes a mere stopping point on the way to romanticism and modernity without critically examining what those categories entail or how evangelicalism contributed to and contested them. The most influential of these critics is Richard Brantley who, in *Wordsworth's Natural Methodism* rightfully points out Wordsworth's own evangelical sensibilities and investments, arguing that his "methodism" is represented in "the religious quality of his thoroughgoing reliance on one's own experience as a basis for knowing the good and the true" (8). Brantley is also invested in refuting the idea that romanticism equals secularization, arguing that both Wordsworth and the evangelicals participated in "the revival and not the secularization or rejection of Christian myth and morality" (2). But even this denial of romantic secularization implicitly endorses the secular as a movement away from the religious, it just shifts the timeline.

Reading evangelical women's literature on its own terms thus helps us re-contextualize the relationship between evangelicalism, romanticism, and secularization. As Colin Jager has pointed out, the idea that romanticism represented a secularization of the evangelical impulse is simply not borne out by empirical evidence from the period and if we begin to understand secularization "not as a loss of belief but rather as an example of the differentiation that characterizes modernity... then we can start to analyze our own investment in secularization as that which underwrites and legitimates romanticism" (1). Jager goes on to argue that in the case of women writers in particular, we cannot begin to fully reincorporate their work into our scholarship as long as "romanticism's own relationship to secularization remains uninterrogated

and unhistoricized” (74). Especially considering how much women’s writing during the period had explicitly religious content or was written by women who were religious, we still know shockingly little about how religion operated in romantic women’s writing beyond generalized and largely inaccurate narratives of secularization. If secularization was constituted as a discourse within religious structures themselves then what we need to attend to is the way in which these discourses are changing and in turn how these changes alter our conceptions of religion in the first place.

In this, evangelical women’s writing allows us to explore some of the alternative narratives of the period, which really help to explode binaries between public and private, self and other, experience and action. Like the romantic poets these women also see experience as an impetus for writing and action, but they tend to posit it in different terms. Instead of creating a language of the self, these women turn outward towards God and the world, writing in a way that is intended to form a sociable community of common readers and writers in an expanding evangelical public sphere. In this, the way that evangelicals embraced the possibilities of printing and cheap periodical literature early on indicates that they understood that the wide circulation of their experience in print opened up new avenues for engendering similar experiences in others. What the role of evangelical women’s writing illustrates is that a much wider range of types of writing was occurring during the eighteenth century – writing that troubles our literary categorizations and canons. Furthermore, careful attention to evangelical writing reveals that it was widely read and important *in its own right*, not just as a precursor to broader literary movements.

Evangelical Women’s Writing

Evangelical women's writing is thus a particularly useful means through which to explore the complex relationship between evangelicalism, enlightenment, romanticism, and secularization in that women and women's roles were so often at the center of how each of these movements sought to define themselves. However though the past twenty years have witnessed the recovery of many important women writers from the period and an entire literature now exists on the important contributions of women like Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, evangelical women writers have largely been left out, while the overt evangelicalism of someone like Hannah More has been mostly ignored. Anne Mellor, for example, in her foundational studies *Romanticism and Gender* and *Mothers of the Nation* does not ignore or discount religion but instead reads it primarily in terms of how women writer's religious beliefs informed their political action. So while extensive space is given to Hannah More's religion, it is constructed mainly in terms of her crusade to reform manners, while the more experiential elements of her spirituality are ignored. This is a problem that Mellor herself has identified in much feminist criticism since the publication of *Romanticism and Gender*.¹¹ Though writers like More, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Jane Austen, and Mary Shelley are now firmly established in scholarship and college curriculum, we still know shockingly little about how they lived out their religion.

Despite how little work has been done on the religious commitments of these well known female romantics, even less has been done on the extensive writings of the women of the evangelical movement. Recent work by Phyllis Mack, Vicki Tolar Burton, Jennifer Lloyd, and Christine Krueger¹² has sought to correct this, but they have focused primarily on the exceptional women of early evangelicalism – the preachers like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, the semi-professional writers like Hester Ann Rogers, and the prophetesses like Margaret Fell or Joanna Southcott. This is largely due to the fact that these women simply left more written evidence

behind. Hester Ann Rogers, for example, was a literary celebrity during her lifetime, and her *Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers* was reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic for over one hundred years. These women's lives and writings still needed to be recovered, but the recovery process has been largely based on existing writing that could be considered "literary."

Lay women's writing, though, has been almost entirely overlooked – largely because evidence of it is so scarce. Though literally thousands of books have been written on John Wesley and Methodism, we still know astonishingly little about the lives of actual Methodist lay people. Aside from the still important work of Leslie Church and Clive Field, we just do not have much information on how Methodist women lived, acted, and wrote.¹³ This makes the process of reconstructing their lives and writings even more daunting as it must be pieced together from multiple print and manuscript sources and then put into the broader context of the movement. Nevertheless, this important work must be attempted if we are to understand how ordinary Methodist women conceived of spiritual experience during the long eighteenth century.

Furthermore, little scholarship has taken seriously evangelical writing *as* literature. Thus it is important closely attend to the formal characteristics of the various genres that women wrote in – personal narrative, religious tracts, poetry – as a means to comprehend how evangelical women understood their own subjectivity in and through writing. As such, I will not attempt to pass value judgments on the content or validity of these women's religious experiences, except to point out that reason, emotion, and cognition are far more linked that has been previously thought. I will simply let these women speak for themselves and judge their experience in terms of its output or what William James terms "cash-value" – in this case their writing. In following this method, then, I will strive to pay close attention to form as a manifestation of experience. For example, in using the conversion narrative form, many women self-consciously mirror the

spiritual disciplines that helped elicit spiritual experience in the first place. Thus form and function are married in the way the women express experience. In reading each genre in this way I hope to illustrate that, for evangelical women, the work of writing became a way through which they could express their newfound sense of self and engage effectively with the public sphere. In other words, it was both *through* their writing and *because of* their writing that the sense of subjectivity formed after conversion broke down binaries between self and other, body and mind, emotion and reason. In tracing this transformation I will focus on each of these fundamental elements, reading evangelical women's writing in terms of how this inner emotional experience was *formed by* writing and then worked outwards into the rapidly developing public sphere *through* writing – creating a sort of feedback loop of experience, print, orality, and publicity that is both caused by and causes the development of the spiritual subject.

The main goal of this project is to explore and reveal how evangelical lay women thought, acted, and wrote during the long eighteenth century. In particular I will trace how individual women's experience within evangelicalism worked outward into the broader Methodist community and world, often through the means of various forms of sociability and writing. None of the women I examine here set out to be well known – they simply wrote because they were compelled to by their own experience. Likewise we should resist the temptation to set Methodist women up as proto-feminists intent on staking out new territory for women. These women acted – often outside of societal norms – not to make a larger socio-political point but because they were “drawn out in love” for God and their neighbor through evangelical experience.

This trajectory – from internal experience to external action – sets the stage for my analysis of specific instances of evangelical lay women's writing in the long eighteenth century.

Though all of the women writers considered here wrote at different times, from different evangelical traditions, and for different reasons, the common thread that runs through all of these expressions is a deep and abiding sense of the presence of the actual kingdom of God in their life and work. Though interpreted and expressed differently over the course of the century, all of these women believed that their lives had been transformed by their experience with the divine and it is this spontaneous overflow of religious emotion that stimulates and permeates their work.

In order to trace how individual spiritual experience was transformed into the grounds for writing and action, I will begin by examining the supposed binary between enthusiasm and enlightenment that characterizes so many accounts of the evangelical revival. The revival, so this narrative goes, was a late expression of religious enthusiasm that operated as a reaction to the rise of enlightenment thinking in Britain. Thus the intense spiritual experiences of Methodist women are the vestiges of a culture of enthusiasm, out of step with the dominant forces of the eighteenth century. In Chapter Two, I will use the life and writings of Hester Ann Rogers to argue that the relationship between evangelicalism and enlightenment was far more complex; that in fact they rose from similar sources and were intimately interconnected throughout the eighteenth century. To do so I will examine how philosophers like John Locke and Peter Browne influenced John Wesley and how Wesley in turn developed a deeply embodied theory of spiritual senses that mirrored natural sense. It was this type of spiritual sense that Methodist women turned to in order to describe their otherwise ineffable experiences of the divine. In thus making the body the location of spiritual experience Methodist women like Hester Ann Rogers tapped into a tradition of mystical spirituality and discipline that John Wesley himself endorsed through his publication of the lives of female mystics in his *Christian Library*.

Then, in Chapter Three, I will more closely examine how Methodist women transformed their internal experience into outward action, writing, and publishing. The signal example of this is Mary Bosanquet Fletcher who, in addition to being one of the most famous female preachers of early Methodism, also established a network of women that engaged in active philanthropy throughout Britain. This network was based on sociable bonds that were fostered in what Michael Warner terms the rising “evangelical public sphere” – a nexus of single sex religious meetings, correspondence, and print that worked to create a space within which women could share their experiences and, in sharing, foster further experience and further action. Finally I will examine how the rise of this evangelical public sphere and Methodist sociability contributed to some of the abuse Methodists endured in public and what this abuse tells us about the nascent British fear of enthusiasm circulating outside of proper bounds.

In Chapters Four through Six, I will pick up on the themes articulated in the first three chapters to provide some case studies of how experience and print worked in conjunction to create a new type of evangelical subjectivity for women. Chapter Four turns to John Wesley’s *Ariminian Magazine* to examine women’s conversion narratives in the context of Wesley’s print empire. These narratives acted as a sort of map whereby evangelical women could track their experience and then transmit it to a wider public, thus eliciting mimetic experiences. Careful attention to the form also indicates the extent to which the narratives are intertwined, wrapped up in a process of circulation that was fostered by Wesley’s own correspondence and publication efforts.

Chapter Five takes up this theme by examining the perceived threat to the establishment that these types of unbounded circulation caused. In particular I will examine the Sunday School activities and literature of Hannah More as a means of tracking how More’s own evangelical

experience led her to engage in a broader (and controversial) program of philanthropy in the Mendip Hills around Bristol. I will specifically focus on the materiality of Sunday School literature to argue that medium of cheap print and moral tracks operated as a larger threat to the establishment than has previously been thought. Particularly in the years surrounding the Napoleonic wars, such populist literature was viewed with increasing suspicion, thus in many cases progressive medium trumped conservative message in More's Sunday School literature.

Finally, in Chapter Six I will detail the life and work of Agnes Bulmer, perhaps the most prominent poet and female intellectual of the second generation of Methodism. Bulmer's epic *Messiah's Kingdom* is one of the most impressive literary achievements of Methodism and yet it has gone largely unexamined. After providing a brief biography of Bulmer's life, I use *Messiah's Kingdom* as a means to examining how Bulmer, and by extension the Methodists of the early nineteenth century, used their experience of creation as a means of understanding God. Arguing from analogy Bulmer articulates a design argument that was common in the late eighteenth century but modifies it by using evangelical experience as the grounds for perceiving what is real and anticipating the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. In this she is truly the inheritor of the eighteenth century Wesleyan tradition of experience while at the same time she adapts it to shifting cultural realities. In fact, as I will explore, her work provides an interesting counterpoint to that of the era's most prominent atheist – P.B. Shelley. Finally, I will use the tensions inherent in Bulmer's life – intellectual and domestic, poet and wife, public and private to illustrate the shifting space for women both within Methodism and a broader culture on the cusp of the Victorian age.

Throughout all of these chapters I will argue that it was precisely through their conversion experiences that evangelical women found the means to challenge dominant

assumptions about gender, religion, and public space in the eighteenth century. It is only by striving to comprehend these women's experiences according to their own cultural and religious contexts we can begin to better understand how the women of the evangelical revival viewed the relationship between the inner experience of spiritual regeneration and the acts of speaking, writing, and acting in the public sphere. This means that, as Phyllis Mack puts it, we need:

an angle of vision that allows... [us] to share... the struggles of ordinary Methodists and lay preachers, to stand with individual men and women as they worked to shape their own subjectivity, not in a single cathartic moment at a revival meeting, but over a lifetime (10).

In locating this “angle of vision” we not only gain a better perspective on the true role and influence of such spiritual texts and religious enthusiasm, but also the cultural and religious contexts that shaped the subjectivities of Methodist women and, by extension, how the faith traditions that so dominated eighteenth century life interacted with the formation of modernity. This perspective also reveals the true character of evangelical women's writing. Too often this type of writing is blithely characterized as boring, didactic, or un-literary. Yet careful attention to the writing itself, along with the discourse conditions that produced it reveals that it is full of surprises – vivid and fresh in a way troubles many of our common critical assumptions about both evangelicalism and literature.

CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING A SPIRITUAL SENSE: THE BODY AS LOCATION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Thy love sinks me into nothing; it overflows my soul. O, my Jesus, thou art all in all! In thee I behold and feel all the fulness of the Godhead mine. I am now one with God: the intercourse is open; sin, inbred sin, no longer hinders the close communion, and God is all my own!

--An Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers 45-46

Hester Ann Roe was born on January 31, 1756 in Macclesfield, Cheshire. Her father, a Church of England clergyman, died when she was young, leaving her to the care of her mother. As with many Methodist women whose writings have survived, Hester was a relatively religious girl, who tried to observe all outward signs of religion. Despite repeatedly falling into what she describes as the “sins” of dancing, card playing, novel reading, and fondness for fine clothes (usually followed by periods of ascetic repentance), she attended church regularly and seems to have been fond of private prayer. Nevertheless, throughout her narrative, Rogers continually refers to this period of her life as one of darkness and sin, writing that, “I fell into all the vain customs and pleasures of a delusive world... Thus was my time misspent, and my foolish heart wandered far from happiness and God; urging me to endless ruin” (8).

In 1773, the young Hester Roe first heard Methodist David Simpson preach at Macclesfield. Upon learning that he was a Methodist, Rogers writes that, “This conveyed to my mind as unpleasing an idea of him, as if he had been called a Romish priest; being fully persuaded that to be a Methodist was to be all that was vile under a mask of piety” (15). She thus echoes many of the common perceptions of Methodists during this time: that they were Papists; that they were financial opportunists; and, worst of all, they were enthusiasts who, by preaching justification by faith alone, gave license to sin without consequence. Nevertheless, Simpson eventually convicted her of the need for the “new birth” in Christ. She writes, “I felt myself indeed a lost, perishing, undone sinner; a rebel against repeated convictions and

drawings; a rebel against light and knowledge; a condemned criminal by the law of God” (22), and subsequently began to seek for this “new birth” through faith alone. In fact, she goes home and destroys all her finery, cuts her hair short, and begins to pray for salvation, which comes in stages after a long struggle – she vividly describes the experience in a passage that bears quoting at length:

As Mr. Simpson was reading that sentence in the communion service, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins,” a ray of divine light and comfort was darted on my soul, and I cried, Lord Jesus, let me feel thou art the propitiation for my sins. I was enabled to believe there was mercy for me; and I, even I, should be saved! I felt love to God spring up in my heart, and in a measure could rejoice in him, so that I would have given all the world to have died that moment. (23-24).

This experience inaugurates a longer struggle for spiritual justification that ends with her feeling, “My sins are gone, my soul was happy; and I longed to depart and be with Jesus. I was truly a new creature, and seemed to be in a new world!” (31). She may have been a “new creature” in Christ, but Rogers’ conversion and subsequent involvement with Methodism began a period of estrangement from her family, and particularly her mother, which continued for some time.

Despite this opposition from her family, Rogers began rigorously seeking what Wesley termed “Christian perfection,” or the elimination of all intentional sin, which he believed to be attainable in this life. To this end, she began to engage in a rigorous program of prayer and fasting which bordered on holy anorexia and, on multiple occasions, brought her dangerously close to death. Eventually, however, she achieves a sense of this perfection, which she vividly describes in terms of mystical union with God:

Thy love sinks me into nothing; it overflows my soul. O, my Jesus, thou art all in all! In thee I behold and feel all the fulness of the Godhead mine. I am now one with God: the intercourse is open; sin, inbred sin, no longer hinders the close communion, and God is all my own! (45-46)

In this, Rogers not only echoes the language of mysticism – describing her experience in terms of emptiness before God and an erotic filling and overflowing of this emptiness by the presence of God – she also frames this experience in explicitly Wesleyan terms, emphasizing that “inbred sin,” no longer comes between her and God.

This experience of perfection led to an extended correspondence with John Wesley – who often wrote to individuals who claimed perfection in order to judge whether the experience was authentic. In 1776, the two met for the first time and Rogers became one of a number of women with whom Wesley developed a deep personal connection and lifelong friendship.¹⁴ After Hester’s marriage to James Rogers, one of Wesley’s lay preachers, Rogers and Hester ministered together (Hester herself often led prayers and class meetings) in England and Ireland until in 1790 Wesley transferred James Rogers to London, in part so that Hester could attend Wesley as he approached his final days. And in fact, Hester Ann Rogers was one of the few people actually present at Wesley’s death in 1791. During his last days Wesley helped edit the first edition of Hester Roger’s *Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers*, which was published shortly after Wesley’s death in 1791 and which quickly became a bestseller. Rogers herself died due to complications from childbirth on October 10, 1794 and her *Account* was subsequently republished with appendices by both her husband and Thomas Coke. This version of the *Account* was reprinted in hundreds of editions in England and America throughout the 19th century, making Hester Ann Rogers perhaps the most well known woman of early Methodism.¹⁵

Though Hester Ann Rogers was unique in that she had a close personal relationship with John Wesley, her spiritual experience itself was not unique. In fact one of the most striking things about the evangelical revival in England was the outpouring of emotional spiritual experience that bordered on the mystical. Drawing upon multiple influences – from Puritan

conversion narrative and theology to empirical philosophy – evangelicals came to rely on the senses and emotions as a barometer of spiritual experience. This did not mean that they abandoned reason, Church tradition, or Scripture as vital means through which spiritual truth could be known, but they put a new emphasis on “experiential” religion and *feeling* one’s sins were forgiven by God. In this Rogers’ experience provides a useful roadmap for exploring how the women of the evangelical revival experienced spiritual transformation and then rhetorically constructed this experience for a community of readers. It was this transforming experience with the divine that provided women with the impetus to write as a spiritual discipline first and then as a means to encouraging others in the faith.

It is often difficult for those of us who, as David Hempton puts it, “inhabit the intellectual space of the Enlightenment,”(149) to fully appreciate the extent to which these almost ineffable encounters with the divine molded these women’s subjectivity. At its core eighteenth century women’s religious experience eludes easy definition then and now – it is spontaneous and controlled, emotional and rational, embodied and spiritual, deeply interior and radically engaged with the world. For these women, religious emotions were very real and fundamentally transforming experiences with the divine. They were often sensory encounters with something that they felt larger than themselves that overwhelmed and redefined their subjectivity. In taking the body as the fundamental location of the female religious subject we must seek to understand how religious experience acted on the body and how this interaction in turn helped form women’s subjectivities.

Thus I will attempt to read emotion, the body, and spiritual experience in terms that eighteenth-century Methodist women understood and based on the empirical results that they report. In doing so I hope to illustrate that, properly framed, subjective religious experience can

be a generative category for analysis in its own right. To do so I will first work to define what I mean by experience, and especially women's experience within the context of the evangelical revival and how experience was used to obtain agency and subjectivity. I will then provide a brief overview of how the Enlightenment theories of feeling, emotion, senses, and cognition promulgated by empirical philosophers like John Locke, Peter Browne, and David Hume were actually used by men like John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards to develop sophisticated theories of spiritual experience. This fascinating history points to some of the ways in which Enlightenment and evangelicalism were not so much radically opposed to one another, but instead arose from many of the same sources and participated in the same generative discourses that shaped how individuals thought and acted during the eighteenth century.

I will then trace the outlines of a theory of spiritual experience grounded in this understanding of the connection between body and mind. Beginning with Locke, Browne, and Wesley and drawing upon more recent understandings of cognition, emotion, and reason promulgated by philosophers like William James I will further interrogate the mind/body, reason/emotion dualisms that have been constructed by the very Enlightenment discourses that the Evangelical Revival participated in. In doing so I will draw upon recent discoveries in neuro-biology by scientists like Antonio Damasio to argue that in fact bodily emotion and affective experience play a vital role in both rationality and religious experience.

Finally, I will return to the experience of Hester Ann Rogers to illustrate the two primary ways through which Methodist women experienced and then related their encounters with the divine – the erotic body and the body in pain. Specifically I will focus on how Rogers channels the female mystical tradition, which had been forwarded to her via Wesley's publishing enterprise, to construct a sense of subjectivity and agency founded in the ability to be God's

agent in the world. By locating her spirituality between the twin poles of eroticism and asceticism, Rogers and women like her seek to discipline the body and thus discipline experience into something that is transmissible within the movement context of evangelicalism. This not only operates to form their own sense of self but gives them a voice within Methodism that otherwise would not have existed.

By exploring the ways in which women navigated the thin line between over-reliance on the body for spiritual salvation (mysticism/enthusiasm/spontaneity) and an understanding of the control of the body as an agential site for spiritual transformation (Enlightenment/control) we will thus be able to better understand how individual women perceived experience and how these experiences then shaped their subjectivity. It is not that women did not find subjectivity through religious experience, but that the subjectivity they did find was multiple, various, emotional, and predicated on the willingness to be God's agent in the world. What results is a theory of affective spiritual experience that, for the women of the evangelical revival, became generative in new and important ways. This method also allows us to examine how the women of the eighteenth century revival affectively experienced the transformative inward religion of evangelicalism and then detail how this inward experience worked outward through writing into a larger religious community forming bonds of empathy, affection, and sociability. The "heart religion" of evangelical women during the eighteenth century formed a delicate synthesis between emotion, cognition, reason, and perception that fundamentally altered how women viewed themselves and their roles in the broader community.

Women's Religious Experience and Subjectivity

Of course, "women's experience," not to mention women's *religious* experience, has long been a troubled category for feminist analysis. In her influential essay, "The Evidence of

Experience,” Joan Scott argues that privileging experience as foundational to feminist historiography tends to occlude broader investigation of the historical and cultural discourses that shaped these women’s experiences:

Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as relationally constituted. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience (779).

Thus, for Scott, “women’s experience,” is constituted through external cultural, historical, and religious discourses that come to shape their subjectivities. Within this scheme there is little room for individual autonomy or voice – women’s experiences are simply products of discourse that require deconstruction.

Though Scott is right to point out that women’s experience on its own is not a sufficient grounds for analysis and that broader historical and cultural factors need to be taken into consideration, in denying these women any role in producing their own subjectivities she inadvertently ends up denying them the agency that subjectivity is intended to create. Furthermore, returning to a supposedly common experience creates an illusion of shared experience that has the unintended effect of leaving out minority and sub-altern experience – including evangelical experience. In *Retrieving Experience*, Sonia Kruks argues that women’s experience should primarily be interpreted as embodied, lived, and affective. The difference here is between what she terms a “third person,” or discursive *explanation* of experience and a “first person” exploration that seeks to *understand* the experience from the inside out at the level of felt emotion (141). Both perspectives are important, but it is through the exploration of the “first person” experience that we come to grasp how women’s experiences shaped their subjectivities. As Kruks argues, “What both discursive and Enlightenment accounts of the subject fail to

consider are the lived, corporeal aspects of subjectivity. Sentient, affective, and emotional experiences come to be a vital constituent of cognition, judgment, and speech” (147). This is especially true of the religious women under consideration here, many of whom have been ignored by modern feminists precisely because of their religious investments. Their experience is best understood precisely in the context of the highly emotional, affective, and deeply felt spirituality that they represent, experiences that shape how they viewed themselves as subjects and the world around them. Thus, exploring their narratives primarily as embodied, lived experiences does not preclude an examination of the broader cultural and religious discourse in which they were embedded; in fact, it provides a useful starting point from which to interpret these larger social patterns.

In representing religious experience as “first person,” and especially in terms of how the emotions act on the body, evangelical women express something that is almost completely absent from similar writing by men. In similar published conversion narratives men tend to focus on their prior unconverted state and the outward changes that occur in their life after conversion. Even when they do focus on their emotional state or bodily response, it is generally only to illustrate God’s continuing work in their life and not as a primary means to understanding God’s saving power. For women, on the other hand, religious experience is generally represented either through the eroticized body in the overflow of emotions like love or in terms of the control of the body through pain – sometimes both. It is not at all clear, however, whether in fact evangelical men and women necessarily *felt* differently, but what is clear is that they *expressed* experience differently and privilege different elements of the experience in their lives and written accounts.¹⁶ This points to the legitimate question of whether these women actually felt what they claimed to experience or merely followed a set of narrative conventions as a means to gaining a

voice within the evangelical movement. As I will examine at length in Chapter Four, there can be no doubt that there were a variety of narrative conventions available to evangelical women which, as Hindmarsh has argued, acted as a road map that identified “the sort of terrain one might cross and the sort of destination one might arrive at if one chose to venture out” (157). Furthermore it is true that Wesley privileged a certain type of narrative of experience – one that Hester Ann Rogers’ *Account* exemplifies nicely. Evangelical women also actively pursued disciplines of piety that were intended to produce experience, experience that was then disciplined into written accounts weeks, months, and sometimes years after the fact. Nevertheless, if there is an element of rhetorical structuring to women’s experience accounts, this by no means precludes examination of experience as lived. The end result of such narratives may have been access to a wider reading public, which was itself a feminist act, but there is little evidence that these women saw this activity in these terms.

In any case, the operation of the emotions on the body substantively shapes the way Methodist women view their own subjectivity and agency within the larger evangelical community. In this evangelical women both play into the conception of the female body as inherently sinful through Eve, while at the same time subvert the Pauline assumption that spiritual experience is divorced from the body and located in the soul.¹⁷ In either case the experiences of evangelical women firmly establish the body as a canvass upon which the spiritual can be inscribed – which ultimately forms of a new type of spiritual subjectivity. In locating the body as the center of spiritual experience Methodist women both draw upon and depart from the female mystical tradition in some important ways. John Wesley was, of course, deeply indebted to both the mystical tradition and the Enlightenment. This is, after all, the man who published abridgements of the *Life of Madame Guion*, the prominent French mystic along

with his notes on Locke's *Essay*. So, while he indeed valued the body as a means through which the individual could gain spiritual truth, he ultimately shied away from the extreme asceticism of the mystics – encouraging people to attend to their physical health and publishing *Primitive Physic* as a general guidebook. As Phyllis Mack puts it, Methodist teaching on the body encouraged both, “the proactive care and attention needed to improve the body’s well-being, and submission to the purifying catharsis of strong bodily pain” (182). Nowhere is this careful balancing act more apparent than in the way Methodist women utilized the body as a key means of understanding experience.

This emphasis on the bodily aspect of spiritual experience also points to some of the ways in which Methodist women’s writing constructs an alternative narrative of enlightenment subjectivity. As Barbara Taylor has recently pointed out in an innovative reading of Mary Wollstonecraft’s feminism and religious commitments, the history of subjectivity and the goals of feminism have largely been constructed according to an enlightenment philosophy of liberalism that privileges an autonomous subject and the right to self-possession. Because, according to this history, feminism is “almost invariably located in the tradition of Enlightenment liberalism [it] is assumed to be at least indifferent to religion if not actively hostile to it” (16). And yet, for Wollstonecraft and other women what they were looking for was not simply a physical liberation but a spiritual one. Taylor goes on to re-examine Wollstonecraft’s work through this lens, arguing that “if Wollstonecraft’s faith becomes a dead letter to us then so does much of her feminism, so closely are they harnessed together. And what locks them together... is a concept of the erotic imagination which places the love of God at the centre of an authentic female subjectivity” (16). Thus Wollstonecraft is a far more religiously invested thinker that has previously been thought and her feminism is deeply rooted in women’s

religious traditions instead of being a movement away from it. This is not to suggest that the women of the revival were consciously feminist in the sense that we have come to think of, or even were feminist in the sense that Wollstonecraft was, but to point out that both access a tradition of female subjectivity that goes back centuries and has its origins in the tradition of female mysticism and the disciplinary practices of lived spirituality.

As this reading of Wollstonecraft's work suggests, the history of eighteenth century religion has long been constructed as a broader movement away from religion towards the secular. This process was enhanced by the transformation of faith as a matter of disciplined and embodied practices to faith as assent to a set of propositions. In many ways the evangelical revival played its own part in this transformation; however evangelical women's experiences offer an alternative narrative that disrupts easy characterizations of secularization. For evangelicals belief is an important element of faith, but the women I discuss here do not think they truly have belief until their bodily senses are overwhelmed and they *feel* they have been transformed. This emphasis on the body as the location of experience thus introduces a lived aspect to their conversion accounts – it is *not* simply enough to give mental assent to the idea that Christ forgave their sins, they have to *experience* it and then *live* it in the way they engage in action in the world.

Like the Catholic mystics it is through practices of bodily discipline that evangelical women are able to both experience conversion and then engage in action in the world. More importantly for our purposes, however, is what this disciplinary nature of women's experience tells us about how practices of piety affected women's formation of a sense of self within a patriarchal structure. Methodist women used the body as the specific site of spiritual discipline and practice and they used the traditional spiritual disciplines of reading, speaking, praying, and

writing in order to discipline the body. Likewise, in her analysis of the contemporary women's mosque movement in Egypt in *The Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood argues that the mosque participants she observed "did not regard authorized models of behavior as an external social imposition that constrained the individual. Rather, they viewed socially prescribed forms of conduct as the potentialities, the 'scaffolding,' if you will, through which the self is realized" (148). In other words these women did not see their adherence to outward forms of behavior as constricting, but ultimately liberating – as a means to becoming God's agent in the world. This definition of agency, though, requires that we situate agency within the particular discourse in which it operates. In this case that means, as Mahmood puts it, we think of "agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to social norms but as a modality of action." Doing so:

raises some interesting questions about the kind of relationship established between the subject and the norm, between performative behavior and inward disposition. To begin with, what is striking here is that instead of innate human desires eliciting outward forms of conduct, it is the sequence of practices and actions one is engaged in that determines one's desires and emotions. In other words, action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them (157).

In thus situating agency within local discourse and as a "modality of action" we can better understand how religious women view the formation of the self, how spiritual discipline helps form inward orientation, and how this ultimately works its way out into the public sphere. For the women Mahmood studied this sometimes meant going against the wishes of their husbands and fathers when their wishes conflicted with what they saw as God's calling.

To better understand how subjective religious experience was fundamentally agency-granting for evangelical women I will first turn to the history of Wesley's investment in the empirical philosophy of John Locke and especially Wesley's emphasis on sense as the grounds of experience. I will then turn to Wesley's understanding of the role of the body in spirituality before returning to Hester Ann Rogers and Methodist women as a way of understanding how this

theology of experience played itself out in the writing and work of early evangelical women. I will especially focus on how the body and the orientation of the body towards God forms these women's sense of self and their relationship to the wider Methodist community.

Spiritual Senses and Emotion from Locke to Wesley

For John Wesley, the foundation of religious experience lay not with outward moral action but with the experiential quality of justification by faith. Just as his heart was famously “strangely warmed” at Aldersgate in 1738 he believed that people could know and *feel* that their sins were forgiven. Contrary to later accusations, this experiential knowledge could not be obtained through good or moral works; instead these works were the *result* of a true and abiding faith in Christ. In confronting this question Wesley drew on his religious heritage and a tradition of experiential theology that traced its lineage back through the Puritan revival to the Catholic mystics, and on back to St. Augustine and St. Paul. However he also drew upon modern empirical philosophy (specifically John Locke, Peter Browne, and Joseph Butler) to develop a theory of religious experience that relied on what they termed “spiritual senses” and the Biblical “fruits of the Spirit.” In this section I will trace the formation of what I term Wesley’s “empirical enthusiasm” as a means to understanding how he conceived of the connection between natural senses and spiritual senses. I will then turn to Hester Ann Rogers’ famous *Account* in order to explore how a prominent Methodist woman used the language of the senses to express her erotic experiences with God.

John Wesley was a thoroughly Lockean thinker, and this is evident throughout his theological writing. Though he may have quibbled with specific points of Lockean philosophy, Wesley wholeheartedly endorsed the basic assumption that the mind is a blank slate, devoid of innate ideas and that all ideas come from sensation and reflection. Thus, according to Locke, *all*

that we know can ultimately be traced back to sense experience. That said, though Locke was himself a Christian, he did not believe that the metaphysical world could be perceived by sense – only deduced from the rational ordering of the universe. Nevertheless, eighteenth century religious leaders from Jonathan Edwards to John Wesley most certainly read Locke (Wesley published an abridgement of the *Essay*, along with his own commentary in his *Arminian Magazine*) and used his general principle of sensible experience to develop a theory of religious sensibility. (Dreyer 18)

Furthermore, Wesley fully participated in the empiricist philosophical milieu that dominated England during his lifetime. Of particular importance to his developing philosophy of spiritual senses was Bishop Peter Browne's (1665-1735) *Procedure, Extent, and Limits of the Human Understanding* (1728). We know that Browne exerted a particularly formative influence on Wesley's theology because in 1730 he finished a 103 page manuscript abridgement of the *Procedure*, a manuscript he was apparently still working from when he published a further abridgement of Browne in his *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation* (1777) (Brantley 29). Taking as his starting point the assumption that we can know nothing outside of direct sensation, Browne argues that the means through which we understand divine things, about which we can sense nothing directly, is what he terms divine analogy. Divine analogy he defines in opposition to divine metaphor, which he argues has been the traditional means through which humans have understood the divine, but which is ultimately arbitrary and meaningless:

Metaphor expresses only an Imaginary Resemblance or Correspondency; Analogy conveys the Conception of a Correspondent Reality or Resemblance. Metaphor is rather an Allusion, than a real Substitution of Ideas; Analogy a proper Substitution of Notions and Conceptions. Metaphor at best is but the using a very remote and foreign Idea to express something Already supposed to be more exactly known; Analogy conveys something correspondent and answerable, which could be now No otherwise usefully and really known without it. Metaphor is mostly in Words, and is a Figure of Speech; Analogy a Similis Ratio or

Proportion of Things, and an excellent and necessary Method or Means of Reason and Knowledge. Metaphor uses Ideas of Sensation to express immaterial and heavenly Objects, to which they can bear No Real Resemblance or Proportion; Analogy substitutes the Operations of our Soul, and Notions mostly formed out of them, to represent Divine Things to which they bear a Real tho' Unknown Correspondency and Proportion. In short, Metaphor has No real Foundation in the Nature of the Things compared. Analogy is founded in the Very Nature of the Things on both Sides of the Comparison: And the Correspondency or Resemblance is certainly Real, tho' we don't know the exact Nature, or Manner, or Degree of it; at least we may safely presume this from the Truth and Veracity of God, who has thus made his Revelations to Mankind under the Analogical Conceptions and Language of this World (141-142).

The example Browne gives is the difference between describing God in terms of his “strong hand” and “mighty arm,” metaphors that can have little meaning as we cannot actually *see* God, and understanding the “knowledge of God” and “goodness of God” analogically, in terms of the ideas we form via our own experience and complex ideas (136, 138-139). In other words, because we can know nothing of God directly, humans must substitute what they know of themselves and the world. This type of analogical thinking came to define inductive natural philosophy after Locke – leading from what we can know of the natural world to a supernatural creator.

Another example of how this type of analogical reasoning came to inform natural philosophy is Joseph Butler's (1692-1752) immensely influential *Analogy of Religion* – first published in 1736. Wesley read the *Analogy* in 1745 and thought it an extremely useful book, though “far too deep for their understanding to whom it is primarily addressed” (*JWW* II:7). In the *Analogy*, Butler argues that the natural world provides an analogy for the spiritual world and that it is through understanding natural religion that we can understand revealed religion on the basis of probability. Taking as his founding assumption that God designed the natural world Butler goes on to argue that the logic of analogy dictates that just as God reveals himself in nature so he also reveals himself in a like manner through Scripture:

If there be an analogy, or likeness, between that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which revelation informs us of, and that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which experience, together with reason, informs us of, that the known course of nature; this is a presumption, that they have both the same author and cause; at least so far as to answer objections against the former being from God, drawn from any thing which is analogical or similar to what is in the later, which is acknowledged to be from him; for an Author of nature is here supposed (86).

In following this method Butler hopes to refute the claims of the Deists, who claim that there is no revealed religion by showing “that the system of religion, both natural a revealed, considered only as a system, and prior to the poof of it is not a subject of ridicule, unless that of Nature be so too” and affording “an answer to almost all objections against the system both of natural and of revealed religion” (89). Like Browne, analogy provides Butler with a method of proving correspondences between the natural and spiritual – it is an argument from design that rests upon making assumptions about revealed religion based upon experience and the evidence of the senses.

This particular type of analogical thinking became especially important to Wesley as he developed his theology of spiritual experience and this combination of divine analogy with spiritual experience had both a direct influence on Romantic poetry in general, and Methodist poetry in particular. Coleridge, for example, thought highly of Butler’s *Analogy*, first reading excerpts of it in 1795 in Joseph Priestley’s *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (Kooy 56). He annotated a copy of the *Analogy* and in 1798 he wrote to the Unitarian minister John Prior Estlin asking whether he had “given over the thoughts of editing Butler's analogy with notes?” (*Letters* I:384) through the Unitarian Society, adding that the *Analogy* “aided by well-placed notes would answer irresistably all the objections to Christianity founded on a priori reasonings -- & these are the only reasonings that infidels use even with plausibility” (385). Clearly the argument from analogy was influential both in Methodist circles and beyond. By

reasoning from experiential evidence to a spiritual world and a creator, both Methodists and Romantics were able to make the argument for the primacy of the senses – both natural and spiritual – in both spiritual experience and poetry.¹⁸ For Wesley, the analogical method lent itself to a theory of spiritual experience that carefully towed the thin line between enthusiasm and genuine spiritual knowledge.¹⁹ For, while validating the idea that we can know and experience something of the divine, divine analogy also precludes enthusiasm in that Browne claims that the body itself cannot experience the divine world in the same way it experiences the natural world. Thus Wesley is able to posit spiritual senses as the analogical equivalent of natural senses.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Wesley's *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), where he argues that faith cannot be based on natural sense, but spiritual:

And seeing our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses, it is certainly necessary that you have senses capable of discerning objects of this kind: not those only which are called natural senses, which in this respect profit nothing, as being altogether incapable of discerning objects of a spiritual kind; but spiritual senses, exercised to discern spiritual good and evil (*JWW VIII:13*).

Here Wesley simultaneously draws on Locke and Browne and moves further than both of them, arguing for spiritual perception of spiritual things to mirror natural perception of natural things. However, as Dreyer makes clear, Wesley's philosophy of spiritual senses is unique in that he believes that "The believer acquired his spiritual sense in his regeneration through the act of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, for Wesley, regeneration meant the acquisition of the spiritual sense" (18). Thus once again Wesley is a synthesizing theologian who takes the best of empirical philosophy and molds it for his own use.

This same impulse is evident in the work of Wesley's friend and fellow evangelical Anglican clergyman John Fletcher (1729 –1785) who, in his *Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation of the Son of God* (1791) argues that "The things of the Spirit of God cannot be

discovered, but by spiritual, internal senses, which are, with regard to the spiritual world, what our bodily, external senses, are with regard to the material world” (5). It is this spiritual sense that is imparted by the Holy Spirit upon conversion and allows the believer to experience God in a way that is incomprehensible and indescribable to the non-believer. In other words a person who has not been regenerated can know something of God from the natural world (natural revelation) but the true sense of God can only be imparted upon conversion by the Holy Spirit. This, for Wesley, is the true definition of faith:

Faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man discerneth God, and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world, what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God... [it] is the eye of the new-born soul... It is the ear of the soul, whereby a sinner “hears the voice of the Son of God, and lives...It is... the palate of the soul; for hereby a believer “ tastes the good word, and the powers of the world to come;” and “hereby he both tastes and sees that God is gracious, ‘yea,’ and merciful to him a sinner.” It is the feeling of the soul, whereby a believer perceives, through the “power of the Highest overshadowing him,” both the existence and the presence of Him in whom “he lives, moves, and has his being;” and indeed the whole invisible world, the entire system of things eternal. And hereby, in particular, he feels “the love of God shed abroad in his heart” (*JWW VIII:4-5*).

Thus faith is intimately connected to sense and even in the case of spiritual sense Wesley describes it primarily in terms of natural sense and emotion as a means to validating experience. For this reason Methodist conversion narratives and religious experience accounts are full of the language of sensory perception and emotion – though the experience of faith is ultimately ineffable these men, and especially women, use the language of sensibility to describe it.²⁰

Consistent throughout all of Wesley’s thinking is the belief that the senses are important in that they can tell us much about the nature of the created order, but are limited in that there is still a spiritual order that exists beyond sense. Browne, Wesley, and Edwards sought to solve this difficulty by positing natural sense as an analogy for spiritual sense and creating a language of spiritual sense to describe spiritual experience. In this they subtly anticipate many of the moves

romantic poets make later in the century.²¹ William Blake is a particularly good example of this in that he rejects the empirical philosophy of Locke and Newton as the sole basis of knowledge and argues for a world of vision beyond sense, an “immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five” (*Marriage* E7:4). Like Wesley, it is not that Blake *rejects* sense as a means to experiencing the world; he just believes that there is more to be known *beyond* sense. In *Europe*, for example, he describes the construction of the crystal serpent palace that represents the enslavement of Britain to a world of sense:

Their oak-surrounded pillars, form'd of massy stones, uncut
 With tool; stones precious; such eternal in the heavens,
 Of colours twelve. few known on earth, give light in the opaque,
 Plac'd in the order of the stars, when the five senses whelm'd
 In deluge o'er the earth-born man; then turn'd the fluxile eyes
 Into two stationary orbs, concentrating all things.
 The ever-varying spiral ascents to the heavens of heavens
 Were bended downward; and the nostrils golden gates shut
 Turn'd outward, barr'd and petrify'd against the infinite. (E10:9-17).

Here the main problem is not sense itself, which has its uses, but the fact that sense has been used to shut off all sense of the mystical or infinite. Likewise when, on plate 13, the spirit Newton “siez'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!” Blake is commenting on the inability of science and empirical philosophy to enact an imaginative revolution – this can only be achieved through the power of Los, the creator who breaks through into imaginative space.

This is not to argue for direct influence between Wesley and Blake, but only to point out that both are operating according within the same tensions between enthusiasm and enlightenment. Blake was well aware of the revival and respected many of its key leaders – even casting Wesley and Whitefield as the two prophets of Revelation in *Milton* – and his sensibilities are similar, though focused in a different direction. Likewise the mysticism of someone like Hester Ann Rogers has interesting correspondences with Blake’s own poetic visions – based in a

world of sense; nevertheless both writers take sense as the impetus to move beyond mere bodily sensation and into the transcendent. Both seem to understand that though their physical senses may be limited, their spiritual senses allow them to see and experience beyond the merely physical. In this they both work towards a type of subjectivity that locates itself in the divine and not merely within the self.

But I want to argue even further – suggesting that, for the women of the evangelical revival, emotion was not just a part of religious experience, it was not simply one of the ways they expressed religious sensibility, but it instead defined a new mode of perception that came to transform both heart and life. As Jonathan Edwards wrote in defining the spiritual senses, “the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration is often in Scripture compared to the giving a new sense, giving eyes to see, and ears to hear, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and opening the eyes of them that were born blind, and turning from darkness unto light” (206).²² In using their new spiritual senses these women attempt to tread the very thin line between Enlightenment rationalism and religious enthusiasm; they want to use the evidence of the senses to test and authenticate experience without being overcome by every whim of the spirit – a charge to which evangelical women were especially susceptible. In other words these women came to comprehend or understand religion primarily *through* these emotions and then translated internal feeling into outward action. By doing so they sought to live out the scriptural dictum that “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) – it is an overwhelming internal force that creates the grounds for transformation.

Spirit, Mind, Body, and the Formation of the Evangelical Subject

Of particular importance to theologians after Locke was the question of how the body and the senses interacted with the soul and spirit and whether, in fact, there was as radical a

separation between these elements as had long been thought in Christian theology. This theology largely naturalized a neo-Platonic philosophy developed first by St. Paul and later by St. Augustine.²³ According to this Hellenized theology it is the body that is corrupted by sin through Adam, while the separate mind and spirit are transformed through Christ. This form of rational idealism was famously propagated by Descartes in his *cogito ergo sum* and came to inform the philosophical and theological discussions of the eighteenth century. For philosophers and theologians like Peter Browne and John Wesley, operating within an empiricist framework, these explanations of the relationship between body and soul were unsatisfactory and thus they sought different explanations – explanations that were easily located by returning to the Judaic tradition in Scripture in which this radical separation had not been effected.

Peter Browne is perhaps one of the best examples of this, not the least because his philosophy of body and spirit so influenced Wesley's. Browne begins by separating out spirit, soul, mind, and body – defining each before detailing how they relate to one another. Spirit he defines as “the purely immaterial Part of our Composition, which is capable of Separation from the Body, and can then exist and operate independently of Matter. This is often by mistake call'd the Soul” (148). Thus Browne acknowledges from the outset that there is a portion of the self that is theoretically separable from body – crucial to Christian theology – but he does not stop there. Next he defines the soul or what he terms the “inferior Soul” as something in us resulting from an essential Union of the pure Spirit with our material Frame” (148). This definition is a little fuzzier throughout the treatise but it seems that for Browne the soul itself is defined by union between spirit and body, it is the glue that holds the two together. The mind, on the other hand, he says is a “more general and complex Term, and includes the pure Spirit, together with the Intellect, the Will, and Memory, and all the Passions and Affections of the inferior Soul”

(148). Again, the mind works to combine elements of spirit with the body and especially the operations of the brain like intellect and passions or affections.

Underlying this theory of spirit, soul, and mind, however, is an understanding that all three must work in concert with the material body, at least during life. In fact, Browne argues that “numberless *Errors* and *Mistakes* in Religion” have been made by thinking and speaking of the “pure Spirit, or superior Soul, as if its Operations were *Now* in all respects the same, and as intirely independent of Matter, as they will be when it is in a state of *Separation* [after death]”

(149). He goes on to explain that:

Men commonly speak of it [the spirit] as of something *Within* us, and not *Of* us; as if it thought and reasoned *In* the Body, and not together *With* any part of it; as if the Body were a mere *Box*, or *Case*, or *Place* of Residence for it. Not considering that there is as much Truth in saying, that the Body is in the Spirit, as in saying that the Spirit is only *In* the Body; tho’ this sounds oddly to a vulgar Ear; or indeed to any one who is not capable of understanding, that these two different Principles could not constitute one and the same Individual Man, unless both were intimately united in Operation and Essence (149).

According to Browne, though the spirit is technically separable from the body, it works *with* the body to produce knowledge. Elsewhere he argues that the spirit in itself can know nothing outside of the body – its sole source of knowledge is through sensation in its union with matter. In other words Browne draws Locke’s assertion that there are no innate ideas out to its logical theological conclusion – arguing that though an eternal soul does exist, all it can know in this life is still obtained through experience.

The implications of this idea for evangelical theology are manifold. We have already seen how the analogical method, drawn from Locke and Browne, enabled Wesley to argue for a set of spiritual senses that paralleled the natural ones. This moved the body clearly towards the center of spiritual experience, as it is only through the body that we can truly know anything. Thus the experiential theology of the early revival is founded in the understanding that the body and the

brain are intimately connected to spiritual experience. Remember that Wesley clearly articulated a theology that valued both reason and experience (according to Browne both dependent upon the union between body and spirit) as a means to understanding divine truth.

Furthermore, Wesley also clearly understood that bodily health and spiritual health were intimately connected. Always an abstemious eater and an inveterate exerciser, Wesley believed that the best methods to cure disease could be gleaned by experience and empirical method, not learned in theory by a highly educated physician. To this end in 1747 he published what became his most popular book, *Primitive Physic*, a basic guide to home remedies for disease. That there was a demand for such advice is evidenced by the fact that the book went through twenty-three editions by Wesley's death in 1791 and continued to be printed well into the nineteenth century. Though some of the remedies prescribed are laughable by modern standards, in many respects Wesley's handbook was far more useful than the expert medical advice of the day. For example he warns against the then prevalent use of mercury to treat disease and advises readers to "Abstain from all mixed, all high-seasoned, food. Use plain diet, easy of digestion; and this as sparingly as you can, consistent with ease and strength. Drink only water, if it agrees with your stomach; if not, good, clear small beer. Use as much exercise daily, in the open air, as you can without weariness" (*JWW XIV:312*). Good advice even today, and the fact that Wesley lived to the age of eight-seven in an era when the average life expectancy was forty is in part a testimony to its wisdom.

More importantly, however, is how Wesley conceives of the connection between body and spirit. Disease, Wesley argues in his Preface to *Primitive Physic*, is a direct result of sin:

When man came first out of the hands of the great Creator, clothed in body as well as in soul with immortality and incorruption, there was no place for physic or the art of healing. As he knew no sin, so he knew no pain, no sickness, weakness, or bodily disorder.... But since man rebelled against the Sovereign of heaven and

earth, how entirely is the scene changed! The incorruptible frame hath put on corruption, the immortal has put on mortality. The seeds of weakness and pain, of sickness and death, are now lodged in our inmost substance; whence a thousand disorders continually spring, even without the aid of external violence. (*JWW XIV: 307-308*)

Part of what Wesley is doing here is restoring the body as an important locus of the spiritual life. In contrast to the long standing neo-Platonic, Augustinian, and rationalist bent in Christian thought which radically separates soul and body, making the former greater than the latter, Wesley posits an empiricist, Judaic, and Biblical understanding of spirituality in which the soul and body work in symbiosis. For Wesley it is not that the material is greater than the spiritual but that, following Browne, the spiritual is inextricably bound to the material, at least in this life. The health of one affects the health of the other. As he argues in his later *Thoughts Upon Necessity* (1774), “who can deny, that not only the memory, but all the operations of the soul, are now dependent on the bodily organs, the brain in particular” (*JWW IX:469*).

Body, Agency, and the Neural Substrate of Emotion

More importantly for my purposes this return to a conception of mind and body working together, instead of being radically separated, opens the way for a better understanding of how oft-separated reason and emotion work together to form the grounds for consciousness and subjectivity. In this the empiricists working after Locke in many ways anticipated the work of William James and modern neuro-scientists who, in uncovering how the brain operates, have validated many of the assumptions about mind and body that were first made in the eighteenth century. This is particularly pertinent to my subject because it helps to explain some of the ways in which the religious experiences of eighteenth century women truly transgressed traditional theological bounds by revitalizing the body as a location of spiritual experience.

It is only when this body/mind dualism is deconstructed that we can begin to consider the role of emotion in the formation of experience, and specifically religious experience. This was particularly at issue in eighteenth century women's religious experience as the charges often leveled against women accused them of trusting their body and sensibility over their "rational" mind. However in his pioneering work on emotion in *Principles of Psychology* William James (1842-1910) instead argues that emotion, body, and cognition are intimately linked:

Our natural way of thinking about these coarser emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My theory, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes follow directly the *perception* of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the shame changes as they occur *is* the emotion (352).

In other words "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be" (352). What James realized without benefit of modern neuro-imaging techniques, was that emotion was intimately connected to bodily responses and bodily responses were in turn intimately connected to cognition. In other words the "reasonable," mind was in many ways dependent upon the "emotional" body.

Freud also realized that the reasonable conscious mind could not fully explain human action. As he wrote in his 1915 essay on "The Unconscious," even healthy minds have a significant amount of material that slips through the gaps of consciousness but which nevertheless informs decision making. In fact, he writes that "at any given moment consciousness includes only a small content, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case be for very considerable period of time in a state of latency, that is to say, of being psychically unconscious" (574). Thus the self is built upon a neural platform of emotion and unconscious desire that is not always identifiable to the conscious brain. This has

the effect not only of breaking down consciousness and individual subjectivity as the source of reason and knowledge, but also opening up avenues for privileging different types of experience as formative of the self.

In thus linking body, emotion, and consciousness James and Freud anticipate recent developments in neuro-science which have largely confirmed the role of emotion in the making of reasonable decisions and indeed in the formation of consciousness itself. For example in *Descartes' Error* (1994), neuro-scientist Antonio Damasio details how he used neuro-imaging to examine brain-damaged individuals who seemed to have lost the ability to make reasonable long term decisions or plans. These otherwise healthy individuals seemed to reason and function normally except for the loss of any ability to use reason to prioritize tasks. What Damasio found was that all of these individuals had some type of damage to a part of their frontal lobes that largely control decision making – in other words they had lost the ability, not to reason, but to use the underlying bodily feedback of emotion to make reasonable decisions. As Damasio puts it in his later *The Feeling of What Happens* (1999), “the presumed opposition between emotion and reason is no longer accepted without question.... emotion is integral to the processes of reasoning and decision making, for worse and for better” (40-41). Thus the body and emotions are not inherently “unreasonable,” but are utilized to better help us understand the world around us and make decisions. The damage these patients experienced to their frontal lobes disrupted the bodily systems of reasoning, thus leading them to make unreasonable decisions. This view of the body as an interconnected system or organism not only allows for a more nuanced understanding of emotion, but also provides a better picture of how subjectivity is formed in conjunction with emotion and the body.

Likewise, though many attempts have been made to discredit James' radical theory of emotion throughout the twentieth century, recent work in neuro-biology has in large part confirmed and expanded his observations. In *The Feeling of What Happens*, for example, Damasio distinguishes between emotions, which he defines as non-conscious bodily responses to external objects, and feelings, which occur when the sense of feeling that the emotion creates is represented to the brain (279-280). From this perspective, then, there is "no central feeling state before the respective emotion occurs...[and] expression (emotion) precedes feeling" (283). Furthermore, "'having a feeling' is not the same as 'knowing a feeling'" (284). Within this process the body becomes central as not only neurons, but the musco-skeletal system and even the homeostatic operations of the blood and cells have an effect on brain function and how an individual "feels" an emotion." As Damasio puts it:

Even in the most typical course of events, the emotional responses target *both* body proper and brain. The brain produces major changes in neural processing that constitute a substantial part of what is perceived as feeling. The body is no longer the exclusive theater for emotions and consequently the body is not the only source for feelings, as James would have wished. Moreover, the body source may be virtual, as it were, it may be the representation of the body "as if" rather than the body "as is" (288).

Thus James was only partially correct. The body or "viscera" do indeed create emotions which are then felt in the brain – but by the same token the brain has the ability to represent feelings "as if" the body had actually felt them – thus stimulating what Damasio terms the "body loop" of emotion and feeling (281).

Of course it would have been impossible for John Wesley to understand the complexity of how the human brain processes sensation and emotion and then translates these experiences into the grounds of consciousness and subjectivity. However he was keenly aware of the importance of the body to spiritual experience, refusing to subscribe to an abstract

spiritualization of experience that bordered on Gnosticism. What Wesley recognized was that the body was an important location of experience, especially in that it was through the body that experience was made manifest in the world. For Wesley it was never enough simply to know God, God had to be made known through works. The body may not have been an end in itself, but it was inextricably tied to spirituality. This was a key theme that Methodist women seemed to pick up on and, as I will explore below, they had clear precedents for this in the work of seventeenth century Catholic mystics whose writings Wesley edited and published. It is in this tradition that we observe the coming together of the seemingly disparate strands of Wesley's experiential theology.

Methodist Women and Embodied Spirituality

In searching for a precedent for his delicate synthesis between the roles of the body and the spirit, the senses and the emotions in Christian life, John Wesley turned not only to the empirical philosophy of Locke, Browne, and Butler, but also seventeenth-century Catholic mysticism and Puritan devotional literature. Ever the theological synthesizer, it was in these traditions that he found evidence of an embodied spirituality that was rooted in a search for spiritual holiness, even perfection. For Wesley such accounts were not in conflict with his empirical thinking, but rather were an affirmation that the body and the way the body acted in the world could be a location of legitimate spirituality instead of spirituality being separated out and idealized, disconnected from experience.

Early in his studies at Oxford the young Wesley was tremendously influenced by works like Thomas a' Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* (1418) and William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729). He even struck up a relationship with Law though he later moved away from the older man's more mystical theology. What seemed to strike Wesley most about these

mystical writers was their emphasis on personal holiness and love for God leading to an experience of perfection in love; however he later came to repudiate the quietism and asceticism of some of the Catholic mystics, arguing that the Christian must be active in the world – exercising the means of grace on the road to union with Christ. These influences have been well documented elsewhere and are evident in the way that John Wesley drew from the mystics so heavily in developing his theology of “heart religion.”²⁴ Indeed the feeling of love for God and neighbor is the defining quality of many Methodist narratives by both men and women and this can be traced directly back to the influence of mysticism on eighteenth century evangelicalism.

Though a’Kempis and Law were influential in forming Wesley’s experience with mysticism, it was in fact contemporary mystics like Madame Guyon, Antoinette de Bourignon, and Gaston de Renty who would have a far more lasting impact on the Methodist movement through Wesley’s publishing enterprise. Though not nearly as well known today, these seventeenth century continental mystics inspired a type of popular piety during the eighteenth century centered around their reliance on experience as a guide to spiritual life, their published devotional pamphlets, and their pious action in the world. In this they, rather than the medieval mystics, were ideal for Wesley’s purposes in that they too were invested in the same type of empirical and experiential theology as he was. That these exemplars were Catholic was certainly unusual for a major British religious leader, yet Wesley’s relationship with Catholicism was always unique. Rack sums up many of the reasons for this in *Reasonable Enthusiast*, arguing that in many ways the Catholic mystical tradition acted as the ideal model for a spirituality based on disciplined action:

The Catholic pursuit of disciplined progress in real, achieved holiness reinforced what he [Wesley] had inherited from the High Church tradition, and as we have seen, this persisted through his rediscovery of justification by faith.... It is worth nothing that the Catholic and even the mystical literature and biographies

continued to attract Wesley, not least Madame Guyon with her picture of a ‘short and easy method’ which in a sense resembled the short cut to salvation offered by evangelical conversion, here applied to perfection as well (401).

Wesley was also less virulently anti-Catholic than many other eighteenth-century evangelicals, writing an sermon titled “Catholic Spirit” which, while continuing to hold Catholicism in error, argues for a more tolerant approach to those who might differ on points of doctrine.

Part of the way Wesley navigated his desire to hold women like Madame Guyon up as examples, while at the same time repudiating elements of their theology that he saw as overtly Catholic, was by editing and publishing accounts of their lives himself. This allowed him to highlight the aspects of their spirituality he found useful, while silently omitting what he saw as Catholic superstition or mystical quietism and asceticism. Thus Wesley published abridged versions of the lives of Guyon, Antoinette de Bourignon, M. de Renty, and Gregory Lopez as part of what he called his *Christian Library*. This *Christian Library* was intended primarily as an educational tool for preachers and converts to Methodism who would have had little familiarity with the classics of Christian theology. Published in fifty volumes between 1749 and 1755, these cheap pamphlets were meant to be distributed by Wesley’s network of itinerant preachers and included extracts from a wide variety of authors – from the Church fathers to Foxe, Pascal, Bunyan, Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards. All were edited by Wesley to suit his ends (thus the hyper-Calvinism of someone like Edwards is conveniently omitted) and produced cheaply for mass distribution. Some of the most popular of these pamphlets – including the *Life of Madame Guion* – were issued again later in the century as standalone texts – influencing an entirely new generation of readers.

It is my contention – explored at length in Chapter Three – that such books acted as spiritual guides for entire generations of evangelical women as they sought to foster a new kind

of spirituality. In fact there is good evidence that evangelical women in particular were influenced by the female mystical spirituality evidenced in works like Guyon's and this spirituality – with a distinctly Wesleyan inflection – is on clear display in their written works. For Methodist women, this emphasis on embodied mystical spirituality, as transmitted to them in the *Christian Library*, manifested itself in two key ways: the overflowing and overwhelmed erotic body, and the disciplined and painful body. Both of these elements are on display in Hester Ann Rogers influential *Account* and many of the particular instances of these mystical experiences have much in common with Madame Guyon's *Life*, which Rogers had certainly read. Thus here we have a clear example of the careful synthesis between body and spirit, experience and action, that Methodism sought to form and the way in which this theology of experience was transmitted from generation to generation of religious women.

The Erotic Body

For Methodist women, one of the most common ways they translated sensory experience into knowledge of God was through erotic experiences with the divine that manifested themselves in eroticized accounts of divine contact. Much like the female mystics, Methodist women often experienced God bodily and in turn represented this experience in erotic and relational terms. Of course this mystical and erotic vein of Methodism is one of the elements that left it open to criticism, both in the eighteenth century and today. In the eighteenth century the claims of the mystic to communicate directly with God always left the individual open to accusations of enthusiasm. With this in mind, Wesley was always careful to distinguish between the sense of knowing one's sins are forgiven and a direct, extra-Scriptural revelation from God. He often criticized the writings of mystics (even those he approved of) for their overreliance on personal revelation at the expense of Scripture. Nevertheless, despite his tight control of the

movement, many individual Methodists continued to claim these types of revelations, and often used erotic imagery to relate them. E.P. Thompson famously picked up on this criticism in the twentieth century, writing that its “authentic language of devotion was that of sexual sublimation streaked through with masochism: the ‘bleeding love’, the wounded side, the blood of the Lamb” (40-41).

Feminist critics have also singled out the erotic aspects of mystical accounts as evidence of the transference of erotic love for man to the God-man. Simone De Beauvoir, for example, though in many ways surprisingly indebted to the work of the mystics, ultimately reads religion as fundamentally oppressive:

Woman is habituated to living on her knees; ordinarily she expects her salvation to come down from the heaven where the males sit enthroned. They, too, are wreathed in clouds: their majesty is revealed from beyond the veils of their fleshly presence. The loved one is always more or less absent; he communicates with his worshipper by obscure signs; she knows his heart only through an act of faith; and the more superior he seems to her, the more impenetrable his behavior appears (670).

Thus, according to De Beauvoir, women turn to mysticism to indulge their own narcissism, constructing the relationship with God as a supernatural spouse in an attempt to form an independent sense of self. For De Beauvoir this is, except in the case of someone like Teresa of Avila, ultimately doomed to degenerate into a form of erotomaniacal hysteria that has no function in the world.

Amy Hollywood, however, in *Sensible Ecstasy* attempts to put twentieth century critics like De Beauvoir and Georges Bataille in productive conversation with mysticism. Indeed, as Hollywood points out, a surprising number of these theorists were interested in mysticism in one way or another and went out of their way to address it in their greatest works. De Beauvoir, for example, though skeptical about some of the more common expressions of religious fervor,

admires Teresa of Avila as a woman who is in control of, instead of being controlled by her erotic experience with the divine (Hollywood 128). “For Beauvoir,” according to Hollywood, “Teresa’s agency is expressed through her active and self-conscious sexual response to and desire for her lover, who is God” (128). What is valuable about this to De Beauvoir lies “not in the pleasure with which it is subjectively experienced, but in the objective influence it allows its subject to wield” (129) – a position surprisingly close to William James’. Thus, for De Beauvoir, mystical experience is only valuable in as much as it allows the subject to become an active agent in the world – something John Wesley would have whole-heartedly endorsed and which will be explored at more length in the next chapter.

In her reading of George Bataille’s *Inner Experience* Hollywood argues that Bataille “distinguishes three forms of eroticism-physical, emotional, and religious-and thus argues that the religious is a subset of the erotic. Physical, emotional, and religious experiences are fundamentally tied together in that all three bring about the dissolution of the self and hence of the boundaries between inner and outer” (38). Just as in erotic experience, mystical religious experience involves becoming lost in the other in the moment of complete union. An independent subjectivity is in some sense dissolved in that the subject is drawn out toward the other and radically re-orientated toward both God and humankind. Boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, body and soul are dissolved in contemplation of the divine.

Though John Wesley certainly would have been uncomfortable with the complete dissolution of self described by mystics like Teresa of Avila, he nevertheless valued the type of inner spirituality that such mystics cultivated. One of the mystics Wesley read early on and consistently cited throughout his life as an example of mystical piety in action was the seventeenth century French mystic, Madame Guyon (1648-1717). Guyon was the daughter of a

French aristocrat who was married at a young age to a much older man. After several miserable years of marriage her husband died and she was left with a sizeable inheritance and a passion for spreading her mystical spirituality and helping the poor. She published a book titled *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* which, due to its supposed quietism, got her condemned as a heretic and imprisoned for nearly seven years. Because of her emphasis on the internal spiritual life, Guyon's work was popular with the Protestants of the early evangelical revival, even if they still disapproved of her Catholicism and faith in the Church. Wesley often recommended his followers read her autobiography and, to that end, published an abridged version of it as a part of his *Christian Library* and then in 1776 as a stand-alone pamphlet. In his preface he commended Guyon as "deeply devoted to God, and often favoured with uncommon communications of his Spirit" (iv), and a "pattern of true holiness" (viii) while at the same time cautioning against her overreliance on personal revelation instead of Scripture and dedication to extreme asceticism. Many of these "errors" he edits out, while others he provides footnotes on in order to provide a "correct" interpretation of events to his readers. Despite his reservations, however, it is clear that Wesley valued Guyon's life as an example of true inner piety.

The fact that Guyon's life was so central to Wesley's own spiritual formation and that he valued this type of spirituality both operated as an invitation for Methodist women to share their own experiences according to the same pattern and worked to place women and women's experience at the very heart of the movement. Thus the influence of Wesley's *Extract of the Life of Madam Guion* can be seen in both the form and content of Methodist women's writing throughout the eighteenth century. Formally speaking there are many similarities between how Guyon constructs her narrative (or, more accurately, how Wesley edits it) and how Methodist women relate their spiritual journey. As I will explore at length in Chapter Four, such narratives

acted as models for Methodist writers – Methodist women clearly read extensively and consciously or unconsciously imitated the confessional styles of what they read. Furthermore the way in which Guyon and many Methodist women represent their spirituality is similar – both tend to talk about their experiences with God as relational, as an overflow of love, and even as a marriage relationship. Guyon, for example, upon first experiencing a mystical union with God writes that she “slept not all that night, because thy love, Oh my God! flowed in me like delicious oil; and burned as a fire which was going to devour all that was left of sin in an instant” (40). Compare this passage to one by Hester Ann Rogers, recorded shortly after her experience of “Christian perfection,” quoted at length at the beginning of this chapter:

I am emptied of all; I am at thy feet, a helpless, worthless worm: but I take hold of thee as my fulness! Every thing that I want, thou art. Thou art wisdom, strength, love, holiness: yes, and thou art mine! I am conquered and subdued by love. Thy love sinks me into nothing; it overflows my soul.... In thee I behold and feel all the fulness of the Godhead mine. I am now one with God: the intercourse is open; sin, inbred sin, no longer hinders the close communion, and God is all my own! (45-46)

Here Rogers describes her experience in terms of emptiness before God and an erotic filling and overflowing of this emptiness by the presence of God – she also frames this experience in explicitly Wesleyan terms, emphasizing that “inbred sin,” no longer comes between her and God. Thus the powerful effect of God’s love on her body is to sink her “into nothing and overflow my soul.”

Elsewhere Rogers goes even further, writing that she “was deeply penetrated with his presence, and stood as if unable to move, and was insensible to all around me” (101). This erotic infilling is inherently gendered imagery – even though this image of penetration can be found in mystical accounts by men (especially similar Moravian accounts) it is often effeminizing. Here Rogers explicitly locates her experience in a gendered and embodied space, using penetration

imagery to describe becoming filled with God. This imagery is followed by another staple of women's experience, an almost audible message from God:

While thus lost in communion with my Saviour, he spake those words to my heart, - "All that I have is thine! I am Jesus, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily - I am thine! My Spirit is thine! My Father is thine! They love thee, as I love thee - the whole Deity is thine! All God is, and all he has, is thine! He even now overshadows thee! He now covers thee with a cloud of his presence" (102).

Here sensual perception (in this case hearing) is combined with a deeply spiritual revelation of union and communion with God that ends with Rogers describing the intensity of the experience in terms of life and death, writing "I believe, indeed, if this had continued as I felt it before, but for one hour, mortality must have been dissolved, and the soul dislodged from its tenement of clay" (102). As Leigh Eric Schmidt has pointed out in *Hearing Things*, the spiritual senses, and especially spiritual hearing, became crucial components whereby evangelicals were able to confirm their new birth. "These extraordinary calls," Schmidt writes, "were joined to an overarching teleology within evangelical devotion that worked toward divine intimacy, toward a palpable relationship with Jesus.... Behind this intimacy... was a metaphysics of the senses, and this metaphysics... formed the basis for any other cultural work that such revelatory presences performed" (46-47).

Furthermore both Guyon and Methodist women tend to construct their relationship with God in terms of literally becoming the "bride of Christ." After the death of her husband Madame Guyon writes that she "entered into my closet, renewed my marriage-contract, and added thereto a vow of chastity" (82). Likewise many of the most prominent Methodist women were either single or widowed, and thought of their relationship with Christ in terms of a marriage contract. Wesley himself was rather ambivalent about marriage (his own came relatively late and was an unmitigated disaster) and his views on celibacy seemed to have resonated with much of his

female audience. In fact Earl Kent Brown points out that, of ninety-five of the most prominent female Methodist leaders, only sixty-eight were married (and most of them late in life) and only twenty-six had children (222-223). Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, for example, rejected numerous offers of marriage before she married Methodist leader John Fletcher in 1781 at the age of forty-two. He died just three years later and she spent the rest of her life as a widow living with another female preacher named Mary Tooth. After the death of her husband she too came to see that “the souls of the redeemed are given by the Father to the Son as his bride” (216), and entered into a “marriage-contract” with God. Of course there is a very real sense in both Guyon’s *Life* and Methodist women’s writing that celibacy and singleness are also means to protecting themselves, their calling, and their subjectivities from subversion. Especially in the case of Guyon and Bosanquet Fletcher singleness was a means of maintaining their property and freedom to dispose of their resources as they saw fit. Bosanquet Fletcher in particular developed a community of women who held their property in common and worked largely outside of male control. This decision not to marry and have children does not preclude a spiritual call to celibacy, but spiritual celibacy did provide a legitimate justification for maintaining control over the self.

This type of erotic and relational language of emptying oneself before God and then being filled with his love is far more prevalent in the spiritual narratives of Methodist women than those of Methodist men. Part of the reason may be, as Phyllis Mack suggests, that “women were more comfortable with the language of dependency or self-emptying than men, and more able to appreciate the relationship between dependency and an intense experience of love or grace” (132). This feeling of love thus allows a submission to God’s power that overwhelms their senses and confirms that their sins have been forgiven. What distinguishes these moments

is that they mystically *feel* their sins have been forgiven – that they have been justified to God. There is a sensory, experiential quality to these narratives that reflects John Wesley’s belief that the individual could know that she was saved and that God loved her. It is through this eroticized body, then, that these women are able to navigate the complex nexus between experiential perception and spiritual emotion.

This type of sensual language became the stock in trade of evangelicals throughout the eighteenth century and beyond – shaping the identities and subjectivities of an entire generation of believers. By imitating the type of language Wesley held up as an example in texts like Guion’s *Life* Methodist women were not only able to gain access to a public forum for their writing, they also participated in a synthesis between emotion and sense that is at the same time heavily indebted to the Enlightenment and profoundly opposed to it – in other words it is both enlightened and enthusiastic – a complex fusion of the two that effectively works to break down a binary opposition. It is in tracing these trends from Locke to Wesley and his movement that we can begin to see that expressions of religious “enthusiasm” persisted throughout the eighteenth century but they did not persist in a vacuum – they subtly shaped and were shaped by a culture that was still working out what it meant to be a female being in the world.

The Disciplined Body

If the spontaneity of erotic spiritual experience represents one pole of Methodist women’s spirituality the management and discipline of the body – especially the body in pain – represents the other pole. It has long been assumed that internal dispositions related to consciousness inform outward agency and action. However the work of James and Damasio indicates that, not only is the body crucial to the formation of consciousness and the reasoning capability, but it also plays a vital role in shaping emotions and feelings. Likewise Mahmood has argued that the

Aristotelian concept of habitus (long established in the Muslim world) has come to inform how Muslim women view the bodily practice of piety for religious women:

Habitus in this older Aristotelian tradition is understood to be an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person. Thus, moral virtues (such as modesty, honesty, and fortitude) are acquired through a coordination of outward behaviors (e.g., bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g., emotional states, thoughts, intentions) through the repeated performance of acts that entail those particular virtues (136).

Thus the bodily disciplines of prayer, fasting, modesty, etc come to form inward spiritual dispositions and not vice versa. This would seem to accord, not only with centuries of religious tradition across cultures, but also with an understanding of the body as intimately connected the mind and consciousness, not radically separated from it.

Much the same is true of early evangelical women who, following the examples set for them by Puritan and Catholic foremothers, consciously adopted bodily postures of piety in an attempt the elicit spiritual transformation. Crucial to this spirituality were the bodily spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting that the medieval mystics saw as so vital to spiritual transformation. These devotional practices were, in some measure, taken up by Methodist women as a means to fostering spiritual experience. Though John Wesley never endorsed the type of extreme asceticism that characterizes experiences like Madame Guyon he believed, in true Enlightenment fashion, that spiritual health and physical health were intimately connected, and that disease could often be a direct manifestation of a sinful spiritual state. One of the reasons that he published *Primitive Physic* and instructed both his itinerant ministers and lay leaders to attend to the sick, was that he understood the importance of caring for the physical body.

Nevertheless, Wesley and lay Methodists more broadly also interpreted physical sufferings as spiritual trials that helped them identify more clearly with the suffering of Christ. In this they drew upon a long tradition in medieval spirituality and mysticism that focused on the contemplation of and identification with the passion and death of Christ. According to this tradition it was in contemplating the absolute alterity of God or, especially, the embodied sacrifice of Christ on the cross, that the mystic in some sense identified bodily with Christ's suffering. Through this identification the body becomes the conduit through which God can reorder the individual subjectivity – it represents one of the only means open to women to represent religious experience in their own terms and for their own purposes. As Mack puts it, “the crux of the sinner's self-transformation, her understanding of the meaning of the atonement for herself, in her own particular case, required that the sinner actually suffer – not in moderation but in extremis – with Christ” (179). This understanding of pain is reflected in the many Methodist hymns (which E.P. Thompson so famously objected to) that describe in detail the sanctifying power of the blood of Christ and the glory of “resting in His side-wound” (an extremely maternal and vaginal image in its own right). It is also most clearly reflected in writing by evangelical women who, it would seem more than men, came to understand suffering and identification with Christ's suffering as vital means through which they could become closer to God (Mack 183).

Especially in her youth Hester Ann Rogers embodied the more mystical and ascetic understanding of the purifying power of pain. Though Wesley endorsed fasting and used it as a spiritual discipline throughout his life, Rogers took fasting to an extreme in her spiritual quest, writing that “besides all my labour and fatigue, I used rigorous fasting. The doctor who attended my mother was moved with compassion, and insisted I should no longer go on with what he

called sacrificing my life” (34-35). Such practices bordered on the type of holy anorexia practiced by mystics like Julian of Norwich; indeed for Rogers the weakness of her body caused by rigorous bodily discipline bore an intimate connection to her spiritual state:

I therefore went to bed, but could not sleep: and at four in the morning rose again, that I might wrestle with the Lord. I prayed, but it seemed in vain. I walked to and fro, groaning for mercy, then fell again on my knees: but the heavens appeared as brass, and hope seemed almost sunk into despair: when suddenly the Lord spake those words to my heart, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved... [I said] “I will, I do believe; now I venture my whole salvation upon thee as God! I put my guilty soul into thy hands, thy blood is sufficient! I cast my soul upon thee for time and eternity.” Then did he appear to my salvation. In that moment my fetters were broken; my bands were loosed; and my soul set at liberty. The love of God was shed abroad in my heart, and I rejoiced with joy unspeakable (29-32).

In denying herself sleep, *walking* to and fro, *groaning*, *falling* on her knees, and *wrestling* with God in prayer, Rogers performs bodily actions intended to create an emotive and deeply felt internal spiritual experience. The subsequent feelings of liberty, love, joy, union with God, and having her sins forgiven are *produced* by her bodily posture – for her there is an intimate connection between how her body acts and how she feels. Note as well that Rogers sees her suffering as leading her to closer union with Christ – even embracing death if it will bring her closer to Him. Indeed she seems to take an almost sado-masochistic delight in pain and the prospect of death. As she wrote during a later illness:

My weakness of body seems to increase; and so does my union with Him my soul loveth.... Sometimes my weakness of body seems quite overpowered with the Lord’s presence manifested to my soul; and I have thought I could bear no more and live.... I long to be freed from earth; but I am resigned to live and suffer here (52).

Thus weakness and pain, even unto death, are intimately connected to how Rogers perceives and experiences God’s presence – it is an overflow of spiritual emotion that allows her to embrace the cleansing power of pain. This physical manifestation of experience also operates as a sort of

physical evidence of her faith – by learning to control her body Rogers is able to defend herself from charges of possessing an unruly and unstable female self. In this sense control of the body is a means of demonstrating the reality of what she experiences.

These types of emotional spiritual experience utilize what Damasio terms the “body loop” of emotion whereby actual changes in the body effect what the mind feels and knows. However Damasio also details the functioning of an “as if body loop” within which the “representation of body-related changes is created directly in sensory body maps, under the control of other neural sites... It is “as if” the body had really been changed, but it has not” (281). In these cases the subject utilizes the sensory memory of spiritual experience in order to create a similar experience all over again. Methodist women like Hester Ann Rogers clearly utilize this emotive function as well, often describing an internal state that mirrors the types of feelings created through bodily emotion:

Last night and this morning I had deep communion with my God. I feel I am indeed one with Christ, and Christ is one with me: I dwell in Christ, and Christ in me. O blessed union with him my soul loveth! And the more I feel of his great love, the more I sink at his feet in humbling views of my own nothingness; and here it is I would ever lie; this is my own place: Jesus alone is exalted; and I, a poor sinner, saved from sin! (48)

Here Rogers’ spiritual state is created through the internal act of communion – and indeed spiritual union – with God. Nevertheless this internal state activates bodily responses that enact the same type of emotional responses that are triggered by actual bodily actions. In both cases spiritual experience is explicitly located within the processes of the body and the way the body interacts with both mind and spirit.

Though in many ways indebted to the Catholic mystical tradition that associates pain with spiritual enlightenment, Methodists ultimately saw pain as something to be endured, not sought for its own sake.²⁵ One of John Wesley’s greatest criticisms of Madame Guyon was that

she believed in order to be purified one must experience inward *and* outward suffering leading her to the “unscriptural practice, of bringing suffering upon herself: by bodily austerities” (vii). Thus he silently omitted almost all of Madame Guyon’s descriptions of her extreme asceticism on the grounds that they were unscriptural. Instead, most Methodists valued the body and the health of the body as the means through which they experienced God and Wesley did not endorse the types of extreme fasting and bodily harm that characterize the most extreme types of Catholic mysticism. In true Enlightenment fashion, all the senses need to be healthy and alive God was to be fully known.

By thus locating the body as the hub of spiritual activity Methodist women moved towards an understanding of spirituality grounded in all of the senses – painful as well as pleasurable – and in doing so opened the body up as a source for pious action in the world. It is through bodily discipline that Methodist women seek to exert over their own senses in an attempt to help form internal disposition. As we have seen in the case of Hester Ann Rogers, it is through bodily discipline sometimes bordering on asceticism that spiritual experience is elicited and in some sense controlled. Likewise it is in the art of recollecting and relating the details of spiritual experience that women like Rogers are able to articulate the meaning of experience both for themselves and others. Many Methodist women who had their works published worked from a much larger body of manuscript diaries and spiritual letters from which they culled what was most important and contextualized in for a specific audience (see Chapter Four). Hester Ann Rogers, for example, worked with John Wesley to edit her *Account* which was published shortly before her death.²⁶ In this sense women played a role in mediating their own work and in forming experience into something that was usable both for themselves and others. Thus writing

itself becomes a form of spiritual discipline whereby women are able to exercise agency over their own experience.

In this Methodist women are able to utilize bodily posture and positioning as a form of subject formation and agency in the sense that, through the agential control of the body, women are able to form spiritual experience and then demonstrate the results of spiritual experience in the world. In other words women are able to *control* bodily posture through spiritual discipline as a means of dictating their own type of spirituality which in turn gives them license to enter the public sphere. Though I do not think these women necessarily set out to alter the existing gender order, their experience necessitated the use of very public means in order to fulfill their calling to be God's agent in the world. In this they were able to consciously use the public sphere forms (discussed in the next chapter) of manuscript and print circulation, along with common evangelical genres like the conversion narrative, to both form their own subjectivity and rhetorically construct themselves and their broader role within the Methodist movement. Thus, though their *intent* may not have been proto-feminist, the result was – evangelicalism *did* open up public spaces for women that were previously closed to them and these spaces persevered as important centers of women's action despite attempts on the part of the Methodist hierarchy post-Wesley to shut them down.²⁷ In claiming this control over their own spiritual bodies, then, evangelical women were able to play a vital role in their own subject formation – and in valuing the emotional responses of the body they were able to develop a new type of subjectivity that worked to counteract prevailing notions of the radical dualism of mind and body. In this light the embodied religious experiences of the women under consideration here take on a new cast – they are no longer necessarily the enthusiastic excess of overheated religious fervor – instead they are intimately connected to the formation of subjectivity itself.

This experience of mediating their own experience through writing also points to some of the ways in which writing, for Methodist women, represented an entry into a religious public sphere that had been largely closed to them. By utilizing the built in single sex communities of Methodism (explored at length in the next chapter) women were able to mold internal experience into something that worked outward into the world. In this Methodist women worked not only to navigate the thin lines between spontaneity and control, enthusiasm and Enlightenment, but also between private experience and public action. The problem for all evangelicals was how to make a completely subjective experience intelligible to others in a way that could prompt real change. It was in making this translation that women like Hester Ann Rogers were able to articulate a new kind of subjectivity – a subjectivity founded in the body and on the body’s ability to both experience and control its senses. Though they may not have meant to do so, evangelical women articulated a vision of subjectivity as unstable, multiple and oriented towards community.

Finally, the way in which evangelical women used the body and bodily discipline to mediate spiritual experience disrupts easy conflation between enlightenment and secularization. As I will explore in the next chapter, to the extent that evangelicalism participated in the privatization of belief as a matter of intellectual assent it too was part and parcel of the enlightenment and helped make the secular conceivable. However, as the experience of Hester Ann Rogers illustrates, many evangelicals – and especially women, seem to have disrupted this narrative by returning to bodily disciplines and experience as the basis for belief. As Amy Hollywood has pointed out, “for many religious traditions, ancient texts, beliefs, and rituals do not replace experience as the vital center of spiritual life, but instead provide the means for engendering it. At the same time, human experience is the realm within which truth can best be epistemologically and affectively (if we can even separate the two) demonstrated” (“Spiritual but

Not Religious”). Just like the members of the women’s piety movement in Egypt that Mahmood describes, these women embody a lived spirituality – a spirituality that is grounded in everyday action instead of simple belief. Methodist women may need to “know” their sins are forgiven, but the way they achieve that goal is through the practices of piety that come to inform belief.

CHAPTER 3: HUNTING THE WESLEYAN FOX: CONSTRUCTING AN EVANGELICAL PUBLIC SPHERE

*To speak of Christian experience and practice, as if they were two things, properly and entirely distinct, is to make a distinction without consideration or reason. Indeed all Christian experience is not properly called practice; but all Christian practice is properly experience. And the distinction that is made between them, is not only an unreasonable, but an unscriptural distinction.... not only does the most important and distinguishing part of Christian experience, lie in spiritual practice; but such is the nature of that sort of exercises of grace, wherein spiritual practice consists, that nothing is so properly called by the name of experimental religion. For that experience which is in these exercises of grace, that are found, and prove effectual, at the very point of trial, wherein God proves which we will actually cleave to, whether Christ or our lusts, are as has been shown already, the proper experiment of the truth and power of our godliness... This is properly Christian experience, wherein the saints have opportunity to see, by actual experience and trial, whether they've a heart to do the will of God, and to forsake other things for Christ, or no. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (450-452).*

For early evangelicals spiritual experience in itself was simply not enough. In fact, for both John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards one of the surest signs of religious enthusiasm was experience that ultimately made no difference in the world or, in the language of Scripture, bore no fruit. To be sure early evangelicals practiced an experiential faith, but it was experiential in the sense that Jonathan Edwards lays out above as the twelfth and final sign of true religious affections. In this passage Edwards works to elide the complex boundaries between experience and action, inner feeling and outward works, faith and works, private and public by arguing for the vital intertwining of experience and practice in a way that truly evidences the marks of a Christian life. Indeed, throughout their writings both Edwards and Wesley use the Biblical analogy of the “body” of Christ to describe how the Christian is to live her life within a community of believers linked by experience. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:14-16:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Spiritual experience is the entry point to the Christian life but it is not the end – each individual must manifest the results of experience in community and a public space. Part of the radicalism of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century was that it made faith a very *public* thing – the body of Christ was no longer defined by the state or the established Church, but by any community of believers joined together in common love and common action in the world.

For women especially evangelicalism experience provided the impetus for entering this public sphere. As Misty Anderson has recently pointed out:

Through a populist, religious adaptation of Lockean consciousness that, paradoxically, emphasized the vulnerability of this self in its own secular terms, Methodism brought the discussion about modern Lockean psychology to general audiences and encouraged them to talk, think, and write about both their evangelical transformation and their experience of their inward state. In this they embodied a modern model of consciousness, supported by its own print culture and an evangelical version of the public sphere (15).

As I will explore at length below, Methodist women not only wrote, like Hester Ann Rogers, but also travelled, preached, exhorted, taught Sunday school, corresponded, wrote spiritual letters, and founded orphanages and charitable organizations. Perhaps the best example of a woman who did *all* of these things and who cited her personal conversion experience as the reason for it, was Mary Bosanquet Fletcher.²⁸ Bosanquet was one of the most prominent women of early Methodism – an important preacher in her own right who founded a network of extraordinary women that was active well into the nineteenth century. Bosanquet's life and experience provide context to the discussion of the development of the evangelical public sphere that follows. In her work we can trace the development of a defined evangelical public within which she operated various single-sex counterpublics throughout her life. It was within these single sex spaces of that early evangelical women found the impetus to enter public space.

Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and Her Network

Mary Bosanquet Fletcher was born on September 1, 1739 to a wealthy Huguenot family in Leytonstone, Essex. She grew up primarily in London and, like Hester Ann Rogers, was interested in religion from a very young age. Around age eighteen she came into contact with the Methodists, most notably Sarah Crosby and Sarah Ryan, two of the earliest Methodist women preachers and class leaders. Crosby would go on to act as Bosanquet's spiritual mother and advisor – counseling her to turn down a favorable offer of marriage that had been arranged by her family. Following this incident Bosanquet writes in her auto-biography that she “saw the path in which I ought to walk. I determined not to think about a married life, for my present light was to abide single.” Instead she determined to “be wholly given up to the church, in any way that he [Christ] pleased. I desired not to be idle, but employed as those described by St. Paul to Timothy; ‘If she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, and diligently followed after every good work’” (27-28). This resolution was to become the mission of Bosanquet's life – in many ways structuring everything she accomplished afterwards.

Three years after this incident Bosanquet was forced to put this resolution into action in a dramatic way. For several years her relationship with her parents had become increasingly strained over her association with Methodism and, when Bosanquet turned twenty-one her father asked her to leave the house. Though he did not cut her off financially or remove her from his will, he nonetheless felt he could no longer tolerate Bosanquet's influence on her younger siblings. She subsequently moved to rented rooms in London where she lived with Sarah Lawrence, her friend, servant, and fellow preacher for most of the rest of her life. In 1761 and 1762 a major evangelical revival took place in London and it was during this period that Bosanquet first experienced sanctification. She writes that during this period, “The Spirit was

poured out on some in such a degree as can hardly be conceived, but by those who felt the divine influence... These rivers [of living water] did indeed flow from heart to heart... [and] some portion of this river seemed now to reach me also” (36).

During this period Bosanquet struggled with God, wanting to become united to him, but feeling sin as a hindrance. Not only this, but she writes that if “she saw, or heard of the consequences of sin, I was ready to die! For instance, if in the street I saw a child ill used, or slighted by the person who seemed to have the care of it, or a poor person sweating under an uncommonly heavy burden; or if I saw a horse or a dog oppressed or wounded, it was more than I could bear” (38-39). This sensitivity to sin – both her own and others – characterizes Bosanquet’s experience and writing. She is never content to sit by and watch others suffer. For her the experience of sanctification is intimately tied to the results of sin that she witnesses around her. When she finally does receive the sense of sanctification she describes it as “such a simplicity, such a hanging on the Lord Jesus, that self seemed annihilated, and Jesus was my all. The nothing into which I felt myself sunk, and the great salvation which I seemed to possess in Jesus, were such as I cannot explain” (39). For Bosanquet the old “sinful” self is annihilated in God, enabling to reach out to others in love – attempting to right the wrongs she sees in society.

One of the first things Bosanquet did after her experience of sanctification was to renew her vow of to live a single life and dedicate herself to God. In this she found a partner in her friend Sarah Ryan, whose relationship with Bosanquet was to form the basis of a network of women that Bosanquet would use to accomplish her evangelistic and charitable purposes throughout England. In this we see evidence of an early pattern to Bosanquet’s work which I will explore at length below. In contrast to many male Methodist itinerants who largely operated on their own, Bosanquet’s work was largely collaborative. First in Sarah Lawrence, then in Sarah

Ryan and later in Mary Tooth, Bosanquet sought out like-minded women with whom to pursue her ministry. These partnerships not only provided security for women as they journeyed around the country on their own, but also created a type of spiritual intimacy that formed the basis for communal action.

Ryan herself was a colorful character who, though she enjoyed the personal friendship and support of John Wesley, acted as a divisive figure within the early Methodist movement. Married three times (sometimes simultaneously) to men who abandoned her, Ryan became involved in Methodism in 1741 and quickly became active as a class leader and preacher. She was a frequent correspondent of John Wesley and in 1757 he appointed her the housekeeper of the New Room in Bristol and then the Kingswood School.²⁹ When Ryan returned from Bristol in 1762 she lodged with Bosanquet in London and then moved with her to Leytonstone where Mary owned a house. Here they established their first community of women which acted as a sort of charitable organization – preaching, teaching, and assisting the poor – mainly children. They opened an orphanage in their own home and worked to train children to take up trades. Eventually, due to Ryan's failing health, they moved to Yorkshire and purchased a farm – called Cross Hall – which became a base for Methodist women's charitable activities in the north of England. Here Bosanquet in essence became a business manager – managing the everyday affairs of the farm, which was largely run by the poor and orphans who they welcomed into their doors. Ryan died shortly after their move in 1768, but Cross Hall became a base from which an extensive community of women lived and worked together during the late eighteenth century.³⁰

In 1781 Bosanquet married the Methodist theologian John Fletcher (the only man she thought she could ever consent to marry)³¹ and moved with him to his living in Madeley, Shropshire. Here she once again went about establishing her charitable and preaching ministries,

gathering around her another formidable army of women. Fletcher died in 1785, but she continued to live in the Vicarage until her death in 1816. Here she exercised considerable influence in the community, even insisting on having a say in who was appointed curate in the parish. She held meetings almost every night of the week and travelled extensively, preaching to mixed audiences all around the country.³² Following Fletcher's death the Methodist itinerant Mary Tooth moved into the vicarage and she and Bosanquet formed a dynamic preaching partnership for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, at various points notable women itinerant preachers like Sarah Crosby, Sarah Lawrence, Elizabeth Ritchie, Susanna Knapp, Ann Tripp, Mary Barritt Taft, Martha Grigson, and Sarah Mallit (to name just a few) were all associated with Bosanquet's community – first at Cross Hall and then at Madeley. Thus, throughout her ministry Bosanquet cultivated a deep network of women based on common evangelical experience and common goals. Bonds of sociability among female Methodists, like the ones Bosanquet created throughout her life, had the effect of creating a developed public – even counterpublic for women in the Methodist movement.

Methodist Women and the Public Sphere

As the example of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and her network clearly illustrates, evangelical women developed the means to translate private spiritual experience into public action. However, it is this division between private and public that has most vexed scholars of the early evangelical revival; for the paradox of eighteenth century evangelical religion was that it was simultaneously both deeply private and exceedingly public – sometimes simultaneously. The experiential ground of the revival was laid out in the previous chapter; I will now build on that framework to explore how this vital and transformative spiritual experience interacted with the developing public sphere – how experience and practice within these communities of women

combined as an impetus for evangelical women's writing. Inherent in evangelical discourse culture is a complex interplay between orality, experience, sociability, manuscript production and print. This complex nexus worked to produce a print culture of evangelicalism during the period that, in turn, worked to form a fully developed religious public sphere. In fact, both John Wesley and George Whitefield early on realized the power of print within the burgeoning public sphere – developing print empires anchored by the sensational and best selling published *Journals*. These print empires in turn interacted with a network of sermon preaching, orality, and religious discussion that created a fully formed religious public sphere by century's end – a religious sphere that has largely been ignored in the extensive literature on the subject.

To better illustrate how this evangelical public sphere operated and was contested I will first turn to the work of Michael Warner and others to illustrate how a developed evangelical public sphere was formed in England during the eighteenth century. Crucial to this narrative is the fact that, contrary to much previous scholarly opinion, in many ways the evangelical revival arose *along with* the Enlightenment and not in opposition to it. In other words the Enlightenment did not represent a step in the movement away from religion, but instead existed in symbiosis with it. This perspective calls into question the narrative of secularization that reads the Enlightenment as the evacuation of the religious from public life. To illustrate this I will investigate the public reaction to the work of John Wesley and John Thelwall – two seemingly opposed figures who nevertheless experience similar reactions due to the nature of their public discourse. By examining the ways in which these two figures are connected we thus gain a better perspective on how the discourses of both the revival and political radicalism came to shape public perceptions even more than doctrine or revolutionary content. In this we see how the

histories of evangelicalism and secularization are intertwined – relying on the same types of discourse structures and practices.

Likewise by investigating the ways in which the material conditions of Methodist discourse culture developed we are thus able to better understand the both the success of and opposition to the movement at its inception. By utilizing an organizational structure that emphasized small, single sex groups of believers, John Wesley cleverly fostered a network of individuals all bound by the same experience. These networks then had the effect of producing smaller public spheres within which believers could share their common experience, encourage one another, exchange spiritual letters, travel together, preach together, and publish together. Thus, I will then look at how these networks of sociability – especially among women – in turn came to operate as a type of counterpublics within the larger evangelical public sphere. It was within these single-sex counterpublics that Methodist women were able to negotiate their identity in relation to the Methodist movement as a whole and the culture at large.

Finally, I will then return to Mary Bosanquet Fletcher's formidable network of women as an example of a developed, single sex, religious public sphere that served as a type of clearinghouse for Methodist women's writing and spiritual experience. Not only do these evangelical women illustrate how print could be used to blur gendered distinctions between public and private, they also used their private, internal experience as a way to disrupt the very categories of public and private themselves. Religious experience in this sense gave them the language to enter a public space – first in single sex groups and then publically – a language that exploded any distinction between inner emotion and outer action. Thus it was not so much that evangelical religion appealed to women because it was inherently more suited to private and domestic consumption, but, more radically, because it allowed for participation in a conversation

beyond those bounds.³³ By examining how networks of sociability were formed among Methodist women, we are thus able to better understand how the “new media” of the eighteenth century played a vital role both in the development of the public sphere, but also how women were able to use their own experience to break down artificial boundaries between public and private.

Evangelicalism and the Public Sphere

Since the publication of Jürgen Habermas’ *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* the concept of the public sphere as an institution of bourgeois society has been progressively modified, including by Habermas himself.³⁴ The problem is that, incisive as Habermas’ analysis is, it still fails to account for the full range of public expression in eighteenth century England. What inevitably emerges, in Habermas’, account is a secular, middle class, and male public sphere that worked to form public consciousness in Britain. However, as Linda Colley and Paula McDowell point out, this view ignores the significant role women played in forming public associations, engaging in political activity, and writing and printing. In *Britons*, for example, Colley traces the rise of women’s participation in political organizations and politics, while McDowell argues that, as early as the late seventeenth century women were playing an increasingly great role in print production and the world of public ideas. Such feminist criticism of public sphere theory has helped to refine and idea of a public that is in reality made of multiple simultaneous publics and counter publics that often overlapped and sometimes conflicted.

Much scholarly work has been done in the past thirty years dedicated to sharpening our understanding of how women and other marginalized groups participated in the development of public spheres in Britain. Less work has been done, however, on the question of how the rise of

evangelicalism in the eighteenth century impacted the development of the public sphere. As Jennifer Snead argues, the evangelical public “was not made up of the homogenously literate, rational, secular, abstracted individuals debating in print the political and aesthetic issues and the news of the day who populate models of the development of the public sphere derived from the influential theories of Jürgen Habermas” (96-97). Instead the evangelical public that came into being during the eighteenth century “marks a moment in the development of the public sphere where the temporal and spiritual were suddenly juxtaposed; where prior, religious conceptions of what it meant to be public came into contact with emerging, secular ideas of the public sphere” (98). Thus the evangelical revival played an undeniably important role in developing what it meant to act publically and especially to translate private experience into a public space.

Likewise in *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation* Jon Mee has pointed out that the Habermasian theory of the public sphere leaves little space for the “enthusiastic” discourse of the revival:

Habermas’s notion of the bourgeois public sphere, with its newspapers being discussed in coffee houses and clubs, its periodicals encouraging the circulation of sound knowledge and banning disputation in religion from its pages, had an alter ego in the heterotopias of chapels, field meetings, and the huge circulation of popular religious pamphlets and sermons. Eighteenth-century notions of civility were almost defined by the exclusion of this kind of religious literature with its tendency to rancor, disputation, and ecstasies (72-73).

Mee goes on to argue that Romanticism in many ways drew upon the very public enthusiasm of the evangelical revival as an impetus for the type of inspiration and feeling which characterized the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Thus Romanticism, in Mee’s estimation operated as a sort of regulating force – naturalizing the language of the revival in an attempt to domesticate and secularize it.

Nevertheless the actual discourse of this public space of evangelical preaching, manuscript circulation, and sociability has been largely overlooked in discussions of public sphere formation in Britain – as has the large body of anti-Methodist literature that arose in response to the evangelical movement. Misty Anderson has recently taken on both points arguing that, for eighteenth century Britons, Methodism “served imaginatively as a space of intimacy, desire, and even ecstasy for the modern British self even as, and indeed because, it served as a boundary for that self” (15) and that “Methodism made canny use of the public sphere, particularly the world of print, in a mass-media effort to get its spiritually and emotionally intense message of “inward religion” out, and in so doing complicated the terms of these modern conceptual separations” (37). According to this argument, Methodism served as an important conceptual category that, because of its very publicness, helped form what became known as the modern, secular self. Thus the very ideas of what it means to be modern or secular are intimately bound up with the question of how an evangelical public sphere functioned while at the same time evangelical experience complicates the very categories it helped bring into being.

While I would agree with Mee and Anderson that evangelical culture did indeed form its own type of public – one that has been largely ignored in the literature – I would take issue with the idea that such a public was outside of the British mainstream or operated as a category that individuals defined themselves against. Indeed, part of the problem with much public sphere theory to date is that it assumes a secular public sphere that arose in response of to the excesses of evangelicalism – expelling is enthusiastic other. Instead I argue that in many ways the conceptual category of the secular arose as a discourse within evangelicalism – a discourse that was made possible by blurring of the lines between public and private that characterized the evangelical movement. Such binary thinking ignores the fact that evangelicalism itself was

intimately bound up in the construction of publics in Britain and that throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century more religious literature was printed in Britain than any other single category. People were clearly interested in reading and discussing religious material and the developing market economy was eager to provide it.

It would seem that, far from being the antithesis of an “Enlightened” and secular public, evangelicalism was intimately connected to it from the very beginning. As Michael Warner has recently pointed out:

Far from being simply a reaction against an already congealed ‘Enlightenment,’ eighteenth-century evangelical practices came into being through many of the same media and norms of discourse. What we now call evangelicalism can be seen as the transformation of older strains of pietism by public sphere forms.... Indeed, it is not clear that enlightenment and evangelical religion were recognizable to contemporaries as opposing forces (Preacher’s Footing 368).

Thus evangelicalism in fact participated in the same norms of discourse that created an evangelical public sphere during the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Foucault argues that discourse itself cannot be “divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one,” but is instead “a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable (100). Thus the evangelical public sphere operated alongside the secular in ways that, according to Warner, “required the space of controversy afforded by competing printers, the compressed and progressive temporality of news, awareness of translocal fields of circulation, and a semiotic ideology of uptake” (Freethought and Evangelicalism 11:00).

In other words, evangelicalism was not a *reaction* to Enlightenment, instead the two were mutually constitutive. By only positing the public sphere in terms of secularization and liberalization scholars have overlooked the fact that the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century participated in a robust public sphere of print and periodical literature that still dwarfed

secular publications throughout the century. Whitefield and Wesley's print empires dominated the literary marketplace of the eighteenth century with their published journals going through hundreds of editions on both sides of the Atlantic. Wesley's *Arminian Magazine* and its successor *Methodist Magazine* regularly outsold the better known and influential *Gentleman's Magazine*. And this dominance of evangelical print extended far beyond the Methodist movement. By 1830 *The Sunday School Magazine* had sold over 30 million copies, far more than any other contemporary title, Hannah More's *Cheap Repository* sold close to 2 million copies by 1796, while the London Religious Tract Society, formed in 1799, sold nearly 800,000 copies in its first two years of operation alone. By the mid-nineteenth century, tract printing and distribution had reached staggering proportions. Starting in 1848 the Drummond Tract Enterprise printed over 200 publications and eight million copies within ten years. Between the 1860s and 1914 they ran five evangelical magazines, holding over 300 different tracts at a time, and published short stories, religious poems and novels. By the 1930s, their catalogue had 2,000 titles, a third of them novels, with print runs of between 10,000 and 50,000 copies and tracts and children's books from two to sixteen pages, with print runs of over 100,000 copies (Brown 49-50).

This astonishing success of evangelical print well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries also points to some of the ways in which evangelical discourse culture, far from being the antithesis of secular discourse, in many ways helped create it. This history also points to some of the ways in which the concept of "secularization" itself has become increasingly troubled as an analytical category. In *A Secular Age*, for example, Charles Taylor lays out three possible definitions of the secular, the first two of which have been traditionally conceived of as the means of secularization: 1. the uncoupling of Church and State; 2. the emptying of God from

public space; or 3. a shift from a society where belief was the norm to a society where belief is one option among many (2-3). The second definition of the secular is the one most commonly applied to the eighteenth century. As an increasingly public space for the open discussion of ideas came into being, so the argument goes, religion was gradually evacuated from the public sphere leaving, by the early nineteenth century, a completely secular sphere of rational discourse. However the reality was far more complex. Religion was still very much part of public discourse in Britain, not only participating in its own public sphere forms, but informing discourses as varied as radical politics and romantic poetry.

Furthermore, as Callum Brown has pointed out, religious discourse actually exploded over the very time when society was ostensibly becoming more “secular” according to traditional definitions. There was in fact *more* religious discourse in public life by the middle of the nineteenth century, not less. Likewise such definitions even fail to account for the religious conditions of twenty-first century America where, despite an ostensibly “secular” culture, the majority of the population still express religious belief. If this is the case then we must turn to evangelical discourse if we are to understand both its cultural influence and the turn towards secularization in the late twentieth century. Brown argues that, by “consulting the dominant media of the time (such as popular books, magazines and religious tracts), we can trace how the discourses circulated in society” (13), and then reconstruct how “discursive Christianity” altered the “protocols of personal identity which they derive from Christian expectations, or discourses, evident in their own time and place” (12). This type of, “discursive Christianity,” allows us to take a broader view of how evangelical discourse worked to form both individual identity and culture for, as Brown argues, “Evangelicalism held up discursive mirrors against which the individual negotiated his/her self” (36). Thus in chapters on both men’s and women’s evangelical

conversion experiences and narratives, Brown weaves a picture of secularization as occurring within the discourse conditions of evangelicalism instead of outside them.

According to this narrative, then, it is not so much that the religious is “secularized” in the form of “secular” art or poetry, but that religious discourse itself reveals some of the ways in which secularization lies outside of the realm of belief or doctrine and is embedded in discourse structures and cultural practices. As Colin Jager has argued in the context of romanticism, the longstanding narrative of romantic poetry as the secularization of the enthusiastic or evangelical impulse simply does not hold up to scrutiny³⁵:

The historical change that the word ‘secularization’ tries to capture does not reside solely or even primarily at the level of ideas and beliefs... but incorporates habits, dispositions, and postures that are themselves carried out and performed within changing institutional contexts. Thus if secularization is understood not as a loss of belief but rather as an example of the differentiation that characterizes modernity – a differentiation that necessarily entails neither religious decline nor the privatization of religion as a form of feeling or emotion – then we can start to analyze our own investment in secularization as that which underwrites and legitimates romanticism (1).

In applying this approach to secularization we are thus able to take a broader view of both the development and importance of evangelical discourse in the public sphere and the rise of romantic era writing. In both cases the modes of discourse that are utilized are of primary importance, more than the content or orthodoxy of belief. In many ways romanticism provides an interesting case study in how religious discourse structures were incorporated into the “secular” – but not in the way that was been traditionally thought. Far from being a secularization of the religious impulse or a reaction to it, romanticism instead used the discourses and dispositions of popular religion to develop a differentiated public voice.

If this is the case then we need to look more carefully at Taylor’s third definition of the secular, which involves shifting patterns of belief. As I argued earlier, the evangelical revival in

fact participated in a form of religious differentiation the result of which made it possible for people to choose belief from an increasingly varied religious landscape. The public sphere forms of itinerant preaching, pamphlet publication, and periodical literature made possible the very forms of religious discourse that resulted in challenges to established orthodoxy. As I will examine at length in the next chapter, religious periodicals became the grounds for disputation between various branches of the revival, with Calvinist followers of George Whitefield attacking the Arminian Wesleyans in print. This differentiation became even more pronounced in the nineteenth century as the Methodists officially split from the Church of England and more and more evangelical sects came into being. Thus secularization became much more about the conditions of belief and the choice among many options (including unbelief) as about the absence of belief in the public sphere.

The Wesleyan Fox: Secular Preaching/Preaching Secularization

A good example of this confluence of discourse and belief is John Thelwall (1764-1834), the radical speaker and writer who travelled around Britain during the 1790's preaching liberty. According to modern critical thinking Thelwall is a prime example of the development of a secular public in opposition to evangelicalism. Thelwall was part of a generation of political radicals who promoted a political philosophy that formed the basis of the modern liberal state and thus his message could be interpreted as antithetical to religion. However, it was not *what* Thelwall said that caused the most controversy in his own time, but *how* he said it. In fact he was often characterized as a raving Methodist parson by his enemies – a secular itinerant preacher who travelled from place to place “preaching” his gospel of liberty. In this the rhetoric of evangelicalism and the rhetoric of radicalism are not as far apart as has been previously thought. In his brilliant essay on the life and career of John Thelwall, “Hunting the Jacobin Fox,” E.P.

Thompson recounts the story of the violent public reaction to a series of six political lectures Thelwall gave at Yarmouth. Barred by the infamous Two Acts from speaking openly on political subjects, the radical reformer cloaked his politics in lectures on Classical History as a means to circumventing the law.³⁶ As he wrote in his *Prospectus of a Course of Lectures*, he had no doubt that such a plan would expose his audience to “no more danger of fine or prosecution for attending them, than the pupils at a course of chemical lectures, or the frequenters of a parish church or methodist chapel” (8). As it turned out, the lectures in Yarmouth³⁷ ended up turning the exact *same* kind of violence on his audience as many early Methodist experienced in their own chapels.

By the time he arrived in Yarmouth, Thelwall at already given the course of lectures without incident at Norwich and had moved on to the seaside town due to the fact that, as Thelwall puts it, there was “a sort of comparative equality in the condition of the inhabitants. The links of the progressive chain of society are not yet broken” (16). Sensing a receptive audience for his lectures Thelwall began the series before a crowd of nearly two hundred people at a seaside lecture room. On the first two nights the lecture hall was surrounded by a group of sailors who, while taunting and threatening Thelwall did nothing. On the third night, however, a group of nearly ninety sailors showed up – this is how Thelwall describes the scene in the account that was published in the *Courier* on August 22, 1796 and later in his *Appeal to Popular Opinion*:

About five minutes after this [a person walked out of the lecture] a great disturbance was heard at the door, and in rushed a desperate banditti of about ninety sailors, as their numbers stand ascertained by regular dispositions. These desperadoes, drafted from the difference ships of war in the roads, and armed with bludgeons and cutlasses, after having cut and knocked down the persons who guarded the door, and even the mere gazers who happened to be loitering about, poured in among the audience with the most wild ferocity, dealing blows indiscriminately upon man, woman, and child, who, totally unprepared for resistance, were knocked down across the benches with terrible wounds and bruises; and a scene of fashion, gaiety, and pleasure was instantly metamorphosed

into one of carnage and horror, of fractured heads, and garments covered over with blood. A general massacre seemed to be inevitable; no means either of defence or escape presented themselves; and the ruffians, not satisfied with knocking people down, reiterated their blows as they lay prostrate at their feet (22-23).

With the help of some friends Thelwall managed to escape, but a crowd followed him and threatened to pull down the house he was staying in. The aim of the attack seems to have been to impress Thelwall into naval service (Thompson 162). In the end nearly forty people were injured and the lecture hall ransacked. After this event, however, the lectures were allowed to proceed without incident. These events occurred at a time when Thelwall's movements were being carefully tracked. Apparently Thelwall's public lectures were so powerful that the government felt it necessary to attempt to close off the unbounded public space of his meetings. Indeed, Thelwall often claimed that the Two Acts were passed in direct response to his lecturing.

Methodist preachers, including John Wesley, were no stranger to this type of violence. Most famously, on October 20, 1743 John Wesley rode into the town of Wednesbury in the West Midlands. As was his custom, he proceeded to the middle of the town and began to preach in the open air. On this particular occasion his text was Hebrews 13:8 (Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever) and he remarks in his journal that there was a "far larger crowd than expected." After preaching, Wesley retired to a local Methodist's house. There he was engaging in his endless correspondence when a mob beset the house and forced Wesley to come with them to the local magistrate. This is how Wesley describes the scene in his *Journal*:

To attempt speaking was vain; for the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea. so they dragged me along till we came to the town; where seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in; but a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into the middle of the mob. They made no more stop till they had carried me through the main street, from one end of the town to the other. I continued speaking all the time to those within hearing, feeling no pain or weariness. at the west end of the town, seeing a door half open, I made toward it and would have gone in; but a gentleman in the shop would not suffer me, saying

they would pull the house down to the ground. However, I stood at the door, and asked, "Are you willing to hear me speak?" Many cried out, "No, no! knock his brains out; down with him; kill him at once." Others said, "Nay, but we will hear him first." I began asking, "What evil have I done? Which of you all have I wronged in word or deed?" And continued speaking for above a quarter of an hour, till my voice suddenly failed: then the floods began to lift up their voice again; many crying out, "Bring him away! bring him away!" (*JWW* I:437-438)

What is remarkable about this story is that 1. Wesley was an ordained Anglican priest who always preached (even in the open air) in his cassock and bands, 2. The text and message he presents are completely orthodox – in complete agreement with the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-Nine Articles, and 3. the vehemence of the mobs reaction and their willingness to use physical violence against the famous John Wesley. However, such incidents were by no means isolated in the early years of Methodism. Methodists, though legally still part of the established Church, were routinely harassed by fellow citizens who looked upon them with suspicion and contempt. Riots regularly broke out at Methodist meetings, chapels were vandalized and destroyed, preachers were attacked and/or pressed into the army and navy and Charles Wesley was brought before the magistrates on charges of Jacobitism.³⁸

Traditional interpretations of these events would have us believe that what these types of mobs objected to had to do with the content of what both these men had to say – in John Wesley's case supposedly "unorthodox" doctrine and in Thelwall's radical politics. To my mind, however, the opposition to Thelwall's lectures and Wesley's sermons is not adequately explained by objections to their message – the ideas they presented were not new and in fact they had been largely developed by others – what *was* new was the way they powerfully translated these ideas into discourse. Instead the violent reaction to both Thelwall and the Methodists is better explained by how both used the expanding public sphere afforded by the closely intertwined discourses of orality and print to disrupt established order in both politics and religion. If this is

the case, then the relationship between Thelwall's "secular" rhetoric and the popular religious form of the open air sermon can tell us much about how the discourse of the evangelical revival affected discourse structures outside of its bounds and in turn participated in the process of secularization itself. Thus, in consciously or unconsciously imitating the open air preaching methods of the revival, Thelwall tapped into a deeply subversive method of communicating – one that provoked violent reaction whether from the lips of an evangelical Anglican priest or a Jacobin radical.

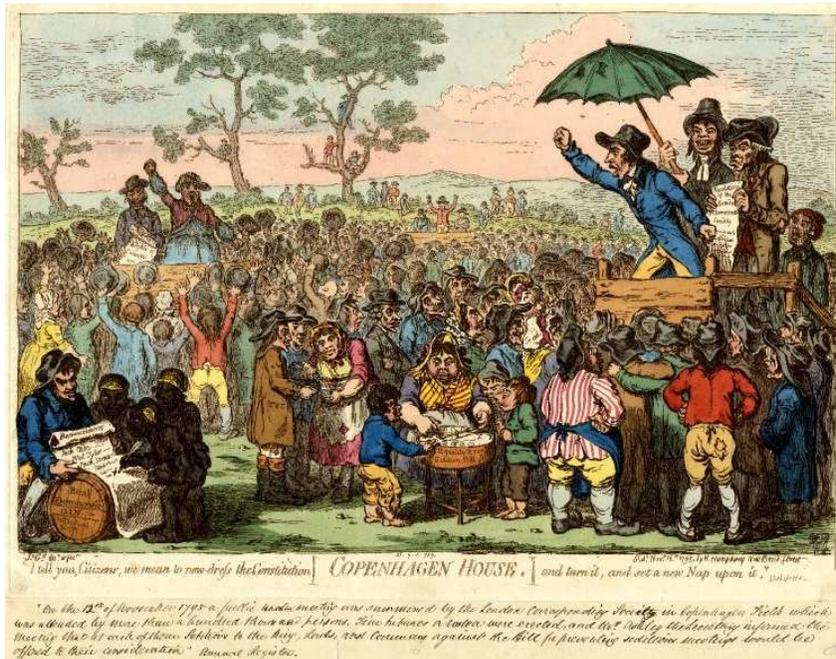
Surprisingly, the similarities between Wesley and Thelwall go well beyond the fact that both of them were attacked by mobs. Like Wesley Thelwall spoke in public (either in the open air or large gathering halls), his lectures attracted a similar demographic (the poor, women), and he too was accused of engaging in "enthusiastic" discourse. In fact even his friend Thomas Amyot compared him to a Methodist itinerant preacher, writing that, "He raves like a mad Methodist parson: the most ranting Actor in the most ranting Character never made to much noise as Citizen Thelwall..." (qtd. in Thompson 158). Here Thelwall is explicitly compared to a Methodist preacher in that the unbounded nature of his speech is perceived as having a negative effect on his hearers – of arousing their emotions instead of appealing to their reason. Likewise the conservative Bishop Samuel Horsley blithely conflated the Jacobins and the Methodists, even referencing the Two Acts that forced Thelwall to itinerate and disguise his message, as the impetus for the explosion of radical "preaching:"

In many parts of the kingdom new conventicles have been opened in great number, and congregations formed of one knows not what denomination. The pastor is often, in appearance at least, an illiterate peasant, or mechanic. The congregation is visited occasionally by preachers from a distance.... It is very remarkable, that these new congregations of non-descripts have been mostly formed, since the Jacobins have been laid under the restraint of those two most salutary statutes, commonly known by the names of the Sedition and the Treason Bill. A circumstance which gives much ground for suspicion, that Sedition and

Atheism are the real objects of these institutions, rather than religion. Indeed, in some places this is known to be the case. In one topic the teachers of all these congregations agree; abuse of the Established Clergy, as negligent of their flocks, cold in their preaching, and destitute of the Spirit.... It is a dreadful aggravation of the dangers of the present crisis in this country that persons of real piety should, without knowing it, be lending their aid to the common enemy, and making themselves in effect accomplices in a conspiracy against the Lord, and against his Christ. The Jacobins of this country, I very much fear, are, at this moment making a tool of Methodism (19-20).

Even here, then, the lines between reason and enthusiasm are (in the mind of the Establishment) dangerously blurred and potentially indistinguishable to a supposedly gullible population.

These concerns over the effect itinerant preaching can have on an audience is reflected in some of the caricatures of Thelwall and his radical speaking. James Gillray's 1795 *Copenhagen House*, for example, paints almost as chaotic a scene as popular representations of a Methodist revival:



Here Thelwall is presented as the “preacher” at a meeting organized the London Corresponding Society on November 12, 1795. Here we see him engaging the rhetorical techniques he outlines in his *Prospectus*, using gesture and speaking without notes, ostensibly from the heart. He is

standing in a public field, surrounded by the same types of people that often appear in similar caricatures of Methodist preachers (explored later) – women, children, the poor, here even a group of what appear to be black slaves in the bottom left corner. If one did not know the context of the print it would be easy to assume that the man on the platform was a Methodist preacher, whipping the crowd into an enthusiastic fervor during the early days of the evangelical revival. Clearly what is at stake here is the unbounded space depicted in the print and the power of the speaker to influence a mass of people.

Indeed it was this blurring of the lines between reason, enthusiasm, and radicalism in both Thelwall and Wesley that most alarmed the establishment. Edmund Burke, for example, deplored the use of print in the service of enthusiasm and radicalism, condemning its ability to “make a kind of electric communication everywhere” (380). According to Burke such “‘mechanic’ spasming of enthusiastic philosophers” (Mee 91) did not provide the space for reflection that was supposed to be necessary for reasoned discourse and one of the common complaints against Methodism was that it encouraged the “proliferation of enthusiasm in print” (Mee 64). Moreover this early evangelical (and radical) media culture worked to form a type of feedback loop within which the genres of public oral sermon and printed discourse were constantly in conversation. Both Thelwall and Wesley not only lectured and preached, but had their discourses printed and then commented on in newspapers and the public sphere at large. And it was this feedback loop of orality and print that truly threatened to break down the established public boundaries between private belief and public life.³⁹

The Evangelical Public Sphere

Given the astonishing importance and influence of evangelical media culture it is long past time to reassess what role evangelicalism had on the development of the public sphere and

vice versa. If, as Siskin and Warner have recently argued, “Enlightenment is an event in the history of mediation” (1), so too is evangelicalism which, as I argued in the previous chapter, was built in large part on Enlightenment ideals. Furthermore, since the evangelical revival relied on the forms of discourse created by the print revolution, we must carefully examine the forms of evangelical media as a means to understanding the movement as a whole. Doing so requires paying careful attention to the material nature of Methodist writing, how it was produced, and then how it was circulated within the evangelical movement and beyond.

Early on John Wesley clearly realized the potential power of print to spread his message and educate a wide spectrum of readers. Not only did Wesley instruct people *what* to read, he was also heavily involved in publishing material *to* read. The print empire of early Methodism was immense – Wesley was a prodigious writer, abridger, publisher – establishing a Book Room at the Foundry (his London headquarters) and working overtime to provide works to supply it.⁴⁰ The foundation of this empire was the ongoing publication of Wesley’s *Journal*, which commenced publication in 1740 and was published in more or less regular installments (twenty-one in total) until Wesley’s death in 1791. The *Journal* was far and away the most important (and most successful) of Wesley’s publishing projects, but he also published the *Christian Library*, editions of his *Sermons*, instructional pamphlets, and a major periodical over the course of his career. In many important ways Wesley was the forefather to the evangelical tract movement that sprung up under the leadership of evangelicals like Hannah More and ballooned over the course of the nineteenth century.

The question then becomes, to what extent did these educational exemplars circulate among the ordinary Methodist lay person and what impact did they have on women’s reading and writing practices? In this Wesley was able to utilize one of his most original (and

controversial) innovations – his network of circulating itinerant preachers. According to the *Large Minutes*, preachers were to “take care that every society be duly supplied with books” (*JWW VIII:319*). Thus the mobile preachers provided the circulation network whereby ordinary Methodists obtained the materials necessary for spiritual improvement. A good example of this is the case of William Mallit (c.1748-1813), a local preacher and class leader in Lowestoft, near Norwich. Mallit apparently took seriously John Wesley’s injunctions about education for he read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and was in possession of a (for the time) rather extensive library. More importantly, he is said to have owned complete editions of John Wesley’s *Works* and the *Christian Library*, all of which he bequeathed to the Methodist society in Lowestoft (*Church, Early Methodist People 12*).

Most importantly for our purposes, however, is the fact that Mallit’s niece was Sarah Mallit (c.1764-1843), one of the first woman preachers of Methodism and the only woman to ever receive an official license to preach from the Methodist Conference.⁴¹ By all accounts Sarah had little formal education. Her family was poor and she made her living as a tailor both before and after her 1793 marriage to Thomas Boyce – also a tailor and local Methodist preacher. Whatever education she had she must have obtained from her uncle’s library when she lived with him and/or from books lent her from John Wesley himself. Sarah and Wesley were frequent correspondents and, in a letter dated August 2, 1788 he wrote “Let me know any time what books you wish to have, and I will order them to be sent to you,” and on December 26, 1788, “I answered your letter long ago, and desired Mr. Whitfield to send my letter with the Magazines which he was sending to Norwich, desiring withal that the next preacher who went to Long Stratton would give it you.” Thus it appears that Wesley was directly involved in supplying Sarah with reading material, much of which (as we have seen) was spiritual biography,

autobiography, or devotion. Sarah most certainly would have read parts of *The Christian Library*, Bunyan, Alleine, and indeed John Wesley's own *Journal*.

Likewise a Methodist lay woman identified only as Mrs. S.N. specifically references her reading as a vital component of her conversion:

At these times many sweet portions of scripture were brought to my mind; especially Jer. xxxi. 9. I found great encouragement also from Bunyan's *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, and from a little book called, *A Guide to Heaven*, and also from Fox's *Time, and end of Time*; particularly from those words, "Assuring faith is attainable: pray for it, and vigorously press after it" (*AM XII: 527-528*).

This reading list could be considered typical of many early Methodists – Samuel Hardy, John Fox, John Bunyan, and Scripture – each provided a guide for evangelical experience and conversion. Furthermore, this reading list indicates that, for many lay Methodists, reading had the effect of sealing experience – of bringing the sensible experience of God home and applying it in their lives. Women's accounts are peppered with references to scripture, hymns, and spiritual autobiography – each of which brought home a particularly poignant truth to the individual. For example Mrs. S.N., who was apparently a voracious reader, references Jonathan Edwards' *Life of David Brainerd* (which was abridged and published by John Wesley in England) at a particularly important point of her own spiritual journey:

I continued seeking the Lord till Nov. 10. 1768, at which time my father was reading an account of an Indian, in the life of D. Brainard, who said, he had "Often tried to give his heart to God, and thought that sometime he should be enabled so to do, and then he should be accepted; but now he saw it was for ever impossible for him to do it, and that he must perish after all that he had done, or could do." I had been striving to make the same bargain with God; and he, in like manner, convinced me of the utter insufficiency of all my endeavours to procure salvation. I was much shocked at first to see myself stript of all, and left naked and helpless in the hands of God; till I remembered Mr. Brainard's mentioning his being stript of all his own righteousness, about two days before he was justified; and then I was exceeding glad, thinking the time of my deliverance was near (*AM XII: 583*).

Soon after, Mrs. S.N. herself received a sense of justification in much the same way that Brainerd describes – thus the reading of an exemplary life had a clear mimetic effect – both informing the means of Mrs. S.N.’s salvation and then providing a model for writing her own conversion narrative.

As these examples illustrate, not only were publications like the journals of Whitefield and Wesley and the *Christian Library* important in their own right, they also provoked further writing and further print in the mode Clifford Siskin has detailed in *The Work of Writing* – turning readers into authors (163-170). Individual converts imitated Wesley’s confessional style and utilized the burgeoning print culture to transmit their experience to a much wider, and much more socially variegated, audience. Drawing upon the “private” diary and letter form, spiritual experience authors oriented their texts towards a specific audience – probing the developing space that was opening up in print. As Habermas writes, “From the beginning, the psychological interest increased in the dual relation to both one’s self and the other: self observation entered a union partly curious, partly sympathetic with the emotional stirrings of the other I” (49).⁴² John Wesley travelled, preached, wrote spiritual letters, and published his spiritual experiences not only or primarily for his own sake, but in order to elicit mimetic spiritual experiences and spiritual reports in a rapidly expanding reading public. In this the use of print as a form of public agency within the Methodist movement mirrored John Wesley’s strong Arminian convictions. Just as Wesley believed that God’s grace was free and could be freely accepted by anyone, so he used the space afforded by print circulation to open up the public expression of experience to anyone – no matter how poor or uneducated.

In this Wesley stands apart, not only from the Calvinist wing of the revival, but also from theories of the public sphere that conceive of it as primarily secular and middle class. In fact I

would argue that it was the discourse structures of the revival embodied by John Wesley's publishing and itinerant ministry that actually elicited the most opposition to his movement. By combining media in the forms of public street preaching, itinerant ministry, manuscript correspondence, and widespread distribution of printed materials, Wesley used media culture to radically alter the religious landscape in Britain (see below). As Michael Warner has argued, we must attempt to understand evangelicalism "not by the doctrinal emphasis which has so far dominated the intellectual history of evangelicalism since almost all of these doctrinal elements could be found almost anywhere, anytime," and instead move toward an approach that examines the "discourse culture of evangelicalism" (Printing and Preaching 31:00). To do so we must examine the discourse of popular evangelicalism more broadly – moving beyond print to the relationship between print and orality in early evangelicalism. As Warner puts it, "In a movement context that mixes printed and preached sermons with pamphlets and newspapers, performance and print were densely laminated together" (Printing and Preaching 42:00). This type of discourse culture reveals the extent to which print, manuscript, and oral culture were still not well differentiated. Habermas has pointed to the important role print played in the development of the public sphere, but what evangelical discourse reveals is that the preached sermon was just as important as the printed sermon in the development of an evangelical public and that the two in fact existed in symbiosis.

In the case of Methodism the confluence between print and orality was inherent in the Methodist media culture. In his published *Journal*, John Wesley not only records his extensive travels, but also details the sermons he preached – many in the open air to thousands of listeners. However, in contrast to his printed sermons which are composed and arranged specifically for publication, in the *Journal* Wesley usually only recounts the Scripture passage he preached on

and the number of people he preached to. As Albert Outler has observed, the oral sermon's purpose was proclamation and invitation, while the printed sermon's were for nurture and reflection (*Bicentennial Edition* 24). These mostly *ex tempore* public sermons were shaped by his context and his public audience, and the account of them in the printed journal thus highlights the unbounded nature of his audience and his text. Though educated at Oxford in all the classical forms of public address, John Wesley nevertheless developed and encouraged a preaching style that was based on simplicity of speech and addressing the *heart* of the listener, not just the mind. In the preface to his 1746 volume of collected *Sermons*, for example, he lays out his guiding principles for sermon preaching and writing:

I now write (as I generally speak) *ad populum* – to the bulk of mankind – to those who neither relish nor understand the art of speaking, but who notwithstanding competent judges of those truths which are necessary to present and future happiness... I design plain truth for plain people... I labour to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life... (JWW V:i).

In choosing to use the language of “common life,” Wesley both anticipates the language of Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and lays out a pattern for his itinerant preachers – most of whom had no formal education. In fact in 1747 he formalized his advice for preachers in the *Minutes* of the conference, writing that preachers should “Choose the plainest texts you can.

Take care not to ramble; but keep to your text, and; make out what you take in hand.

Be sparing in allegorizing or spiritualizing. Take care of anything awkward or affected, either in your gesture, phrase, or pronunciation” (JWW VIII:317) And in 1749 Wesley published a pamphlet for his preachers titled *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* instructing them in the proper use of language and cadence. In reality this was likely an adaptation of a 1657 French elocution manual by Michel Le Faucher, but Wesley abridged it to highlight the most important points for his preachers (Tolar Burton 115). Clearly Wesley understood the power of

oral public discourse even in an era when print was quickly becoming king. In this he reflects an awareness that the power to address the listeners directly, to the heart, in common language carried with it tremendous power to trouble public space regardless of content. Nevertheless, the fact that an account of many of Wesley's sermon made it into the *Journal* and that some version of them were eventually printed illustrates the closely intertwined nature of Methodist public space.

It was the unbounded nature of open air Methodist itinerant preaching that was perceived as the greatest threat to the established social norms. Anglican parish preaching was directed in mostly set language (*The Book of Common Prayer* and the *Homilies*) to a very specific and set group of people within a sanctioned public space by an ordained priest – itinerant Methodist preachers, on the other hand, openly operated outside of this established structure. Mostly unordained and uneducated, they moved from town to town preaching *ex tempore* in the open air or unsanctioned chapels. Many of their sermons were never printed, but the storm of controversy they stirred up (both for and against) clearly made its way into print and informed the national conversation on the Revival. Thus it was this “unauthorized” entrance into the public space of preaching – the claim to be able to address an unbounded audience – that caused much of the animosity towards Methodism. In other words, to paraphrase Michael Warner, it was the discourse *not* the doctrine of the revival that was at issue.

Recognizing the power of these discourse structures, John Wesley consciously used the rapidly developing media culture of the eighteenth century to rapidly spread his message. Incidents like Wednesbury quickly became legend and, despite the opposition, more people would show up to see Wesley or Whitefield speak at their next stop. Both men regularly report crowds of as high as 20,000 and, even given the inevitable exaggeration, there can be no doubt

that they were media sensations by any measure. More than that, though, this example illustrates how closely intertwined orality, manuscript, and print were in early Methodism. Wesley's account of the Wednesbury incident in his *Journal* bears clear evidence of the use of oral culture (public preaching and popular relations of the incident), manuscript production (when the mob comes to the house Wesley is staying at he is engaged in his correspondence), and print production (the publication of the account in his *Journal*). Thus early evangelical media culture worked to form a type of feedback loop within which the genres of public oral sermon and printed discourse were constantly in conversation. And it was this feedback loop of orality and print that threatened to break down the established public boundaries between private spirituality and public life.

Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and a Women's Counterpublic

Nowhere is this more apparent than in women's participation in the Methodist movement. From the beginning, one of the major criticisms of Methodism was that it lured impressionable young women away from their communities and families. If, as I have argued here, the main objection to the revival was rooted in discourse and not doctrine then this begs the question: what was it about the discourse of the revival that so appealed to women and, more importantly, what was it about their participation in these discourse structures that was so threatening to the status quo? Part of the reason for this very well may be that women's involvement in Methodism *was* threatening to public space in England in some important ways. Especially in the case of the networks of women preachers and writers to which women like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher belonged, the sociable practices of these groups operated as a type of counterpublic to both mainstream British culture and (after Wesley's death) the Methodist hierarchy itself.

Especially after Wesley's death in 1791, women's roles within Methodism were increasingly proscribed and thus the networks that sprung up around Bosanquet Fletcher, Sarah Mallit, and the Primitive Methodists (a breakaway group) came to define themselves as much against the public practices of the Methodist hierarchy as the culture at large. In this way, consciously or unconsciously, many women's networks defined themselves against the dominant forms of discourse, while at the same time imitating and sometimes still participating in them. As Michael Warner defines counterpublics:

Some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining to the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status (*Publics* 56).

By turning to the activities of Bosanquet Fletcher's sociable network we will be able to further explore how it operated as a counterpublic and then how this public space turned them into one of the most radical groups of women travelling, preaching, and writing during the eighteenth century. By examining how their bonds of sociability were formed within this discourse we will be able to better understand just how threatening that discourse was to mainstream culture.

In this light, one of the most distinctive elements of early evangelical spirituality was that it rarely operated in a vacuum. Though the individual experience with God was a crucial element of evangelicalism, this personal experience was almost always produced within and shared with a larger community of believers. Especially in the case of women, single sex societies, meetings, and friendships were key locations for producing and monitoring spiritual experience. Within these single sex spaces women were free to share their thoughts, sins, triumphs, and deeply felt spiritual experiences openly – it was a space within which embodied spiritual experience was

often performed and vicariously experienced by other members of the evangelical community – prompting mimetic experiences. In this the single sex communities of early evangelicalism operated to create a sort of sociable space within which deep friendships and bonds of love were formed as individual women opened themselves to each other. As a result the boundaries of class and social standing were elided, creating a spiritual space of intimacy. This space then provided the impetus and means for women to act together in the public sphere.

In this women developed a complex internal subjectivity nurtured by a collective religious identity that was founded on evangelical forms of media. As Hindmarsh argues, spiritual “narratives [by women] bear witness to the ways in which the convert felt connected through Methodism to a shared experience with others and to larger, unitary patterns of belief and practice. If the converts of the early Evangelical Revival appear as individualists of a sort, they were also communitarians of a sort” (150). Methodist women used these community bonds to take the first steps into public space first through participation in oral culture in the form of Methodist class and band meetings, then through participation in groups of women who were active in their community, travelling, preaching, and corresponding with each other, and finally through participation in print. In this way Methodist women were able to, in large part, participate in the mediation of their own experience. Bosanquet operated largely on her own – using her modest inheritance to fund her charitable work and asserting her right to preach publically. Likewise single sex class meetings operated outside of the direct control of the Methodist hierarchy. Nevertheless, as I will explore at more length in Chapters Four and Five, unless a woman had independent means and connections, access to the public sphere afforded by print was still largely controlled by men within the Methodist hierarchy. Thus the experience of

Methodist women is particularly instructive in that it provides a case study in how evangelical discourse structures were formed, maintained, and challenged over the course of the century.

Networks of Women: The Methodist Class Meeting and Oral Culture

One of the distinctive innovations John Wesley introduced early on to Methodism was a system of single sex classes and bands that worked to hold members accountable, encourage spiritual growth, and operate as community action organizations. This idea originated in Bristol where, in 1742, the Methodist society divided itself into small groups of twelve in order to financially support the growing society and provide accountability for one another. The idea spread and Wesley recounts that he “called together all the Leaders of the classes... and desired, that each would make a particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly” (*JWW VIII:252-253*). The only requirement for becoming part of a class was a “desire to flee the wrath to come,” and each member was examined quarterly to find out whether they were growing in faith – if so they were issued with a “class ticket” for the next quarter.

The single sex bands and select bands developed later on to accommodate those who were advancing further in the faith and had a higher standard of accountability. The rules of these bands, as Wesley described them, included an intention:

- (1.) To meet once a week, at the least.
- (2.) To come punctually at the hour appointed.
- (3.) To begin with singing or prayer.
- (4.) To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our soul, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
- (5.) To desire some person among us (thence called a Leader) to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations. (*JWW VIII: 272*)

It was in this social space that many men and women came to experience God in new ways. Especially for women these classes and bands provided an opportunity for community and an intellectual outlet that was unavailable to them elsewhere. As Phyllis Mack has pointed out

Methodist women, “lived and worked in a relatively stable collective environment, where regular class and band meetings encouraged mutual discussion and mutual confession” (135). These class meetings were the foundations for transformative relationships between women that would come to structure both their experience and action. It should come as no surprise, then, that some of the most intense spiritual experiences women describe occurred in these communal spaces.

Sarah Ryan, for example, was a member of the female preacher Sarah Crosby’s class in London and achieved some of her greatest spiritual breakthroughs within this space:

As I kneeled down to prayer, I felt myself strongly affected; and after we had prayed a short time, I said, “Lord, if thou hast this blessing to bestow on *me*, let some one mention me in prayer.” Presently S[arah] C[rosby] broke out, “Lord, thou hast plucked her as a brand out of the burning, and thy light does now shine round her; what she hath gained this night, let her never lose, till she sees thy face in righteousness: and she never *shall lose it*.” I answered in my heart, “I never shall more;” feeling my soul greatly confirmed, and being filled with light and love (*AM II:307*).

Crucial to the success of these single sex groups was the way each member was accountable to the other and the way in which leader, in this case Sarah Crosby, acted as a spiritual guide and director for those under her care. Thus the classes and bands became a place within which women could come and share themselves with other like-minded women, gain spiritual guidance, learn the conventions of the Methodist community, and see other women in positions of religious and intellectual authority. In the passage quoted above we clearly see the influence of one woman (Sarah Crosby) in forming the spirituality of another – in the close confines of the group meeting the bodily actions of Methodist spirituality almost pulse through the air, encouraging mimetic expressions of awakening among its members.

This type of performance of spiritual embodiment within a single-sex public space became the impetus for the development of networked women’s groups that often came together to accomplish a public purpose. In this way these classes and bands operated in many ways like a

female counterpublic within the larger evangelical public sphere. These meetings became a kind of clearinghouse for ideas and experience where Methodist women learned how to perform their spirituality in public – once again blurring the lines between private experience and public expression. As Michael Warner points out, these types of counterpublic spaces are often perceived as dangerous or subversive in that their discourse threatens the dominant narrative of society which clearly demarcates public and private. However within this space – consciously or unconsciously – women work to translate embodied experience into something that is visceral and actionable:

In a counterpublic setting, such display [of private feeling] often has the aim of transformation. Styles of embodiment are learned and cultivated, and the affects of shame and disgust that surround them can be tested, in some cases revalued. Visceral private meaning is not easy to alter by oneself, by a free act of will. It can only be altered through exchanges that go beyond self-expression to the making of a collective scene of disclosure. The result, in counterpublics, is that the visceral intensity of gender, of sexuality, or of corporeal style in general no longer needs to be understood as private. Publicness itself as a visceral resonance (62-63).

This transformation of the private into the public in part accounts for much of the opposition to Methodism during its early years. As I have argued before, it was not really the doctrine of the revival that was at stake in the public's sometimes violent reaction to the movement, but the way in which groups of Methodists disturbed and altered local discourse patterns.

Nowhere is this tension between public and counterpublic clearer than in the especially brutal portrayal of female Methodists in popular culture and the way in which young Methodist women were treated by their families and communities. It is empirically the case that more women were drawn to Methodism than men, especially in its early years and, in the eyes of the public, this was undoubtedly both dangerous and subversive. Indeed, as late as 1809 Leigh Hunt sums up the public sentiment on the attraction of Methodism to women, writing, “We may see

directly what influence the body has upon this kind of devotion [Methodism], if we examine the temperament of its professors. The female sex, for instance, are acknowledged to possess the greater bodily sensibility, and it is the women who chiefly indulge in these love-sick visions of heaven” (55). This supposed susceptibility to emotion and inherent “sensibility” were blamed for Methodism’s allure and charged with leading young women astray. Furthermore, women who participated in the movement and engaged in what we have already seen were often overtly erotic expressions of spirituality within confined single sex spaces were accused of seeking to fulfill a deranged sexuality. Little wonder, then, that many families and friends were concerned about their daughters’ participation in Methodism.

The stereotype of Methodist women as emotional, prone to sensibility, and even sexually voracious persisted in anti-Methodist literature proliferated during the period. Novels by Smollet (*Humphry Clinker*) and Fielding (*Joseph Andrews*) lampooned Methodists as deranged enthusiasts and portrayed Methodist women in particular as emotionally/sexually unstable and especially prone to being led astray by unscrupulous Methodist preachers. Anti-Methodist pamphlets and cheap print circulated widely – often accusing the Methodists of being secretly Catholic. Others, like *The Story of the Methodist-lady; or, The Injur’d Husband’s Revenge: A True History*, cast Methodist women as sexually manipulative, using their supposed faith to embarrass and cuckold their husbands.⁴³

A similar motif is carried through in William Hogarth’s 1762 print, *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism*, which parodies the often unbridled expressions of “enthusiasm” that characterized the early revival – especially its focus on the language of the heart and the overwhelming “love” of God:



In the print a preacher who looks suspiciously like Wesley stands behind a pulpit, a text hangs down that reads, “Only Love to us be givn Lord we ask no other Heavn, Hymn by G. Whitefield.” Above is a man who looks like a Catholic priest holding marionettes of a devil and a witch. To the right of this figure is what appears to be a musical that is labeled “W—d’s [Whitefield’s] Scale of Vociferation” and which runs from “Nat’ Tone” to “Bull Roar”. Directly below it is a thermometer that rests on a collection of Wesley’s *Sermons*. The thermometer moves from madness and suicide at the bottom through to low spirits, lukewarm, lust, madness, and raving – apparently symbolizing a scale of Methodist devotion. At the top of the thermometer is a picture of what appears to be a bed beside a female figure shaped like a vagina. The implication is clear – that the enthusiastic nature of Methodist public display plays on the emotions and encourage rampant sexuality – especially among women.

The rest of the print bears this out. To the left of the thermometer is a couple apparently in an erotic embrace, the woman grasping another of the vaginal, virgin like figures. The audience appears to be primarily made up of women, all in various states of ecstatic religious expression – crying out, falling down, clapping, exclaiming – all of which did really happen at public revival meetings early in the movement. On the floor an apparently drunken man is vomiting next to a basket that contains a copy of Whitefield's journal. Next to him is a woman who appears to either be in convulsions or childbirth. The implications here are clear – not only were convulsive fits common at early Methodist meetings but one of the accusations leveled against Wesley and his itinerants was that they used their influence over women for illicit sexual ends. The line below the engraving emphasizes Hogarth's underriding concern with the power of enthusiasm by quoting 1 John 4:1, "Believe not every Spirit; but try the Spirits whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World."

In all of this Hogarth cleverly blurs the lines between private and public by having many of the figures performing intensely private acts – childbirth, sex – in a very public space. Furthermore, by casting this public meeting in what appears to be an Anglican church and not outdoors, he further emphasizes the way in which many people saw Methodism as troubling the waters of established religion. In sending his itinerants to preach in parishes that were not their own, Wesley explicitly challenged the parish system that had been set up by the Church of England. Above all this print emphasizes the extent to which women, women's emotions, and women's bodies were tied up in the public discourse and controversy about Methodism. It was the very publicity of Methodist preaching that was seen as the greatest threat to women and society.

What accounts for these violent reactions? Certainly it could not be expected that a poor farmer or journeyman tradesman would care much about the doctrine of justification by faith. Instead families and communities were more concerned with how Methodist discourse encouraged women to find community and a public outside of a private domestic space. Indeed many of these women found their own type of family within Methodism, eschewing marriage in favor of single sex communities of like minded individuals. For example according to Clive Field during “the Norwich riot of 1752 one of the complaints against James Wheatley [a Methodist preacher] was that ‘Many journeymen who had worked hard till noon, going home, found their wives gone out to the *dear hearers*, and their children neglected and no dinner for them, and that by such avocations many mouths had come upon the parish’” (157). Once again we see the concern with wives and mothers gathering outside the home, in public, to engage in religious expression. If, as Warner argues, this blurring of the lines between private and public within a counterpublic like a women’s class meeting represented a threat to the dominant discourse, then it should come as no surprise that Methodist women were singled out for special scorn by the public at large. By suggesting that internal spiritual experience licensed them to act in an unbounded public way, these women were in essence refusing to subscribe to local and social norms – redefining what it meant to be a woman within the community. This move is especially apparent in how Methodist women like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher translated their experience into a call to travel and preach in public in the company of other like-minded women. Thus these women gained a sense of public agency through their call to be God’s agent in the world.

Bonds of Affection: Female Preaching Partnerships

For Methodist women the bonds of female friendship formed within the class and band structures often extended beyond the class meeting. Especially among the early female preachers of Methodism, female companionships were vital to creating and sustaining partnerships within a social space traditionally dominated by men. Like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, the majority of the early female leaders in Methodism were single, widowed, abandoned, or married very late in life. Few had children and all of them looked upon it as their primary vocation to serve God as preachers and teachers of the gospel.⁴⁴ However it was often dangerous for single women to travel and preach alone in England and thus they formed preaching partnerships that allowed them to move around in relative safety. Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and Mary Tooth are perhaps the most prominent of these preaching partnerships, but others included Sarah Crosby and Ann Tripp and Sarah Mallit and Martha Grigson – all members (at one time or another) of Bosanquet’s network. These women not only travelled and preached together on a semi-regular circuit, but they also often, lived together, slept together, and shared all their worldly resources with each other. In many ways the homosocial space they opened up was part of what licensed these women to preach and act in public for, though women’s preaching was highly controversial, these friendships provided the mutual encouragement to continue despite public perception. In many ways, then, it was the circulation of these pairs of women preachers and their oral discourse, as much as their writing, that disturbed public space.

Though officially John Wesley endorsed the Anglican prohibition on women’s preaching, in practice he allowed it as long as the woman exhibited an “extraordinary call.” As early as 1761 Sarah Crosby wrote to John Wesley to ask his advice about the propriety of a woman preaching publically as she had started to testify before mixed-sex congregations. He responded in a letter dated Feb. 14:

I think you have not gone too far. You could not well do less. I apprehend all you can do more is, when you meet again, to tell them simply, ‘You lay me under a great difficulty. The Methodists do not allow of women preachers; neither do I take upon me any such character. But I will just nakedly tell you what is in my heart.’... I do not see that you have broken any law. Go on calmly and steadily. If you have time, you may read to them the Notes on any chapter before you speak a few words, or one of the most awakening sermons, as other women have done long ago. (*JWW XII:353*)

Though women’s preaching remained rare during the early years of the revival, a group of women – largely centered on Crosby, Ryan, and Bosanquet – used this unofficial approval as a license to travel and preach with tremendous effect. By 1771 the issue had apparently come up again because Bosanquet sent a detailed letter to Wesley outlining the scriptural justifications for women’s preaching and systematically refuting every argument against it. Likewise Crosby petitioned Wesley for clearer guidance on women’s preaching and on June 13 received this response:

MY DEAR SISTER,--I think the strength of the cause rests there--on your having an extraordinary call. So I am persuaded has every one of our lay preachers; otherwise I could not countenance his preaching at all. It is plain to me that the whole work of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of His providence. Therefore I do not wonder if several things occur therein which do not fall under the ordinary rules of discipline. St. Paul's ordinary rule was, 'I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation.' Yet in extraordinary cases he made a few exceptions; at Corinth in particular. (*JWW XII:356*)

This “extraordinary call” became the basis upon which Wesley allowed limited women’s preaching. Ever the empiricist, in the end Wesley was convinced by the real results of women’s preaching in the world – as it was largely successful he was willing to accept it under particular circumstances. As I will explore at length in Chapter Six, this changed after John Wesley’s death

in 1791. Wesley's position on women's preaching had never been terribly popular with the male Methodist leadership and in 1803 the Conference issued a ban on women's preaching. As Jennifer Lloyd and others have demonstrated, this ban was often ignored, but it indicates the extent to which official toleration for women's preaching was altered by Wesley's death and also the type of opposition these women could face within their own movement.

In effect, though not officially appointed to circuits like the male itinerants, women like Fletcher and Tooth or Grigson and Mallit acted as itinerant preachers in much the same way. We have already seen how Bosanquet Fletcher formed a network in the north of England and then in Madely. Similarly, Grigson and Mallit effectively served as itinerants in the area surrounding Norwich in the east. These preaching activities thus went far beyond local preaching to single-sex groups or children and extended to very public meetings and mixed-sex crowds. Bosanquet Fletcher's diary, for example, records multiple well attended speaking engagements where her preaching was advertised in advance along with the passage of scripture she would be speaking on. These women's situation was far more tenuous than their male counterparts, however, in that they received no compensation from the Methodist Conference for their efforts and had to rely on the charity of the Methodist communities they travelled to. In this Bosanquet was influential in that she was able to use her sizable inheritance to support a network of women preachers. Likewise Martha Grigson used the inheritance she received upon the death of her husband to fund her and Mallit's preaching activities.

As we have already seen, it was also potentially dangerous to preach publically as a Methodist and thus these women opened themselves up to attack, both from non-evangelicals and Methodist opposed to women's preaching – thus the support of a women's preaching community and the homosocial bonds created within them were crucial to their success.

Bosanquet's close spiritual relationship with Ryan is a useful example of this type of single-sex companionship. "The more I conversed with Mrs. Ryan," Bosanquet writes shortly after their first meeting, "the more I discovered of the glory of God breaking forth from within, and felt a strong attraction to consider her as the friend of my soul. I told her the past sins, follies, and mercies of my life, and received a similar account from her" (29-30). The two women lived together for the rest of Ryan's life, sharing a bed, and going on to open an orphanage in Leytonstone and then at Cross Hall in Yorkshire. In all of this the two women operated side by side, sharing everything with each other and ministering as a team. As Bosanquet wrote shortly before Ryan's death, "above all other temporal goods, I saw the blessing of my friend Ryan. It would have been impossible for me to have acted this part alone; I had neither grace nor ability for it; but the Lord gave her to me as a mother" (61). Here the language Bosanquet uses is that of the relationship between mother and daughter, and it is clear that there is a mutual reliance upon each other as the basis for ministry. Though Bosanquet would go on to marry John Fletcher, she spent the majority of her life partnered with another woman, Mary Tooth, who moved into the vicarage after John Fletcher's death in 1785. The vicarage at Madely then became a sort of training ground where other female preaching partnerships found affirmation, training, and support. Sarah Mallit and Martha Grigson record several visits to Madely and both kept up an extensive correspondence with Fletcher and Tooth.

Mallit herself was deeply influenced by the work of Fletcher and Tooth. As I detailed in the first chapter, she got her start preaching in trances, first resisting the call to preach that followed her spiritual experience, but eventually giving in. She went on to become the first woman to receive an official license to preach from the Methodist Conference and John Wesley and continued to travel and preach until her death in 1843 – long after the official Methodist ban

on women's preaching took effect in 1803. In fact Mallit's name appears on the circuit register for the area surrounding Norwich as late as 1830 indicating that local Methodist leaders often ignored official policy (East 97). Thus the transformation she experienced at conversion propelled her, not further inward, but into a life of public ministry and action.

Key to Mallit's success was her relationship with Martha Grigson. Both widowed, Mallit and Grigson formed a type of spiritual marriage of mutual support and encouragement that lasted for over thirty years. In 1833, for example, Mallit (thinking she was dying) wrote:

My dear friend Mrs Grigson and I shall soon be parted in body but I hope never in affection. It will be a painful change to me, but I see the hand of the Lord is in all this. His will be done – I will submit – the Lord will be very near to us both. I could not leave the little flock – may the Lord help me to feed his lambs... we returned from Lynn last evening – the devils kingdom is falling there – and Christ's is rising (qtd in East 112).

Mallit would in fact live another ten years, but this letter is instructive in that it reveals how she conceived of the connection between female companionship and preaching. Like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and Sarah Ryan, Sarah Mallit and Martha Grigson see their bonds of affection tied to their success or failure as public preachers. In travelling and speaking together regularly the two women are able to find support and guidance in each other's company – a connection that allows them to act far beyond the bounds traditionally laid out for religious women.

These spiritual marriages were relatively common among early Methodist women. As I noted in the previous chapter, many evangelical women who actively engaged in public ministry eschewed traditional marriage. Many were single by choice, widowed after brief marriages, or only married late in life. In 1764 Bosanquet even wrote an open letter titled *Jesus Altogether Lovely* to the single women of Methodism arguing that their primary allegiance should be to Christ and that, "To *you*, who are able to receive this saying, I will speak the inmost sentiments

of my heart. Whatever others are, *you* are called to the glorious privileges of a single life” (4-5). Though not considered socially acceptable, this choice gave these women unprecedented autonomy over their own lives and work. If, like Bosanquet, they were lucky enough to have independent means this opened up even further avenues for ministry; if, like Sarah Ryan they did not, the support of someone like Bosanquet was crucial to allowing her to minister publically. These relationships also opened up a type of intimacy between these women that, though not erotic, was very intense. These friendships were obviously of primary importance to the women involved and point to the way in which single-sex friendships were structured differently within the revival – affording a space for intimate sharing of the self with others and bonds of intimacy that licensed action together in the public sphere.

These preaching partnerships were nurtured by larger communities of women, like the one around Mary Bosanquet Fletcher. Though not all of the women in these communities preached or were single, it was within this communal space that many women found the impetus to act publically in large and small ways. Though women’s sermons (even Bosanquet’s) were rarely published and most manuscripts have not survived, nevertheless we have ample evidence that women did travel and preach together well into the nineteenth century. This type of circulation of preachers in defined geographical locations has all the features of a developed type of publicity. Building on the innovative itinerant preacher system developed by John Wesley, these female preachers took it upon themselves to circulate the gospel by whatever means necessary. The fact that their circulation took the form of oral discourse, not print, further illustrates the extent to which orality and print were still not as clearly demarcated as we often think and also the extent to which the discourses women most commonly participated in have been written out of mainstream history. In the defined context of evangelicalism it was often the

oral and local discourses that were the most influential in forming and maintaining networks of women who spoke and acted in public.

Methodist Women, Circulation, and Print

Though a vibrant oral culture in the form of class meetings and itinerant preaching was crucial to the formation of the Methodist movement it was ultimately through the regular circulation of manuscript and print that it gained national and international prominence. John Wesley early realized the power of print and, over the course of his life, developed a print empire that had a profound influence in British life and culture. The primary means through which he did this was by developing a network of correspondents and itinerant lay preachers who could be counted on to circulate letters, sermons, and works of practical piety among the movements members. Thus the circulation of the preachers had the effect not only of spreading the evangelical message through oral culture, but also manuscript and print culture which, in the early years of Methodism were still closely linked. A letter that began as an address to a specific individual could quickly become circulated among a wider network within a city and locality, and finally published as a standalone address, in a collection of letters, or in Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*. In developing this complex distribution network Wesley was thus able to mold the hearts and minds of a broader section of the population – using preaching, manuscript, and print together to develop a genuine evangelical public sphere of ideas and action.

In this we must remember that, as Michael Warner points out, “In a movement context that mixes printed and preached sermons with pamphlets and newspapers, performance and print were densely laminated together” (Printing and Preaching 42:00). The oral culture of preaching, classes, and bands was never very far removed from the print productions that followed. Furthermore, the gap between manuscript and print culture was not nearly as great as it is today

(Hindmarsh 98). Because of this, many women class members were deeply involved in compiling, editing, and then circulating spiritual letters and accounts of spiritual experience that eventually made their way to print. Sarah Crosby, for example, helped the largely uneducated Sarah Ryan prepare her conversion narrative in 1760 during a time when Ryan's character was under attack from some Methodists due to her multiple marriages. This narrative circulated first in manuscript and was sent to John Wesley in letter form. Letters like this would often be used as examples by Wesley and read out loud on public "letter days," occasions when particularly encouraging or exemplary letters would be read aloud in the Methodist meeting. Wesley also saved these letters and many of them (including Ryan's account) often made their way into print when Wesley began publishing the *Arminian Magazine* in 1778.

Likewise women often circulated manuscript letters among themselves as examples of piety and experience. Sarah Crosby, for example, writes that in the space of one year she wrote 116 letters of spiritual advice to men and women who had written to her for help. These were generally very substantial theological letters, not simply friendly correspondence. Mary Bosanquet Fletcher was also a prolific letter writer, distributing letters like *Jesus Altogether Lovely* among her vast network of correspondents that were then in turn re-circulated by the recipients in manuscript and then printed as standalone letters or in a collection.⁴⁵ Most prominent among these letters was one she sent to John Wesley in 1771 arguing for women's preaching. Moving through each objection to women's preaching point by point, Bosanquet convincingly refutes each objection through a combination of empirical logic and astute Biblical interpretation. For example in responding to the objection that Paul requires that "the women learn in silence" (2 Tim. 2:12), Bosanquet responds that "I understand the text to mean no more than that a woman shall not take authority over her husband, but be in subjection, neither shall

she teach at all by usurping authority... but I do not apprehend it mean she shall not entreat sinners to come to Jesus” (qtd. in Taft 22).⁴⁶ Likewise she later responds to the objection “But all these were extraordinary calls; [referring to women who spoke in scripture] surely you will not say, yours is an extraordinary call?” by asserting, “If I did not believe so, I would not act in an extraordinary manner” (qtd. in Taft 23). Ultimately her letter was so effective that it was influential in changing Wesley’s mind about the propriety of women preaching, though in practice he had tacitly allowed it for years. This letter, though originally addressed to Wesley, quickly became part of the public domain, circulated and recirculated to support the propriety of women’s preaching.⁴⁷ Thus what often began as a private address to an individual quickly, through rapid re-circulation, became a public address to a wider audience of interested individuals. Once again the lines between private and public are easily blurred in a movement that relied on the temporality of circulation to spread its evangelistic message.

Jane Cooper’s letters are another excellent example of this practice. Cooper (1738-1762) was a frequent correspondent of John Wesley and an individual he often held up as an example of Christian perfection. She not only wrote letters to John Wesley, but also to many lay Methodist women – offering spiritual advice and testifying to her experience of perfection. These letters, along portions of Cooper’s diary, circulated first in manuscript, as is evidenced by the fact that the young Sarah Crosby copied portions of Cooper’s manuscript writing into her own letterbook (Chilcote 87). Then in 1764 John Wesley published selected *Letters Wrote by Jane Cooper*, which opened with an account of Cooper’s life (including selections from her diary describing her own conversion) and then proceeded to reproduce selections from Cooper’s correspondence with a large network of Methodist women. Finally, after the founding of the

Arminian Magazine Wesley reproduced many of Cooper's letters once again in print and, in 1782, he included a four page account of her spiritual experience.

Cooper's published *Letters* then reached an even wider audience in print – operating as a model and example for an entirely new generation of Methodist women. Mrs. S.N., in her *Arminian Magazine* conversion narrative, specifically references Cooper's letters as an important turning point in her quest for Christian perfection:

The last time I received a sense of his renewing love, was October 14, 1769, while I was reading these words in one of J. Cooper's Letters, "One thing is needful for you in your present situation, even to cast yourself upon God, just as you are:" on which I was enabled to venture my soul upon Jesus; and I felt somewhat of "That prostrate awe which dares not move, before the great Three One!" From that time my heart daily owned and rejoiced in the kingly power of the Lord Jesus, and my delight was to sit at his feet, and to love and obey him (*AM XII*: 585).

The reference is to Cooper's May 6, 1762 letter (pg. 23) to an unidentified Mrs. J.C.M., indicating that Mrs. S.N. was not only reading Cooper's letters as a guide to spiritual life and experience, but also in part modeling her own published account on Cooper's experience as it is elaborated in the letters and the diary extract that open the publication. Thus here we have clear evidence that communities of women were hearing, circulating, reading, and writing in community, and that they not only took the great saints as examples of Christian piety, but also strove to imitate *each other's* experiences and writing. In this way manuscript and print circulation expanded the counterpublic of the class and band meeting beyond those who could physically meet together. Thus spiritual bonds could be formed in wide-ranging virtual communities of women.

That said, women's access to print was in many ways still controlled by men, institutions, and money. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, many women had their spiritual autobiographies published in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*, but they were all carefully

edited and arranged by him. This situation became even more extreme after Wesley's death when the opponents of women's teaching and preaching in public came to dominate the Methodist leadership. Even someone as notable as Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, who died in 1816, never had any of her sermons or diaries published during her lifetime. A posthumous autobiography appeared, edited by Henry Moore, but even this is greatly abridged. There were exceptions to this rule, as I will examine in Chapter Five, but these exceptions were mainly predicated on access to money and the means of print. Regardless, what becomes clear is that evangelical women were very much a part of a developing evangelical public sphere in Britain – using the linked mediums of orality, manuscript, and print to subversively blur the lines between public and private in ways that were threatening to both the Methodist hierarchy and the public at large.

Women's Counterpublics, Romantic Sociability, and Secularization

As we have seen, the networks of sociability formed by Methodist women helped them bridge the divide between private spiritual experience and public speech, action, writing, and publishing. Furthermore it was by participating in the discourse of the revival that women were both emboldened to enter the public sphere and at the same time made an object of ridicule and satire. The model of these closely linked female networks of sociability would in turn have a powerful effect on the next generation of social reformers, politicians, and artists – as is most clearly evidenced by the work of Hannah More and her circle. Hannah More's work as a poet, social reformer, and member of both the bluestockings and Clapham Sect will be examined at length in Chapter Five but, clearly influenced by evangelical experience and sociability, she consciously used networks of women *and* men to see her work (both artistic and social) into completion.

Likewise the models of evangelical and female sociability that came to inform the revival have some clear parallels in what Russell and Tuite have termed “romantic sociability.” Moving away from a largely masculinized public sphere, sociable groups of artists, poets, and radical reformers grew up around figures like Joseph Johnson, William Godwin, Mary Wollestonecraft, and Daniel Isaac Eaton during the 1790’s. These networks would come to have profound impacts on major romantic figures like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and John Thelwall. Most famously, the sociable circle formed by these three men and Dorothy Wordsworth during the summer of 1797 at Alfoxton House in Somerset would come to symbolize the creative fountainhead of the romantic movement. In fact, much recent work has focused on how this network has been mischaracterized as a collection of individual geniuses working in solitude instead of the collaborative effort of a community.

These critical reassessments in many ways run parallel to each other in that both allow us to more broad examine the role of women and sociability in the formation of the major literary and cultural movements of the eighteenth century. These lines of congruence thus work to further break down the tenuous divide between enthusiasm and enlightenment. Evangelicalism was not so much a reaction to Enlightenment, secularism, or liberal radicalism as it was intimately bound up with the discourses that made these things possible. Likewise, the similarities between the representations of Methodists and radicals like John Thelwall in satiric prints also further calls into question the assumption that Methodism operated primarily as a cultural category against which the modern, rational, and secular British self defined itself. Instead, the discourse structures of public preaching and print operated to open up a public space within which secularization, liberalism, and modernity were possible. As Misty Anderson has recently argued:

“The people called Methodists” became part of the conversation about modern British identity, both as a response to perceived secularization but also as part of a complex modern experience of spirituality that unfolded through the psychological language of inwardness, sensation, and self-transformation and that cut across private and public domains of experience (25).

In other words, it was through evangelical public practices that an idea of the “secular” was made conceivable in the first place.

Such a perspective also calls into question the problematic secularization narratives that have dominated eighteenth century and romantic studies. At the end of the eighteenth century, so the narrative goes, the enthusiastic babbling of the religious fanatics was inevitably aestheticized (in high romantic poetry and art), politicized, and secularized (in radical reformism). According to this narrative, then, the politics of Thelwall and the poetry of Wordsworth are part and parcel of the same linear un-halting progression away from an “unreasonable” religious past – a complete break with its enthusiastic other. Key to this narrative is the privatization and aestheticization of religion as it becomes further abstracted from public expressions of enthusiasm. By aestheticizing inspiration in the form of poetry, so the argument goes, poets like Wordsworth were able to capture and control the power of enthusiasm without having it completely overwhelm their sense of self.

Instead what the discursive construction of enthusiasm and Enlightenment I have outlined above reveals is that in many ways the two worked symbiotically throughout the century to create the discourse conditions necessary for secularization itself. If nothing else the activities of Methodist women illustrate that, instead of the secular being something that is defined by a break with a mystical past, it is instead bound up in the dual orientation between inner and outer – self and community. As Anderson puts it, “Methodism unfolded in the midst of the age of reason, which, because it began to imagine secularism as a viable worldview, gave birth to religion in the

modern sense of the word” (19). Thus, by in many ways redefining the boundaries of the self in the way they opened themselves to experience and then public action, Methodist women made possible a discourse within which the questions of a secular self could be articulated in the first place. By examining more closely the types of public discourse that evangelical women participated in we can better understand how the evangelical public sphere came to shape the broader conversation about religious belief and experience in eighteenth century British culture.

CHAPTER 4: “EXCUSE WHAT DIFFICIENCIES YOU WILL FIND”: METHODIST WOMEN AND THE RELIGIOUS SUBJECT IN JOHN WESLEY’S *ARMINIAN MAGAZINE*

Tucked away among the pages of the August 1791 edition of John Wesley’s popular *Arminian Magazine*, vying for space with Wesley’s abridgement of Locke and stories of the heroes of the Christian faith, was a rather strange account written by a woman only identified as Mrs. Planche. Mrs. Planche was not a great figure of Methodism; in all likelihood few people knew her name. Yet, writing from a relatively remote corner of Scotland, this obscure widow laid her soul bare to the vast Methodist readership of the *Magazine*, telling of the freedom she found in Methodism: “He came into my soul with such a display of his grace and love, as I never knew before,” she writes, “All my bands were loosed, and my spirit was set perfectly free. I felt an entire deliverance from all the remains of sin in my nature; and my precious Jesus took full possession of my heart” (XIV:42).

For evangelicals, religious experience was not something to be kept to oneself – it had to be shared with the wider evangelical community. It was for this reason that John Wesley constantly solicited and collected religious experience accounts from Methodists and published them in his *Arminian Magazine* beginning in 1778. For Wesley it was not enough to simply claim conversion. True faith was evidenced in how Christian love was enacted in the world – it was to be judged in terms of its fruit. Drawing on the evangelical conversion narrative tradition dating back at least to Bunyan, women use erotic and embodied language to describe the inner transformation of heart and mind that occurs at conversion. According to these early Methodist women, it is this intense inner experience that provides the impetus for social action. Thus I will turn here to the conversion narratives by women that John Wesley published in the *Arminian Magazine*. These accounts are not only “white hot” accounts of spiritual experience that

fundamentally reshaped these women's subjectivity and relationship with the world, but they are also evidence of participation in a religious public sphere of ideas that formed the British consciousness at least as much as secular publications like the *Tatler*, *Spectator*, or *Gentleman's Magazine*. Thus, inherent in the conversion narratives by women that John Wesley published in the *Arminian Magazine* is a complex interplay between orality, spiritual experience, belief, conversion, and print that characterized early Methodism. This complex nexus produced a print culture of evangelicalism during the period that helped develop a religious public sphere. By examining the experience and writing of these non-professional women writers, we can thus get a better handle on how individual Methodist laywomen conceived of the connection between spirituality and public life.

Furthermore I want to suggest that these accounts of intense inner spirituality work, within the context of Methodism, to break down many of the binaries social historians have imposed on Evangelical religion – body/mind, inner/outer, public/private, internal piety/external action, rich/poor. What becomes clear from an analysis of these conversion narratives is that some women did find a sense of subjectivity and agency within religious experience – though not according to traditional Western liberal definitions. As Saba Mahmood has pointed out in the context of female participants in the piety movement in Egypt, such women do “not regard authorized models of behavior as an external social imposition that constrained the individual. Rather, they viewed socially prescribed forms of conduct as the potentialities, the ‘scaffolding,’ if you will, through which the self is realized” (148). In other words these women did not see their adherence to outward forms of behavior as constricting, but ultimately liberating – as a means to becoming God's agent in the world. This definition of agency requires that we situate agency within the particular discourse in which it operates. In this case that means, as Mahmood

puts it, we think of “agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to social norms but as a modality of action” (157). Instead, the agency and subjectivity women gain as a result of experience are primarily figured as willingness to be God’s agent, to express “freedom” through Christ. By properly situating Methodist women’s narratives within their own discourse culture, I will illustrate that these women located their own subjectivity not in the individual self of the Enlightenment but in a willingness to subject themselves to God and then serve a larger religious community. By focusing on the ordinary laywoman we are thus able to glimpse what Methodism was like at the grassroots level and better understand the relationship between gender, religion, and subjectivity during the long eighteenth century.

In this context *writing itself* becomes an important site of spiritual experience and spiritual discipline. Writing often acted as a bodily spiritual discipline whereby women were able to both confirm conversion experience and formulate a narrative that worked to reconstruct the self as multiply oriented. More importantly for our purposes, however, is what this disciplinary nature of women’s writing tells us about how these practices of piety affected women’s formation of a sense of self within a patriarchal structure. These women did not write theology and, though some of them did preach, their sermons were not printed and few survive. What does survive is a living record of how each woman framed experience as the impetus to write and later publish. In this way writing operated as a spiritual discipline whereby the convert worked to reform her identity following conversion. Thus it was in and through writing that Methodist women were able to assimilate spiritual experience into consciousness and then use that experience as an entry point into a community of believers (often other women) who were active in the world.

On the other hand it would be easy to read the spiritual disciplines (including writing) these women practiced as a means to spiritual experience as one more example of patriarchal control – as an attempt on the part of the male leaders of the Methodist movement to control women’s bodies and spiritualities. To some extent, this battle was real in that the struggle for the control of women’s bodies as a site for spiritual experience was firmly entrenched in the narrative discourse structures that both men and women utilized. However, the narrative of patriarchal control of discourse and imposition of a feminized domestic piety is not as clear cut as it may at first seem. These women *did* find a form of agency within spiritual experience that defied discursive control and, I would argue, this agency is best expressed in the way they used writing to form the self post-conversion.

To illustrate these points I will first examine the sources of the evangelical conversion genre and how this deeply rooted tradition manifested itself during the evangelical revival. In doing so I will argue that it was in narrating the self that evangelicals came to terms with what it meant to be converted – “born again” in the language of the revival – though men and women often expressed this understanding quite differently. I will then turn to the *Arminian Magazine* itself, and specifically women’s contributions to it as a means of framing my subsequent discussion conversion narratives by women in the *Arminian Magazine*. These narratives are quite unique in that, unlike men’s conversion narratives, they are intensely focused on the body and the transformation of the body and bodily practices as a means to spiritual devotion. In this they draw on the deep mystical tradition of Methodism (discussed in Chapter Two) – using outward bodily discipline to inform inner spiritual life. It was in this context that women wrote their spiritual narratives for publication – using writing as a further means to solidifying evangelical experience and forming the self.

The Evangelical Conversion Narrative

When discussing the sources of the evangelical conversion narrative, it is first important to understand what evangelical, conversion, and narrative mean in context. My definitions of the first two terms have been laid out in Chapter One, so I will not dwell on them here. Suffice it to say that, for my purposes, evangelical denotes a broader movement in eighteenth century religion towards a felt “heart religion,” a focus on faith in Christ as the sole means to salvation, and a belief that an individual could *know* his or her sins were forgiven. In this context conversion denotes not so much the change from one religion to another, but a shift from a *system* of belief to a *personal* belief. Thus even Martin Luther left behind little in the way of a personal conversion narrative – instead his decisive shift occurred when he realized that the Church structure he was a part of did not lead him to God.

The evangelical conversion narrative form itself traces its roots back to the seventeenth century tradition of Puritan spiritual autobiography. Of particular importance to the development of the evangelical narrative as a genre were John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). Unlike most previous spiritual autobiography, both *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Grace Abounding* espoused an intensely personal and introspective piety – a piety that envisioned conversion not so much as a shift in allegiance, but a shift in attitude of the heart towards God. Most famously, in *Pilgrim’s Progress* Bunyan narrates the journey towards God as an allegorical personal journey. In thus positing the Christian life as a journey, with a defined narrative structure, Bunyan emphasizes the fact that individual faith and action in the world are more important than simple assent to a set of beliefs. In this we get closer to the types of evangelical conversion narratives that would develop over the course of the eighteenth century. In particular Bunyan’s conversion anticipates the way in which the moment of

conversion came to be understood as a radical turning point in the lives of evangelical men and women, one that required them to construct a new narrative of the self in relationship to their newfound faith.

Though heavily reliant upon the Puritan conversion narrative tradition, the evangelical conversion narrative also participated in the larger turn towards autobiography and self writing that characterized the eighteenth century. In fact, in many ways all autobiography *is* conversion narrative in that it tracks changes in internal states over the course of a life as perceived by an individual subject. If, as the growing genre of autobiography demonstrated, the self was constructed through experience of the world then it became possible and important to represent the self through narrative – thus narrative became a means through which the self was consolidated and constructed. Rousseau’s monumental *Confessions*, for example, purports to track the author’s internal state over the course of his life – representing his youthful experiences and the effects they had on the adult Rousseau. This type of representation of the self was truly new in the eighteenth century and was part of a larger move towards cataloguing sensory experience that traces its roots to the empiricist philosophy of Locke and Hume. Indeed Hume himself wrote a brief account his life titled “My Own Life,” that was published posthumously. Likewise the young William Wordsworth completed (though did not publish) his *Prelude* in 1805 – a conversion narrative that traces the young poet’s conversion and prophetic call to poetry.

John Wesley fully participated in this Enlightenment discourse culture and, in his *Journal*, reflects his roots in the Enlightenment while at the same time looking forward to romanticism. In fact it is this *Journal* that represents the clearest model for the types of conversion narratives that eventually appeared in the *Arminian Magazine*. It begins with an

account of Wesley's disastrous tenure as a missionary in Georgia and then proceeds to his return to England in 1738 and subsequent conversion experience at Aldersgate Street:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (JWW I:103).

The Aldersgate experience is one of the only truly first person, internal narratives in the entire *Journal* – the rest being a record of Wesley's public ministry and a justification for his distinctive theology. However this section is crucial in that it clearly models the general pattern of evangelical conversion that Wesley expected Methodists to follow: leading from consciousness of sin and the inability to make oneself righteous, to justification by faith and the sensible assurance of salvation, to conversion as the impetus for action in the world. Thus these *Journal* "extracts" not only served as an apologia for Wesley's ministry but also, according to Hindmarsh, worked to mimetically produce both spiritual experiences and spiritual experience accounts by lay people, thus creating a kind of "narrative community" (127-128). Both Wesley's and George Whitefield's *Journals* were runaway best-sellers, in large part because of the controversy the revival engendered, in any event they were vitally important to the Methodist movement and clearly worked to provide a road map for spiritual experience.

Furthermore the types of narrative Wesley utilizes in the *Journal* – most notably travel narrative and conversion narrative – were instrumental in the rise of the novel during the eighteenth century. Drawing upon the private diary and letter form, spiritual experience authors began to orient their texts towards a specific audience or narrative community – probing the developing space that was opening up in print. As Habermas writes, "From the beginning, the

psychological interest increased in the dual relation to both one's self and the other: self observation entered a union partly curious, partly sympathetic with the emotional stirrings of the other I' (49). By thus appropriating these forms in print, early eighteenth century conversion narrative writers (like novelists) began to develop a complex internal subjectivity that was both rooted in internal experience but oriented towards a public space. People like John Wesley published their spiritual experiences not only or primarily for their own sakes, but in order to elicit mimetic spiritual experiences in rapidly expanding reading public. This generated further writing and further print in the mode Clifford Siskin has detailed in *The Work of Writing* – turning readers into authors (163-170).

By using the conventions of conversion narratives from the past, especially Bunyan's, evangelicals were thus able to use an already existing form and mold it to new purposes. Just as the novel appropriated and reshaped existing genres, so the evangelical conversion narrative adopted the conventions of 17th century Puritan narratives to their specific context. In exhibiting these patterns, the narratives perform the mimetic function that John Wesley hoped to instill through his own *Journal*. Furthermore, they also indicate that evangelicals tended to see themselves as part of a larger community of readers and writers, all of whom were pursuing the same spiritual goals. As Hindmarsh has pointed out:

Through these communal practices they learned what was commonly expected in religious experience, and what was common became, in literary terms, conventional.... In expectation of conversion, evangelical discourse acted like a map, identifying the sort of terrain one might cross and the sort of destination one might arrive at if one chose to venture out (157).

Of course, as Hindmarsh also makes clear, just because these narratives were conventional, does not mean that they lack originality or insight. Instead, evangelicals appropriated readily available genres as a means of relating their own experience in a way that would be better

understood by the broader Methodist community. It was precisely by *using* these conventions that men and women were able to form a unique sense of identity grounded in the broader religious culture.

Thus narrative operated not only as a *means* of expressing evangelical experience – it also worked to *form* and *solidify* that experience in the heart and mind of the convert. As Somers and Gibson have argued, narrative structures are powerful, illustrating that “stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that ‘experience’ is constituted through narratives” (38). It is in writing that men and women are able to locate themselves within the context of individual experience – articulating a new sense of self as it has been transformed by the love and grace of God. It is in and through the spiritual discipline of writing that women were able to continue to form their own subjectivity. This narativization of the self that often followed conversion in evangelical practice in many ways resembles a response to a traumatic event – a “catastrophe” in its literal original sense.⁴⁸ Catastrophe in this sense conforms to George Bataille’s notion of the contemplation of catastrophe as the cause and organizing principle of mystical experience in his *Inner Experience* (1943). According to Amy Hollywood:

For Bataille ecstasy is anguish because behind the object that provokes ecstasy lurks catastrophe. War is the catastrophe to which Bataille, in a necessarily indirect fashion, bears witness... Bataille is compelled to face catastrophe in order to communicate it, yet only the meditative embrace, even intensification, of catastrophe enables communication (85-86).

It is through embracing the traumatic, catastrophic change in the self that the self is able to become drawn out towards the all-encompassing other. For Bataille the catastrophe of war provided this entry to internal contemplation, but for Methodist women conversion was a catastrophe, or turning point, almost as momentous.

More importantly, it is through writing and narrativization that this self-shattering is assimilated into the subject. According to Hollywood recent research has illustrated that in situations where the subject is hyperaroused through a traumatic or exciting experience he or she is unable to assimilate these experiences in a normal manner. In cases of trauma this can result in these memories disrupting consciousness in harmful ways, thus “the best available treatment for such memories seems to be narrativization, through which bodily memories are relived and reordered in meaningful narrative forms” (76). Narrative, then, operates as the mechanism through which the subject comes to grips with the catastrophic, turning the data of experience into something that is understandable and communicable. Thus, according to Hollywood, “Bataille’s text itself attempts... to engender in writing and in the reader the dissolution of subject and object that is inner experience. Through this dissolution, communication occurs and a new community emerges” (74). It through the dissolution of the self and the eliding of an inner/outer divide that a narrative community is created and structured. Experience engenders writing and thus autobiographical narrative, for Methodist women, does not work to stabilize a self, but to further destabilize it – to imagine it in multiple and ever-changing relationships with the other.

If this is so then we must attend carefully, not just to the content of evangelical conversion narratives, but also to the form. For it is in the formal structure of the narrative itself that we begin to glimpse how evangelicals attempted to integrate their new identity into the self in a way that prompted a new ideal of action in the world. Of course these formal narrative structures clearly reflected larger cultural discourses on gender, power, and the construction of the self. Evangelical religion itself was a product of multiple and changing social and cultural

discourses on the individual's relationship to the world and these shifts are registered within the discourse of the revival. As Foucault points out:

We must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (100).

This multiplicity of discursive elements is clearly evidenced in the way that evangelical narratives work to reshape the self multiple times over the course of a lifetime and in how the narratives reflect larger discursive shifts within society. In other words, by attending closely to the narrative communities of Methodism we get a picture of evangelical identity as shifting and multiply valenced – evangelicals came to see and represent themselves as part of a complex web of relationships with God, the self, and others – with each context requiring a new narrative positioning of the self.

Finally, I want to make clear that in this chapter I will be focusing primarily on the Arminian Methodist version of the evangelical conversion narrative. Although there are broad similarities between the narratives spawned by the different wings of the revival, there are also subtle differences that shape the types of piety the narratives espouse. The more Calvinist elements of the revival, for example, focus more heavily on the covenantal nature of conversion, whereas the Moravians espouse an even more erotic and pietistic idea of conversion than the Arminians do. The Arminian accounts, on the other hand, focus more heavily on the struggle for justification (especially since they believe the assurance of salvation can be lost) and are more heavily interested in the pursuit and achievement of a second work of grace that Wesley called Christian perfection. As a result the Arminian narratives are more cyclical and less linear than narratives by Calvinists. Though clear narrative patterns can be traced, these accounts are more

anxious, fitful, and full of stops and starts than those of other branches of the revival. I do not wish to overemphasize the differences between the different narratives – which overall are broadly similar – but by attending to these differences we can gain a broader perspective on the types of evangelical piety and evangelical writing the revival engendered.

The *Arminian Magazine*: History and Purpose

John Wesley founded the *Arminian Magazine* in 1778 in direct response to growing tensions within the evangelical revival over the question of predestination. Contrary to subsequent historical portrayal, the evangelical revival in England was both diffuse and diverse with, by mid-century, relatively defined factions divided – especially over the doctrine of predestination. The Wesleyan branch of the revival (which became the largest) remained staunchly Arminian, while those loyal to George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon split to form loose Calvinist connections. Eventually the Wesleys and Whitefield came to an understanding that, though they disagreed on the subject of predestination, they would not preach openly against each other. However, by 1778 Whitefield was dead and the predestination controversy resurfaced in force on the pages of various religious periodicals. The Calvinist evangelicals launched the first salvos in *The Spiritual Magazine* and *The Gospel Magazine*, lampooning Wesley, satirizing his writings, and portraying his followers as enthusiasts (Heitzenrater 267). In reply, Wesley began publishing the *Arminian Magazine* to counteract this Calvinist message.

Wesley's introductory comments to the first issue reflect this tension by claiming that *The Spiritual Magazine* and *The Gospel Magazine* “are intended to show, that God is not loving to every man; that his mercy is not over all his works; and, consequently that Christ did not die

for all, but for one in ten, for the elect only” (*JWW XIV:279*). He then lays out in contrast the general plan of his magazine, saying that it will include:

First, a defence of that grand Christian doctrine, ‘God willeth all men to be saved... Secondly, an extract from the Life of some holy man... Thirdly, accounts and letters containing the experience of pious persons, the greatest part of whom are still alive; and, Fourthly, verses explaining or confirming the capital doctrines we have in view (*JWW XIV:280*).

Thus the purpose of the magazine, for Wesley, was to defend “universal redemption” against predestination not only through polemic and theological argument, but also through the personal experiences of actual living Methodist men and women. As Hindmarsh points out “the context of conversion was no longer only the parishioner in his or her local community of faith, but the individual as a member of the broader public, even when that ‘public’ was one created in part through new patterns of communication, such as ‘public’ preaching and the magazines” (71). By publishing the biographies of living people who had experienced conversion and sanctification, and not just the exemplary lives of the past Wesley sought to illustrate against the Calvinists that the salvation experience narrated in the conversion accounts was available to all.

It is in this context that Wesley solicited personal religious experience accounts for the *Arminian Magazine*. The first few volumes of the magazine were dedicated to the autobiographies of Wesley’s itinerant preachers, most of whom had served Wesley for twenty to thirty years. As such their accounts are largely retrospective narratives of lives of service that center on the conversion experience. In publishing the lives of the preachers, however, Wesley was entering controversial territory. Though it was common for similar religious magazines to publish biographies of great saints and church fathers, it was considered poor taste to hold up a living person’s life as exemplary, as that individual could still make mistakes that cast the narrative in doubt. As Hindmarsh states, by publishing one’s narrative in a magazine, “The fluid

life became fixed in print, and the public consumption of that life as a product further fixed the narrative identity of the subject in public discourse” (233).

Yet it was precisely the movement towards the *consumption* of spiritual autobiography as a commodity that made it so successful well into the nineteenth century. Many printers and publishers seemed to realize there was money to be made in the controversy over autobiography. In response to the *Arminian Magazine*, an evangelical Calvinist printer named Alexander Hogg founded the *New Spiritual Magazine* in 1783. He invited over one hundred evangelical ministers to submit their autobiographies for print and publically advertised to this effect. Unfortunately many of the ministers had not agreed to have their lives published, were upset by the advertising, and a rather public dispute arose over the issue, which only helped to increase sales (Hindmarsh 230-232). This story illustrates that not only was their growing demand for evangelical publications (a demand that would explode in the next century) but that spiritual autobiography was becoming a commodity in its own right. Evangelical publication had entered the print marketplace in earnest, with the economics of print publishing and circulation coming to in part dictate the type of content that these magazines provided.

Despite this controversy (or more likely because of it) the *Arminian Magazine* and its successor, the *Methodist Magazine* were stunning successes by any measure. This was the age of print and religious print remained *the* dominant force in the marketplace well into the nineteenth century. According to Hindmarsh, even though distribution of the *Arminian Magazine* was conducted primarily through the Methodist meeting houses and not general booksellers, circulation ran as high as 7,000 by Wesley’s death in 1791 (238). In contrast, circulation of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* had reached only 4,550 by 1797 (Altick 392). Real circulation numbers must have been much higher for, as Altick points out, sharing of newspapers

was common, sometimes at a ratio of nearly ten people to one newspaper and Methodists were no exception (323). By 1807 the *Edinburgh Review* was reporting circulation of the *Methodist Magazine* at 18,000-20,000 (Altick 392). Concrete numbers are impossible to come by – what is certain is that the *Arminian Magazine* and its successors clearly filled a niche in the religious marketplace and were read by a significant portion of the literate population.

Women in the *Arminian Magazine*

In contrast to the relatively staid, retrospective autobiographical lives of the male preachers that John Wesley solicited and published in the early volumes of the *Arminian Magazine*, the autobiographical writing by women included in the *Magazine* is what Bruce Hindmarsh terms “white hot” (130). In other words, much of it was written in the heat of actual spiritual experience – thus the act of writing became an integral part of comprehending the experience and integrating it into the self. Unlike the male preachers who interpreted their entire life from a distance in terms of evangelical conversion, many of the women whose accounts were published used the diary or journal letter form to write about experience while it was still fresh in their minds. Many of these letters were sent to John Wesley who, when he began publishing the *Arminian Magazine*, culled through his massive correspondence looking for exemplary accounts to publish. Other women, like Hester Ann Rogers (1756-1794) and Sarah Crosby (1729-1804), used their diaries in the manner exemplified by John Wesley’s *Journal* – to record their spiritual practices, experiences, and tempers each day. These diaries were then edited and published (in the case of Crosby after her death) as exemplars of evangelical piety.

In the cases of Rogers and Crosby, however writing was a clear matter of spiritual discipline. Just as Methodists were expected to pray, read scripture, take communion, and attend meetings on a regular basis, so too did John Wesley emphasize the spiritual disciplines of

reading and writing. In fact, in the 1744 Conference minutes Wesley instructed his preachers to keep journals “as well for our satisfaction as for the profit of their own souls” (*Bennet’s Minutes* 16) and in 1747 he asked “are you exact in writing your journal” (*Bennet’s Minutes* 50). Clearly Wesley expected Methodists to use their journals as a means of recording and solidifying spiritual experience. In the case of women, it appears he often solicited their accounts himself, as it is relatively common for narratives to begin like Elizabeth Scaddan’s: “At your desire, I shall endeavor, though I am at a loss where to begin, to give the recital of that goodness and mercy, which hath followed me all the days of my life” (XIV:182). Thus Wesley was clearly soliciting accounts from his female followers both as a means for forming their spirituality, but also as proofs of the effectiveness of his ministry and demonstrations of the possibility of his doctrine of Christian perfection. Ever the empiricist, Wesley obsessively collected the data of experience in order to assess whether what people felt was real.

Ultimately, it was so important to Wesley that his preachers and members record these conversion experiences that he even offered to edit their accounts to alleviate their anxieties over writing.⁴⁹ The fact that Wesley recognized that his lay members might have legitimate fears about their writing abilities also indicates the extent to which the lay membership that corresponded with Wesley and contributed to the *Arminian Magazine* was far from culturally elite. This is an especially prevalent subtext of the accounts by women in the magazine, who are both unsure of their abilities as writers and their role within the Methodist public conversation. Elizabeth Scaddan, for example, ends her narrative by apologizing for its “deficiencies:” “I have endeavoured to give the relation desired by you; though to be as particular as I might, would take up too much paper, and too much of your time. Excuse what difficiencies [sic] you will find in this, and believe me, with the utmost duty and respect, your friend and servant, E. Scaddan”

(XIV:188). Despite these concerns, these female correspondents overcome their reservations because they see themselves as *called* to speak out and testify to the broader Methodist community about what God has done in their lives.

Clearly women did have a voice in the *Arminian Magazine*, at least while it continued to be edited by John Wesley. Furthermore, despite his editorial hand, these accounts by women about women are vibrant, unique, and distinct from similar accounts by men. In fact, an empirical survey of the amount of women's writing in the *Arminian Magazine* indicates the extent to which women contributed to the magazine. Tolar Burton has estimated that, of the 238 biographical accounts in the *Arminian Magazine*, 79 are about women (200). Interestingly enough, 113 of these accounts were published between the inception of the magazine in 1778 and Wesley's death in 1791 (Jones 275), at which time men's and women's accounts were almost equally represented (Tolar Burton 200). Furthermore, according to Jones, nearly forty percent of all biographical material published under Wesley's editorship was by or about women, though only fourteen accounts can be directly attributed to women authors (Jones 275). Finally, even after Wesley's death, Tolar Burton estimates that almost a quarter of the published accounts were about women, though even fewer were authored by them (Tolar Burton 200).

Nevertheless it is difficult to escape Wesley's ever-present influence – both over the form and content of women's narratives. Wesley published his own *Journal* and other conversion accounts with the explicit purpose of providing a map for evangelical experience. Thus one of the reasons that so many conversion accounts seem similar could be that women were simply imitating an accepted form, framing experience according to the accepted discourse of the movement or, perhaps more generously, molding memory according to discourse norms. Likewise the fact that these narratives were published by Wesley indicates that he himself

privileged a certain type of narrative and that he valued the discursive power and embodiment of women's narratives because he thought elements inspired conversion. There is likely some truth to this; however this does not mean that these accounts are any less useful as an indication of how early Methodist women chose to represent experience. If there is a disciplinary aspect to these narratives, it is as much one of self-discipline – of using form as a means of making experience comprehensible both to the self and an outside audience – as it is an instance of patriarchal control over women's voices. Indeed, Wesley's collection and editing of women's conversion narratives is only part of the story of their journey to print. As I argued in Chapter Three, we also have clear evidence that these women not only read and imitated the biographies of famous saints of the leaders of the movement, but also that communities of women influenced each other through their writing and indeed mediated each other's entry into print.

This movement of women's experience from oral testimony in a single sex class or band meeting to manuscript letter circulated in a defined community to print production circulated to the Methodist world at large illustrates the role communities of women themselves played in gaining access to the wider evangelical public sphere. Though Wesley's editorial hand is clearly evident in all the women's accounts that were printed either independently or in the *Arminian Magazine*, many of these letters and narratives had already been (and continued to go) through a process of refining and circulation among communities of women. This in itself is a form of agency whereby groups of women used the bonds of love developed in religious communion in order to shape the subjectivities of present and future Methodists (Mack 167). Indeed, the discursive power of these narratives was so potent that subsequent editors of the *Arminian Magazine* had to work to suppress the distinctive voice that communities of women contributed

to these narrative accounts – despite the perseverance of these communities well into the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

Wesley's death precipitated a dramatic decline in accounts by women about women, especially after Joseph Benson became editor of what was now called the *Methodist Magazine* in 1804. Under Benson's editorship, material about women continued to be featured – but it was almost all written by men and the majority of it concerned holy deaths and examples of pious (read, domestic) women (Jones 280-281). Even when diary extracts by women were published, like Sarah Crosby's in 1806, they were heavily edited. In Crosby's case, almost all references to her preaching activities were omitted (women's preaching had been banned in 1803) while journal entries that emphasized her newly idealized and "feminized" piety were given prominent place. Even more tragically, the almost 1,000 page manuscript Crosby had written about her fifty year career in ministry has been lost to history, though Zechariah Taft (1772-1848) quotes from it in his (now rare) *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women*, in which he claims Crosby had clearly intended it for publication (Krueger 77; Taft II:23). At least Crosby's life got some recognition; when Sarah Mallit died in 1846 at the age of 82, having preached most of her adult life and outlived all the other preachers of her generation, she did not even receive an obituary in what was then known as the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (East 125).

Thus, though he did edit writing by women, John Wesley clearly valued the experiences of women and went out of his way to include them in the magazine in a way that subsequent editors did not. Furthermore, the *Arminian Magazine* narratives written by women about themselves before Wesley's death have a quality quite distinct from both the accounts about men and the accounts by men about women. Their unique individual voices *do* shine through, along

with the unique style women developed together through the networks discussed in Chapter Three. For example, in their own testimonials, women often spend relatively little time on their lives as virtuous wives and mothers and instead focus on their experiences of inner spiritual transformation. It is this intense, often sensory, spiritual experience that both sets these narratives apart from conversion accounts written by and/or about men and prompts these women to speak and act publicly. In doing so, they move women's religious experience out of the limited domestic sphere traditionally assigned to female piety, into the broader religious community by circulating and publishing their unique conversion accounts.

By working to understand the complicated nature of these descriptions of religious experience and how they affected the lives and actions of individual Methodist women a more complete picture emerges of the nature of Methodist thought and social practice – one that allows for a more nuanced interpretation of how the internal religious experiences of these women prompted them to think, act, and write in ways that were new, innovative, and even socially transgressive. Most notably, the *Arminian Magazine* accounts largely work to break down binaries between public and private, internal experience and external expression, faith and works. For early Methodist women, the division between private and public became artificial following their conversions. The impetus to act, speak, and write within a public space was, for them, a natural extension of their internal spiritual experience and it was this experience that prompted them to locate this public speech within their religious community

Women's Experience and the Public Sphere in the *Arminian Magazine*

Here I will focus on a corpus of twelve conversion narratives published in the *Arminian Magazine*. All but one of the narratives (Sarah Crosby's) were published prior to Wesley's death, indicating that their narratives were most likely a result of direct correspondence with him. Sarah

Crosby's narrative and diary extract was published posthumously in 1806 but I am primarily concerned with the opening segment of her narrative which was written in 1757 and sent as a letter to John Wesley. Thus it provides an interesting example, not only of the evangelical conversion narrative, but of the way these women's narratives reached print after Wesley's death.

Broadly speaking, the conversion narratives by women that appear in the *Arminian Magazine* fall into a relatively consistent seven part narrative pattern: 1. Consciousness of sin; 2. Acquaintance with Methodism and search for salvation; 3. Justification; 4. Opposition from within and without; 5. Search for "Christian perfection"; 6. Achievement of perfection; and 7. Evidence of God's grace in life and community.⁵¹ Though not all of twelve narratives considered here include every one of these elements; the majority do and in exhibiting this general pattern, they perform the mimetic function that John Wesley hoped to instill through his own *Journal* and publishing projects. They also indicate that these women saw themselves as part of a larger community of readers and writers, all of whom were pursuing the same spiritual goals. This was especially true of the women who had their accounts published for, though both men and women relied on many of the same narrative conventions, they enacted them differently. So, for example, though some men relate the struggle for and achievement of Christian perfection, they do so far less often and in different terms than women. Instead of perfection being the intensely embodied and erotic experience it is for the women considered here, male conversions are mainly conceived of as an impetus for action that comes to inform their lives of ministry.

The first narrative convention that appears in all the *Arminian Magazine* accounts is *consciousness of sin* and the need for salvation. As with many Methodist converts, all of the

women considered here were religious children who tried to observe all outward signs of piety. Elizabeth Scaddan recalls that from an early age she was taught by an older pious woman to observe her duty to God and neighbor and that “the duties of religion demanded my chief concern. Her endeavours so far succeeded, as to give my mind a religious turn; and before I was ten years old, I felt a concern whenever I thought I had offended God” (XIV:183).

Nevertheless, these women come to believe that their early piety was not enough and that they are in reality slaves to the “sins” of dancing, card playing, novel reading, and vanity. As M. Taylor recalls, “I was fond of dancing and card-playing, and soon became eminent for both. I made no distinction of days: on the Lord’s day I went to Church at ten o’clock, repeated the prayers with as much devotion as others did; but in the afternoon I would dance or play at cards” (XIV:613). Eventually, this sensibility of sin begins to grow as the women become more uncomfortable with their spiritual state. Rachel Bruff writes that, “I was brought under deep distress of soul, being made sensible of my undone estate by nature: and was constrained to implore the aid of the blessed Spirit; knowing that I could do nothing of myself” (X:135). Hester Ann Rogers famously writes that, convicted of the sinfulness of her propensity for fine dress, she:

Took all my finery, high-dressed caps, &c, &c, and ripped them all up, so that I could wear them no more; then cut my hair short, that it might not be in my own power to have it dressed, and in the most solemn manner vowed never to dance again! I could do nothing now but bewail my own sinfulness, and cry for mercy. I could not eat, or sleep, or take any comfort (22).

Thus these women seek to orient the body towards God and not “sin” through a variety of bodily disciplines – all of these women are aware of the effects of sin and strove to overcome them by reorienting their bodily action.

For Methodists in general the body was an important site of spiritual power and, as I illustrated in Chapter Two, pain was one of the chief means through which Methodist women came to comprehend spiritual experience. Sarah Mallit was frequently ill and became subject to a type of epileptic “fit” within which she prophesied and preached, furthermore she writes that she “seemed as one dying, my eyes being fixt and all my senses locked up. They [the seizures] came first every day, then every second day, and then every third day. In one of these the sinews of my left leg shrank; so that I walked on the tip of my toe” (XI:186). Likewise Sarah Crosby recounts that early in her spiritual journey she was seized with “a rheumatic pain in my arm, from my elbow to my shoulder, so that I could not move it. This continued more than a week, during which time I often prayed the Lord to give me power to stretch out my arm, and was tempted to think I had no faith” (XXIX:421). Though it could be argued (I believe correctly) that these were psychosomatic symptoms of a larger spiritual struggle, or unrelated medical issues being interpreted through a spiritual lens, other women reported undeniable and horrific pain as a part of their spiritual journey. Mrs. A.B., for example, relates that “Some years ago Dr. C. cut a cancer out of my breast. Last summer I had a return of it under my left arm. Some weeks before Conference my husband mentioned my severe distress to W. G.... who willingly joined him in prayer for my recovery; and one night... I lay down as peaceful as usual... and in the morning my pain was gone”(XII:465). Thus bodily pain, along with recovery from it, became an important location of spiritual experience for Mrs. A.B. In any case this type of pain – real or imagined – was very real to these women as the struggle for their spiritual wholeness played out within the physical body. Furthermore, even though it is in a pious context, these women often draw attention to their gendered bodies. Even if, as in this case, the intention is non-sexual they

are still talking about their body in a very public manner. From the beginning, then, this focus on the gendered body is crucial to how women experience and represent spiritual life.

To the modern mind these concerns with outward acts like dancing, card playing, and fine clothing may seem trivial and the symptoms of pain they experienced extreme – but to early Methodist women they reflect the way they conceived of the connection between bodily discipline and spiritual orientation. It was not that these practices were sinful in and of themselves, or that bodily denials necessarily led to salvation, but that outward dispositions towards trivial pleasures distracted them from disciplines that would lead them to Christ. This focus on the transformation of outward actions is thus indicative of a larger trend among Methodist women. By learning to discipline the body and bodily actions – directing them away from “worldly” pleasures and towards spiritual disciplines like prayer and scripture reading – women were able to become the agents (in a sense) of their own spiritual liberation. It was not that they were “saved” through these actions (Wesley made it perfectly clear that the individual could *do* nothing to obtain salvation)⁵² but by transforming outward bodily dispositions women were able to alter their inner orientation toward God – preparing the grounds for faith in the first place. Thus, paradoxically, spiritual discipline became the means through which individual women claimed to find liberation.

Saba Mahmood comments on this phenomenon in her book on the contemporary Islamic women’s piety movement in Egypt. Like the early Methodists, these women subscribe to a system that places value on learning to discipline the body as a means to becoming pious. According to Mahmood, these “women learn to analyze the movements of the body and soul in order to establish coordination between inner states (intentions, movements of desire and thought, etc.) and outer conduct (gestures, actions, speech, etc.)”(31). The clearest example of

this is the *hijab* which, Mahmood argues, women wear not so much as a sign of patriarchal oppression, but because the outward representation of modesty engenders an inward disposition towards piety. Like Hester Ann Rogers who changes the way she *dresses* her body as a means to forming her inward state, the women of the mosque movement see outward appearance as a performative act whereby they can form their subjectivity.

Another example of how these Muslim women break down the traditional Western correspondence between inner volition and outward act is the duty to rise before dawn for morning prayer. In one encounter Mahmood analyzes an older Muslim woman is instructing younger women in the proper cultivation of the discipline of prayer. Interestingly, she does not recommend “trying” harder or strengthening willpower, but action and emotion:

Performing the morning prayer should be like the things you can't live without: for when you don't eat, or you don't clean your house, you get the feeling that you must do this. It is this feeling I am talking about: there is something inside you that makes you want to pray and gets you up early in the morning to pray. And you're angry with yourself when you don't do this or fail to do this (125).

This linking of emotion and action to spiritual practices thus reverses the liberal Western model of spiritual experience. Instead of the individual deciding to do something through an act of will, she is disciplined in these practices through action. In other words, outer discipline forms inner orientation which in turn affects how that orientation is made manifest in the world.⁵³

This same shift is evident in the conversion narratives of Methodist women as they come to realize that they need to alter their outward orientation in order to effect inward change. It is in this spiritual state that these women usually became acquainted with the Methodists and their emphasis on justification by faith and the sensible experience of salvation. Though each woman's first experiences with Methodism were different and some (like Rachel Bruff) did not become acquainted with the Methodists until after their conversion, in general Methodism

operated like an electrifying force in these women's spiritual journeys. Their conviction of sin and the need for salvation intensify after their encounters with the Methodists and they begin to earnestly *seek for their salvation*.

Like many women, Sarah Clay first became acquainted with Methodism through hearing George Whitefield preach. Upon returning home she was not only convinced of the reality of her sin, but was also drawn towards the spiritual discipline of scripture reading as a means to affecting a change of heart:

Now I began to search the Scriptures. Aforetime I never liked to read any but the historical part: all the Epistles I knew were written to believers; and I knew I was an unbeliever, and that, if I died as I was, must go to hell. For that text was brought to my mind, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder."...Wherever I went to hear, I was condemned. I felt the sinfulness of sin, and had a real desire to flee from the wrath to come. The 7th chapter to the Romans pointed out my state: I could have read it for ever. But I saw and felt, that if I had the sins of the whole world on my single soul, that would not keep me out of Christ if I could believe. Yet I could as well reach heaven with my hand as believe (VI:529).

Clay grounds her understanding of sin and the need for salvation within the context of scripture reading and meeting attendance. Likewise M. Taylor first comes in contact with the Methodists in America, where she works as a ladies maid. She hears the famous Dr. Coke preach and, upon seeing him she, "was seized with a palpitation of the heart, which seemed to affect my whole body, so that I could not put the needle into my work" (XIV:135). These portions of their narratives are particularly vivid as the women almost literally wrestle with God and the knowledge that they can do nothing for their own salvation except believe. They also tend to use an intense language of embodiment that describes the *physical* effects that spiritual awareness has on their bodies. Mrs. Planche, for example, writes of her palpable desire for justification that she fears will never come:

I had many doubts and fears, the burden of sin lay heavy upon my conscience, and I groaned under it. But the same blessed spirit which convinced me of sin, likewise opened to me the way of salvation through a blessed Redeemer... I came to his footstool with tears, and cried, "Save Lord, or I perish!" O how I longed to come to him; but found I was shut up in unbelief, and could not break my chain.... I found a divine attraction upon my heart, and had many visits of God's love; but I wanted justifying faith, and a clear sense of my interest in Christ, and determined not to rest till I found it (XIV:418-419).

In both of these cases it is a perceived spiritual power, a "divine attraction," that operates upon the physical body, causing "palpitation of the heart." This contributes to the strange, almost "in-between" quality that pervades Methodist narratives – especially those by women. Like many women who wrote their conversion accounts, Mrs. Planche feels that she *knows* and *feels* the way to salvation and even possesses the *desire* to be saved, but cannot achieve it herself. As such, this portion of the narratives is often filled with stops and starts, with intense spiritual experiences that almost result in a sense of justification, but always fall short.

Furthermore, many of these women turn to scripture (like Sarah Clay) or hymns as a means to disciplining the body and, by extension, turning their inner orientation towards Christ. Martha Thompson writes that she "began to read Dr. *Watts's* hymns which gave me some consolation. At length the Lord discovered to me in a dream, the utter insufficiency of all things under the sun to make the soul happy" (VI:469). These disciplines of spiritual reading – and the importance of them to their ultimate salvation – are present throughout these women's narratives. In fact, the citational practices of Methodist women offer a glimpse into how they conceived of the connection between reading, writing, and belief. Quotations from scripture or hymns (especially *Watts'* and *Charles Wesley's*) pepper the conversion narratives by women and it would be easy to write these quotations off as simple devotional piety. However, I would argue that these citations indicate that spiritual reading was actually a part of the mechanism whereby

these women transformed their hearts and minds and were able to ultimately surrender to God's love.

In particular, many of the women recount having specific scripture passages or lines from hymns brought to mind at particularly vital points of their salvation journey. Sarah Ryan recounts going to hear John Wesley preach at the Spitalfields Church. Upon the conclusion of the sermon, and just as Wesley was beginning to administer communion, she writes that:

In the same moment I felt my soul all desire, and it was said to me, *Ask, and thou shalt receive*: upon which, clasping my hands on my breast. I said, "I *will* ask, and I *shall* receive." But my body was so weak, I could hardly stand, while I was enabled to say, from my inmost soul,

"My soul is on thy promise cast:

The promise is for me!"

And all the way, as I went up with much difficulty to the table, I was still saying, "for *me*, Lord; for *me*." When I came up, my strength being quite gone, I threw my body across the rails, and, being overwhelmed with the power of God, was utterly regardless of outward things (II:301).

This account is indicative of women's spiritual discipline, search for salvation, and movement towards justification in several vital ways. First of all is the context within which this experience happens. Ryan has clearly been attending Methodist meetings (one of Wesley's "means of grace") regularly and is familiar with the forms of Methodist spirituality, including sermon audition and reaction. This also occurs within the context of preparing the heart for communion – another vital means of grace whereby Wesley believed an individual could find salvation. Her experience is also peppered with references to scripture passages and hymns – both of which serve to seal the experience of faith. She first quotes from Matthew 7:7 (*Ask, and thou shalt receive*) recounting that these words were powerfully applied to her heart and then moves on to quote from one of Charles Wesley's salvation hymns, "Father, if I have sinn'd, with Thee An Advocate I have" (Poetical Works 3:32). Both of these quotations are brought powerfully home to Ryan in a manner that is reflected in many of the Methodist accounts – Methodists often used

scripture quotation as a means of making the gospel message specially applicable to the self (Hindmarsh 83). Finally Ryan echoes many of the other accounts by women, writing that she came to understand that Christ had died for her (“for *me*, Lord; for *me*.”) reflecting her newfound understanding that Christ loved her and had died especially for her. Thus the multi-layered context of sermon audition, hymn singing, and scripture reading come powerfully together in an experience that mystically overwhelms Ryan as she is “overwhelmed with the power of God, was utterly regardless of outward things.”

In this Ryan moves on to the experience of *justification* (the experience of knowing God has forgiven an individual’s sins) that ultimately succeeds spiritual struggle. This is arguably the most important point in these narratives and their descriptions of the moment of justification are remarkably similar. In every case, justification is preceded by some sort of outward religious discipline – prayer, scripture reading, hymn singing, religious services – and the sense of justification comes without the effort or striving that characterizes their attempts. Rachel Bruff writes that, praying one night, “The very air seemed to breathe sweetness, and my soul glowed with love divine! As I was looking up to heaven, praising my great Creator, I felt that my sins were forgiven” (X:136). while Mrs. Planche says, “the Lord then spoke peace to my soul. He took away all guilt and condemnation from my conscience, and shed abroad his love in my heart. I knew my sins were forgiven, and that I was accepted in the Beloved” (XIV:419). What distinguishes these moments from their previous religious experiences is that they mystically *feel* their sins have been forgiven – that they have been justified to God. This is especially reflected in how almost all of the women come to understand that, in the words of Sarah Ryan, Christ died, “for *me*.” Thus there is a personal, sensory, experiential quality to these narratives that reflects John Wesley’s belief that the individual could know she was saved and that God loved

her. Because it is impossible to prove justification, Methodist women use the language of sense to lend validity to their claim. By using the analogy of the senses women are able to navigate the complex nexus between experiential perception and spiritual emotion and then make this experience intelligible to a reading or listening audience.

In their characterization of conversion in physical, embodied language, these accounts are truly unique. For these women religious emotions were very real and fundamentally transforming experiences with the divine. They described their conversions as sensory encounters with something that they felt larger than themselves that overwhelmed and redefined their subjectivity. However, emotion was not simply one of the ways they expressed religious sensibility; it instead came to define a new mode of perception that came to transform both heart and life. In this, early Methodist women attempted to tread the very thin line between Enlightenment rationalism and religious enthusiasm – using the evidence of the senses to test experience without being overcome by every whim of the spirit. In other words they came to comprehend and describe religion primarily *through* these emotions and then translated internal feeling into outward action.

However, this sense of justification is often frequently questioned and *opposed from within and without* as the women begin to question their own spiritual state and friends and family members ridicule them for becoming Methodists. M. Taylor's experience was typical; she relates that, "Satan tempted me to doubt of the blessing; by relations and acquaintance persecuted me; and my evil heart was prone to start from the living God" (XIV:619). Elizabeth Scaddan was given an ultimatum from her own family who told her she "should no longer remain with them; that they would disown me; and accordingly I had only till the next morning to determine what answer to give them" (XIV:187). Eventually her family backed down, but it

was not atypical for family members to be distressed at their daughters or wives becoming Methodists.

Likewise, the intense persecution that Mrs. A.B. describes following her decision to become a Methodist illustrates the localized nature of Methodist experience and the ways in which persecution was very much tied to the disruption of social and cultural norms. Mrs. A.B. was born to a Catholic family on an island of Lough Key in Ireland. Through the influence of an old Protestant woman who boarded with the family during Mrs. A.B.'s childhood, she was convinced of the error of the Catholic Church and the necessity of salvation by faith. When she was fifteen, Mrs. A.B. was sent to the local priest for religious instruction – she refused to take part in Catholic rituals and openly defied both the priest and the Bishop, to whom she was sent to cast the “witchcraft” out of her. When she was twenty-one she came in contact with the Methodists and was converted. She then publically recanted the Catholic Church, causing the parish priest to say he “would make hawk’s meat” of her. After this she applied to the Rector of the Church of England parish for admittance and protection, but was rejected due to her belief in the ability to sensibly know her sins were forgiven. She then applied to another clergyman, who agreed to receive her into the Church. After this her friends and family attempted to marry her to a Catholic by force – rather than comply she fled, covering over seventeen miles by foot in a single day and contracting a life threatening fever. Eventually she was taken into the house of a local Methodist and eventually married a Methodist man. What is crucial to recognize here is that Mrs. A.B. was an obscure, young woman who dared subvert local cultural norms because of her evangelical conversion. She was willing to stand up to religious authorities up to and including a Bishop and flee her family and friends rather than marry someone against her will. Likewise Wesley selected Mrs. A.B.'s story for inclusion in the *Magazine* not only for its

exemplary spiritual content, but to illustrate that the Methodist work in Ireland was bearing fruit. As a converted Catholic, Mrs. A.B. was ideally suited to testify to the power of the Methodist message.

The persecution these women faced following conversion reflects the fact that the controversy over religious doctrine in eighteenth century England was rooted in something far deeper than scholastic arguments over the nature of salvation and redemption. The average layperson may not have understood why Wesley's doctrine of justification by faith and insistence on immediate sensible conversion caused such uproar within the Church establishment, but he or she surely understood that such doctrines threatened social order in radical ways. Implicit in Wesley's assertion that God's grace was a free gift and salvation was available to *all* was an understanding of doctrine that exploded static categories of rich/poor, male/female, public/private. Furthermore, by emphasizing that the experience of salvation could be sensibly experienced outside of Church walls, Methodism offered a fundamental redefinition of self based on personal experience with God and interaction with a new community of faith.

However, this newly formed affective and embodied religious subjectivity served to highlight deep anxieties over religious "enthusiasm" throughout the eighteenth century. As Clive Field's comprehensive survey of early Methodist membership lists tentatively suggests, the perceived threat to social structures reflects the fact that a disproportionate number of Methodist members tended to be drawn from the skilled trades – mining, carpentry, weaving, etc – though this could vary by locality (165). In this type of local economic activity families had a vested economic interest in their sons and daughters remaining in the family trade (Malmgreen 64). The concern on the part of fathers, mothers, and husbands was that if their daughters or wives were out participating in Methodism meetings they would not be at home helping raise the

family or contributing financially. Furthermore, by developing a grassroots system of classes, bands, and select bands in order to foster a unique Methodist social community, Wesley created an organization that operated with what Gail Malmgreen describes as a “centrifugal force” which brought individuals together across wide distances and “broke down the narrowness of provincial life” (62). For this very reason, though, these bands were seen as profoundly threatening to existing social and religious structures; thus it should come as no surprise that the early years of Methodism were accompanied by intense persecution in the form of riots, press gangs, and family pressure to renounce Methodism.

In becoming Methodists these women were in essence declaring their allegiance to a new spiritual family that was set in direct opposition to mainstream British culture. Henceforth their primary allegiance was to God and the Methodist community and, as Elizabeth Scaddan’s and Mrs. A.B.’s testimonies illustrate, they were willing to give up everything. They did so not necessarily to make a political or feminist statement, but because they felt they owed allegiance to a higher moral authority. Such self-determination in the face of vigorous opposition from friends and family defined many women’s experience with Methodism, especially in the early days of the movement, and it partially explains why they felt compelled to speak out about the true nature of their religious experiences.

For Methodists, however, justification was only the first step on a journey to salvation that ended with Wesley’s doctrine of “Christian perfection,” otherwise known as sanctification. The achievement of this most esoteric Methodist doctrine was the ultimate goal of the Christian journey. Wesley defined Christian perfection as the elimination of all intentional sin, which he believed to be attainable in this life. However, by “sin” Wesley does not mean unintentional wrongdoing but a “voluntary transgression of a known law” of God (*JWW* XI:396). Thus,

throughout his life, he worked to construct a definition of perfection predicated on positive, liberatory action instead of legalistic rules and requirements. In fact, elsewhere he defines perfection as “the loving God with all the heart, so that every evil temper is destroyed, and every thought and word and work springs from and is conducted to that end by the pure love of God and our neighbor” (*Minutes* 713). For Wesley perfection, like justification, is something granted by God instantaneously and is ultimately evidenced through outward action that springs from inner spiritual renewal. It was thus something that appealed inherently to women and other outsiders in that it offered a direct apprehension of the divine absent mediation by the establishment.

Of the women under consideration here, most relate their *struggle for and ultimate achievement of* Christian perfection. All became increasingly aware of the need for perfection following their justification and begin to seek for it in much the same manner as justification. Rachel Bruff first hears about Christian perfection from a lay preacher and actively begins to seek it:

From the time I was convinced of the necessity of this blessing, there was a struggle in my soul. I was sensible the promise was to be received by faith, and the language of my heart was, Lord, help me!... This struggle continued for eight days. All this while I groaned in secret; and intreated God to destroy the last remains of sin (X:191-192).

Though Bruff struggles for eight days, Mrs. Planche struggled for four years, writing that “I had no doubt of God’s love to me, yet I felt myself very unlike him, and clearly understood that nothing unholy could dwell with him” (XIV:421). Nevertheless, these women continued to search for the sensible experience of sanctification.

Much like justification, these women experience Christian perfection only when they surrender themselves to God. Furthermore, they tend to represent this experience in almost

erotic terms – using the language of love and affection to describe the sensory feeling of sanctification. This would seem to suggest that these women view perfection in much the same terms as a human relationship – their relationship with Christ is cemented in Christian perfection through the mystical union of their soul and body with Christ. Unlike similar accounts by men, perfection is an intensely embodied experience. For example, Rachel Bruff describes sanctification thus:

One day I bowed myself at the Redeemer’s feet, and determined not to let him go without the blessing. And glory be to his Name! in a moment my burden was gone. My soul was now so enraptured with a sense of his love, that I was constrained to praise his name aloud. From that time he has been constantly with me, and has borne me up above all my sins, temptations, and sufferings (X:192).

Mrs. Planche similarly uses the language of liberation to describe her experience:

He came into my soul with such a display of his grace and love, as I never knew before. All my bands were loosed, and my spirit was set perfectly free. I felt an entire deliverance from all the remains of sin in my nature; and my precious Jesus took full possession of my heart (XIV:421).

While Sarah Ryan uses intensely erotic language to describe the entire overwhelming, even dissolution, or her individual subjectivity in union with Christ. Her case is worth quoting at length:

Sometime after, being deeply affected at this, I felt a cold sweat and a trembling come over me. I knew it to be the power of God, but said nothing to those with me.... In the moment I saw (not with my bodily eyes) the Lord Jesus standing before me, and saying, *This day is salvation come to this house*: I saw all my works and attainments laid at his feet, as nothing worth: and I saw my soul as it were taken up, and plunged into God.... God said to my soul, *I will sweep away thy sins with the besom of destruction*. Immediately I felt the Spirit of God as it were go through my whole soul. My agony ceased, and the love of Jesus was again represented to my mind: only he now seemed above me; and as I looked up, I said, “Lord, John leaned on thy breast; but I am in thy bosom.” To which my Lord replied, *Neither heights, nor depths, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall for one moment separate thy soul from me*, in time or in eternity. Quickly after, those words were spoken into my inmost soul,

“Fill’d with abiding peace divine,
With Israel’s blessing blest,

Thou, thou the church above shalt join,
And gain the heavenly rest.”

...

And with these words, I saw the Lord Jesus present my soul to God the Father. I continued sitting in the same manner, and waiting what the Lord would speak, only crying out between whiles, “O, the power of God! O, the power of God!” (II:308-309)

This experience alone embodies everything that was most characteristic about women’s descriptions of perfection – from intense sensory language, spiritual visions, and an erotic infilling of God’s love into a body that is emptied before him – to quotations from hymns and scripture as the experience is solidified in the soul.

In each case these women represent sanctification as an overwhelming experience of God’s love that destroys sin by entering into them and taking possession of their hearts. Intentional sin is no longer an option because, as Bruff states Christ is “constantly with me.” Key to this experience is the fact that it is the senses that are affected by experience. Ryan says that she “sees” (though not with her bodily eyes) Jesus standing before her and this becomes a crucial moment of transition. In fact many the women who recount the experience of Christian perfection relate “seeing” Christ or “hearing” him speak to them directly. Clearly sanctification was an intensely sensory experience – one in which all normal senses were displaced. we see reflected here the language of spiritual sense that I detailed at length in Chapter Two. It is in the experience of perfection above all that we see this language extended to its most extreme conclusion as each woman comes to see, feel, and hear a new spiritual reality. Here again it is the gendered body that operates as the locus of experience – providing the language to express what was inherently inexpressible.

Much like the medieval female mystics, Christian perfection represents an erotic union with God that comes to pervade every action. In fact, this language of emptying oneself before

God and then being filled with his love is far more prevalent in the spiritual narratives of Methodist women than those of Methodist men. As Amy Hollywood argues, female mysticism of this sort can be read as an attempt to elide the boundaries between inner and outer in erotic and embodied union with God. In contemplating the absolute alterity of God or, especially, the embodied sacrifice of Christ on the cross, women in some sense identify bodily with Christ's suffering. In fact, many Moravian hymns and conversion narratives (which deeply influenced Methodism) revolve around the contemplation of Christ's "side hole" a strongly vaginal and feminine representation of his suffering on the cross. The Moravian Martha Barham, whose account was published in the *Arminian Magazine* after her untimely death, even goes so far as to use bridal imagery to represent her relationship to the suffering Christ: "*My Beloved is mine and I am his.... I dare not go into the marriage suffer without a wedding garment, clothe me then that I be not found naked!*" (IX:604). The eroticized body becomes the conduit through which God can reorder the individual subjectivity – it represents one of the only means open to women to represent religious experience in their own terms and for their own purposes. This reordering also results in a shift in orientation towards the world as the newly sanctified woman, like Teresa of Avila or Madame Guyon, begins to see her religious experience as the impetus for action.⁵⁴ Following in this vein it would appear that women, more than men, saw their sanctifying submission to God as an empowering or agency-granting experience in the sense that their primary allegiance was to God, not men. Thus, the experience of sanctification empowered them to speak and act in ways that would have been inconceivable before because they believed they were operating as God's agent in the world.

Even within the extensive literature by and about the early Methodists, the experience these women describe is unique and it provides a vital clue to why these accounts were selected

for publication in the *Arminian Magazine*. For despite John Wesley's firm belief in the possibility of reaching Christian perfection in this life, before the moment of death, he never actually claimed this for himself and in practice believed it to be extremely rare. Wesley examined many of the people who claimed to have experienced Christian perfection in order to ascertain whether the signs of this transformation were genuine. These accounts represent proof positive for Wesley that Christian perfection was achievable. By publishing them he not only attempts to silence his numerous critics on the doctrine, but also provides examples to follow, showing his membership what they must do to reach perfection.

If we follow Wesley's positive construction of Christian perfection as pure love for God and neighbor, it naturally leads to the final step of the religious experience narrative: *evidence of God's grace in life and community*. Not only are these accounts constructed according to specific community conventions, they also describe how these female converts see themselves as part of a unified religious community within which they have found a scope for speech and action. As Mrs. Planche writes following her justification, "I did indeed love him with all the powers of my soul, and made a free-will offering of myself to him, to be his for ever. O what a heaven did I enjoy in his favour and love; and how did *I feel my soul united to his dear people!*" (XIV:419, emphasis added). This is an especially bold statement from Mrs. Planche as she lived a full forty miles from the nearest Methodist society. Her experience prompted her to not only be active within her community, but also to advocate with Wesley himself for the stationing of a lay preacher at Kelso, in Scotland.

Other women took this post-conversion call to action even further – taking up an "extraordinary call" to preach and travelling the country as itinerant evangelists. Strictly speaking Wesley followed the traditional Church line on women preachers, but was convinced to

relax this rule in extraordinary circumstances by the testimony and success of women like Sarah Crosby, Sarah Ryan, Sarah Mallet and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher.⁵⁵ Sarah Crosby, for example, records that in a single year of ministry she was enabled “to ride 960 miles, to keep 220 public meetings, at many of which some hundreds of precious souls were present, about 600 private meetings, and to write an 116 letters, many of them long ones: besides many, many conversations with souls in private”(XXIX:567). Sarah Mallit, whose story I related at length in the first chapter, became the only woman to receive an official license to preach from the Methodist Conference and John Wesley. Thus the transformation she experienced at conversion propelled her, not further inward, but into a life of public ministry and action. Mystical spirituality was thus an impetus (and a license) to action – not an end in itself.

These communal bonds further empowered ordinary women to become involved in visiting the sick and poor, lead classes and bands, correspond with the most powerful people in the Methodist movement, and even record their religious experiences for the broader Methodist community. They also served as a vital check to the type of individualism that the evangelical conversion experience tended to foster. In arguing that the individual could know her sins were forgiven and that Christ died for *her* specifically, the danger always was that the movement would fall into a dangerous type of insularity – one within which the only concern was for one’s own soul and salvation. By intentionally fostering a unique connectionalism through the system of classes and bands, Wesley attempted to illustrate that true conversion meant love for others and the world. Especially for women, these bonds were vital in providing them the means and models to act and write publically. Though many claimed they felt inadequate to do so, the outpouring of love they experienced through sanctification provided the undeniable impetus to enter public space.

The fact that of these were ordinary laywomen further emphasizes this point. Despite the massive amount of scholarship on the Methodist movement as a whole, there is still relatively little research on lay piety in general and lay female piety in particular. The women whose narratives are presented here are quite different. Their entry into public space on the pages of the *Arminian Magazine* came not because they felt called to challenge cultural assumptions in the way the women preachers did, but because Wesley asked them to write about their conversion and they felt compelled to by that experience. These were not the voices of the educated or pious elite, but regular Methodist laywomen who wrote in spite of their perceived inadequacies simply because they felt their experience demanded it. Nevertheless, by using the conversion narrative form they participated in an oppositional counter-culture that shook the core of British society and established lay women's voices as vital to the religious conversations that shaped culture.

Religious Experience, Agency, and the Public Sphere

As analysis of these extraordinary narratives illustrates, these conversion accounts operate in a unique rhetorical space that works to break down binary divisions between private and public – at the same time that they develop a complex internal subjectivity and interiority, they also incorporate a collective religious subjectivity. For these women, religious conversion was the door through which they extended themselves in love, first to the Methodist community and then to the entire world. In locating their narratives within this community space, these women were able to better express their unique individual experience with faith. Religion, for them, was about far more than right belief and came to encompass their identities as women and their relationship with the public sphere. Particularly for Methodist women, who relied on the communal nature of the movement both to forge relationships of affection and then work to

transform society, conversion acted as a solvent – dissolving the barriers between self and God and self and world. It thus formed a sense of identity that operated within a liberated religious space.

Likewise, these narratives subtly interrogate the theory of feminized piety which argues that women were disproportionately represented in evangelicalism because its forms of worship were uniquely suited to a private, domestic space. In the *Arminian Magazine* we see women of every social class simply ignoring these arbitrary barriers – speaking out because they feel called. This breakdown between public expression and private domestic piety is particularly well illustrated by the way the *Arminian Magazine* narratives interrogate prevailing gendered ideologies. Not only do these women inscribe themselves in terms of an individual gendered subjectivity founded upon spiritual experience, they also carefully avoid portraying themselves solely as a wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters. Though the women make passing references to their families, this is not the primary focus of their narratives. In fact, Mrs. Planche is the only one who even mentions being married and having children. Instead they focus on describing an intense inner spirituality that comes to pervade every aspect of their lives.

Predictably, it is exactly this type of subjective interiority that is absent from accounts of women's conversion *written by men*. In these cases the narratives tend to be rather formulaic stories of chaste and upright women who performed their proper womanly roles. This contrast is illustrated in Mrs. Planche's account, which was actually completed and sent to Wesley after her death by W. Hunter, the lay preacher appointed to her circuit. While the section of the narrative written by Planche is entirely focused on her struggle for justification and sanctification and her community activism, the brief section appended by Hunter explicitly portrays her as a paragon of private womanly devotion. He writes that, "She seemed to be all light and devotion.... She

possessed a simplicity not found in many, so that she received good by every means. To this was joined such sweetness of temper and manners, as made her agreeable wherever she was” (XIV:422) In using words and phrases like “light and devotion,” “simplicity,” “sweetness of temper and manners,” Hunter illustrates an overarching anxiety about women’s public religious expression and an attempt, after the subject’s death, to domesticate alternative spiritualities and reclaim women’s bodies as the site of domestic piety. The fact that the types of narratives about women published in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine* shifted so dramatically after Wesley’s death amply illustrates the discursive power of these types of narratives. Though Methodist women continued to subtly resist this developing discourse of power and piety throughout the nineteenth century, official channels for spiritual expression were systematically shut down.

As we have seen, however, Methodist women were unafraid to speak out after their conversions even if their actions disrupted local family and community structures. Experience came to authorize action even within what was still a mostly male public space. Religion for Methodist women was not simply a matter of “right belief” it was intimately connected to the disciplines and practices of the larger Methodist community. Paradoxically it was the very disciplinary nature of Methodism, even bound up as it was with male power structures that authorized the defiance of social and cultural norms. One of the main reasons that John Wesley ultimately could not say no to women’s preaching was that the preacher’s spiritual experience authorized their call and this call was further confirmed in the success of their work.

Finally, though the grand realization of conversion may have been that Christ died “for me,” nevertheless these women work through narrative to reorient the self as multiple and shifting in relationship to themselves, their community, and their God. In doing so they not only acted against cultural norms, they also undermined the very structures of mind/body, inner/outer

that defined Enlightenment subjectivity. In the moment of mystical ecstasy that characterized Christian perfection, the self was dissolved in God and then reoriented towards community. Thus, any attempt to understand these types of religious texts solely in terms of modern theoretical constructs like “agency,” “freedom,” or “individual autonomy” can lead to fundamental misinterpretations of these women’s lives and stories. The language of freedom pervades these narratives, but it is not the freedom of the Lockean individual subject that we have come to associate with this period. Instead it is the language of freedom of bondage to sin. As Mrs. Planche declares upon her sanctification, “All my bands were loosed, and my spirit was set perfectly free.” This type of freedom and agency thus belongs to an entirely different kind of subjectivity – a subjectivity that is constructed around the freedom to be an agent of a larger, interdependent religious community. It is this freedom that women found in Methodism and it is this freedom that allowed them write, speak, and act in spite of their perceived “difficiencies.”

At its core eighteenth century women’s religious experience eludes easy definition then and now. It is emotional and rational, embodied and spiritual, deeply interior and radically engaged with the world. For these the lay women examined here, religious emotions were very real and fundamentally transforming experiences with the divine. They were sensory encounters with something that they felt larger than themselves that overwhelmed and redefined their subjectivity. Their accounts of these experiences were simultaneously enlightened and enthusiastic – a complex fusion that effectively works to break down binary oppositions between self and other, public and private, reason and experience. It is not that women did *not* find subjectivity through religious experience, but that the subjectivity they did find was multiple, various, emotional, and predicated on the willingness to be God’s agent in the world. Thus early Methodist women found a sense of subjectivity not in individual autonomy but in liberated

community. In this sense these women stand apart in that their experience allows them to construct a new holistic identity within which traditional religious notions of gender itself can be renegotiated.

CHAPTER 5: THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE: SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE, SPIRITUAL TEXT, AND SEDITIOUS LITERACIES IN HANNAH MORE'S SUNDAY SCHOOLS

In April 1802 the ultra-loyalist periodical *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* published a lengthy and vicious attack on what they believed to be a new threat to Church and King. The successor of the short-lived *Anti-Jacobin; or, Weekly Examiner* that was published in 1797 and 1798, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* was a monthly magazine dedicated to exposing all loyalists believed to be radical and seditious in British culture.⁵⁶ Feeding on the paranoia surrounding the war with Napoleon and the possibility of invasion, the magazine dedicated itself to upholding the established Church and political system at all costs. From around 1800 to late 1802, however, many of its pages were taken up with attacking what the editors of the *Review* perceived to be a new threat to established religion – Sunday Schools – and particularly the Sunday Schools established by Hannah More in the Mendip Hills outside of Bristol. The dispute surrounding these schools came to be known as the Blagdon Controversy and the April 1802 issue of the *Review* represented the height of the periodical's campaign against More's schools:

The Sunday Schools, *we* are now convinced, and *this* fact demonstrates the point to us, however religiously they were designed at first, were yet eagerly seized as means of mischief under the forms of religion, and were artfully and violently converted into batteries of assault upon the church, by the foul spirit of dissention from it, by a Calvinistical Mrs. More, and by all the Calvinistical amongst the Methodist or the Presbyterians. Much in the same style and spirit did the Presbyterians of the seventeenth century, those *Methodists* of a former age, only *all* Calvinistical then, and *all* Dissenters, set up a practice of maintaining LECTURES for the afternoons of Sundays. The church had provided the sermons for the afternoons; but some private individuals (who, probably, preferred *preaching* to *praying*) contributed to pay for them, as others are now contributing to pay for Sunday Schools. The lectures thus became as numerous then as the schools are now (423-424).

Hannah More, well known for her conservatism and anti-radicalism made a strange target for *The Anti-Jacobin Review*. Known for her religious fervor and defense of Church and King in

during the Revolution Controversy of the early 1790's, More nevertheless was at the center of the *Review's* attacks on Sunday Schools. What is even more remarkable about this passage is how the attack is framed. It is not enough to portray the Schools as a possibly irregular religious innovation that, in teaching the poor how to read, opens them up to all kinds of seditious ideas (like Paine's *Rights of Man*). These were all well rehearsed points in opposition to Sunday Schools by this time. Instead, echoing Burke's attack on Richard Price in his *Reflections*, the reviewer goes so far as to conflate More's supposed Methodism with Calvinism and Presbyterianism. The implication is clear – in associating More with the Presbyterian dissenters of the seventeenth century he is drawing a straight line from the religious enthusiasm of the Civil War to Sunday Schools and Methodism. In emphasizing the fact that these dissenters set up unsanctioned “lectures” outside of Church hours that bred sedition, the reviewer implicates More in a pattern of irregular church practices that apparently leads directly to radicalism and revolution.

In the context of the French war these were serious charges that indicate the extent to which some forces in British society were concerned with unsanctioned innovations in religion. Remember that these events occurred just a few years after the infamous London Corresponding Society trials and right around the same time that William Blake was on trial for sedition after ejecting a drunken soldier from his cottage in Felpham. As Jon Mee and Iain McCalman have laid out, though the initial force of the French Revolution had dissipated, there remained a dedicated radical underground that often drew upon religious enthusiasm for inspiration and which was more repressed than ever during the paranoid years of the Napoleonic Wars.⁵⁷ Though *The Anti-Jacobin Review* represented the most extreme and reactionary forces in British

society it nevertheless gave voice to a very real fear that religious enthusiasm in the form of evangelicalism could spill over into radical and destabilizing political action.

The Blagdon Controversy itself originated in 1799 when Hannah More received a letter from Sarah Bere, the wife of Thomas Bere, curate of Blagdon, which accused More's schoolmaster, a Methodist named Henry Young, of conducting unsanctioned Methodist meetings in his house outside of Church hours. Though the More sisters were fully aware of Young's Methodist ties, Sarah Bere's letter made it clear that he was conducting a Methodist class meeting for adults in his home on Sunday night. This was not remarkable in itself, except that the Beres felt that this type of meeting went beyond Young's mandate as schoolmaster and in fact trampled on Thomas Bere's responsibilities as curate. Though the Methodists had in fact been conducting similar meetings for close to sixty years by this point, clearly this local clergyman felt that such practices were dangerous since, as he saw it, Young was not a licensed clergyman or dissenting minister and was conducting what Bere believed to be religious services outside of the Church.

More received the letter from Sarah Bere but did not respond immediately due to illness and her constant travel. When she did reply in April of 1799 she mainly brushed off the accusations, stating that she would have her sister Martha speak to Young on the matter of his unsanctioned class meetings. The matter would have ended here except that Bere clearly felt wronged. Hannah More was a well-respected and formidable woman who was used to getting her way – especially in the running of her schools – and Bere felt that the management of both the schools and his parish was slipping out of his hands, taken over by the Mores and someone who he considered to be a dangerous enthusiast. He appealed first to the vicar, Dr. Crossman, whose living he was serving and then to Sir Abraham Elton, who More recommended as

arbitrator. The end result of this series of exchanges was that in November of 1800 Young was removed from his position as schoolmaster by a group of local magistrates and the Mores immediately closed down their school.

Hannah More continued to pursue the matter, however, engaging her powerful friends in a behind the scenes campaign to discredit and remove Bere as curate of Blagdon. This campaign culminated in January 1801 when the Bishop of Bath and Wells ordered Bere's removal from his curacy. The Mores immediately reopened their school under Henry Young's supervision but Bere was justifiably angered and took to the press to defend his innocence. In March he published *The Controversy between Mrs. Hannah More and the Curate of Blagdon*, which presented many of the primary documents relevant to the case and argued that he was a victim of a vast conspiracy against both himself and the Established Church. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* immediately took up his cause, initiating a periodical war that lasted nearly two years and culminated in the above quoted April 1802 article accusing More of enthusiasm and radicalism.

After 1802 the controversy largely died down. Bere was reinstated and received an apology of sorts from the diocesan authorities. In the end the Blagdon Controversy, minor as it seems today, represents an important moment in eighteenth-century religious history. Not only was the conflict a microcosm of the larger battle between evangelical reformers and High Church defenders of the status quo, it also gets to the heart of the old fear of enthusiasm gaining traction among the masses through the circulation of ideas in the form of itinerant preachers and cheap print. From the beginning Hannah More was clear that the purpose of her schools was to teach the poor to read and to provide them with appropriate reading materials. In this I would argue that what was at issue in Blagdon Controversy was the temporality and circularity of the evangelical message in the form of itinerant teachers appointed by More, Sunday Schools, and

Sunday School materials and not (as the *Anti-Jacobin Review* would have it) doctrine. In the overheated media atmosphere of the 1790's and Napoleonic Wars, the unbounded and circulatory nature of evangelicalism and one of its most novel innovations – the Sunday School – was easily associated with radicalism, Calvinism, and every type of threat to the establishment.

This chapter will explore the materiality of the texts and cheap children's literature that were produced for these Sunday Schools, both by Hannah More and others. To that end I will first lay out a brief history of the Sunday School movement in England, along with some of the critical reactions to it, before turning to the texts themselves. Doing so cuts through much of the rhetoric over Sunday Schools – both in the eighteenth century and in modern historical criticism – and allows us to take a ground level view of *how* both children and adults were being taught and how these texts took on a life of their own after publication. This viewpoint also exposes the ever-present tension between the progressive medium of print – cheap to produce, easy to circulate across boundaries, constructed around an educationally progressive curriculum – and often self-consciously conservative messages that filled the texts. That such texts were indeed controversial is evident through the pages of conservative periodicals like *The Anti-Jacobin Review* which consistently attacked on Sunday Schools and children's literature as potentially radical and seditious due to their unbounded and unaccountable structures. (*AJR* 2: ii-iii). In this sense Marshal McLuhan's famous dictum that "the medium is the message" applies more than ever – by using pedagogical strategies like progressive exercises and woodblock illustrations, Sunday School textbook and tract authors created a sort of spiritual literacy that grew out of the forms and structures of the classroom exercises. These types of literacy in turn informed how an increasingly literate, industrial populace engaged with the larger social questions of the day. By examining the material texts of early Sunday Schools – textbooks, spellers, catechisms – we can

develop a clearer perspective on how Sunday Schools shaped the minds of an entire generation of Britain's children on the cusp of the industrial age.

Hannah More and Sunday School Education in Britain

By the time the Blagdon controversy erupted, Sunday Schools were rapidly becoming *the* primary way that many of the poor and working classes learned to read and write. Though individual reformers, like the Methodist Hannah Ball, set up local Sunday Schools as early as the 1740's, it was not until the 1780's that they began to gain mainstream support – especially within the evangelical wing of the Church of England. Specifically, in 1780 a prominent Gloucester publisher and philanthropist named Robert Raikes (1736-1811) was walking on a Sunday when he noticed what he saw as the abuse of the Sabbath by unruly poor children. As he wrote in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1784:

I was walking into the suburbs of the city, where the lowest of the people (who are principally employed in the pin-manufactory) chiefly reside [when] I was struck with concern at seeing a group of children wretchedly ragged, at play in the street. I asked an inhabitant whether those children belonged to that part of the town, and lamented their misery and idleness. – Ah! Sir, said the woman to whom I was speaking, could you take a view of this part of town on Sunday, you should be shocked indeed; for then the street is filled with multitudes of these wretches who, released on that day from their employment, spend their time in noise and riot and playing at chuck, and cursing and swearing in a manner so horrid, as to convey to any serious mind an idea of hell, rather than any other place (qtd. in Tolar Burton 270).

This was the impetus for Raikes' founding of a Sunday School in Gloucester in 1780. Other schools quickly sprung up in the area so that by November 1783 Raikes could write in his own *Gloucester Journal* that, "In those parishes where this plan has been adopted, we are assured that the behaviour of the children is greatly civilized" (qtd in Power 35-36). This became the model that evangelicals like Hannah More adopted – a wealthy patron who set up a system of local schools that were (at least in theory) under his/her control. Though, as we have seen, still viewed

with suspicion even at the turn of the century, the 1790's saw a rapid growth both in the expansion of Sunday Schools and the amount of literature that was produced both explicitly for them and to satisfy the demand for pious reading material from an increasingly literate public.

Thus at their inception Sunday Schools, much like the charity schools that had preceded them, sprung from a desperate need for education among the still coalescing working class. There was no comprehensive system of public education in England until well into the nineteenth century and, though expressed by Raikes as a concern for public order among the poorer classes, his Sunday Schools met a real social need and responded to rapidly changing social conditions in England during the 1780's. Their success over the course of the next fifty years was phenomenal – By 1800, 200,000 children attended Sunday Schools, by 1818 – 240,000, by 1833 – 1,400,000, and by 1851 – 2,100,000 out of a total population of 21 million (Laqueur xi). Titles like the *Sunday School Magazine*, which was published and distributed by the Sunday School Union, sprung up and gained circulation numbers the millions. In fact, by 1839 25-30 million of such moral tracts and literature had been distributed – outselling even the most popular bestsellers (Laqueur 118).

This was the context Hannah More entered when she and her sister Martha founded their first school in the Mendip Hills in 1789. After a luminous career as a London bluestocking, playwright, and protégé of David Garrick, Hannah More experienced a gradual evangelical conversion during the 1780's that led to her renouncing her career as a playwright and dedicating herself to the moral improvement of society. In this she found powerful allies in men like the abolitionist MP William Wilberforce who was an influential member of the evangelical Clapham Sect. With financing largely from Wilberforce and other Claphamites, the Mendip Schools expanded tremendously from 1789 to 1799 when the Blagdon Controversy erupted. From their

initial school in Cheddar, the sisters expanded into surrounding towns like Wedmore, Axbridge, Shipham, Nailsea, Yatton, Congresbury, and Blagdon. The sisters' practice was to enter a town, get permission from the parish clergyman to form a school and then solicit the villagers and local farmers for support. Some of these schools were quite successful, and eventually formed adult schools and charity clubs for women which provided compensation for sickness or lying in. The Cheddar school even persisted well into the twentieth century.

By and large, though, the history of Sunday Schools, including Hannah More's has been dominated E.P. Thompson's famous argument in *The Making of the English Working Class* that Sunday Schools mainly operated as middle class instruments of social control and indoctrination (375-376). Though no doubt prompted by the best of motives, reformers like Raikes and Hannah More did see themselves as defenders of the existing social order. The conditions of the poor could be bettered and they could be taught to be better stewards of their time and money, but they ultimately could not expect to rise above their God-ordained place in society. Such critiques especially like to point to More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* (discussed at length below), painting them mainly as instruments of social control during the age of revolution. Even her admirers tend to read them this way, for example Anne Stott praises the clever use of language and deft narration of the *Tracts* yet remarks that they "are widely disliked for preaching the doctrine that the poor must passively await their salvation at the hands of the upper classes. They are also highly predictable. More's devout upwardly mobile heroes and heroines rise through their own efforts and the benevolence of kind-hearted ladies, zealous magistrates, and godly clergyman – far-fetched scenarios in the traumatic 1790's" (179). Such criticism is understandable. The *Cheap Repository* is didactic and difficult to read by modern standards – yet we would do well to keep in mind that such standards would have made little sense in More's

cultural context and that, as Pederson has pointed out and I will explore at length below, in many ways the *Tracts* were revolutionary by the standards of the age.

Likewise such critics like to point to a letter Hannah More wrote to Wilberforce when she was first establishing her schools in the Mendips in which she describes her course of study:

...my plan for instructing the poor is very limited and strict. They learn of week-days such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing. My object has not been to teach dogmas and opinions, but to form the lower class to habits of industry and virtue. I know no way of teaching morals but by infusing principles of Christianity, nor of teaching Christianity without a thorough knowledge of Scripture. In teaching in our Sunday-schools, the only books we use are two little tracts called "Questions for the Mendip Schools,"... the Church Catechism (these are hung up in frames, half-a-dozen in a room), the Catechism broke into short questions, Spelling-books, Psalters, Common Prayer-book, and Bible (*Mendip Annals* 6).

Because she strictly limited what her pupils could read to her own, highly moral, literature and barred the teaching of writing, many have drawn a picture of More as a conservative defender of the status quo, attempting to balance the educational needs of a growing population with a fear that teaching the masses to read and write would foment revolution. However convincing such a reading might be, viewing More's Sunday Schools exclusively in terms of class conflict fails to account for the scale and violence of the opposition to Sunday Schools and children's literature that characterized the Blagdon Controversy. Clearly reading More's social activities through the lens of Marxist critique, however interesting it might be, misses something about her local, social, and religious context.

Since Thompson's still influential critique, a generation of feminist scholars has reassessed both More and her work, arguing for a picture of More that is far more grounded in her cultural context. Mitzi Myers and Anne Mellor pioneered this strain of criticism, arguing that More's feminism and political activism had far more in common with the project of someone like Mary Wollstonecraft than has previously been thought. On the other hand both Demers and

Kowaleski-Wallace have painted more complex pictures of More – acknowledging her singular achievements but ultimately marking her as complicit in the governing order and a defender of the established social hierarchy.⁵⁸ More recently feminist scholars have sought to walk the line between these positions – acknowledging More’s often deep social conservatism while at the same time applauding her pioneering work in women’s education, abolition, and social reform. For example according to Nardin, More’s views on the poor as expressed in her unpublished letters seem quite different from those that were edited and published posthumously by her biographers. She argues that More, “was angrier and more deeply critical of both church and state than... [most scholars] allow. And her disaffection increased markedly during the 1790s” (269).

Furthermore, as I have also pointed out, judgments about the conventionality of More’s social and educational beliefs often fail to take fully account of her historical context. As Nardin argues, no “‘characteristic’ or ‘typical’ attitude toward the poor marked the years from 1789 to 1803. An acrimonious debate over the cause and cure of poverty characterized the period, a debate to which More responded in an idiosyncratic manner. As her own views changed, a period of reaction set in, and this conjunction of events prevented her from negotiating a wholly satisfactory public stance” (269). More’s shifting perspective on the problem of poverty and the education of the poor can be directly traced to her evangelical beliefs, thus it should come as no surprise that, at exactly the time when her evangelical Sunday School project was first coming to prominence in the national eye, she faced some of her most vehement opposition in the form of attacks from the establishment.

More’s perspective on the problem of poverty also speaks to her controversial (and often misunderstood) prohibition on writing instruction. As Laqueur has argued, the conventional view of the subject, which reads this prohibition as conservative and repressive, does not take into

account the broader scope of the argument in the early nineteenth century (124-125). In reality the prohibition on writing was rarely enforced and, when it was, it had more to do with the limitations of the Sunday School system itself than a fear of working class revolt. Given the short amount of time that was given over to teaching during the week, for most students writing was simply not a needed skill. In many cases More did allow more promising students to learn writing – often outside of Sunday School hours. Furthermore, many of the fears over writing in the broader public instruction faded after 1800 and the opposition to writing was based mainly on religious conviction and denominational politics. However these fears, the most commonly discussed challenges to Mores project, do provide a useful frame for understanding some of what was written in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*.

Likewise Hilton, Shefrin, and Stott, in important works on the establishment of working class education in England, have argued that More’s educational theory was indeed progressive by the standards of the time. As Hilton and Shefrin point out in their introduction to a volume on *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain*, a “new cultural history of education... calls for a reconsideration of the ideas of renowned educational theorists such [as]... Hannah More, a reconsideration that relates their moral and social ideas in fine detail, including their forms of representation, to their contemporary cultural environments” (5). Following this pattern in the same volume Stott argues that More’s “Christianity was infused with Lockean principles and wider Enlightenment values and this impacted strongly on her theory and practice of education” (42). Likewise Hilton, in *Women and the Shaping of the Nation’s Young*, argues more broadly for the role women like More played in shaping the education of Britain’s children. In More’s case, Hilton maintains that the *Strictures* was in fact a “clarion call to women’s activism... evangelical philanthropy by individuals who were driven by an inner need to secure their own

everlasting redemption was to become an extraordinarily widespread locus of female endeavour” (142). The aggregate portrait that emerges from this work is that of a woman who was deeply grounded in the educational theory and practice of her times, who often expressed one view when speaking to wealthy patrons, and another when actually dealing with the people she served. What all of these critiques lack, however, is a clear understanding of More’s evangelical context and the role conversion played in her life and work. This context is crucial if we are to fully understand the vehemence of the backlash against her during the Blagdon Controversy and the suspicion of Sunday Schools more broadly.

Finally, the view that Sunday Schools largely operated under the heavy hand of a wealthy patron like Raikes or More has also been reassessed. Thomas Laqueur has convincingly argued that what began as a relatively circumscribed movement among middle class evangelical Anglicans quickly spread across the country and among Methodists, Dissenters, and even political radicals. What is more, control of these local Sunday Schools rarely rested in the hands of wealthy patrons like Raikes. Instead, Sunday School instruction quickly became far more dependent upon local and denominational circumstances than the opinions of a few influential reformers. What all of these scholars have in common is an understanding of More’s activities grounded in cultural and political reality. All of them realize that educational reformers like More in many cases worked to reform education (especially women’s education) in innovative ways.

Nowhere is this innovation more apparent than in the production, distribution, and use of Sunday School textbooks which, by the turn of the eighteenth century was a major enterprise. Laqueur estimates that, between 1809 and 1830 over 10 million copies of two of the most popular Sunday School readers were sold (114). The non-denominational Sunday School Union was especially active in producing Sunday School materials that were used by schools across the

denominational spectrum. By and large these texts were cheaply mass produced for a vast audience and distributed across the country. These textbooks speak for themselves as a living record of how early Sunday School organizers, teachers, and students viewed the tasks of reading and writing instruction. Though sometimes used in the service of conservative social ideas, nevertheless the progressive medium of the Sunday School textbook in many cases trumped any conservative message.

Thus, by taking the material texts of the Sunday School movement – readers, spellers, catechisms, magazines, chapbooks, children’s literature – as our starting point, we are able to get a better perspective on how these texts actually operated in context. As Lisa Maruca has argued “print is a site in which the book as a tangible object meets the meaningful text contained within its pages” (4). Too often (following the romantics) we have paid exclusive attention to the content of such texts, ignoring the medium altogether. Often medium and message work in close conjunction but, as we will see below, this is not always the case when the educational goals of the medium transcend the cultural particularities and peculiarities of a given time and place. The extension of the Sunday School project in the nineteenth century well beyond the bounds prescribed for it by someone like Raikes in the eighteenth are ample evidence of this fact. Often the medium of print became an avenue for new forms of political and religious expression of which the founders of the movement could not conceive and certainly would not have approved.

This is not to argue for some sort of technological determinism, whereby the medium of print trumps all. As we have already seen in the case of the Blagdon Controversy, how print is interpreted has very much to do with context and the social and religious contexts of the late eighteenth century were in an almost constant state of flux. Thus the Mendip Schools could, overnight, go from being hardly controversial at all to a radical danger to Church and state. That

said much of the controversy over Hannah More's work and legacy has been colored by twenty-first century assumptions about what evangelical religion means and the broader social goals of the movement. Instead of reading back modern assumptions about religion and religious experience onto the eighteenth century, I will instead use the materiality of Sunday School literature to more fully understand her context and especially how More perceived her evangelical mission. To do so I will first trace the origins of Sunday School textbook production, which are deeply tied to the development of primary school education in England and the debates over the proper course of education of children that characterized the late eighteenth century. Though Hannah More never wrote one of these textbooks they were nevertheless common in Sunday Schools like hers and thus came to shape the way a generation of children learned to read, write, and think.

An examination of these textbooks also provides necessary context for understanding the educational and children's literature More herself produced – her abridged catechism, *Questions and Answers for Mendip Schools*, and her *Cheap Repository Tracts*, many of which were written about Sunday Schools and represented the type of literature her pupils were expected to read. The *Cheap Repository* in particular has long been considered one of More's most deeply conservative projects and, though there is truth to this, placing the texts in the context of the Sunday School movement as a whole reveals an entirely new perspective on their form and function. Thus this broad based approach to the literature allows us to better understand More's particular evangelical project and the function of the Sunday School movement as a whole. For despite More's best intentions, the materiality and circularity of Sunday School texts made it easy for them to slip out of her control. In this sense the Sunday School movement opened the door for the working class movements of the early nineteenth century by providing workers with

an organizational model to imitate. Furthermore, by pioneering the teaching of reading through the use of cheap moral literature Hannah More made possible the very kinds of social and political reform she most bitterly opposed.

Early Sunday School Textbooks

Textbook publication by and for turn of the eighteenth century Sunday Schools was a major enterprise. Part of the reason for this massive circulation is that these texts were cheap to mass produce and, through the vehicle of itinerant preachers and teachers like Henry Young, easy to distribute. Such books were also clearly profitable for the publishers, as they continued to turn out Sunday School material at an astonishing rate well into the nineteenth century. Rivington, in particular, was noted for publishing a wide variety of moral literature for popular consumption, including the *Cheap Repository*. The most popular readers and spellers remained relatively consistent throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and were widely used across denominational bounds. They included: William Paley's *Reading Made Completely Easy*, T. Wise's *Reading Made Easy and Best Guide to Spelling*, and Joseph Brown's *New English Primer, or Reading Made Easy*. Each textbook followed a similar graduated curriculum that stressed progressive exercises in reading and spelling. Students would first be introduced to the letters of the alphabet and then progressively work through one, two, three, and multisyllable words. Each unit also usually contained a short story or scripture passage that used many of the words included in the lesson. These stories, if not from scripture itself, usually contained an explicit moral lesson for the child to learn. Furthermore, rough woodcuts often accompanied the stories or words to illustrate the concepts visually for the student.

In this these early readers and spellers incorporated much of the Lockean educational theory that had been popularized by educators like Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft,

Sarah Trimmer, and Hannah More herself who, in her *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, recommended the *Essay* as part of a course of study for young women. John Locke's 1693 treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* essentially applied the conclusions of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to the education of children – arguing that children's minds were essentially blank slates and that all ideas are gained through the senses. As such, children should be taught to read and write through an approximation of sensual experience:

If his Aesop has pictures in it, it will entertain him much better, and encourage him to read, when it carries the increase of knowledge with it: for such visible objects children hear talked of in vain and without any satisfaction whilst they have no ideas of them; those ideas being not to be had from sounds, but from the things themselves or their pictures. And therefore I think as soon as he begins to spell, as many pictures of animals should be got him as can be found, with the printed names to them, which at the same time will invite him to read, and afford him matter of enquiry and knowledge (184).

In arguing for the incorporation of pictures of animals and other natural objects into a text, Locke posits a pedagogical role for illustrations which, according to Schultz, worked to “extend... the limits of the children's knowledge and help... them to connect with a world larger than that of their immediate circumstance” (88). This theory was picked up by Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) who in 1778 published *Lessons for Children* – a groundbreaking children's book which not only included pictures but led children through basic concepts of reading and writing step by step – mirroring the complexity of the subject matter with the complexity of the language.

Paley's *Reading Made Completely Easy*, which was one of the most widely used Sunday School texts (Laqueur 114), was subtitled: *A Necessary Introduction to the Bible: Consisting Chiefly of Scripture Sentences; Each lesson of which is disposed in such Order, as the Learner is led on with pleasure, Step by Step, from simple and easy, to compound and difficult words:*

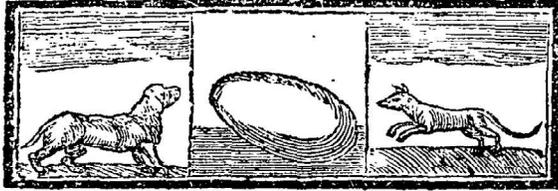
which is allowed by All to be the most regular, speedy, and rational Method of Teaching. By thus adopting the Lockean method of leading the student step by step through graduated lessons that stressed experience, *Reading Made Completely Easy* adopts a decidedly “rational” approach to education that is based on theories of cognition instead of innate knowledge. Paley was one of the foremost proponents of a theory of natural law based on Locke’s *Essay*. His *Natural Theology* was one of the most influential works and widely read works of the eighteenth century and first popularized the analogy of the “watchmaker God” to explain the design of the universe. By explicitly illustrating its lessons through “scripture sentences,” and by concluding with a brief catechism that leads students through the basic tenants of the faith, the textbook fulfills the other chief goal of the Sunday School – instruction in Bible reading and Christian living. For Paley especially knowledge of the world as inculcated in educational texts leads naturally to knowledge of who made the world.

Likewise, as Shultz has pointed out, the woodcuts that accompany such texts cannot be ignored as tools of instruction (88). The Lockean theory of education privileged sensory experience of the world and the illustrations that accompany the text worked to reproduce this experience. Both *Reading Made Completely Easy* and *Reading Made Easy*, for example, begin with an illustrated alphabet that includes images that correspond to each letter:

4 *READING made*
 Ap-ple. Bear. Cock.



Dog. Egg. Fer-rit.



Goofe. Hen. Jay.

This provided a concrete image that the student could then associate with each letter of the alphabet. Likewise the *New English Primer* includes woodblock illustrations of scenes from everyday life that subtly inculcate a moral or social message:



The Windmill
grinds the corn for bread.



The sluggish Hog
waits to be fed.



Behold the King
in robes of state.



The humble Beggar
at the gate.

Here children are encouraged to associate specific simple words and phrases with still life representations. Notice that, though the content of the woodblocks seems to confirm the established divide between king and beggar and the traditional societal role of the farmer or miller, the medium is decidedly progressive, providing a means to reading, writing, and understanding the world to a marginally literate public. I will discuss this tension at length in my examination of the *Cheap Repository*, but this tension between image, text, and idea is present throughout the literature produced for Sunday Schools and, despite the seemingly innocuous social message it is important to keep in mind that it was precisely this type of instruction that worried the producers of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*.

Thus, even when the material included in the Readers and Spellers is not explicitly religious, it is specifically moral. *Reading Made Easy*, for example, includes an entire section of fables that include a specific moral. In the fable of “The Lion and the Mouse” the moral is that “the great and little may need the Help of one another – the most powerful or wealthy Person on Earth may want the Assistance of the smallest or poorest, in some Way or other. – for who could have thought that the Lion, so powerful as he is, could have been indebted to a Mouse for his Life.” Even here, then, the reading exercise seeks to promote virtue and knowing one’s place in the social order.⁵⁹ And the woodcut that accompanies the story provides a vivid visual example for the young reader.

62 READING MADE EASY.

F A B L E II.

The Lion and the Mouse.

A Lion was once very kind to a poor little Mouse, and saved him from the Claws of a Cat.

Overall, then, the Readers and Spellers that were used by Sunday Schools served a variety of purposes. Not only did they teach reading and writing based on Lockean educational theories about experiential, graduated knowledge – they also promoted social and religious virtue through the reading exercises that accompanied the texts. In some texts (*Reading Made Completely Easy*) the scriptural component was more pronounced than others, but all sought to frame literacy in explicitly religious terms, creating a type of “spiritual literacy,” which Vicki Tolar Burton describes as the “regular, repeated practices of reading and writing that occur in the private, communal, and institutional life of the spirit” (2). Looking for this type of spiritual literacy means taking account of the wide variety of literacy practices that ordinary people engaged in. It was through these literacy practices that a significant portion of the British population learned to engage first with religion and then with a rapidly shifting public sphere. That this literacy often spawned beliefs and movements that went well beyond the intentions of Sunday School authors is simply a testament to the power of the medium to shape ideas and beliefs.

Catechisms and Moral Literature

This is readily apparent in the second category of Sunday School textbook that was used by almost all the schools: catechisms and cheap moral literature like More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*. Remember that Hannah More only allowed the use of "two little tracts called 'Questions for the Mendip Schools,'... the Church Catechism... the Catechism broke into short questions, Spelling-books, Psalters, Common Prayer-book, and Bible" (6). We have already seen how catechistic and moral material could be woven into the readers and spellers that most Sunday Schools used, but there was also an entirely separate category of moral and religious literature that was used alongside these core texts.

Catechisms

The catechisms were often abridgements of standard catechisms adapted to both the age of the audience and particular denominational differences. Hannah More's *Questions and Answers for the Mendip and Sunday Schools* is a brief (eleven page) text, which abridges the Church of England catechism, asking questions like "Who made you and all the world?" and "Who redeemed you?" By thus applying reading instruction to Church doctrine, More was able to both control what children read and inculcate religious virtue. In this she also follows Locke who suggested that "as soon as he can say the Lord's Prayer, Creed, the Ten Commandments, by heart, it may be fit for him to learn a question every day, or every week, as his understanding is able to receive and his memory to retain them" (*Some Thoughts* 188-189). Thus progressive reading and memorization are combined to instill moral principles for, as Locke argues in his *Essay on Human Understanding*, these are the principles that, if learned while young, will guide a child through the rest of his or her life.

However, Hannah More's *Questions and Answers* is a deceptively simple text that has received little attention in the critical literature. Perhaps because the content itself seems to so

closely mirror the Church catechism, few people have paid attention to the form – both the way the pamphlet is constructed and the way it leads the reader through a set of questions to a conclusion which the internal logic of the text dictates. Unlike the official catechism, More's *Questions and Answers* is far more evangelical, beginning with questions like, "Who redeemed you?" and "Who sanctified you?" (3) before moving on to cover "What is the Gospel?" (4), "For whom did Christ die?", "Will all then be saved?" (7), "What is faith in Christ?"(8), "What is leading to a new life?" and "How are we to shew our duty to our neighbor?" (9). The doctrine itself is not unique, it is thoroughly Arminian and can in fact be found in the Church catechism, *Book of Common Prayer*, and *Book of Homilies*. What is uniquely evangelical is the way the information is highlighted, with the singular focus on the work of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and the resultant change of heart and life that works outward into the world in love for one's neighbor. It is not hard to imagine, then, how the *Questions and Answers* could be regarded with suspicion by the Church establishment in its seeming elision of the role of the Church in mediating the gospel. Salvation is collapsed, in More's account, into a personal relationship and experience with God that prompts action.

Formally speaking the *Questions* inculcate an internal dialogue that in many ways mirrors the experience of prayer. By leading the child progressively through a series of questions about the nature of God, sin, and salvation, More constructs a logic that leads to an inevitable conclusion. Though this conclusion is necessarily evangelical and religious in nature, it would be dangerous to underestimate the impact this type of question and answer structure had on the formation of working class subjectivity. As Baker and Freebody have argued, books written for children pioneered this type of question and answer format by utilizing reported speech to lead a young reader through an argument to a correct conclusion. By imitating the language and

conversations of everyday life children are taught what to expect and how to react in real life. We see this type of reported talk all the time, for example, in works as seemingly disparate as Anna Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*, Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life*, and More's own *Village Politics* and *Cheap Repository Tracts*. Though commonplace by today's standards, this type of talk was a relatively new and Lockean innovation in children's education. In the *Questions and Answers*, More appropriates the familiar form of the catechism and uses the inbuilt question and answer structure to inculcate an entirely different type of social and religious message. By thus subtly teaching a new set of people to ask questions of the Church establishment, texts like the *Questions* (consciously or not) *did* contribute to the growing unrest among the bulk of the population. In this the *Anti-Jacobin* was perhaps correct to be worried for, as Laquer has pointed out, many of the working class organizations that sprung up during the 1810's and 1820's had their origin within the Sunday School movement.

That the theology of the *Questions* is subtly different from that of the official Church catechism becomes germane to the controversy over More's schools as reported in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and other ultra-loyalist publications. This theology is very much of a piece with the final section of the *Strictures*, thoroughly evangelical and concerned primarily with the child's personal experience of God. As Stott argues, "the Mendip *Questions* ascribe salvation, in true 'Methodist' fashion, entirely to personal faith in a way that highlighted the differences between Evangelical and High Church teaching on salvation" (243). The importance of this question cannot be overestimated. Perhaps nothing was more controversial about Hannah More, and the evangelical movement in general, than the question of salvation. In her 1799 *Strictures*, the final section of the book clearly lays out the main tenets of evangelicalism and powerfully

(and controversially) argues for works as a fruit of faith and, by implication, salvation as a matter of faith alone:

It will be well here to distinguish that there are two sorts of Christian professors, one of which affect to speak of Christianity as if it were a mere system of doctrines, with little reference to their influence on life and manners; while the other consider it as exhibiting a scheme of human duties independent on its doctrines. For though the latter sort may admit the doctrines, yet they contemplate them as a separate and disconnected set of opinions, rather than as an influential principle of action. In violation of that beautiful harmony which subsists in every part of Scripture between practice and belief, the religious world furnishes two sorts of people who seem to enlist themselves, as if in opposition, under the banners of St. Paul and St. James.... Those who affect respectively to be the disciples of each, treat faith and works as if they were opposite interests, instead of inseparable points.... This combined view of the subject seems, on the one hand, to be the only means of preventing the substitution of pagan morality for Christian holiness; and, on the other, of securing the leading doctrine of justification by faith, from the dreadful danger of antinomian licentiousness; every human obligation being thus grafted on the living stock of a divine principle (407-409).

Even on this point, however, More opened herself up to attack from High Church partisans for her overly zealous evangelical views.

The ultra-Tory High Churchman Charles Daubeny led these attacks and in fact was the man behind many of the attacks in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*. In his *Letter to Mrs. Hannah More* (1799) he praises the majority of the *Strictures*, but severely criticizes More's interpretation of the role of faith and works in salvation. He particularly objects More's interpretation of Romans, upon which she founds her argument for works being the natural result of faith in Christ as the means of salvation. As a good Churchman, Daubeny would have agreed with her that faith in Christ was paramount, but he takes exception to her argument that the Church makes works a matter of mere duty or moralism in the service of salvation. Interpreting the crucial twelfth chapter of Romans, he argues that no man or woman could hope to perform the actions of a Christian as a matter of mere duty:

This chapter, therefore, cannot, according to this idea be understood, much less can the duties of it be practiced, but by a person acquainted with the genius and spirit of the Christian religion. To consider it then, as containing duties which the mere moralist might perform, is to degrade the subject, which the Apostle appears to have had before him, and thereby to lessen the effect which the spiritual connexion between the Law and Gospel, when properly enforced, was calculated to produce (20).

The difference between the positions may seem like relative shades of grey today – with More arguing for an evangelical conversion experience that works necessarily through the believer’s life as against a performance of duty as a means to faith, and Daubeny claiming that no true Christian could perform their duties if they were not justified to God in the first place, thus confirming the role of the performance of Church duties on the road to faith. In reality the two positions are not very far apart (in fact John Wesley would have claimed that there was no difference between them at all) but in the supercharged atmosphere of the late 1790’s, any deviation from the establishment could be interpreted as seditious.

Indeed, More’s emphasis on evangelical salvation in her educational work provided additional fodder for her opponents in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* which, at Daubeny’s urging, savaged her in its pages. In fact, the reviewer clearly paraphrases Daubeny’s *Letter*, linking More to Wilberforce and arguing, that “If Mrs. More be really of Mr. Wilberforce’s school, her faith is, like his, Calvinism in disguise and her attachment to the Church of England of a very questionable kind” (*AJR* IV:255). Likewise, as the Blagdon Controversy unfolded the *Review* returned again and again to the question of the orthodoxy of her belief on this point – prompting anonymous letters of defense from on “I.S.” which were published in the pages of the review throughout 1800. In this light the revelation, in 1802, that More had received communion from the hand of a dissenter was all the more serious as it was taken as the final proof of her failure to adhere to Church teachings. All this to say that evangelical conversion operated as the crux of

More's work, while at the same time it was this very evangelicalism that opened her up to charges of dangerous radicalism. Thus the *Questions and Answers for the Mendip and Sunday Schools* operate as a powerful educational tool – one that, far from being repressive, opens up a broad array of new ways of thinking about the individual's place in Church and society. Drawing on both conversion experience and Lockean theory, More uses the language of everyday life and the question and answer form to create a type of spiritual literacy that was subsequently difficult to control – even for More. The story of the *Cheap Repository*, which I will turn to next, is thus largely the story of attempts to control religious language and the possibility that this language – through the medium of print – could ultimately slip out of control.

The Cheap Repository Tracts

In February 1795 at the urging of some of her influential friends like the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, Hannah More embarked on a monumental publishing endeavor that would consume much of her time and energy over the next five years. Responding to both the upheaval of the French Revolution and what she perceived as the coarsening of popular entertainment and culture, she began writing and publishing the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, inexpensive chapbooks that aimed to reach a broad portion of the British public, but especially the type of person who might have attended one of her Sunday Schools. By almost any measure the *Cheap Repository* proved to be tremendously successful. According to Pederson 300,000 were sold or distributed between March 3 and April 18, 1795; 700,000 by July 1795; and over 2 million by March 1796 (112). They continued to be reprinted well into the nineteenth century and even spawned spin-off tracts that were not authored by More or her immediate circle, indicating that publishers believed there was a market for this type of literature. Though some scholars have questioned the extent to which these copies actually reached the poor – pointing

out that many were purchased in bulk by wealthy philanthropists for distribution – it seems clear from a study of Sunday Schools that such literature had a far-reaching impact.

Indeed there can be no doubt that More's work was on the leading edge of what would become a nineteenth century explosion of moral periodicals written explicitly for Sunday Schools. Titles like the *Sunday School Magazine*, which was published and distributed by the Sunday School Union, sprung up and gained circulation numbers the millions. Clearly such literature did work to shape the way children learned to read, write, and relate to key social institutions throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thus, though the *Cheap Repository* has been studied as an important moment in print culture and in the context of Hannah More's literary work, they have not been read in the context of her Sunday Schools – for which I argue they were in part written. Indeed the *Cheap Repository* fits well into the burgeoning genre of children's literature that More's contemporaries like Anna Barbauld, Sarah Trimmer, and Mary Wollstonecraft were beginning to experiment with and deserve to be considered as such.

Thus I will focus on the *Tracts* primarily in the context of More's educational projects, arguing that they operated as a powerful pedagogical tool whereby children and adults were taught to read and that this "unregulated" reading – even of moral literature – still worried some in the establishment. On the surface these tracts seem to inculcate a relatively conservative form of moralism – accepting one's place in the established order, working hard, and receiving a reward commensurate with one's station in life. This is how they have largely been read in the growing literature on the *Cheap Repository*, even in works that take a more nuanced view of More's life and work.⁶⁰ However, while it is certainly true that the *Cheap Repository* is incredibly didactic by today's standards, this type of cheap and readily available literature was

still considered threatening, especially to the writers of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. In fact in 1799 the *Review* announced its wish to “press upon the attention of the public the contents of an article inserted towards the conclusion of the present volume, relative to the diffusion of Jacobinical principles, through the medium of *Children’s Books*” and labeled this as a “diabolical effort to corrupt the minds of the rising generation, to make them imbibe, with their very milk, as it were, the poison of atheism and disaffection” (ii). The article itself goes even further, arguing that children’s literature is a trick whereby Jacobins plant their ideas in the heads of the young:

Among the various modes of disseminating Jacobinism, or what directly leads to it, the principles of liberty and equality, there is one which, though in appearance may be less formidable, is no less pernicious in its tendency, and which has hitherto escaped your notice. It is well known what pains all writers of that stamp have taken to impress upon the minds of the young and unwary the leading doctrines of their school, and under what artful disguises and specious pretexts they have endeavoured to insinuate their poison into all ranks and degrees of men. Even the nursery is not exempt from the unremitting efforts of these disturbers of the human race. And the fact, which I shall now state, will shew the necessity of every parent’s examining, with care, every little penny book which may fall into the hands of their children, even of the most tender age (450).

Though the *Cheap Repository* is not mentioned, the identification of “penny books” as the chief source of this type of sedition clearly marks out the chapbook and broadside market for opprobrium. Indeed, one of the underlying insinuations in the *Review*’s subsequent attacks on More during the Blagdon Controversy is that she is using her Sunday Schools to inculcate Methodist (and thus, in their minds, Jacobin) principles.

Ironically, it was a similar concern over the promiscuous circulation and reading of “penny books” that prompted More to begin the *Cheap Repository*. For, if she was going to teach children and adults to read in her Sunday Schools, she wanted them to use their newfound knowledge to read appropriate literature. Of particular concern to More was a tradition of cheap popular literature in England that dated to the early seventeenth century. Broadside ballads,

cheap pamphlets, and bawdy tracts were produced cheaply and en masse and then sold throughout the countryside by ballad hawkers (Pederson 87). Such literature was tremendously popular but also deeply troubling to someone like Hannah More who objected to the often immoral sexual content of the broadsides. This opposition is registered in the *Tracts* themselves, most notably in *The Sunday School*, which chronicles the efforts of a Hannah More-like character named Mrs. Jones to establish a Sunday School in her country parish. While soliciting support for her Sunday School Mrs. Jones visits a wealthy farmer to ask for his support and subscription to the cause. The farmer is far from convinced of the necessity of Sunday Schools, stating that “Of all the foolish inventions, and new-fangled devices to ruin the country, that of teaching the poor to read is the very worst” (10). In this the farmer echoes the concerns of the establishment and of wealthy landowners who feared that teaching workers to read would reduce the effectiveness of their labor. Indeed when Hannah and Patty More were canvassing for support of their original Cheddar school they too met with similar opposition from a local farmer who is most certainly the model for this one.⁶¹ However Mrs. Jones responds to the farmer by arguing for the usefulness of reading and taking him to task for his immoral reading habits:

“And I, farmer, think that to teach good principles to the lower classes is the most likely to save the country. Now in order to this we must teach them to read.” “Not with my consent nor my money,” said the farmer, “for I know it always does more harm than good.” So it may,” said Mrs. Jones, “if you only teach them to read and then turn them adrift to find out books for themselves. There is a proneness in the heart to evil which it is our duty to counteract, and which I see you are promoting. Only look round your own kitchen, I am ashamed to see it hung round with loose songs and ballads. I grant indeed it would be better for your men and maids, and even your daughters, not to be able to read at all than to read such stuff as this. But if when they ask for bread you will give them a stone, nay worse, a serpent, your’s is the blame.” (10-11).

Mrs. Jones then goes outside and finds a ballad hawker selling this type of immoral penny literature to the farm girls, further emphasizing what More saw as a real threat to society. Thus in

this tract More simultaneously provides a justification for Sunday Schools, denounces immoral broadsides, and provides an alternative that could easily be used at a Sunday School or at home. In refusing to simply condemn reading as the source of immoral or seditious reading habits, Hannah More sought to provide an acceptable alternative to more popular forms of media. As we will see, however, in treading this fine line she always risked the medium getting away from her and opening the way to the types of promiscuous reading she disapproved of. What, after all, was to stop a student from moving on from the *Cheap Repository* to the *Rights of Man*? This was what worried the *Anti-Jacobin Review* the most.

Indeed the publication and distribution history of the *Cheap Repository* itself points to both how the tracts could often transcend their conservative message and also some of the ways in which the medium itself could not be controlled or disciplined, even by its creator. From the very beginning Hannah More conceived of a plan of mass circulation explicitly designed to circumvent official channels of distribution in order to reach the widest possible audience. This is clear even from the title pages of the individual tracts which, in addition to the title and a woodblock illustrating a scene from the story, included detailed information on the publisher, booksellers, hawkers, and price:

Sold by J. Marshall, (Printer to the CHEAP REPOSITORY for Religious and Moral Tracts) No. 17, Queen St, Cheapside, and No. 4, Aldermary Church-Yard, and R. White, Piccadilly, London. By S. Hazard, at Bath, J. Elder, and Edinburgh, and by all Booksellers, Newsmen, and Hawkers, in Town and Country. Great Allowance will be made to Shopkeepers and Hawkers. PRICE ONE PENNY, Or 4s. 6d. 100 – 6d for 50 – 1s. 6.d. for 25. A Cheaper Edition for Hawkers.

Clearly More intended the tracts to be sold cheaply or even given away. Tremendous emphasis is especially placed on the role of ballad hawkers, who are mentioned multiple times – not only does the page state that “great allowance will be made to shopkeepers and hawkers,” but it goes on to list the discounts that are given if the tracts are purchased in bulk and hint that they will be

sold at an even cheaper price to hawkers. Clearly the intention here is to have the tracts circulate as widely as possible and More understood that the best way to do this was to make them available at an extremely low cost to the network of ballad hawkers that travelled the country. In fact according to Stott, More and her wealthy patrons made a concerted effort to recruit hawkers to their cause. According to one Bristol newspaper, hawkers were invited to attend a gathering at Hazard's library in bath and "A number of hawkers attended, decently dressed, with characteristic ribbands in their hats, and an assortment of instructive and entertaining works in poetry and prose were presented to each by a subscription of ladies and gentlemen there present" (qtd. in Stott 169). Likewise More provided discounts for wealthy patrons so that they could give away the tracts and there is evidence that some of the gentry did buy the tracts in bulk, which could in part account for their high circulation numbers (Stott 75). In any event it is clear that More wanted her tracts to circulate freely, quickly, and in large numbers. That her publishers seemed eager to continue to produce the tracts is a testament to the fact that they must have made money.

CHEAP REPOSITORY.

THE
SUNDAY SCHOOL.



Sold by J. MARSHALL,

(Printer to the CHEAP REPOSITORY for Religious and Moral Tracts) No. 17, Queen-Street, Cheap-side, and No. 4, Aldermay Church-Yard, and R. WHITE, Piccadilly, LONDON.

By S. HAZARD, at Bath, J. ELDER, at Edinburgh, and by all Booksellers, Newsmen, and Hawkers, in Town and Country. Great Allowance will be made to Shopkeepers and Hawkers.

PRICE ONE PENNY,

Or 4s. 6d. 100.—2s. 6d. for 50.—1s. 6d. for 25.

A Cheaper Edition for Hawkers,

[*Entered at Stationers Hall.*]

That said, there is even evidence within the tracts themselves of how More intended them to circulate among the poor – and especially her Sunday School pupils. *The History of Hester Wilmot*, for example, continues the story More began in *The Sunday School* by telling the tale of Hester, a young pupil in Mrs. Jones' Sunday School whose father, John, is a drunkard, and whose mother, Rebecca, is a busybody who does not see the value of religion. Hester has been saving the money she earns from spinning to buy a gown for the Sunday School's annual celebration (modeled on More's actual feasts for the Mendip Schools) where the pupils recite from the Bible, receive rewards, and enjoy a feast provided by the Sunday School patrons. Her father, however, asks for the money to gamble with and Hester obeys the fifth commandment and complies. Predictably her father loses all the money and Hester is forced to go to the celebration in an old gown. Mrs. Jones rewards Hester for her piety by presenting her with her own Bible and the end result is that her father begins attending church because of his daughter's sacrifice.

The most interesting part of this story for my purposes, however, is the hint it gives about how More intended her tracts to be used. Towards the end of the tale we find out that John has not only been attending church but also an adult Sunday School and has learned to read – a change that causes him to look for new reading material:

In a few months John could read a psalm; in learning to read it he also got it by heart, and this proved a little store for private devotion, and while he was mowing he could call to mind a text to cheer his labour, He now went constantly to church and often dropped in at the school on a Sunday evening to hear their prayers. He expressed so much pleasure at this, that one day Hester ventured to ask him if they should set up a family prayer at home. John said he should like this mightily, but as he could not yet read quite well enough, he desired Hester to try to get a proper book and begin next Sunday night. Hester had bought of a pious Hawker for three-halfpence the Book of Prayers, printed for the Cheap Repository, by Mr. Marshall, Queen-Street Cheapside. When Hester read the exhortation at the beginning of this little book, her mother, who sat in the corner, and pretended to

be asleep, was so much struck that she could not find a word to say against it. (14-15)

Thus at the dangerous moment when the working man learns to read and begins to want to read new things, the *Cheap Repository* steps in and provides appropriate material. Embedded in the text is not only an example of how a Sunday School could work to reform the poor, but also an advertisement for another tract and information on where to buy it. Not only that but More provides an example of how this further example of circulation continues to work outward in converting Hester's mother Rebecca. The tract that she advertises is her *Cheap Repository Prayers* which provided set prayers that a family could use in private – thus not only did More provide the poor with their own catechism in the *Questions and Answers* but their own version of the *Book of Common Prayer* in the *Cheap Repository Prayers*. Small wonder then that men like Charles Daubeny, Thomas Bere, and reviewers at the *Anti-Jacobin Review* were concerned about the free circulation of penny literature – even if it claimed to be religious it still toyed with the margins of what it was acceptable for the poor to know.

Especially concerning to men like this was the issue of adult education, which *Hester Wilmot*, addresses directly. One of the chief objections to More's work during the Blagdon Controversy was not so much her teaching children to read, but Henry Young's establishment of a similar school for adults that often met on weekday evenings. Many Sunday Schools eventually added adult schools – in fact it is this type of school that George Eliot has her title character attend in *Adam Bede*. By the time Eliot was writing this type of activity was considered relatively benign, but at the turn of the century it was still controversial. Adult schools concerned Thomas Bere because he feared Young would turn the meetings into Methodist conventicles and they concerned wealthy farmers, like the one portrayed in the *Sunday School*, because they feared such schools would make their workers aim above their appropriate station. More

addresses this head on in her tracts, arguing that education in fact makes better Christians and better workers but in practice this did little to quiet the opposition. In point of fact it was the education of adults in Sunday Schools that was to prove so immensely influential during the nineteenth century.

What the *Anti-Jacobin* understood, probably correctly, was that even if the *Cheap Repository* itself and publications like it were thoroughly religious, they opened the door to other kinds of reading and the Sunday Schools themselves provided a model for working class organization. Indeed, Thomas Lacquer has argued exactly that, pointing out that many of the men and women of the early industrial revolution were educated in and helped run Sunday Schools, which then provided the models for the first working class associations. As Stott points out, to read the *Cheap Repository* simply as an instrument of social control fails to fully comprehend the myriad social and cultural factors that collided at the turn of the century. It is indeed possible that readers appropriated the tracts by “internalizing them and reinterpreting their meaning” (207) according to their own, rapidly shifting, cultural contexts as the *Tracts* and works like them were published and republished well into the nineteenth century.

In this we see evidence once again of the medium slipping away from the message, and of form trumping content. Several scholars have already noted how More’s earlier *Village Politics* undermined its own conservative message by giving the poor a voice and providing them with a language.⁶² A similar thing happens with the *Cheap Repository*. Hannah More possessed a sophisticated understanding of how children and adults learned and nowhere is this more evident than in the masterful way she uses language and form in the *Cheap Repository*. Reading through the tracts one is struck by the variety of subjects she covers at different difficulty levels. Her first tract *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, for example, is clearly written with a younger audience in

mind. Both the language and moral are simple and the pastoral setting makes it appealing to children. Likewise the story of *Betty Brown, the St. Giles Orange Girl* is engaging and easy to understand, while other titles like *The Cottage Cook* and *The Sunday School* are clearly intended for older audiences. Didactic though they may be, the use of language displayed in these tracts is masterful and stands in sharp contrast to tracts that written by other authors.

It would also be unwise to overlook the role woodblock illustrations played in these tracts. Each one was accompanied by a frontispiece that illustrated a key moment from the story. For example *Betty Brown's* illustration shows the title character being tricked by the usurious Mrs. Sponge, while *Hester Wilmot* illustrates the moment when Hester gives her father her hard earned money:



Betty Brown, the St. Giles Orange Girl



The History of Hester Wilmot

Both moments clearly illustrate the morals of the stories. Indeed it is conceivable that such visual representations were even more effective than the text of the stories themselves – providing a graphic reference point for morality that could be easily interpreted.

This history also reveals the partial injustice of portrayals of More as unsympathetic to the plight of the poor – she clearly understood the larger social factors at play and utilized pity (in its best eighteenth century sense) to identify with the poor and give them a voice in her

literature. In *The Way of Plenty* and *The Cottage Cook*, for example, she provides what she believed to be practical solutions to the increasing impoverishment of the countryside – recommending that women bake their own bread and brew their own beer rather than buy bread from bakers who cheated them on the weight and drink tea with sugar (both products of slavery, which More knew well). She even provides a list of inexpensive recipes in *The Cottage Cook*, which she hoped her readers would use.

These measures may seem quaint by today's standards – a nostalgic endorsement of the “old ways” that take little consideration of the rapidly shifting conditions of the British economy at the end of the eighteenth century. This is no doubt true, but consider also that More was working and writing at the same time Malthus was promulgating his “positive check” on population growth among the poor, enclosure was robbing many people of their livelihood, and the famines of the mid-1790's were reducing large portions of the population to subsistence. As Nardin points out, More was not blind to the larger social and economic factors that were creating poverty and understood that solutions would have to be enacted at both the local and national levels. In fact, in a little read letter to her friend Mrs. Bouverie she decries the “wickedness of monopolizers, or forestallers, or contractors, or the negligence of the rich, will I fear contrive to defeat the kindest bounties of Providence,” and comments that “The sight of this oppression really embitters my life, and I do continue to cry in the ears of the few magistrates and managing persons who come in my way; but I might as well spare my breath” (qtd. in Nardin 273). Part of the reason her *Tracts* may seem so backwards looking – encouraging the poor to accept their place in society, is because More was increasingly frustrated with attempts to reform the poor laws at the national level (Nardin 272-273). That some of her suggestions for reducing poverty and her vision of the ideal society were overly idealistic and hopelessly out of

date in a nation that was moving rapidly towards mass industrialization and urbanization does not negate the fact that she genuinely saw education as a gateway to a better life.

Beleaguered by illness and an immense workload, Hannah More wound down the *Cheap Repository* in 1798. One hundred and fourteen tracts had been printed and she had written nearly half of them (Stott 205). However the tracts continued to be published well into the nineteenth century in bound editions by Rivington, an influential religious publisher who had a contract with the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (Stott 205). These editions were primarily produced for the middle and upper classes and put out in more expensive editions. More problematically, the previous publisher of the *Cheap Repository*, Marshall, continued to claim he held the rightful copyright and began issuing his own tracts under the *Cheap Repository* label, even going so far as to use the same woodblock artist to produce the illustrations. This greatly angered More and in the end her friend, fellow Claphamite Henry Thornton essentially paid off Marshall in order to get him to cease production (Stott 206-207).

If nothing else, this publication history indicates that the *Cheap Repository* was a profitable business with multiple markets that could support different types of publications. There is little doubt that the *Cheap Repository* was always more popular among the middle classes than it was among the poor, as is evidenced by the Rivington edition, but clearly Marshall saw a market in continuing to produce cheap penny editions aimed at the working classes. This also indicates the difficulty More had in maintaining control over how her work was appropriated after it left her hands. If she could not even control *how* it was produced, she certainly could not control how the new-found skill of reading would be used by her intended audience. Of course, ascertaining with any degree of certainty *who* read the *Cheap Repository* and *how* is nearly impossible given the nature of their production. It is likely that local

circumstance had as much to do with readership as More's intentions. What is certain is that the *Cheap Repository Tracts* represented a watershed moment, both for Hannah More and for educational material in general. By providing the poor with something "suitable" to read More may have inadvertently opened the door to radical changes she herself opposed.

In this the attacks on both More and children's literature in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* may not be as far afield as they at first seem – at least from the loyalist perspective. In fact they point once again to the fact that the concerns of the establishment over teaching the poor to read and Sunday Schools had little to do with what was actually being taught, but with the circulation of unregulated and "dangerous" ideas through the medium of print. It did not matter that More's *Tracts* defended the status quo; they nevertheless participated in an economy of print that was fundamentally threatening to the established order. That this was certainly not what More intended is beside the point, after all she herself started the *Cheap Repository* in part as a reaction to what she saw as the promiscuous distribution of immoral literature. However as the publication history of the *Cheap Repository* itself shows even she could not maintain strict control over what was produced under the *Cheap Repository* label, how it was distributed, or how it was appropriated. Thus, in trying to inculcate moral virtue through print More may have unwittingly participated in the processes of secularization that she (and the *Review*) were attempting to fight.

Medium and Message

In the end the media culture surrounding the publication and proliferation of educational materials for Sunday schools has much to tell us about the rise of evangelicalism in Britain, the development of mass education, and the processes of secularization. By examining how the medium of mass-produced, cheaply printed moral and educational tracts came to define the

evangelical project at the beginning of the nineteenth century we gain a glimpse of how the evangelical social project had evolved since the days of John Wesley. Despite continuing suspicion from publications like the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, evangelicalism was becoming more mainstream – with influential middle class individuals like Hannah More and William Wilberforce using their evangelical conversion experience as a jumping off point to affect change on a broad spectrum of social and political issues. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Sunday Schools had become *the* primary way that the working class learned to read and write and the control of these schools had long ago devolved away from wealthy patrons like More.⁶³

Using progressive exercises and woodblock illustrations, these early Sunday Schools created a sort of spiritual literacy that grew out of the forms and structures of the classroom exercises. By using gradual repetition and structured scripture memory, millions of eighteenth and nineteenth century children developed skills and ideas that often opened avenues far beyond the intent of Hannah and Patty More. Thus, not only did these children learn how to read and write in Sunday School, they learned how to relate to their rapidly changing world. In this sense Sunday Schools became a sort of refuge for children from the brutal factory owner or mill foreman instead of a further instrument of repression.

All this is not to try to paint More as some sort of progressive liberal reformer – she most certainly was not – but simply to place her more squarely back into her social and religious context. Issues like the Blagdon Controversy simply do not make sense to modern scholars unless we understand what was really at stake in the controversy over evangelicalism at the turn of the century. The founders of the movement – the Wesleys, Whitefield, John Fletcher – were all dead and a new generation of evangelical reformers was rising. This group included notable

people like More and Wilberforce but also less well know figures like Zachary Macauley and Henry Thornton. These figures in many ways transformed evangelism – giving it political and religious power at a time when there were serious conflicts brewing in church and state. Within thirty years of the Blagdon Controversy this second wave of evangelicals would become instrumental in advocating for poor law reform, suffrage reform, abolition of the slave trade, Catholic emancipation, and a significant renewal movement within the Church of England – all changes that the authors of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* bitterly opposed. However, if evangelicalism was becoming more mainstream, it was also becoming more middle class, with more money flowing into the organizations and larger and larger churches being built. Some of this history as pertains to Methodism will be examined in the next chapter, but the history of Hannah More’s Sunday Schools plays a major role in tracing the changes that were occurring within the evangelical movement and in British society at large.

Finally, the constant tension between progressive medium and conservative message that is evident from *Reading Made Easy* to the *Questions and Answers* to the *Cheap Repository* further illustrates how the splintering of the religious landscape through print made created discourse conditions conducive to secularization. As Michael Warner has reminded us it is in many ways more important to examine the broader “discourse culture of evangelicalism,” as opposed to any perceived differences in doctrinal emphasis. The explosion of evangelical printing at the turn of the century combined with the increasing prevalence of itinerant Methodist and dissenting preachers, made it possible for individual lay people to credibly choose a different religious alternative from a growing menu of options. Learning to read in a Sunday School by using these types of educational tools often opened the way to different avenues of thinking and acting in the world that often extended far beyond the original intent of the Sunday School

movement. This is perhaps what the establishment and the *Anti-Jacobin Review* feared the most; for if the laity could credibly choose what to believe in the religious sphere, what was to stop them from choosing who to follow in the political realm?

CHAPTER 6: “MASCULINE ROBUSTNESS OF INTELLECT”: AGNES BULMER, THE POETRY OF EVANGELICAL EXPERIENCE, AND THE END(S) OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

For, however general it may be in these days of cold and calculating utilitarianism, to depreciate poetry, I cannot but consider its soothing and ameliorating influence as, in some measure, essential to the correction of that dissonance and disorder of the mind which is natural to rude and uncultivated man. But, perhaps, I am not an impartial judge; I am under more than common obligations to that gentle art, which almost in childhood taught me to give expression to thoughts and feelings unconnected with a merely sensitive world, and which otherwise might not have been seriously cherished; and I owe much also to its soothing influence in seasons of deep sorrow, when I was enabled to resort to it as an alleviating and refreshing occupation, during days and years of pensive and almost melancholy depression. – Memoirs of Agnes Bulmer, 118-119.

In the autumn of 1795, four years after the death of John Wesley, the Methodist theologian Dr. Adam Clarke (1760-1832) and his wife met an extraordinary young woman named Agnes Collinson Bulmer at the Methodist chapel in Spitalfields, London. This is how their daughter, Anna Rowley, describes the meeting over forty years later:

She was then in the twenty-first year of her age; and, I have heard my mother say, was one of the most interesting young women she ever met with. I recollect her narrating to me her earliest impression respecting Mrs. Bulmer, in the following words: - “The first time I saw her was in the old chapel at Spitalfields; and so strong was the feeling on my mind towards her, that I could not help, at the close of the service, inquiring who the young lady was to whom I had felt so irresistible an attraction.” This was introduction enough. When they met on the next day they felt that they were not strangers. My father was equally pleased with her; and at that hour commenced a friendship which, built upon the only sure foundation, proved so strong, so rational, and so abiding, as to brace unhurt the varied trials of nearly forty years. (Rowley 804)

Adam Clarke and Agnes Bulmer would go on to become two of the most important theologians and scholars of the second generation of Methodists – though only one of them is remembered as such. Adam Clarke is best known for authoring a monumental *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, which came to define Methodist theology for over a century after its publication between 1810 and 1826 and which continues to be used today. Even at the age of twenty one Agnes Bulmer, as the passage above indicates, was his intellectual equal in every respect. The two became lifelong

friends, often recommending books to each other and corresponding about theology. Bulmer herself would go on to author numerous poems, a series of children's books titled *Scripture Histories*, one of the best and most famous memoirs of an early Methodist woman, and finally what is perhaps one of the longest poems ever written by a woman: *Messiah's Kingdom*, a twelve book epic of over 14,000 lines that articulates Methodist theology, soteriology, and eschatology in grand poetic form. It is in many ways the poetic counterpart to Clarke's more famous *Commentary*. Her *Memoirs of Elizabeth Mortimer* is a monument of religious biography and continued to be printed well into the twentieth century, influencing generations of Methodists. In short, almost every Methodist on both sides of the Atlantic would have known who Agnes Bulmer was or read her work.

That Bulmer's life and work has been forgotten, while Clarke still continues to be influential, is hardly surprising. This has as much to do with the neglect of eighteenth century women's poetry in general and *religious* women's poetry in particular as it does with the equivocal status of Bulmer's work within the Methodist movement itself (discussed at length below). When it comes to the poetry of the late eighteenth century it is, of course, the genre most readily associated with the male romantic imagination yet, as Stuart Curran has pointed out, "In the arena of poetry, which in the modern world we have privileged as no other in this age, the place of women was likewise, at least for a time, predominant, and it is here that the distortions of our received history are most glaring" (187). And indeed, there were numerous popular female poets throughout the Romantic era – Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon – all of whom were well known in their day and able to make a living through writing. Their poetry was no doubt in many ways "different" from the male romantics, but it

was no less important or successful in their own time. Indeed, as Anne Mellor has pointed out, Landon earned in excess of two hundred fifty pounds annually (114).

The reasons for this critical neglect have as much to do with an ideology that was shaped by romanticism as they do with a willful blindness to the incredible success of poetry written by women. This “romantic ideology” as Jerome McGann famously termed it, not only dominated critical opinions in the nineteenth century, but also much of the twentieth – most notably in the works of critics like M.H. Abrams and Harold Bloom. Based on assumptions about what it meant to write great poetry, the “Big Six” male romantics along with their nineteenth and twentieth century critics have had a monumental impact on how we have come to assess aesthetic value in poetry, and much of the women’s poetry written during this period does not conform to these values. The problem is compounded, according to Marlon Ross, by the fact that much of this critical neglect has to do with a narrative of masculine power and desire that was constructed by the romantic poets – a narrative that sought to expel its feminine and domestic other. As Ross argues, “If we are to move beyond the myth that romantic men create of the feminine, we must attempt to see romantic ideology for what it is....This means exploring the margins of romantic poetry, listening to the voices, and recovering history that has too long been covered over by our own enamored with masculine power and romantic myth” (186). Simply put, if we are to properly understand women’s poetry during the romantic period we have to attempt to escape from our own critical preconceptions and rethink the very core of what constitutes the “romantic” and the “modern.”

Over the past thirty years, much good work has been done to both re-incorporate poetry by women into mainstream literary studies and rethink the very paradigms by which we judge “romantic” poetry; yet more work remains to be done. Despite the inclusion of important poets

like Charlotte Smith and Letitia Landon in modern anthologies, many religious women poets continue to suffer from critical dismissal and/or neglect. Agnes Bulmer, for example, is only one of several evangelical poets whose work was well respected, important, and oft-reprinted in their own day but who are little studied today. Part of the reason for this has to do with the fact that much of the best religious poetry seems overly didactic by modern standards, too focused on inculcating moral virtue and religious conformity. Furthermore many of these women poets were more focused on the creation of community in their poetry and a devotion to God rather than devotion to an imaginative ideal. There is indeed a type “self-kowing” in these poems but it is primarily through a process of self-discovery intimately linked to a relationship with God and the evangelical community. Formally speaking as well, these poets have been written off (both in the nineteenth century and today) because they did not necessarily embrace the type of lyrical style that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley made famous and which was lauded by twentieth century literary critics.

Likewise, religious women poets often turn to the past – old stories and old metaphors – to make their point and, in an age where “originality” and “authenticity” continue to be valued, such poetry is largely dismissed. Instead of privileging imagination, these women tend to privilege fancy – instead of originality, repetition of established form. As Colin Jager has argued, “Repetition – particularly repetition undertaken with the aim of more firmly entrenching an already established subject position – has not fared especially well within a liberal theoretical tradition that tends to validate freedom, autonomy, and originality” (99). Especially for religious women poets the goal of their poetry was not necessarily the modern liberal ideal of autonomy, but the subjection of the will to God and the establishment of an inter-subjective community of love that transcends the self. And it is this ideal that is reflected in the form of their poetry as

much as the content. Thus analysis of Bulmer's contribution to romantic poetry is revealing for what tells us both about romanticism (and romantic studies) in general, and religious women's poetry in particular.

Likewise, analysis of Bulmer's life and work is useful for what it tells us about evangelicalism and evangelical women's writing on the cusp of the Victorian Age. One major danger in analyzing poetry by women during this period is that it potentially gives too much credence to the "feminization of religion" thesis, which argues that after 1800 evangelical piety became largely feminized and domestic – eventually evolving into the religious woman as the angel in the house. Most notable among the proponents of this thesis is Callum Brown who, in *The Death of Christian Britain* argues that "As well as feminising piety, evangelicalism pietised femininity. Femininity became sacred and nothing but sacred. The two became inextricably intertwined, creating a mutual enslavement in which each was the discursive 'space of exteriority' for the other" (59). In some ways the largely private and domestic Agnes Bulmer would seem to confirm assumptions about the role of women in Methodism post-John Wesley – she does not preach, she does not teach men, she is instead a wife, correspondent, and pious author. This interpretation has the benefit of moving past class as a primary motivator of women's religious experience but, as Sarah Williams points out, in the end it reifies a static, generalized binary between public and private religious expression (16). Furthermore, as Morgan and deVries have recently argued, it is possible that "proponents of the 'feminisation of religion' thesis [have] simply taken what was a Victorian cultural construction and naturalised it as a historical reality" (8). This is not to say that the "angel in the house," was not a legitimate Victorian ideal, but it is to say that the women's writing analyzed here significantly troubles the ways in which evangelical women related to this ideal. Some may not have even realized they

were doing it, but by breaking down barriers between spiritual experience, outward action, and writing, these women were carving out a unique public space for religious expression – one that is not so simply defined by “feminization.”

Finally, Bulmer’s work provides a useful bridge between the Methodism of Wesley that began this study and the world of Victorian Methodism that ends it. The deaths of Clarke and Bulmer, only four years apart, in many ways also marked the death of some of the last ties with early Methodism. Few people who had actually known Wesley remained and those who did were mostly dead within a decade. This is only one indication of a seismic shift within British Methodism which had been ongoing for twenty five years but which was to increasingly alter the character of the movement. In many ways the life and work of Agnes Bulmer help track these changes within Methodism along with the shifting roles of women within the movement and British culture at large. As such I will proceed to first lay out a brief biography of Bulmer’s life and work as a means to establishing her as a major writer and intellectual in her own right. I will then turn to Bulmer’s masterpiece, *Messiah’s Kingdom*, to analyze how she uses analogy to lay out an argument from experience and sense as a means to understanding God’s purpose for the world and the believer’s place within it. In this she internalizes the theology of experience and action laid out by John Wesley and detailed in the previous chapters while writing a poem that significantly troubles our ideas of romanticism and modernity. Finally, I will focus on some key themes from her life and work in order to trace the shifts within Methodism from women’s movement to male hierarchy, marginal to middle class, and movement to institution. In doing will not only lay out the tensions between public and private that defined Bulmer’s life, but illustrate the shifting public space women that came to define Victorian Methodism.

A Brief Biography of Agnes Collinson Bulmer

Agnes Collinson Bulmer was born on August 31, 1775 in London, the third daughter of Edward and Elizabeth Collinson of Lombard Street. Unlike the other women I have examined so far, Agnes Bulmer was a second generation Methodist. Her father was an early convert to Methodism while Elizabeth Collinson's parents were themselves Methodists and friends of Wesley (Stevenson 497). Edward Collinson was one of the trustees of the prestigious City Road Chapel and a prosperous London tinman and ironmonger (Stevenson 250, 497). He and Elizabeth were personal friends of John and Charles Wesley and the young Agnes was baptized by John and received her first class ticket from him in December 1789. She was placed in Hester Ann Rogers' class in the City Road society, where she would remain a member for the rest of her life. Like most London Methodists of this time the Collinsons were also faithful adherents to the Church of England – a practice that Agnes never gave up over the course of her life. As her friend and later editor William Bunting put it, the Collinsons were “equally allied, like most of the first followers of Mr. Wesley, to the established Church of England, and to the Society of ‘people called Methodists’” (*Letters v*), and the two were not seen as mutually exclusive. Also in common with a growing number of London Methodists, the Collinsons were decidedly middle class and the young Collinson girls appear to have received what was, by the standards of the age, an excellent education. This, combined with her natural curiosity, led the young Agnes Bulmer to read widely and voraciously, a practice that she would continue over the course of her life.

By the age of twelve, Bulmer was reading Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, a favorite of Wesley and evangelicals more generally, and this work was to have a tremendous influence on her own poetry. In 1788, at the age of fourteen, Bulmer published her first poem, “On the Death of Charles Wesley,” in the *Arminian Magazine*:

Ah happy man! thy griefs are passed away;
 Thy struggling soul to heaven has took its flight:
 To bliss eternal winged its wondrous way,
 And safety lodged in realms of pure delight

Summoned by God to join the heavenly band,
 And dwell with Him in everlasting rest
 Thou now art happy in Immanuel's land,
 Where grief and pain shall never more molest.

But ah! how many will thy loss deplore?
 Unmindful that 'tis eternal gain;
 They mourn their Friend so quickly gone before,
 Forgetting he is gone from toil and pain:

Forgetting he is gone to joys on high,
 And join the angelic hosts in heavenly lays
 Far, far above yon bright ethereal sky
 To aid the concert of eternal praise.

And now for every pang he felt below,
 His soul receives a full, and sure reward;
 While heavenly joys in streams of glory flow,
 And Jesus crowns him with divine regard.

Then why should Death appear so great a foe?
 Why with such terror is the subject fraught?
 Since he relieves the just from every woe,
 And brings them bliss, beyond the reach of thought! (*AM 11:557*)

Though the subject is undoubtedly conventional, the execution of the poem is surprisingly solid, especially for a fourteen year old. Even here we see evidence of a lively intellect at work, already writing about themes that will come to occupy her adult life – Christian service, pain, death, and the purpose of human life on earth. The poem is all the more interesting in that Bulmer is eulogizing a poet whose role as religious bard she herself would most fully carry on into the nineteenth century. John Wesley sent the young Agnes Collinson a personal note thanking her for this poem and cautioning the prodigiously talented child to “Beware of pride; beware of flattery; suffer none to commend you to your face; remember, one good temper is of

more value, in the sight of God, than a thousand good verses. All you want is to have the mind that was in Christ, and to walk as Christ walked.” It was characteristic Wesley, but the simple fact that he took the time to respond to verses from a child indicates that he was impressed by the young woman’s talent and further highlights the way Wesley often used correspondence with members of his movement (and especially women) to shape the Methodist community.

The young Bulmer continued to write poetry even as she became more and more involved with the Methodist society at City Road. She was a member of Hester Ann Rogers class and during this time came to know the older Elizabeth Ritchie Mortimer, whose biography she would later author, and Sally Wesley, Charles Wesley’s only daughter. These three women were at least fifteen years older than Bulmer and very close to John Wesley. In fact, all three attended Wesley at his death in 1791. Upon Hester Ann Rogers’ untimely death in 1793, Bulmer wrote an elegy titled *Thoughts on a Future State*, which was published with the 1794 edition of Rogers’ famous *Account* (See Appendix A). Like her “Lines on the Death of Charles Wesley,” Bulmer once again takes up the subject of death and what happens to a Christian afterwards. In the Methodist tradition death was an especially important event as it provided an opportunity for the dying individual to testify of his or her faith to the end. Thus accounts of “holy dyings” in the *ars moriendi* tradition abound in literature by Methodists and Bulmer’s poetic take is particularly powerful.

In 1793, at the age of eighteen, Agnes Collinson married Joseph Bulmer, a London merchant and warehouseman who was also a member of the Methodist society. Joseph Bulmer was born at Rothwell, near Leeds, on May 16, 1761. Though his mother was religious, she died when he was nine and it is unclear whether she was a Methodist or not. He grew up in Leeds, where he served an apprenticeship, and early on came to associate with the Methodists there. In

1780 he moved to London where he apparently became quite prosperous (“Joseph Bulmer” 818). His influence within London Methodism is evidenced by the fact that over the course of his life he served as the treasurer and one of the stewards of the important City Road Chapel, London Circuit Treasurer, Treasurer of the Methodist Missionary Auxiliary Society for the London District, General Treasurer of the Children’s Fund, a member of the Preachers’ Friend Society along with several other non-Methodist charities (819). All of these positions would have been bestowed on him not only because of his commitment to Methodism, but also due to his success in business affairs and management of money. In fact Joseph Bulmer is regularly listed in the *Methodist Magazines* of the time period as a major donor to causes like the Children’s Fund and Missionary Auxiliary Society.⁶⁴ For example, the April 1839 issue of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* lists Bulmer’s legacy to the Missionary Society at nearly 200 pounds (351). Clearly Agnes had come from the middle class and married into the middle class.

By all accounts the marriage was a happy one which closely resembled the ideal of the companionate marriage being promoted by writers as different as Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, and Jane Austen. Agnes was clearly Joseph’s intellectual equal in every way and there is little evidence that he hindered her in her work. In fact it is quite clear from the evidence that in many ways Agnes and Joseph Bulmer worked as a team – bound together by their commitment to the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. For example, in a poem to her husband written on their ninth wedding anniversary, Bulmer beautifully frames their marriage in terms of companionship and a mutual commitment to be God’s agents together:

February 7th, 1802

While some are doom’d to bear the load of life
 In single solitude, without the aid,
 The cheering aid of Friendship’s social power,
 Like lonely trees upon a blasted heath,

Exposed to all the beatings of the storm;-
 While others, stung by disappointment, feel
 The bands design's for comfort, peace, and love,
 To be the cords of bondage to their souls;-
 Say, my loved friend, what happiness is ours,
 That we can greet this morning with a song,
 A song of praise, to that all-gracious Power,
 Who in the counsels of his matchless love,
 First form'd our union, and then kindly join'd
 our hearts and hands by his own sacred ties!
 Obtaining strength by him as years increased,
 More and more firmly have our souls been bound;
 And spared by grace, this ninth revolving morn
 Finds us more join'd in cordial, constant love,
 Than we first before the altar bow'd.

Hail! welcome morn! thy glad approach we greet,
 And bless the as the happiest of our lives.
 Still may thy sun rise cloudless; and the years
 That yet may roll their courses o'er our heads,
 Increase, mature, and sanctify our love.
 While, as we travel o'er life's varied path,
 Upheld by mutual tenderness, we rise
 Above the storms that sometimes cross this way,
 And, by participation sweet, receive
 A richer pleasure from its brightest scenes;
 While humble gratitude, with careful eyes,
 Noting the boundless gifts of Love Divine,
 Leads us together to the mount of praise,
 To adore the Author of our numerous joys.

For Bulmer marriage is a means through which God empowers men and women to serve him better in the world. It is *God* who “First form'd our union, and then kindly join'd / our hearts and hands by his own sacred ties! / Obtaining strength by him as years increased,” and it is God who makes them more useful together than they could be one their own. Here we see Bulmer working out a way to frame religious marriage as an enabling spiritual partnership. Though, as we will see, others tried to paint Bulmer's marriage as the ideal of a Christian woman's submission to her husband it is clear from this poem and others like it that Bulmer saw it as more of a mutual partnership in Christ. This also represents a distinct shift in how Methodist women viewed

marriage. Whereas before a woman like Sarah Ryan or Sarah Crosby could travel and preach by themselves and saw no problem with it, increasingly roles for women were defined by marriage. Though widows like Sarah Mallit in fact outlived Bulmer, the single preaching woman was increasingly a dying breed, especially after the prohibition on women's preaching in 1803. If women were to find a role within Methodism it was increasingly within a domestic space – though women like Agnes Bulmer continued to trouble this dynamic.

Between 1793 and 1822 Bulmer was mainly employed in the regular activities of a middle class Methodist woman who was under no obligation to work. She was a Class Leader at the City Road Chapel, visited the sick, dying, and poor, and spent much of her time writing. She also participated in a weekly Ladies Working Society which, in addition to discussing religious subjects, made garments for the assistance of the poor (Stevenson 190). Her friend Anna Rowley notes that Bulmer was “naturally retiring and timid,” and thus “had great difficulties to overcome in the performance of those duties which brought her at all into contact with other persons; yet for many years she employed herself in various departments of public usefulness” (808). Her sister confirms this, remarking that she was “not only a contemplative, she was also an active Christian” and that:

For above thirty years she was a Class-Leader among the Wesleyan Methodists in London, and deeply felt the responsibility of the situation she filled. Those can best appreciate the value of her advice who enjoyed its advantages in those religious meetings, which, to use her own expression, “provide for the minuteness of individual instruction, and adapt themselves to that variety of experience which as distinctly marks the spiritual as it does the intellectual or material man.” (74).

This work as a class leader, which we have already seen was an incredibly productive space for Methodist women, also extended into her publishing activities during this period, in which she published poems and essays to both the *Methodist* and *Youth's Magazines*⁶⁵ and began publication of her *Scripture Histories*, adaptations of Bible stories for the use of children

(Collinson 27). Though intended for the young, *Scripture Histories* are in many ways prose studies of the Biblical episodes that she would later render in poetic form in *Messiah's Kingdom*. The fact that she wrote them for a younger audience, however, indicates that she was (like Hannah More) alive to the need for good children's instructional literature and at the same time being pigeonholed into teaching only women and the young – the “proper” role for pious women. That the *Scripture Histories* are in many ways theologically sophisticated is only one further evidence of the way Bulmer was able to use a genre that was open to her as a means of opening a space for scholarly women.

On July 23, 1822 Joseph Bulmer died after a long illness and two years later her mother followed him. This was a deep period of grief for Bulmer, which she expressed primarily through poetry that not only acted as an outlet for her grief, but also framed the deaths in light of the Methodist hope of an after-life.⁶⁶ Especially poignant is her *Memoir of a Lyre Resumed: or A Requiem at the Tomb of a Beloved Friend* (see Appendix A), and *Songs in the Night of Affliction*, which beautifully capture her feelings following her loss. One in particular, “Pensive Musings Composed on a Journey, July 1823” is evocative of the type of synthesis between emotion and piety that characterizes her poems. Writing almost a year after her husband's death, she uses nature as a canvass upon which to express her feelings – a technique that she will later master in *Messiah's Kingdom*:

Nature, how calm thy face appears!
 How smooth thy streams translucent flow!
 How soft the hue thy verdure wears!
 How mildly sweet thy breezes blow!

Thou breathest peace: O, might my heart
 Thy tranquilizing influence feel!
 But, gentle, soothing, as thou art,
 Canst thou the wounded spirit heal?

From year to year the ripening grain
 Luxuriant waves thy vales along,
 Thy milk-white flocks adorn the plain,
 Thy Woodland warblers pour the song;

Thy rocks and hills, with frowning brow,
 O'erhang the restless river's bed;
 Thy mountain-flowers as beauteous blow
 As when they first their bloom display'd.

Sweet Nature! thou by Him sustain'd
 Whose plastic hand thy form impress'd,
 In pristine beauty has remain'd:
 but Man, thy passing stranger-guest,

Admires thy loveliness awhile,
 And he pursues his onward way;
 Beholds no more thy valleys smile,
 Nor climbs thy upland summits gray.

A misty veil of formless clouds
 Descends upon the traveller's path,
 A night of sudden darkness shrouds
 Thy cheerful scenes: - that night is Death.

And Death has interposed, and hung
 His sable veil before my view;
 Its shade projects my path along,
 And lays thy lights in shadow too.

O, yes! his hand, his icy hand,
 Has laid my earthly treasure low:
 And can by feebleness withstand
 The keen reverberating blow?

Sad Memory fondly loves to trace
 Those happy hours, too soon gone by,
 When panting Wonder loved to gaze
 On Nature's wildest scenery;

When Friendship shared the quickening glow
 Of Admiration's kindled flame;
 When Thought in converse sweet would flow,
 And Pleasure, shared, Delight became.

Now, lone amidst these lofty hills,

I mournful muse on blessings flown;
 A sigh my pensive bosom swells,
 And Echo sad responds, - "Alone."

Yet check that thought, repress that sigh,
 Thou has a Friend whose guardian power
 Protects thee here, whose watchful eye
 Surveys thee in the darkest hour.

And He shall guide thy lonely way,
 And He shall clear the devious path,
 And He thy sinking steps shall stay,
 And He shall chase the shades of death;

And in the Paradise of bliss
 Thy lost society restore,
 And bless thee with that perfect peace
 Which Time and Death shall break no more.

Writing rhymed quatrains of iambic tetrameter, Bulmer uses a common hymn form⁶⁷ (for example similar to Charles Wesley's "And Can it Be") to compose a meditation on death and the afterlife – both which were common evangelical themes. Unlike many evangelical poems on death, however, here Bulmer does not simply frame it as a joyous entrance to a happier place. She does not shy away from exhibiting sorrow, in fact she embraces her grief in a way that is unusual for an evangelical poet – telegraphing it onto the landscape before moving on to describe memories with the absent loved one that mirror her current surroundings. Death is a very real presence in this poem and though, by the end she is looking forward to a reunification in heaven, the separation is very real and very felt. That Bulmer takes death as one of her chief subjects and treats it so evocatively is both a reflection of her evangelicalism – the understanding that this life is not the end – and the early and continuing influence of Edward Young on her poetry.

Furthermore, in using nature as her muse and in structuring the poem as a musing that moves slowly outward from nature to individual subjectivity to a reflection on death and God, Bulmer is strikingly Wordsworthian here – both in the fact that the poem is reminiscent of some

of the *Lyrical Ballads* and in that it creates a sense of self that is grounded in nature and a feeling of something larger than the self. There is no record of Bulmer reading Wordsworth in her biographies, but this is hardly surprising as they were meant to act as spiritual biographies and not literary ones. Bulmer left little writing of her own behind aside from her published work so it is impossible to know whether she had read Wordsworth, but it seems likely given the structure of poems like this and the fact that, given her devotion to the Church and Wordsworth's own return to orthodoxy, she would have strongly sympathized with his views. Her likely familiarity with Wordsworth is evident in this poem, as in her use nature to describe a path to God she both mirrors Wordsworth's later poetry and evidences the type of natural theology that will come to tremendously inform *Messiah's Kingdom*.

In 1835 Bulmer turned to another genre, publishing the *Memoirs of Elizabeth Mortimer*, which memorialized the Methodist "mother in Israel" who had been a close friend of John Wesley's and a long-time member of the City Road Congregation. Bulmer had befriended the older woman and from her learned about the early days of Methodism. Here again we see evidence of Bulmer constructing an authorial persona in conversation with a mentor or friend – it is this relational aspect of her work that permeates all of her writing whether the relationship is between student and teacher, husband and wife, or child and religious model (John Wesley). Furthermore, the *Memoirs* is unique in that it is one of the few biographies of an early Methodist woman written by a woman and it would go on to become Bulmer's most famous and most published book on both sides of the Atlantic. It is also notable for its Introduction, which clearly lays out a theory Christian biography, calling it "a treasure of no ordinary value; [which]... applies the proper test to principles; and calls forth experience to vouch for truth" (12). This appeal to experience to vouch for truth, as I explored in Chapter Two, was uniquely Methodist.

Here Bulmer applies Wesley's experiential theology to the subject of biography – working from the empirical details of experience upwards to the higher truths of religion. It is this process that sets the *Memoirs* apart from other accounts of holy women, including the *Memoir* written about her by her sister. By applying experiential theology to her work Bulmer is able to eschew simple hagiography and construct a picture of Elizabeth Mortimer that, while biased, nevertheless serves the interest of a larger truth.

However it was her epic, *Messiah's Kingdom*, that Bulmer likely considered her most important work. Published in 1833 by Rivington, *Messiah's Kingdom* was the result of over nine years of work begun during her early widowhood and represented the culmination of all her religious and poetic interests. Spanning twelve long books, the poem runs to nearly 14,000 lines of rhymed couplets, with a few “digressions” in lyric form intermixed to highlight particularly important points. Its scope is tremendous, beginning (like Milton) with the fall of man and proceeding through the major events of the Old and New Testaments, the establishment of the Church, the Reformation, and up to the establishment of the British empire (which Bulmer views as God-ordained, especially in its missionary endeavors), and the evangelical fight against slavery and other social ills. As Bulmer herself expressed it, the main purpose of the work was to delineate the evangelical salvation message as presented in the grand narrative of scripture:

The work is not a poetical version of Scripture History; a development [sic] of the great scheme of human salvation, through a Divine Incarnate Redeemer. This, from its first announcement to its final consummation, is pursued through its various forms of manifestation, - in the Patriarchal, Levitical, Prophetic, and Christian Revelations. And the great moral of the poem is, (as in the first book enunciated,) “Propitiation through sacrificial blood; typically, at first, under the introductory dispensations by the blood of slain beasts; and finally, and really, by the offering up of the great Antitype, “The Lamb who taketh away the sins of the world.” In the prosecution of this great subject my line of order has been to follow the course of its development [sic] in the Sacred Scriptures, - the spring-head of my inspiration; and time, place, and circumstance have been subordinated to this primary design (Collinson 103).

Its overriding theme is thus the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, first through his redemptive work on the cross and then through the actions of the individual Christian in society. In doing so she takes the created order as her primary example of God's goodness to humankind and then works upward, by analogy, to His purpose for creation – themes I will expand on below.

Messiah's Kingdom was greeted with indifferent reviews from the outside press, but glowing notices within evangelicalism. James Montgomery commented that, while it contained “a great deal of good poetry,” nevertheless “the great fault of the poem is, the narrative makes no progress; you read, and read, and read, and still appear to be at, or at most moving about, the point where you set out. It is not like a river, flowing rapidly, or even regularly onward; but rather like a lake, reflecting the sunshine, it may be, but either entirely motionless, or only breaking up the light by its surface ripples” (78). On the other hand the anonymous *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* reviewer praised the poem for holding to the example of piety and poetics set out by Milton:

Nor has Mrs. Bulmer, as we hope to convince our readers, mistaken her high and hallowed calling, whether her talents, or the subject chosen for their exercise, be considered. And the right use and direction of such endowments, it may be presumed, has been with her no less a matter of prayer, than of literary diligence. “This,” says Milton, “is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.” (359).

Keeling, writing long after Bulmer's death, writes that Bulmer composed the poem, “with a rare fervour and depth of conviction, with impassioned eloquence, and a style always musical and graceful, often rising in power. The whole poem presents an attractive unconscious picture of a high, pure spirit delighting itself in the loftier regions of thought and speculation; and in the

frequent lyrical outburst which break the flow of its rhymed heroic verse there is a certain swift and fiery quality, an airy grace of flight..." (158). The truth of the overall response to the poem probably lies somewhere in between these extremes. Agnes Bulmer was of the middle class and was writing to the middle class. Among this class of readers it is likely that the poem was received very well, however it was unlikely that the ordinary provincial Methodist would have been able to afford the 7s. 6d. asking price or have been particularly interested in the subject matter. Furthermore, as with Hannah More's later work, the main criticism of the poem seems to be its didacticism, its tendency to sometimes descend into evangelical sermonizing – exactly the qualities that the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* appreciates. Once again, though, this tendency to treat explicitly religious or moral poetry as somehow inferior was common both in Bulmer's day and ours and has much to do with the romantic ideals that still inform our criticism. Careful analysis of the poem reveals a keen intellect and a firm grasp of poetic conventions that skillfully uses religious experience as the impetus for poetic action.

Experience and Analogy in *Messiah's Kingdom*

Given the immense scope of Bulmer's epic poem, I cannot even begin to treat it holistically here. Instead, I will focus on how Bulmer uses the analogical language to articulate an argument from design that validates the Methodist theology of experience and action that I laid out in Chapter Two. In this *Messiah's Kingdom* troubles many of the narratives that have been forwarded about Romantic poetry. As Colin Jager has asked, if poets (male or female) are "not writing Greater Romantic Lyrics, then under what definition do they qualify as romantics" (73-74)? Many attempts have been made to solve this riddle, most notably by critics like Anne Mellor who create categories like "masculine romanticism," and "feminine romanticism" to describe the different types romantic writing. Others like Marlon Ross have offered a more

nuanced reading of these differences, arguing that we must seek to “reconstruct our critical vocabulary and the theoretical bases on which that vocabulary is founded” (316) as a means to better understanding the totality of what male and female poets are doing during the period.

Likewise we must attempt to assess where Bulmer’s work fits in the tradition of turn of the century British epics. As Curran has pointed out, early nineteenth century Britain was awash in epics as a nation at war in the wake of the turbulent 1790’s attempted to come to terms with its national identity. This presence “is felt in the sudden outpouring of nationalistic epics... in attempts to adapt the typology of Biblical subjects to the historical crisis, in radically subversive and visionary works that would liberate all nations; and naturally those poems which endeavored to translate national missions into epic dimensions” (Curran 159). In many ways *Messiah’s Kingdom* participates in all of these British epic traditions. It is (as I will discuss below) primarily a religious epic in the tradition of Milton, however it also deals substantively with the national and political concerns that consumed the rising British empire during the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

For example, a major theme of Bulmer’s epic is the belief that Britain has a God-ordained role to play as the home of “right religion” in the form of the Church of England. As a Methodist Bulmer believed that Christ’s kingdom would be a literal one and that through the efforts of the Church on earth the nations of the world could be made to reflect God’s purpose. Britain, first in the establishment of a *via media* in the form of the Church of England, and then in its fostering of an evangelical revival movement within the church, becomes the ideal vehicle for conveying a proper sense of Christ’s kingdom to the world:

Britannia, haste! on wings of mercy fly!
 Salvation to a ransom'd world dispense;
 Unfold the treasures of Omnipotence;
 Fulfil the high behest, the charge assign'd, —

Evangelists! discipling all mankind,
 Send forth thy consecrated sons to claim
 The purchased nations in Messiah's name! (305).

In this the Britain and Christ's kingdom become conflated in ways that point to some of the large shifts going on in British culture. As the British empire expanded more and more evangelicals saw this as an opportunity for missions work – bring “civilization” and Christianity in one package. Both of the Bulmers were intimately involved with this work, with Joseph Bulmer serving as one of the treasurers and major donors to the Methodist Missionary Auxiliary Society and Agnes writing poetry in support of foreign missions work. However Bulmer also argues that Britain has largely abdicated its responsibility to its empire by not fully embracing missionary opportunities and that this directly puts Britain in danger.

Important as this nationalist theme is to *Messiah's Kingdom* it is not Bulmer's ultimate focus. Instead of constructing an idealized history of a nation or a people, Bulmer tracks the progress of Christ's kingdom on earth as is manifested in the different stages of the development of the Church. Remember, her stated purpose for the poem was to, develop “the great scheme of human salvation, through a Divine Incarnate Redeemer” (Collinson 103). John Wesley never endorsed a particular eschatology, and eschewed the type of millenarian speculation that was rampant during the late eighteenth century,⁶⁸ instead Methodists advocated for an active participation in the world as a means of establishing a version of Christ's kingdom on earth. It was the job of the church, then, to point the world in the right direction and to evidence Messiah's Kingdom in how it interacted with society. Thus projects like the campaign to abolish slavery became paramount as evangelicals sought to mold the world according to what they believed were Christ's principles. Methodists certainly did believe that one day Christ would *literally* return to establish his reign on earth, but they also believed that it was their duty to do

their best to imitate this kingdom in the meantime. Though Bulmer is a loyal British subject and clearly believes in a national mission for the nation, her ultimate allegiance is to a higher kingdom.

Largely because of this explicitly pious and evangelical focus, *Messiah's Kingdom* and epics like it have been largely ignored by modern critics. Though, as Curran notes, it was common to turn to Scripture and Milton in order find a typology through which to express national concerns, much of this work has been treated as strikingly “unoriginal” and too bound to the Scriptures that form the backbone of the narratives. Curran echoes much of the critical consensus on these poems, arguing that they “cannot escape the solemn piety that universally afflicts these poems” and “founder as well on the rock of ages... for being wholly unwilling to put out to sea” (163), while Herbert Tucker briefly mentions *Messiah's Kingdom*, dismissing it as a “doctrinally earnest work in heroic couplets,” that is “built like a tank” (284). This criticism points not so much to a dislike of Scriptural allegory and allusion but a fundamental misunderstanding of the aims of evangelical poetry and an implicit bias towards originality over repetition and inner reflection over external reality. For example, in commenting on Blake’s *Jerusalem*, Curran comments that Blake “forces reflection upon narrative events, drawing external action into mental space” (178). However as I will illustrate below the action of Bulmer’s poem is decidedly and intentionally the opposite – the external action of her poem instead draws the reader out, via analogy, into the created order that then leads to God. In this sense the fact that the epic conforms tightly to convention, scripture, and repetition is exactly the point.

I point all this out not to single out Curran, whose work on the epic and also on women poets remains groundbreaking and important, but only to point to a certain critical myopia that

persists in analyses of religious poetry, and especially epics. Part of the problem is that Bulmer is writing in genre that has persistently been gendered as “masculine,” and yet the poetics of fancy, analogy, and affection she uses have traditional been described as “feminine.” What a religious epic like *Messiah’s Kingdom* allows us to do is to break down some of these static binaries between “masculine” and “feminine” poetry that have become commonplace by re-examining the grounds of religious experience and poetic expression for someone like Bulmer. Especially in her use of analogy, Bulmer pushes against, “the romantic affection for metaphor and symbol [which] inspires a progressive reading of romantic secularization as that which re-orders the relationship of this world to the next world by transforming divine into human content” (Jager 31). Instead, what Bulmer, and other religious poets like her, do is reverse this process – making an analogical argument from design that privileges experience, practice, and repetition over originality, theory, and imagination. As I will show below, this is no way means that Bulmer’s work is not “romantic”, it just taps into another sense of what that term entails, especially as relates to the progressive secularization and modernization narratives that are so prevalent in “High Romantic” work.

One of the primary ways that Bulmer accomplishes these far-reaching goals is by engaging in a poetics of analogy that seeks to use empirical data gathered from nature and the world around her to construct an ideal heavenly kingdom that all good evangelicals should strive towards. *Messiah’s Kingdom* poetically maps the terrain which Bulmer believes the Christian has to cross in order to be a true citizen of the kingdom of God. By focusing on the experiences of the senses and of nature as types of God and his kingdom, Bulmer is thus able to promote a theology of feeling that is simultaneously contemplative and active. In this her analogical poetics model a type of spiritual discipline that takes what is seen as a type of what is unseen and asks

her audience to participate in the world based on the conclusions to which these assumptions ultimately lead.

In her use of analogy Bulmer participates in a tradition of poetry during the romantic era that has been largely ignored – mainly because it does not conform to traditional ideas about what romantic poetry is. The argument from analogy, in this context, refers to the inductive argument for the existence of God that reasons from empirical experience to larger truth. As we saw in Chapter Two, this line of thinking was prevalent in the early eighteenth century – the Oxford educated John Wesley followed the thinking of Locke, Browne, and Butler to formulate a theory of religious experience based on the analogy between physical sense and spiritual sense. Over the course of the eighteenth century this type of analogical argument was turned into an argument from design and taken up by theologians like William Paley who, in his *Natural Theology*, argued from the evidence of the perception of nature to a creator God. The classic analogy that he argues from is that of a watch found on a walk which, upon examination of its complex mechanical workings suggests a watchmaker; likewise the complexity of the design of nature suggests a designer.

This theory of natural theology was immensely influential well into the nineteenth century and in fact represented a shift from the Great Chain of Being thinking prevalent throughout much of the seventeenth century. For, unlike the Great Chain which was static, the argument from design was based on the evidence of sense which was liable to shift perceptions of the order of nature even if it continued to suggest a creator. It was this inheritance of the argument from analogy passed down through Wesley, and the argument from design that comes to powerfully inform Bulmer's work. As I have already pointed out, Bulmer was extremely well read and took care to read all of the major theological works of her day. She was certainly

familiar with both Butler's *Analogy* and Paley's *Natural Theology*, along with a panoply of other works which forwarded these arguments.

In fact both Bulmer herself and her later biographers make explicit that the primary theme of *Messiah's Kingdom* is God's grand design for creation. Anne Collinson writes that her sister's grand project was "to trace the Divine power, wisdom, and goodness, in the starry heavens, in the wonderful adaptations of the human system, in the aspirations of the governing, reasoning, immaterial mind in the animalcule that eludes the unassisted sight, and in the various productions of the vegetable world" (28). By thus tracing the God's design in His creation, Bulmer is able to reason "from effects to causes, and from apparent motives to their principles" (29). This knowledge ultimately leads her to understand "the love of God to man, as exhibited in that Saviour who gave himself 'to be a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world;' to restore poor, fallen human nature, not only to the favour, but also to the image, of God" (28). Thus the evidence of the senses and the experience of God's design in creation argues for a spiritual reality within which that creation (including humankind) is restored to its original state through Christ.

Bulmer herself often articulates this philosophy for, as she puts it in her Introduction to the *Memoirs of Elizabeth Mortimer*, she believes that "Creation, in its descending scale, exhibits the perfections of the Deity, as he left them gloriously inscribed on all his works" (10). Likewise in her letters Bulmer often turns to the argument from design to validate the primacy of experience in the search after truth. Nature figures prominently in these letters as Bulmer tends to see nature as an expression of the Divine order:

I am here in a beautiful seclusion, looking forth upon rocks and woods, rich in autumnal foliage; upon trees bending beneath the weight of clustered fruits; upon a bright and tranquil scene, which scarce a breeze ruffles, or a sound violates; except the notes of the robin-redbreast, and a few other birds, that seem resolved

to enjoy, as much as may be, the bright and calm sunshine of the declining year. How many times have I exclaimed, since I left home, “What a beautiful world is this, which God has provided for the abode of man!” I feel thankful that my powers of perception for such beauties and pleasures are not weakened. What sources of delight and enjoyment has our Creator furnished for us in his works! They are truly great, “sought out of all them that have pleasure therein (*Memoirs* 104).

In this we hear echoes of early Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Dorothy Wordsworth in that Bulmer takes nature as her primary inspiration – allowing it to lead her to God. She marvels in her own perceptive ability which, even marred by sin, so incredibly allows her to experience the world around her in vivid detail. However unlike like Wordsworth and Coleridge (but very much like Dorothy Wordsworth), Bulmer’s reflections on nature do not solely lead inward to the development of an individual sense of self and self-expression. Instead they are the impetus for a poetics that springs outward, using the data of sense as evidence for God’s design in creation. As this passage suggests, it is in the human mind and its powers of perception that Bulmer sees the greatest evidence of God’s providential dispensations to humankind. “The human mind,” she writes, “next to the Divine, is the most important object of investigation and research; I love to analyze its operations; to trace it in the exercise of its amazing faculties and powers. With this view, the progress of an individual, (especially if he be of no ordinary cast of character,) in the search after, and attainment of, truth, is to me a truly valuable study (*Memoirs* 56)”. The mind, for Bulmer, is the ultimate watch that suggests a watchmaker – the brain is the location of physical senses that come to suggest spiritual reality. It is by tracing the operations of the brain in the way that it processes experience that Bulmer is ultimately led to God.

It is this type of analogical reasoning from experience to divine truth that most informs the content and structure of *Messiah’s Kingdom*. Even in writing about how she composed the

poem Bulmer makes clear that she always started from effects and worked to causes, writing the data of experience into an epic overview of God's purpose for the world:

The machinery of preparation for this most stupendous event ever witnessed by the intelligent creation, being massive and magnificent in proportion to its purpose; and its foundation being deeply, and widely, and strongly laid; it rose gradually from the depths of Divine Wisdom, before the view of an admiring universe. Whoever, therefore, adventurously undertakes to descant upon such a theme must, of necessity, bring out its evolutions upon a scale adapted to their character. *A gradually and slow unraveling of the mystery will, of course, ensue; shadows, and symbols, and prophetic enunciations, whether by action, voice, or vision, must occupy their proper sphere in the great system of evangelical truth; and the times, events, and personages, with which they are connected, must stand in the same relation, even should their arrangements appear to invert the regular chain of chronological history* (*Memoirs* 102, emphasis mine).

What is most important – even more important than chronological accuracy – is the “gradual and slow unraveling” of the mystery of God's creation and redemption and the only way to properly do this is to argue analogically. And indeed this was something that her audience apparently respected and valued, as the reviewer of *Messiah's Kingdom* in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* singles Bulmer's use of analogy as one of the poem's most admirable features, writing that, “The similes which we shall shortly adduce are in proof of the versatility of our author's genius in seizing on natural objects to illustrate moral truths. And our readers will observe her striking fidelity in the delineation of natural scenery” (369). Clearly the argument from experience and analogy was something with which the evangelical reader was familiar, illustrating that the discourse communities created by Wesley's publishing empire were still alive and well even long after his death.

The argument from design via analogy plays out in *Messiah's Kingdom* not only in its overall message – the reality of Christ and His plan for creation – but also formally. By returning repeatedly to analogical language as one of her primary poetic tools, Bulmer not only emphasizes nature as one of the primary means of understanding God, but also highlights

experience, discipline, and practice over the traditional romantic ideals of imagination and originality – a distinction that was made most articulate in Coleridge’s now famous distinction between imagination and fancy. For Coleridge imagination is the higher of the poetic faculties in that it seeks a unified language through which to express reality while fancy is rooted in the definite and the concrete. It is a “mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice” (*Major Works* 313). So, whereas imagination privileges the originality of the author, especially in creating metaphors for truth, fancy instead tends to use analogical language as a means of repeating or representing truth based on its analogical relationship to the concrete. As Jager points out in his analysis of Anna Barbauld’s religious poetry, “Like Coleridge, in the *Biographia*, Barbauld imagines an encounter with God’s creative word, and like him she recognizes the vast distance between that word and her own human words. But where Coleridge tries to bridge the gap with a theory of imagination, Barbauld does not: she stops, turns around, and goes home” (97-98). Likewise Bulmer uses the concrete language of repetition and fancy in an attempt to bridge the divide between the created order and God. As I have already pointed out, that her methods diverge from the norms of originality and imagination set up by the High Romantic poets says more about our own critical investments than it does about the value of Bulmer’s poetry.

Crucial to Bulmer’s analogies throughout *Messiah’s Kingdom* is a focus on the church and its role in the world. Since the goal of her poem is to develop “the great scheme of human salvation, through a Divine Incarnate Redeemer.... through its various forms of manifestation” (101) she needs an effective way of rendering indescribable things like God’s love, grace, salvation and kingdom in understandable language that can be applied to individual action and

the church at large. So, for example, throughout the poem she consistently compares the Church to a tree where each part relies on the other to survive and show its beauty to the world while the whole relies on the sun and rain (God) to live. Likewise if any part of the tree is diseased, it affects the other parts. This image of an ecosystem, with each part relying on the other is one Bulmer returns to frequently in attempting to describe the relationship between God, the Church, and the individual believer:

In varied streams benignant nature leads
 Her fostering waters o'er rejoicing meads: —
 In fleecy snows, in fertilizing rains,
 The clouds of heaven drop fatness on the plains;
 Soft dews in silence earth's cold bosom steep;
 From mountain heights hoarse-roaring torrents sweep;
 In stately swell majestic billows rise,
 And gathering vapour dims the humid skies.
 One element, by Nature's plastic power,
 In ocean, river, torrent, dew, or shower,
 In form dissimilar its influence sheds,
 And life and beauty o'er creation spreads.
 So God ordains, to bless his Church below,
 His Spirit's gifts in varied streams should flow:
 In differing forms his energy conveys;
 In each his wisdom, power, and grace displays;
 In all unfolds the glories of his name;
 Their source, their nature, and their end the same. (89)

Throughout the poem Bulmer turns time and again to this parallel structure – first painting a picture of a natural scene and then drawing an analogy between natural relationships and the relationship between God and the Church. She first describes various scenes of water flowing or falling as a means to understanding how God's power invests his Church (and by extension its people) with the power to affect change in the world just as the water nourishes creation. Here as well the form of the poem reflects and structures its intended design. In choose to use couplets, Bulmer participates in a type of repetition or doubling that serves her poetic purpose. This type of parallelism has its roots in Hebrew poetry and was given voice in the

eighteenth century in Bishop Robert Lowth's influential *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1787), with which Bulmer was undoubtedly familiar. In these *Lectures* Lowth traces the way in which the Hebrew poets used parallelism to repeat ideas – layering one on top of another. In a similar fashion Bulmer layers her natural images, one on another, until they become a type of cascade that reaches a critical mass by the time she gets to her analogy.

This disciplined composition of the couplets also illustrates the way the formal logic of the epic in many ways comes to structure its message. By writing in a form that demanded careful design, planning, and execution Bulmer mirrors the type of analogy that her poem illustrates. Just as the formal epic conventions that structure the poem point to her as the designer, so creation points to a creator. This focus on creation and the creative act in both form and content thus reflects both her romantic inheritance and her subversion of it. In taking nature as her primary analogy for God and impetus for poetry she echoes Wordsworth while at the same time flipping the script. Instead of conforming to a type of “natural supernaturalism,” disciplining reflection as a means to leading inward to the self and progressively away from the religious Bulmer instead takes nature as her starting point, painting a landscape that ultimately leads back to God.

In fact Bulmer returns frequently to the analogy of rain and water falling on creation later in the poem to describe how God's Holy Spirit invests individuals with this power to act:

Soft from yon o'erfraught cloud the genial shower
 Distils sweet moisture on each opening flower;
 There scents the rose upon its thorny stalk,
 There bids the violet grace the enamell'd walk;
 The tulip here disclose its thousand dyes,
 And there the lily's stainless beauty rise;
 All from one source the crystal drops descend,
 Alike their nature and the same their end;
 Each blooming plant, one fostering store supplies,
 Enriches all, yet each diversifies.

So on the Church, that garden seal'd below,
 Where living trees in holy beauty grow,
 In varied forms the Spirit's gifts descend,
 Yet all on him, their bounteous Source, depend;
 He sheds the light, the energy, the grace,
 All works in all, to each assigns his place,
 In beautiful order blends each diverse power
 To bless the whole; then bids the copious shower
 In ascending incense, glorious, rise,
 Exhaled by Heaven's own light, an offering to the skies. (179-180)

Here it is the individual flowers that are portrayed as receiving the nourishment of the rain and dew – the water coming all from the same place but helping different, co-dependent flowers in an ecosystem to grow and evidence their beauty to all creation. The analogy is clear – it is the Church that is the garden, an ecosystem where one plant depends on another but is nourished by the same source. The Holy Spirit's gifts descend on the Church (in imitation of Pentecost) and assigns a special talent or place within this order to each individual. Not only that, but analogous to the process of evaporation, these individuals then return praise to God in a unified fellowship. Here as throughout the poem, though, the analogy is twofold – not only is Bulmer attempting to represent the unrepresentable (God's grace in sending the Holy Spirit), but she is channeling experience, and by implication spiritual experience, as a legitimate source for action. Thus the flowers that receive the rain are nourished by them in the same way that the believer who receives the Holy Spirit is prompted by experience to discipline herself to know God better and then do his will in the world. Thus, following Wesley, it is through the data of the natural senses that the spiritual senses are awakened.

However within her natural images is an evangelical consciousness of creation – beautiful as it is – as diseased by sin. Following the pattern of Romans 8:22, which claims that the “whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together,” as a result of original sin, Bulmer

also analogically links the travails of the earth to the inconstancy of the Church throughout its history:

There is a glory of the sun, a light
 Essential, changeless: the pale orb of night
 Possesses, too, her splendour, when she glides
 Athwart the hemisphere of stars, or rides
 In pure and peerless majesty alone,
 As heaven's blue concave were her single throne.
 Yet soon, too soon, that beauteous brightness fades,
 And envious earth with interposing shades
 Obstructs the radiance of her dazzling beams.
 No longer, soft, her silvery lustre streams
 O'er the still lake, or bathes the landscape bright
 Of fringing woodland in a sea of light.

Inconstant thus the changeful Church appears:
 Awhile her light, in crescent glory, cheers
 Dim twilight's shade: then, o'er the ample sky
 She rolls, full orb'd, in lucid majesty,
 The' Eternal Sun in imaged brightness shows,
 And o'er a darkling world His lustre throws.
 Yet soon, from spheres beneath, what shadows rise.
 What meteors shroud, what mists obscure the skies!
 Nocturnal gloom, with reascending sway,
 Returns, opaque, to quench her argent ray;
 Sin, Error, Ignorance, averse from light,
 Who love delusion, and who haunt the night,
 Again, intrusive, on her hallow'd sphere
 Malignant rise, and veil in darkness drear. (253)

When the Church and the individuals in it do not follow God's will – and Bulmer consistently singles out the Roman Catholic Church for special opprobrium – this too is mirrored in the creation. Christ's kingdom cannot be established until the very physical creation is healed in the same way that the believer is healed through her experience with Christ.

As I have already indicated Bulmer believed that the nation of Britain had a special role to play in the extension of the gospel to all nations; but in the end she understands that the efforts of an individual nation – even one like Britain – cannot be enough. An earth plagued by sin and

in need of restoration is also an analogy for the individual plagued by sin and Bulmer's primary concern in *Messiah's Kingdom* becomes finding a means to healing both of these halves – of uniting the created order with the spiritual order so that analogy is no longer needed to experience Christ fully. Throughout the poem Bulmer returns repeatedly to the question of the senses – on the one hand they are necessary for they are analogous to the spiritual senses and it is through empirical experience of nature that human beings can know God; but on the other hand they are imperfect, plagued by sin and in fact act as a barrier to knowing God fully. Thus, absent the establishment of Christ's true kingdom, sense is useful but limited and can in fact be turned to sinful purposes:

Dark was that sketch the mighty Master drew,
When Inspiration to his hallow'd view
Presented man, degenerate, false, defiled;
The slave of sense, the sport of passions wild,
Foe of his kind, abhorring and abhorr'd,
Rebellious traitor to his rightful Lord; (313)

However it is in the hope of a restored creation that Bulmer places the hope of a restored sense, where there is no barrier between the self and the divine. In the final book of the poem, which looks forward to the establishment of *Messiah's Kingdom* and its establishment on earth, she makes this restoration of the true senses one of her key themes:

In vain! No mortal muse that light may show!
No energy to earthly bards consign'd
Paint the pure raptures of the deathless mind,
Pursue the' expanding thought that soars and springs,
Outstrips the semblance of terrestrial things,
Collects its elements from scenes sublime,
Veil'd ever from the darkling sons of time,
Contemplates Deity unchain'd by sense,
And unobstructed scans Omnipotence! (354)

In elevating the senses – both in their degraded and perfected states – Bulmer returns experience to the heart of the conversation about how it is believers know God and make Him known in the

world. Furthermore, by using empirical sense as the basis of her analogies for God and his work through the Church she implicitly makes an argument for God's design in and plan for creation. It is always creation that is at the core of her argument – a concrete engagement with nature that both figures the spiritual and prefigures the world to come. The final book of the poem makes this clear as Bulmer again uses sense analogies to describe a restored creation that she cannot physically see:

Remodell'd by this wand of power, this rod,
 Borne by commission'd hands, what works of God
 Has this dark world disclosed! Its deserts wild
 Have bloom'd in beauty; bright and soft have smiled.
 In its rude glens, the myrtle and the rose:
 Where dragons lay, in perilous repose,
 Now springs the healthful blade; a tide of life
 Comes on the gale where pestilence, late rife
 With mortal plagues, disburden'd her dank wing;
 Cheer'd by heaven's light, unwonted wild notes ring
 Through the deep forest's gloom; on mountain streams,
 Translucent, fall bright Morning's beauteous beams;
 Fresh night dews sparkle on the thirsty ground;
 Creation wakes, and Nature smiles around. (335)

Like Barbauld, Bulmer is uninterested in bridging the gap between experience and the divine by means of a perfect theory of imagination, but by returning back on creation through the means of concrete language and description. In this nature is not something that is to be deified or spiritualized, but instead experienced and used as a source of meditation that leads to an experience of God.

Ultimately Bulmer's accomplishment in *Messiah's Kingdom* is that she uses experience in a way that allows her to discipline sense in a way that both looks backwards on the establishment of the Church and then look forwards to the perfect restoration of creation. The writing of poetry is thus for her a means of disciplining the self, of taking the raw material of

experience and, by reflecting on it, turning it into a broader truth about God and his relationship to her. Her letters express this feeling very clearly:

For, however general it may be in these days of cold and calculating utilitarianism, to depreciate poetry, I cannot but consider its soothing and ameliorating influence as, in some measure, essential to the correction of that dissonance and disorder of the mind which is natural to rude and uncultivated man. But, perhaps, I am not an impartial judge; I am under more than common obligations to that gentle art, which almost in childhood taught me to give expression to thoughts and feelings unconnected with a merely sensitive world, and which otherwise might not have been seriously cherished; and I owe much also to its soothing influence in seasons of deep sorrow, when I was enabled to resort to it as an alleviating and refreshing occupation, during days and years of pensive and almost melancholy depression (118-119).

Given the ever-present specter of death and pain in her life it should come as no surprise that Bulmer turned inward as a means of dealing with depression. Sense experience, especially the pain that goes along with sickness and death, is a means through which she can access a poetic language that allows herself to take the material of inner experience and turn it into something of greater use. Poetry thus becomes the means through which she is able to discipline the self in the manner I explored in Chapter Two. It is by writing poetry daily for close to ten years after the death of her husband that she is able to make sense of God's purpose for her life. Analogy, for Bulmer, encourages the spiritual discipline of meditation, of returning back on an object in nature again and again as a means of drawing out a larger meaning – of using concrete sense and the cultivation of spiritual disciplines as a means of engendering a spiritual experience that then works outward into the world – often through the means of more writing.

Furthermore, Bulmer's epic has much to tell us about the relationship between religion, secularism, and romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century. Perhaps one of the most unusual echoes in *Messiah's Kingdom* is that of Shelley, commonly thought of as the era's most prominent atheist. However as Earl Wasserman has pointed out in a still influential reading of

Mont Blanc, “In effect, *Mont Blanc* is a religious poem, and the Power is Shelley’s transcendent deity” (232). This transcendence can only be “known” through the evidence of the senses. This represents what Wasserman terms the fundamental paradox of the poem, which embodies “the experiential and the transcendent; the immediate and the inaccessible; qualities and essence; cause and effect; the actual and the suppositive; thought and thing” (236). Like Bulmer, then, Shelley uses the space of *Mont Blanc* itself as a canvas upon which to inscribe a relationship between the real and the unreal. In many ways it is this same paradox at play in *Messiah’s Kingdom*, except that the transcendence that Bulmer is describing is explicitly the Christian God and the creation that is described is His creation.

Bulmer’s poem also exposes the extent to which both *Messiah’s Kingdom* and *Mont Blanc* are bound up in the history of secularization – in many ways they are two sides of the same coin – each creating the other in discourse. As the work of Colin Jager and others has illustrated the nature of Shelley’s atheism points to some of the many ways in which the concept of the secular is itself bound up with and created by the religious and vice versa. As I pointed out in Chapter Three, the discourses of the evangelical revival, the enlightenment, romanticism, and secularization sprang from the same sources and existed in a type of symbiotic relationship. In fact by positing belief as something that is mentally subscribed to instead of embodied, religion in fact helped create the secular while at the same time, as Jager puts it, the secular in its modern liberal form, “validates a particular organization of the human sensorium; by remaking religion as a primarily epistemological concern, a matter of minds rather than of bodies, it reorders the hierarchy of the senses in accord with its own goals” (“Shelley After Atheism” 630). In this *Mont Blanc*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Messiah’s Kingdom* reveal how two poets – seemingly on the opposite ends of the religious spectrum – were nevertheless bound up in the same

discourses and invested in resisting the same types of progressive shifts towards modernity. By rooting their poems in the experiential knowledge of truth through nature both poets envision a renovated creation that subverts a purely epistemological view of the world.

However, as the passage quoted above also suggests, the very fact that a woman like Bulmer could be accepted as a poet says much about the shifting space for women in Methodism and Britain at large on the cusp of the Victorian Age. Despite the best efforts of men like Shelley to defend the role of poetry in the public sphere the fact was, as Bulmer put it, it was common “in these days of cold and calculating utilitarianism, to depreciate poetry” (119). As Ross has detailed in his examination of Felicia Hemans life and writing, poetry was quickly losing its status as something that philosophical minds performed in solitude and was becoming appropriate for “domestic” and “affectional” poets – women who had the time and leisure to write poetry ostensibly based on their own “domestic” experience. These poets were tremendously popular, while at the same time their work was relegated to a sort of second class status as the prominent male poets of the age sought to “move beyond” the poetics of the domestic “female bower” (Ross 168-169). In his biography of Lord Byron, Tom Moore even goes so far to argue that it is “the very nature and essence of genius to be forever occupied with the intensely with the Self, as the great centre and source of its strength” (3:127) and that, as such, domestic happiness and great poetry could not go together. Inadvertently, though, by creating a poetics based on the self and personal experience, these male romantics opened the way for women to use their own experiences as a legitimate grounds for poetry.

Bulmer is certainly not a domestic poet in the traditional sense of the term, but her work was still often cast as such by contemporary critics. Even the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* singles this characteristic out as one of the admirable elements of *Messiah's Kingdom*, writing

that, “Frequently, too, our poet relieves the overstrained imagination, when roused by themes of intense interest, by drawing her metaphors from the social hearth, and other most familiar scenes” (369). This was certainly not something that would ever have been written of a male poet no matter how invested in domestic life (for example Wordsworth) and indicates both some of the larger shifts in how British culture thought about poetry and – as I have detailed at length above – the increasingly contested status of public women within the Methodist movement. As such Bulmer provides a useful bookend to this study of Methodist women’s writing in the eighteenth century as her work tends to highlight the tensions between public and private, self and other, experience and action that characterize all of this writing, while at the same time evidencing the shifts in Methodist thinking on these issues.

Victorian Methodism and a Shifting Space for Women

Agnes Bulmer died suddenly on August 20, 1836, just shy of her sixty-second birthday and exactly ten months before the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne. She had traveled to the Isle of Wight with several family members in the middle of August when she fell ill of an unknown complaint – several days later she was dead. Her funeral sermon was preached by her friend, the Rev. William M. Bunting, son of Jabez Bunting, President of the Methodist Conference and she was interred next to Bunting at the burial ground of the City Road Chapel, of which she had been a member her entire life. Her epitaph reads: “The sweet remembrance of the just / Shall flourish when he sleeps in dust” (Stevenson 498) and her obituary in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* remarked, “Of retiring and modest habits, her mind, nevertheless, was well cultivated, and calmly elegant.... Even the list of those English females who have done honour to their sex, loses nothing of its luster by having her name inscribed on it” (15:807).

Yet even these admiring words bear witness to the complex contradictions and tensions in Bulmer's life that came to define Methodism in the Victorian age. Judged solely by her work Bulmer was undoubtedly one of the greatest Methodist minds and public intellectuals of her generation and yet, largely because she was a woman, she was ignored by the major scholars of her day and ours. This has much to do with the shifting space for women within Methodism that defined the early nineteenth century – shifts that had as much to do with class as they do gender. These shifts help us better understand how the discourse culture of Methodism moved from the freewheeling open-air revivals that welcomed women at the beginning of the eighteenth century, to the male-dominated stately chapels at the end. In exploring these themes I want to trace three interlocking shifts as a way of concluding this chapter and this study: 1. women's movement to male hierarchy, 2. marginal to middle class, and 3. movement to institution. These three shifts are largely inextricable from each other as they existed symbiotically – one could not really have happened without the other and each perpetuated the other. Thus the proscription of women's roles had as much to do with the growing middle class character of the movement as it did the increasing institutionalization and centralization of the Methodist hierarchy. This is not to say that Methodism in England was uniform or monolithic. In many cases local circumstance more than official policy dictated how Methodist communities responded to their changing environments. Thus we find Sarah Mallit preaching well into the 1840's in East Anglia, where dissenters had a strong presence, while in the more genteel London Church Methodism of Bulmer's lifetime this would have been practically unheard of. Nevertheless the arc of official Methodist doctrine was away from a culture of enthusiasm towards conformity. In tracing these shifts, then, we can get a better glimpse of the shifting space for women within Methodism at the end of the eighteenth century.

The Bulmers were undoubtedly part of a very middle class Methodism that centered around City Road Chapel in London. This status is especially reflected in the fact that they quickly became friends with many of the leading lights of the second generation Methodists. I have already described the meeting between Adam Clarke and the young Agnes Bulmer. In addition to his role as Methodist theologian, Clarke was also frequently elected as the President of the Methodist Conference in the years directly following Wesley's death and he and Bulmer struck up an intellectual friendship that lasted until his death. He once commented that "That woman astonishes me. She takes in information just as a sponge absorbs water. The nature of the subject seems to make little difference; for whether it be philosophy, history, or theology, she seizes upon it, and makes it all her own" (Rowley 804). Clarke and Bulmer frequently exchanged books with one another and sent each other lengthy letters discussing philosophy, theology, and history.

Also included in this circle of friends was Richard Watson, another important Methodist theologian and President of the Conference; Joseph Benson, the editor of the *Methodist Magazine*; Jabez Bunting, the *de facto* leader of Methodism for much of the early nineteenth century; and William M. Bunting, his son. As William Bunting wrote in his introduction to Bulmer's published *Letters*, she was notable in this circle for her:

keen, irrepressible, and, if we might so say, passionate intellectuality; a thirst for *all truth*, fully as evident as was her pleasure in imparting what she had already apprehended of its facts and principles; a surprising copiousness and saliency of thought on any question which *incidentally* excited it; a range of information, which carried her at once into the details, far beyond most with whom she conversed; and then, on religious subjects, a perfect sublimity of feeling, an adoring piety, and a manner even in speaking of the present God, as if every breath were incense, and every utterance an act of worship, or of consecration (xxiv-xxv).

Clearly Agnes Bulmer was the intellectual equal of these important men. She could, and did, stand up to them in conversation and arguments on all subjects. As another member of this circle remarked years later in a reminiscence in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, “In discussion she was a match for men like Adam Clarke, Jabez Bunting, and Richard Watson; her forte being the resolute insistence on precision and consistency. ‘Define your terms, Sir,’ she would say to any one who tried to draw her into an argument” (Gregory 850). This clear, lively, and precise type of thinking is evident in her letters, both to these men and others. While many spiritual letters written during this time by Methodist women tended to be full of platitudes and common Methodist truisms, Bulmer’s are alive with a clever and searching intellect, always seeking to analyze a situation or argument and provide clear and cogent thoughts on the matter at hand.

On the other hand, though most of her male contemporaries seem to have viewed Bulmer as their intellectual equal, every one of her biographers felt the need to qualify this fact by playing up her “feminine” and “domestic” qualities, often immediately after praising her “masculine” intellect. William Bunting is perhaps the worst offender for, after offering the effusive praise of her intellect quoted above he goes on to remark that “These qualities... were set off by a most feminine delicacy of sentiment, yet suavity and charmingness of demeanour; by a cheerfulness, soft, quiet, and lambent as the fire-shine on the hearth around which we met her... and by the utmost shrinking, in practice and in taste, from all the airs and annoyances of a teaching or a talking female” (xxv). Elsewhere he comments on her “masculine robustness of intellect, with none of the affectation of masculine manners” (xvi). Clearly Agnes Bulmer is an exceptional woman, but she is chiefly exceptional (in Bunting’s mind) for the skilful way she blends feminine grace and sociable conversation around the hearth with a “masculine” intellect

which is at the same time not threatening *because* she seems so “feminine,” according to the standards of the age.

This might be expected of Bunting, but similar sentiments are found in memoirs by both of Bulmer’s female biographers. Anna Rowley, for example, comments that “as a wife, her wisdom and influence were so exercised as to contribute in every respect to the honour and comfort of her husband” (807), while Anne Collinson lauds the way her sister balanced intellect pursuit and domestic duty:

With a heart capable of the warmest affection, she possessed an uncommon degree of prudence, and employed the great influence which she had over him, for the best of purposes, and was truly his fellow-helper in the road to Zion. If she had a wish to shine, it was in his sight; and he in his turn felt proud and delighted at her intelligent and unassuming manners. A new sphere of duties and employments being thus opened to her, she assiduously applied herself to move regularly in it, and never permitted her love of study to intrench on the peculiar duties of her sex. Her household arrangements evinced her well-disciplined mind; - every thing was in order, and she herself was never in a hurry, though always employed (8-9).

Here as well is a separate “sphere of duties” that Bulmer was meant to balance with her scholarly activities. Collinson thinks it is vital to point out that, though he sister excelled as an intellectual she never let this get in the way of her “domestic duties,” and as late as 1889 Annie Keeling felt it necessary to remark that “The careful heed with which she fulfilled every domestic duty, interfered neither with her intellectual nor her spiritual progress” (151). These comments are especially difficult to square with Bulmer’s role as a very *public* Methodist author and intellectual. Though it is clear that others want to frame her as a domestic paragon of virtue who wrote on the side, it is far from clear that Bulmer viewed herself this way. Though it is likely that the humble and unassuming Bulmer would in part have played into these characterizations – perhaps even engaging in some self-presentation to meet common cultural expectations – we know little about how she thought of herself in this regard. Though it is perfectly clear that she

loved her husband deeply and took pleasure in working with him, no writing of her own has survived that indicates she saw a tension between intellectual and wife – in all likelihood she saw the two vocations as perfectly compatible.

This tension between Bulmer's roles as public intellectual and author, on the one hand, and wife, on the other, is indicative of a larger struggle over women's roles in Methodism during the beginning of the nineteenth century. After the death of John Wesley in 1791 intense battles were also fought within Methodism, especially over the issue of women's preaching. Though, as we have seen, Wesley clearly sanctioned women's preaching on the grounds of an "extraordinary call," issued Sarah Mallit with a license to preach, and actively supported the independent work of women like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Sarah Ryan, and Sarah Crosby, his was always a minority opinion within the movement. Even his support was qualified and, with his death, women preachers lost their most powerful defender. The Methodist Conference (made up entirely of men) moved quickly to circumscribe this activity by first discouraging women's preaching and then by outright banning it in 1803.⁶⁹ As we have already seen in Chapter Three, women like Sarah Mallit, Mary Barritt Taft, and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher simply ignored this prohibition and, often with the complicity of their circuit leaders, continued to preach well into the 1840's. Likewise women's preaching was common in the Primitive Methodist Connection. However the attitude of the Methodist leadership was clear and as the century progressed the roles for Methodist women became increasingly limited to the instruction of other women and children and visiting the sick and dying or what were considered "proper" domestic roles. The London "Church Methodism" of City Road Chapel would have thus been far more inclined than East Anglian Methodism (where Sarah Mallit preached) to embrace prohibitions on women's preaching activities. In all of this Adam Clarke's own *Commentary* played an influential role in

that it codified many of the restrictions on women's ministry and relegated them to the domestic sphere through conservative interpretations of disputed Biblical passages.

However, though the space for women within Methodism was becoming increasingly circumscribed, many women subtly (and unconsciously) pushed back. We have already seen how Bulmer commanded the respect of some of the most important men in Methodism through her command of the Scriptures, knowledge of theology, and intelligent writing. Though men like Bunting continued to try to assert their version of a pious domesticity, many women like Bulmer tended to look to the past – to women like Elizabeth Ritchie Mortimer – for examples. What they found was a model of piety that used religious experience as an impetus for action in the world and, though the space for this action was shrinking, they seem to have come up with new and creative ways of fulfilling their calling.

For example, while the women of the early evangelical revival were primarily amateur writers who only wrote when asked to testify to their experience or share advice with other women in letters, women like Bulmer and Hannah More were increasingly turning to other, more professional genres, to get their message across. Not only were roles for women as preachers and teachers drying up during this period but, as Jones has illustrated, space for publishing their own auto-biographical experience in *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* was rapidly shrinking. To some extent religious poetry was acceptable for evangelical women to write because it could be done from a domestic space – it did not necessitate the type of preaching and travelling that characterizes writing by women like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Sarah Ryan, and Sarah Mallitt. Nevertheless Bulmer's work strikes a careful balance between public and domestic – she never eschews the domestic per se, but at the same time she clearly embraces a role for herself as a public voice within the Methodist movement. In one sense she was forced to become more

creative in the means she used to navigate these tensions between the private, domestic sphere encouraged by evangelical culture and the public active one that her faith demanded she engage with. I do not think she set out to blaze a course for women but the result of her work was to in many ways break down static binaries between public and private as religious experience became an impetus for action. Thus Methodist women of the late eighteenth century used their writing to open up a new space for public expression. It is this tension between private and public, domestic and intellectual, that comes to define Bulmer's work in later life – and in everything she seems to subvert this binary by refusing to fully conform to either ideal.

Furthermore, the focus on domesticity and sociability in these comments about Bulmer indicate the extent to which Methodist sociability itself, especially in London, was changing. Whereas during the early days of Methodism sociability had been largely defined by the single-sex class and band structure, in the London Methodism of the early nineteenth century this was fast becoming a relic of the past. Though the structure still existed in name well into the nineteenth century, in practice the rigorous type of self examination that occurred in the bands earlier in the movement's history began to disappear in favor of a more middle class sociability. The Bulmers and their circle are an excellent example of this. As her sister, Anne Collinson, put it in her *Memoirs of Agnes Bulmer*, "Her manners were cheerful and animated, though never frivolous; and she felt social intercourse to be one of the chief blessings of this changeful life" (9). While Agnes herself advises her brother in a letter that "A little recreation is a necessary relief from the labour of the study; and, in a well-regulated intercourse with the world, and observing mind will learn many lessons which his book would teach him in vain" (20). Likewise William Bunting remarks on Agnes Bulmer's charming sociability and goes on to state that "We do not think that the talent of conversation, as it is called, is either cultivated or valued

sufficiently by the generality of religious people. The fire-side circle was considered by our late accomplished friend as one department of *Christian opportunity*" (xxiii). These sentiments, though common in the nineteenth century are a far cry from the early days of Methodism. Though John Wesley certainly endorsed engaging with the world, he had little patience for social convention or polite standards of sociability. His Methodists were to be busy and active and thus have little time for fire-side conversation. That this was clearly important to Methodists like Agnes Bulmer and William Bunting indicates that the social terrain of Methodist – especially in London – was changing and that it was now the middle class gathering that superseded the noisy class meeting.

This rise of genteel Methodist sociability also points to the way in which the space for women within Methodism was shifting – though Agnes Bulmer was respected for her intellect, it was still expected that her proper place was beside the fire-place engaging in sociable conversation, not as a part of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher's band of itinerant preaching women. One of the key provisions of the 1803 restriction on women preaching was that they should only do so *if* they received the permission of their district superintendent and if they wanted to go to another circuit to preach they were required to obtain "a *written* invitation of the Superintendent of such Circuit, and a recommendatory note from the Superintendent of their own Circuit" (*Minutes* 180).⁷⁰ Thus the prohibition on women preaching had as much to do with fears of women *circulating* outside of prescribed boundaries as the act of preaching itself. However, if opportunities for women to circulate their work and themselves within a public space were being gradually proscribed, they simply found new ways to assert their influence in an increasingly male hierarchy. In this Bulmer adapts to the Methodism of her time and place by engaging in a much more genteel version of sociability and pious action. Her sociable relationships with men

like Adam Clarke and Jabez Bunting, along with her involvement with City Road Chapel, in many ways allowed her greater influence in Methodism power circles than she could have otherwise hoped. The testament of these important men to her intellect and skill bear witness to the fact that she was able to carve a role out for herself, despite official restrictions.

This shift from noisy movement to middle class institution is intimately connected to the history of the London City Road Chapel, to which Joseph and Agnes Bulmer, along with many of their notable friends, belonged. City Road had been constructed under Wesley's supervision in 1777 to replace the old Methodist headquarters at the Foundery. Completely outside of diocesan control, nevertheless during John Wesley's lifetime the pulpit at City Road was restricted to Methodist preachers who were ordained in the Church of England and in practice Charles Wesley essentially became the equivalent of the parish priest there until his death in 1788 (Stevenson 76-77).⁷¹ Charles was always the more orthodox of the two brothers and his control of City Road was a way for him to reshape the character of the movement from its most prominent pulpit. In general the London Methodists during Charles' lifetime tended to be more affluent, more conservative, and more observant "Church Methodists." Even after Charles' and John's deaths, many London Methodists (including the Bulmers) tended to be far more observant of the practices of the Church of England than provincial Methodists (Lloyd 227-229). Furthermore, more and more middle class merchants and wealthy businessmen were becoming influential in the Methodist movement. The list of trustees of City Road Chapel is disproportionately made up of skilled tradesmen (like Edward Collinson), merchants (like Joseph Bulmer), and bankers (Stevenson 250-251). Though it is safe to assume that the wider membership was more diverse, there can be little doubt that City Road was becoming decidedly middle class.

This shift within Methodism, which only intensified into the nineteenth century, can also be tracked in the discourse of the movement. Take, for example, Silas Told's description of an early Methodist meeting at the Foundry – held even before it had been completely renovated:

When we entered the Foundry (as I had heard various unaccountable reports both of the place and people) I was much tempted to gaze about me, in order to make a few observations thereon; and finding it a ruinous place, with an old pantile covering, a few rough deal boards put together to constitute a temporary pulpit, and several other decayed timbers, which composed the whole structure, I began to think it answered the report given of it, as there were many rooms and corners similar to those caverns related to me by my former irreligious acquaintances. In one of these recluse parts of the Foundry sat three or four old women, one of whom appeared in the attitude of an unmoveable statue, with her apron over her face, nor was she uncovered during the whole time of divine service.... My friend, Mr. Greaves, stood close behind me, to prevent my going out, as I did at Short's-Gardens, to which I was strongly tempted, and had it not been for the multitude of people assembled together, so early in the morning as between four and five o'clock, and the striking consideration of such profound seriousness, which evidently appeared in the countenance of almost every person there, I must certainly have given way to the temptation, and thereby have lost the greatest blessing I ever experienced before.... Exactly at five o'clock a general whisper was conveyed through the congregation, and "Here he comes! Here he comes!" was repeated with the utmost pleasure. I was filled with curiosity to see his person, which, when I beheld, I much despised.... He passed through the congregation into the temporary pulpit, and, having his robes on, I expected he would have begun with the Church service; but, to my astonishment, the introduction to his preaching was the singing an hymn, with which I was almost enraptured; but his extemporary prayer was quite unpleasant, as I thought it savoured too much of the Dissenter's mode of worship, which at that time my prejudice could not abide. After which he took his text in the second chapter, of the first epistle general of St. John, twelve and thirteen verses. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you, &c."... I then plainly saw I could never be saved without knowing my sins were forgiven me; and in the midst of his sermon the Spirit of God sealed the truth of every word upon my heart. At the close of the discourse, however strange it may appear, a small still voice entered my left ear, with these words, "This is the truth!" and instantly I felt it in my heart; and for five and thirty years I have never once doubted of those truths and doctrines received amongst us... My worthy friend, Mr. Greaves, observing my attention to the sermon, asked me how I liked Mr. Wesley. I replied, "As long as I live I will never part from him." (73-75).

This is clearly a long way from the genteel City Road chapel and, though the message had not changed over the intervening years, clearly Methodism was moving more towards a staid

institution, leaving the noisy days of the early revival well in the past. Though much of the language of early Methodism is evident in works well into the nineteenth century, being a Methodist was becoming more socially acceptable, especially for the middle class. And as the middle class became more involved in the movement, especially in London, so its traditions and practices became more bound up in aphorisms and moralistic rules rather than the spontaneous movement of the Spirit that characterized the early years. In this it could be argued that Methodism (at least in its most official character) never really separated from the Church, instead it in many ways *became* the Church while at the same time it gradually drifted away from its control.

These shifts from movement to institution, noisy revival to stately church, poor to middle class, female to male, only accelerated as Methodism moved into the nineteenth century.⁷² Especially in considering how the official roles for women were circumscribed during the second generation of Methodism even as the Methodist movement became more middle class and institutionalized, it would be easy to take this as confirmation of the “feminization of piety/pietization of femininity” thesis. After all, though women were restricted from preaching or teaching men, their roles as teachers of women, children, and upholders of moral virtue within the family were idealized in many of the official evangelical publications. Even Anna Rowley posits Agnes Bulmer’s participation in these activities as proof of exemplary piety:

Reading the Scriptures, private devotion, constant attendance upon the public means of grace, and the most conscientious attention to her duties as a Class-Leader and visitor of the sick, were evident to all who knew her; and her example here might be copied with great advantage by females moving in a similar rank of life. (808)

However, if anything this idealization of pious femininity tells us more about the shifting discourse culture of evangelicalism than it does about what women actually did. That women

should be held up as the ideal balance between action and domesticity should come as no surprise within a media atmosphere that was attempting to circumscribe official roles for women (see Jones). As we have already seen, however, many women simply ignored the prohibitions on women's preaching, and many others subverted this discourse culture in creative way. In this the "angel in the house" was as much a cultural construct as it was a living, breathing reality. While true that women like Agnes Bulmer did actively participate in teaching the young and attending at the beds of the poor, sick, and dying, they did so not to fulfill some pious feminine ideal but because they felt compelled to by their evangelical experience. Furthermore, as the example of Agnes Bulmer shows, many women were able to create their own space, poetically and otherwise, within which to express themselves despite the restrictions on women's actions. As public intellectual of the Methodist movement Agnes Bulmer was second to none.

In this Bulmer was able to use her position as a prominent intellectual and scholar to shape the religious sensibilities of a generation of women. Like her intellectual foremothers – Hannah More, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Elizabeth Mortimer, Sarah Crosby, Hester Ann Rogers, Sarah Ryan – she believed that it was through friendly discourse in conversation, in letters, and in print that spiritual experience could be nurtured into action. That most of these women have been forgotten is not surprising given the critical and cultural norms that inform our criticism, but we ignore these formidable women at our peril. It is only by including women's religious writing in our accounts of eighteenth century literature and culture that we can begin to understand the full range of how eighteenth century people thought about their world. In this the lives and experiences of evangelical women are instructive in that they trouble our conceptions of romanticism, secularization, and modernity itself.

APPENDIX A

THE OCCASIONAL POEMS OF AGNES BULMER

Agnes Bulmer never published a comprehensive collection of her poetry. Many of her poems were originally published in other works, like the *Arminian Magazine* or simply remained in manuscript. Some of these more personal poems (like the poems to her husband) were published posthumously in Anne Collinson's *Memoir of Mrs. Agnes Bulmer* in 1837, while two of her most notable early poems were published along with the *Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers*. Almost all of these poems were occasional – revolving around a significant anniversary or death. Because these poems are not widely available, I have collected them here.

Anniversary Poems*Untitled Anniversary Poem*

How swift the feather'd feet of time
 Their soft and silent course pursue!
 Not swifter flies the bird sublime,
 Not softer falls the pearly dew:
 With outstretch'd wing, the eagle soars.
 To her impervious nest on high:
 Time seeks with fleeter steps thy shores,
 Thy unknown shores, Eternity.

Yet not the orient dew of heaven,
 Whose drops so sweetly, softly fall,
 Have richer stores to nature given,
 Or more refresh'd this earthly ball:
 Not more the gems that strew the ground,
 And sparkle in each leaf and flower,
 Than are the blessings which have crown'd
 The silent flight of every hour.

And many an hour, and many a day,
 Have pass'd with silent flight along,
 Since, crossing in our early way,
 When life and all its scenes were young,
 Our cheerful hearts the plighted faith
 To God and to each other gave,

To travel in one common path,
 And seek one home beyond the grave.

Since that fair morn, our path has laid
 Through many a sweet and varying scene,
 Through walks of sunshine and of shade,
 Through wilder heaths and meadows green.
 The smiling mead, with flow'rets graced,
 Its fragrance on our spirits flung;
 The sterile mountain's keener blast
 Our souls to firmer vigour strung.

Oft have we heard the Voice Divine
 Allure us to the world of light,
 And seen the fiery column shine
 To make the path of duty bright.
 The Covenant Angel's powerful hand
 Has led us all our journey through,
 With manna strew'd the barren sand,
 And bathed the thirsty earth with dew.

That Power benign, how kind, how wise,
 How good, our weakness to sustain!
 How rich the gifts his hand supplies!
 O! never may those gifts be vain!
 Be life and all its powers employ'd
 His sacred counsel to fulfil,
 Without whose presence life is void,
 A formless waste, or form'd to ill.

Yes; dearest friend, by Heaven assign'd,
 Kind partner of my hopes and fears;
 Henceforth, with energy combined,
 Increasing with increase of years,
 Be God our being's glorious end,
 Be heaven the Christian pilgrim's rest,
 The prize, the point, to which we tend,
 Though earth and hell our aim contest.

Far on our way toward Canaan brought,
 Here ground the pilgrim's staff awhile;
 To seek the God whom Abraham sought,
 To raise the sacramental pile;
 By mercies boundless as the dew,
 Whose precious drops so plenteous fall,
 Constrained to consecrate anew

To Him our life, our strength, our all.

To Him, who first in union sweet,
 In bonds of love, our spirits bound;
 Who still preserves those bonds complete,
 And pours his copious blessings round; —
 To God be humblest praises given,
 While Time his eagle course pursues;
 A higher, holier strain in heaven
 Shall consecrate a loftier Muse.

Reflection Poems

Jehovah, the God of the Spirits of All Flesh

Father, thy gracious hand we own,
 And bow submissive to thy rod:
 That must be wise which thou hast done:
 It must be kind, for thou art God!

The God from whom our spirits came,
 The Builder of this house of clay;
 Jehovah is thine awful name,
 And life and death thy word obey.

Thy love to each his place assigns,
 His time, his portion, here below;
 Thy wisdom in his lot combines
 The varied scenes of joy or woe.

Though life to darken'd minds appears
 A desert rude, a trackless waste;
 A land of sorrows, griefs, and fears,
 Where Chaos wild his throne has placed:

Not so the Christian's eye surveys
 The various ills that round him rise;
 For, leading through the doubtful maze,
 He marks a passage to the skies.

He knows from God his spirit came,
 And upwards to his Source aspires,
 A spark of heaven's ethereal flame,
 To burn and shine when life expires.

Call'd forth to life at thy command,

Whose eye at once all being views;
 Bade in the appointed lot to stand,
 Which best shall to the end conduce:

Though pain and grief to man allied,
 With him their certain kindred claim;
 Though, flesh and spirit to divide,
 Death take his sure and steadfast aim;

Yet shall not grief the soul invade,
 Or pale disease the flesh confine;
 Nor death within his awful shade
 Unnoticed hide a child of thine!

No; not the monster's utmost power
 Can crush an infant's feeble frame;
 Or harshly break the beauteous flower,
 Just bursting to the solar beam.

Not so the Christian's eye surveys
 The various ills that round him rise;
 For, leading through the doubtful maze,
 He marks a passage to the skies.

He knows from God his spirit came,
 And upwards to his Source aspires,
 A spark of heaven's ethereal flame,
 To burn and shine when life expires.

Call'd forth to life at thy command,
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Though pain and grief to man allied,
 With him their certain kindred claim;
 Though, flesh and spirit to divide,
 Death take his sure and steadfast aim;

Yet shall not grief the soul invade,
 Or pale disease the flesh confine;
 Nor death within his awful shade
 Unnoticed hide a child of thine!

No; not the monster's utmost power
 Can crush an infant's feeble frame;

Or harshly break the beauteous flower,
Just bursting to the solar beam.

Their breath resumed at thy command,
To thee their angel-spirits rise;
The plants that could not here expand
Shall bloom immortal in the skies.

Nor should the boon of life, assign'd
For purposes so vast and high,
Have been to such a space confined,
That ere they fully live, they die;

Had not He known whose name is love,
When gathering clouds the skies deform,
His plants, unless safe housed above,
Would fall before the wintry storm.

Still flows the sad, the tender tear:
Yes, though the Christian meekly bends,
From parents o'er their children's bier
The unforbidden grief descends;

Yet holy hope, with sacred joy,
Anticipates that hour to come,
When cherub-children shall convey
Their spirits to their heavenly home.

Yes; when fulfill'd the wider sphere,
Assign'd them by thy sovereign grace,
They too shall in thy house appear,
And bow before their Father's face.

There, bending at thine awful feet,
Their long-lost little ones receive;
Nor those alone, but gladly greet
Whom now thy mercy spares to live.

Bound in the lot of endless bliss,
With joy may they their charge resign,
Their triumph in that day be this, —
"O Lord, our children all are thine!"

“Thoughts on Eternity”

“*God created man, and made him to be the image of his own eternity.*” — Wisdom ii. 23.

Pale, starry fires! how bright ye shine!
 How calm through heaven's pure pathway move!
 Yet, when ye fail, this soul of mine
 Shall glow in brighter worlds above.

A living spark of quenchless light,
 Enkindled by the eternal Sun;
 My spirit, when ye sink in night,
 An everlasting course shall run.

Who that unmeasured round can trace?
 Who can compute eternity?
 On planets, stars, and suns, I gaze;
 They only speak of time to me.

Thought, by the immaterial mind,
 To distant realms excursive sent,
 Leaves all these glistening worlds behind,
 And gains a loftier firmament;

Inquires of every throned power
 Who earliest swell'd the choral hymn,
 Hailing creation's primal hour,
 Of seraph flames, and cherubim.

"Say ye who saw each burning star
 Dart its first beams athwart the gloom,
 Ye sons of light! can ye declare
 Duration's infinite — TO COME?"

All heaven is hush'd! nor voice, nor lyre,
 Dares to the mighty theme respond: —
 Archangels, seraphs, veil'd, inquire
 The wonders of the scene beyond.

He only knows! the Great! the High!
 Whose own right hand his throne sustains,
 Who is, who was! Eternity
 His vast, profound abode, remains!

He from himself, essential Sun,
 To me this spark of being gave,

His own eternal course to run,
 Immortal life in Him to have.

He waked those intellectual fires
 Which shoot through mists of death and time;
 He breathed those infinite desires
 Which rest but in himself sublime.

Creation rich in beauty glows,
 Heaven's spangled arch majestic rolls;
 But God — a spirit only knows,
 He dwells alone in hallow'd souls.

To feel the ecstasies of bliss, —
 To taste unutterable woe, —
 The high, the awful destinies
 Of spirits bless'd or cursed, to know!

This, tenant of a house of clay,
 This is the lot to thee assign'd!
 And thou shalt see these fires decay,
 And leave a flaming world behind!

Shalt stretch the bright, the buoyant wing,
 To spirit's awful Fountain soar;
 Drink bliss and being at their spring,
 And pant for earthly streams no more!

Eternity's unmeasured round
 From joy to joy shall bear thee on!
 That depth, in which thy thoughts are drown'd,
 Shall prove thy being's bliss and crown.

But pause ! — An awful charge is thine!
 The balance to thy hand is given!
 Say! shall the scale to death decline?
 Or lift thee up to life and heaven?

“Lines Written in November, 1834”

“They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.” — Isaiah xl. 38.

With sun-bright eye, and soaring flight,
The eagle scales the rough rock's height;
Then sinks with folded plumes to rest,
Secure within its lofty nest.

Lo! upward borne, on wing sublime,
Beyond the turbid waves of time,
My spirit seeks repose above,
Beneath the shade of sovereign love.

He bids me rise: his voice Divine
Allures me to that inmost shrine;
Bids me, in whispers soft and sweet,
Approach that sprinkled mercy-seat.

I come, in want and weakness, known,
In all their depths, to Him alone;
On him to wait in lowly prayer,
Till he shall meet and bless me there.

On him I wait; nor wait in vain;
I feel pervading power sustain
My troubled, strengthless, flutt'ring breast,
So long by guilt, by fear, oppress'd.

I see, while in his presence bow'd,
Bright through the veiling incense-cloud,
Resplendent break those glories mild,
Which speak my Father reconciled.

I see, within that hallow'd shrine,
The consecrated Priest Divine;
His hand the golden censer bears,
He pleads my cause, presents my prayers.

Lo! glad in strength renew'd I rise,
Unwearied press to grasp the prize;
Surmount the lingering mists of time,
And gain, e'en now, a loftier clime.

On wings of faith, of hope, I soar,

By darkling fears detain'd no more;
 With joy pursue my upward way,
 And hail the dawn of endless day.

Yes, glorious visions meet my eye,
 Which eagle, soaring to the sky
 In golden sun-light, never scann'd,
 The splendours of that far-off land.

There, by those streams of holy light,
 Which downward dart their radiance bright,
 I see the heaven prepared for me,
 When life absorbs mortality.

Those hallow'd realms, how calm, how fair!
 How pure the sacred pleasures there,
 Where seraphs, veil'd, adoring stand,
 And rapture stays the minstrel's hand!

There prostrate elders lowly bend;
 There songs from mystic powers ascend;
 There saints, in choral shouts, proclaim,
 One great, one high, one only Name!

Bow to that Name, ye thrones of light!
 There cast your crowns, ye seraphs bright!
 My soul, present thy homage there,
 The bliss of saints, of angels, share.

Who dwells within that veiled shrine?
 Who claims that worship all Divine?
 'T is He, the Lamb, who press'd for me
 The blood-stain'd height of Calvary!

Hail! holy Victim! lo! I rise,
 Through thy all-perfect sacrifice;
 With strength renew'd, to urge my way,
 Though hell and death my course would stay.

On wings of faith, of hope, I soar,
 That far-off land with joy explore;
 I've pass'd within the eternal shrine,
 I bask in light and love Divine.

Elegaic Poems

The Lyre Resumed:
Or A Requiem at the Tomb of a Beloved Friend

"We bless thy holy name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear." —
Communion Service.

Sweet evening, lovely are thy tranquil hours,
Mid summer skies, when halcyon breezes stray,
Fragrant with balmy breath of closing flowers;
When mild thou beam'st with Sol's retiring ray,
While in the empurpled west,
Sinks his bright orb to rest,
And clouds of gorgeous dyes dissolve in pensive gray.

Yet softer than those incense-breathing airs,
Whose light wings rustle through the leafy grove;
More lovely than those pale and twinkling stars
That faintly gem the deepening arch above;
More hallow'd on the mind,
By memory's power refined,
Come from yon distant world the forms of those we love.

So, wandering far, by angel-harps beguiled,
The pensive Muse to themes unearthly stray 'd;
The light of heaven, with gentlest radiance mild,
As its own peerless bow, around her play'd:
But, ah! that lambent sign,
Those soothing sounds Divine,
Presaged the gathering storm, the wreck that storm has made.

In murmurs loud the howling tempest woke,
No breeze AEolian swept the poet's lyre;
Its slender strings the gusty whirlwind broke,
All save the sparks of heaven's own hallow'd fire;
That overwhelming flood,
That drenching rain subdued,
And bade the fairy forms of Fancy's train retire.

Yet come, sweet lyre! all broken as thou art,
And let me tune thy simple chords again;
Perchance thy melodies may ease my heart,
My heart oppress'd with languishment and pain;
For soft thy numbers flow,
In plaintive tones, and slow,

And thou wast taught to breathe full many a pensive strain.

Or, lured again by minstrelsy Divine,
 Within the pure, the curtain'd realms of light,
 O, might thy lays with harping angels join,
 And bring once more, in tenderest radiance bright,
 Those hallow'd forms to view,
 Which late their splendours threw
 Athwart thy trembling wires, like moonbeams o'er the night!

The world and time receding far behind,
 Full on my sight celestial visions stole,
 Spirits of light, who, erst in flesh confined,
 Held o'er my heart a tender sweet control;
 A sainted parent dear,
 And friends and kindred near,
 Whisper'd of heavenly joys, and claim'd my yielding soul.

But, ah! while lingering, listening to the call,
 No voice reveal'd, that, with that sacred band,
 He, whom my heart had fondly own'd its all,
 That he so soon amidst their ranks should stand,
 And join with them to cry,
 "O come! come up on high,
 Come, and rejoin thy friends in this delightsome land."

Ah, no! I knew not that the Power Divine,
 Severely kind, e'en then the word had given;
 I saw not the commission'd angel's sign,
 As swift he floated through ethereal heaven.
 I felt not then the dart
 Which since has pierced my heart,
 The fatal shaft of death, through thine relentless driven.

Most loved! most loving! in the quiet grave
 Thine ever rests, from torturing sorrow free;
 Bright beams of glory o'er thy spirit wave,
 And all is sight, and joy, and bliss, with thee.
 But mine still weeps and bleeds,
 Still pang to pang succeeds,
 And Grief's sad springs are fed by active Memory.

Fresh o'er my mind, in every charm array'd,
 Flit the fair shadows of departed joys; —
 The enlivening smile that made the morning glad,
 The evening cheer'd by friendship's soothing voice;
 The untold tenderness,

By heaven design'd to bless
The calm, sweet peace that crown'd affection's earliest choice.

These, these are past! and other visions rise,
Visions of deep and solitary gloom;
Yet brighten'd by a glory from the skies, —
Glory, that could the sufferer's couch illumine,
Chase the pale spectre Fear,
Though Pain and Death were there,
And all that train which throngs the passage to the tomb.

O Memory! soothing, torturing as thou art,
On these sad scenes thy deepest lines impress;
Nor ever, ever from my bleeding heart,
May ought their monitory stamp efface.
They point my upward way;
Why lingering should I stay,
When what I loved on earth has found in heaven a place?

The gathering mists on life's lone vale descend,
The wind breathes chill along the leafless grove,
No shepherd comes his timid charge to tend,
By strength to succour, to sustain by love.
Silent and cheerless all,
Save where the moonbeams fall,
Fitful, and pale, and weak, through struggling clouds above.

Yet far beyond, where turbid meteors swell
Their threatening piles, beneath the wintry sky,
Faith views the land where sainted spirits dwell,
Through heaven's blue arch her sweeping pinions fly,
And in the blest abode
Of those e'en now with God,
Reclaims her loved, lost friends, and joins their company.

Fair are the realms of everlasting day!
Bright is the sun that in that region shines!
Temper'd, and calm, and pure, is every ray!
No clouds obscure it, and no night confines.
O spirits of the blest!
How hallow'd is your rest;
Yours is perennial spring, a year that ne'er declines!

No glistening tears suffuse the downcast eye,
No sighs of grief the heaving bosom rend;
There anguish pours no more its piteous cry,
Nor pain, nor death, their empire there extend.

Hail, glorious heirs of light!
 Soon to your mansions bright,
 Redeem'd from earth and sin, I too would fain ascend.

Yet say, from realms of empyrean bliss,
 Where heaven's own joys in full profusion flow,
 Stoop ye not sometimes down to visit this,
 This frail, this fleeting, failing world of woe?
 Stand ye not sometimes nigh,
 To catch the rising sigh,
 Still struggling in the breasts of suffering friends below?

No mortal coil confines your vigorous powers,
 Nature's firm barriers to your impulse yield,
 O'er height, o'er depth, the unprison'd spirit towers,
 Sweeps earth's low boundaries and heaven's argent field.
 And wilt thou come to me?
 And, by thy ministry,
 Compose my fluttering heart, my steps from danger shield ?

Yes! though the veil of flesh awhile divide
 Thy form of glory from my tearful eye;
 I will rejoice to think thee still my guide,
 Nor feel my solitude when thou art nigh;
 The voice I loved to hear
 Shall still my sorrows cheer,
 And grief its sighs suspend in such society.

And wilt thou not, replete with heavenly joy,
 To me reveal the secret of thy bliss?
 Teach me the thoughts that angel-minds employ,
 The language of celestial ecstasies,
 Till, fill'd with light Divine,
 My spirit too shall shine,
 And wing, with thine, its way to realms of purest peace?

Hark! what a sound, a swell of bliss was there!
 What raptured tones of reverential love!
 Heard ye not floating, on the ambient air,
 The echoing triumphs of the bless'd above?
 O, hear ye not that cry,
 That shout of victory,
 As towards the sapphire throne their shining spirits move?

Not warriors crown'd with spoils, or flush'd with fame,
 So rich a triumph ever raised below.
 Not reapers, when from harvest fields they came,

Exulting, with such transports learn'd to glow,
 As fire that hallow'd throng,
 While loud they raise the song
 To Him who tried their faith, and brought them conquerors through.

Hail! holy, happy, all victorious band!
 How have ye pass'd the furnace unconsumed?
 How bright ye shine as stars in his right hand,
 Whose blood redeem'd you, and whose light illumed!
 True, ye have tasted death;
 But he too slept beneath,
 And sanctified the grave, wherein ye lie entomb'd.

Jesus! atoning Lamb! triumphant Lord!
 Fountain of life to saints above, below!
 Thy saving name these ransom'd hosts record,
 Thy saving name thy suffering servants know,
 Who still with thee sustain
 The cross of grief and pain,
 Till thou shalt bid them rise, and share thy victory too.

Yes! join'd in Thee, the cheering, quickening Soul,
 The Sun in whom the rays of glory meet,
 The Church is one! one pure, one beautiful whole!
 And soon, assembled round thy shining seat,
 One mighty sound shall swell,
 One song of triumph tell,
 The mystery fulfill'd! the family complete!

July 31st, 1823 – On the Anniversary of Her Husband's Funeral

"He thanked God, and took courage." Acts xxviii. 15.

And so escaped the briny flood,
 By whom in fear an angel stood,
 So pacing slow the Roman Way,
 'Twas meet that thou, blest Paul, should'st pay
 Thy sacrifice of grateful love
 To Him who succour'd from above;
 Thy filial faith and hope renew,
 In God the great, the good, the true.

For thou wast saved when threat'ning skies
 Forbade the light of heaven to rise,
 When hoarse and loud the tempest blew,
 Nor helm, nor sail, the steersman knew.
 For thou wast saved, when yawning waves
 Presented, dread, a thousand graves;
 Saved, when the fearful grasp of death
 Assail'd thee in the gulf beneath.

Mine is a slow and stammering tongue,
 Yet love exalts the humblest song.
 I, then, as it becomes me too,
 Will here my confidence renew;
 I, too, will reverence, bless, adore,
 That guardian Grace, that sovereign Power,
 Who from the billows heard my prayer,
 And bade the raging tempest spare.

O, 'twas a dark, a dismal night,
 Faith only track'd the distant light;
 But on those clouds a glory beam'd
 Than angel-plumes that brighter seem'd;
 And in that storm a voice was heard,
 That whispered "peace," and, when I fear'd,
 It gently answer'd, "I am thine,
 And seas in storm, or calm, are mine."

While struggling, too, beneath the wave,
 I saw a hand stretch'd out to save;
 I felt its grasp, it bore me through,
 And to the strand in safety drew:
 There trembling, panting, while I lay
 It was my kind support and stay;

Revived the quivering spark of life,
And shielded from surrounding strife.

And now, receding from the shore,
I hear the ebbing billows roar,
The tempest-wind more gently sighs,
Its echo on the rough rock dies.
The heavens assume a milder hue,
The softened sweet ethereal blue,
In tenderest beauty beams above,
Though clouds in under-regions move.

And dimly through the parting storm
I see that bending angel-form,
Which, once a kindred spirit here,
Was wont to wipe the falling tear;
I see him in his robes of light,
Serenely soft, divinely bright,
Point to the victor's crown of stars,
And sweetly, gently, calm my fears.

'Tis well; that radiant crown I see,
Its jewell'd splendours blaze for me;
But I must win the dazzling prize,
Must, with the Man of Sacrifice,
Awhile the hallow'd cross sustain,
Pursue my way through toil and pain;
Prepare my Master's will to meet,
To suffer, triumph, at his feet.

Strike then the harp, with angel choirs,
'Tis faith, 'tis hope, 'tis love inspires.
And grateful praise the song shall swell
To Him who "doeth all things well;"
Who heard me, when the tempest swept
The stormy deep, and kindly kept,
And led me through the parting wave, —
The Lord, omnipotent to save.

What, though with future storms in view,
I still my mournful way pursue;
What, though life's solitary path
Is hedged with thorns, and closed by death?
Yet shall not terrors shake my soul;
'Tis His to guide, sustain, control;
And He his humblest charge shall keep,

And hear me sigh, and see me weep.

Illustrious Paul! I fain would be
 A follower of thy Lord and thee.
 Thou, when the ocean's rage was quell'd,
 The viper's venom'd tooth repell'd;
 Thou didst not yield to servile fear,
 Though bound to Caesar's bar severe;
 But firmly good, and nobly great,
 Didst onward press with soul elate.

And thou, that fearful trial o'er,
 Redeem'd from the destroyer's power,
 Didst sweetly, sacredly, record
 The truth, the friendship, of thy Lord.
 He, when by human aid forsook,
 Did on thy bonds, thy dangers, look;
 Beside thee in the conflict stood,
 And slaked the lion's thirst for blood.

My spirit, wake! his Lord is thine,
 Thy Saviour! and canst thou repine?
 Wilt thou not joy his cross to bear,
 His cup of sorrow meekly share?
 Wilt thou not emulate the faith
 Of saints, who, conquering sin, and death,
 And pain, and sorrow, meekly proved
 Triumphant through the name they loved ?

On Him, the great, the good, the true,
 'Tis thine to rest in danger too;
 Him for thy hope, thy all, to take;
 His name thy rock, thy refuge, make;
 With grateful love the past survey,
 To Him commit thy future way,
 Till, every toil and trial past,
 Thy Saviour's rest thou share at last.

THOUGHTS ON A FUTURE STATE,
Occasioned by the Death of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers.
By a young lady who met in her class.

Air built and baseless all, are earth's delights,
And grief intrudes into their noblest heights;
To changes subject, and to ills a prey,
They bud and wither in a winter's day;
And like the unfriendly plant of sense too quick,
Bloom at a distance, but when touch'd grow sick:
What calls on man to look beyond this sphere,
Since he's immortal, and all is mortal here!
If endless life, and lasting summers wait,
To crown us when we leave this wint'ry state,
How should each change instruct us to be wise,
And tell us we are natives of the skies!

But, sure of bliss, (if ought deserves the name,)
Fair friendship's pleasures must the title claim:
Her joys are mighty, but they often fail,
For while in mortal robes, e'en she is frail,
Ah yes, Celestia! friendship's tears must flow,
While memory lasts, or we thy absence know;
Full oft we trace the happy moments fled,
When we to noblest joys by thee were led;
And whilst we talk'd of heaven, and learn'd the way,
Mercy divine let in a beam of day,
Till faith and hope exulting soar'd on high,
And each affection centred in the sky;
We long'd to clap the immortal wing, and praise
In louder songs the source of boundless grace,
Where no dull sense, or intermediate cloud,
Can ever the Redeemer's presence shroud,
But love unbounded, and ecstatic joy,
Burst forth in endless songs without annoy.

But scenes elapsed I'll leave, while I presume,
With daring thought to penetrate the gloom
That hides immortal things from mortal view,
And humbly thy enraptured flight pursue
To worlds of bliss, complete fruition's height,
Perfect existence, and immediate sight

O, had we seen thee when the veil withdrew,
And thy freed spirit from its prison flew!
What floods of glory burst upon thy sight,

What songs melodious rung the ether bright,
 As heavenly spirits led thee through the sky,
 'Midst blazing suns, and rolling worlds on high;
 While joyful friends throng'd thick the heavenly way,
 And hail'd thee to the bright abodes of day;
 Then joining in their songs of triumph high,
 The loud hosannas echo'd through the sky.

And now what mighty joys thy powers surprise,
 Stretch'd out from mortal to immortal size;
 Surrounded, fill'd, absorb'd in Godhead's sea,
 And wrapp'd in visions of the Deity,
 Yet not o'erwhelm'd, bewilder'd, or confused,
 Thy nature so with the divine infused,
 So fitted to thy state, so pure and high,
 That heaven's profounds suit thy capacity.

Thy glow-worm knowledge here by faith begun,
 In open vision bursts into a sun;
 Through organs weak no longer dribbled in,
 Nor labours purblind reason scrapes to win:
 But senses large, congenial with the skies,
 'Wake to new life, and into action rise,
 By intuition now, all ear, all sight,
 Perception all, and piercing as the light,
 Thou need'st no medium to convey delight,
 With open face thou view'st the eternal Three,
 In union join'd a glorious Trinity!
 And at the view increasing raptures flow,
 While proving "'tis eternal life to know."
 Thou view'st unveil'd the attributes divine,
 Which in unrivall'd beauty round thee shine,
 Adoring the transcending harmony,
 Which joins them all in man's redemption free.

Alike by thee his government is survey'd,
 Where'er his all-creative power 's display'd,
 Allow'd his circling providence to trace
 From heaven's first order to the reptile race:
 Here wonders now create sublime delight,
 And holy praise breaks forth at every sight.

Nor less his grace thy searching mind employs,
 Since "angels o'er a penitent rejoice;"
 Here they discover mercy's richest store,
 And endless cause to wonder and adore.

Now thou well know'st the secret works of grace,
 Which first attracted thee to seek his face,
 From hence pursuing all the steps divine,
 Which through thy life in ceaseless mercies shine;
 The end discovering of each grief and pain,
 Why they were sent, and what the endless gain:
 Alike survey'd in every hidden snare,
 Escap'd by thee through providential care;
 A thousand blessings now to thee are known,
 O'er which on earth a pierceless veil was thrown.

What funds of pleasure must such views supply,
 And themes for praise throughout eternity!
 Creation's works are open to thy sight,
 From lifeless matter to the seraph bright:
 What wonders in the world of spirits shine,
 Expressive of their origin divine!
 Here beings high and things inanimate,
 Which still retain their pure primeval state,
 Are understood by thee, whose piercing eye
 Can into being's inmost essence pry;
 And if revisiting this nether sphere,
 How differently each object must appear!
 No longer can the surface bound thy sight,
 But nature's secret springs are brought to light;
 And God appears diffused throughout the whole,
 The source of life, — creation's living soul.

Is such thy knowledge of thy glorious Lord?
 Then sure thy love in measure must accord;
 Possessing now the end thy soul pursued,
 In near fruition of its perfect good:
 No more (as here) frail nature sinks opprest,
 When with peculiar revelation blest;
 Then words were lost in love's immense abyss,
 And silence best express'd the unutter'd bliss.
 (What proof that love is heaven's commencement here,
 Since mortal language sinks beneath its sphere.
 Praise aims in vain to set its glories forth,
 And only songs celestial gave it birth:)
 But now at large uncircumscribed and free,
 Thy vast affections feed on Deity;
 Ecstatic love in holy rapture flows,
 Increasing ever as thy knowledge grows:
 In full enjoyment and immediate sight,
 Of him whose beauties are thy sole delight,

Thy praise unwearied, must for ever flow,
 And pleasures no embarrassment can know:
 Renew'd by having his continual smile,
 No doubt intruding thy delights to spoil,
 But large returns for ever flow to thee,
 Of mutual love and sweet complacency.
 And joy (love's first-born offspring) lives to prove,
 And celebrate the jubilee above;
 Immediate draughts receiving from the throne,
 While thy loved Saviour makes his joy thy own;
 Thou sharest in all his glorious victories,
 Exulting o'er its vanquish'd enemies,
 Ascribing endless glories to his name,
 And ever crying, "Worthy is the Lamb
 Who wash'd our robes and conquer'd all our foes,
 And now on us eternal life bestows:"
 And fresh discoveries of unfathom'd love
 Will through eternity thy joys improve.

Are such the glories of thy perfect state?
 Then thy employments must alike be great;
 (For spirit is to action ever bent,
 And torpid rest is not its element.)
 Art thou engaged in acts to us unknown
 Of solemn worship 'fore the eternal throne,
 Which all thy mighty faculties employ,
 And give full scope to wonder, love, and joy?
 Or sent to this terrene on errands kind,
 Perhaps to soothe thy partner's fainting mind,
 When deep-felt grief's impetuous tempests blow
 Or secret tears from silent anguish flow?
 Then to administer the cordial sweet,
 And lead his views to yon celestial seat,
 Where kindred souls in sweet enjoyment meet?
 Or dost thou come a guardian angel bright
 O'er the dear objects of thy late delight,
 Averting danger, and instilling truth
 In soft instructions to their tender youth?
 Or dost thou visit those with kind solace
 Who were thy pupils in the school of grace?
 O, have I ever felt thy friendly power
 Conducting me through dark temptation's hour,
 And taken, when unconscious of thy aid,
 The cup of comfort by thy hand convey'd?
 Reviving thought! it wipes the tear of wo,
 Since friendship lives more perfect than below.

Nor less 'tis likely that thy guardian hand
 Supports thy friends along thy shadowy land,
 When life is hov'ring on the short'ning breath,
 And its warm current gently cools in death;
 Then bearing the triumphant soul away,
 Thou sid'st its anthems in the courts of day,
 And mixing with the brilliant hosts above,
 Recount'st the wonders of redeeming love;
 While list'ning angels hear with sweet surprise;
 And gusts of allelujahs ring the skies.
 Now fellowship is perfect and complete,
 Where thought communes with thought, and notions meet,
 And swift as lightning distant souls can reach,
 With clear expression far surpassing speech;
 Thus fitted for sublime society,
 With beings of consummate purity,
 Thou hold'st high converse with angelic choirs,
 Cherub, and seraph, and with human sires,
 With all the glorious hosts around the throne,
 Perhaps with beings yet to us unknown,
 Gather'd from num'rous worlds remote from ours,
 And form'd with various faculties and powers;
 While each the victories of grace declare,
 And countless acts of providential care:
 Then joining in melodious strains of praise,
 To mercy's centre, and the source of grace,
 Each happy soul takes in large draughts of joy,
 And unconceived delights thy powers employ.

Say, does some spirit (perhaps thy infant son,
 For sure by thee he's still beloved and known,)
 Direct thy flight along the ethereal way,
 Where suns unnumber'd burn, and comets stray,
 To some new workmanship of power divine,
 Where beings in Adamic glory shine,
 And uncurs'd nature all harmonious glows,
 And shining fair its Maker's glory shews.
 Here wonders rise on wonders to thy view,
 In objects fair, immaculate and new;
 And seem with thee in concert sweet to join,
 In one delightful hymn of praise divine.

Are such as these thy blest employs on high?
 While God is all in all, and ever nigh;
 For wide extended space is full of him,
 Nor aught thy ever-waking sight can dim

Hence, though engaged at nature's utmost bound,
Thy heaven — thy God, must still thy soul surround.

But cease my vent'rous thought, too apt to fly
To things for thy capacity too high:
Since ear hath never heard, nor eye beheld,
Th' immortal glories of the upper world,
And all is bold chimera at the best,
In darkness form'd, and wrapt in errors, rest;
Nor thought can paint, nor language give them birth,
And faint descriptions but degrade their worth.
Hence I'm constrain'd the subject to dismiss,
Till made with her a fellow-heir of bliss.

May 15, 1795

An Elegy on the Death

Of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers.

By a Lady,

Who enjoyed the privilege of her maternal instructions on the way to glory.

Sat, shall the muse, in plaintive weeping strains,
 A dear departed pious friend lament!
 Or join the host on yonder glorious plains,
 To greet, with triumph, the victorious saint?

A conquering warrior, who return'd from fight,
 Has gloriously her every foe subdued,
 And now reposes in the plains of light,
 And triumphs in the presence of her God.

Can we, who sojourn in the vale of life,
 (Who still each anxious, painful trial, know,)
 Desire to lengthen out the mortal strife,
 Of one so fully meet from earth to go?

Can we the breathings of her spirit trace,
 Behold the ardour of her panting soul;
 Her steadfast care to run th' appointed race,
 Her longing to attain the heavenly goal?

Her deep communion with the God of lore,
 To feel whose presence was her soul's delight;
 Her life of faith concealed with Christ above,
 Now changed into the beatific sight.

Say, can we view, and wish to stop her flight,
 Even for a moment to the world recall?
 O that her glory on our souls may light!
 On us some portion of her spirit fall!

No, surely, here we'll bid our tears farewell,
 And triumph with the saint to glory gone;
 With her the praise of our Redeemer, tell —
 Above, below, the triumph is but one.

Ah, no! 'tis not the dead demands our tears,
 But for ourselves, alas! our sorrows flow;
 We joy in her escape from grief and fears,

To where the tree of life and pleasures grow.

But by a double tie she claim'd our love,
 And lo, at once, we mourn a friend and guide!
 Oft has she led our soul to things above,
 And sweetly pointed to the Crucified.

Deeply experienced, Satan's wiles she knew,
 And bid us of his dang'rous baits beware;
 Set forth the Saviour's love for ever new,
 Watching our souls with constant tender care.

Full well she knew the goodness of her Lord,
 And wish'd that all with her his love might feel:
 For this mercy she to all declared
 With humble gratitude and pious zeal.

To youth, or age, her kind advice she gave,
 Alike by youth or age beloved, revered,
 To all adapted, all their souls to save,
 Some roused by threat'ning, some by comfort cheer'd.

Yet while she labour'd thus, with pious zeal,
 She ne'er despised the social calls of life,
 But with a conscientious care fulfill'd
 The duties of a parent, child, and wife.

Thus while on earth her Master's work she wrought,
 And now her Lord has said, "Enough is done;
 Thy arms lay down — the fight of faith is fought,
 The prize of everlasting glory's won."

Thrice happy saint! No more our tears shall flow,
 No more our selfish hearts thy loss shall mourn;
 Be this our aim, like thee our God to know,
 That with like joy we may to heaven return.

And thou, dear partner of her joys and cares,
 What consolation can a friend impart,
 (A child of your united faith and prayers,)
 To ease the sorrows of a wounded heart?

Short is the time of man's appointed space,
 Soon will this transitory life be gone;
 Then shall your souls its dearer part embrace,
 And stand with her before yon glorious throne!

Even now, by faith, your soul with hers shall join,
And learn the strains of the seraphic throng;
Till all renew'd in purity divine,
You sing in heaven the never ceasing song!

NOTES

Chapter 1

¹ For example Peter Gay, *Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. New York: Norton, 1995. and *Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom*. New York: Norton, 1996.

² This argument was made most influentially by M.H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, but it appears in numerous studies over the past forty years.

³ See W.M. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.; and E.G. Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.

⁴ The Moravian Brethren, or *Unitas Fratrum*, were an influential pietist movement that grew up out of renewal movements within the Lutheran Church during the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century in Bohemia and Moravia. Beginning in 1675 with Philipp Jacob Spener's (1635-1705) *Pia Desideria* the pietist movement sought to reform the Church along evangelical lines – emphasizing the importance of the Bible, sensible conversion, and pious action. This “heart theology” was picked up by thinkers like August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) at the University of Halle and Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), a German aristocrat who established a Moravian community on his estate at Herrnhut in present day Germany in 1722. Zinzendorf became the patron and bishop of the Moravian Church and, significantly, encouraged extensive missionary work throughout the rest of Europe and the world. These missionaries eventually made their way to England and America and, with their theology of the heart, were a powerful influence on the nascent revival in both countries. John Wesley met the Moravian missionaries August Gottlieb Spangenberg (1704-1792) and Peter Böhler (1712-1775) during his time in Georgia and they were tremendously influential in the early years of the revival.

⁵ For some background on the rise of Methodism in Britain see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).; David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005).; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).; and Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989).

⁶ See Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790's* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992; and *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. and Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

⁷ See also Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap,

2007.; and Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

⁸ In this I contest a major line of thinking on the Enlightenment most influentially outlined by scholars like Peter Gay, who has contributed tremendously to our knowledge of the Enlightenment but, as I will lay out in Chapters Two and Three, overlooks some of the ways in which evangelicalism was itself a product of enlightenment thinking.

⁹ For example see Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.; Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790-1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.; and Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. For an analysis of why religion has been overlooked for so long in early modern studies see Ken Jackson, and Arthur Marotti. "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 167-190.

¹⁰ See *Transactions of the Wordsworth Society* 6 (10 May 1884): 226.

¹¹ Anne Mellor and Devoney Looser, "Women," Seminar held at the 2011 NASSR Conference, Park City, UT, 12 Aug. 2011.

¹² See Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.; Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe*, Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2008.; Jennifer Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers, 1807-1907*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009.; and Christine Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth Century Social Discourse*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.

¹³ See also Leslie F. Church's still foundational work in *The Early Methodist People* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949) and *More About the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth 1949) along with Clive D. Field, "The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 76, no. 1 (1994): 165.

Chapter 2

¹⁴ Such platonic male-female relationships were not uncommon in Methodism, with members of Methodist communities considering each other brothers and sisters. However, the question of the nature of Wesley's relationships with these women is complicated. He regularly corresponded with a number of women like Rogers, leading to jealousy on the part of his wife, Mary Vazeille. In fact it was rumored that Wesley's extensive correspondence with such women was a major reason for their separation. Both John and Charles Wesley were often accused of using their positions as a means of attracting vulnerable women. Even their friend, the Moravian James Hutton, wrote in a 1740 letter to Count Zinzendorf that the brothers were, "dangerous snares to young women; several are in love with them. I wish they were once married to some good sisters, but would not give them one of my sisters if I had many" (qtd. in Rack 190). For a

modern and influential (if controversial) opinion on this subject see Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992.

¹⁵ For more on Hester Ann Rogers' life and work see Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2008.

¹⁶ In fact there is evidence that the differences in how British Methodist men and women related experience are rooted in culture. Similar Moravian conversion accounts by both men and women, for example, are far more embodied and eroticized than Methodist accounts. See Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*.

¹⁷ For example see 1 Thessalonians 5:23 where Paul appears to separate out spirit, soul, and body or Romans 7:24-25, which locates sin within the body, while it is the soul that is delivered through Christ.

¹⁸ For more on the influence of natural philosophy on the literature of the eighteenth century see Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era*. Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. The argument from design became immensely influential in the eighteenth century – in essence arguing that because nature clearly had a discoverable design, there must naturally be a designer. If a fully functioning watch is found laying on the ground, there must be a watchmaker. This type of logic not only influenced theological and philosophical circles but, as Jager makes clear, was vital to the work of authors like Wordsworth, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Jane Austen. See Chapter Six.

¹⁹ Wesley's relationship with Butler is a particularly good example of how he toed the line between Enlightenment and enthusiasm. For, while he admired Butler's *Analogy* and indeed employed the analogical method in arguing for a spiritual sense, he also came into direct conflict with the Bishop when first beginning his work in Bristol. As Bishop of Bristol, Butler summoned Wesley at least three times during the summer of 1739 to interview him about his activities in Bristol. Butler accused Wesley of operating outside of his parish, to which Wesley responded that, as a Fellow of Lincoln College, he had no parish and was thus licensed to preach anywhere. Butler was not impressed by this argument and told Wesley, "You have no business here. You are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore I advise you to go hence". This confrontation illustrates not only the real concern over enthusiasm among the higher ranks of the clergy, but also the extent to which Wesley himself understood himself to be operating within established Church structures. Indeed, not only does Wesley admire and reference Butler's own work, but in the account of his interview with Butler he goes to great pains to emphasize his orthodoxy by quoting from the *Book of Homilies* and other standards of Anglican doctrine. For more on this relationship see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*; Heitzenrater, *John Wesley and the People Called Methodist*. For Wesley's own account of his interview with Bishop Butler see his *Journal*, Bicentennial Edition, Volume XIX.

²⁰ This is not to say, however, that Wesley ignored other means of finding spiritual truth in favor of pure experience. In fact, in one of the most famous distillations of Wesley's theology, Albert

Outler has argued that Wesley's entire system can be reduced to what he terms a "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" that consists of Scripture, Reason, Experience, and Tradition (*Wesleyan Theological Heritage* 28-34). As Dreyer puts it, "Whatever the believer felt, it added nothing to his knowledge of Christian truth. The inward feeling had to be tested by the authority of the written word, not the reverse" (15-16). Thus, in general Wesley thought that the true test of every religious emotion was how the convert manifested the fruits of the Spirit in everyday life. Though a person could not be saved through works; love, joy, and peace with one's neighbor were the true signs of conversion. As Phyllis Mack has argued, "Methodists addressed the issue of agency through the medium of their emotions" (15), and nowhere was this more true than the narratives of early evangelical women.

²¹ Methodist historian Henry Rack, argues that, "The claim is that he [Wesley] had a discernible influence in preparing an audience for the Romantics and even that he had some influence on major figures among them. These claims for a capacity to join such very difference worlds seem exaggerated. It would be more plausible to maintain that to a degree at least, Wesley was in an unusually good position to act as a cultural middleman" (352). On the other hand Richard Brantley has argued eloquently in both *Wordsworth's Natural Methodism* and *Locke, Wesley, and the Method of English Romanticism* for the importance of the revival to Romanticism. More recently both Jon Mee and Robert Ryan have brought forth clear evidence of the extensive cross-pollination between religion and art during the Romantic period.

²² Edwards' *Religious Affections* is perhaps the most thorough and articulate expression of an evangelical theory of the senses and how they affect spirituality. However, though widely distributed in New England, *Religious Affections* was little known in England until John Wesley's own abridgement of the work, which he published in 1773.

²³ For a history of how this shift towards neo-Platonism took place within Christianity and subsequently shaped Church history and theology see Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011.

²⁴ See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, Heitzenrater, *John Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, and Tuttle, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*.

²⁵ One of the most striking examples of this is related by Betty Duchesne, who describes the spiritual significance of attending at the mastectomy (without anesthetic) of her friend Mrs. Davis:

While the surgeon went to put his dress on, I was left alone with her, she said I wish he would come and do it now, for I am quite ready, and am sure the Lord will be with me.... When the surgeon came in to make the operation, she gave me one hand and asked me if the other must not be held, but she stirred neither, but only to lift them up in prayer to God. She received the first cut without a groan: when her pain increased she groaned, and prayed to God... when the inside of her breast was taken out she asked if they had done cutting; I answered yes, and some thread being called for, she immediately said there is some in my work basket on the table: while they sewed up the blood vessel, she said this pain is very great,

she called on the Lord to strengthen her and said I'm faint, and while she was going to receive some drops from the hand of a friend: I fainted away: the cause of my fainting is quite hid from me at present: For during the whole time I found my soul entirely stayed on the Lord... and being confident that every pain she endured would be sanctified to the good of her soul, I felt no degree of fear. I was entirely happy (qtd. in Mack 194-195).

What is interesting is the way in which the experience is framed as a type of sanctification through suffering – the bodily pain Mrs. Davis experiences is perceived as an opportunity to trust God more and identify with Christ's pain. Nevertheless, unlike Rogers' experience and those of the mystics, this account does not post pain as a spiritual end *in itself*. The body is to be cared for and attended to with the help of medical care and it is *through* the experience that both Davis' and Duchesne's faith is made stronger.

²⁶ For more on the fascinating history of how Rogers' *Account* was mediated and manipulated both before and after her death see Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism*.

²⁷ See Chapters Three and Six.

Chapter 3

²⁸ For the sake of clarity I will refer to Mary Bosanquet Fletcher as Bosanquet and John Fletcher as Fletcher.

²⁹ Sarah Ryan was born October 20, 1724. She saw George Whitefield preach in London sometime during 1741 and soon after became involved with John Wesley's Methodist community at the Foundery. Around 1743, at the age of nineteen and having gone into service, Sarah married a corkcutter who was both already married and virtually penniless. This man ran off soon after their marriage and Ryan was again married to a sailor named Mr. Ryan who also virtually abandoned her – going sea and eventually on to America. During this time Ryan married again, this time to an Italian named Solomon Benreken, who also abandoned her. Ryan was never legally divorced from any of these men, thus resulting in the negative accounts of her character that plagued both her life and legacy (for example Luke Tyerman's particularly acerbic account in his *Life of Wesley*). Despite her personal struggles Ryan was active in the Methodist community, even on occasion preaching to mixed crowds. She was a frequent correspondent of John Wesley and in 1757 he appointed her housekeeper of the New Room in Bristol and then the Kingswood School. Legend has it that it was in fact Wesley's frequent, intense, correspondence with Ryan that sparked his wife's jealousy and ended in their virtual separation. For more on her relationship with Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and influence on subsequent generations of Methodist women see Mack, *Heart Religion*.

³¹ This was an interesting decision on Bosanquet's part. Though it may seem out of character for a woman who had ostensibly pledged herself to Christ and so clearly sought out female companionship, John Fletcher was no ordinary man. In fact, Fletcher's mystical spirituality would seem to have far more in common with the type of spirituality I explored in Chapter Two and thus is a far more "feminized" version of evangelicalism. Furthermore Bosanquet's marriage to Fletcher, at this point the second most important man in Methodism, gave her a type of

influence and access to the power structures of Methodism that would have been unavailable to her otherwise.

³³ The question of why women were so attracted to Methodism so much has driven much research and speculation both in the eighteenth century and today. From contemporary critics like Leigh Hunt, who saw women's adherence to Methodism as evidence of a dangerous sensibility, to E.P. Thompson, who read women's participation as psycho-sexual, many critics have argued that women were attracted to Methodism because they were inherently more emotional or unbalanced than men. Others, like Callum Brown, have suggested it was the domestic piety of the movement that drew women. For a more nuanced reading of women's involvement in Methodism see David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* and Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*.

³⁴ In his recent work Habermas has revisited the question of the role of religion in the public sphere, arguing in *An Awareness of What is Missing* for an open conversation between religion and what he terms "secular reason," provided that "we speak with one another" and not "merely about one another". He goes on to write that in order to foster dialogue "two presuppositions must be fulfilled: the religious side must accept the authority of 'natural' reason as the fallible results of the institutionalized sciences and the basic principles of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality. Conversely, secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith, even though in the end it can accept as reasonable only what it can translate into its own, in principle universally accessible, discourses. The one presupposition is no more trivial from a theological perspective than the other is from that of philosophy" (16). As I will explore at length further on, this conversation between "secular" reason and religion was ongoing as far back as the eighteenth century and Methodism played a key role in fostering the dialogue. See also Habermas, "Faith and Knowledge," in *The Future of Human Nature*.

³⁵ Most prominent among the proponents of this thesis is M.H. Abrams who, in his seminal *Natural Supernaturalism* argued for Romanticism as the naturalization of the religious impulse.

³⁶ See Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing*, University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2001.

³⁷ Interestingly enough, this was also the area where Sarah Mallit and Martha Grigson were most active. East Anglia had strong ties with dissent, which may explain why Thelwall thought he would receive a better reception there.

³⁸ See John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

³⁹ Another interesting example of the conflation of evangelical and secular public discourse in the public mind is John "Orator" Henley, who Alexander Pope mocks in the *Dunciad* and Thelwall greatly admired. A former clergyman, Henley attracted great crowds in London to his theatrical "services," within which he adapted religious rituals to secular purposes. Henley's meetings were also caricatured by Hogarth and George Bickham the Younger in much the same way that Thelwall's and the Methodists' were.

⁴⁰ In 1739 Wesley established a Book Room at the Foundery, his London headquarters. In 1753 put a Book Steward in charge of distribution of Methodist materials. Until 1778 Wesley used a variety of publishers to print his work, but in 1778 (incidentally the year he founded the *Arminian Magazine*) he began utilizing his own press at the Foundery. For more on this and the patterns of male Methodist narratives see. Isabel Rivers. “‘Strangers and Pilgrims’: Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative.” *Augustan Worlds*. Ed. J.C. Hilson, M.M.B. Jones, and J.R. Watson. New York: Harper & Row, 1978. 189-203

⁴¹ Wesley himself visited Mallit in 1786 and was impressed by her spiritual experience and call to preach. Though the Methodists officially followed the Church of England line against women’s preaching, Wesley believed Mallett possessed an “extraordinary call” and with his support, the 1787 Manchester Conference issued her a license to preach. The license itself read: “We give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallet, and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connexion, so long as she preaches the Methodist doctrines, and attends to our discipline.” This written approval was highly unique and it in fact allowed Mallit to continue preaching long after Wesley’s death, and indeed even after the 1803 Conference officially banned women’s preaching.

⁴² The epistolary nature of Methodist discourse is thus intimately connected to the development of both the evangelical conversion narrative (explored at length in the next chapter) and the novel. A prime example of this is Richardson’s *Pamela*, which combines the epistolary form with an inner voice that is intimately connected to religious discourse. For more on this connection see Misty Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*.

⁴³ See especially Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in 18th-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self* for a particularly detailed analysis of how this anti-Methodist literature functioned in relationship to Methodism as a conceptual category.

⁴⁴ Few Methodist male itinerants felt they had to make this choice. Though itinerancy was by its nature a dangerous and difficult thing to do many male itinerants had families that did not travel with them.

⁴⁵ Some of the most notable of these letters included: *An Aunt’s Advice to a Niece*. Leeds, Bowling, 1780.; *A Letter to The Rev. Mr. Wesley by a Gentlewoman*. London: Foundery, 1764., which lays out the plan and successes of her ministry at Cross Hall; *A Letter to The Rev. Mr. Wesley on the Death of The Rev. Mr. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley in Shropshire*. Madeley: Edmunds, 1785.; and *Jesus, altogether lovely: Or a Letter to some of the Single Women in the Methodist Society*. London: Hawes, 1766.

⁴⁶ It could be persuasively argued that here Bosanquet cleverly matches her rhetoric to her audience. Though she claims to believe that men are the rightful leaders in church and in marriage her actual actions to not bear this belief out. Especially in the administration of the parish of Madeley after her husband’s death Bosanquet was immensely influential, in effect exercising final say over who was appointed curate there and acting as the de facto parish priest.

⁴⁷ It even shows up as late as 1825 in Zechariah Taft's important, but largely ignored, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women*. Taft's wife, Mary Barritt was herself a preacher who had been a part of Bosanquet's network and ignored the 1803 prohibition. That the letter appears here indicates that the Tafts had a copy in manuscript.

Chapter 4

⁴⁸ According to the OED, the Greek word *καταστροφή* (kata-strophē) means overturning, sudden turn, conclusion.

⁴⁹ See *The Letters of John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), VII:17.

⁵⁰ For more on the perseverance of women's preaching and social activity well into the nineteenth century see East, *My Dear Sally*, Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance*, Jennifer Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers*, and Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down*.

⁵¹ These narratives (with the exception of Sarah Crosby's) were first extracted from the thirteen volumes of the *Arminian Magazine* published prior to John Wesley's death in 1791, then each narrative was read through to look for general narrative patterns. From these holistic readings I identified seven common characteristics and then read through each narrative again coding for instances of each characteristic.

⁵² This was a major controversy during the early years of the Revival. The Moravians, with whom Wesley was closely allied at the beginning of his career, held that a human could do nothing for her salvation and instead had to hold herself in "stillness" until God extended His grace towards her. Wesley, as a good Anglican, would have none of this arguing that in fact the "means of grace," as he called them (prayer, searching the Scriptures, receiving the Lord's Supper, etc) while not saving in themselves, could nevertheless be used by God to save the individual. He even believed that communion especially could be a "saving ordinance," in itself and often claimed that his mother, Susannah Wesley, was saved in this manner. This disagreement ultimately led to a split within the early revival – with Wesley going his own way to form Methodism proper while the Moravians formed their own congregations throughout the country. See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 402-409 for a lengthy discussion of this and also Wesley's Sermon titled "The Means of Grace" (*JWW* V:185).

⁵³ There are also some interesting correspondences here with the fundamentalist branch of the modern day evangelical movement, which values modesty (especially in women) as a means to engendering piety. However evangelical fundamentalists of this sort also tend to subscribe to an extreme gender ideology that relegates women solely to the domestic sphere. In the work of John Wesley and these early Methodist women we see that this was not always the case within evangelicalism, though the seeds of this ideology were already being sown during this period. For more on this see Christy Mesaros-Winkles, "Christian Patriarchy Lite: 19 Kids and Counting," in *Media Portrayals of Brides, Wives and Mothers*, ed. Alena Ruggerio, Lanham, MA: Lexington, 63-74.

⁵⁴ In fact, one of Wesley's favorite mystics was the French Catholic Madame Guyon (1648-1717), whose biography he abridged and published in 1776. One of the reasons Wesley admired Guyon was that she used her own deeply embodied and erotic mystical experiences as an impetus for social action. Many of the women whose own narratives were published in the *Arminian Magazine* would certainly have read Wesley's abridgement of Madame Guyon's life and thus had this type of spirituality as an explicit model. See Chapter Two for more on this.

⁵⁵ This attitude is reflected in the writing of William James and Simone de Beauvoir, both of whom were interested in judging mystical experience primarily by its real results in the world. According to Hollywood, "Beauvoir insists that the value of mystical experience lies not in the pleasure with which it is subjectively experienced, but in the objective influence it allows its subject to wield. Beauvoir insists that in the absence of criteria for determining the authenticity of mystical experience (she will go further and claim that mystical experience cannot be genuine, as there is no God), its value lies in its outcome" (129).

Chapter 5

⁵⁶ See Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution* for an excellent overview and analysis of anti-Jacobin periodicals like the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in turn of the century Britain.

⁵⁷ See Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790's* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992; and *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. and Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

⁵⁸ See Mitzi Myers, "Reform or Ruin: 'A Revolution in Female Manners'"; Anne Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*; Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More*; and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father's Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity*.

⁵⁹ This type of thinking also figures prominently in Hannah More's 1792 anti-radical tract, *Village Politics*, in which two working men, Tom Hod and Jack Anvil, discuss the French Revolution and their place in the social order. In the tract Anvil convinces Hod that he does not need "liberty and the rights of man" because by performing his role in the British social order he is well taken care of. Though seemingly reactionary, this type of thinking actually represented a shift from the perspective that those lower in the social order should simply obey their superiors. In this model the rich squire is just as dependent on the poor mason as the mason is on him.

⁶⁰ See Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*; Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father's Daughters* for a more traditional interpretation of the *Cheap Repository*. See Susan Pederson, "Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth Century England"; Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution*; Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian*, and Jane Nardin, "Hannah More and the Problem of Poverty" for more nuanced discussions of the *Cheap Repository's* moral and political content.

⁶¹ For an account of this see *Mendip Annals*: “We learned from him that nothing material could be undertaken at Cheddar without the concurrence of Mr. C., a rich farmer, who lived ten miles below.... He assured us religion would be the ruin of agriculture; that it was a very dangerous thing, and had produced much mischief ever since it was introduced by the monks down at Glastonbury. So very much in earnest was he at one part of our discourse, that we were obliged prudently to change the subject, and talk of the excellency of his wine, as though we had been soliciting a vote at an election (14).

⁶² In particular see Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian*, and Pederson, “Hannah More Meets Simple Simon.”

⁶³ Though Laqueur’s valuable study provides an excellent starting point, much work remains to be done on how Sunday Schools operated locally. The problem is largely one of resources. Hannah More had the money and support to produce her own Sunday School material in print; however many Sunday Schools had to rely on already produced material or even manuscript exercises. For example, Methodists like Hannah Ball were setting up Sunday Schools as early as the 1740’s but almost none of the material from these schools has survived and we still know little of Ball aside from a *Memoir* published first in the *Arminian Magazine* and then as a stand alone pamphlet. Likewise Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and Mary Tooth were extraordinarily active in establishing Sunday Schools. Some of their manuscript lesson plans and exercises are held by the John Rylands University Library, but much has been lost. A better understanding of these local circumstances and what was taught in these schools would perhaps provide a better overall picture of the broader social effects of Sunday Schools and go a long way towards refuting the idea that Sunday Schools were *only* socially repressive.

Chapter 6

⁶⁴ See *MM* 24: 369; *MM* 25: 345, 389; *MM* 27: 521; *MM* 42: 638-39; *MM* 43: 79, 159, 399, 639, 719, 799, 879.

⁶⁵ *The Arminian Magazine* was renamed *The Methodist Magazine* in 1798 and placed under the editorship of Joseph Benson. It was again renamed as *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* in 1822 to distinguish it from the publications of various Methodist splinter groups, such as the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*.

⁶⁶ Teaching women and the young was only one of the acceptable roles for women that Bulmer was able to both fulfill and transform during the early years of the nineteenth century. Methodist women were also expected to attend at the beds of the sick and dying and Bulmer seems to have been especially active in this regard. Indeed, one of the most frequent subjects of her poems is death, indicating that she was intimately familiar with it and attended at the deaths of many friends. The moments before death were especially important to Methodists and during the beginning of the nineteenth century this became the special province of women. As Arminians, the Wesleyan Methodists believed that it was possible to lose one’s salvation and thus it was vital to ascertain whether an individual persevered in his or her faith to the end. In fact the

Methodist Magazine from this time period is filled with accounts of holy dyings intended to inspire the faithful. As Margaret Jones has pointed out, pious women were often the subject of these holy dying accounts – thus women not only were the key participants in the creation of the holy dying tradition, they themselves were also often the subjects. Women were considered especially suited to this task as an extension of their domestic duties. Anne Collinson’s account of her sister’s life makes it clear that Bulmer attended at many holy dyings, while Bulmer’s own *Memoirs of Elizabeth Mortimer*, published in 1835, takes as one of its central episodes Mortimer’s attendance at the death of John Wesley before going on to describe how she was frequently called to the deathbeds of friends and relatives due to her superior skill.

⁶⁷ Bulmer in fact wrote one hymn “Hymn for the Ancoat’s Methodist Chapel,” which remained in the Methodist Hymnal well into the twentieth century.

⁶⁸ In 1763 two of Wesley’s itinerant preachers, Thomas Maxfield and George Bell, proclaimed themselves spiritually perfect and led a portion of one of Wesley’s London congregations into antinomianism and millenarianism. Wesley was slow to react, as Maxfield was a particularly valued assistant, but in the end he expelled them both. However his hesitation caused a major rift within London Methodism. In general, however, Wesley spoke and wrote little about eschatology.

⁶⁹ Though the resolution at the Conference continued to allow some women to preach in very limited circumstances, its overall effect was to drastically reduce the number of women in active ministry: “Q. Should women be permitted to preach among us?

A. We are of opinion that, in general, they ought not. 1. Because a vast majority of our people are opposed to it. 2. Because their preaching does not at all seem necessary, there being a sufficiency of Preachers, whom God has accredited, to supply all the places in our connexion with regular preaching. But if any woman among us think she has an extraordinary call from God to speak in public, (and we are sure it must be an *extraordinary* call that can authorise it,) we are of opinion she should, in general, address her *own sex*, and *those only*. And, upon this condition alone, should any woman be permitted to preach in any part of our connexion; and, when so permitted, it should be under the following regulations: 1. They shall not preach in the Circuit where they reside, until they have obtained the approbation of the Superintendant and a Quarterly-Meeting. 2. Before they go into any other Circuit to preach, they shall have a *written* invitation of the Superintendant of such Circuit, and a recommendatory note from the Superintendant of their own Circuit” (*Minutes* 179-180).

⁷⁰ This at least partially explains the continued preaching activities of women like Sarah Mallit and Martha Grigson well into the nineteenth century. Mallit operated not only with a license from John Wesley, but also the explicit blessing of her District Superintendent in territory (East Anglia) that was friendly to dissent and not terribly interested in conformity to central power. Her continued preaching tours outside of East Anglia, however, were clearly pushing the boundary of what the Conference allowed and are a testament to the radical commitment of these women.

⁷¹ By 1778 Charles had moved his entire family to London from Bristol, in large part to promote the musical careers of his prodigiously talented sons Charles Jr. and Samuel Wesley. ⁷¹ Charles Jr. eventually became the personal organist of the Royal Family, while Samuel became a prominent composer. Both eventually rejected Methodism, with Samuel going so far as to convert to Catholicism. In their youth Charles Wesley Sr. organized private concerts for them in his London home, sometimes on Sundays, and invited many of the London elite. These concerts were controversial as many ordinary Methodists viewed them as frivolous entertainment for the elite and were especially scandalized by the fact that they were occasionally held on the Sabbath. Even more controversially, John Wesley was said to have attended these concerts on several occasions. This is itself an example of Methodism's slow shift towards more middle class values and the controversy this elicited in the years directly surrounding Wesley's death.

Interestingly enough Bulmer mentions these concerts and the controversy over them in a lengthy footnote in *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Mortimer*, passionately defending the Charles Wesley family. This indicates that this was still a contested issue nearly fifty years after the events in question. Bulmer and Mortimer were friends with Sarah Wesley, Charles Wesley's only daughter, who was a poet in her own right. Apparently Bulmer felt the need to defend Mortimer's friendship with Sarah Wesley who, while remaining in the Methodist movement, maintained a conflicted relationship with it at best. See *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Mortimer*, pgs. 207-210. For more on Sarah Wesley and her relationship to Methodism see Deanna P. Koretsky, "Sarah Wesley, British Methodism, and the Feminist Question, Again," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46.2 (2013): 223-237.

The controversy surrounding Charles and his family illustrates both the tensions within the movement over adherence to the Church of England and the fact that, contrary to the opinions of several prominent historians (most notably E.P. Thompson), Methodism prior to Wesley's death was by no means a monolithic movement of and for the middle class – in many ways this shift was still being contested. It was not until the nineteenth century, as Methodism moved towards institutional status that some of these elements came to the fore and even then the degree to which Methodism was associated with middle class values varied from locality to locality.

⁷² The shifts in Methodist sociability, Methodist practice and, most importantly, public space for women only accelerated as the nineteenth century progressed. Following John Wesley's death in 1791, a vacuum was created in the top ranks of the Methodist movement. Wesley's most obvious successors, Charles Wesley and John Fletcher, had predeceased him and no one remained with the stature or abilities to hold together the broadening movement under one roof. In 1784, recognizing the potentially organizational problems of a Methodism without his leadership Wesley, with the help of Thomas Coke, issued the Deed of Declaration which established a "Legal Hundred" Methodist preachers who would constitute the governing body of Methodism after his death. This body was known as the official Conference and the duly elected President of this Conference was the nominal leader of Methodism. This was the role that men like Thomas Coke, Adam Clarke, and Jabez Bunting would eventually fill in the years following Wesley's death. Jabez Bunting became the most prominent of these figures – using his considerable organizational skills to mold Methodism into a more conservative and bureaucratic institution during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century.

Thus the years directly following Wesley's death marked a time of intense turmoil within the movement as they attempted to decide what type of institution they would be without their founder. The careful balance Wesley had maintained while holding together the disparate strands of Methodism was over and fights erupted over separation from the Church of England, administration of the sacraments, ordination, and women's preaching. London Methodists of Charles Wesley's ilk tended to favor continuation of the relationship of the Church of England and oppose administration of the sacraments and ordination outside of Church bounds, while many of the long-standing Methodist itinerant preachers favored a more decisive separation from the Church. From the evidence we have it appears that Agnes Bulmer was more of the former camp, though William Bunting goes to great lengths in his biographical sketch to prove her loyalty to the Methodist Connection. In the end a series of compromises was reached – Methodists did begin administering the sacraments outside of Church hours and ordaining their own preachers, however the split with the Church of England was never made official and in practice many Methodists – the Bulmers included – still considered themselves part of the Anglican Communion. Other Methodists abandoned what became known as the Wesleyan Methodist Connection altogether and formed their own connections. Most notable among these groups was the Primitive Methodist Connection, formed in 1810, which became far more democratic and revivalistic than the Wesleyan Methodists – drawing on what they believed to be the “primitive” or original principles of Methodism.

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ABSTRACT**DRAWN OUT IN LOVE:
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND EVANGELICAL LAY
WOMEN'S WRITING IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND**

by

ANDREW O. WINCKLES**August 2013****Advisor:** Dr. Michael Scrivener**Major:** English**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

“Drawn Out in Love: Religious Experience, the Public Sphere, and Evangelical Lay Women’s Writing in Eighteenth Century England” explores the writing of eighteenth century evangelical lay women in print, poetry, and educational material. Through careful attention to both the content and materiality of their texts I reveal how the women of the evangelical revival used subjective spiritual experience as an impetus for entry into the public discourses of print, and in turn, how their religious narratives were shaped by these discourses. Chapters on women’s conversion narratives, moral literature for children, and religious poetry demonstrate the ways that personal spiritual experience prompted engagement with an evangelical public sphere shaped around the confluence of oral, manuscript, and print culture. Ultimately, through its investigation of under-researched yet influential women writers this dissertation contends that the discursive construction of enthusiasm and Enlightenment during the eighteenth century worked symbiotically to create the discourse conditions necessary for secularization, Romanticism, and modernity itself.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Andrew O. Winckles received his M.A. in English Literature from Eastern Michigan University in 2009 and his Ph.D. in English Literature from Wayne State University in 2013, with a specialization in Eighteenth Century and Romantic British Literature. His research focuses on evangelical (and especially Methodist) women's writing and print culture during the long eighteenth century and has been published in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*.