

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Woman's Right to Revelation:
Literary Representations of Spiritual Sensibility in the Writings of Hannah More, Mary
Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Baker Eddy.

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD

in the University of Hull

by

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December 2005





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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my Mother, Mary, widowed as a young mother, but whose spiritual awareness and representation of the paternal, as well as maternal, nature of the Deity have been an inspirational beacon throughout my life.

'She is left a widow, perhaps, without a sufficient provision, but she is not desolate!.....her heart turns to her children with redoubled fondness, and anxious to provide for them, affection gives a sacred heroic cast to her maternal duties..... but her imagination, a little abstracted and exalted by grief, dwells on the fond hope that the eyes which her trembling hand closed, may still see how she subdues every wayward passion to fulfil the double duty of being the father as well as the mother of her children.....I think I see her surrounded by her children, reaping the reward of her care.' Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. p 119.

'Who can feel and comprehend the needs of her babe like the ardent mother? What other heart yearns with her solicitude, endures with her patience, waits with her hope, and labors with her love, to promote the welfare and happiness of her children? Thus must the Mother in Israel give all her hours to those first sacred tasks, till her children can walk steadfastly in wisdom's ways.' Mary Baker Eddy, *Prose Works*, 'Retrospection and Introspection'. p 90.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I am immensely grateful for the guidance and support given by my supervisor, Professor Valerie Sanders, her empathy with my topic has made my goal achievable. Thanks to the English Department and its staff for the opportunities provided to assist its research students.

Without the patience, love and care of my husband, *and his culinary skills*, this thesis might have been starved of inspiration, and would undoubtedly have been that much more of a challenge. My children and their spouses have offered cheer and consolation as the occasion has demanded over my period as a 'mature' student. My grandchildren have made me laugh, all bringing a wonderful sense of balance to my academic research. They have allowed me to witness that 'sheltering wing of maternalism', as referred to by Mary Wollstonecraft, at first hand. For their constructive criticism, I should like also to thank friends, John and Ray.

I should like to thank Adam Hart-Davis, relative of Richard Hart-Davis, M.P. for Bristol, 1812-31. Hannah More wrote three hundred letters to Richard Hart-Davis. A box of uncatalogued manuscript material given to the Bristol Record Office in January 2001 by Adam Hart-Davis, the property of his deceased father, was made available to me, as a result of contact with Adam Hart-Davis.¹ This and other manuscript material yielded some valuable and important insights into the mind of Hannah More in her later years. Thanks also to Sheila Lang, Archivist for Bristol Museum, and staff at the Bristol Record Office.

Appreciation to staff at the British Library, London; Bodleian Library, Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts and Duke Humphrey's Library at University of Oxford; University of Leeds, Special Collections; University of York Library, for their assistance.

¹ See appendix

Gratitude to Research Staff at The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity in Boston, U.S.A. who assisted in my procurement of copies of Eddy's earliest writings. Gratitude to the Susan B. Anthony House, Rochester, New York, for permission to reproduce correspondence. Last but not least, grateful thanks to staff at the libraries of the University of Hull, at the Scarborough and Hull campus.

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WOMAN'S RIGHT TO REVELATION: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF SPIRITUAL SENSIBILITY IN THE WRITING OF HANNAH MORE, MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, ELIZABETH CADY STANTON AND MARY BAKER EDDY.

The spiritual movement of an age, which, more than any other, is the offspring of the spirit, is the wonder of our time, the most precious and the most precious of all the gifts of nature, which, in the hands of the great, has become the most precious of all the gifts of nature, which, in the hands of the great, has become the most precious of all the gifts of nature.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Mary Wollstonecraft

Hannah More

Mary Baker Eddy



Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Mary Wollstonecraft

Hannah More

WOMAN'S RIGHT TO REVELATION: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF SPIRITUAL SENSIBILITY IN THE WRITING OF HANNAH MORE, MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, ELIZABETH CADY STANTON AND MARY BAKER EDDY.

The prevailing manners of an age depend more than we are aware, or are willing to allow, on the conduct of women; this is one of the principal hinges on which the great machine of human society turns. Hannah More, *The Works of Hannah More 'Essays on Various Subjects Principally Designed for Young Ladies'*, Vol 2, p 552.

Christianity is the great and leading circumstance which raises women's importance. H. More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Vol 1 p 34.

While the lords of creation have been debating her sphere and drawing their chalk marks here and there, woman has quietly stepped outside the barren fields where she was compelled to graze for centuries, and is now in green pastures and beside still waters, a power in the world thought. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Autobiography*, p 221.

When women understand that governments and religions are human inventions; that bibles, prayerbooks, catechisms, and encyclical letters are all emanations from the brain of man, they will no longer be oppressed by the injunctions that come to them with the divine authority of "Thus saith the Lord." E. Cady Stanton, *Autobiography*, p 239.

In this revolutionary period, like the shepherd-boy with his sling, woman goes forth to battle with Goliath. M. B. Eddy, *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p 268.

In Natural Law and in religion the right of woman to fill the highest measure of enlightened understanding and the highest places in government, is inalienable....This is woman's hour; with all its sweet amenities and its moral and religious reforms. M.B.Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings 'No and Yes'*, p 45.

I may be allowed to doubt whether woman was created for man; and, though the cry of irreligion, or even atheism, be raised against me, I will simply declare, that were an angel from heaven to tell me that Moses's beautiful, poetical cosmogony, and the account of the fall of man, were literally true, I could not believe what my reason told me was derogatory to the character of the Supreme Being. M. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p 80.

Introduction:

This thesis will explore the philosophical writing of four female reformers, identifying how their spiritual representations of the feminine attempted to authorise and empower women. It will critically investigate how Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Baker Eddy challenged historical identity formations, textually communicating a spiritual role for women through a language of patriotism and piety. Discourse which emphasised public virtue and domestic duty as areas of female concern highlighted the potential for female influence in the private *and* public sphere. It was that eighteenth-century phenomenon, the cult of sensibility, and its emphasis on benevolence, sympathy and a heightened state of consciousness, however, which significantly reinforced an appreciation of the feminine, and female reformers took advantage of the literary space this 'cult' made available to them. Championing the benefits of well educated Christian women, More, Wollstonecraft, Stanton and Eddy constructed an idiom through which to represent the spiritual equality of the male and female. An innovative critical route will reveal the means through which they promoted their plausible alternative to religious arguments for female subjection.

The thesis will critically analyse their writings, identifying the religious threads, which it will suggest underpinned their arguments. In spite of the parallels in their perspectives, however, there is an exciting diversity. Four authors: two British, two American; two eighteenth-century, two nineteenth-century; and possibly even more crucial, two feminist and two anti-feminist perspectives, all indicate the inevitably challenging nature of this topic. It is important to make clear at the outset, however, that the critical interrogatory route will be focused quite specifically towards 'The Woman Question.' Because each woman made an indelible mark on the historical landscape, their ultimate achievements will be identified in the first instance:

Wollstonecraft was perhaps best known as a political feminist, author and humanitarian reformer whose most notable text was surely *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (hereinafter *Vindication*). More, considered to be a

conservative traditionalist, nevertheless wrote in a provocative didactic fashion. Close friend of William Wilberforce and developer of education and Sunday schools for the poor, her best known text was probably *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (hereinafter *Strictures*). Stanton was one of the founding members of the American Suffrage Movement, lecturing and writing prolifically for the cause; her text *The Woman's Bible* probably her most memorable work. Eddy's historic achievement was as founder of a worldwide religious movement; a publishing house; and author of the text *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures* (hereinafter *Science & Health*). This thesis will chart the shift through social, political and religious discourse as each author negotiated a spiritual identity for woman for the purpose of defining and authorising the female sex.

These writers are connected to each other by ideas which refused to rest with traditional arguments for female subordination, and the cult of sensibility rooted their argument for female spirituality. This cultural phenomenon, having achieved a shift in the public consciousness towards appreciation of a more unselfish, sympathetic and caring nature, assisted in the construction of a 'hierarchy' of mental qualities with the maternal becoming highly esteemed. The refined, sensitive thought, not overly concerned with material things and more open to divine inspiration became associated with the feminine and assisted in a representation of the female as an equal spiritual being, worthy of respect. This atmosphere assisted in giving a sense of purpose and authority to women writers; a language of sensibility, language of nature and ultimately a language of overt spirituality emerged from this 'heightened state of consciousness.' Eddy writes: 'When the heart speaks its language is always acceptable to those who have hearts.'²

Literature thus became the means through which women writers could critique a male view of the world which hitherto had largely gone unchallenged. The subjugation of women had been promoted and supported by male authors who were in part responsible for the construction and portrayal of a femininity which emphasised weakness and inferiority. Wollstonecraft refers to: 'the

² M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works* 'Miscellaneous Writings', (Boston, U.S.A: Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker G. Eddy, 1896), p 262.

fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists,' - this artificial representation which led to 'the sacrifice of truth and sincerity,' resulted in virtue becoming simply - 'a relative idea, having no other foundation than utility....' In a condemnatory tone she concluded that men took it upon themselves to arbitrarily judge that utility, effectively 'shaping it to their own convenience.'³ This period saw the emergence of a number of women who through strong religious convictions evaded cultural silencing. The galvanizing of public opinion was fundamental to their reforming influence. Literature which attempted to dovetail sentimental attitudes with religious ideals served to inspire an appreciation of the feminine. Indeed, a female ideology emerged which, it might be said, became central to a national mission of reform. Robert Shoemaker suggested that 'women had a significant if distinctive role to play in religion, politics, social life and culture. Moreover'. he continued, 'despite the increasing articulation of the ideology of separate spheres, these opportunities increased over the course of the period.' He argued that public behaviour was conditioned by religious beliefs, and these reformers saw the potential of women as a stabilising and regenerating influence.⁴ Substantive arguments structured upon a Christian sentiment concluded that, as Wollstonecraft identified: 'For men and women, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same.'⁵

Examining the connections between women's writing and women's spirituality, this thesis will compare and contrast the 'sensibility' arguments from a 'feminist' and 'anti-feminist' perspective. It will seek to understand how these writers built upon early humanitarian issues - the abolition movement and female emancipation - tracing an emerging awareness that it was Biblical interpretation which was ultimately responsible for their secondary and subjugated status. The historical and religious construction of gender thus became central to their philosophical arguments.

³ M.Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792), p. 120. Wollstonecraft's writings are included in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, published (London: William Pickering, 1989) and referencing of all her texts, throughout the thesis, will be identified by the volume number of these *Works*.(vol 6)

⁴ R.B.Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850* (Addison Wesley Longman Ltd, 1988), p. 209.

⁵ *Vindication*, p. 120.

The thesis will, in effect, trace an ascending argument for the undeniable worth of woman and her inviolate right to 'revelation'⁶ as these women challenged repressive patriarchal ideologies. Patriarchal translation of sacred texts and its discriminatory emphasis on the masculine aspect of God inevitably undermined the role of woman, justifying in effect her subjection to man. A revisionist paradigm of women's didactic tracts, largely ungarnered from this perspective, will examine their promotion of the moral and spiritual superiority of the 'feminine.'⁷ Julie Melnyk suggests: 'Recently, literary critics and historians have turned their attention to nineteenth-century women's religious writing. Few, however, have discussed Victorian women's theological writing, perhaps because there isn't supposed to be any.'⁸ The fundamental aim of the thesis, therefore, will be to understand the gender and language issues which allowed the authors' effective reinstatement of woman in Scripture, through their reading of *The Bible* from a woman's theological perspective.

Contextual framework of the thesis

Hannah More's writing overtly refers to the authority which she understands Christianity confers upon women, suggesting: 'Christianity is the great and leading circumstance which raises women's importance.'⁹ Her later works go further, identifying even the femininity of Christianity. The year 1811 saw the publication of *Practical Piety: or, The Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of Life* (hereinafter *Practical Piety*). More was 66 years of age, and her own heart at this stage of her life had registered the full spectrum of emotions. The preface to this text introduces the fundamental essence of

⁶ Revealed religion as the disclosure by God of ideas which are not arrived at by reason or intellect alone is what bases the argument for Woman's Right to Revelation: this communicatory system becomes the means through which the authors challenge determined doctrine, and identify Scriptural authority for the legitimacy of spiritual womanhood.

⁷ 'O fairest of creation, last and best of all God's works, creature in whom excelled whatever can to sight or thought be formed; Holy, divine, good, amiable or sweet!' John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1658) (Addison Wesley Longman Ltd) 1968 p 521

⁸ J. Melnyk (ed), *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the faith of their Fathers* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1998), pxi.

⁹H. More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, with a view of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of rank and fortune* (London: Cadell and Davies, 2 vols. 1799) (1818), p. 34, vol 1.

the argument of this thesis, and the critical means of identifying the author's claims: 'Christianity may be said to suffer between two criminals, but it is difficult to determine by which **she** suffers most;¹⁰ Having registered the *femininity* of Christianity in the preface, her gendered grammatical classification seems to suggest that it is the responsibility of this 'female' divine influence to regulate the behavioural pattern of the male to the end that: 'his dark understanding is illuminated, **his** rebellious will is subdued, **his** irregular desires are rectified; **his** judgement is informed, **his** imagination is chastised, **his** inclinations are sanctified; **his** hopes and fears are directed to their true and adequate end. Heaven becomes the object of **his** hopes, an eternal separation from God the object of **his** fears. **His** love of the world is transmuted into the love of God. The lower faculties are pressed into the new service. The senses have a higher direction. The whole internal frame and constitution receive a nobler bent; the intents and purposes of the mind a sublimer aim; **his** aspirations a loftier flight; **his** vacillating desires find a fixed object; **his** vagrant purposes a settled home; **his** disappointed heart a certain refuge."¹¹

Whilst it could be suggested that More was simply conforming to grammatical convention, the reader should beware making this assumption. A letter she wrote to her sister in February 1788 gives evidence of her concern at *that* time, that her writing tone may offend her influential friends: 'I shall expect to find almost every door shut against me.'¹² By the time she wrote *Practical Piety*, however, it is clear she means to write without fear of censure: 'Those who endeavour to steer clear of all extremes,' she now suggests, 'are in danger of being reprobated by both.'¹³ The nature of the title indicates the down-to-earth approach which will be taken to promote the essentials of practical Christianity. There is nothing elusive or obscure about this work and her gendered use of language clearly constructs a dialogue of literary distinctions. Strategically, this is a shrewd approach; eighteenth-century

¹⁰ H. More, *Practical Piety; or, The Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of the Life* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1825) (1811), p. ix.

¹¹ *Practical Piety*, p. 5.

¹² W. Roberts, *Memoirs of The Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More* (R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1834), p. 103, vol 2.

¹³ *Practical Piety*, p. vii.

fiction, Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela* for example, had already propagated the cultural reforming potential of women of sensibility, More simply took this argument to a higher level. The natural feminine instinct was given a spiritual authority and to this heavenly disposition she assigned the task of regulating masculine base instincts. These few lines at the beginning of her text, I would suggest set a framework for the fresh and innovative insights this thesis expects to bring to her theological arguments. The masculine inclination towards the 'lower faculties' is given a 'higher direction' through a 'sublimar aim'; clear reference to the feminine, further confirmed by 'his vagrant purposes' finding a 'settled home' indeed a 'refuge' for his 'disappointed heart.' 'Home', 'refuge', and 'heart', all have feminine connotations: Hannah More believed that the home was the seat of authority, and indeed the powerbase from which emerged all that was good, *or bad*, in society. It was to women that she gave the important task of forming and reforming the manners and morals of mankind. 'To you, is made over the awfully important trust of infusing the first principles of piety into the tender minds of those who may one day be called to instruct, not families merely, but districts, to influence, not individuals, but senates. Your private exertions may at this moment be contributing to the future happiness, your domestic neglect, to the future ruin of your country.....If you neglect this your bounden duty, you will have effectually contributed to expel Christianity from Britain, her last citadel.'¹⁴Clearly, More expected woman to exert her powerful influence for good from the heart and hearth, the locale of the feminine. A discourse which juxtaposed privacy and nationality emphasises this, contributing towards a perception of familial and domestic duty as the utopian model upon which social and economic reform could be built.

A contemporary of Hannah More, whose works I shall critically examine, was Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft's dissenting voice made a powerful contribution to the canon of female reforming literature. She was more radical in her vigorous embracing of a feminist position, and certainly caused controversy through her libertine principles and way of life. Whilst Hannah More considered Wollstonecraft's life to be beneath contempt, her own life,

¹⁴ *Strictures*, pp. 62-64.

particularly in the early days must have been quite colourful: she refers to these early years as her 'wicked years'. More suggests that Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* was 'metaphysical jargon' and that whilst she had been much pestered to read the tract, was 'invincibly resolved not to do it'¹⁵ She might have been surprised had she read the work; their thoughts are amazingly consistent and a vernacular of feminised spirituality creates analogous arguments.

Wollstonecraft's political arguments are hedged about with religious implications, and the thesis will identify her dissenting theological perspectives as central to her promotion of female equality. A spiritual legitimacy marks her reforming ideal: 'The only solid foundation for morality' she writes, 'appears to be the character of the supreme Being;.....The High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, doubtless possesses many attributes of which we can form no conception; but reason tells me that they cannot clash with those I adore - I am compelled to listen to her voice.....For to love God as the fountain of wisdom, goodness, and power, appears to be the only worship useful to a being who wishes to acquire either virtue or knowledge.'¹⁶ Wollstonecraft pursued an acquisition of both virtue and knowledge, and it is important to note that at the heart of this pursuit was her religious reliance: 'Few can walk alone. The staff of Christianity is the necessary support of human weakness.'¹⁷

The works of these women when looked at simultaneously weave a rich tapestry, recording thwarted hopes, dashed expectations, and severe contestation from the masculine world, but alongside this emerges an image of strength, compassion, inspiration, humility and above all a radical femininity which has contributed to the discursive debate on 'the woman question.' Mary Wollstonecraft is probably more well known today than Hannah More, as her feminist argument is one with which women of today can more readily

¹⁵ *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, p. 371, vol 2.

¹⁶ *Vindication*, p 115. It is interesting that Wollstonecraft is so gender determinate in her identification of the quality of 'reason'.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 273.

identify.¹⁸

In support of the argument of this thesis, the writing of two American 'sister' reformers will be closely examined in an attempt to identify the pivotal role *their* arguments played in the spiritual authorisation of women. The early writing of Mary Baker Eddy and Elizabeth Cady Stanton advanced the humanitarian causes pursued by Wollstonecraft and More. The threads which link their writings are incontestable, but the connections do not end there, it has been suggested that Mary Baker Eddy was related to Hannah More.¹⁹ Looked at simultaneously, the writing of these two women offers a powerful argument for female supremacy.

Nineteenth century American culture was addressing many of the problems faced by eighteenth century Britain. The uneasy alliance between Puritanism and capitalism was leading to a secularisation of the Protestant ethic resulting as Keith Stavely suggests in: 'an anarchy of individual consciences.' Maintaining social control he suggested should be through 'invisible, refined, spiritual ties, bonds of the mind and heart'.²⁰ Eddy was born into that era referred to as the American Romantic Period which was marked by literature intended to re-establish an American identity. This period witnessed the emergence of an abundance of female writers who sought to construct a literary form which engaged with American sensibilities. Graceful language which spoke from the heart aroused sympathetic responses in its readership. The cause of abolition was one of the chief beneficiaries of their early literary contributions. Eddy began writing early: at sixteen years of age she was writing for the leading newspapers, and she records that for many years she wrote for the best magazines in the South and North. Her literary style and argument developed and progressed over the years, as did that of More and Wollstonecraft, resulting in her major polemic in the mid nineteenth

¹⁸ L. Colley suggests in *Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1992) p. 274: 'Feminists have never quite known what to do with More, sometimes applauding her as one of themselves, sometimes dismissing her as a reactionary and apostate.'

¹⁹ 'The Daily Inter-Ocean', Chicago, December 31, 1894 reported: 'Mary Baker was the daughter of Mark and Abigail (Ambrose) Baker, and was born in Concord, N.H.....On her father's side Mrs. Eddy came from Scotch and English ancestry, and Hannah More was a relative of her grandmother.'

²⁰ K.W.F.Stavely, *Puritan Legacies, Paradise Lost and the New England Tradition 1630-1890* (Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 210.

century. Her writing expressed the diversity that was America's history and this was reflected in the company she kept: her associates included Bronson Alcott, Frances Hodgson Burnett and Louisa M. Alcott. Eddy's awareness and appreciation of contemporary thought are evident in a review of George Eliot's essays where she wrote: 'Her metaphysics purge materialism with a single sentence'. Eddy's biographer notes: 'In a genuine outburst of sincere appreciation of the great English novelist [Eddy] declares her womanly and heroic with firm, unflinching adherence to honest conviction and conscientious reasonableness.'²¹

Womanly heroics, firm, unflinching honesty and conscientious reasonableness were qualities Eddy admired and the very ones needed as she went on to become a staunch supporter of the Abolition Movement, writing eagerly for the cause. She was deeply concerned at the plight of women and children, and although not an overt feminist, a letter from Susan B Anthony²² to Mary Baker Eddy suggests that Anthony considered Eddy's writing to support the cause of suffrage. Eddy ultimately founded her own publishing house for the purpose of promoting her radical religious ideals. Her key text *Science & Health* went through over 400 editions in her lifetime.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked closely together publishing profusely on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Movement and Women's Rights, their brand of reforming literature contributing to the cause of liberty. Stanton's literary exertions reflected an overt feminist agenda and she was a keen admirer of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. The daughter of a lawyer, Stanton's social perspectives had been shaped early, witnessing at close hand the trauma faced by women at the hands of dissolute husbands. Political dissolution and reconstruction seemed to her the only route towards effective reform, and her literary exertions reflected an overt political agenda. Stanton was an instinctive rhetorician, using language to persuasive and impressive effect, but it was her major polemic published towards the latter part of the nineteenth century which provided a platform for her radical

²¹ S. Wilbur, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy* (The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1907), p. 206.

²² See appendix for copy of this letter.

religious ideals. She now believed that a masculine interpretation of the *Holy Bible* was at the root of the subjugation of women. Far from being the word of God she wrote, 'these degrading ideas of woman emanated from the brain of man.'²³ American politics reflected its theological heritage, its life-blood was *The Bible*, its arguments for female subjection based on a particular reading of Scripture, and Stanton concluded that if women were ever to be emancipated, scriptural language needed close investigation. Quite simply, she was determined to establish heavenly authority for the equal status of male and female. If evidence were needed of the contentious nature of her theological arguments one need look no farther than the deep split in the suffrage movement which resulted. It caused deep divisions between her and Anthony, who had famously remarked: 'Women needed to be emancipated from their 'superstitions' from 'living in the air with Jesus and the angels', insisting female emancipation would result only from political reform.'²⁴ Stanton's argument, however, coincides with and augments those of Wollstonecraft, More and Eddy who all sought to recover 'Herstory', to find a language through which female spirituality could be recognised and acknowledged.

Each woman whose writing this thesis will examine wrote in a particular didactic fashion, indeed there were only three published novels between them. (Wollstonecraft's second novel being published posthumously). They wrote to effect reform, condemning weakness and immorality in whatever guise. They condemned politicians who were deficient in humanitarian sentiments, they reproached bigoted ministers of religion who lacked an innate sense of spirituality and morality. They demanded education for women to equip them as a powerful force for good, championing feminine virtues. The parallels in the literary route these women took to reach their public are notable: as well as producing texts, tracts and essays of a didactic nature, they also established worldwide publications. Hannah More introduced her *Cheap*

²³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, p. 8, part 2.

²⁴ E.C.Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, p. xxvii. Fitzgerald suggests that we might never have seen *The Woman's Bible* in print had Stanton not become so intensely and righteously frustrated with the political suffrage perspective of Anthony. 'Stanton's constant attempts to bring the issue of women and religion to the public' she suggested 'reveal a death-grip effort to continue the tradition of radical individualism that had undergirded her feminist theory.' *The Woman's Bible*, p. xxvii.

Repository Tracts in 1795. These *Tracts* were established to ensure that all classes of society had access to her reforming crusade, the adoption of Christianity being her key theme. The influence of these publications was felt across continents, shiploads of them being sent to every quarter of the globe, indeed some 2,000,000 copies had been sold or given away by March 1796. Bishop Porteous wrote to Hannah More on 16 January 1797 'I hear from every quarter of the globe. To the West Indies I have sent shiploads of them. They are read with avidity in Sierra Leone, and I hope our Scottish Missionaries will introduce them into Asia.'²⁵

Elizabeth Cady Stanton established a newspaper, *The Revolution*, in 1867. Her time as editor of this newspaper, Stanton claims to have been not only one of the most useful, but also one of the happiest periods of her life: 'We said at all times and on all subjects just what we thought.....'²⁶ Advancing the feminist ideals of Wollstonecraft, *The Revolution* serialised *Vindication* in 1868.

Disappointed with the lack of moral principle she witnessed in the publications of the day, Eddy established a newspaper in 1908: 'When the press is gagged, liberty is besieged:' she wrote, 'but when the press assumes the liberty to lie, it discounts clemency, mocks morality, outrages humanity, breaks common law, gives impulse to violence, envy, and hate, and prolongs the reign of inordinate, unprincipled clans.'²⁷ Each woman was well past middle age when establishing their newspapers, Eddy was aged eighty seven when she founded *The Christian Science Monitor* as an international daily newspaper.²⁸ Clearly these women were concerned with liberty, morality and justice for the oppressed, and were prepared to embrace whatever literary genre necessary to press their reformatory ideals.

²⁵ *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, p. 5. vol 3.

²⁶ T. Stanton and H. S. Blatch (eds), *Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in Her Letters Diary and Reminiscences*, p. 215. vol 1.

²⁷ M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works* 'Miscellaneous Writings', p. 274.

²⁸ In February 1999, The National Foundation for Women Legislators honoured Mary Baker Eddy as founder of this newspaper, with a media award. *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia Deluxe* 1999 (The Learning Company, (1999) Inc) writes: 'One of the most highly respected newspapers published in the United States is the Christian Science Monitor.'

The question of credibility

Melnyk points out that whilst religious discourse of the period was 'gendered neutral or even slightly feminized, theology, "the study of or science which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and the universe" (OED), remained a clearly masculine discourse'.²⁹ Equally, critical neglect of the contribution made by female authors to the canon of spiritual reforming literature has left women without a historical credible alternative to patriarchal theological argument. Literary critics and historians are becoming aware that through close critical analysis of neglected female texts an ascending argument can be traced which contributes to a feminised spiritual identity.³⁰ The authors in this thesis adopted a tone of voice and literary form which enabled them to argue with authenticity for a spiritual role for women. They found a language through which coherent *theological* arguments could be pressed and it is the intent of this thesis to engage with their writings for the purpose of uncovering their somewhat radical interpretations. In their own period, and even today, these authors faced severe contestation. Misunderstanding, neglect and outright opposition accompanied authors who spoke ahead of their time. Robert Hole, in his capacity as editor of More's published works, suggests that her later works 'degenerate into decline'. 'By 1805' he says, 'More had said everything of interest which she had to say. Her later writings reveal a decline into old age that it is charitable to ignore.'³¹ Horace Walpole publicly lambasted Mary Wollstonecraft as 'that hyena in petticoats',³² and Mark Twain swung between overt opposition and outright adulation of Eddy and her writing.³³ This thesis, whilst paying attention to contemporary criticism, will critically analyse the writing of these women in the light of their religious *and* theological arguments, for the purpose of identifying these neglected perspectives.

²⁹ J. Melnyk (ed), *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p xi.

³⁰ For example see, *Religions and Discourse, Towards a Different Transcendence, Feminist Findings on Subjectivity, Religion and Values*, P. Lang (ed) (European Academic Publishers, Bern, 2001, vol 9).

³¹ R. Hole, *Selected Writings of Hannah More* (William Pickering. 1996), p. xv.

³² W.S. Lewis (ed), *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, 48 Volumes xxxi (1961), p. 397.

³³ M. Twain in his text *Christian Science*, (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1993)(1907).

My reason for choosing these particular four authors is to demonstrate the underlying unity of purpose which can be clearly traced in the arguments of feminist or anti-feminist across centuries and continents. Though their lives did not really coincide, and as in the case of More and Wollstonecraft even seemed to be at severe odds, each woman pointed to a misunderstanding of Scripture which allowed for the subservience of the female sex. What does unite them is their radical Protestantism, and the thesis will suggest that it is the threads which link their sometimes diverse perspectives which make their ultimate arguments for the spiritual autonomy of women so intriguing.

The thesis will investigate the religious complexities which prevailed in the period in which these women wrote, attempting to identify ambivalencies in public opinion which surrounded women who stepped outside their domestic parameters. Mary Wollstonecraft speaks for all pioneering women when she writes: 'Those who are bold enough to advance before the age they live in, and to throw off, by the force of their own minds, the prejudices which the maturing reason of the world will in time disavow, must learn to brave censure. We ought not to be too anxious respecting the opinion of others. - I am not fond of vindications. - Those who know me will suppose that I acted from principle. - Nay, as we in general give others credit for worth, in proportion as we possess it - I am easy with regard to the opinions of the *best* part of mankind - I *rest* on my own.'³⁴

Each woman represented in this thesis wrote to influence the '*best* part of mankind'; (might that, as suggested in *Paradise Lost*, be woman: 'O fairest of creation, last and best of all God's works'?) The thesis will explore this theory, paying close attention to the writing of these reforming women, to discover how they advanced an argument for female equality through promotion of woman's spirituality. Feminist or anti-feminist, traditionalist or revolutionary, their arguments coincided: 'Why' asked Stanton, 'is it more ridiculous for woman to protest against her present status in the Old and New Testament, in the ordinances and discipline of the church, than in the statutes and constitution of the state? Why is it more ridiculous to arraign ecclesiastics

³⁴ J. Todd (ed), *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*, (Polity Press, 1989) p. 266.

for their false teaching and acts of injustice to women, than members of Congress and the House of Commons? Why is it more audacious to review Moses than Blackstone, the Jewish code of laws, than the English system of jurisprudence?³⁵

It has been suggested that Stanton's exegetical text was heretical,³⁶ and there can be little doubt of its disruptive potential, so to discover that Hannah More, that pious eighteenth-century authoress and supporter of conservatism was equally sceptical of scriptural interpretation suggests this is an area which needs close investigation: 'The religion which it is the object of these pages to recommend,' More suggests, 'has been sometimes misunderstood, and not seldom misrepresented. What doctrine of the New Testament has not been *made* (my italics) to speak the language of its injudicious advocate, and turned into arms against some other doctrine'³⁷ Exposing the 'pious error of holy men' she condemns the 'formal religionist who has never obtained any sense of the spiritual mercies of God.'³⁷

'The Woman Question' clearly cannot be confined to any one period, or defined in any one genre, nor is it the prerogative of any one nation. Different women in different times have approached the question of female subjugation in a number of ways. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how four, apparently quite different women, laid claim to a religious rhetoric through which they were able to challenge, what they suggested were, centuries of mistaken doctrine in terms of female definition. It will point to the biographical nature of their major texts, suggesting that these writings reflected a growing awareness of the special claim women had, through a heightened state of consciousness, to divine inspiration. The arguments of these women made an important contribution towards identification of God as mother as well as father, which in turn authorised an appreciation of the nature of womanhood.

Sources

The primary sources for the thesis are the women's published writings.

³⁵ *The Woman's Bible*, p. 10.

³⁶ See the chapter 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' in Cullen Murphy's text, *The Word According to Eve* (The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 21.

³⁷ *Practical Piety*, pp. 11-14.

Critical analysis of the social and political arguments of Wollstonecraft and More has been prolific; this thesis, whilst necessarily touching on these aspects, will seek to locate their religious perspectives, which it will suggest, underpinned their theories for societal reform. It will investigate an aspect of their argument which has hitherto been neglected. The following texts will be examined, along with discovered unpublished manuscript material: More's *Strictures* (1799), *Practical Piety* (1811), Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* (1792), *Mary* (1788), *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), and *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), Stanton's *Eighty Years and More* (1898), *Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences 1815-1897* (1898), *The Woman's Bible* (1895), and Eddy's *Science & Health* (1875), *Prose Works* (1896), and *Poems* (1911). The early part of the thesis will look at the political and humanitarian arguments, identifying the religious impulse which motivated them. The heart of the thesis will investigate the authority the cult of sensibility gave to women, while the latter part will seek to discover how overt religious argument pervaded the later works of More, Stanton and Eddy. The thesis will trace the routes taken to, firstly, create a literary space and vernacular through which to challenge accepted gendered values so damaging to women; and secondly to understand how religious discourse became a prime communicatory source for advancing the cause of women. In support of the authors' published works, diaries, essays and letters will be examined: these manuscript sources shed valuable light on some of the more disturbing incidents of their lives.³⁸

³⁸ A virulent dispute in the early years of the nineteenth century saw Hannah More become the focus of an extremely vindictive attack. An effigy of her was ceremoniously burned by male students, and she was brought to a nervous breakdown. The dispute was the result of the alleged teaching of doctrines at variance with those of the Church of England, at one of More's schools in Blagdon. See *Hannah More* by M.G.Jones. Mary Baker Eddy was the focus of Mark Twain's animadversion in a text which he called *Christian Science*. In this text, he attempted to discredit the woman and her works with a supreme vindictiveness. Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes in her autobiography, 'Considering the pressure brought to bear on Miss Anthony and myself, I feel now that our patience and forbearance with our enemies in their malignant attacks on our good name, which we never answered, were indeed marvelous.' *E.C.Stanton As Revealed*, p. 215. A remark made by Horace Walpole in 1795 showed his distaste for Mary Wollstonecraft. Praising Hannah More: 'Thou excellent woman!' he condemned her contemporary: 'Thou reverse of that hyena in petticoats, Mrs Wollstonecraft.' W.S.Lewis (ed), *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, 45 Volumes: xxxi (1961), p. 397.

Outline of the thesis

Critical investigation of the authors' texts will be undertaken drawing on biographical, historical and feminist literary critical theory. Because scriptural interpretation becomes a central issue in their arguments for female authority, hermeneutic criticism will assist in understanding the philosophy of language and linguistic structures at work in their theological discourse. Examination of the socio-historical, political and cultural issues surrounding the representation of women's spirituality will contribute towards the establishment of a framework upon which to structure the argument. The arrangement of the thesis will be thematic, and whilst I am aware that this will be the more challenging route I believe it to be the best means of portraying how the *lives* of these women contributed to the different tropes and genres of their reforming publications.

Chapter One will explore the early influences, questioning whether there is a unifying theme which underlies the radical nature of the later writing. The formative years will be investigated for the purpose of contextualising their later attempts to establish scriptural authority for the autonomy of the feminine. It will question the religious situation which prevailed in their societies and will look at the religious practices which dominated family life, questioning whether this was an 'institutionalised' faith or one which emphasised a 'heart' religion. Religious beliefs, in the period in which these women lived, conditioned public conduct, and the restraining of female behaviour was enshrined in the religious codes of their day.

Chapter Two will investigate their early writing, examining the causes which inspired and motivated them to take up the pen in the name of reform. It will build on the suggestions of chapter one that their didactic writing emerged from an innate humanitarian spirit, a sensitivity to the suffering of others and a desire to bear witness to a God of love; a God who cared for His creation equally. Such was their conviction they were able to transcend prescribed doctrinal dogma in their demand for spiritual and moral reform. This chapter will focus on their literary contributions toward the cause of abolition: Hannah

More's poem *The Black Slave Trade*, written in 1788, to assist William Wilberforce's abolition bill, will be examined along with Eddy's poem *The New Century*. Wollstonecraft and Stanton's anti-slavery rhetoric exposes their merging of the interests of women with black slaves, and this adds a significant perspective to the argument.

Chapter Three studies the relevance of the cult of sensibility to their arguments. Its emphasis on the moral significance of a heightened state of consciousness and its resultant empowering of the female will be examined. Having harnessed a developing trend of social consciousness and communal responsibility through anti-slavery rhetoric, these women sought to redefine intellectual and moral culture. This chapter will address their literary dismantling of patriarchal assumptions, paying close attention to their construction of an ideology of feminised spirituality. The key areas under discussion in this chapter are education, sensibility and religion; these three spheres were quintessential to the reforming campaign which was waged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Chapter Four will uncover and identify a spiritual sub-text; sometimes clearly evidenced in overt religious expression, at other times subtly nuanced within secular ideological disquisitions. Identifying misconceptions and misogynistic tendencies at the heart of the Judeo-Christian religion, these visionary writers exposed an image of a feminised Deity, legitimising and authorising the feminine as equal if not superior to the masculine. This chapter will endeavour to evaluate how the effect of masculine and sometimes feminine opposition, both in their private and public lives served to focus and intensify their arguments for equal rights through a reinterpretation of traditional doctrinal theology. It will attempt to discern and expose the change in literary tone which surfaced as a result of personal trauma. Intensity of sentiment ignited an originality of thought which led to this tangible sea-change. Perhaps the most marked example of this transformation can be seen when comparing Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* with *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. This chapter will juxtapose the earlier arguments of each

woman with succeeding texts for the purpose of tracing an ascending spiritual awareness.

Chapter Five - Whilst abolition and emancipation had established women as able reformers, this chapter focuses on the still largely unchallenged barrier to female personal advancement: religious tradition. Scriptural interpretation therefore became central to the later arguments of these women authors.³⁹ Two major polemics which challenged patriarchal theological interpretation - Eddy's *Science & Health* and Stanton's *Woman's Bible* - will be critically analysed to discover how their reading of 'Genesis' and 'Revelation' ennobled the female sex. Writing through 'reason' and 'revelation' they pointed to an ascending scale of creation, effectively confirming Milton's 'last and best' portrayal. These texts make an important contribution to the canon of female spiritual literature.

Summary

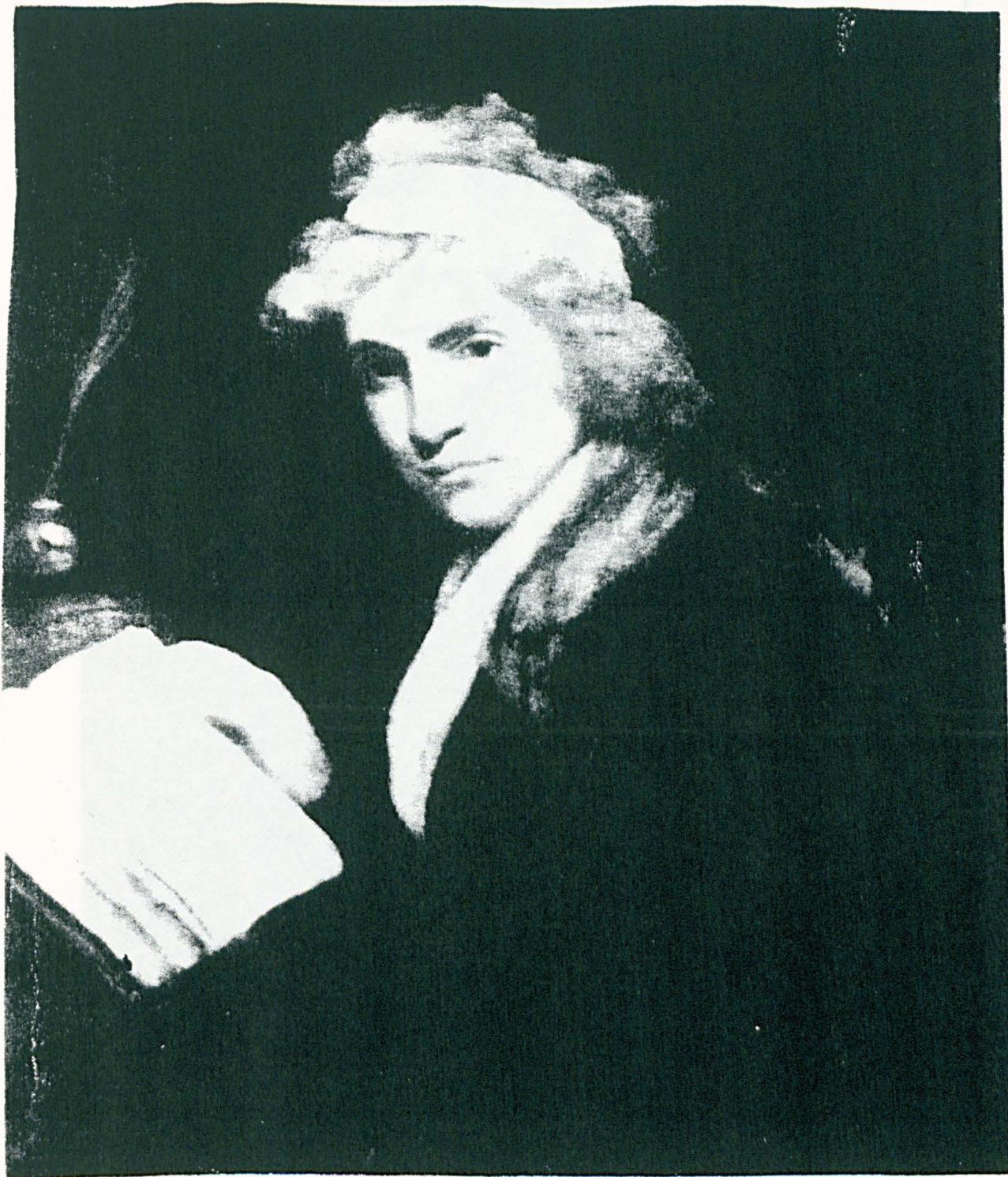
The argument of this thesis is structured around the authors' growing awareness and increasing questioning of patriarchal religious ideals, their effect on women as individuals, and society as a whole. Each woman wrote to authorise women and to empower the feminine; what is of special interest is the diverse literary routes they took. The re-shaping of religious tradition was pursued through an avenue of didactic dialogue which attempted, through a variety of genres, to penetrate the public consciousness. Challenging what they believed to be negative historical gender assumptions, the women found a public voice through which they linguistically authorised the status of womanhood. Feminist or anti-feminist, anglican or nonconformist, their arguments ultimately merged in a clear recognition that only an interpretation of Scripture which bestowed equal spiritual status on male and female would accord to women their birthright. The arguments of these four women register their growing awakening to this position. They used the pen to effect reform in society, contributing to a multitude of causes en route. They argued with specificity for the inherent potential of women as a powerful force for good in

³⁹ The early death of Mary Wollstonecraft precludes her writing from this later chapter.

the world, they challenged what seemed to them a glass ceiling of religious orthodoxy. The chronological and geographical distances between the women, as well as their political differences and disagreements, add dimension to the argument, making their ultimate theological conclusions all the more cogent. The conclusion of the thesis will expect to confirm that their perspective contributes a unique standpoint to the argument for sexual equality.



[Faint, illegible text, possibly a signature or address, located below the portrait.]



Mary Wollstonecraft by John Opie.

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON AND CHILD

From Daguerrotype, 1850



ELIZABETH CADY STANTON AND CHILD

From daguerreotype, 1856

The first part of the book is devoted to a study of the female subject in the

literature of the late nineteenth century.

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MARY BAKER EDDY

CHAPTER ONE: THE FEMALE SUBJECT

'Let us rejoice that we are subject to the divine "powers that be."' Mary Baker Eddy. *

Introduction: **Christian Induction**

This chapter will examine experiences in the formative years of these reformers which may have contributed to their later somewhat unorthodox religious perspectives, suggesting the change in tone and style of their writing, as well as responding to political and social issues, reflects changes in their 'lived experiences'. Their early attempts at writing, including poetry, prose and letters shed light on the religious and cultural conditioning to which they were subjected. The chapter will chart the effect of this conditioning on their religious attitudes as they questioned the predominant 'institutional' faith which they believed had encouraged inequalities to flourish. Religious beliefs, in the period in which these women lived, conditioned public conduct, and the restraining of female behaviour was enshrined in the religious codes of their day. The language used by these women reflects their growing awareness of the need to connect the role of women in society with a sense of moral and spiritual authority.

Religion and Politics in Eighteenth-Century British Culture

The world into which Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft were born was structured upon patriarchal values. Literary and cultural historians have argued that the eighteenth century saw a sharpening of the divisions between male and female. As Robert Shoemaker identifies in *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*, this was 'a crucial period of change in the history of gender roles.....there was an increasing separation of spheres, a sharpening of the differences between male and female social roles.'⁴¹ The public world of politics and religion was largely inhabited by men, whilst the private sphere of the home became the focus of women's attention. The decision makers, those with the power to influence affairs of the nation, were

⁴⁰ *Science & Health*, p.249.

⁴¹ *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*, p. 6.



thereby masculine.

Prescriptive roles for women were constructed upon a framework of gender differences as defined in 'Genesis', the first book of the *Holy Bible*. Early Christian teaching justified the subjugation of women, arguing that as God created Adam first, and woman was taken from man, man must be superior. Woman was further castigated as the weaker sex as a result of Eve's role in the fall, taking the forbidden fruit and giving it to her husband. The fundamental inferiority of the feminine was thus established and reinforced on the basis of theological tradition.⁴² An understanding of the political and religious values which prevailed in eighteenth-century England is necessary to contextualise its radical thinkers and the chapter will examine this historical perspective.

Hannah More's (1745-1833) early years were spent at the heart of a close knit family. She was born on the 2nd February 1745 in Fishponds, then part of the parish of Stapleton in Gloucestershire, to Jacob and Mary More. Her background and family connections were of a modest nature. Jacob More, a charity school teacher, had left his home at Norfolk, due to a legal dispute which had deprived him of what he considered to be his rightful inheritance, to settle in the West Country. He was a good classical scholar and had intended to take Holy Orders, before this dispute. Religion, though, was a contested subject between More and *his* mother who was a zealous Nonconformist, whilst Jacob More was a High Churchman and a Tory. Inevitably, a religious tension existed in the household. He and Mary, who was a farmer's daughter, had five daughters, Hannah More being the fourth.

All five daughters benefited from a thorough grounding in the classics, mathematics and languages. Indeed, so adept was Hannah More at mathematics that her father stopped lessons, fearing she would become too successful. More learned French, under the tutorship of her sister, and later taught herself Spanish and Italian. During the Seven Years' War (1756-

⁴² Evidence of historical discrimination comes from a council meeting held in Lyon, France in the year 584 A.D. Church leaders tussled with the question of women's humanity; sixty three delegates were present, and women were declared human by one vote - 32 voted yes and 31 voted no. Source, *Christian Science Sentinel*, 14.1.2002, p 7.

1763) her father entertained French prisoners of war whilst they were on parole in Frenchay, allowing the young More to become a fluent French conversationalist. This background proved to be immensely valuable in her later contribution towards the British Enlightenment.⁴⁹ Her translating abilities also allowed a contribution towards European intellectual movements.

In 1758, More's eldest sister, Mary, opened a boarding school for young ladies at 6 Trinity Street, College Green, Bristol. So successful did the school become, that in 1762, larger premises were bought at 43 Park Street. By now, all the sisters were involved in the important task of educating young women as well as young men.

Whilst details of More's early days remain largely obscure, in the light of her father's religious and political beliefs, it is not difficult to establish the sort of influence which would have pervaded her early years. As a High Churchman and Tory, her father would have adhered strictly to a traditional Christian, monarchical and aristocratic code of conduct. Whilst he clearly encouraged his daughters' education, nevertheless, they would be expected to conform to orthodox and accepted tradition in keeping with religious doctrine and standards of morality.

When More reached her teens, she met Dr James Stonhouse (1716-1795) who was to wield enormous influence in the development of an independence of spirit. Stonhouse had held deeply sceptical religious views until Dr Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), one of the leading Nonconformist ministers and writers of the age, caused a conversion to take place in Stonhouse. He subsequently became an Anglican clergyman and physician. More's love of literature, it is said, owes much to the influence of Drs Stonhouse and Doddridge.

⁴⁹ More's poem *The Bas Blue*, written in celebration of the Bluestockings emphasised the equal educational opportunities necessary for a cultivated society. It reinforced Enlightenment theory that rational conversation was a mark of civilized society. Her *Slavery: A Poem* equally contributed to an Enlightenment debate on the nature of humanity. Anne Stott elaborates on this suggestion in *Hannah More the first Victorian*, (Oxford University Press, 2003).

This cultured and intelligent young woman was warmly welcomed into the social and intellectual life which prevailed in eighteenth-century Bristol. She mixed freely with the philosophical thinkers of her day, men such as Rev Josiah Tucker (1712-1799), who became Dean of Gloucester, associating with the philosopher David Hume and Sheridan amongst others.

Her fluency in languages was particularly valuable as she worked on a number of translations of contemporary authors' works. At the age of sixteen, she wrote her first acknowledged publication, a pastoral drama, *The Search after Happiness* which was published in 1773. Her first published work, it is suggested, was the anonymous *Select Moral Tales, translated from the French by a Lady* (1763). Marmontel was the author of the original work, but due to the fact that More disliked the life and work of the Frenchman, it is thought she did not wish to acknowledge authorship of the translation. This piece of work was dedicated to Mrs Elizabeth Montague, who was to play an important role in the future life of Hannah More.⁴⁴

In 1767, at the age of 22, More became engaged to the wealthy middle-aged squire, Edward Turner of Belmont, of Wraxall, Somerset. His reluctance to marry her, three times delaying the marriage ceremony, resulted in More's calling off the engagement. She regarded this as a humiliating episode and resolved never to marry. Her friend, Dr Stonhouse, secured an annuity of £200 from Mr Turner as a sort of compensation, and Turner bequeathed a sum of £1000 to More on his death.

After a period of readjustment, More launched herself amongst a new circle of friends, who warmly received her into their midst. She quickly became a well known figure amongst the London theatrical set. David Garrick and his wife became close friends and she was soon found to be an accomplished playwright. A free translation of *Metastasio's Attilio Regalo* became *The Inflexible Captive* (1775) and was presented by Garrick at theatres in Bath and Exeter. This was followed by *Percy. A tragedy* in 1777 and *The Fatal Falsehood* in 1779. Evidence of More's popularity can be seen in an

⁴⁴ 'bright Montagu' was marked for praise in *The Bas Blue*.

epigraph inscribed on the walls of The Theatre Royal, 'Boast we not a More?'⁴⁵

Five years later, however, years which saw the death in quick succession of her father, Garrick and Johnson, More gradually withdrew from the world of the 'Great and the Gay', that fashionable world of London society. This withdrawal coincided with a change of location and more notably, the adoption of a more serious literary tone. She had witnessed at first hand the manners and morals of 'fashionable society' and they had disturbed her. Disappointed with the irreligious attitudes displayed by the supposedly pious men and women of her London 'set', a puritanical zeal surfaced in More, and her writing of this period reflected this change of heart. Religious tracts and moral tales became the vehicles through which she sought to reform the manners and morals of the nation. More's proselytizing zeal drew her into a new circle of friends known as 'The Saints'. The genre of her writing in this period was of a politico/ religious and didactic nature. She used elaborate and evocative syntax in an attempt to address the discontent simmering under the surface of British society.

In 1788, More wrote *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*. In this text, she emphasised the duty of each citizen in contributing towards a cohesive and well structured society. Great stress was placed on the important relationship between Church and State, as the preface to this text notes:

While Great Britain is exhibiting a glorious energy in the cause of a nation, brave and generous like herself, yet professing an erroneous worship, let her convince that nation that she is actuated in assisting her, by the spirit of religion that is indeed *reformed*: a religion which having the love of God for its motive, has consequently for its end, charity to mankind without distinction of country or of religion.

⁴⁵ M.G.Jones, *Hannah More* (Cambridge at the University Press, 1952), p.16.

We are becoming conspicuous like a city set on a hill. We are “the observed of all observers.” While the eyes of the whole world are fixed upon us, let the whole world perceive that our active services, our warm benevolence to our suffering fellow-creatures, flow from the only principle which can sanctify right conduct, from the only source which can recommend it to the favour of God.⁴⁶

The rhetoric of this narrative sets an important precedent for More's later writing. The nationalistic fervour is impressive. The epic spirit which is manifested in her discourse reflects a grandeur which parallels the great ceremonial performances of the 'ancients'. The formal and elevated style reflects a masculine topos, but nuanced within its argument are the key themes which are to infuse her later works, the references to the reforming power of a religious sensibility.

More *apparently* grounds her suggestions in orthodoxy and tradition: the above text is not unlike that of John Winthrop who declared in his famous shipboard sermon, that 'the eyes of all people are upon us' and that the Puritans were called to erect 'a city upon an Hill' - a city that would stand as lesson and beacon to the whole world.⁴⁷ This is a powerful invocation, but even at this stage in her writing career, More is identifying and promoting a religion of the heart. As her career progresses, her agenda becomes more overt.

In 1790, More's text *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*⁴⁸ was published, she was, as the thesis introduction identifies, afraid that her influential friends would be dismayed at her criticism of their manners and morals. This fear, however, was unfounded as evidenced in a letter she received in July 1791 from John Newton: 'There is a circle by which what you write will be read...and which will hardly read anything of a religious kind that is

⁴⁶ H. More, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (T. Cadell & W. Davies, in the Strand, 1818)(1788), p. ix.

⁴⁷ K.W.F. Staveland, *Puritan Legacies, Paradise Lost and the New England Tradition 1630-1890* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 14.

⁴⁸ Published anonymously, fearing retribution from her fashionable friends.

not written by you.⁴⁹

More targeted her readers with precision. Robert Hole, in his introduction to *Selected Writings of Hannah More*, suggests that *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great (1788)* and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* are 'earnest and sincere works addressed to women of society'.⁵⁰ I would suggest that *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* is a pedagogical work directed squarely towards a male audience, and witnesses More's careful construction of a didactic platform from which to counsel and restrain negative masculine traits:

Shall we expect then, since men can only be scholars by sedulous labour, that they shall be Christians by mere chance?.....For the great secret of religious education, and which seems banished from the present practice, consists in training young men to an habitual interior restraint, an early government of the affections, and a course of self-control over those tyrannizing inclinations.....Without this habit of moral restraint, which is one of the fundamental laws of christian [sic] virtue, though men may, from natural temper, often *do* good, yet it is impossible that they should ever *be* good.....Whether therefore a man's charitable actions proceed from religious principle, he will be best able to ascertain by scrutinizing into what is the general disposition of his time and fortune; and by attending to such an habitual regulation of his pleasures and expences [sic] as will enable him to be more or less useful to others (p 64).

More goes on to identify those Christian character traits which, she suggests, are intrinsic to a truly charitable disposition and which she conspicuously identifies as 'the very essence of a man of business'.⁵¹ These two texts, Christine Krueger suggests were 'intended to prick the spiritual consciences of

⁴⁹ *Memoirs of The Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, p. 226, vol 2.

⁵⁰ R. Hole, *Selected Writings of Hannah More* (London: William Pickering, 1996), p. xxix.

⁵¹ H. More, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (Dublin: Ptd for P.Wogan, P.Bryans, J.Moore, J.Jones, A.Grueber, R.McAllister, W.Jones, G.Draper, R.White, J.Rice, 1791) (third edition) pp 62-101.

the upper ranks.....No writer', she argues, 'manipulated the ideological and rhetoric of evangelicalism to shape social discourse more successfully than Hannah More.....Her role, like that of women preachers among the Methodist hierarchy, was ambiguous, for the same patriarchal beliefs that made her a powerful evangelist inspired her prophetic rebuke of patriarchal sins.'⁵²

Further evidence of More's gendered definitions can be seen in *Strictures*, where she turns her attention to women:

The chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women, is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life. Their knowledge is not often like the learning of men.... A lady studies, not that she may qualify herself to become an orator or a pleader; not that she may learn to debate, but to act. She is to read the best books, not so much to enable her to talk of them, as to bring the improvement which they furnish, to the rectification of her principles, and the formation of her habits. The great uses of study are to enable her to regulate her own mind, and to be useful to others.⁵³

More's discourse emphasises the gender divisions inherent in eighteenth-century culture. The mental cultivation and intellectual development of women she considered essential if they were to fulfil their role of educating the next generation towards rectifying the manners and morals of society. More emphasises the interrelation between domestic sentiments and national loyalties as she attempts to authorise femininity.

Admonishing masculine opposition to female improvement, she writes:

As to men of sense, however, they need be the less inimical to the improvement of the other sex, as they themselves will be sure to be gainers by it; the enlargement of the female

⁵² C.Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse*, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp 94-124.

⁵³ *Strictures*, p. 1, vol 2.

understanding being the most likely means to put an end to those petty cavils and contentions for equality which female smatterers so anxiously maintain. I say smatterers, for between the first class of both sexes the question is much more rarely and always more temperately agitated. Co-operation and not competition is indeed the clear principle we wish to see reciprocally adopted by those higher minds in each sex which really approximate the nearest to each other. The more a woman's understanding is improved, the more obviously she will discern that there is a perpetual struggle for power; and the more her judgement is rectified, the more accurate views will she take to the station she herself was born to fill, and the more readily will she accommodate herself to it; while the most vulgar and ill-informed women are ever most inclined to be tyrants, and those always struggle more vehemently for power, who would not fail to make the worse use of it when attained. Thus the weakest reasoners are always the most positive in debate; and the cause is obvious, for *they* are unavoidably driven to maintain their pretensions by violence who want arguments and reasons to prove that they are in the right.⁵⁴

More targets the hostility, so prevalent amongst eighteenth-century middle class men, to the improvement of the minds of their womenfolk. She argues that the slight superficial knowledge of women is damaging to both sexes, and appeals for more cooperation between them. She suggests that the 'higher minds' of each sex 'approximate the nearest to each other' and she appeals to 'men of sense' to understand how the contribution of women of intellect will valuably assist in the collective raising of the minds and manners of society. Her strategy is clear as she speaks both individually and collectively to each sex in her attempt to define the roles of each in society. Whilst ostensibly appearing to suggest that the female need not become qualified as an orator, More herself displays all the qualities of a skilled orator as she moves adeptly between masculine and feminine discourses. In the ten years from 1788 to 1798 Hannah More wrote prolifically. Her

⁵⁴ *Strictures*, p.14, vol 2.

Cheap Repository Tracts (1795-98) included moral tales, Bible stories and instructive ballads, and reached a wide audience with a circulation of two million in the first year. She wrote to influence each section of society from the poor and illiterate to the wealthy upper classes. In 1799 she wrote *Strictures* emphasising the importance of education for girls, but her suggestion that: 'Christianity is the great and leading circumstance which raises women's importance'⁵⁵ hints at the later connections she will make between Christianity and the feminine. This work was highly regarded, going through thirteen editions and selling more than 19,000 copies, and whilst Hannah More was viewed as an upholder of traditional values, this text gives a glimpse of the covert radical religious perspectives which, the thesis will argue, were to become an over-riding concern.

The foregoing attempts to build an outline of the structure upon which Hannah More based her reforming literature. The early years, and the influences which shaped her in this period are valuable if one is to understand their contribution to her later writing. Scholarly research of her early writing has been extensive: for whatever reason, interest in her later works has been negligible. This may have something to do with Robert Hole's suggestion that More's later works 'degenerate into decline' and that it would be 'charitable to ignore'⁵⁶ these texts. It is More's later writing that the latter part of this thesis will focus on. Her state of mind at this period will be examined in the light of a manuscript copy of an unpublished letter from Hannah More to Rev Richard Hart-Davis (1821), a richly descriptive letter written by Anna Victoria Inman after visiting Hannah More in June 1824, and a manuscript copy of an unpublished essay presented to her by More. This essay, written in May 1824 whilst at Barley Wood, relates specifically to the significance of the Bible, emphasizing that whilst 'other books may teach us the knowledge of the world, the Bible alone can teach us the knowledge of ourselves.....Other books may teach human Sciences, the Bible alone can teach the Science of Salvation thro' the blood of Christ.' The 'Science of salvation' and 'knowledge of ourselves', I shall be suggesting when critically examining More's later works, have been learned through bitter experience. Other personal correspondence will usefully

⁵⁵ *Strictures*, p. 34, vol 1.

⁵⁶ *Selected Writings of Hannah More*, p. xv.

contribute to the argument of the thesis.⁵⁷

Hannah More wrote to counter those revolutionary tendencies propounded by Thomas Paine in *Rights of Man* and Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication*. It was considered that Wollstonecraft was an arch-rival of Hannah More; not unsurprisingly, as More herself fuelled this argument, insisting that she would not read the 'metaphysical jargon' of her contemporary. This thesis will suggest, however, that the parallels which run between the writing of these two women are too numerous to ignore. Their allegedly diverse opinions are indeed remarkably consistent when viewed in the light of their demands for female education and moral reform, but it is their underlying preoccupation with religious principles and practices which the thesis will ultimately investigate. A correspondent of Miss More, Mary Berry, who also corresponded with Horace Walpole, wrote in a letter of 1799:

I have been able... to go entirely through Hannah More, and Mrs Wollstonecraft (sic) immediately after her. It is amazing, or rather it is not amazing, but impossible, that they should do otherwise than agree on all the great points of female education. H. More will, I dare say, be very angry when she hears this, though I would lay wager that she never read the book.⁵⁸

This chapter will now explore the formative years of Mary Wollstonecraft, focusing as before on the early family and religious influence she was subject to.

Mary Wollstonecraft: 1759-1797

The formative years of Mary Wollstonecraft were in distinct contrast to those of Hannah More. Wollstonecraft was the second of seven children, and the

⁵⁷ The Bristol Record Office allowed me to access boxes of uncatalogued material given to them by Adam Hart-Davis, a descendant of Richard Hart Davies, MP for Bristol 1812-1831, and recipient of some 300 letters from Hannah More.

⁵⁸ Lady Theresa Lewis (ed), *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry, from the year 1783 to 1852*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, 1865), 2.91092, to Mrs. Cholmeley, 2 April, 1799.

eldest girl. Her father was Edward John Wollstonecraft, a one-time farmer. He had been left a large inheritance on the death of his father, but had dissipated this on various unsuccessful commercial and agricultural ventures. Wollstonecraft's mother was Elizabeth Dixon of Irish descent. Life in the home became increasingly difficult due to her father's fits of violence, which were the result of too much alcohol. As a child, it is reported, she lay outside her parents' bedroom to prevent her mother being beaten. Her elder brother was the most favoured by her mother and this situation undoubtedly caused additional distress to the young Wollstonecraft: added to the early view she had of relations between man and wife, it is not difficult to see how these experiences were reflected in her later rather extreme attitudes to marriage.

From the age of nine to fifteen Wollstonecraft lived in Beverley, East Yorkshire, in a house in the shadow of the Minster, attended the local school and made some enduring friendships. Letters written during this period reflect her burgeoning interest in literature and the theatre. Society in Beverley was lively and a literary club flourished.⁵⁹ Cameron notes: 'One would gather from Mary's letters that there was a good deal of literary, theatrical, and scientific interest in the town and it may have struck deeper intellectual roots in the young schoolgirl than Godwin seemed to think. Her early letters, in fact, show an almost avid interest in poetry and similar matters.'⁶⁰

The patriarchal domination within her home environment, however, left an abiding conviction of the controlling role played by men and the consequential subservience of women. Wollstonecraft reflects on this autocratic and dictatorial masculine ethos in her unfinished novel *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* where she suggests:

His orders were not to be disputed; and the whole house was

⁵⁹ See *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Claire Tomalin, (Penguin Books, 1974, 1992), p. 18.

⁶⁰ Cameron, K.N. (ed), *Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822* (Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, 1961), p 935, vol 11. Fourteen letters written to Miss Jane Arden from Mary Wollstonecraft and not previously published were acquired by The Carl H. Pforzheimer Library. A copybook bearing the title "Unpublished Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft" was passed to them when Volume 1 of the above mentioned work *Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822*, was already in plate proof. These letters provide valuable resource material in assisting biographical research of her early years.

expected to fly, at the word of command....He was to be instantaneously obeyed, especially by my mother, whom he very benevolently married for love; but took care to remind her of the obligation, when she dared, in the slightest instance, to question his absolute authority. My eldest brother, it is true, as he grew up, was treated with more respect by my father; and became in due form the deputy tyrant of the house.⁶¹

The education of his daughters had not been a priority for Edward Wollstonecraft, and his daughter became keenly aware of her shortcomings when a new friendship blossomed with Jane Arden. The arrival of this well educated family in their midst was to prove invaluable to the young Wollstonecraft. Well versed in the sciences, literature and philosophy, they became a valuable source of intellectual stimulation during this period of her life. She became an avid letter writer, using the pen as a means of dealing with her anxieties. Her letters to Jane, as a schoolgirl of fourteen, gave vent to a variety of emotions and reflected a similar tone to the letters she was to write as a woman of thirty-five on her travels through Scandinavia. A letter written to Arden in June 1773 (or possibly November 1774) represents a sensitive and somewhat fragile temperament:

Dear Jenny I have read some where that vulgar minds will never own they are in the wrong: - I am determined to be above such a prejudice, and give the lie to the poet who says - "Forgiveness to the injured does belong But they ne'er pardon, who have done the wrong" and hope my ingenuously owning myself partly in fault to a girl of your good nature will cancel the offence - I have a heart too susceptible for my own peace..... I cannot bear a slight from those I love.....

Her reflections mark a sentimental inclination. The inclusion of part of an essay on friendship exposes an emotional nature, an almost desperate need to be loved: 'Friendship founded upon virtue Truth and love; - it sweetens the

⁶¹ M. Wollstonecraft, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman. A Fragment in two volumes*, p. 124, vol 1.

cares, lessens the sorrows, and adds to the joys of life. - It corrects our foibles and errors, refines the pleasures of sense and improves the faculties of the mind.¹⁶²

The overriding impression, however, of Wollstonecraft's early years is of a solitary child who developed a passion for animals, and according to biographer Claire Tomalin 'a detestation of cruelty of all kinds.' Her days were spent roaming the countryside, 'in search of angels.'¹⁶³

Possibly the most reliable representation of Wollstonecraft's childhood can be found in her novel, *Mary*. In this autobiographical 'fiction' she exhibits a rhetoric of sentimental confession. The preface displays her emotional fervour: 'Those compositions only have power to delight, and carry us willing captives, where the soul of the author is exhibited, and animates the hidden springs.' *Mary* involved the writer in an extensive exploration into how novels of sensibility could mediate between art and the world at large and she clearly intended to exhibit her own soul. Writing which had at its source the emotions, offered women writers an avenue through which to portray women's social experience. This enabled them to depict the effects of gender on the relationship of the individual to society. Her formative years were clearly not happy ones. Denied parental affection and feeling deeply unappreciated, she records how she 'conversed with angels.'¹⁶⁴ She suggests that her religious education had been sorely neglected, 'her mother's lukewarm manner of performing her religious duties, filled her with anguish.'¹⁶⁵ This text yields sophisticated insights into a mind which was, according to Gary Kelly in his introduction to *Mary* allied to the philosophical method of 'necessitarianism' resulting in a religious impulse to self-examination.

Whilst Janet Todd, editor of *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*, suggests that *Mary, A Fiction* 'provided an idealized and simplified account of her

¹⁶² Letter from Wollstonecraft to Arden June 4. 1773-November 16, 1774? Cameron K.N. *Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822*, p. 957, vol 11.

¹⁶³ C. Tomalin, *The Life & Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Penguin Books 1985), pp. 16-18.

¹⁶⁴ M. Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction*, p. 11, vol 1.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 6.

childhood⁶⁶ it nevertheless yields useful insights into the issues uppermost in her mind. Clearly religion and the role of women in society were areas of key concern. An apparent desire for death as a release from marital responsibilities was especially revealing: 'Mary's delicate state of health did not promise long life. In moments of solitary sadness, a gleam of joy would dart across her mind-She thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage.'⁶⁷

Perhaps the 'lukewarm' teachings Wollstonecraft had received in religious matters engendered a capacity for freedom of thought which had not been accorded to many of her contemporaries. She professed a religion of sensibility, not unlike that expressed by Hannah More in her poem *Sensibility* written to The Honourable Mrs Boscawen in 1782. 'Sweet Sensibility! Thou secret pow'r.....Thy subtle essence still eludes the chains of Definition, and defeats her pains.'⁶⁸ This 'secret pow'r' revealed to hearts which were tender and open to divine impressions was in distinct contrast to the restrictive religious practices which claimed the name of Christianity without its nature. Wollstonecraft's religious passion is evident in her 'fiction' where she describes Mary sitting up half the night, studying the scriptures and preparing to receive the holy sacrament: 'The orient pearls were strewed around-she hailed the morn, and sung with wild delight, Glory to God on high, good will towards men. She was indeed so much affected when she joined in the prayer for her eternal preservation, that she could hardly conceal her violent emotions;'⁶⁹

At fifteen, Wollstonecraft had become aware of the deep social and cultural divisions, not only between male and female, but also between the poor and their wealthy masters, which prevailed in eighteenth-century society. If one is to believe the autobiographical nature of *Mary*, this also was a subject which troubled her deeply. The passage where a little girl stabbed herself in a fit of delirium, reveals a woman deeply concerned with societal deprivation and

⁶⁶ J. Todd (ed), *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ *Mary*, p. 73. See *Holy Bible*, St. Matthew 22:30 'For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.'

⁶⁸ H. More, *The Works of Hannah More*, pp. 167-187, vol 1.

⁶⁹ *Mary*, p. 11.

inequality:

A little girl who attended in the nursery fell sick. Mary paid her great attention; contrary to her wish, she was sent out of the house to her mother, a poor woman, whom necessity obliged to leave her sick child while she earned her daily bread. The poor wretch, in a fit of delirium stabbed herself, and Mary saw her dead body ... and so strongly did it impress itself to her imagination, that every night of her life the bleeding corpse presented itself to her when she first began to slumber..⁷⁰

By the time Wollstonecraft was to write *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, her arguments had become powerfully enshrined in scriptural metaphor and her heroines accorded names with a Biblical resonance. Wollstonecraft's spiritual affiliations will be examined more closely in further chapters, but for the purpose of establishing a clear picture of her early and formative years, a glimpse at the autobiographical 'fiction' has been valuable. This unconventionally religious woman was a deep spiritual thinker, whilst her critics have tended rather to focus on her political and social arguments, neglecting somewhat the perspective this thesis will adopt.

In 1774, Edward Wollstonecraft uprooted the family from Yorkshire and moved once more to London. The bad habits of the father had made it difficult to live comfortably in the close knit community which was Beverley and the anonymity which could be found in the capital was deemed to be more suitable. Again, Mary Wollstonecraft had to struggle to find a place in this new community. Her brother Ned, by this time a trained lawyer, was a constant source of irritation, tormenting and humiliating his sister, who found it necessary to look beyond the family circle to find comfort and companionship. Solace came in the form of a retired clergyman and his wife, Mr and Mrs Clare. In their home, she was encouraged in a taste for poetry and the classics. Here she was introduced to Milton and Shakespeare, and this relationship proved to be extremely beneficial. The Clares encouraged

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p. 14.

Wollstonecraft in acquiring all the social skills necessary for a young woman of the age. They also introduced her to someone who was to prove influential in her emotional development. Fanny Blood was another protégée of the Clares, and emerged as a kindred spirit to the young Wollstonecraft. Two years older, and with a homelife not dissimilar to that of Wollstonecraft, she had nevertheless acquired a certain cachet which dramatically impressed the younger girl. Indeed, she admitted feeling 'quite a passion' for her mentor.⁷¹ The lives of these two young women were intrinsically linked for a while as Wollstonecraft resided at the Blood family home.

1784 was the year in which Wollstonecraft, along with two of her sisters, Eliza and Everina and her friend Fanny Blood, took a large house at Newington Green, and opened a school. This was common practice in this period for women who needed an income and some independence. Wollstonecraft had early learned that if she was to succeed in life, then she must rely on her own resources. She had to borrow money, find rent and furnish the school at the same time organising teachers, maids and cooks as well as becoming a teacher herself. Her life up to this time had shown her the folly of relying on men: each masculine example, except perhaps for Mr Clare, had been a disappointment.

The Dissenters of Newington Green

Some hundred years before Wollstonecraft moved to Newington Green, Daniel Defoe had been a resident. Since that time, the area had attracted dissident intellectuals bent on reforming society; one such was the famous dissenting minister Dr Richard Price, whose chapel could be seen from the windows of Wollstonecraft's school. This radical political theorist was to wield enormous influence over Wollstonecraft. Dr Price was at the centre of a radical reforming group which crossed America and France as well as England. Men such as Franklin, Jefferson, Condorcet and Priestley were among his correspondents. Here was a man Wollstonecraft could respect: not only was he an influential intellectual, he was also a man of humanitarian principles who

⁷¹ C. Tomalin, *The Life & Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 31.

cared for children, animals and the vulnerable in society.

The time at Newington Green proved to be a critical period in the life of Wollstonecraft. For the first time she began mixing with radical intellectual thinkers, writers, poets. She was warmly welcomed into their midst, moved freely amongst the dissenting households and attended Dr Price's chapel to hear him preach. The doctrine of these rational dissenters was based on the principles of John Locke. Locke was a Deist, expelled from Oxford in 1684, who determined to get rid of all the 'unreasonable' elements in Christianity. In 1690 his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was published in which he propounded his determinative theological ideology. Discarding the Trinity and the doctrine of predestination, which represented a key departure from traditional Christian teaching, Locke insisted 'if one wanted to discourse reasonably and understandably, one really must discard any idea that could not be given a determinate shape and meaning.'⁷² The theological teachings embraced by Wollstonecraft during this period disputed much traditional dogma: the Trinity, the concept of eternal punishment and the notion of original sin.

As well as becoming a spiritually liberating period, it was also a time when she began mixing with 'liberated' literary women. Anna Barbauld was the daughter of dissenting Doctor Aikin, who became a successful poet and educational writer. Ann Jebb was the wife of Price's friend, and a dissenting writer who wrote political articles for the press. These women projected a powerful femininity which appealed to the equivocal nature of this woman of sentiment. William Godwin's portrayal of Wollstonecraft's early years exhibits a woman who needed no male mediator between herself and her God. 'Her mind' he suggests 'constitutionally attached itself to the sublime and amiable. She found an inexpressible delight in the beauties of nature, and in the splendid reveries of the imagination. But nature itself, she thought, would be no better than a vast blank, if the mind of the observer did not supply it with an animating soul. When she walked amidst the wonders of nature, she was

⁷² M.H.Abrams (ed), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (W.W.Norton & Company, New York: London: 1993), Manuscript copy of Locke's *A discourse of natural and revealed religion in several essays*, confirmed this particular perspective: 'God is one or rather very oneness....' Ms. Locke c.27. Duke Humphrey's Library, University of Oxford.

accustomed to converse with her God.⁷³

The early years of Wollstonecraft's life had imbued her with an active social conscience: here was a young woman deeply concerned about those less fortunate in society - and the plight of women was a particular concern. Tomalin suggests 'Mary wanted to believe that individual will power and energy would better the state of the world, and that human nature was improving.....It seemed to her far preferable to hope that men might grow less vicious as the circumstances of their lives grew gentler, rather than accept that women were given an appearance of virtue only by the crack of the whip.'⁷⁴

Four years after the opening of the school, Wollstonecraft wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). This first publication was inevitably prompted by the experiences she faced as an educator of young girls and was quickly followed by *Mary, A Fiction* (1788). *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) was also published the same year, and the following year *The Female Reader* (1789). Didactic courtesy books had become a feature of eighteenth-century women's writing. Both Wollstonecraft and More wrote prolifically in this genre, attempting to educate and reform society as a whole, but women in particular. Janet Todd suggests: 'The development in Wollstonecraft's thinking through the decade of her literary works is recorded in her pedagogical writings.....and show her mingling of rationalism and piety, her understanding of social as well as physical misery, and her firm belief in its divine purpose.'⁷⁵

Wollstonecraft was supported in her literary exertions by Joseph Johnson, the radical bookseller of St. Paul's Churchyard.⁷⁶ For the next five years, he employed her as a reader and translator. During this time, she translated *Lavater's Physiognomy*, Jacques Necker's *Of The Importance of Religious*

⁷³ W. Godwin, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Constable & Co. Ltd., 1928), p. 27.

Wollstonecraft married Godwin in March 1797.

⁷⁴ C. Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 51.

⁷⁵ J. Todd (ed), *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*, p. 23.

⁷⁶ A letter written to Johnson in the summer of 1788 records the depth of her feeling for him: 'You are my only friend - the only person I am *intimate* with. - I never had a father, or a brother'. 'Letters to Johnson' p 358, vol 6.

Opinions (1788) and C.G.Salzmann's *Elements of Morality* (1790). She also became reviewer and editorial assistant, contributing several articles to Johnson's *Analytical Review*. Indeed, Johnson was an important influence in both her literary and personal life. He included her in his social circle, introducing her to men such as Tom Paine, supporter of the American Revolution; Henry Fuseli,⁷⁷ the German-Swiss painter and commentator on Rousseau; William Godwin,⁷⁸ the political and social theorist; William Blake, poet and radical thinker, and the novelist Thomas Holcroft. This group acted as intellectual stimulation to this budding reformer, and Wollstonecraft wrote to her sister in relation, "I am then going to be the first of a new genus ... You know I am not born to tread in the beaten track, the peculiar bent of my nature pushes me on"⁷⁹

The year 1789 witnessed an infinitely more confident Wollstonecraft; July of that year saw the beginning of the French Revolution, and her response to these events could be seen in tracts which were of a radical political nature. In 1790, she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* as a direct response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Wollstonecraft prized intellectual independence and this quality contributed to the burgeoning radicalism of her rhetorical style. Her most famous work was undoubtedly *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which had powerful implications for the role of women in society.

Vindication was probably as important to Wollstonecraft as *Strictures* was to Hannah More. Both these texts have been examined by countless literary critics and historians through the past two hundred years and both have made a valuable contribution to the canon of female reforming literature. This thesis however is intent on uncovering a religious agenda which it will suggest was fundamental to their reformatory arguments. As already pointed out, an

⁷⁷ Wollstonecraft fell passionately in love with Henry Fuseli, though he did not return her affections.

⁷⁸ It has been suggested that Godwin fell in love with her as a result of her *Letters from Sweden*. He wrote, 'A book of travels that so irresistibly seizes on the heart, never, in any other instance, found its way from the press.' W. Godwin, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 84.

⁷⁹ C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries* (London: Henry S. King, 1876), pp.191-192.

important platform for Wollstonecraft's spiritual arguments is constructed in her 'fiction' *Mary* and an analogous approach to Hannah More's advocacy of salvation through atonement, can be found in *Original Stories from Real Life*. The thesis will focus on practical works based on the life's experiences of these women.

Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft negotiated a public space from which to promote their own particular brand of reforming literature. Their writing reflected a growing personal conviction of the moral and spiritual influence women could bring to bear on the political and public scene. Their didactic texts demanded that well educated, virtuous women take the helm and steer the nation towards a common humanitarian goal. They claimed a moral and spiritual imperative at the heart of the feminine, which could mediate on behalf of the weaker members of society, on the basis of the teachings of Christ Jesus. They did not see femininity as a restraining factor, rather they sanctified all the fine qualities inherent in motherhood and domesticity, giving women permission to take responsibility for reforming the manners and morals of society.

'New England' and Puritan Inheritance

The argument of the thesis will be supported by the writings of two American women reformers, and this chapter will seek to understand what ultimately led Elizabeth Cady Stanton to write *The Woman's Bible*. (The text itself will be closely examined in later chapters.) On July 19, 1848, Stanton was to proclaim: 'Let her live first for God, and she will not make imperfect man an object of reverence and awe Thus she will learn the lesson of individual responsibility for time and eternity. That neither father, husband, brother, or son ... can discharge her high duties of life or stand in her stead when called into the presence of the great Searcher of Hearts at the last day'⁸⁰ To discover what prompted this religious radicalism, a brief look at Stanton's formative years will yield valuable insights.

⁸⁰ Ann D. Gordon (ed), *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, pp. 107-108, vol 1.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton - 1815-1902

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born on the 12 November 1815 to Daniel Cady and Margaret Livingston. Stanton wrote an autobiography which records her formative years and reveals the thoughts and experiences she was subject to. These early reminiscences reveal a powerful patriarchal influence at the heart of the family home. 'My father' she writes 'was a man of firm character and unimpeachable integrity.....Though gentle and tender, he had such a dignified repose and reserve of manner that, as children, we regarded him with fear rather than affection.' She went on to reveal, 'Our parents were as kind and considerate as the Puritan ideas of those days permitted, but fear, rather than love, of God and parents alike, predominated.'⁸¹

Puritanism was the cultural and spiritual inheritance of nineteenth-century American society, and to understand American literature and culture, it is important to contextualise it against this background. Nineteenth-century America was engaging with similar debates to those of eighteenth-century Britain in that a duplicity had crept into its religious ideals. Doctrinal divisions had arisen between the 'sensationalist' rhetoric of men such as Jonathan Edwards who argued for a God of fury holding his children perpetually over 'the pit of hell', and the more reasonable Benjamin Franklin, an intellectual man, distinguished in literature and science. Boris Ford suggests 'Franklin's Puritan background instilled into him a scepticism about human access to ultimate truths, and a sense of the innate frailty of fallen man. He accepted cheerfully that the mind is a bundle of impulses and desires controlled by reason at only the most superficial level.....'⁸²

It was this cultural atmosphere that pervaded the early years of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Her father was a lawyer, and her mother a woman of firm principles. A strong sense of morality and justice was early ingrained into her

⁸¹ T.Stanton and H.Stanton Blatch (eds), *Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in Her Letters Diary and Reminiscences* (Harper & Brothers Publishers: New York and London), pp. 1-3, vol 1.

⁸² Boris Ford (ed), *American Literature* (Penguin Books, 1988), p. 19, vol 9.

character. She records that her religious training invoked an overwhelming sense of fear, referring to this frequently: 'Visions of the inferno were strongly impressed on my childish imagination. It was thought, at that time, that firm faith in hell and the devil was the greatest help to virtue. The clanging of the Church bells, calling the inhabitants of Johnstown to prayer 'filled me with the utmost dread' (*Reminiscences* p 6). Stanton clearly gave much thought to doctrinal issues from an early age. Her Scottish nurse, Mary Dunn, questioned her one day on discovering her pensively looking out of the nursery window: 'Child, what are you thinking about;' she replied, 'I was wondering why it was that everything we like to do is a sin, and that everything we dislike is commanded by God or some one on earth. I am so tired of that everlasting no! no! no!. At school, at home, everywhere it is 'no'! Even at church all the commandments begin 'Thou shalt not.' I suppose God will say 'no' to all we like in the next world, just as you do here' (*ibid* p 9). Her nurse was shocked, considering such questioning of Calvinistic doctrine to be blasphemous.

A powerful influence on the spiritual education of the young Stanton came from the Rev Simon Hosack. Born and educated in Scotland, he came to America to take charge of the Presbyterian Church in Johnstown. Speaking of him, she wrote 'The being I loved best on earth at that time was the gray-haired, heavy-browed, high-cheeked parson, and not a day passed without my seeing him. I loved as a child always loves one who is kind and tender, and who is never weary in answering satisfactorily endless questions' (*ibid* p 19). Indeed, she credits him with the cultivation of her intellectual development, awakening 'in my young and receptive brain a taste for rhetoric' (*ibid* p 20). He regaled her with tales of life in his native Scotland, and she suggests that these early memories prepared her well for the visits she would make to Scotland in the course of her career.

A major influence in the direction that Stanton's life was to take was caused by a tragedy in the family. When she was eleven years old, her beloved elder brother, who had just graduated from Union College, came home to die. He was the pride of his father's life, and had been a young man of great talent

and promise, destined to join his father in the law firm. Believing that she could, in some way, make up for his death, she climbed upon her father's knee to comfort him. His response to this act was to set the seal on the future of his daughter, 'Oh, my daughter, would that you were a boy!' (*ibid* p 23). This incident was to change the course of Stanton's life, 'Then and there I resolved that I would not give so much time as heretofore to play, but would study and strive to be at the head of all my classes and thus delight my father's heart. All that day and far into the night I pondered the problem of boyhood. I thought that the chief thing to be done in order to equal boys was to be learned and courageous. So I decided to study Greek and learn to manage a horse' (*ibid* p 23). The next day, she questioned her beloved Pastor, 'Doctor, which do you like best, boys or girls?' His unequivocal response - 'Why, girls, to be sure; I would not give you for all the boys in Christendom' - (*ibid* p 23) gladdened the heart of his young protégée, but did nothing to dampen her ardour for instruction in all the masculine skills.

The Pastor's library became a second home to Stanton, as she strove to acquire all the masculine skills. She learnt to drive, and horseride, studied Latin, Greek and mathematics with a class of boys much older than herself, taking the second prize for Greek at the village academy. She recalls how, as soon as school was dismissed, she ran to her father's office and laid the Greek Testament on his table, certain now of his endorsement; the ramifications of his resultant, 'Ah, you should have been a boy!' turned her 'joy to ashes', and inevitably hardened her resolve towards equalising the sexes, even at this early stage. It was around this time that she was also to lose her close friend and confidant, her 'noble and generous friend' as she referred to her pastor. In his will, he bequeathed to her his Greek lexicon, Testament and grammar, and four volumes of *Scott's Commentaries*. She acknowledges, 'I never look at these books without a feeling of thankfulness that in childhood I was blessed with such a friend and teacher' (*ibid* p 26).

The foregoing identifies the dominant familial and cultural influences which contributed towards the political and theological arguments of the mature Stanton. On the one hand, there is an image of a loving home life, but

alongside this picture, there is the subtle, yet pernicious subordinating of the female. This clearly influenced Stanton's work as a leading campaigner for the Women's Rights Movement. At the same time, she started to become aware of other injustices in society. The prejudice displayed in the church against their coloured friend and carer disturbed her deeply, but it was the treatment of her own sex by their fathers, husbands and brothers which appeared to cause most consternation.

Her awareness of inequities in the law was stimulated by time spent in her father's office. Most of her time outside school, she began to spend amongst the lawyers. The tears and complaints of the women who came to her father for legal advice touched her heart. Her attention was drawn to the injustice and cruelty of the laws. In her neighbourhood, many men still retained the old feudal ideas of women and property, and many of the women seeking advice had been made unhappy dependants of their sons, destitute and subject to the congeniality of their daughters-in-law.

Injustices meted out to women in the name of law had convinced Stanton of the need to take active oppositional measures. The budding reformer decided to take all her father's statute books and cut out the offending laws. Her plan was discovered but an idea was planted in her mind by her father. 'When you are grown up, and able to prepare a speech, you must go down to Albany and talk to the legislators;' he said, 'tell them all you have seen in this office - the sufferings of these Scotchwomen, robbed of their inheritance and left dependent on their unworthy sons, and, if you can persuade them to pass new laws, the old ones will be a dead letter' (*ibid* p 34). Thus the seeds of discontent were sown, to bear fruit over the next half century.

The correlative to this 'legal' training, was a religious conversion experience. For the purpose of this thesis, this is perhaps the more significant. Stanton was still effectively a child, some fourteen years of age, but totally preoccupied with the old dogma of Calvinism. Sermons on predestination, justification by faith and eternal damnation darkened her days. She wrote, 'I can truly say that all the cares and anxieties, the trials and disappointments of

my whole life, are light, when balanced with my sufferings in childhood and youth from the theological dogmas which I sincerely believed, and the gloom connected with everything associated with the name of religion, the church, the graveyard, and the solemn, tolling bell. Everything connected with death was then rendered inexpressibly dolorous.....At the grave came the sober warnings to the living, and sometimes frightful prophecies as to the state of the dead. All this pageantry of woe and visions of the unknown land beyond the tomb, often haunted my midnight dreams and shadowed the sunshine of my days' (*ibid* p 26).

The next year saw her attendance at Mrs. Willard's Seminary at Troy, a fashionable school for girls, and whilst this period was influential in her scholastic and literary growth, it also witnessed the culmination of her harrowing religious experiences. The Rev Charles G Finney became her tormentor. He was a terrifier of human souls, emphasising God's hatred of sin, and His irreconcilable position toward the sinner. Even the most innocent girl believed herself a monster of iniquity! Doctor Finney preached the depravity and deceitfulness of the human heart, until Stanton could bear it no longer. So dismayed did she become, that a fear of the Judgment seized her soul, 'Visions of the lost haunted my dreams. Mental anguish prostrated my health' she wrote, 'Returning home, I often at night roused my father from his slumbers to pray for me lest I should be cast into the bottomless pit before morning' (*ibid* p 48). Fearing for her health, her parents sent her away and she recollects: 'My religious superstitions gave place to rational ideas based on scientific facts, and in proportion, as I looked at everything from a new standpoint, I grew more and more happy, day by day' (*ibid* p 49).

Connections between the law, politics and religion instilled into the mind of the young Stanton, made a powerful contribution to the widely divergent literary genres she employed in her attempt to reform society. She was a regular contributor to the daily and weekly press⁸³, and the first three volumes of the *History of Woman Suffrage* stand to her credit. A public address given in 1848 and later used as a source for short published articles, exposes the

⁸³ More will be written on the newspaper she founded, in further chapters.

beginnings of a religious sentiment clearly at odds with patriarchal theological exegesis: 'There is a class of men', she suggests, 'who believe in the natural inborn, inbred superiority both in body and mind and their full complete Heaven descended right to lord it over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, the beast of the field - and last tho' not least the immortal being called woman.' She urges this group towards an: 'attentive perusal of their Bibles - to historical research, to foreign travel...' and with an audacious twist, invites them to: 'closer observation of the manifestations of mind about them and to an humble comparison of themselves with such women as Catharine of Russia, Elizabeth of England distinguished for their statesmanlike qualities, Harriet Martineau and Madam de Stael for their literary attainments, or Caroline Herschel and Mary Summerville [sic] for their scientific researches, or for physical equality to that whole nation of famous women the Amazones.'⁸⁴ Stanton was intent on lifting contemporary conceptions of the feminine and was convinced, as were More and Wollstonecraft, that the improvement of the race was the prerogative of women. An article published on 30 September 1852 emphasises: 'We want the right sort of public sentiment and the most efficient means of obtaining it, is to place the right sort of reading in every family, that the women and children may be informed, and keep up such an incessant talking about voting for temperance men, that their husbands and fathers will be compelled for peace's sake, if no other, to cast their votes for honest, humane, total abstinence men.'⁸⁵ She clearly gave to 'women and children' a purity of sentiment capable of reforming louche and undesirable masculine behaviour.

Didactic and reforming official suffrage documents and appeals poured from the pen of this avid promotor of liberty. It would be difficult to examine Stanton's writing and not acknowledge her tremendous influence on the Suffrage Movement. This thesis will acknowledge that work, but its ultimate focus will be *The Woman's Bible*, written when she was aged eighty years. The preceding years had been spent lecturing widely as well as writing; the years from 1880, however, she devoted largely to literary endeavours. In

⁸⁴ A.D.Gordon (ed) *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, (Rutgers University Press, 1997), p 98, vol 1.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, p 206.

fact, the age of the authors is worthy of note; the profound nature of the texts to be considered owes more to the intrepid tendencies of youth. These, however, were not the babblings of young radicals, Hannah More was seventy years old when she wrote *Practical Piety*, Mary Baker Eddy was well into middle age when she wrote *Science & Health*. These important texts were the result of lives lived in a society and culture which favoured patriarchy, and written in an era in which religious leaders were expected to be men. The fact then that these women wrote and were published at all was remarkable, but their promotion of a 'maternal' image of God and its consequent 'election' of the female made a powerful contribution towards the spiritual authorisation of womanhood.

The chapter will conclude by examining the formative years of Mary Baker Eddy for the purpose of contextualising not only her early writing, but her ultimate argument, contained in *Key to the Scriptures*, for the spiritual equality of the sexes.

Mary Baker Eddy 1821-1910

Mary Baker Eddy was born in New Hampshire in 1821, forty years after the close of the American Revolution. Her cultural and religious heritage had been formed by the early puritans, the founding fathers of the United States of America. Having fled the religious oppression and corruption in the English Church, puritans saw themselves as having been divinely chosen to re-establish Christian purity in a new land. Indeed, these early puritans likened themselves to the children of Israel in their passage to the promised land.

The Bible was central to the life of Eddy's family. Each evening, along with her five siblings, she would listen to her father reading *The Bible*. Much of her early learning came from a close relationship with her grandmother who regaled her with tales of her Scottish ancestry. This grandmother, descended from the Scottish Covenanters instilled a religious quest in the mind of her grandchild: 'Your ancestors wrote their names on the covenant in blood,' she

told her, 'religion was more to our ancestors than their lives.'⁸⁶ She also talked at great length of that 'pious' authoress, Hannah More,⁸⁷ sharing early literary manuscripts that her mother had written. These discussions of literary talents imbued Eddy with a burning ambition and a hunger and thirst after divine things.

The Baker family had been in New England for six generations and were respected as valuable contributors to their community. Mark Baker, Eddy's father, was a Justice of the Peace for his township, a deacon of the church, a school committeeman and for many years chaplain of the state militia. Her mother, Abigail Ambrose, was the daughter of Deacon Nathaniel Ambrose, a public-spirited and pious man. The Rev'd Richard S Rust's memories of her were of a woman who 'possessed a strong intellect, a sympathizing heart, and a placid spirit, and as a mother was untiring in her efforts to secure the happiness of her family.'⁸⁸ Eddy inherited her mother's intellect and sensibilities; as a small child she was deeply concerned about the plight of animals, singing to comfort them. Equally, and unusually for a child, she liked to listen to the weightier political and religious conversations taking place between her father and his business associates.

Not unusually for that time, Mr Baker concentrated his attention on his sons. Albert Baker was destined to become a lawyer, but he and his young sister had a close bond. Desperate to become a scholar, she begged this brother to instruct her; when he questioned her as to the reason she wished to become a scholar, her reply set the seal on her future, 'Because when I grow up I shall write a book; and I must be wise to do it. I must be as great a scholar as you or Mr. Franklin Pierce. Already I have read Young's 'Night Thoughts,' and I understand it.'⁸⁹ True to his word, this young man instructed his sister in moral science, natural philosophy, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. At ten years of age she was as familiar with Lindley Murray as with the

⁸⁶ S. Wilbur, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy* (The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1907), p. 16.

⁸⁷ Eddy's paternal grandmother was a descendant of the McNeils of Edinburgh, whose parents went to America seeking religious liberty. It was through this bloodline that Eddy was believed to be related to Hannah More.

⁸⁸ *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 14.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 27.

Westminster Catechism which she had studied with her sisters every Sunday from babyhood. She was an apt pupil and learned quickly.⁹⁰

Like Stanton, Eddy's religious experience suffered a grave crisis; her father's bitter doctrine of predestination and terrifying decree of endless punishment caused her deep consternation; she was far more comfortable with the God of love portrayed by her mother. At the age of twelve, however, she was expected to agree the 'unconditional election' necessary to unite with the church. A deep wrestling of souls resulted from this demand, with the daughter resolutely refusing to go along with this concept. With her Pastor and all the eyes of the congregation upon her awaiting the necessary assurance that she had been 'truly regenerated' she spoke unhesitatingly 'I can only say in the words of the psalmist, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'⁹¹

The inner turmoil caused by this affair, caused the child to be stricken with a fever, but the experience proved to be an important one. She records in her autobiography, 'My mother, as she bathed my burning temples, bade me lean on God's love, which would give me rest if I went to Him in prayer, as I was wont to do, seeking His guidance. I prayed; and a soft glow of ineffable joy came over me. The fever was gone and I rose and dressed myself in a normal condition of health. Mother saw this and was glad. The physician marveled; and the "horrible decree" of Predestination - as John Calvin rightly called his own tenet - forever lost its power over me.'⁹² Her mother, as had Stanton's, sent her daughter away for a while in an attempt to restore her peace of mind. This period witnessed some of her first attempts at poetry as she strove to purge a troubled soul. These first lispings witnessed a rapturous love of nature, and a confident affirmation that hope in God lifted the thought to higher regions where it was able to 'soar above

⁹⁰ Her first cousin, H.H.Smith, suggested: 'Her brother Albert was one of the ablest lawyers of New Hampshire; but Mary was deemed the most scholarly member of her family.' *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 8.

⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 31.

⁹² M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works* 'Retrospection and Introspection', p. 22.

matter and fasten on God.⁹³ Her poems will be examined throughout the thesis, as one of the many genres she used to press her perspective.

By the age of fifteen years, Eddy had come into contact with a pastor who was to have an important influence on her spiritual growth. The Rev Enoch Corser was a man of liberal culture, and according to his son, came to regard the young woman as the brightest pupil he had ever had. She must have made a strong impression on this old Calvinist preacher as he told his son, 'I never before had a pupil with such depth and independence of thought. She has some great future, mark that. She is an intellectual and spiritual genius.'⁹⁴ To the young woman, he remarked, 'Mary, your poetry goes beyond my theology, why should I preach to you!'

These formative years prepared Eddy for the literary career which was to follow. The 'independence of thought' allied to an education and a humanitarian spirit became the basis from which she embarked upon her career. Indeed, at the age of sixteen, she was writing for the leading newspapers and magazines in the South and North of the country. She was also becoming acknowledged as a fine young poet amongst her literary circle.

A letter written in that period between childhood and womanhood shows the state of mind with which she would meet some of the first dramatic challenges of her life. Written to her friend Augusta Holmes in 1841, it is a typical correspondence between two friends and though marked by an overt poetic sentiment, discloses the issues uppermost in her mind at this time; friendship, illness and a marked contrast between cold-hearted, insensitive man and the feminine, feeling heart:

Ever dear Augusta,

Can I ever, ever tell you my health will permit of my again enjoying one of the richest of heaven's earthly blessings, "the society of friends"? No Augusta, I fear not; but pardon, pardon,

⁹³ S. Wilbur, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 32.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 35.

my gloomy strain, for it is certainly some pleasure to have a sympathizing friend, to whom we can unbosome our very heart, or rather tell some of its secrets, for there are some feelings that can better be felt, than described, such as disappointed [sic] expectations - this, [ERASED] as when a heady perfumes of grief [?] [END ERASE]

Dear Augusta, is the corroding canker of a youthfull, [sic] a and ardent mind, and Oh! the monotony of books, books with an agreeable variety of pain; surely Augusta, I could say with Biron,[sic] "it be hardly life to bear within myself this barrenness of spirit" was it not for absent friends, and those near me too, and this sweet, cherrished [sic] remembrance, comes oer my spirits like a spell, and the only cloud that can forego this, is the thoughts of a lingering disease. To die, is almost denied me! but why complain? will not he that tempers the wind to the shorn Lamb, be mindful of me also? Yes Augusta, I know it; and I will try to rally my spirits and congratulate you on your heroism last evening, and I shall call you the heroine too, of that group of ladies that deserve a monument. How I should enjoyed [sic] being by your side, doing good; making cold hearted man raise his standard of female excelence,[sic] still higher. - Oh! what what an exhibition of philosophy, this the first of my note, but do excuse it, for the heart directed, not the head of your friend, in adversity, or prosperity, the same Mary M. Baker.⁹⁵

'What an exhibition of philosophy' indeed, is exhibited in the rather over-sentimentalised poetic tenor of this 'heart directed' correspondence to her friend. The literary self-consciousness of the writer emerges through a rather adolescent style which parodies a literary conceit made popular by the portrayal of 'virtue in distress' in literature of sensibility. There is nevertheless,

a meaningful strain to be detected behind this extravagant posturing
⁹⁵ Certain items in this thesis are from The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity and are used courtesy of The Mary Baker Eddy Collection: this letter is part of an early collection of her writings Exhibit No. [L02678]

sentimentality; the value of friendship, indeed four references in this short letter. It also identifies the moral potential of a 'group of ladies' on the reformation of male manners.

The year 1841 witnessed events which were to have a dramatic effect on Eddy; her beloved brother Albert died. His death was a calamity for the family, who had pinned such hopes on his future, but Eddy was inconsolable, her grief knew no bounds. The death of an elder brother had a similar effect on the lives of both Eddy and Stanton disrupting the hierarchical balance in each family. It was the arrival of her future husband which brought a sense of stability back into the life of Eddy: she married George Washington Glover in 1843 and moved with him to South Carolina. This move to the South brought out another facet in the mind of the young woman - faced with the whole question of slavery, she became an outspoken abolitionist. She endeavoured to influence her husband to free the slaves on his property, arguing that it was a sin to 'own' another human being. At the same time she created a dissenting public dialogue on the issue of black slaves, writing prolifically for local publications.

Her life, however, was to take another unexpected turn: her devoted husband died within the first year of marriage. A business trip to North Carolina, on which her husband insisted she join him (her abolitionist demands had made her unpopular and he feared for her safety) witnessed the death of the young man from a raging epidemic of yellow fever. Eddy was left, a young and by now pregnant, widow.

The following five years were traumatic ones: her mother died, and her own health became so precarious that family members decided her child should be cared for by Mahala Sanborn, the woman indeed who had been engaged to care for Eddy. Thus in the space of a few years, she lost her brother, husband, mother and son. The Sanborns moved States taking George with them and it was to be some forty years before mother and son were united.

The words of a poem *O For Thy Wings, Sweet Bird!* (published in August 1849) evidence her tenuous state:

Blessed compared with me thou art -
Unto thy greenwood home
Bearing no bitter memory at heart;
Wearing no earthly chain,
Thou canst in azure bright soar far above;
Nor pinest thou in vain
O'er joys departed, unforgotten love.
O take me to thy bower!
Beguile the lagging hours of weariness
With strain which hath strange power
To make me love thee as I love life less!

From mortal consciousness
Which binds to earth - infirmity of woe!
Or pining tenderness -
Whose streams will never dry or cease to
flow;

An aching, voiceless void,
Hushed in the heart whereunto none reply,
And in the cringing crowd
Companionless! Bird, bear me through
the sky!⁹⁶

An overwhelming sadness pervades each stanza, that one word 'companionless' portrays the agonizing desolation. Its tone mirrors that of Wollstonecraft in *Mary* (p. 73): 'In moments of solitary sadness, a gleam of joy would dart across her mind - She thought she was hastening to that world.....' Both women had a vision of a higher and better world; a world that offered freedom from the bitter restrictions and earthly chains of this one.

⁹⁶ M.B.Eddy, *Poems* (Allison V.Stewart, Boston, USA Falmouth and St. Paul Streets, 1911,) p. 34.

There is a notable lack of contrivance in this poem, distancing it from some of her earlier writing. A literary self-consciousness has been replaced, personal and life-changing experiences have led to an obvious literary maturing, in turn, igniting a responsive condolence in the heart of the reader. In style and tone it has similarities to Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

That these harsh experiences contributed towards a spiritual awakening and ultimate transformation is apparent when reading part of a later address to the Concord Church in February 1899: 'Remember, thou canst be brought into no condition, be it ever so severe, where Love has not been before thee and where its tender lesson is not awaiting thee. Therefore despair not nor murmur, for that which seeketh to save, to heal, and to deliver, will guide thee, if you seekest this guidance.'⁹⁷

The inequalities, however, which were embedded in the secular notion of a civil society deeply concerned Eddy. The American Declaration of Independence had failed to include women in its demand for human equality and political freedom, as had the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* had attempted to address the argument that full citizenship and individual rights should be extended to all. Eddy was equally determined to negotiate a position for women through an aggrandizement of the female virtues: 'Woman, she writes, should not be ordered to the rear, or laid on the rack, for joining the overture of angels. Theologians descant pleasantly upon free moral agency; but they should begin by admitting individual rights'.⁹⁸ Eddy clearly empathises with and reinforces More's earlier argument that the conduct of women was ultimately 'one of the principal hinges on which the great machine of human society turns.'⁹⁹

⁹⁷ M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works Miscellany*, p. 149. A paper presented to the New England American Studies Association held at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, April 28, 2002, entitled 'Understanding Mary Baker Eddy' by Thomas Johnsen suggests: '...the very circumstances which seemed crushing in her life became a driving force behind her break with theologies which held at arm's length (or so it seemed to her) the immediacy of the divine reality, "We are hungry for Love..." she wrote in a Christmas message in the 1890s; "we are tired of theoretic husks..."'

⁹⁸ *Prose Works No and Yes*, p. 46.

⁹⁹ H. More, *The Works of Hannah More*. 'Essays on Various Subjects Principally Designed for Young Ladies'. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), p. 552, vol 2.

The moral language of the literary and cultural contributions of these four writers indicates their early commitment to upholding the spiritual potential of womanhood. The implications of these perspectives will be examined as the thesis progresses.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the formative years of Wollstonecraft, More, Stanton and Eddy for the purpose of identifying the familial and cultural influences they were subjected to. It has suggested that they witnessed social, political and religious injustice from an early age which led them to question the place of women in society. It has shown that religious conditioning caused deep unrest in that *their* understanding of Christ's message did not sit comfortably alongside patriarchal theological practice. Their early writing, I would suggest, was a form of self-definition, reflecting a growing awareness of their subjugated place in a patriarchal society. Acknowledging that each woman possessed a high intellect and spirit of sensibility, this chapter has identified religion as possibly the single most important influence in their reforming impulse and the basis upon which their later political, moral and spiritual arguments were constructed.

The next chapter will investigate their foray into public morality. The anti-slavery movement gave a focus and impetus to their reforming literary zeal: cold-hearted cruelty became associated with the public masculine world of commerce and this portrayal allowed women to seize the high moral ground, increasing their authority and respect from within the private sphere of the home. Drawing on Christian symbolism, their abolition discourse marked a sharp change of tone and technique. The heart susceptible to another's feelings had a new way of expressing itself - reading, writing and campaigning resulted in a literary maturing of these women. The language of sentimental friendship was to be replaced by religious and political rhetoric which sought to connect femininity with piety and public virtue. There are clear

connections between sentimentality and the anti-slavery movement and women of sensibility were not slow to build upon their earlier arguments for a more just and compassionate society. This traumatised period allowed women to challenge patriarchal religious and political codes, seize the day and demand legislative reform; they wrote avidly for the cause, at the same time validating and empowering the role of women in society.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RELIGIOUS IS PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

'The well intentioned and well- principled author, who has uniformly thrown all his weight, though that weight be but small, into the right scale, may have contributed his fair proportion to that great work of reformation,' Hannah More.¹⁰⁰

'Can we suppose that the omniscient God would have given these unqualified commands to powerless, incapable unimpressible beings?' Hannah More. ¹⁰¹

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the authors created a dialogue which contrasted effectively the purity of female virtue with the hypocritical political scene. Through appropriate language, they connected women and motherhood with a spiritual authority and responsibility for refining a brutal world order. The sharpening of divisions between the private and public spheres in this period allowed them to argue from a space which emphasised the superiority of female values; benevolence, tenderness and mercy they believed, had the power to overturn public corruption and hypocrisy, and the anti-slavery movement was the cause which inspired and impelled them. As chapter one of this thesis suggested, each woman possessed an innate humanitarian spirit, a sensitivity to the suffering of others, and a desire to bear witness to a God of love: a God who cared for His creation¹⁰², *all* his creation equally. Such was their conviction they were able to transcend prescribed doctrinal dogma in their demand for a spiritual and moral reform.

This 'cause' proved to be one in which women excelled. The inevitable conclusions drawn from the anti-slavery campaign led to demands for female liberty and the abolition of slavery in the home. Hannah More's satirical essay *The White Slave Trade - Hints towards forming a Bill for the Abolition of the White Female Slave Trade, in the Cities of London and Westminster* is a powerful proselytising essay on behalf of women.

The cause of abolition was significantly enhanced through the fashionable

¹⁰⁰ *The Works of Hannah More* (T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1818), p. xx, vol 1.

¹⁰¹ *Practical Piety*, p. 17.

¹⁰² 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. *Holy Bible*, Galatians 3:28.

literary cult of sensibility, and women writers used anti-slavery rhetoric in an attempt to reform on a grand scale. The ethics of benevolence gained momentum with women taking the lead in transforming anti-slavery into a mass movement. Women only organisations were formed, and the experience gained in the cause of abolition was used in promoting their arguments for female equality. Indeed women were responsible for a quarter of all the anti-slavery poems written in the eighteenth century. Through subsequent involvement in political movements they devised methods of extraparliamentary agitation with the express purpose of effecting legislative change: 'Many hands of moderate strength and ability may,' argued More 'by cooperation do that which a very powerful individual might have failed to accomplish.'¹⁰³

These female writers were not of course the first women to attempt reform. What was noteworthy about them, however, was their ability to move easily through multiple genres to reach their readership, both male and female. The apparent ease with which their didactic arguments drew on a political and religious vernacular was particularly impressive. A more usual genre for female authors was the novel, and the eighteenth century witnessed a significant number of women writing fiction.¹⁰⁴ The identification of female authors with this type of literature, however, tended to reinforce a hierarchy of genres, political discourse usually being associated with a masculine and more powerful literary style. The chapter will chart their deployment of literary strategies, their progress towards finding a public voice, suggesting that private letters may well have been a rehearsal for their public discourse.

The social and economic upheaval that accompanied the eighteenth century had a tremendous influence on the cultural fabric of Great Britain and beyond. Significant changes emerged during the decades in which Hannah More,

¹⁰³ *The Works of Hannah More*, p. xx, vol 1.

¹⁰⁴ Their writing style may have been influenced by the negative connotations associated with female literature. Fordyce suggested these novels: 'are in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous, and contain such rank treason against the royalty of Virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute.....' James Fordyce, from 'Sermons to Young Women, 1766'. V. Jones (ed), *Women in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p.176.

Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Baker Eddy lived and worked. Industrialisation and population growth led to a burgeoning of the middle classes and their influence. Challenges to the religious monopoly of Anglicanism by dissenting nonconformists on both sides of the Atlantic, and an erosion of the influence of the monarchy served to create tensions which contributed to an undermining of the old social order. Gender roles in this crucial period underwent dramatic changes.¹⁰⁵

Of equal importance, to the argument of this thesis, came the opportunity for women of strong religious conviction to evade cultural silencing: their galvanizing of public opinion was fundamental to their reforming influence. Writing by women attempted to dovetail sentimental attitudes with religious ideals and in turn served to inspire an appreciation of the 'feminine'. More's 'practical' Christianity won her admiration and support from some of the leading politicians of the day. William Wilberforce firmly believed that true believers needed a more realistic and practical way of living Christianity, suggesting:

Christianity appears to me to consider the world as in a state of alienation from God, as lost in depravity and guilt; pointing out at the same time 'how we may escape from the wrath to come,' from the natural consequences of that guilt and depravity; and not only how we may be absolved from the guilt, but emancipated from the power of moral corruption. This must be effected by the power of the Holy Spirit It ought to be the grand object of every moral writer ... to produce in us that true and just sense of the intensity of the malignity of sin and of the real magnitude of our danger, which would be likely to dispose us to exert ourselves to the utmost to obtain deliverance from the condemnation of emancipation from the power of sin.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ See: L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987, rpt 1992, 1994, 1997), p. 416, and R. Ruland & M. Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism A History of American Literature* (Penguin Books, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ R. Isaac & S. Wilberforce (eds), *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce* (London: John Murray, 1840), W. Wilberforce to Ralph Creyke, 8 January, 1803. pp. 247-253.

Emancipation from 'the power of moral corruption' was at the heart of these writers' didactic works and this chapter will attempt to demonstrate how each woman strove to promote in mankind a true and just sense of morality. Investing this higher moral code with a feminised perspective allowed women's sympathetic virtues to be more clearly discerned and appreciated. The depravity which engulfed the black slave trade, the immorality which reduced women to simpering playthings¹⁰⁷ witnessed distinctive literary responses - satire and sensibility mingled with political discourse - and their strategies will be closely examined in this chapter.

Their efforts to emancipate humanity from 'the power of sin' were rooted in that eighteenth-century cultural phenomenon of 'sensibility.'¹⁰⁸ The cultivation of sensibility took on an immense moral significance. This heightened consciousness of feeling was largely identified with women and promoted an association between religion and the heart. More considered that sensibility sponsored a special propensity in women for the Christianity that elevated them: 'Christianity' she suggested 'has exalted women to true and undisputed dignity... equally with men redeemed by the blood of Christ.'¹⁰⁹ Whilst the tender, ministering qualities characterised the feminine, the masculine demeanour was represented as more aggressive, unsympathetic, heartless even. This chapter will suggest that the cause of abolition gave an urgency and legitimacy to the humanitarian arguments of these women as they sought to authorise the feminine.

The structural order of this chapter is such as to compare the 'anti-feminist' (or covert feminism) of More and Eddy with the overtly 'feminist' arguments of Wollstonecraft and Stanton. This arrangement allows the chapter to emphasise the inherent suggestion of the thesis that the later 'American' sisters appear to build on the earlier arguments of their British counterparts.

¹⁰⁷ 'Why must the female mind be tainted by coquetish arts to gratify the sensualist?' asks Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ See G.J.Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁹ *Strictures*, p. 33.

The Grand Object - Emancipation from Moral Corruption

In the general preface to *The Works of Hannah More*, she suggests: 'Between him who writes and him who reads, there must be a coalition of interests, something of a partnership, however unequal the capital, in mental property.'¹¹⁰The 'coalition of interests' in this period was the religious revivalism surfacing on both sides of the Atlantic. This re-awakened blend of religious enthusiasm was characterised by its strong emphasis towards moral and social reform. The distinguishing feature of this evangelical movement was the personal conversion its followers experienced. Along with this experience came the desire to convert and save souls on a grand scale. The period from 1787 to 1792 witnessed an alliance between radical dissenters and conservative evangelists for the purpose of promoting the abolition campaign. The orientation of the culture of sensibility towards reform gave power to the female writers of the period. From the fusion of sensibility with evangelism there emerged a humanitarian reforming zeal which contributed to the abolition of the slave trade.

In 1788, More attempted to assist Wilberforce¹¹¹ at the opening of his parliamentary campaign against the slave trade. At his request she wrote her poem *The Black Slave Trade*, a powerful rendering of anti-slavery rhetoric. The literary style mirrored the popular verse style of the period - heroic couplets; the equipoise of the couplet form, however, is in distinct contrast to the 'aggravated sin' being addressed and the ordered nature of her writing style serves to emphasise the grotesque disorder being addressed:

If Heaven has into being deign'd to call
Thy light, O LIBERTY! to shine on all;
Bright intellectual Sun! why does thy ray
To earth distribute only partial day?

This stanza poses a question: acknowledging that the poem is addressed to

¹¹⁰ *The Works of Hannah More*, p. xxiii, vol 1.

¹¹¹ William Wilberforce 1759-1833 - Yorkshire MP from Hull. Leading layman of the evangelical 'Clapham Set' and powerful campaigner for the cause of abolition.

the middle and upper class traditional Christian practitioner, it is an intriguing strategy, because whilst these lines pose a question, they obliquely answer it. Christian doctrine recognises the impartiality of God's light, and this basic Christian truth is supported by God and nature. Anything then that opposes this law of God, or anyone who does not actively oppose the perpetuation of this pernicious inhumanity is not exemplifying the teachings of Christ Jesus. Bearing in mind More's assertion that Christianity underlies sensibility, she adroitly establishes heavenly authority as the chief criterion in the overthrow of human slavery. More persists in questioning vein:

Why should fell darkness half the South invest?
Was it decreed, fair Freedom! at thy birth,
That thou shou'd'st ne'er irradiate *all* the earth?
While Britain basks in thy full blaze of light,
Why lies sad Afric quench'd in total night?

The frequent references to light and dark emphasise the inequity between Britain and Africa. The liberal use of question marks impels her readers to examine their conscience, while use of figures of sound combined with her apostrophizing works to convey an immense strength of feeling:

The cause I plead shall sanctify my song.
The Muse awakes no artificial fire,
For Truth rejects what Fancy wou'd inspire;
Here Art wou'd weave her gayest flow'rs in vain,
The bright invention Nature wou'd disdain.
For no fictitious ills these numbers flow,
But living anguish, and substantial woe;
No individual griefs my bosom melt,
For millions feel what Oronoko¹¹² felt;
Fir'd by no single wrongs, the countless host
I mourn, by rapine dragg'd from Afric's coast.

¹¹² *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* was an anti-slavery play written by Aphra Behn. More was influential in persuading the Manager of the Drury Lane Theatre to perform 'Oroonoko' as a way of reaching three thousand people each performance.

The cause or purpose is sanctified, born of a holy and sacred intent to wash away the sins of the world, instigating a renewed religious fervour. Artifice, contrivance and duplicity are anathema to Hannah More; her writing is from the heart and she speaks to the heart of her reader. The intuitive Christian heart cannot be influenced by fictitious ills. More's use of rhetoric is factually persuasive. 'Living anguish' and 'substantial woe' imply large scale suffering. This image is reinforced by her juxtaposing of words such as 'individual' 'single' and 'my bosom' alongside 'substantial' 'millions' and 'countless'. In the space of a few lines she has syntactically engaged the thought of the reader with the vast scale of the inhumanity. This was the period of 'the Englishman's home is his castle.' The family and household were of central importance, the home representing the core of family life, a protective shelter from the outside world. The female influence at the heart of the home nurtured and protected the emotional stability of the family. Socially and culturally, the home became the key locale from which to promote virtue and order. More's literary portrayal adeptly invades this cosy domestic scene in an attempt to disrupt its inherent complacency. This strategy is calculated to integrate and involve the reader in an attempt to stir the soul, the innermost feelings towards something better, higher, holier.

More widens her approach:

Perish th' illiberal thought which would debase
The native genius of the sable race!
Perish the proud philosophy, which sought
To rob them of the powers of equal thought!
Does then the immortal principle within
Change with the casual colour of a skin?
Does matter govern spirit? or is mind
Degraded by the form to which 'tis join'd?
No; they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,
And souls to act.....

The intolerance of narrow-mindedness is attacked, along with that

philosophical viewpoint which argued for the inherent inferiority of the black peoples. Exclamation marks represent strong, sudden cries which invite reader response and in effect encourage a mental jolt. Rhyming couplets - 'Does then the immortal principle within/ Change with the casual colour of a skin?' are used satirically to burlesque effect. The colour of skin as of any relevance to the heart, soul or mind of man she discredits with the use of that one word 'casual'. Following the exclamations and questions, the abrupt 'No' brings with it a powerful implication: 'they have heads to think, and hearts to feel/ And souls to act'. The human responses of thinking, feeling and acting are precisely the senses More is appealing to. Her readers have been invited to think, she now moves them to 'feel':

Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,
Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;
I see, by more than fancy's mirror shows,
The burning village and the blazing town;
See the dire victim torn from social life,
The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife;
She, wretch forlorn! is dragg'd by hostile hands,
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!

Using a rhetoric of suffering, More endeavours to make the torment tangible. The clipped forceful phrases are rich in verbal texture, alliteration and syntax being used to emotional effect. More has a clear mental image which the words impart with precision. So clearly is she able to behold the images of barbarism, she writes as a witness to these events, giving her words the authority of a factual account. The frequent use of the letter 's' slows the reader, giving him more time to feel and see. More's juxtaposing of the familiar images of village, town and social life with its implication of public civic community, is disturbing when set alongside the 'hostile hands' of the tyrants perpetrating acts of terror to mothers and babies. Africa is presented as civilised and domestic, Britain as savage and tyrannical. Having commanded her readers to think and feel, More's instructions reach a climax:

Barbarians, hold! th' opprobrious commerce spare,
Respect His sacred image which they bear.
Though dark and savage, ignorant and blind,
They claim the common privilege of kind;
Let malice strip them of each other plea,
They still are men, and men should still be free.

The order is specific, personal and shocking in its implication: 'Barbarians, hold!', the British middle and upper classes had believed the primitive communities and tribes of black Africa to be barbarians. More, however, brings them face to face with their own barbarism. They were indeed as guilty, if not more so, than the slaves they sought to subjugate and control, whose only fault, she suggests, was ignorance and blindness. The narrative of this poem served to alert, shock and humiliate its readers, demanding that professing Christians practise their alleged faith. More's zealous advocacy for the cause of Christianity is apparent in the evangelistic tone of the final stanza, her demand for spiritual equality being rooted in the teachings of her faith: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.'¹¹³

And Thou! great source of nature and of grace,
Who of one blood didst form the human race;
Look down in mercy in thy chosen time,
With equal eye on Afric's suffering clime:
Disperse her shades of intellectual night,
Repeat thy high best - Let there be light!
Bring each benighted soul, great God, to Thee,
And with thy wide salvation make them free!¹¹⁴

The epic nature of More's poem is manifested in its concluding stanza where her poetic strategy draws together the three great causes which infuse her abolition rhetoric: humanitarian, political and religious themes. Global

¹¹³ *Holy Bible*, Galatians 3: 28

¹¹⁴ *The Works of Hannah More*, 'The Black Slave Trade', pp. 371-390, vol 1. This poem clearly builds upon an earlier one 'Slavery, A Poem' (London: T Cadell in the Strand, 1788), M.DCC.LXXXV111.

Christianisation resulting in salvation and liberty for all is the proselytising argument inherent in More's abolition discourse. This poem represents a powerful fusion of her belief system, containing the themes which will recur throughout the thesis and reflecting the ascending arguments which culminate in her demand for the granting of spiritual liberty to 'each benighted soul.' According to Robert Hole, this period was one of her most productive in terms of influence; her writing during the 1780s he suggests 'applied her religious belief to society and social life'. He further suggests that women were her primary target: 'She was convinced of their importance and influence. They had a vital role to play in the preservation of the traditional order of things.'¹¹⁵ The period from 1787 to 1792 witnessed a vigorous promoting of the abolition campaign and the endorsement of an alliance between radical dissenters and conservative evangelists for this purpose.

Abolition sentiment served to assist in the construction of a grand master discourse, a ceremonial literary style and epic spirit. The purity of moral sentiment inherent in abolition discourse also emphasised and empowered the sympathetic virtues inherent in womanhood. Clare Midgley argues that the sympathetic domestic femininity, constructed in the arguments of abolitionists, furnished women with a form of political agency.¹¹⁶ The poetic perspectives of Hannah More, imbricated as they were with hints of a 'feminised' Christianity made a powerful contribution to the authorising of women as reformers.

Interclass communication

'Women writers' suggests Krueger, 'most notably Hannah More, often dominated the creation of social narrative by adapting evangelical rhetorical strategies and conceptions of literary authority, drawing the political conclusions implicit in women preachers' writings.....'¹¹⁷ Acutely aware of the power of religion and education in controlling and informing the lower classes,

¹¹⁵ R. Hole. (ed), *The Selected Writings of Hannah More*, p. xxviii.

¹¹⁶ See Clare Midgley: *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹⁷ C. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance*, p 94.

these rhetorical strategies are evidenced in More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*. These *Tracts*, vested with a dual purpose, specifically brought the plight of the black slaves to the attention of the lower classes. They also served to press a moral theme; the saving influence of Christianity. The portrayal of religious conviction as able to make human suffering bearable was a powerful proselytising strategem. *The Evangelical Magazine* noted that 'More was the first to try her hand at interclass communication between England's two nations.'¹¹⁸

These *Tracts* ensured that the lower classes had access to her reforming crusade. Disturbed at the influence of Thomas Paine who was actively sowing the seeds of discontent, More presented through these *Tracts*, a type of domestic ideology. Emphasis was placed on the role of women and endorsement of the moral value of domestic duties: *A Cure for Melancholy* - 'Shewing the way to do much good with little money, written during the scarcity of 1794' - is a good example. This moral tale introduces Mrs Jones, a pious woman, 'the widow of a great merchant', who was rather 'too apt to indulge her sorrow....' Moved by a sermon on 'The Good Samaritan' Mrs Jones bemoaned her inability to 'go and do likewise.' Mr Edwards, the vicar, rebuked her sharply: 'You, madam, I will venture to say, might do more good than the richest man in the parish could do by merely giving his money.....bestir yourself to find out ways of doing much good with little money.....You have influence.....exert that influence.' Putting aside her sorrow, she emerges as a powerful force for good in the community; reforming cheating tradesmen, closing down alehouses and educating the women and children. The *Tract* eulogises: 'Thus Mrs. Jones, by a little exertion and perseverance, added to the temporal comforts of a whole parish, and diminished its immorality and extravagance, in the same proportion.' To the Vicar's: 'Well Madam.... which is best, to sit down and cry over our misfortunes, or to bestir ourselves to do out duty to the world?' she replies; 'Sir....I thank you for the useful lesson....You have taught me that an excessive indulgence of sorrow is not piety, but selfishness; that the best remedy for our own afflictions is to lessen the afflictions of others, and thus

¹¹⁸ G.J.Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility : Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 224.

evidence our submission to the will of God....' This tract reflects More's agenda in terms of public welfare and moral and spiritual reform, it portrays female beneficence as the key to societal rehabilitation, and concludes: 'May all who read this account of Mrs. Jones, and who are under the same circumstances, *go and do likewise!*'¹¹⁹ More articulates her Evangelical ideology through a narrative frame which is not unlike the New Testament parables,¹²⁰ and Myers suggests: 'Through female influence and moral power, this cultural myth's new woman would educate the young and illiterate, succor the unfortunate, amend the debased popular culture of the lower orders, reorient worldly men of every class, and set the national house in order.'¹²¹

The success of these innovative *Tracts* is evident, as the thesis introduction identifies; by March 1796, 2,000,000 had been sold or given away to the poorer classes. Not only did More communicate to the 'two nations', the upper and lower classes that made up English society, but her influence crossed continents. *The Cheap Repository Tracts* formed a principal part of the English cottagers' library, and though evidently read much further afield, More's primary aim was the regulation of the behaviour of the working classes through Christianity. The evils of the slave trade allowed More to propagate her evangelical principles and the abolition campaign undoubtedly evinced an avenue through which the ethics of Christian benevolence could be transmitted. A contemporary of Hannah More, Anna Letitia Barbauld suggested: 'nothing...for centuries past, has done the nation so much honour.'¹²²

¹¹⁹ *The Works of Hannah More*, pp. 329 to 360, vol 4.

¹²⁰ Matthew 13: 'The same day went Jesus out of the house....And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. Therefore speak I to them in parables.....'

¹²¹ M.A.Schofield and C.Macheski, (eds), *Fetter'd or Free?: British Women Novelists 1670-1815*. M.Myers, "Hannah More's Tracts for the Times: Social Fiction and Female Ideology." (Ohio University Press, 1980) p.265.

¹²² W.McCarthy & E.Kraft, (eds), *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*. (The University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 285.

American Sensibilities - dissolution and reconstruction

'When the heart speaks, however simple the words, its language is always acceptable to those who have hearts,' Mary Baker Eddy. ¹²³

Notions of sentiment were permeating American political, spiritual and literary culture around the early to mid nineteenth century, a language of sympathy emerging as central to the developing ideas of citizenship and nationality. The language of patriotism and public virtue merged with domestic images, resulting in narrative which attempted to fuse the private sphere of women with the civic and public sphere of men. This period of American history is referred to by historians and literary critics as an emotionally disordered period, 'traumatised' even and 'anxious.' Henry Seidel suggests: 'Thoughtful Americans....had come to believe that the American dream of a brotherhood of equality had been sold in the market place and was indeed only a dream....'¹²⁴ Keith Stavely suggests that a secularisation of the Protestant ethic was, in effect, leading to an 'anarchy of individual consciences.' He writes: 'A society of that sort, one in which the Church was finally disestablished and social control maintained even more exclusively than before by "invisible, refined, spiritual ties, bonds of the mind and heart" was exactly what nineteenth century New England was.'¹²⁵

Literary women of the period did not miss the opportunity this social atmosphere offered to them, and Eddy's writing of this period concentrated on the cause of women, as well as abolition. In the November 1846 edition of *The Covenant*, she invites her readers to consider: 'woman's high and holy faith in the doctrines of divine inspiration, revealed in love....' Reflecting on the *nature* of womanhood, she identifies their 'sacred duties of a gifted destiny' suggesting that 'with martyr strength and trust in Heaven' they may 'exert this mysterious, potent influence over the minds of men - holding crime in awe,

¹²³ *Prose Works*, 'Miscellaneous Writings', p. 262.

¹²⁴ H. Seidel, *American Literature*, 'Decline and fall of Mark Twain', p. 167.

¹²⁵ K.W.F. Stavely, *Puritan Legacies, Paradise Lost and the New England Tradition 1830-1890* (Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 201.

reclaiming vice and smiling it into virtue.’¹²⁶ Arguing for the femininity of the “invisible, refined, spiritual ties, bonds of the mind and heart” Eddy proclaims: ‘Methinks if my pen was dipped in my heart, thus to transcribe from the tablets of feeling, it could not fail to waken oft the note responsive in other breasts, - to thrill the electric chain of being, which binds the happy, or links the unfortunate in tenderness unutterable;’ The ‘invisible’ links become identifiable as those spiritual qualities which bind the sisterhood of women with their families, individually and collectively:

Behold with woman’s nature, the ministering angel o’er the death couch, watch the scene till it darkens, when hope and love that so lately nestled warm in the bosom, is shrouded in the tomb! with life’s most fairy day-dreams of bliss and daring schemes, all, all, hurried into its oblivious vortex....Vast as the amount of human suffering, is the bow of Omnipotence, and the realm for good deeds in unostentatious record; “If an hungered or athirst, sick, naked or a stranger, ye ministered unto me.” Look again - we behold the mother.....Art thou incredulous still, dear reader, heareth thine own heart no silent testimony to these sublime truths?...Nay, rather, if it is not a glorious superstructure whose frame-work is sure, founded in *friendship*, reared in *love*, supported by *truth!* and woman, last at the cross and first at the sepulchre, were befitting its fairy guardian; yea, it *were* sullyng the chastity of her pure spirit, not to bid it God speed.¹²⁷

The demise of the American dream left in its wake a nation in need of ministering unto; female credentials fitted them for this important task. The mother country needed in effect, a gestation period in which to develop a reconstruction plan. Eddy’s use of sentimental language and imagery contributed towards portraying the female as an embodiment of the Christly

¹²⁶ This subject of female influence on their menfolk is reminiscent of More’s earlier arguments.

¹²⁷ *The Covenant*, Vol v, November, 1846. No. 11.

qualities and as such a sound frame-work upon which to build a new order.¹²⁸ A society which valued justice and freedom was one in which subjugation and slavery could not be tolerated. Through aesthetic discourse she underscored an ideology of separate spheres, appropriating meritorious qualities to the sphere inhabited by wives and mothers. These were very public proclamations of female excellence, and in a publication 'Devoted to the Cause of Odd-fellowship', were clearly addressed to a male readership.

The Covenant of May, 1847, however, included a publication with a different tone; it registered a literary shift from her earlier advancement of social appreciation for the value of woman, towards a more overt political rhetoric. *Erin, the Smile and the Tear in Thine Eyes*, witnessed her criticism of social inequity:

When Burke and Berkley are forgotton;[sic] when the name of Emmett shall cease to be spoken; when the last thunder-tones of O'Connell shall have died along the shore of the sweet isle of the ocean, then may Ireland be accused of want of intellect. The English philanthropist can view with telescopic eye, the *slave* writhing beneath the lash of the West India task-master, and his generous bosom heave with just indignation at the wrongs of suffering humanity.....But a change must come..... The civilized nations of the globe are beginning to take a more enlightened view of the relations they sustain to their fellow-men. Their religion is assuming a milder form, and a more liberal spirit is, becoming diffused through all the ramifications of their government.

Eddy seems to be suggesting that whilst there were clearly emerging signs, in some countries, of Enlightenment principles, England still retained a

¹²⁸ A paper by David J. Hufford, PhD. identifies the centrality of the notion of woman as minister, mother and nurse in Eddy's writings: 'documents show that, *nurse*, like mother, had become a central aspect of her thinking....these make it clear that for Mrs. Eddy the idea of nursing, is inextricable from that of motherhood and love, metaphoric and literal, often poetic, permeates her thinking from an early age.' The Mary Baker Eddy Library Core Collection, 'Spirituality and Health, A Preliminary Assessment,' May 2003. It is worth noting that Florence Nightingale (1821-1910) suggested that had she not gone into nursing she would have founded a religion.

bigoted, narrow-mindedness: 'When the English shall possess religion without bigotry, and their politicians legislate without parsimony, then shall Ireland "strike the bold anthem" of the free.....'¹²⁹ The sharp contrast between the nature and tone of these two publications reflects the author's deep concerns, but also her ability to move easily between political and sentimental rhetoric. They show how she effectively crossed the boundaries between private and public, creating a dialogue which allowed her to transcend traditional gender stereotyping. Through a language of sentiment she effectively defined the relationship between privacy and nationality, and identification of the spiritual worth of women worked to promote their reforming potential. To the 'pure spirit' of the female she urges - 'godspeed' - an effective instruction to an initiator of reform. She was aware nevertheless of a need to tread carefully in literary terms; Barker-Benfield identifies problems associated with reforming women writers: 'Women's self-assertion in writing was a declaration of war,' he suggests, 'threatening to disable men.'¹³⁰ Whilst conscious, therefore, of the shortcomings of those American theologians and politicians who failed to tackle effectively either the slavery problem or the woman question, Eddy's covert criticism came through a more surreptitious and thus less confrontational route.

On the 17 August, 1861, Eddy wrote to Major General Benjamin Butler, a prominent Civil War commander, in terms which appear to reflect her desire that women be seen to be morally active and politically informed:

Permit me individually, and as the representative of thousands of my sex in your native state, to tender the homage and gratitude due to you, one of her noblest sons, who so bravely vindicated the claims of humanity in your late letter to Secretary Cameron.

You dared to assume, in the dignity of defending with your latest breath our country's honour, a position of justice and equity.

The final solution of the great National query follows, - will it be

¹²⁹ *The Covenant*, Vol V1, May, 1847, No. 5. p. 409.

¹³⁰ G.J.Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 352.

rendered to black as well as white, men, women and children, whom you have the courage and honour to defend in this the hour of our Country's pain and purification?

You hold freedom to be the normal condition of those made in God's image. In this, the man, can only equal the soldier who lays down his life for his country, and by fairness of argument elucidates the justice which can save her, and transmit to posterity the success of a republican form of government in heritage perpetual, and undimmed in its lustre.

But I would not task your time or forbearance to persue [sic] farther comment on a letter which has thrilled with electric hope the homes and hearts of this section of our Country, -- hope in God and the Right.

The red strife between right and wrong can only be fierce, it cannot be long, and victory on the side of immutable justice will be well worth its cost.

Give us in the field or forum a brave Ben Butler and our Country is saved. Respectfully.....¹³¹

Eddy appears to have assumed, as did More, a mantle of spokesperson for her sex: and if, as suggested earlier, private letters were a rehearsal for public print, the language in this correspondence indicates her desire to connect the private character of women with the wider implications of citizenship. Whilst there may be an air of submissiveness in the opening paragraph, a patriotic tone soon emerges, mingling abolition and suffrage sentiment. Under the aegis of religious argument and in the name of honour, justice and equity she highlights the question of freedom being rendered to black as well as white, men, women, and children. Effectively reinforcing her argument she draws on combat rhetoric: 'In this, the man, can only equal the

¹³¹ ExhibitNo L02683 MBEL

soldier who lays down his life....' A patriotic sentiment is further augmented by references to 'a republican form of government' alongside words such as 'justice', 'heritage', 'lustre' and 'victory'. Mingling with the language of patriotism and public virtue Eddy is careful to include familial imagery: 'the hearts and homes' of the nation which are 'thrilled with electric hope.' It is interesting that she uses this 'electric' imagery again. This language is visual, and gives credence to a suggestion that the 'hearts and homes' are not a passive or subservient space, but rather, charged, vital, awaiting stimulation. Close analysis of this letter exposes a woman whose agenda was reform, and who was intent on defining the female qualities as those upon which a more virtuous society might be constructed. Butler's reply would have encouraged Eddy's pioneering spirit; his discharge of public duty he suggested was made easy by such commendations coming from the 'noble and loyal of the land.'¹³²

The New Century

Poetry had long been a genre through which Eddy registered her ideals; and nature and nurture are the notable features of *The New Century*. The style is simply structured around rhyming couplets and whilst the theme is a powerful argument for human rights, it draws on nature imagery and the ministering qualities of the maternal:

Tis writ on earth, on leaf and flower:
Love hath one race, one realm, one power.
Dear God! how great, how good Thou art
To heal humanity's sore heart;
To probe the wound, then pour the balm -
A life perfected, strong and calm.
The dark domain of pain and sin
Surrenders - Love doth enter in,
And peace is won, and lost is vice:

¹³² General Benjamin F. Butler's remarks can be found in his letter to her dated August 20, 1861, written by his Aid-de-camp on his behalf. MBEL (Incoming Correspondence File No. 653)

Right reigns, and blood was not its price¹³³ .

It is in its very simplicity that its authority lies, and the style, structure and sentiment of Eddy's poem parallel More's in *The Black Slave Trade*:

What page of human annals can record
A deed so bright as human rights restored?
O may that godlike deed, that shining page,
Redeem our fame, and consecrate our age!
And let this glory mark our favour'd shore,
To curb false freedom, and the true restore!
And see, the cherub Mercy from above,
Descending softly, quits the sphere of love!
On Britain's isle she sheds her heavenly dew;
From soul to soul the spreading influence steals,
Till every breast the soft contagion feels.
She speaks, exalting, to the burning shore,
With the best message angel ever bore:
Hark! 'tis the note which spoke a Saviour's birth!
Glory to God on high, and peace on earth
She vindicates the pow'r in heaven ador'd,
She cheers the mourner, and with soothing hands
From bursting hearts unbinds th' oppressor's bands;
Restores the lustre of the Christian name,
And clears the foulest blot that dimm'd its fame.

Humanitarian reform is the focus of both these poems: Eddy's: 'Tis writ on earth, on leaf and flower: Love hath one race, one realm, one power' coordinates with More's: 'A deed so bright as human rights restored'. The essential ingredient in these poems is the figure of virtuous femininity. There is convincing evidence through feminised representations of the part women are to play in this restorative period. The invocation of Mother Nature reaffirms this basic postulate. The 'soothing hands' which unbind the

¹³³ M.B.Eddy, *Poems*, p. 22.

'oppressor's bands' (More) and the 'healing' qualities required to 'probe the wound, then pour the balm -' (Eddy) represents an exaltation of maternal qualities. Indeed More identifies the 'cherub Mercy' as female. The tender compassion inherent within the feminine 'breathes **her** spirit o'er the enlighten'd few', spreading **her** influence, 'Till every breast the soft contagion feels.' Solace, consolation and comfort are pure expressions of maternal love. Richard Cadbury, the Quaker cocoa manufacturer spoke thus: 'Can Heaven bestow a warmer glow - Of sunshine from above - A purer, holier pledge below - Than in a mother's love.'¹³⁴

The combative and often aggressive characterisation of the masculine, its need to dominate and subdue, often at the expense of shedding blood, has been eclipsed: 'Right reigns, and blood was not its price.' These poems speak to the hearts of their readers, their chief aim being cultural and spiritual conversion. Gendered emphasis works to powerful effect, portraying a sisterhood of linked souls, which, once roused and stimulated conjoin in galvanizing public opinion towards a more just and benevolent society.

This part of the chapter has highlighted similarities in the arguments of More and Eddy. It has examined some of the different genres used to promote their reforming ideals, and suggested that whilst their stepping into the public sphere may have been considered adventurous, their literary tones were nevertheless tempered. The next part will explore the essentially 'feminist' radicalism of Wollstonecraft and Stanton and their reforming rhetoric.

Moral Indignation and Millenarianism

The powerful impetus given to feminist reforming writers through the anti-slavery campaign was evident in the revivalist evangelical message central to the arguments of both British and American reformers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Women were voluble as well as visible in the promotion of a reforming zeal. The New England Great Awakening witnessed converts at a ratio of three women to two men in the period 1798

¹³⁴ Davidoff L. & Hall C, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850*. (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 335.

to 1826¹³⁵ indicating the potential of proselytising women.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was married to an ardent young abolitionist and became a staunch campaigner for the cause. Under the aegis of abolitionism came the demand for freedom on a grand scale, with the rights of women becoming a key concern. The religious motivation for humanitarian reform gave women such as Susan B Anthony¹³⁶, Lucretia Mott¹³⁷, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton a powerful platform from which to demand equal rights for women. These two campaigns, abolition and women's rights, contributed to the burgeoning of a feminist consciousness, in America as well as Britain.

There is little doubt that Mary Wollstonecraft had been a tremendous influence on her American 'sisters'. She was considered a powerful contributor to the the feminist awakening in the United States: Cromwell notes that Lucretia Mott (one of the most important early feminists) kept a copy of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* at a centre table in her home for forty years.¹³⁸ At the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was a keen supporter of Wollstonecraft and her ideas, spent considerable time discussing them with Lucretia Mott. The argument in *Vindication* was unequivocal in its demand for equal rights for women. Employing the Enlightenment emphasis on natural law, reason and equality, Wollstonecraft suggested it was a patriarchal cultural and environmental influence on girls and women which contributed to their subjugation. Equal rights, therefore, extended to women, particularly educational rights, she argued, would do much to readjust this imbalance.

The arguments of feminists on both sides of the Atlantic drew heavily on

¹³⁵ See Cott, N.F., *The Bonds of Womanhood 'Woman's Sphere' in New England 1780-1835*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 133.

¹³⁶ Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) Leader of the American suffrage movement. It is worth noting that Anthony took formal instruction in the new religion founded by Mary Baker Eddy. *Christian Science Sentinel* 30.10.2002, p 20.

¹³⁷ Lucretia Mott wrote to Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1851: 'It is from the pen of a woman too, in great part, which adds to the interest of the article - for no man can write on woman's wrongs, as an *intelligent* sufferer of our own sex can.' Cromwell notes in *Lucretia Mott*: 'Following the English pioneer, Mary Wollstonecraft, American women had not been silent.' Indeed Catharine Beecher was an eloquent orator on behalf of women's rights and Sarah Grimke suggested: 'the inferior status of women could be traced to faulty interpretations of the Scriptures.' O. Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), p. 150.

¹³⁸ O. Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott*, p. 29.

religious ideals, and the Unitarians, Evangelicals and of course the Quakers reflected a religious position which contributed to the movement for female suffrage.¹³⁹ Abolition and female suffrage became intrinsically linked in the writing of female reformers.

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that there were primarily two strands within the promotion of the ideal of female equality. On one side was the evangelical tradition with its strong emphasis on promoting woman's mission as guardian of the nation's morals. This tradition promoted a doctrine of true womanhood. It represented an image of the 'gentle sex' as able to offer succour and comfort from that metaphorical 'womb' the refuge or sanctuary of the home. This sacred maternal mission was endowed with transcendental qualities which served to promote an ideal of female superiority. It was to this evangelical and primarily conservative tradition that More belonged and similarly Eddy. The more militant, radical philosophical ideals advocated by Wollstonecraft and Stanton were the more revolutionary arguments that had inspired the French and American Revolutions. They were concerned with breaking down traditional stereotypical images of the 'weaker sex' which saw them confined and isolated from public life and decision making.

At the time More was writing her important anti-slavery poem, Wollstonecraft was putting together a collection of *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) and a collection of texts for girls - *The Female Reader* (1789). From the year 1789 until 1798 she was employed as a reader and translator for Johnson's *Analytical Review*, translating such works as *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions* (1788) by Jacques Necker, and *Elements of Morality* (1790) by C. G. Salzmann. The Advertisement to Necker's tract makes clear Wollstonecraft was in a position of influence: 'In rendering this Work into English some Liberties have been taken by the Translator, which seemed necessary to preserve the Spirit of the Original.'¹⁴⁰

These were powerful texts, intended to rouse the minds of her female

¹³⁹ See: O. Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*. (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), p. 32.

¹⁴⁰ M. Wollstonecraft, *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions*, p. 5. (vol 3).

readers to their reforming potential. Scholars have largely identified the nature of Wollstonecraft's writing in political and revolutionary terms, and rightly so, but it was her intrinsic religious values which make her radical arguments so intriguing. The intent of *The Female Reader* was, in her own words: 'To fix devotional habits in a young mind' and she made - 'no apology for introducing the book which contains devotional pieces.' 'Religion', she argued, is the only solace for women when 'oppressed by sorrow, or harassed by wordly cares.....' and 'piety is not to be acquired in the hour of trouble; it must have been a cherished inmate of the soul, or it will not afford consolation when every other source fails.'¹⁴¹

Through carefully chosen devotional pieces and reflections on topical concerns, the reader becomes aware of an author well acquainted with her maker. She has clearly chosen descriptive pieces carefully with a specific purpose in mind.¹⁴² The anti-slavery movement, as has already been suggested, was argued in religious and moral terms and Wollstonecraft used these texts to promote her arguments on the woman question and the evil nature of the slave trade, but undergirding the structure of her arguments are cogent religious perspectives.

Civic Virtue and Domestic Economy

The implications of female superiority were powerfully enhanced through the authors' association with abolition sentiment. Distinctive gender divisions actually worked to reinforce an ideology of female authority. Davidoff & Hall suggest that middle-class men 'who sought to be 'someone,' to count as individuals because of their wealth, their power to command or their capacity to influence people were, in fact, embedded in networks of familial and female support which underpinned their rise to public prominence.'¹⁴³ Humanitarian reform, building on this ideal, sought to lift humanity into a feminised spiritual realm replacing brutality with the milk of human kindness.

¹⁴¹ M. Wollstonecraft, *The Female Reader*, p. 56. (vol 4).

¹⁴² The inclusion of William Cowper's poem *On Slavery* confirms this. 'The Female Reader', p. 297.

¹⁴³ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (Routledge: 1987, 1988), prologue.

The years 1788 to 1797 were active literary ones for Wollstonecraft. The preface to *Original Stories* sets out her strategic intentions: 'to fix principles of truth and humanity on a solid and simple foundation; and to make religion an active, invigorating director of the affections, and not a mere attention to forms.'¹⁴⁴ Her contributions to the *Analytical Review* reflected this purpose and gave her a wide and varied readership. The prefatory note expounds: 'The *Analytical Review*..... was aimed at a general educated public of liberal persuasion interested in literature, politics, philosophy, religion and science.'¹⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft served as editorial assistant to Joseph Johnson and by June 1789 she was contributing well over thirty reviews to an issue. The character and nature of her ideological perspectives inevitably emerge in these contributions, and a review of *The interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Varsa, the African* registers her deconstruction of contemporary values:

The life of an African, written by himself, is certainly a curiosity, as it has been a favourite philosophic whim to degrade the numerous nations, on whom the sun-beams more directly dart, below the common level of humanity, and hastily to conclude that nature, by making them inferior to the rest of the human race, designed to stamp them with a mark of slavery. How they are shaded down, from the fresh colour of northern rustics, to the sable hue seen on the African sands, is not our task to inquire, nor do we intend to draw a parallel between the abilities of a negro and European mechanic; we shall only observe, that if these volumes do not exhibit extraordinary intellectual powers, sufficient to wipe off the stigma, yet the activity and ingenuity, which conspicuously appear in the character of Gustavus, place him on a par with the general mass of men, who fill the subordinate stations in a more civilized society than that which he was thrown into at his birth.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ M. Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations, calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*, p. 360.(vol 4)

¹⁴⁵ M. Wollstonecraft, *Contributions to the Analytical Review 1788-1797*, p. 14.(vol 7)

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 100.

This review, marked by its ironic trope, witnesses Wollstonecraft's disputation of the theorists' arguments for black subservience as fanciful. The reason for their skin difference 'is not our task to enquire' though she covertly suggests it may simply be protection for those 'on whom the sun-beams more directly dart'. I believe she effectively cuts the whole argument down to size in the review, by identifying the utter sameness of character of Gustavus with men in general. Strategically it is not unlike More's *The Black Slave Trade*: 'Does then the immortal principle within/Change with the casual colour of a skin?' Through mockery of this serious issue, Wollstonecraft succeeds in emphasising its gravity. Calling attention to the small-mindedness of their arguments, she underlined their insubstantiality.

Black Slaves - White Women and The Promotion of 'Human' Rights

Barker-Benfield suggests that 'Wollstonecraft illustrated the capacity of antislavery writers to put themselves "in the Negro's place."¹⁴⁷ Reinforcing my suggestion of Wollstonecraft's habit of merging the interests of subjugated women with black slaves, Barker-Benfield submits: 'In a brilliant simile, she compared woman's automatic subjection to man, her pleasingness - that is, "blind propriety" - to sugar, and asked: Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer method to sweeten the cup of man?'¹⁴⁸

This sentiment was powerful in its implications: sugar production was a contentious issue in the 1790s suffused with its implicit betrayal of civilized morality. To ally this with her cause for the 'vindication' of women was certainly an effective proselytising stratagem. Denial of freedom, whether in the case of black slaves or white women was acceptable only to those who were either blind or greedy, blind to the cause of common humanity and justice in the name of God, and greedy for material gain. 'A desperate disease' as Wollstonecraft referred to this barbarism, 'required a powerful remedy' - and

¹⁴⁷ G.J.Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, p. 224.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 225

she challenged the double standards at work in both politics and religion:

injustice had no right to rest on prescription; nor has the character of the present clergy any weight in the argument. You find it very difficult to separate policy from justice: in the political world they have frequently been separated with shameful dexterity. To mention a recent instance. According to the limited views of timid, or interested politicians, an abolition of the infernal slave trade would not only be unsound policy, but a flagrant infringement of the laws (which are allowed to have been infamous) that induced the planters to purchase their estates. But is it not consonant with justice, with the common principles of humanity, not to mention Christianity, to abolish this abominable mischief? There is not one argument, one invective, levelled by you at the confiscators of the church revenue, which could not, with the strictest propriety, be applied by the planters and negro drivers to our Parliament, if it gloriously dared to shew the world that British senators were men: if the natural feelings of humanity silenced the cold cautions of timidity, till this stigma on our nature was wiped off, and all men were allowed to enjoy their birth-right - liberty, till by their crimes they had authorized society to deprive them of the blessing they had abused.¹⁴⁹

Through powerful abolition sentiment, Wollstonecraft strikes at the heart of the British establishment. Historically prescribed standards of behaviour did not authorise or give credence to a barbaric code of practice. She uncovers with deft literary precision the hypocrisy at the heart of officialdom, portraying their support of an 'abominable mischief' carried out in the name and nature of a Christian nation. Now was the time to highlight the spiritual poverty at the heart of the public sphere; demanding that the 'natural feelings of humanity' be allowed to take precedence over the 'cold cautions of timidity' she called for a society in which all were 'allowed to enjoy their birth-right - liberty.' The ideological potency with which Wollstonecraft's abolition discourse is infused

¹⁴⁹ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, p. 50. (vol 5)

was a powerful reproof to the 'specious errors' inherent in unjust legislature. Any semblance of credibility in the unjust arguments of priest or parliament needed exposing and Wollstonecraft clearly casts herself in the mould of truth-teller. 'Plausibility, I know, can only be unmasked by shewing the absurdities it glosses over, and the simple truths it involves with specious errors. Eloquence has often confounded triumphant villany; but it is probably that it has more frequently rendered the boundary that separates virtue and vice doubtful.....'¹⁵⁰

Wollstonecraft strikes at the heart of the masculine world of politics; its detachment of justice from policy, she argues, inverts constitutional laws and institutes barbarous codes and practices. She pours scorn on the timidity of 'British senators', arguing the need for the sensitivity and benevolence which marked the feminine. The warmth of feeling and tenderness associated with the maternal human nature, silences, melts even, the cold conventionality of machiavellian politics. Bearing in mind the masculine and political genre of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft's agenda appears to be a 'feminisation' of masculinity. This is not without irony when considering her persuasive efforts to 'masculinise' femininity in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Vindication aimed to instil in women nobler ambitions. Critical of historical gendered assumptions, Wollstonecraft argued that the acquirement of knowledge, scholarship and learning be made available to woman. *Exaggerated* sensibility was neither useful nor appropriate and she was clearly intent on showing its destructive tendencies: 'their minds are not in a healthy state', she wrote, 'strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty, and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season they ought to have arrived at maturity one cause of this barren blooming, I attribute to a false system of education.'¹⁵¹ Nature narrative is a common trope in Wollstonecraft's writing, and 'flaunting' leaves had connotations of sexual provocativeness. The chief purpose of these beautiful 'flowers' is visual delight. Women's physical

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 50.

¹⁵¹ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 73.(vol 5)

beauty, and therefore their appeal, as that of the flower, Wollstonecraft argues, is transitory and temporal. She is critical of male writers who have argued that female education be directed towards rendering them pleasing: 'formed to please and to be subject to him; and that it is her duty to render herself *agreeable* to her master...' ¹⁵² She argues that through cultivation of strength of character and morals, this 'barren blooming' would be replaced with fertile productivity. Wollstonecraft uses strong rhetoric to counteract the ritualistic language of gallantry which she considered served to incarcerate women in a perpetual state of slavish dependency. The condescending use of feminine phrases, seductive forms of patriarchal language and the flattering of their 'fascinating graces' she argued, kept women in an abiding state of infancy.

Birds of a Feather?

'Confined then in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch.' M. Wollstonecraft. ¹⁵³

Anti-slavery rhetoric worked on a number of levels and its rehabilitating potential was not overlooked by reforming women. The destruction of 'slavish dependency' was a common goal, and this is apparent when examining More's satirical style in *The White Slave Trade*. ¹⁵⁴

Wollstonecraft's arguments, it has been noted, were the opposite of More's more measured language and perspectives, though similarities appear when we look closely at More's 'Hints towards forming a Bill for the Abolition of the White Female Slave Trade, in the Cities of London and Westminster'. The style and tone of the argument suggest it could have been written by either writer: in spite of More's apparent aversion to her contemporary, its political and sexual innuendo hints at a rebelliousness not usually associated with More. Its power lies in its 'tongue in cheek' ability to highlight inequity between the sexes through connection with 'master' and 'slavery' issues,

¹⁵² *Vindication*, p. 147.

¹⁵³ *ibid*, p. 125.

¹⁵⁴ *The Works of Hannah More*, pp. 391-405, vol 1.

raging at this time. It also usefully exhibits the 'covert' feminist at her most satirical:

Whereas many members of both houses of parliament have long been indefatigably labouring to bring in a bill for the amelioration of the condition of slaves in our foreign plantations, as well as for the abolition of the trade itself; by which trade multitudes of fresh slaves are annually made: and whereas it is presumed that the profound attention of these grave legislators to this great foreign evil prevents their attending to domestic grievances of the same nature; it is, therefore, humbly proposed, that whilst these benevolent senators are thus meritoriously labouring for the deliverance of our black brethren, the printer will, as in duty bound, insert these loose hints of a bill for the abolition of slavery at home; a slavery which, in some few instances, as it is to be feared, may be found to involve the wives, daughters, aunts, nieces, cousins, and grandmothers even of these very zealous African abolitionists themselves.

More was a clever and experienced rhetorician and it could be said that the *pace* of this passage mimics and in effect reinforces the protracted nature of abolition attempts. Terms such as: 'Long been'; 'by which'; 'whereas'; 'whilst these'; highlight the politicians' tactics of 'playing for time', or 'hedging of bets'. The final sentence works as a literary representation of the delaying and teasing tactics of those politicians who talk too much and do too little, with the length to final closure reinforcing the endless postponement of anti-slavery legislators. More continues by linking this 'great foreign evil' with its home grown variety:

In our West India plantations the lot of slaves is of all descriptions; here, it is uniform. There, there are diversities of masters; if some are cruel, others are kind; and the worst are mortal: here, there is one, arbitrary, universal tyrant, and like the lama of Thibet he never dies. FASHION is his name. Here, indeed, the original subjection

is voluntary, but, once engaged, the subsequent servility of the slaves keeps pace with the tyranny of the despot. They hug their chains, and because they are gilt and shining, this prevents them, not from feeling, but from acknowledging that they are heavy. With astonishing fortitude they carry them about, not only without repining, but as their glory and distinction. A few females are every where to be found who have manfully resisted the tyrant, but *they are people whom nobody knows*; as the free people are the minority, and as, in this one instance, the minority are peaceable persons, no one envies them an exemption from chains, and their freedom is considered only as a proof of their insignificance.

Fashionable society had a code of social conduct, a unique style or way of doing things. This code could be defined in the word 'consummation' or its derivative 'consumed'. *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights*¹⁵⁵ argues: 'It is true, that man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner. When a small brook or little river incorporateth with Rhodanus (Rhone) Humber or Thames, the poor rivulet loseth her name: it is carried and recarried with the new associate; it beareth no sway.....'

The inequalities inherent within the marriage contract inevitably created a fertile breeding ground for servility, and whilst More was keen to uphold orthodoxy and traditionalism in her vision of a utopian society, this essay is sharply critical of the state of marriage. As a self-styled guardian of the nation's morals, More believed the holy state of matrimony to be the ideal, (though this was obviously not the case for *every* woman, as neither More nor her sisters married). The arguments More and Wollstonecraft were intent on pressing, however, were that educated, virtuous women had a tremendous potential for influence, on their husbands, their children and indeed all those within their home sphere. More was keen to emphasise the extent to which the female sex had become blinded to the means wherewith they were kept

¹⁵⁵ The male author of *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632) exposes the loss of identity suffered by a woman on the occasion of marriage. E. Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (The University of Michigan Press, 1988), p. 4.

in subjection:

A multitude of fine fresh young, slaves are annually imported at the age of seventeen or eighteen; or, according to the phrase of the despot, *they come out*. This despot so completely takes them in as to make these lovely young creatures believe that the assigned period at which they lose the gaiety and independence of their former free life is, in fact, the day of the emancipation.

I come now to the question of *impolicy*. This white slavery, like the black, is evidently an injury to fair and lawful commerce, for the time spent in training and overworking these fair slaves might be better employed in promoting the more profitable articles of health, beauty, simplicity, modesty, and industry, articles which many think would fetch a higher price, and by which traffic, both the slave and the slave-owner would be mutually benefited.

Many of these elderly female slaves excuse their constant attendance in the public markets, (for it is thought that, at a certain age, they might be emancipated if they wished it,) by asserting the necessity of their attendance, 'till their daughters are disposed of.....

The younger slaves are condemned to violent bodily labour, from midnight to sunrise. For this public service they are many years preparing by a severe drill under a great variety and succession of posture-masters. More compassion, indeed, seems to be shown to the more aged slaves, who are nightly allowed to sit, and do their work.....

She argues that modern marriage and its emphasis on indulgent pleasure, whilst outwardly offering women a semblance of security, quickly degenerated into an unequal relationship with one side holding the reins of power. Where there was not a mutual intellectual attraction, the

relationships often became prosaic and unrewarding. Robert Hole in his introduction to *Selected Writings of Hannah More* suggests: 'Her profound distaste for young men who had become accustomed to "the voluptuous ease, refined luxuries, soft accommodations, obsequious attendance, and all the unrestrained indulgences" of the world of fashion seems at least in part to be based on her awareness..... that the dual standard of morality would allow them to indulge in widespread sexual gratification before marriage. For such a man, marriage may be "little more than a selfish stratagem to reconcile health with pleasure". His earlier "excess of gratification" will now make him "irritable and exacting" and lead him to affect "the manners of a Sybarite". A wife cannot hope, and should not seek, to gratify within marriage the passions which such men had been used to indulging. The result was that, within a few weeks, the wife would be left alone at home whilst the man returned to his earlier haunts of dissipation.'¹⁵⁶ Whilst it is possible to read these passages 'without inferring in them a sexual connotation' according to Hole, it has to be noted that More's overt sexual innuendo is at extreme odds with her usual writing style of rectitude and decorum. This line of approach effectively serves to reinforce an image of writers who could adopt a style to suit the occasion and the audience. Her advice that wives 'should not seek to gratify.....' may have given them some sense of control in an unequal relationship, but reference to 'the violent bodily labour, from midnight to sunrise' demanded of the younger slaves may well have raised a few eyebrows amongst her contemporaries.

The argument, however, was unequivocal: if women were to rise above the role of sexual plaything, which inevitably led to a subjective state, the need was to rise somewhat in the scale of existence, seize the high moral ground, reinstate a sound sense of propriety and Christian morality, and effectively lead the nation from within that powerbase of 'home.' More sets out clearly in this essay, the byzantine manner by which the freedom of half the nation's population had been destroyed. Disenfranchising women of their sacred duty, as caretakers of the nation's morals was a profound injustice, and one which she intends to redress.

¹⁵⁶ R. Hole. (ed), *Selected Writings of Hannah More*, p. xvi.

More concludes her powerful expose:

From all the above causes it is evident, that the white slave trade has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished.

'Till, therefore, there be some hope that a complete abolition may be effected, the following regulations are humbly proposed.

Regulation 1st. That no slave be allowed to spend more than three hours in preparing her chains, beads, and other implements for the nightly labour.

2d. That no slave be allowed to paint her person of more than two colours for any market.

3d. That each slave be at least allowed sufficient covering for the purposes of decency, if not for those of health and comfort.

4th. That no slave be put under more than four posture masters, in order to teach her such attitudes and exercises as shall enable her to fetch more money in the markets.

5th. That no slave be carried to more than three markets on the same night.

6th. That no trader be allowed to press more slaves into one hold than three times as many as it will contain.

7th. That the same regard to comfort, which has led the black factor to allow the African slaves a ton to a man, be extended to the white slaves, not allowing them less than one chair to five slaves.

8th. That no white negro driver or horses be allowed to stand in the street more than five hours in a dry night, or four in a rainy one.

9th. That every elderly female slave, as soon as her youngest grandchild is fairly disposed of, be permitted to retire from her more public labours, without any fine or loss of character, or any other punishment from the despot.

To conclude: - the black slave trade has been taken up by its opposers, not only on the ground of *inhumanity* and *impolicy*, but that of *religion* also. On the first two points alone have I ventured to examine the question of the white slave trade. It would be a folly to enquire into it on this last principle, it can admit no such

discussion, as in this view it could not stand its ground for a single moment; for if that principle were allowed to operate, mitigations, nearly approaching to abolition, must inevitably and immediately take place.

Provocative satire would be the most useful term to describe the tenor of this final onslaught; but the seriousness of its intent is marked by its 'religious' intimation. In the conclusion, she identifies the triune nature grounding the attack on black slavery: inhumanity, impolicy, and religion. When it comes to the question of female slavery, its utter anathematization to Christ's Christianity, she believes, is expiatory.

'The White Slave Trade' was published in a rather insignificant, provincial journal in 1805 -*The Weekly Entertainer; or agreeable and instructive repository*, and whilst one may wonder at its readership, More possibly hoped it would not be those of her own circle. Hole suggests that: 'The attitudes and the intellectual position are entirely those of the 1788 and 1790 works',¹⁵⁷ the only difference being the touch, which he suggests is perhaps lighter. The 1788 and 1790 works he refers to are *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* (1788) and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790). Both these texts reflected More's concern with the desultory prevailing attitudes to religion and morals, and, I would suggest, if *Strictures* was addressed specifically to women, these two texts were written to affect masculine influence. More's writing of the 1780s, as has been suggested,¹⁵⁸ was positioned towards social and cultural reform, the later works witness her application of religious principles towards *political* reform. Bearing in mind that the abolition campaign was drawing to a successful conclusion by this time, and More's intent becomes more apparent. Her adroit use of different genres is once more in evidence: *The Weekly Entertainer*, aimed at the male reader rather than the female, would have been an ideal vehicle through which to highlight the woman question on the back of the anti-slavery movement. The entertaining nature of this essay belies the serious undertones with which it is infused, and could not have

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. xxix.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. xxix.

been read without recognition of its more serious intent. The ninth regulation followed by its *concluding* postulate leads me to suggest that although More asserts, 'it would be a folly to enquire into it on this last principle', (i.e. religion), she has probably pre-empted the need to do that by linking it closely and indissolubly with religious edict. The twin perspectives of inhumanity and impolicy have underpinned these nine regulations, but she suggests that by instigating the 'religious' principle, the whole question of the white slave trade would be outlawed 'inevitably' and 'immediately'. This perspective implies the *tenth* regulation and it would be difficult to overlook its oblique connection with the Ten Commandments.

More's conclusion reflects the all-encompassing nature of her opposition to the grotesque practice of one human being effectively owning another, be it black slave or white wife. Inhumanity and impolicy mark this trafficking in human lives, but when viewed through the principle of religion, these acts are anathema and could not be tolerated 'for a single moment.' The primary and fundamental source, which makes her argument unassailable is **Religion**. If a true spirit of religion were active and functioning within the collective heart of the nation, the mitigating circumstances surrounding white female slavery, as well as black serfdom, would be obliterated. More concludes: 'AN ENEMY TO ALL SLAVERY.' This work may, as Hole suggests, be lighter than some of her other works, but its strategic delivery makes it a powerful text.

The effectiveness of these women authors' reforming initiatives will be judged as the thesis progresses; what is already becoming apparent is their literary agility in pressing humanitarian arguments which connected female servitude with black slavery issues. Through an agency of moral reform, they attacked irreligious attitudes which they linked with the masculine and public world, contrasting these with the sympathy and benevolence at the heart of that private home space. Langford's argument that: 'Sensibility's galvanizing of public opinion was fundamental to the remarkable legislative initiatives aimed at humanitarian reform during the last third of the eighteenth-century',¹⁵⁹ highlights the potential for women reformers who identified a

¹⁵⁹ *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 224.

heightened state of consciousness as the chief conduit of moral reform. The spiritual and cultural implications for women resulting from this perspective will be closely examined.

Bury the Woman in the Citizen

Stanton's arguments witness the merging of abolition and suffrage debate. Summing up the years from 1840 to 1866, she described herself and Susan B Anthony as 'students "in the school of anti-slavery," who learned there the lessons of human rights.'¹⁶⁰ The chapter will now examine Stanton's anti-slavery contributions.¹⁶¹ Ann Gordon, in the introduction to *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony* identifies that through their interest in reform they effectively: 'built a new woman's rights movement on the ideas, skills, and personnel of the older antislavery movement, and established themselves as valuable contributors to their own cause and to the crusade against slavery' (SP p.xxiii).

The year 1866 witnessed the launching of what Frederick Douglass¹⁶² called "the good ship '*Equal Rights Association*'" and this proved to be a pivotal moment in the lives of Stanton, Anthony and indeed the movement as a whole. Merging the interests of subjugated women with black slaves, activists agreed, at the *Eleventh National Woman's Rights Convention*, in New York City in May to "bury the woman in the citizen, and our organization in that of the American Equal Rights Association....."; further they resolved to "secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color or sex."¹⁶³ Effectively, this move was to grant women the right to vote, along with white and black men and also the right to set the radical political agenda. The pursuance of justice and common

¹⁶⁰ Gordon. A.D. (ed), *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony - In The School of Anti-Slavery 1840-1866*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pxxiii, vol 1.

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Henry Brewster Stanton married in May 1840 spending their honeymoon attending the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London.

¹⁶² Frederick Douglass (1817-1895) was born into slavery, but escaped. William Lloyd Garrison was a tremendous influence in his life, but he in turn became impressed with Douglass. As well as speaking on the rights of black Africans, he was a staunch supporter of women's rights.

¹⁶³ *ibid*, p. xxiv.

humanity extended to all mankind was quintessential to the cause Elizabeth Cady Stanton embraced. Part of a letter she wrote to Elizabeth J. Neall from Johnstown on November 26, 1841 evidences this: 'If the true sentiments of an author appear in his works then will my work ever breathe love & justice equality for woman.'¹⁶⁴

Antebellum American consciousness, already sensitive to the political configuration of abolitionism was to receive a rude awakening at the hands of its female reformers. Enjoined by the Bible to be silent, their emergence onto the public and political platform as campaigners for human rights brought them into conflict with political leaders of the day. Stanton was effectively involved in legal reform; Gordon suggests that 'by 1848 she had transformed the antislavery conflict about individual responsibility and moral equality into a legal claim that women were endowed with the same natural rights as men, deserved equal protection of their individual liberty, and should organize themselves to secure their rights in the laws and institutions of the land.'¹⁶⁵

A letter written from York, on August 3, 1840 to her cousin, Gerrit Smith, usefully introduces her perspective:

We hear that in America you abolitionists are sad & depressed, there are so many clouds darkening your horizon & I wonder not. The thought that three millions of our fellow beings and country men groan in bondage & the day of their freedom yet uncertain (though it will surely come) is enough to sadden any heart. Would that you were here you would find much to cheer you. Mr Birney, Mr Scoble, Henry & myself are going through all the principal towns in the Kingdom. These three gentlemen lecture almost every evening - horrifying the British public with the enormities of

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. xxxi. At a Women's Rights Conference at Seneca Falls in 1848, the American Declaration of Independence was specially adapted to reinforce the 'inalienable rights' of women as well as men. Using language which emphasised inherent 'natural rights' endowed on women as well as men, from their Creator, a Declaration of Sentiments was initiated by Stanton and Mott.

our slavery system. Loud cries of shame! shame! fill the House whenever the negro pew is mentioned, & the bursts of indignation that follow some of Henry's graphic descriptions are music to an antislavery ear. We are kindly & warmly received everywhere, - we find it is no disgrace to be an abolitionist in England, but requires some moral courage not to be one, as many of our eloquent clergy have proved..... Night after night we hear many of the British clergy of all sects, declare most solemnly that no American clergyman who is not an abolitionist in America both in theory & practice, shall ever enter their pulpits again.....¹⁶⁶

That the letter was written on honeymoon, and whilst visiting York contributes to its interest. The depth and scale of the slavery problem are apparent, but Stanton clearly feels a certain euphoria at their welcome in England, noting even that it required 'moral courage' *not* to be an abolitionist in this climate. She points to the racial segregation in American churches as a key issue in the mind of British people, but the overall impression of the letter is that her cousin should take courage, both from the abolition progress made in Britain, and the warm support of its people.

Six months later, Stanton was writing to Elizabeth J. Neall, whose Quaker family were distinguished for their contributions to abolition. Neall, a delegate of Philadelphia's Female Anti-Slavery Society, was on the point of marriage to John Gay, and Stanton's letter gives further evidence of the concerns uppermost in her mind at this time. She explains that her visit to England has been of much benefit to the women there, who are now forming societies to aid the American suffrage movement: 'I found many many women fully & painfully convinced of our present degradation as women', she writes, 'They assemble once a week to get & impart what information they can on the subject of slavery.....' (SP p.18). She continued:

I read an article of John G's in the "friend of man" about the convention. I am sorry he is not right on the woman question. You

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 16.

must never say yea Lizzy until he renounces all divine right to govern you or decide in all cases where you differ, dear me! what a mighty shadow some of Paul's private opinions have afforded, under which all the "Lords of Creation" may shelter their cruelties & wrongs towards woman & make injustice a divine command.....¹⁶⁷

This letter, sharply critical of marriage laws as they related to women, also exhibits her dissenting religious arguments on the subject. At the time of writing, Stanton had been married for six months, but she took what must in that period have seemed a radical stance, insisting the word 'obey' be removed from her own marriage ceremony. She explained: 'I obstinately refused to obey one with whom I supposed I was entering into an equal relation....'¹⁶⁸

Stanton's letters are a powerful indicator of her political and religious perspectives, her right to be a free and independent thinker: a letter to Elizabeth Pease, in February 1842, reinforces her contempt for the hierarchical 'divine right' of a husband. Stanton is clearly a woman intent on making her own decisions without interference or deference. The first sentence makes this apparent: to her husband's request, 'now Lizzy tell Miss Pease all the antislavery news', she provocatively insists *she will not be entering into particulars on this topic*. Though the theme of the letter is undoubtedly anti-slavery, its keynote is her admiration for the man, William Lloyd Garrison:

He is a great reformer an honest, upright man, ever ready to sacrifice present interest to stern principle, & having no fear of man. I have full confidence in him, he would be Garrison & no one else the world over. ' Bearing in mind this is a man at severe odds with her husband, and her overt praise could be considered somewhat impolitic. She continues the letter in equally glowing terms: 'Most men will compromise a little sometimes, for policy, as they miscal

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁸ E.C. Stanton, *Eighty Years and More Reminiscences 1815-1897* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p 72.

dishonesty, but Garrison not a hairs breadth where principle is involved. What a noble exhibition of his character, we had at the London Convention.....Being the champion of antislavery in this country he would have undoubtedly received more attention & had more influence in the Convention than any other delegate - he knew that, & yet single & alone he dared (by refusing to take his seat) to say to that august assembly, you have made a false decision, & I shall take no lot nor part with you so long as you withhold justice from my friends.¹⁶⁹ He is an advocate of "Human Rights" not black man's merely. His religious opinions are summed up in Christ's sermon on the mount & I believe he tries to obey those plain commands in all his dealings with the world.....' Stanton concludes her letter: 'Would that people were as willing to take Christ's commands literally, as they are the figurative language of Paul. By telling you what I love in Garrison you may see wherein I sympathize with his party.'¹⁷⁰

Stanton clearly held Garrison in high regard, and perhaps writing of him in such glowing terms in a private letter may not have seemed too irresponsible, until that is, it has been contextualised. The letter is included because it clearly evidences that her own opinions supersede any sense of deference to her husband. William Lloyd Garrison was a man totally at odds with Henry B Stanton. Their unresolved dispute was a longstanding one, based on irreconcilable differences with regard to political involvement in the anti-slavery movement. Henry Stanton believed that only by forcing political parties to make an issue of slavery could it be addressed and abolished. Garrison totally opposed this proposition, believing that abolitionists should refuse to take any part in a political system corrupted by slavery. In 1840, whilst Henry Stanton was in the midst of founding the Liberty party, Garrison went so far as to publicly denounce him. This was no friendly dispute, and for Elizabeth Cady Stanton to heap such praise upon a man who had publicly condemned her husband was unusual to the extreme. The key to understanding her outspoken appreciation and support of Garrison's views I

¹⁶⁹ This refers to the decision to exclude women from the podium.

¹⁷⁰ *The Selected Papers of ECS & SBA*, p. 29.

believe, however, to be in those two words 'Human Rights'. This issue, wider than merely abolition, was a critical one to Stanton. Christ's message of justice and mercy for humanity was inherent in the practical Christianity proposed by Stanton, and in Garrison she recognised a kindred spirit.

The feeling must have been mutual, as at the invitation of William Lloyd Garrison, Stanton addressed the American Anti-slavery Society. The text was printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* ensuring a wide readership:

This is generally known as the platform of one idea - that is negro slavery. In a certain sense this may be true, but the most casual observation of this whole anti-slavery movement, of your lives, conventions, public speeches and journals, shows this one idea to be a great humanitarian one. The motto of your leading organ, "The world is my country and all mankind my countrymen," proclaims the magnitude and universality of this one idea, which takes in the whole human family, irrespective of nation, color, caste or sex, with all their interests, temporal and spiritual - a question of religion, philanthropy, political economy, commerce, education and social life, on which depends the very existence of this republic, of the state, of the family, the sacredness of the lives and property of Northern freemen, the holiness of the marriage relation, and the perpetuity of the Christian religion. Such are the various phases of the question you are wont to debate in your conventions. They all grow out of and legitimately belong to that *so-called* petty, insignificant, annoying subject, which thrusts up its head everywhere in Church and State - the "eternal nigger." But in settling the question of the negro's rights, we find out the exact limits of our own, for rights never clash or interfere; and where no individual in a community is denied his rights, the mass are the more perfectly protected in theirs; for whenever any class is subject to fraud or injustice, it shows that the spirit of tyranny is at work, and no one can tell where or how or when the infection will

spread. The health of the body politic depends on the sound condition of every member. Let but the finest nerve or weakest muscle be diseased, and the whole man suffers; just so the humblest and most ignorant citizen cannot be denied his rights without deranging the whole system of government (*Selected Papers* p 409).

This powerful proclamation which proposes the overthrow of 'negro slavery', reads like an amended American Declaration of Independence. Quoting the Society's motto - 'The world is my country and all mankind my countrymen', Stanton has adroitly widened the whole issue of the human rights debate to include the interests of all mankind. Stanton emphasised what is essentially the key argument of this chapter: 'in settling the question of the negro's rights, we find out the exact limits of own own', and indicates how the cause of abolition assisted and furthered the cause of women's rights. It was an argument that no *thinking* person could have failed to grasp, its political and religious opinion supported by sound logic: 'where no individual in a community is denied his rights, the mass are the more perfectly protected in theirs.' She carefully connects the rights of women with black slaves in a rhetorical battle plan aimed at decimating a corrupt economy. Highlighting the pernicious nature and inhumanity at the heart of this despotism she concludes: 'This one act has, in its consequences, convulsed this Union. It has corrupted our churches, our politics, our press.....yes, beneath the flag of freedom, Liberty has crouched in fear' (SP p. 410).

This abolition discourse has an ethos of authority, reflecting the urgency of a progressive thinker. The American dream, heretofore imbricated with the belief system of the Pilgrim fathers, who strove to establish a nation in true freedom, had been forfeited through greed and materialism: Liberty, the emblem of their once great nation now 'crouched in fear.' The degradation resulting from the immorality and inhumanity of slavery, she suggests, has purged their land of its cultural, social and spiritual heritage. All the manifestations of a sovereign state, the Church, Government and Press, ^{are} repressed and corrupted, and Stanton brings sharply into focus the painful

dismantling of its Puritan ethics. 'In spite of noble words, deeds of thirty years of protest, prayers and preaching,' she argues, 'slavery still lives, the negro toils on in his weary bondage; his chains have not yet melted in the intense heat of the sun of righteousness' (SP p. 410).

Stanton widens her attack on what she terms this 'dangerous miasma of slavery' (SP p.414) with a resolute precision: '... the mission of this Radical Anti-Slavery Movement is not to the African slave alone, but to the slaves of custom, creed and sex, as well.....' With this in mind, she brings the reader face to face with the consequences of subjection and servitude:

It was thought a small matter to kidnap a black man in Africa, and set him to work in the rice swamps of Georgia; but when we look at the panorama of horrors that followed that event, at all the statute laws that were enacted to make that act legal, at the perversion of man's moral sense and innate love of justice in being compelled to defend such laws; when we consider the long, hard tussle we have witnessed here for near a century between the spirit of Liberty and Slavery, we may in some measure, appreciate the magnitude of the wrong done to that one lone, friendless negro, who, under the cover of darkness and star-spangled banner, was stolen from his African hut and lodged in the hold of the American slaver (SP p. 410).

This carefully worded persuasive passage identifies the scale of immorality resulting from this 'small matter' of a 'lone' abduction; and Stanton is keen to portray how, just like the diseased state earlier referred to, it spread, leading to an extensive perversion of the puritan sentiment. It displays with a poignant potency, the consequences for the perpetrators of the crime, as well as the disenfranchised.

Stanton then notably links female servitude and black slavery with a condemnatory: 'To you, white man, the world throws wide her gates; the way is clear to wealth, to fame, to glory, to renown; the high places of

independence and honor and trust are yours; all your efforts are praised and encouraged, all your successes are welcomed with loud hurrahs and cheers; but the black man and woman are born to shame' (SP p.414). Drawing upon the sensibility argument, she suggests that whilst 'noble men' may have 'eloquently and earnestly....denounced slavery' this 'privileged class can never conceive the feelings of those who are born to contempt, to inferiority, to degradation. Herein', she says,' is woman more fully identified with the slave than man can possibly be.....She early learns the misfortune of being born an heir to the crown of thorns, to martyrdom, to womanhood' (SP p. 414). Stanton's enthusiasm for her cause is palpable, not only does she identify her sex with martyrdom, but there is clear affiliation with the sufferings of Christ Jesus. Indeed, religious argument now supersedes the political as the suffragist proceeds to attack contemporary patriarchal religious argument. To a clergyman who suggests '...in no country in the world does woman hold so high a position as here!' she replies: 'Why, sir,... you must be very ignorant, or very false.' She continues:

Are not nearly two millions of native-born American women, at this very hour, doomed to the foulest slavery that angels ever wept to witness? Are they not doubly damned as immortal beasts of burden in the field, and sad mothers of a most accursed race? Are they not raised for the express purposes of lust? Are they not chained and driven in the slave-coffle at the crack of the whip of an unfeeling driver? Are they not sold on the auction-block? Are they not exposed naked to the coarse jests and voluptuous gaze of brutal men? Are they not trained up in ignorance of all laws, both human and divine, and denied the right to read the Bible? And these are the daughters and sisters of the first men in the Southern States? Think of fathers and brothers selling their own flesh on the auction-block, exposing beautiful women of refinement and education in a New Orleans market, and selling them, body and soul, to the absolute will of the highest bidder. And this is the condition of woman in republican, Christian America, and priests dare look me in the face and tell me that for blessings

such as these my heart should go out in thankfulness! (SP p. 415).

Stanton is an able rhetorician and this public diatribe registers an unbridled passion. It is reminiscent of More's 'White Slave Trade' without the satire, and because of that, I imagine it would have attracted an angry response from the pulpit. This is more than an argument for women's rights, it hints at the religious position Stanton will adopt as her career progresses. Seizing the high moral and spiritual ground, she continues: 'No, proud priest, you may encase your soul in holy robes, and hide your manhood in a pulpit, and, like the Pharisee of old, turn your face away from the sufferings of your race; but I am a Christian - a follower of Jesus - and "whatsoever is done unto one of the least of these my sisters is done also unto me."' Stanton displays a powerful religious authority in the tone of her argument, and her combative language is rather masculine in style, but there is an unmistakable feminine sensibility, which contributes to the argument that woman's heightened state of consciousness allows communion with her God. She writes, 'though.... the whole English language, [be] as dead to me as Egyptian hieroglyphics, yet can I still talk with God' (SP p. 415). Disputing further the need of priestly intercession she writes: 'I sometimes feel the pulsations of the great heart of God. He comes to me in all his works; I have worshipped him in the glorious sun, and moon, and stars, and laved [sic] my soul in their silent majesty and beauty. I have asked the everlasting hills, that in their upward yearnings seem to touch the heavens, if I, an immortal being, though clothed in womanhood, was made for the vile purposes to which proud Saxon man has doomed me, and in solemn chorus they all chanted NO!' (SP p. 416).

Literary landscape imagery more usually associates the feminine with valleys and green pastures indicating a regulated and more lowly position; mountains and high peaks being portrayed as majestic, imposing masculine representations.¹⁷¹ It is interesting, therefore, to witness Stanton identifying female authority through lofty landscape imagery, and indeed this will become more obvious as her edict draws to a close. Stanton has an

¹⁷¹ See: 'Manly Words on Mount Parnassus' and 'Returning to the Beautiful' : L. L. Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism, 1660-1790*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.1-39, 168-210.

amazing ability to shift writing style quickly and apparently effortlessly, without losing her footing; this work reads like a literary collage, so adept is she at juxtaposing key issues. The eight pages which make up this address register a diverse linguistic approach; political debate sits beside a language of feeling and sympathy, rational criticism mingles with romantic idealism, and theological argument is juxtaposed with suffrage rhetoric. 'I have asked', said Stanton, and the reader can now feel the depth of her entreaty, 'this bleeding heart, so full of love to God and man, so generous and self-sacrificing, ever longing for the pure, the holy, the divine, if this graceful form, this soft and tender flesh was made but to crawl and shiver in the cold, foul embrace of Southern tyrants, and, in stifled sobs, it answered, No!' In a tone of spurious indebtedness she continues: 'Thank you, oh Christian priests, meekly I will take your insults, taunts and sneers. To you my gratitude is due for all the *peculiar blessings* of slavery, for you have had the morals of this nation in your keeping. Behold the depths into which you have plunged me - the bottomless pit of human misery! But perchance your head grows dizzy to look down so far, and your heart faints to see what torture I can bear! It is enough!' The peaks and troughs now register a gender divide more in keeping with Stanton's argument, the 'bottomless pit' is replaced by the 'holy mounts': 'I rejoice', she now writes, 'that it has been given to woman to drink the very dregs of human wretchedness and woe. For now, by an eternal law of matter and of mind, when the reaction comes, upward and upward, and still upward, she shall rise. Behold how far above your priestly robes, your bloody altars, your foul incense, your steepled synagogues, she shall stand secure on holy mounts, mid clouds of dazzling radiance, to which in your gross vision, you shall not dare even to lift your eyes' (SP p 416). This elaborate and provocative syntax concludes with a gleeful derision, editor's footnote points to: 'An additional paragraph in the manuscript reveals that behind "our fans & banjo's, the woman and the black man "laugh at least" at how poorly the white man uses his freedom, "at his awkward somersets in church & state," and his failure "in all the acts of war & government & social life"' (SP p.418).

The foregoing gives the merest glimpse of the vigorous efforts on behalf of human rights that were waged by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the mid-

nineteenth century. Her outspoken anti-slavery rhetoric inevitably contributed towards the American Abolition Movement. The propagating of social, civil and religious codes which restored freedom to the black slave and equality to women would leave in its wake a more ethical and refined civilisation. What also becomes apparent, however, is the burgeoning of attempts at spiritual reform allied to her demand for women's equality. The triune onslaught on patriarchal and theological dogma culminated in that radical text *The Woman's Bible*, which laid at the door of patriarchal Biblical exegesis responsibility for female subjugation. This text will be explored in later chapters.

CONCLUSION

'Legally to abolish unpaid servitude in the United States was hard, but the abolition of mental slavery is a more difficult task..... The rights of man were vindicated in a single section and on the lowest plane of human life, when African slavery was abolished in our land. That was only prophetic of further steps towards the banishment of a world-wide slavery, found on higher planes of existence and under more subtle and depraving forms.' M. B. Eddy. ¹⁷²

This chapter has closely examined the writings of More, Wollstonecraft, Stanton and Eddy in the light of their demands for abolition. It has witnessed their literary attempts to discredit a political and theological environment which allowed the trading in human lives, highlighting its contradiction of Christian ideals. Across a diversity of literary genres, these writers attacked public hypocrisy, emphasising the value and superiority of the virtuous feminine nature and the power of the home as a reformatory space. The chapter has identified their mingling of suffrage argument with abolition discourse as a powerful proselytizing strategy.

The key to understanding how they were able to impress their abolition views on a grand scale is to understand the nature of the religious revival taking place on both sides of the Atlantic, and the chapter has identified how this atmosphere was responsible for the considerable opportunities for women to transcend rigid gender divisions of earlier periods. Historians

¹⁷² M.B.Eddy, *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The Writings of Mary Baker Eddy, 1994) (1875), p 225.

suggest that this period witnessed a feminisation of religion resulting in the maternal achieving an almost sanctified status.¹⁷³ Add to this the cult of sensibility which Barker-Benfield refers to as: 'A distinct world view infused with religious values and claiming to reform a fallen population by conversion'¹⁷⁴ and a picture begins to emerge of a world stage being erected from which these women could effect reform. The moral significance of this 'heightened state of consciousness', this awareness of one's own and another's feelings was immense. The acknowledgement by Reverend Thomas Binney, a popular Congregational minister that 'women are to be the making of men', further reinforced by William Wilberforce's suggestion that women were 'the medium of our intercourse with the heavenly world, the faithful repositories of the religious principle',¹⁷⁵ and the opportunities for pious literary women become apparent.

The discourse of sensibility was such that women quickly became aware this was a language they could speak with authority. Religious tracts and moral tales became the vehicles through which women reformers would influence, not just middle class women, but men and the working classes also. Taylor identifies that the public sphere was inhabited by women who were highly effective in remodelling and redefining the collective intellectual culture.¹⁷⁶

These proponents of the Protestant ethic argued that liberty for all was a demand of God, and the reforming influence, according to More, was the responsibility of women. 'TO YOU is made over the awfully important trust of infusing the first principles of piety into the tender minds of those who may one day be called to instruct, not families merely, but districts, to influence, not individuals, but senates.....God has delegated to you.....If you neglect this your bounden duty, you will have effectually contributed to expel

¹⁷³ See R. B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*. (London and New York: Longman, 1998), p. 216.

¹⁷⁴ *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 258.

¹⁷⁵ Wilberforce cited by Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the nineteenth century* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 126.

¹⁷⁶ See Barbara Taylor, 'Work in Progress: Feminism and the Enlightenment, 1650-1850. Research Agenda for a Comparative History'. *History Workshop Journal* 47 (Spring 1999) 261-72.

Christianity from Britain, her last citadel.¹⁷⁷

Whilst the political world remained a largely male-dominated one, this chapter has made it clear that an aggrandizement of female virtues, structured upon Christian teaching, qualified and sanctioned women to reform this political scene. Woman's vocation was as teacher and guardian of the nation's morals, and the home was the powerbase from which to lead this reforming campaign. Although much religious worship took place in private, the conditioning of public behaviour, this chapter has argued, began within this private sphere of the home. The transforming of world politics, More identifies as the responsibility of women.

These four female reformers did not neglect their 'bounden duty' as research into their anti-slavery discourse has shown. Drawing on Christian rhetoric they denounced those perpetrators of slavery as tyrannical barbarians. Through educational tracts, poetry, reviews, journalism, letters, their abolition sentiment flowed, as they attempted to purify the masculine world of commerce and consumerism. *The Monthly Review* of 1789 suggests: 'By the ladies this subject has been contemplated through the pure medium of virtuous pity, unmix'd with those political, commercial or selfish considerations which operated in steeling the hearts of some men against the pleadings of humanity.'¹⁷⁸

Harnessing a developing trend of social consciousness and communal responsibility, the ethics of benevolence gained momentum. This chapter has shown how anti-slavery rhetoric became a trope permeated by several campaigns. Parliamentary reform, civil rights and liberties were all implicated within this language of moral indignation. The rights of women were inevitably mediated through anti-slavery rhetoric. The 'woman question' suffused the arguments of More, Wollstonecraft, Stanton and Eddy. Through a series of innovatory educational tracts they sought to redefine intellectual and moral culture in their attempts to banish world-wide slavery. The chapter has noted the change of literary tone from earlier writing, registering an overt political

¹⁷⁷ *Strictures*, pp. 62-64.

¹⁷⁸ *The Monthly Review* (London) 1789, Vol LXXX, (80) p. 237.

agenda as they sought to attract attention to their arguments. The range of their literary exertions ensured a wide readership which was instrumental in creating an environment in which the message of reform could flourish, and, as this chapter has suggested, contributed towards a moral transformation of society

The following chapter will explore how they sought to build upon their growing public fame *and* notoriety. It will focus on how they sought to lift the heavy hand of oppression off women, asking, as did Mary Astell: '*If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born slaves?*'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ P. Springborg (ed), *Mary Astell, Some Reflections Upon Marriage, in Political Writings*. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 18.

CHAPTER THREE: EDUCATION, SENSIBILITY AND RELIGION - Intelligent Intuitivism, Fixed Principles and a First Cause

O fairest of creation, last and best of all God's works..... John Milton¹⁸⁰

'Woman! by Heav'ns the very Name's a Crime,
Enough to blast, and to debauch my Rhime.
Sure Heav'n it self (infranc't) like *Adam* lay,
Or else some banish'd Fiend usurp't the sway
When Eve was form'd; and with her, usher'd in
Plagues, Woes, and Death, and a new World of Sin.
The fatal Rib was crooked and unev'n,
from whence they have their Crab-like Nature giv'n;
Averse to all the Laws of Man, and Heav'n.
O *Lucifer*, thy Regions had been thin,
Were't not for Womans propagating Sin.' Robert Gould.¹⁸¹

'When Church and State combine, no protest under chains can set the captive free. To my mind, the matter calls not only for discussion, but for outspoken rebellion.' E.C.Stanton.¹⁸²

This chapter will examine how each author stimulated and enhanced the reforming initiative set in motion through their abolition and suffrage discourse. The cult of sensibility had prompted a shift in the public consciousness towards a more humanitarian attitude and this in turn led to an appreciation of the maternal qualities at the heart of this ideology. Sensitivity, sympathy and benevolence marked the followers of this cult and its reforming potential was not lost on writers of the period. If women were to build on these opportunities and play a more active part in regulating public behaviour then they needed equal educational opportunities. Literature on female conduct and didactic tracts worked to identify the fixed principles which would equip women for this important task. At the heart of their argument was a demand for a spiritual sensibility, a religious perspective which valued and

¹⁸⁰ J. Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1968) (1658), p. 521.

¹⁸¹ R. Gould from 'Love Given O're: or, a Satyr against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy, &c, of Woman, 1682'. Jones, V (ed), *Women in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 61.

¹⁸² Article by E.C.Stanton Seneca Falls, N.Y. 16 November 1860 *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, p. 445.

empowered women as important contributors to the reformation of male manners. This chapter holds the key to what went before and what is to follow in the thesis, in that it seeks to identify the authors' literary means of empowering those quintessentially religious sentiments which form the essence of true femininity.

The key areas under discussion are of necessity education, sensibility and religion: these three spheres were integral to the reforming campaign which was waged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. The cult of sensibility gave women hitherto only dreamed of opportunities for reform. Barker-Benfield suggests: 'Sensibility denoted the receptivity of the senses' evidenced through a 'heightened consciousness of feelings, one's own and other people's and it was at the heart of a culture of reform.' Barker-Benfield also noted, however, the continuous struggle over its meanings and values, suggesting that 'while sensibility rested on essentially materialistic assumptions, proponents of the cultivation of sensibility came to invest it with spiritual and moral values.'¹⁸³ It is the investing of sensibility with 'spiritual and moral values' which this chapter seeks to trace.

The intuitive capacities of the female mind, these writers argued, required scholarly instruction if women were to achieve their potential and equal status in society. At the same time, their arguments worked to deconstruct and dismantle traditional patriarchal assumptions. The arguments in this chapter, by necessity, are comprehensive and far-reaching, tackling the 'woman question' from a diversity of perspectives. The 'white slavery' issue was never far from their minds, and consequently the chapter will expect to witness a constant juxtaposing of gendered language. Sensibility is legitimised through a linguistic promotion of discernment and democracy, whilst a political discourse disputes dictatorship and domination.

Commonly held perceptions of womanhood swung between representations of the spiritual Mary and the sinning Eve.¹⁸⁴ The cult of

¹⁸³ *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. xvi.

¹⁸⁴ See 'Exorcising Evil from Eve': Chapter two in *Beyond God the Father* by Mary Daly (The Women's Press Ltd., 1986), p. 44.

sensibility could be said to mirror this perception, and for the purpose of exalting pure femininity, the sharp distinction made between sensibility and its counterfeit representation will be examined. The 'fixed principle' or fundamental truth upon which Hannah More's poem *Sensibility* (1782) was structured acts as a touchstone to the reformatory arguments of this chapter; Wollstonecraft's writing in particular gives clear evidence of *her* struggles with the tensions between sensibility and reason.

The chapter will examine these tensions, contrasting the refined sentiments of her earlier writing with her later impressions as recorded in *The View* which would appear almost contradictory. In *The View* she points to 'reason' as the higher faculty: 'One great cause of misery in the present imperfect state of society is, that the imagination, continually tantalized, becomes the inflated wen of the mind, draining off the nourishment from the vital parts..... Reason;' she suggests, 'beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can provide the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion.'¹⁸⁵ These innate tensions were apparently dissipated in her *Letters* where a shift in outlook and tergiversation of thought is evident: 'The majesty of nature elicits an overflow of emotion, in these respects my very reason obliges me to permit my feelings to be my criterion.'¹⁸⁶ Wollstonecraft's equivocal nature is somewhat stabilised during her travels, and she was to learn that as Green argues in *The Woman of Reason*: 'Sensibility and passion are as necessary to man as is reason.'¹⁸⁷

The ultimate focus of this chapter, whilst acknowledging ambivalent tendencies, will be the identifying and chronicling of the textual negotiations as these writers sought to distinguish between the two versions of sensibility. The aggrandisement of feeling, fundamental to the nature of sensibility, they invested with spiritual and moral values; and clear distinction needs to be made between this virtuous representation and its materialistic and sensual opposite. More's poem *Sensibility* identifies and illuminates this

¹⁸⁵ M. Wollstonecraft, *An Historical & Moral View of the French Revolution*, p. 6, (vol 6).

¹⁸⁶ M. Wollstonecraft, *Letters written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, p. 289, (vol 6).

¹⁸⁷ K. Green, *The Woman of Reason* (Polity Press, 1995), p. 68.

phenomenon with precision. She refers to: 'that quick'ning spark of Deity', a *female* deity, as being a quality inherent in the very fibres of feminine consciousness which exists where 'fine-wrought spirit feels acute paine:/ Where glow exalted sense, and taste refin'd,/ There keener anguish rankles in the mind:/ There feeling is diffus'd thro' ev'ry part: /Thrills each nerve, and lives in all the heart.'¹⁸⁸ Having identified this 'exalted sense' the chapter will argue that its essentially gendered nature inevitably empowered women, allowing their sex a spiritual credibility.

Close attention will be paid to the educational tracts directed towards women. It will critically analyse More's *Strictures* in the light of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. The analogous nature of these two texts was examined in the intervening years, with Anna Seward and Mary Berry, contemporaries of More and Wollstonecraft, remarking on the polarity of their discourse. More recently Harriet Guest pointed out: 'The polarization of the public and private characters of the two women is evident in the texts they produced, but nevertheless what is common to them is the language, the discourse in which they characterize the corruptions of femininity.'¹⁸⁹ The tone of *Strictures*, I shall be suggesting, has perhaps more in common with *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) Wollstonecraft's first publication. This text will also be evaluated along with tracts, essays, letters and poems written by each woman, in an attempt to elicit the nature of their arguments for the autonomy of women.

The philosophical mood of mid-nineteenth-century New England reflected a somewhat similar intellectual and cultural atmosphere to that of eighteenth-century England. Both periods were characterised by an appreciation of the natural world as opposed to materialism and commercialism; an emphasis that intuition was the key not only to knowledge, but to an understanding of the divine; and an accelerating distinction between religious orthodoxy and Protestant nonconformity. Known as the Age of Transcendentalism, this period was marked by a call for individual moral and spiritual development, its

¹⁸⁸ *The Works of Hannah More*, Poems: 'Sensibility.' pp, 167-187, vol 1.

¹⁸⁹ H. Guest, *Small Change Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.275.

outlook not unlike the cult of sensibility. Men such as Waldo Emerson, (1802-82) Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) and Theodore Parker (1810-1860) embraced this philosophical mindset which Emerson suggested called for: 'Unity within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other'.¹⁹⁰

Stanton and Eddy used this atmosphere to press their reformatory arguments; close attention will be paid to the literary tones they adopted. Stanton's bold, political discourse was in marked contrast to Eddy's writing of this period which clearly registered her personal struggles. What is especially interesting to note once again is the wide range of literary genres they contributed to, and the chapter will examine sermons, tracts, short stories, letters and poems to evaluate their arguments for female worth.

Examining the different contexts in which these four women wrote, an important framework becomes identifiable: fundamental to the writing of feminist or anti-feminist, British or American is the demand for the coming together of those three grand forces: education, sensibility and religion. Through 'discussion' and 'rebellion' their works demanded equal educational opportunities, an appreciation of the feminine and a reappraisal of Biblical exegesis. Mothers were represented as caretakers of the nation's morals; epitomizing the tender characteristics of a maternal first parent qualified and empowered them to modify a brutal age. Persuasive and eloquent arguments were responsible for the linking of the domestic economy with civic virtue, effectively empowering and authorising the private sphere of women. These writers were pioneers of a literary genre which created a gendered language through which to argue their cause, and this chapter seeks to identify how, through this lexicon, they spiritually authorised the feminine.

Fixed First Principles

'The image of God implanted in our nature is now more rapidly expanding; and, as it opens, liberty with maternal wing seems to be soaring to regions far above vulgar annoyance, promising to shelter all mankind.' M. Wollstonecraft.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ M.H.Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Sixth Edition, p. 216.

¹⁹¹ *A View*, p. 22.

Wollstonecraft persistently arranged her arguments within a religious framework. Literary criticism of her works through the years has, I would suggest, tended towards analysis of her radical political and feminist ideals, overlooking the fundamental religious fervour which this chapter will suggest permeates her writing. The first chapter of *Vindication* argues succinctly for a need to get back to 'first principles'. Exposing her radical religious perspectives she argues that the idea of woman being created *for* man 'must be allowed to fall to the ground.....Supposing woman to have been formed only to please, and be subject to man, the conclusion is just, she ought to sacrifice every other consideration to render herself agreeable to him.' Wollstonecraft expresses doubts that a Supreme Being could have allowed so debasing a design: 'But, if, as I think, may be demonstrated, the purposes, of even this life, viewing the whole, [be] subverted by practical rules built upon this ignoble base, I may be allowed to doubt whether woman were created for man: and, though the cry of irreligion, or even atheism, be raised against me, I will simply declare, that were an angel from heaven to tell me that Moses's beautiful, poetical cosmogony, and the account of the fall of man, were literally true, I could not believe what my reason told me was derogatory to the character of the Supreme Being' (*Vindication* p148). Wollstonecraft is clearly not an atheist; she is, however, intent on exposing what she considers to be religious subversion, based on blind and bigoted beliefs which she sees as responsible for the subjugation of women. The 'blind submission' imposed upon the clergy, she argues, cramps their opportunities of improvement, declaring boldly: 'I build my belief on the perfection of God' (*ibid* p 84). Wollstonecraft's dissenting doctrinal arguments are fundamental to her exposition of the corruptions of femininity. Her texts, whilst identifying the potential for spiritually minded women, nevertheless sharply criticise contemporary female behaviour and the way woman is publicly portrayed.

Intelligent Intuitivism

Wollstonecraft argued for the advantages of equal educational opportunities, the cultivation of the arts *and* sciences: 'it is obviously the cultivation of these

alone, emphatically termed the arts of peace, that can turn the sword into a ploughshare.....Ignorant people, when they appear to reflect, exercise their imagination more than their understanding: indulging reveries, instead of pursuing a train of thinking; and thus grow romantic, like the croisaders; or like women, who are commonly idle and restless.¹⁹²

Already, Wollstonecraft has characterised female nature in markedly oppositional terms: the sheltering wing of maternalism, that wing which promises to shelter *all* mankind, has powerful connotations in terms of female protective powers. 'Wings' metaphorically speaking as well as having sheltering properties also symbolise a state of soaring ascendancy. It is important to note, however, that it is 'the image of God implanted in our nature' which accredits this portrayal. The second model of womanhood represents a highly materialistic version: ignorant revellers, idle and restless. Clearly, Wollstonecraft is as critical of women as she is of the oppressive and restrictive system of subjugation - education she views as the route which will effectively lead women out of their submissive and dependent states towards a dignified equal social status. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, a chapter entitled 'Unfortunate Situation of Females, Fashionably Educated, and Left Without a Fortune' paints a vivid picture of life's opportunities for women like herself:

Few are the modes of earning a subsistence, and those very humiliating. Perhaps to be an humble companion to some rich old cousin, or what is still worse, to live with strangers, who are so intolerably tyrannical, that none of their own relations can bear to live with them, though they should even expect a fortune in reversion. It is impossible to enumerate the many hours of anguish such a person must spend. Above the servants, yet considered by them as a spy, and ever reminded of her inferiority when in conversation with the superiors. If she cannot condescend to mean flattery, she has not a chance of being a favourite; and should any of the visitors take notice of her, and she for a moment

¹⁹² *ibid*, p. 23.

forget her subordinate state, she is sure to be reminded of it. Painfully sensible of unkindness, she is alive to every thing, and many sarcasms reach her, which were perhaps directed another way. She is alone, shut out from equality and confidence, and the concealed anxiety impairs her constitution; for she must wear a cheerful face, or be dismissed. The being dependant [sic] on the caprice of a fellow-creature, though certainly very necessary in this state of discipline, is yet a very bitter corrective, which we would fain shrink from.¹⁹³

This is a sharp denunciation of the life open to women who were not under the protection of either father or husband. 'Humble' and 'humiliating' were the states they were reduced to; 'tyrannical' was the regime they were forced to reside under, and 'anguish' marked their subordinate state. This clearly autobiographical impression highlights the consternation of having to 'live with strangers': a letter written to Jane Arden on December 20, 1778 reiterates: 'There is no prospect of my quitting this place in a hurry, necessity not choice ties me to it, (not but that I ~~feel~~ receive the greatest civility from this family) - yet, I am detained here only by prudential motives, if I was to follow the best of my inclination I shod [sic] haste away. - You will not wonder at this, - when you consider I am among Strangers, far from all my former connexions:¹⁹⁴ The anguish caused through dependency on 'the caprice of a fellow-creature' clearly wears away at the sensibilities, as a further letter notes: 'my health is ruined, my spirits broken, and I have a constant pain in my side that is daily gaining ground on me: - My head aches with holding it down.....I am tired so good night...'¹⁹⁵ These letters, as well as pointing to Wollstonecraft's later rebellion and humanitarianism also draw attention to an extreme sensitivity: 'I have a heart too susceptible for my own peace,¹⁹⁶ she writes, they also shed light on the later tensions manifested in her different literary tones.

¹⁹³ M. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p. 25. (vol 4)

¹⁹⁴ K.N.Cameron (ed), *Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822*, p. 970. vol 11. Cameron suggests that Wollstonecraft's correspondence with Jane Arden evidences: 'signs of both her later rebellion and humanitarianism.' p. 939.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, p.965.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, p. 957.

Towards a Civilization Founded on Reason and Morality

'It is time to effect a revolution in female manners - time to restore to them their lost dignity - and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world.' M. Wollstonecraft. ¹⁹⁷

'It is very absurd to see a woman, whose brow time has marked with wrinkles, aping the manners of a girl in her teens' writes Wollstonecraft in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*: 'If the understanding is not exercised, the memory will be employed to little purpose':

Girls learn something of music, drawing, and geography; but they do not know enough to engage their attention, and render it an employment of the mind. If they can play over a few tunes to their acquaintance, and have a drawing or two (half done by the master) to hang up in their rooms, they imagine themselves artists for the rest of their lives. It is not the being able to execute a trifling landscape, or any thing of the kind, that is of consequence - These are at best but trifles, and the foolish, indiscriminate praises which are bestowed on them only produce vanity. But what is really of no importance, when considered in this light, becomes of the utmost, when a girl has a fondness for the art, and a desire of excellence. Whatever tends to make a person in some measure independent of the senses, is a prop to virtue. Amusing employments must first occupy the mind; and as an attention to moral duties leads to piety, so whoever weighs one subject will turn to others, and new ideas will rush into the mind. The faculties will be exercised, and not suffered to sleep, which will give a variety to the character. (*Thoughts*, p. 12).

Weak, petty, trivial, intellectually inferior: these were the epithets women subconsciously attached to themselves. It is only fair to note, however, that in this assumption they had been assiduously supported by the male sex. Men had for centuries portrayed woman as weak and ineffectual.

¹⁹⁷ *Vindication*, p. 114.

Wollstonecraft laboured indefatigably to distinguish with clarity in her writing the difference between trifling and flimsy materialism and its substantial, significant opposite. Keenly aware of the potential damage to women as the result of an exaggerated 'sensibility', she was quick to condemn the practice of bestowing 'Indiscriminate' and unearned praise. The production and praise of inferior work did not result in the exercising of their faculties, but simply assisted in keeping them in a subservient and dependent state. This counterfeit expression of sensibility led to vice and disadvantage: it was only through a pursuit of excellence, Wollstonecraft considered, that a woman could seize some measure of independence, both in her life and from the senses. The pursuit of an intelligent intuitivism would release them from *enslavement* to the 'senses.' A reasoned understanding resulting from a sound education was essential if women were to demonstrate moral excellence and regain their lost dignity. 'Dancing and elegance of manners are very pleasing,' suggests Wollstonecraft, 'if too great a stress is not laid on them. These acquirements catch the senses, and open the way to the heart; but unsupported by solid good qualities, their reign is short' (*Thoughts*, p. 12).

Train Up a Child

The Biblical admonition - 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it'¹⁹⁸ - appears to underlie the method of reform pressed by each author.

Wollstonecraft transcribed *Elements of Morality* (1790) from German into English and through this 'little work' written by C.G.Salzman, was able to promote her own opinions regarding the education of children:

This little Work [fell accidentally] into my hands, when I began to learn German, and, merely as an exercise in that language, I attempted to translate it; but, as I proceeded, I was pleased to find that chance had thrown in my way a very rational book, and that the

¹⁹⁸ *Holy Bible*, Proverbs 22: 6.

writer coincided with me in opinion respecting the method which ought to be pursued to form the heart and temper, or, in other words, to inculcate the first principles of morality.I term it a translation, though I do not pretend to assert that it is a literal one; on the contrary, beside making it an English story, I have made [some additions, and] altered many parts of it, not only to give it the spirit of an original, but to avoid introducing any German customs or local opinions.....I wished to insinuate a taste for domestic pleasures into the hearts of both parents and children.¹⁹⁹

That social reform could only be effected through the equal educational opportunities of its children Wollstonecraft understood, as she proceeded to 'inculcate the first principles of morality' through texts which drew pictures from real life. Addressing parents, she claims: 'The design of this Book is to give birth to what we call a GOOD DISPOSITION in children.....A good disposition is, in my opinion, a superior degree of knowledge: knowledge consists in being acquainted with the characteristics of things; but a good disposition is not confined to a bare acquaintance with their distinguishing characters, it extends to their intrinsic value, and the effects produced by them, to which affection or aversion is, at all times, necessarily attached.'²⁰⁰

The text, through didactic argument, inculcates a desire for holiness: it exemplifies the family as the birthplace of a good disposition, emphasising the supreme importance of family life in the reordering of society. The first principles of morality are secured on a bedrock of Christianity, and it is to the mother that the task of forming the heart and temper of her offspring is given:

But where shall I find, asks the affectionate mother, a person who possesses sufficient abilities to instruct my children in this manner?
- Respectable woman, since thou hast sufficient tenderness and sense to be anxious about the person to whom thou wishest to instruct the weighty charge of educating thy children, I approach thee with respect, and with pleasure offer thee my advice. The

¹⁹⁹ M. Wollstonecraft, *Elements of Morality*, p. 5. (vol 2).

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, p. 7.

properest person to form the character of thy children, is thyself.

Your sex has undeniably more tenderness than ours; the female voice is, in general, more persuasive and soft, and more easily insinuates itself into the hearts of children. They have a greater affection for [their mother, if she do not resign the office,] than for any other person in the world, and your vivacity and tenderness will enable you to give a degree of interest and familiarity to the tales, which a man who enters into the busy scenes of life will seldom be able to equal.

To you does the pleasing task belong of forming their tempers, and giving them habits of virtue; for as the sight of your breast is a hint to you that you were destined to suckle your children, so is the consciousness of your abilities, and the domestic ties, which so firmly attach your children to you, hints from God, that the first formation of their character [belongs to] you.²⁰¹

Salzmann and Wollstonecraft are adamant that the teaching of the finer principles was the mother's God-given responsibility. The onus for the acquisition of a virtuous soul was upon them. This heavenly assignment was their life mission, and the reader can feel the covert censure applied to those women who 'resigned' their office. The gendered perspectives in this narrative are worthy of comment; as Wollstonecraft has made it clear that she took the liberty of altering parts of the original text, it is interesting that she chose to maintain the masculine persona. References to 'your sex' could have been replaced by 'our sex' or more anonymously 'the female sex'. She was in a unique position, however, translating the text to suit her perspectives, but hiding behind a masculine persona. The translation of *Elements of Morality* set the stage for the reforming zeal of *Vindication*. This work was published two years later and though a didactic work, its genre was decidedly more political: *Vindication*, whilst incorporating the characteristics of her previous publications, did not include moral tales or fictional narrative as a

²⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 11.

means of imparting its reforming message. This politically motivated polemic was precise, unequivocal and explicit in its unambiguous argument for women's rights, and whilst counselling the mother in *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft is careful to identify reciprocal benefits:

.....fulfilling the duties of a mother, a woman with a sound constitution, may still keep her person scrupulously neat, and assist to maintain her family, if necessary, or by reading and conversations with both sexes, indiscriminately, improve her mind. For nature has so wisely ordered things, that did women suckle their children, they would preserve their own health, and there would be such an interval between the birth of each child, that we should seldom see a houseful of babes. And did they pursue a plan of conduct, and not waste their time in following the fashionable vagaries of dress, the management of their household and children need not shut them out from literature, [or] prevent their attaching themselves to a science, with that steady eye which strengthens the mind, or practising one of the fine arts that cultivate the taste.²⁰²

Her 'plan of conduct' necessitated fulfilling the 'natural' order of things. This order, however, was not at the *expense* of the woman, but rather contributed towards an enlarged understanding. It was 'the idle bustle of morning trifling' that 'drew women from their duty to render them insignificant' which attracted Wollstonecraft's most censorious criticism. The demand for accomplished womanhood is clearly outlined:

.....we shall not see women affectionate till more equality be established in society, till ranks are [confounded and women freed, neither shall we] see that dignified domestic happiness, the simple grandeur of which cannot be relished by ignorant or vitiated minds; nor will the important task of education ever be properly begun till the person of a woman is no longer preferred to her mind. For it

²⁰² *Vindication*, p. 263.

would be as wise to expect corn from tares, or figs from thistles, as that a foolish ignorant woman should be a good mother.²⁰³

Wollstonecraft links her argument for productive womanhood with scriptural imagery; to expect corn or figs from tares and thistles is just as improbable as that uneducated, uncultivated mothers should successfully nurture and sustain their offspring. The book of 'Proverbs' cites a powerful portrayal of ideal womanhood:

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; She looketh well to the ways of her household; She considereth a field and buyeth it; She layeth her hands to the spindle; She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.²⁰⁴

Here is introduced a vision of woman as vindicated from subjugation *through* her feminine attributes. Her virtue and wisdom²⁰⁵ equip her as domestic economist. Indeed, her benevolent nature renders her worth inestimable: whilst caring for the needs of her husband, children and the poor, she is also portrayed as contributing to the household economy, buying and selling fields. Her status as an equal falls naturally to her as a consequence of her virtuous character.

Subverted Femininity

Male critics were quick to condemn apparently liberal-minded women set on disrupting what they considered to be the *natural* order of things. Disputing

²⁰³ *ibid*, p. 263.

²⁰⁴ *Holy Bible*, 'Proverbs' 31: 10-28.

²⁰⁵ It is worth noting the gendered referencing to 'wisdom': Proverbs 4: 5,6,8,9: 'Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake **her** not; and **she** shall preserve thee: love **her**, and **she** shall keep thee. Exalt **her**, and **she** shall preserve thee: **she** shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace **her**. **She** shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall **she** deliver to thee.' (my emphasis)

suggestions of woman as of equal status to themselves they wrote to discredit a 'subversive' female element. Richard Polwhele's²⁰⁶ repressive quelling of 'liberated' women usefully contextualises contemporary opinion.

Richard Polwhele contributed to traditional conservative publications of the day and he was sharply critical of outspoken female authors. His esteem for Hannah More as an ideal feminine representative was notable and contrasted sharply with his opinion of Mary Wollstonecraft: 'Miss Hannah More may justly be esteemed, as a character, in all points, diametrically opposite to Miss Wollstonecraft.'²⁰⁷ His satirical poem *The Unsex'd Females* was aimed at readers of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The language used in this work appears patriarchal and imperialistic, representing the cultural perspective of a dominant masculine ideology. Its assumptions and conceptions constituted the required code of conduct for female behaviour. Its tone privileges and champions the 'softer charms' of the female. Applauding this 'natural' perspective, Polwhele uses overtly aggressive and personally offensive rhetoric to portray the more liberal woman. Use of words such as 'despising', 'defiance', 'vengeance', and 'imperious' in the opening lines of the poem lends a bellicose and belligerent tone:

Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw,
A female band despising NATURE'S law,
As 'proud defiance' flashes from their arms,
And vengeance smothers all their softer charms,
I shudder at the new unpictur'd scene,
Where unsex'd woman vaunts her imperious mien;

See Wollstonecraft, whom no decorum checks,
Arise, the intrepid champion of her sex;
O'er humbled man assert the sovereign claim.....

²⁰⁶ Richard Polwhele (1729-1838) A miscellaneous writer who wrote regularly for the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

²⁰⁷ R. Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females*. A Poem (London: Cadell, 1798), 35n.

The second line invokes the fundamental principle upon which Polwhele's argument is to be structured: 'Nature is the grand basis of all laws human and divine; and the woman who has no regard to nature, either in the decoration of her person, or the culture of her mind, will soon 'walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.' The misogynistic stereotyping of the female character is breathtaking, but close reading of the narrative suggests a latent fear on the part of the writer. The supreme rule of a sovereign certainly suggests the necessary subservient humility of her subordinates. A powerful female milieu was therefore to be avoided at all costs. The intrepid championing of the rights of woman by Wollstonecraft was anathema to Polwhele and his contemporaries. His inclusion of other eminent female writers by name indicates his fear of the burgeoning effect the 'call to the cause' might have on the female population:

To the bold heights where glory beams, aspire,
Blend mental energy with Passion's fire,
Surpass their rivals in the powers of mind
And vindicate the Rights of womankind.'
She spoke; and veteran BARBAULD caught the strain.....,

This stanza highlights, what I would suggest was the covert, but nevertheless very real fear in the mind of men like Polwhele; that female aspirations would lead them to 'heights' and 'powers of mind' which could rival or even surpass those of men. This attitude exposes the fears and weaknesses in a hierarchical belief system where superiority and subservience sit so uncomfortably alongside each other.

It is clear from the foregoing that the cultural milieu of masculine monopoly needed to be penetrated if women were to seize any sense of authority. Whilst the cult of sensibility was a cultural movement of influence, largely associated with women, this did not prohibit masculine assimilation of its finer qualities; indeed its refining and reforming potential was not lost on the male

authors of the period who pressed its civilising influence.²⁰⁸

A Culture of Sensibility - The Behavioural Pattern of the Protestant Ethic

The fundamental nature of this cult led to the enfranchisement of a religion of the heart. This 'Protestant ethic', as it became known was not confined to one creed, but rather embraced all faiths, its nucleus being the Christian belief of revealed religion. A personal, spiritual relationship between God, man and nature was the focus of its ideological perspective. It defined itself against the practice of 'Deism' which relied on truths allied to human reasoning, indeed *this* practice was antipathetical to sensibility's emphasis on the spiritual or transcendental qualities which promoted an ideology of feminised culture. The cult of sensibility argued against the coldly reasonable religion of the day as it sought to effect reform in society.²⁰⁹

The continuous struggle over the meanings and values of this cult is emphasised by Grant who contends: 'Sensibility may be founded on the rock of moral sense, but the sentimental frequently becomes perilously close to foundering on the rocks of sensuality.'²¹⁰ This argument in effect mirrored that which tried to portray women as sensual and disruptive, and it was therefore of major importance to proponents of a spiritual sensibility to elucidate and validate its fixed principles. The positive perspectives are sharply contrasted with its materialistic and sensual opposite in Hannah More's poem *Sensibility*, written in 1782, and described by Anne Stott as 'an advocacy of the religion of the heart.'²¹¹

²⁰⁸ For examples, see writings of Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (1768); Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, (1740); Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Julie or The New Heloise*.(1761)

²⁰⁹ Barker-Benfield noted: 'If sensibility was a form of religion, the evidence suggests it was overwhelmingly a religion of women. Women's minds, bodies, and domestic spaces were its sanctums (one "shrine" therein was the tea table), where it could be consolidated and developed into self-consciousness and authoritative convention, before issuing outward in demands for heterosocial politeness and, eventually, reform. Its fundamental intention was to reshape men.....' *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 262.

²¹⁰ C. Grant, *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere 1700-1830*, 'The choice of Hercules: the polite arts and 'female excellence' in eighteenth-century London', (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 79.

²¹¹ A. Stott, *Hannah More The First Victorian* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 83.

Sweet SENSIBILITY! Thou secret pow'r
Who shed'st thy gifts upon the natal hour,
Like fairy favours; art can never seize,
Nor affectation catch thy pow'r to please:
Thy subtle essence still eludes the chains
Of definition, and defeats her pains.

This stanza is a plenary exposition of the true nature of sensibility: this omniscient power, bequeathed only to the chosen, hidden from the world and defeating any attempts at explanation or circumscription, is a birth blessing and cannot be acquired by art or affectation. The tone of the narrative emulates the refined, cultured and tender atmosphere which, More suggests, is at its heart. The promotion of woman as blest, as the receiver and presenter of blessings is implicit in More's discourse, as it enshrines the nature of the feminine as a divine benefactress. It holds within its discourse a secret promise which portends female equality on spiritual terms. The thought is allowed to run on through the use of open couplets, and the pattern of the verse does not dominate the reading of the poem, giving the reader a flexible and inspirational *modus operandi*. Spiritual reflection, rather than human logic is appealed to, and these spiritual and moral qualities, invested by More in sensibility, could not be successfully 'affected' by those proponents of a materialistic persuasion. The aggrandizement of a quality so associated with the feminine held out tremendous potential for women to capitalise on its 'secret pow'r' and reforming influence: power as a faculty so generally associated with the male. More's poem sanctions sensibility with an authority which supersedes the standards codified by gender, effectively inaugurating a *spiritual* hierarchy, and she identifies its intangibility through linking this 'gift' with 'fairy favours'. These mythical creatures, portrayed as supernatural beings in possession of magical powers, were useful representations of this mystical quality.

The importance of this stanza to the clarification of not only the meaning of sensibility, but its redemptive significance to women, cannot be overstated. References to 'secret pow'r'; 'natal hour'; and 'pains'; clearly connect this 'gift'

closely with the maternal and motherhood, so the suggestion that this - 'subtle essence....defeats her pains' - is a rather intriguing one; is More referring to the 'pains' of childbirth? In the light of the reference to 'natal hour' this would seem a credible explanation. 'Genesis' 3:16 confirms, God said to the woman (after she was beguiled by the serpent): 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children...' could More be suggesting then that this 'secret pow'r' offers woman some sort of spiritual compensation? If so, she clearly sees sensibility as a powerful spiritual attribute, with tremendous redemptive potential:

SWEET SENSIBILITY! Thou keen delight!
Unprompted moral! sudden sense of right!
Perception exquisite! fair virtue's seed!
Thou quick precursor of the lib'ral deed!
Thou hasty conscience! reason's blushing morn!
Instinctive kindness e'er reflexion's born!

Sophisticated literary devices contribute to the rich assonantal effect; the alliteration and structural style add to an elaborate and intricate linguistic strategy. The reader is struck by the prolific use of exclamation marks in this stanza. Exclamation marks are used to indicate words which represent strong, sudden cries and were used frequently and especially by women writers of the period. Could this suggest an excess, or loss of control? I would suggest not; these typographical insignia reinforce More's use of ellipses, eliminating the need for all but a few carefully chosen words.

More expounds the virtues which characterise sensibility - 'Moral', 'right', 'exquisite', its 'instinctive' responsiveness towards human suffering. The 'reason' so commonly associated with the masculine is covertly criticised here: 'Instinctive kindness' has responded 'e'er reflexion's born', the 'lib'ral deed' being accomplished before the 'reasoned' thought has had time for ratiocination. Having already emphasised the *power* inherent within this female phenomenon, the subtext to this stanza includes a political emphasis. The binary nature of words such as 'right', 'lib'ral', 'conscience',

and of course 'blushing morn', suggests an incorporation of political values and reflects a politicising of sensibility. The assumption, therefore, could be made that sensibility is to become a springboard for political didacticism as well as the restructuring of cultural and social attitudes.

More continues by condemning the artifice so prevalent amongst women in the higher echelons of eighteenth-century society, and she does this in the manner of fashionable contemporary literary discourse. The next stanza parodies sensibility:

To those who know thee not no words can paint,
And those who know thee, know all words are faint!
She does not feel thy pow'r who boasts thy flame,
And rounds her every period with thy name,
Nor she who vents her disproportion'd sighs
With pining *Lesbia* when her sparrow dies:

The duplicitous worldliness evidenced by women who were able to operate their nerves by acts of will is roundly condemned by More. The skilful engagement of affectation evidenced by a callous disregard for humanity, whilst expressing an obsessive preoccupation with animals was a key element of this feigned sensibility.²¹² Phonemes are used to good effect, as segments of stream of speech sounds, the final word on each line indicating a more ponderous reflection, which as already noted is the opposite of 'instinctiveness.' Having slowed her readers through this syntactical strategy she now gives them time to reflect on the negative connotations inherent in these multifunctional words: 'paint,' 'faint,' 'flame,' 'name,' 'sighs,' 'dies' - the reader cannot fail to note their negative associations. The artifice inherent in the 'painted' face was cruelly addressed by Alexander Pope in *Epistle to a Lady*: 'Chameleons who can paint in white or black', and in *The Rape of the Lock* he refers to woman as a 'painted vessel.'²¹³ Fainting was a tactic frequently used to emphasise the delicacy of the female constitution, whilst

²¹² See Sarah Scott's *The History of Sir George Ellison* (London: A. Millar, 1766), for an illustration of this. p. 25, vol 1.

²¹³ M. H. Abrams (ed), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (W.W.Norton & Company, 1993), Sixth Edition, p. 2274, vol 1.

the word flame signifies overt passion. Sighing was a wile to draw attention to the person or as a result of boredom and the damage to the cause of sensibility that this inappropriate female behaviour caused, More is intent on addressing.

The next stanza reinforces an image of 'constructed' femininity. With an idiosyncratic perceptiveness and hyperbolic sentiment, More deconstructs the feminine counterfeit:

So exclamations, tender tones, fond tears,
And all the graceful drapery FEELING wears;
These are her garb, not her, they but express
Her form, her semblance, her appropriate dress;
And these fair marks, reluctant, I relate,
These lovely symbols may be counterfeit.²¹⁴

As in the previous stanza, the final word on each line is chosen with precision, so that the natural conclusion is 'counterfeit.' 'Tears,' 'wears,' 'express,' 'dress,' all relate, or could be linked to affectation. The simulation of authenticity is obviously of deep concern to More. This stanza warns of the need to look beneath the surface. 'Garb' is a covering; Elizabeth F, concerned that fashion could be used by the poor to emulate the style of the rich, warned of 'the confusion of all places being great where the meanest are as richly apparelled as their betters.'²¹⁵ The most avid consumers of fashion were the wives and daughters of men in the lower social orders, so impersonation or artifice, on both a physical as well as mental level was clearly a point at issue. More argued for the recognition of sensibility as a spiritual phenomenon, warning against its material or counterfeit opposite. This representation was quintessential to the platform of reform purported by More.

More's analysis of social conditioning was shrewd, and her literary attempts to redress the balance witnessed her application of Christianity to social theory. Fiercely critical of immorality and insincerity in either sex, she threw

²¹⁴ *The Works of Hannah More*, Poems. 'Sensibility'. pp. 166-181, vol 1.

²¹⁵ *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 173.

contempt on the male who, 'scorning life's low duties to attend/Writes odes on friendship/while he cheats his friend.' Honesty and integrity were at the heart of her reforming ideal, but it was to women that she ultimately threw down the gauntlet. Addressing those women who 'unreluctantly yielded themselves to be carried down the tide of popular practices' she wrote in the most stringent of terms. Vigilance against the wiles of evil and a life devoted to the glory of God was their whole duty, and their 'noblest style and title' she exclaimed was 'that of a Christian.'²¹⁶ The importance of More's poem to this chapter cannot be overstated; adroitly encapsulating the 'sensibility' argument, its empowerment of women emerges through its fundamental locating of their spiritual status as a birth-right.

The appropriation of an intuitive and inspirational consciousness to women was an important step in the reforming initiative of these authors. The next stage was two-fold: the dismantling of a patriarchally constructed femininity; and the publication of didactic manuals aimed at the cultivation of female understanding.

Exoneration, Justification and the Curbing of Female Imagination

Probably the most important and well known texts of Wollstonecraft and More, were *Vindication* and *Strictures*. Whilst suggesting that *Strictures* had perhaps more in common with *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, this chapter will now examine the parallels and divergences between the two polemics, suggesting that, as Mitzi Myers points out, Wollstonecraft and More are united, despite their political differences, in 'perceiving a society infected with fashionable corruption, [to which] both preach a militantly moral middle-class reform grounded in women's potentiality.'²¹⁷

Vindication as well as being a didactic manual for women, argued for a change in the public perception of their role in society; it worked to penetrate a masculine cultural milieu, targeting texts which attempted to denigrate or vilify

²¹⁶ *Strictures*, p. xii-xiii, vol 1.

²¹⁷ These issues are discussed more widely in Harriet Guest's essay 'The Dream of a Common Language', *Small Change, Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810*, p. 275.

women and with clinical precision deconstructed their mischievous literary campaigns. Challenging a misuse of sensibility and promotion of passive collusion, chapter V suggests: 'The opinions speciously supported, in some modern publications on the female character and education, which have given the tone to most of the observations made, in a more cursory manner, on the sex, remain to be examined.' She is dismissive of prejudiced male authors who have 'artificially structured' and falsely characterised the nature of women. Rousseau's behavioural prescriptives for women are specifically targeted and challenged: 'I shall begin with Rousseau,' she suggests 'and give a sketch of his character of woman:

Sophia, says Rousseau, should be as perfect a woman as Emilius is a man, and to render her so, it is necessary to examine the character which nature has given to the sex. He then proceeds to prove that woman ought to be weak and passive, because she has less bodily strength than man; and hence infers, that she was formed to please and to be subject to him; and that it is her duty to render herself *agreeable* to her master - this being the grand end of her existence. Still, however, to give a little mock dignity to lust, he insists that man should not exert his strength, but depend on the will of the woman, when he seeks for pleasure with her.²¹⁸

Using a masculine and combative style, Wollstonecraft is scathing in her attack on Rousseau's depiction of the character of woman. Weakness and passivity are anathema to her perception of responsible womanhood; the origin of the argument for women's inferiority is, however, covertly referred to in this paragraph: 'formed to please and to be subject to him'. Here we have the grounds for what seemed to be the positing of woman as secondary and thus inferior - 'formed to please'. The covert reference here is to that *second* record of creation in 'Genesis' 2, that account in which woman was formed from the rib of man. This account, so fundamental to an argument for female subservience, disregards the simultaneous creation of male and female, in His image, already recorded in 'Genesis' 1. Woman seen in this secondary light,

²¹⁸ *Vindication*, p. 147.

it could be argued, was indeed merely an appendage to man. These two opposing creative accounts, and their important relevance to women, will be examined in later chapters. Suffice to say at this point that the argument of men such as Rousseau, Gould and Polwhele for the 'natural' and 'religious' grounds upon which to base masculine superiority was firmly established in this doctrinal perspective.

Wollstonecraft argued that the 'artificial structure' of passivity and subjugated femininity had so infused society that women were as much to blame as men for their blind acquiescence in masculine superiority. To *Vindication* therefore she gave the multifarious task of arguing not only for the rights of women to social equality and a sound education, but of awakening women themselves to their responsibility as equal citizens. Her aims were clear: to discredit the perception of women as over-emotional, artificial and weak; to combat the encouraged manipulative behavioural patterns which in turn led to degeneracy of manners and morals; and to encourage nobler ambitions, a strength of mind and body with which to govern themselves with sobriety. The pursuit of intelligence, compassion, virtue and a cultivated mind would serve to render women inspiring influences in the construction of a more just and moral society.

This treatise on female rights and manners impressed upon women the strategies used by men to construct feminine characteristics and thereby circumscribe their agency. Wollstonecraft presented a rigorously logical and philosophical argument for the equality of women:

It is vain to expect virtue from women till they are, in some degree, independent of men; nay, it is vain to expect that strength of natural affection, which would make them good wives and mothers. Whilst they are absolutely dependent on their husbands they will be cunning, mean, and selfish, and the men who can be gratified by the fawning fondness of spaniel-like affection, have not much delicacy, for love is not to be bought, in any sense of the words, its silken wings are instantly shrivelled up when any thing beside a

return in kind is sought.²¹⁹

This paragraph makes clear that Wollstonecraft, like More, seeks to enhance the role of motherhood to society. Humiliation, she argues, breeds cunning; only through a proper sense of respect and equality, indeed a coming-together of the mental as well as the physical, can a true and loving relationship be realised. Unequal relationships where one partner holds the balance of power inevitably lead to the 'cunning' and 'meanness' she refers to. The symbolically expressive nature of her narrative, the use of words which are instantly transcribed into a visionary experience, bring a cogency to her argument.

The depiction of 'love' with 'silken wings' is beautifully poetic and paints a vivid picture of its fragile, *and* ephemeral nature. Applied in a practical sense, however, Wollstonecraft is using the language of sensibility against itself. The covert message is: beware the over-sentimentalization of love, beware the affectation referred to by More, and strive rather for a natural affection built upon mutual approbation.

Admonishing husbands and fathers, she continues:

Men are not aware of the misery they cause, and the vicious weakness they cherish, by only inciting women to render themselves pleasing; they do not consider that they thus make natural and artificial duties clash, by sacrificing the comfort and respectability of a woman's life to voluptuous notions of beauty, when in nature they all harmonize.

Cold would be the heart of a husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery, who did not feel more delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother, than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise; yet this natural way of cementing the matrimonial tie, and twisting esteem with fonder recollections,

²¹⁹ *Vindication*, p. 212.

wealth leads women to spurn. To preserve their beauty, and wear the flowery crown of the day, [which] gives them a kind of right to reign for a short time over the sex, they neglect to stamp impressions on their husbands' hearts, that would be remembered with more tenderness when the snow on the head began to chill the bosom, than even their virgin charms. The maternal solicitude of a reasonable affectionate woman is very interesting, and the chastened dignity with which a mother returns the caresses that she and her child receive from a father who has been fulfilling the serious duties of his station, is not only a respectable, but a beautiful sight.²²⁰

Nature and philosophy mingle in the rhetoric of this reasoned treatise. Use of the word 'respectability' anchors this portrayal of true 'womanhood', emphasised by the use of this word twice within the space of a few lines: to be respectable is to attract respect. It is an outright attack on artifice, debauchery, trickery all characterised as inherently 'unnatural' and incongruous, whilst the cementing of the 'natural' qualities; comfort, care, consideration and charitable kindness all prompt the prevalence of harmony within the state of holy matrimony. When mutual attraction is based on more than physicality, then neither age nor time will diminish the respect and dignity of one partner for the other. I would suggest that Wollstonecraft is endorsing here, despite her calls for 'independence', the value of separate spheres. The idyll of an intelligent, caring maternal influence at the heart of the home, welcoming her thoughtful, earnest and sober mate is to her a 'beautiful sight.' This utopian vision of marriage, however, has a price:

Moralists have unanimously agreed, that unless virtue be nursed by liberty, it will never attain due strength - and what they say of man I extend to mankind.....To render women truly useful members of society, I argue that they should be led, by having their understandings cultivated on a large scale, to acquire a rational affection for their country, founded on knowledge, because it is

²²⁰ *Vindication*, p. 212.

obvious that we are little interested about what we do not understand.....That women at present are by ignorance rendered foolish or vicious, is. I think, not to be disputed; and, that the most salutary effects tending to improve mankind might be expected from a REVOLUTION in female manners.....²²¹

Traditional gender definitions were in need of radical change, according to Wollstonecraft's arguments; liberty extended to the female sex would reap societal reform from which all would benefit. Appealing to the higher minds of each sex, she suggests:

In treating, therefore, of the manners of women, let us, disregarding sensual arguments, trace what we should endeavour to make them in order to co-operate, if the expression be not too bold, with the supreme Being. By individual education, I mean, for the sense of the word is not precisely defined, such an attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; so that the man may only have to proceed, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason. Consequently, the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue it will render it independent.²²²

On the one hand, Wollstonecraft is suggesting a 'revolution' in female manners, but juxtaposed alongside this she contends for female co-operation. What is the reader to understand by these apparently antithetical positions? I would suggest that these two perspectives encapsulate what is at the heart of Wollstonecraft's vision for female emancipation: a revolutionary demand for female education, a cultivation of knowledge, which as well as instilling a sense of their own worth will render women more

²²¹ *Vindication*, p. 264.

²²² *ibid*, p. 90.

valuable contributors to society. Conversely, cultivation of the heart as well as the understanding was a necessary component of co-operation with the supreme Being. This concept of 'co-operation' with the supreme Being, is one which needs further investigation. At first reading this may simply suggest that woman needs to acquire the attributes which will allow her to fulfil her maternal mission, but use of the word 'bold' suggests another meaning. Co-operation, or a working together with the supreme Being was traditionally a male prerogative, he had already claimed this office, and to suggest a personal collaboration or working relationship between woman and her maker, without the traditional masculine mediation, would have been deemed disruptive.

In a text noted for its rational arguments, her recognition of the 'important task of learning to think and reason' surprisingly comes secondary to the need for 'sharpening the senses', 'forming the temper', and 'regulating the passions', vis-a-vis the assimilation of sensibility. The subjection of sensibility to reason is clearly not as sharply defined as may be expected in a treatise of this nature.

Wollstonecraft argues with verve and vivacity for that type of education, however, which strengthens the very fibres of the being, which constructs and supports the character, giving constancy and resolution to the female mind:

.....for the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to

the judgement.²²³

She argues for the acquirement of accomplished femininity through persistent methodological study. She demands this type of education for women with the express purpose of making them independent. It is only through an enlarged understanding and emancipated liberty that women will be in a position to improve the whole sex. Taking an adroit literary swipe at patriarchal doctrinal theology she proclaims: 'Let men take their choice, man and woman were made for each other, though not to become one being; and if they will not improve women, they will deprave them!'²²⁴ The subsuming and oppression of the married woman within the state of marriage is an injustice Wollstonecraft is intent on reversing.

Treatise v Entreaty

'I have been much pestered to read the "Rights of Women," but am invincibly resolved not to do it. Of all jargon, I hate metaphysical jargon.' H. More.²²⁵

Strictures will now be examined in the light of More's significant oppositional stand against Wollstonecraft. Were the implications for female reform undermined by More's sharp censure of Wollstonecraft's polemic? Certainly the fundamental divisions between the opposing camps were overtly portrayed, More's deep hostility towards speculative revolutionary theories, and the French Revolution in particular, mark her conservative political arguments. Historical contextualisation helps to clarify the schism which existed between the political affiliations of the two writers. The French Revolution traumatised the political scene in Britain, dividing politicians and intellectuals into two camps; radical Jacobins saw the revolution across the channel as an opportunity for political and humanitarian reform in Britain, whilst the counter-revolutionary anti-Jacobins attempted to maintain the old order. In spite of their conflicting political opinions, the juxtaposing of these two texts reveals the fluctuating struggles which ultimately converged in the common

²²³ *Vindication*, p. 92.

²²⁴ *ibid*, p. 247.

²²⁵ *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, p. 371, vol 2.

language of the cult of sensibility. Gender definition was central to the arguments of both sides, and the subversive potential within the cult of sensibility became a key political issue: thus, whilst the radical republicanism of *Vindication* contrasts sharply with the whiggish discourse of *Strictures*, the identification of a common language becomes clearly evident.

The argument of this thesis is constructed upon the writers' promotion of female influence towards the betterment of society and it is important to note the blatant parallels in the literary negotiations of these works. Indeed their arguments for the reforming potential of *educated* women are so similar that the uneducated eye would be hard pressed to distinguish between them. Whether the demand be for 'revolution' or 'influence', the implicit representation of an aesthetics of virtuous femininity is at the heart of the argument in both these texts.

The introduction to *Strictures* exhibits the tone that is to be reflected throughout, and that is its unmistakeable sound of solicitation or entreaty: 'Some reflections on the present erroneous system are here *with great deference* submitted to public consideration.'²²⁶ (My emphasis) More's humility is almost tangible: whilst Wollstonecraft's introduction, though not quite as deferential, still struggles not to sound too dictatorial: '.....I would not lead my readers to suppose that I mean violently to agitate the contested question respecting the equality or inferiority of the sex; but as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it by.....I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion.'²²⁷

The author-reader relationship was an uneasy one for women writers, and a female audience was perhaps harder to placate; so whilst needing to appear firm in their convictions, an over-confidence or swaggering approach was best avoided. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the different literary tones of the two writers. More was concerned that her influential friends would regard her criticism of their manners and morals as deeply offensive, with the result that her works were of a more modest, placatory

²²⁶ *Strictures*, p. 3, vol 2.

²²⁷ *Vindication*, p. 74.

nature.²²⁸ Wollstonecraft undoubtedly had a more disruptive agenda which she pursued with a rather imperious masculinity. The *attitude* of each to her reader is distinctive, and whilst their political persuasions appear irreconcilable, their multidimensional arguments inevitably coincide in their demand for the cultivation of the 'understandings' of women: 'The chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women,' suggests More 'is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life.'²²⁹ The word 'practical' More uses prolifically, and in this context she is clearly promoting a down-to-earth, sensible education in preference to prestigious academic qualifications:

Their knowledge is not often like the learning of men, to be reproduced in some literary composition, nor ever in any learned profession; but it is to come out in conduct. A lady studies, not that she may qualify herself to become an orator or a pleader; not that she may learn to debate, but to act..... The great uses of study are to enable her to regulate her own mind, and to be useful to others.²³⁰

Clearly More needed to choose her words with precision; women writers were in the ascendance in this period, and she obviously did not wish to upset her contemporaries; the 'not often' keeps the avenues open for *their* learning perhaps to be on a par with male learning. Learned *professional* women, however, were another matter, hence the 'nor ever' with regard to female knowledge in this area. No reference here, however, to 'independence'. More's purpose in the educating of women is clearly not for autonomous reasons; not that they should be strutting the world stage as orators or debators - quite the reverse. The impression gleaned from close study of More's discourse is that education will fit them to become effectual

reformers from the 'heart' of the nation. She advises women to 'read the

²²⁸ Note the introduction to *Practical Piety*: 'An eminent Professor of our time modestly declared that he taught chemistry in order that he might learn it. The writer of the following pages might, with far more justice, offer a similar declaration, as an apology for so repeatedly treating on the important topics of religion and morals.' *Practical Piety*, p.v. vol 1. To emphasise my suggestion on tone, note also the preface to *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*: here Wollstonecraft argues that **she** has no intention of swelling the pages with apologies! p. 5.

²²⁹ *Strictures*, p. 1.

²³⁰ *Strictures*, pp. 1 & 2.

best books, not so much to enable her to talk of them, as to bring the improvement which they furnish.....' She expects women to develop their own talents, and through mental 'improvement' influence those in her own sphere. More argues that an attention to study which allows for a discriminating discernment of truth will equip woman to 'regulate her own mind, and to be useful to others.' She proposes:

To woman, therefore, whatever be her rank, I would recommend a predominance of those more sober studies, which, not having display for their object, may make her wife without vanity, happy without witnesses, and content without panegyrists; the exercise of which will not bring celebrity, but improve usefulness. She should pursue every kind of study which will teach her to elicit truth; which will lead her to be intent upon realities; will give precision to her ideas; will make an exact mind; every study which, instead of stimulating her sensibility, will chastise it; which will give her definite notions; will bring the imagination under dominion; ²³¹

Why should More propose the 'chastisement' of female sensibility, having written at such length on its powerful potential for women? I would suggest that More is concerned to identify the benefits to society of the more discerning reader. This was the age of the novel, and as women became more literate and leisured, the opportunities for frivolous pastimes became more prevalent. More was keen to counter the negative connotations of sensibility, the highly imaginative and over emotional, and to promote in women rather a desire for honest investigation, a search for truths with which to govern her domain with sobriety. The diversity of qualities which More recommends should be incorporated into female study exhibits the importance she attached to the cultural role of women. That these attributes should 'make her wife without vanity' emphasises the value of the more spiritual qualities in preference to those physical ones. Discernment of the truth confers upon women a power with which they can regulate the manners and morals of society. Rejecting all that is 'dazzling' they can exert an

²³¹ *Strictures*, p. 3.

elevating moral influence. The orientation towards a determinate intelligence and moral sensibility echoes the tone of her arch rival. More's plan of conduct for women mirrors Wollstonecraft's: 'fulfilling the duties of a mother', pursuing a 'plan of conduct' and disregarding 'the fashionable vagaries of dress', women can assist in maintaining the family. This duty, however, need not preclude their learning: 'With that steady eye which strengthens the mind' the fine arts, literature and even the sciences are all within their capabilities.'²³² More takes the argument further, insisting that it is indeed only through study that an undue sensitivity to emotion will be chastised rather than stimulated. Sharply rebuking bodily or mental excitement of the passions she calls instead for a *depth* to female understanding. Superficial knowledge leads to a 'low standard of intellectual excellence', resulting in women making themselves look ridiculous:

.....the superficial nature of their education furnishes them with a false and low standard of intellectual excellence, so that women have sometimes become ridiculous by the unfounded pretensions of literary vanity: for it is not the really learned, but the smatterers, who have generally brought their sex into discredit, by an absurd affectation, which has set them on depicting the duties of ordinary life.²³³

A 'smattering' of superficial knowledge [More], learned by necessity in fits and starts or 'snatches', [Wollstonecraft] is clearly a contributory factor to the deficiency of female education and the cause of their absurd affectation infecting other areas of their behaviour. An assumed intelligence is clearly as problematic to More as a simulated sensibility, and she is keen to emphasise that: 'considerable advantages are reaped from a select society of both sexes. The rough angles and asperities of male manners are imperceptibly filed, and gradually worn smooth, by the polishing of female conversations, and the refining of female taste'.²³⁴

²³² *Vindication*, p. 263.

²³³ *Strictures*, pp. 3-4

²³⁴ H. More, *Essays on Various Subjects Principally Designed for Young Ladies* (London: T. Cadell in the Strand, 5th edn. 1791), p. 13.

Wollstonecraft identifies the physical effects resulting from moral beauty: 'I know that libertines will also exclaim, that woman would be unsexed by acquiring strength of body and mind.....I am of a very different opinion, for I think that, on the contrary, we should then see dignified beauty, and true grace;.....only insipid lifeless beauty is produced by a servile copy of even beautiful nature.'

To render the person perfect, physical and moral beauty ought to be attained at the same time; each lending and receiving force by the combination. Judgment must reside on the brow, affection and fancy beam in the eye, and humanity curve the cheek, or vain is the sparkling of the finest eye or the elegantly turned finish of the fairest features: whilst in every motion that displays the active limbs and well-knit joints, grace and modesty should appear. But this fair assemblage is not to be brought together by chance; it is the reward of exertions [calculated] to support each other; for judgment can only be acquired by reflection.....²³⁵

This discourse reflects Wollstonecraft's vision of the ideal woman. Her reference to 'lifeless beauty' and 'servile copies' evokes images of doll like creatures devoid of any real purpose in life other than physical attraction. Weak constitutions reflect even weaker natures, and integrity is sacrificed at the altar of personal gratification. Physical beauty on these terms becomes a curse to woman and Wollstonecraft identifies the lacklustre effects of this restricted existence. True beauty, according to Wollstonecraft, is not just a gift of nature, it is the result of firm resolve and reasoned sensibility. The cultivated, disciplined mind utilising its powers of reasoning is evidenced in a vivacity of person, a spiritedness of character; the attainment of moral as well as physical beauty adding dignity and grace to the female form. More identifies: '.....where there is more beauty and more weakness, there should be greater circumspection and superior prudence'.²³⁶

The discriminating reader will draw the conclusion that, whilst More pursues a

²³⁵ *Vindication*, pp. 242- 243.

²³⁶ H. More, *Essay*, pp. 4- 5.

bête noire approach towards the *feminist* argument for women's rights and their 'contentions for equality', she is quietly advocating that principled, intellectual, virtuous women are *already* equal - 'those higher minds in each sex'. These higher minds must make effective use of a particular talent, and that is their proclivity for **Influence**:

Among the talents for the application of which women of the higher class will be peculiarly accountable, there is one, the importance of which they can scarcely rate too highly. This talent is INFLUENCE. We read of the greatest orator of antiquity that the wisest plans which it had cost him years to frame, a woman could overturn in a single day; We are led to reflect with the most sanguine hope on the beneficial effects to be expected from the same powerful force when exerted in this true direction.²³⁷

This most fundamental of female talents, More is keen to see used to positive effect. The power of female influence when exerted in 'this true direction' she regards as a powerful instrument of reform. The battle between good and evil was to be fought on the homefront in the hearts and the minds of middle England, and More called to the women of England to bring into action 'powers of which the effects may be commensurate with eternity':

I would call on them to come forward, and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country. But I would call on them to come forward, without departing from the refinement of their character, without derogating from the dignity of their rank, without blemishing the delicacy of their sex: I would call them to the best and most appropriate exertion of their power, to raise the depressed tone of public morals, and to awaken the drowsy spirit of religious principleAt this period, when our country can only hope to stand by opposing a bold and noble unanimity to the most tremendous confederacies against religion, and order, and governments, which the world ever saw;..... to come forward with

²³⁷ *Strictures*, pp. 1 - 2, vol 1.

a patriotism at once firm and feminine for the general good!²³⁸

Mingling the language of patriotism and public virtue with filial and domestic duty, More's rhetoric served to stimulate and inspire what she viewed as the natural endowments of the female disposition; their piety and consolation which, she suggests, are concealed and lying dormant. Her linguistic vivacity attempted to revive and mobilize these qualities to the cause of the nation, though never must the nation's women lose sight of the refinement of their character. Dignity needs to be maintained, delicacy sustained: indeed beauty, rank, talents and virtue need to blend, instigating a patriotism 'at once firm and feminine.' This is a wake-up call, and the juxtaposing of rousing, nationalistic language alongside images of sloth and torpidity, 'slumbering energy' and 'drowsy spirit', serves to reinforce the ardour, zeal and spirit necessary to turn the tide of inertia. The chapter *On the Effects of Influence* concludes in menacing tone: 'If you neglect this your bounden duty, you will have effectually contributed to expel Christianity from her last citadel. And, remember, that the dignity of the work to which you are called, is no less than that of preserving the ark of the Lord.'²³⁹

The authorial presence of Hannah More pervades the moral sensibility of this discourse, and her narrative is richly threaded with Christian symbolism. The 'ark of the Lord' refers to the chest which contained the tables of the law,²⁴⁰ and the task of preserving this 'ark' was given only to those worthy followers of God. To equate, therefore, the role of women with this vital mission was a powerful proselytising strategy. More was convinced that only through the practice and promotion of the principles of piety could women be instrumental in defending their nation against the threat of revolutionary egalitarianism. The preservation of social order would result, she argued, from the lives of dedicated women at the heart and helm of the nation, steering confidently towards a world imbued with charity and benevolence. This in turn could not fail to contribute towards women's importance - 'Christianity [being] the great and leading circumstance which raises women's

²³⁸ *Strictures*, pp. 4 - 5, vol 1.

²³⁹ *Strictures*, p. 61.

²⁴⁰ See *Holy Bible*: Exodus 37:1

importance' (*Strictures*, p 34), and More's agency was instrumental in advancing the cause of a revised and feminised Christian evangelicalism.

This chapter will further argue that the literary exertions of More and Wollstonecraft crossed continents, enabling their influence to be felt in the United States of America especially, as both had close links with American reforming women. A letter I discovered at the Bristol Record Office and from a private collection reinforces this suggestion. From Barley Wood on March 21 More writes to Bart Huber :

..... I really have so many letters from persons I do not know, that my friends are often set aside for strangers. My transalpine friends and correspondents are all come home, and are succeeded by less amusing, tho [sic] not less pious Transatlantic ones. For instance, I received last night no less than eight books or pamphlets from the respective authors in New York, Boston and Connecticut. Most of these I suppose will require acknowledgment But they forget that I am old and have left off reading, and that I have a sickly body, and a sinful soul of my own to take care of. To speak more seriously it is very gratifying to see that religion with all the spirit and energy of a new principle is rising and flourishing in several Provinces of North America, in waiting for and which I am only beginning to think with clarity; so low they appeared to have sunk in the scale of religion and morals, and manners.....²⁴¹

The letter reflects More's lively interest in a variety of topics; serious comment sits comfortably alongside friendly banter, but more importantly for the purpose of this thesis, identifies the close philosophical and literary links between English and American authors, confirming the suggested potential for influence that the thesis has argued.

This chapter will now investigate the literary contributions of Stanton and Eddy

²⁴¹ Letter from a private collection at Bristol Records Office, Ref: 26168.

as they attempted to impress their values upon a society losing its way. Drawing on letters, published and prescriptive works and other documents, it will trace their establishment of a public dialogue. These authors attempted to address women's issues through a variety of genres; novels, poems, didactic tracts, essays, all were considered suitable avenues for women writers to pursue, but as editorial and publication opportunities became available, they stepped outside conventional literary parameters becoming contributors to journals and magazines more commonly associated with a male readership, thus allowing their pervasive influence to be extended.

Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty - MOTHERHOOD - the key to female emancipation?

Mothers do, in a sense, hold the reins of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory. Yea, they give direction to the moral sentiments of our rising hopes and contribute to form their moral state. To them therefore our eyes are turned in this demoralizing age, and of them we ask, that they would appreciate their real worth and dignity, and exert all their influence to drive discord, infidelity and licentiousness from our land.²⁴²

This pronouncement by William Lyman in the early part of the nineteenth century emphasised the power of wives and mothers to influence, not only those within their home sphere, but on a wider scale, their powers were to be used to 'drive discord, infidelity and licentiousness from our land.' Lyman was not alone in his call to the women of the land; other New England ministers were echoing his sentiment. The representation of woman as 'holding the reins of government' and swaying 'the ensigns of national prosperity and glory', however, was irreconcilable with the powerless creature who had no legal existence apart from her husband's.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, recognising the incongruities surrounding the representation of women and intent on promoting their 'real worth and dignity'

²⁴² W. Lyman, *A Virtuous Woman, the Bond of Domestic Union, and the Source of Domestic Happiness* (New London, Conn., 1802), p. 22.

aspired to the reconstruction of a femininity which was spiritually and morally authorised. Her literary style is bold, political and overtly feminist.

This chapter will investigate the manuscript copy of Stanton's address of September 1848, a work from which shorter articles were later published, thus widening her audience. Interestingly it sets forth her admiration for Hannah More, giving further credence to the effectiveness of influence²⁴³ :

It has happened more than once that in a great crisis of national affairs, woman has been appealed to for her aid. Hannah More one of the great minds of her day, at a time when French revolutionary and atheistical opinions were spreading-was earnestly besought by many eminent men to write something to counteract these destructive influences- Her style was so popular and she had shown so intimate a knowledge of human nature that they hoped much from her influence. Her village politics by Will Chip, written in a few hours showed that she merited the opinion entertained of her power upon all classes of mind. It had as was expected great effect. The tact and intelligence of this woman completely turned the tide of opinion and many say prevented a revolution, whether she did old Englands [sic] poor any essential service by thus warding off what must surely come is a question-however she did it and the wise ones of her day gloried in her success. Strange that surrounded by such a galaxy of great minds, that [sic] so great a work should have been given with one accord to a woman to do.²⁴⁴

Stanton's apparently 'throw-away' remark - 'Strange that surrounded by such a galaxy of great minds, that so great a work should have been given with one accord to a woman to do' - exhibits a sardonic tone. It also reveals the impact of More's writing and its contribution towards women's reform in

America. She is recognised as a pioneer in the field of intellectual reformers,

²⁴³ An address given by Stanton in 1871 confirms her admiration for Wollstonecraft: 'The true nobility and virtue of Mary Wollstonecraft compelled her admission into the most aristocratic and the most moral circles in England.....' *Selected Papers*, p. 395, vol 2.

²⁴⁴ *Selected Papers*, p. 112, vol 1.

her achievements highly prized as contributing towards the empowerment of women.

To the already established framework, Stanton added her own radical arguments. Admonishing those in political and religious circles who sought to subjugate women, she advocated equal opportunities for that half of the population which was oppressed and enslaved:

I should feel exceedingly diffident to appear before you wholly unused as I am to public speaking, were I not nerved by a sense of right and duty - did I not feel that the time had fully come for the question of woman's wrongs to be laid before the public - did I not believe that woman herself must do this work - for woman alone can understand the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of her own degradation and woe. Man cannot speak for us - because he has been educated to believe that we differ from him so materially, that he cannot judge of our thoughts, feelings and opinions by his own.

This powerful opening sets out the basis of her argument and why it falls to woman to speak out on these emotive issues - 'Rights', 'duty', 'woman's wrongs', 'degradation', and 'woe' - these words encapsulate the very heart of her proposition. The public address and published text cleverly indicate the scale and vast implications of her proposal. Her use of words which emphasise the enormity of the problem - 'height', 'depth', 'length', 'breadth' - makes it quickly apparent that this is not a partisan movement, but one which seeks to include politicians and thought leaders, men and women, homeowners and homemakers in the same street, city, nation and beyond. The opening lines see the overt challenging of woman as 'silent, obedient, chaste' - 'Man cannot speak for us', she declares *because* he has been educated to view woman as quite distinct from himself.' (my emphasis). The renegotiation of gendered values is of key importance if the years of subordination and disadvantage are to be overturned and woman to be given a voice:

Among the many important questions which have been brought before the public, there is none that more vitally affects the whole human family than that which is technically termed Woman's Rights. Every allusion to the degraded and inferior position occupied by woman all over the world, has ever been met by scorn and abuse. From the man of highest mental cultivation, to the most degraded wretch who staggers in the streets do we hear ridicule and coarse jests, freely bestowed upon those who dare assert that woman stands by the side of man - his equal, placed here by her God to enjoy with him the beautiful earth, which is her home as it is his - having the same sense of right and wrong and looking to the same Being for guidance and support. So long has man exercised a tyranny over her injurious to himself and benumbing to *her* faculties, that but few can nerve themselves against the storm, and so long has the chain been about her that however galling it may be she knows not there is a remedy.

This discourse identifies the restrictive practices imposed upon women by their menfolk, highlighting the scorn and abuse with which female reformers are faced, not only from the lower class male, but also the 'man of highest cultivation'. Stanton draws attention to the fact that even eloquent and dignified women are powerless and subservient to 'the most degraded wretch' if he happens to be a male wretch. The important point to note, I would suggest, in Stanton's arguments is her proprietorial right to God. Patriarchal divine intercession is set aside by the elemental rights given to woman by *her* God. (Echoes here of Wollstonecraft's proposal that women co-operate with the supreme Being). Her identification of woman as accountable to her God without the need of male mediation, inevitably introduces a challenge to the doctrinal hierarchical system. The establishment of sexual equality as a law of God is a powerful means of authorising the feminine, though Stanton is clearly aware of the 'storm' of protest which may result. She suggests, that so 'benumbed' have become the faculties of the female mind due to their state of subservience that they 'know not there is a remedy.' This suggestion echoes that of More in *The White Slave Trade*,

pointing to the willing acquiescence of female 'slaves' - 'They hug their chains, and because they are gilt and shining, this prevents them, not from feeling, but from acknowledging that they are heavy.'²⁴⁵

Stanton's narrative resonates with implications of what she sees as the social, civil and religious injustice towards women. Linguistically she attempted to rouse them and make them aware of the nature of their subjugation to men, thereby lifting the impositions which for centuries had been used to oppress them. She concedes that woman's sphere may have become enlarged - 'As the nations of the earth emerge from a state of barbarism, the sphere of woman gradually becomes wider' - but she argues, 'not even under what is thought to be the full blaze of the sun of civilization is it what God designed it to be'.²⁴⁶ These are not the conventional arguments of a woman trying to raise the collective feminine consciousness. This narrative does not portray woman as appealing to her male superior in order to glean some semblance of equality. Stanton emerges almost as a spokesperson for her God, identifying the inalienable rights of woman, already granted to her by God.

It needs to be acknowledged that whilst Stanton's views did attract criticism, and from both sexes, in her argument for the refining influence of women - '.....might not her presence do much towards softening down this violence - refining this vulgarity?' (SP p.105) - she was not alone. A sermon delivered by Joseph Buckminster to a women's group in Boston identified not only the reforming potential of spiritual women, but significantly, referred to Christianity in the feminine. He further suggested that whilst men, 'the self-styled lords of Creation', were actively pursuing a life in the public, political sphere, 'the dependent, solitary female' sought God. 'I believe' he said: that if Christianity should be compelled to flee from the mansions of the great, the academies of the philosophers, the halls of legislators, or the throng of busy men, we should find **her** last and purest retreat with woman at the fireside; **her** last altar would be the female heart; **her** last audience would be the children gathered around the knees of a mother; **her** last sacrifice, the secret prayer, escaping in silence from her lips, and heard perhaps only at the throne of

²⁴⁵ *The Works of Hannah More*, 'The White Slave Trade', pp. 391-405, vol 1.

²⁴⁶ *Selected Papers*, pp. 96 - 116 for the complete address.

God.²⁴⁷

Whilst there is clearly an authorising of the feminine here, and the Churches indeed became a space which women occupied, *with masculine ministerial consent*, patriarchal New Englanders nevertheless subscribed to a discriminatory hierarchical system. The exercising of a moral influence from within the private domestic sphere was the height to which woman might aspire. The lack of a legal and political voice reinforced her position as an inferior and Stanton, like More and Wollstonecraft before her, argued that only education could provide the key to access the wider world.

At the same time, therefore, as seizing the emerging opportunities that a feminising of religious culture bestowed, Stanton provocatively challenged the assumed intellectual, moral and physical superiority of the male:

Let us consider his intellectual superiority. Man's superiority cannot be a question until we have had a fair trial. When we shall have had our colleges, our professions, our trades, for a century a comparison may then be justly instituted. When woman instead of being taxed to endow colleges where she is forbidden to enter, instead of forming societies to educate young men shall first educate herself, when she shall be just to herself before she is generous to others-improving the talents God has given her and leaving her neighbour to do the same for himself we shall not then hear so much of this boasted greatness. How often now we see young men carelessly throwing away the intellectual food their sisters crave. A little music that she may while an hour away pleasantly, a little French, a smattering of the sciences and in rare instances some slight classical knowledge and a woman is considered highly educated. She leaves her books and studies just at the time a young man is entering thoroughly into his-then comes [sic] the cares and perplexities of married life. Her sphere

²⁴⁷ J. Buckminster, "A Sermon Preached before the Members of the Boston Female Asylum, September 1810." hand-copied and bound with other printed sermons to the BFA, pp 7-9, BPL.

being confined to her house and children, the burden generally being very unequally divided, she knows nothing beside and whatever yearning her spirit may have felt for a higher existence, whatever may have been the capacity she well knew she possessed for more elevated enjoyments-enjoyments which would not conflict with these but add new lustre to them-it is all buried beneath the weight that presses upon her.²⁴⁸

The foregoing contrasts the servility of woman with the presumption of man: Stanton argues that talents are given to woman as well as to man, by God, but because custom has decreed it is man who is educated, woman finds herself derogated because of her impoverished opportunities. Drawing on her judicial legacy Stanton demands a 'fair trial'; female capacity for intellectual achievement can be assessed only when educational opportunities are equal. Stanton is quick to counter a boasted intellectual superiority resulting from prejudicial circumstances. She challenges male privilege at the expense of woman, pointing to the ability of the female to combine maternal duties with a developing intellect. She does not see one conflicting with the other; she considers that an enlarged understanding 'adds lustre' to her management of the household. Again this emulates Wollstonecraft who suggested, 'fulfilling the duties of a mother.....the management of their household and children need not shut them out from literature, [or] prevent their attaching themselves to a science.' (*Vindication*, p 263). Whatever the opinions of their detractors, these women are promoting the reorganisation, not the overthrow of social order; feminist or anti-feminist, their aims are not to disrupt the natural order of things; indeed quite the contrary; their objectives are the unifying and enriching of humanity, and as More acknowledged, through an enlargement of the female understanding, men 'themselves will be sure to be gainers'. Combine this with Stanton's suggestion that: 'So long has man exercised a tyranny over her injurious to himself', and the mutual benefits to mankind resulting from a more tolerant and democratic approach to the woman question become evident. Stanton insists: 'The individuality of woman must be asserted and upheld, and she must ever hold in her own

²⁴⁸ *Selected Papers*, p. 99 vol 1.

hands the means of self-support and protection. What we now demand is, the reorganization of our social institutions.²⁴⁹

Tyrannical treatment targeted

Stanton challenged the restrictions placed upon women using every available genre, and when a damning review of a female author's work appeared in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* of 13 January, 1855, Stanton seized the opportunity to identify and criticise prevailing male values. *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* written by Fanny Fern was not unlike Wollstonecraft's *Mary*; it was a fictionalised 'autobiography', and the reviewer's literary diatribe targeted the author's 'offence'. The reviewer was "indignant" that she (the author) could "so far forget a Christian law and a natural instinct" as to hold her own father and brother up to public "ridicule and contempt." "The Mohammedans," he continued, "pronounce their most dreadful anathema upon him who is guilty of filial irreverence."²⁵⁰ Stanton's appraisal of the review, published in February 1855, was a caustic satirical response which would have given wider publicity, not only to the novel, but to her own attempts at highlighting the miserable degradations women were forced to endure, often at the hands of their benefactors: 'If by any unfortunate blunder in society', she began, 'she awakes to the consciousness that her legal protectors are her tyrants, in spite of all the beautiful things that have been written and said on conjugal, filial and fraternal devotion, her honest indignation will ever and anon boil up and burst forth in defiance of all ties of blood and kindred.'

In the name of womanhood, I thank Fanny Fern for this deeply interesting life experience. To me the tale of sorrow is beautifully and truthfully told. It matters not whether the selfish male monsters so graphically sketched in "Miss Hall," that compound of ignorance, formality and cant, are all of her own family, - enough that plenty of just such people live. This is some woman's experience. If it is her own life, so much the better. Heaven has witnessed these

²⁴⁹ *Selected Papers*, p. 344, vol 1.

²⁵⁰ This 'Review' and Stanton's Article of Response are in *Selected Papers*, pp. 297- 300.

petty tyrannies in the isolated household long enough. When woman does at length divest herself of all false notions of justice and delicacy, and gives to the world a full revelation of her sufferings and miseries, - the histories of all other kinds of injustice and oppression will sink into utter insignificance, before the living pictures she shall hold up to the unwilling vision of domestic tyrants.

That women were excluded from public life and political debate was of major concern to Stanton, but the indolence which surrounded the cruel servility many were forced to endure, in isolation, and often at the hands of their 'protectors' was anathema to this suffragist. This review furnished the opportunity to publicly deride and demolish the cosy familial scene as, in some cases, a sham, which by the very nature of its 'privacy' provided protection to the perpetrators. Hinting again at martyrdom she suggests: 'Hardship and struggle always crush the weak and insignificant, but call forth and develop the true and noble soul', and fanning the flame of religious rebellion, she continues, 'the great lesson taught in Ruth Hall is that God has given to woman sufficient brain and muscle to work out her own destiny unaided and alone.' The notion that God made woman to 'depend on man' is, she says, simply 'a romance and not a fact of every-day life.' :

Fanny Fern has been severely criticised for drawing her sketches from familiar scenes and faces. If her pictures are not pleasing ones, it seems to me the censure more justly belongs to the living subjects, than the artist who has too faithfully drawn the sketch. That she is truthful, is seen from the fact that the public readily pronounced her work an autobiography. Authors generally claim the privilege of writing about what they have seen and felt. Men have given us all their experience, from Moses down to the last village newspaper; and how much that is palatable have they said of woman? And now that woman has seized the brush, and brought forth on the canvas a few specimens of dwarfed and meagre manhood, lo! what a furor of love and reverence has

seized our world of editors and critics! You who have ridiculed your mothers, wives and sisters since you first began to put pen to paper, talk not of "filial irreverence." This is but a beginning, gentlemen. If you do not wish us to paint you wolves, get you into lambs' clothing as quickly as possible. It is our right, our duty, to condemn what is false and cruel wherever we find it.

The 'indignant' male reviewer of Fern's text handed to Stanton a public platform from which to justify her religious and suffrage sentiment. It was an opportunity to reach readers who might not otherwise have read her didactic tracts and she clearly did not waste the opportunity. With literary precision she deconstructed a religious sentiment which, in the name of Christianity, had supported systematic degradation of women. Her impassioned eloquence invoked Heaven as a witness to the tyrannical treatment of the female sex even within their own private space. A strategy common to Stanton, More, Eddy and Wollstonecraft, was their taking it upon themselves to speak on behalf of their sex and 'in the name of womanhood', hinting at a common cause which they no doubt hoped would strengthen their case. They were aware, however, that if they were to awaken women to the traditions of injustice, they needed a reasoned argument which exposed woman as compliant in her own subservience: 'When woman does at length divest herself...' indicates that woman had a part to play in her own liberation.

Stanton's text works to expose the bias at the heart of nineteenth-century New England religious thought. Her vocabulary attaches to the notion of womanhood the very qualities embodied in the life of a Christian disciple: 'Hardship', 'struggle', 'suffering and poverty', which she emphasises are just the qualities which in turn 'call forth and develop the true and noble soul.' Juxtaposed alongside this representation are the 'ignorance', 'cant', and 'tyranny' of 'selfish male monsters', and it is evident to which sex she attributes true heavenly aspirations. Narrative which evidently emerges from the 'heart' as well as the 'head' of its author seeks to lay its message at the altar of Christianity ennobling the meek and merciful. It reflects on the Christian qualities of truth, justice, mercy and a proper sense of love. It routs

hypocrisy and seeks to restructure society on a foundation of unprejudiced and honourable behaviour. If the message is structured upon meekness, it works to emphasise the *might* of meekness. The literary style is elaborate and of a rather grandiose nature; it manifests a somewhat epic spirit, its message being of profound human importance. 'Christian law' and 'natural instinct' are enshrined in its vocabulary; science and sensibility ground its arguments. Her provocative - 'This is but a beginning, gentlemen' - indicates the resolve at the heart of her plea. She turns to that fountainhead of bigotry:

If all tyrannical parents, husbands and brothers knew that the fantastic tricks they play at the hearthstone, would in time be judged by a discerning public, no one can estimate the restraining influence of such a fear. Woman owes it to herself, to her sex, to the race, no longer to consent to and defend the refinements of degradation to which Christian woman is subject in the nineteenth century..... . If woman had done her duty to her sires and sons, think you it would have taken them nearly one hundred years, after giving to the world a declaration of rights that made every king in Europe tremble beneath his crown, to see that a woman has a right to the property she inherits, and to the wages she earns with her own hands?

Stanton identifies the collective collusion at the 'hearthstone'. Consensual defence of what she describes 'the refinements of degradation', accommodated and advanced through stealth and chicanery, required public disclosure. Dishonesty and deception promulgated female subservience, and like a festering wound, led to a decline in respect and esteem. Stanton inveighed against the hypocrisy inherent in an anti-slavery paper which could allow such a hostile review of one who wrote on the subject of female subjection, whilst purporting the support of liberation and human rights. She condemned the duplicity of writers who preached compassion, but practised inhumanity in the name of Christianity: 'the next *mulatto slave* that comes North, and gets upon a platform.....read him the laws of the Mohammedans

and Christians.....tell him his speech has no literary merit' she angrily proclaims. The next sentence strikes at the heart of specious superficiality: 'Because a villain for his own pleasure, has conferred on me the boon of existence, by what law, other than the Christian one - "Love your enemies" - am I bound to love and reverence him who has made my life a curse and a weariness, and who possesses in himself none of the Godlike qualities which command my veneration?' ²⁵¹ Honour and respect she identifies as reciprocal qualities which by their very nature need to be practised to be procured.

Arguing against the trivialisation of woman, **and** the tyrannical behaviour of man, she pleads for the moral and intellectual cultivation of women: for mothers who, with propriety and noble ambition, govern their family with judgement; who lead by example, inspiring their young charges and their husbands, giving 'direction to the moral sentiments' and assistance in forming their moral states. Educated mothers will then indeed, as pronounced by William Lyman - 'hold the reins of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory.' These arguments do appear to build upon those earlier ones pressed by More and Wollstonecraft, hinting at a universal influence. More's imperative - 'God has delegated to you.....the awfully important trust of infusing the first principles of piety into the tender minds....Your private exertions may at this moment be contributing to the future happiness, your domestic neglect to the future ruin, of your country'²⁵² - is clearly recognisable in Stanton's argument.

Whilst attempting to shame the *Anti-Slavery Standard* for its hypocritical position, Stanton used the opportunity to benefit her cause. The shameful review allowed her to publicly identify and attack tyranny in all its forms and her arguments sit very comfortably alongside Wollstonecraft's:

Parental affection, indeed, in many minds, is but a pretext to tyrannize where it can be done with impunity, for only good and wise men are content with the respect that will bear discussion.....Woman, however, a slave in every situation to

²⁵¹ *Selected Papers*, p. 299.

²⁵² *Strictures*, p. 62-64.

prejudice, seldom exerts enlightened maternal affection; for she either neglects her children, or spoils them by improper indulgence.....The formation of the mind must be begun very early, and the temper, in particular, requires the most judicious attention²⁵³

Arguing for the enlightenment of woman as a check to tyrannical male behaviour, 'maternal affection' is identified as the determining factor in the formation of cultivated minds. Each writer pressed for reform on this platform, and using genres which encompassed the private and public spheres, they moved easily, changing tone and vocabulary to suit their readership. Their arguments are linked by the promotion of home as a primary reformatory site and woman as a major force in behavioural reform.

Sacred duties and gifted destiny

Appropriate roles for women were being contentiously debated in nineteenth century New England, and Eddy's writing of this mid period of her life reflected this turbulent atmosphere. Her earlier writing was not as controversial as it became later, but displayed the vacillating tendencies observed in Wollstonecraft's texts. Indeed, a poem published in 1848 entitled *The Wife* exhibits a woman apparently glorying in marital subservience; and whilst Stanton was adamantly arguing for independence within the marriage state, Eddy extolled the virtues of submission: 'She stood beside him, in the spring-tide hour/Of joy and hope, when Hymen fanned the flame./Of wedded love, and with devotion's power/Knelt in submission to the new born name; /And life so bright, so beautiful did seem, No cheating fantasy or pleasing dream.'²⁵⁴ Eddy wrote in terms which reflected appropriate societal gender divisions, building her claims for female excellence upon women's traditional roles, and as that letter to her friend Augusta explained, to: 'make cold hearted man raise his standard of female excellence[sic]....'

²⁵³ *Vindication*, p. 222.

²⁵⁴ Exhibit No A11395 MBEL.

Eddy made useful inroads into the public consciousness through her contributions to *The Covenant*. Writing for this largely male audience allowed her to challenge prejudice and promote rather an appreciation of woman's finer nature: 'let us reflect on a wise necessity of her nature which constitutes her, a practical *secret* of which even poets have sung with sublime pathos, chanting its spell in praises eloquent; while philosophy's most powerful or dangerous dogmas have yielded, when to resist, was to strive unmanfully, to the timid tear and silent persuadings.'²⁵⁵ The feminine idiolect contrasts with Stanton's use of words and style of expression; whilst reference to a 'timid tear' and 'silent persuadings' might suggest weakness and passivity, Eddy was actually complying with a literary code which accredited these emotional responses with superior powers: *feminine* powers which as well as having a responsiveness to another's distress, had the innate authority to overthrow 'dangerous dogma.' To suggest the 'unmanliness' of resistance was a clever ploy and might have appealed to an 'Odd-fellow's'²⁵⁶ code of conduct. Eddy portrays the female nature in somewhat transcendental terms; she appropriates qualities which as well as being secret and mysterious are omniscient. In common with the arguments of the other writers, Eddy makes clear this gift accords a powerful influence to women. Fulfilling sacred duties, adhering to a religious code and regulating their own sensibilities allowed women to fulfil their 'gifted destiny.'

August 1846 saw the publication of a short story by Eddy: the style of *Emma Clinton, or a tale of the Frontiers* was entirely in keeping with the genre of sentimental novel. It was a didactic tale which registered a sensitivity to beauty and sublimity and worked to expose inequalities in societies and families, emphasising the value of a female influence at the heart of each. Its romantic genre and egalitarian principle belies its politically incorporated values: 'Twas near the close of the eighteenth century, that period which "tried men's souls" in the struggle for liberty, to throw off the galling yoke of Britain's tyranny and establish a firm foundation for a happy republic.' These opening

²⁵⁵ *The Covenant*, a Monthly Magazine Devoted to the cause of Odd-Fellowship. Vol V. No. 11. Man No. 26-1

²⁵⁶ The Oddfellows was a secret benevolent and fraternal association founded in England in the eighteenth century.

lines echo the virtuous republican sentiment used by Wollstonecraft in her *Letters*: this utopian state, this sweet equality could not be found where oppression and tyranny reigned: the fiction goes on to introduce a British aristocratic family who fled their homeland to 'seek asylum at the home of the brave, where poverty was not deemed a crime, and where [his] heavy losses in wealth, (and consequently rank in England) would not deny a just claim on society.'

Through distinctly gendered narrative, the heavy hand of oppression and inequity is identified as a bigoted Britain; this contrasts sharply with the sheltering sanctuary imagery through which America is typified. This portrayal serves to link America with its Puritan history, that sheltering wing of maternalism as cited by Wollstonecraft, under which New England settlers sought a new spiritual beginning. This imagery usefully sets the stage for the connecting of national character with private citizen and as a proselytising strategy continues in gendered terms, as Eddy seeks to celebrate the meritorious qualities of the female mind. The story is centred around Emma, the daughter of the family, who is represented in terms which link her with the motherland, or America, whilst the father appropriates the more British patriarchal standard.

The mother, 'accustomed to the conventional polish of society, possessing a rarely gifted and well-stored mind, was a fit guardian for the youth and inexperience of her daughter; and from the rich store-house and garniture of her own thoughts, she found a useful deposite [sic] for all their hid treasure, in her ardent and developing mind.' Portrayal of the female mind as a 'rich store-house' or depository of precious gifts cooperates well with the 'sweet sensibility', as mentioned by More. The valuable nature of this unseen power is emphasised by 'hid treasure'; its maternal purpose was exalting: 'Seeking to engrave on its spotless tablets, delicacy of feeling, purity, and elevation of purpose, with decision of character, which would prepare her for the mutations of life, and make up the sum total of real wealth.....' There is an extraordinary compatibility here between this portrayal of private development, and that of revised national formation. The daughter was in

every way a just repository for her mother's fine sensibilities: 'A high marble forehead wore the tracery of thought; a slight delicate form, rounded in every outline, completely developed the spirit it enshrined in beautiful contrast with the voluptuous cast of oriental beauty.' This conventional language of sensibility, with its covert censure of eastern sexuality, again mirrors Wollstonecraft's: 'Judgment must reside on the brow, affection and fancy beam in the eye, and humanity curve the cheek.....'²⁵⁷ Eddy's juxtaposing of human nature and national character serves to qualify those qualities identified as feminine, as central to the construction of a more just and benevolent society.

As the story progresses, autobiography apparently mingles with fiction: the 'decision of character' which Emma's mother has instilled into her daughter, results in her choosing a suitor whom her father deems unsuitable. With the words: 'I am half-frantic rendered already by your woman's nature' the father disinherits his daughter; in some ways this deprivation of heritage mirrors the family's ousting from their homeland. The tale now clearly draws on personal experience, Emma's husband, like Eddy's, dies of yellow fever and Emma, like Eddy, is left a young and pregnant widow; Eddy even includes at this stage in the tale, her eulogic poem *The Wife*. Emma, like Eddy, bears a beloved son, but the premature death of the mother, again in both cases, leads to the slow dismantling of female influence. An earlier suitor of Emma's reappears, only to desert her again, marrying another and fathering a son. Unprotected and alone, Emma dies of a broken heart. The wife of the errant suitor also dies early. Two sons, whom Eddy describes as bereft of a 'mother's deep and holy love', that love which alone is capable of 'restraining and governing by a hidden empire in the heart of her child,' are thus left to a patriarchally influenced future. Barbaric tendencies surface, as Emma's son is portrayed as seeking to wreak revenge on his mother's errant suitor by luring this man's son 'from the path of rectitude' towards a life of crime and wretchedness.

Abrams identifies this genre of writing as "the prose tale", a narrative which

²⁵⁷ *Vindication*, p. 243.

can be read at one sitting of from half an hour to two hours, and is limited to “a certain unique or single effect” to which every detail is subordinate.²⁵⁸ The ‘unique effect’ of this prose tale, I would suggest, is what Eddy would later identify as the lesson that: ‘A mother is the strongest educator, either for or against crime.....’²⁵⁹

The conclusion to the tale confirms the religious didacticism which, the thesis suggests, underlies each writer’s reformatory attempts: ‘bitterly did he [the errant suitor] reproach himself for the ruin he had wrought! but repentance came too late as he remembered those words of the inspired oracle, “Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.”’²⁶⁰

Having identified Eddy’s literary means of empowering womanhood through the annals of a male publication, it is very interesting to note the shift in style as she writes material for the ‘drawing-room’ or private sphere. ‘Woman’s Rights - What are they?’ represents the diversity of Eddy’s style and tone, and this poem, first published under that title in *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* in February 19, 1853, provides a platform from which her tenets on reclamation of female rights may be identified. This poem, like Hannah More’s *Sensibility*, is significant in that it emphasises key aspects of the argument for female ascendancy. Interestingly, in further editions the title became simply: ‘Woman’s Rights’. Having lost its questioning vein, the poem became a powerful proselytizing argument on behalf of woman and her spirituality.

This work targeted those wrongs, which for centuries had resulted in female subjugation, distinguishing between the portrayal of woman as beguiling temptress and spiritual intermediary. The tone of the first stanza is pensive yet dignified as it seeks to make that separation between vice and virtue. Within the first four lines, however, it successfully makes the transition; virtue and all the qualities associated with this pure state, sanction and validate the

²⁵⁸ M.H.Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 194.

²⁵⁹ M.B.Eddy, *Science & Health*, p. 236.

²⁶⁰ M.B.Eddy, ‘Emma Clinton, or a Tale of the Frontiers.’ *The Covenant*, August, 1846, pp22-1 to 22-14.

sovereignty of this 'new' woman. The structure of this short but powerful piece of poetry reflects that 'last and best' rising scale of creation argument. The final stanza climaxes her portrayal, woman has indeed earned the right not only to 'to work and pray,' but more, "To point to heaven and lead the way."

Grave on her monumental pile;
She won from vice, by virtue's smile,
Her dazzling crown, her sceptered throne,
Affection's wreath, a happy home;

The right to worship deep and pure,
To bless the orphan, feed the poor;
Last at the cross to mourn her Lord,
First at the tomb to hear his word:

To fold an angel's wings below;
And hover o'er the couch of woe;
To nurse the Bethlehem babe so sweet,
The right to sit at Jesus' feet;

To form the bud for bursting bloom,
The hoary head with joy to crown;
In short, the right to work and pray,
"To point to heaven and lead the way."²⁶¹

The simple structure of this sixteen line poem, written in couplets, belies its potent message. Women's leadership qualities are enshrined in its narrative. In the space of a few lines, public and private spheres have merged, effecting an aggrandizement of the female virtues, sanctioning and qualifying woman 'to lead the way.' The poem opens in dignified fashion implying woman's majestic and epoch-making characteristics. Eddy bases her narrative on biblical hermeneutics and is succinct in pressing for woman's

²⁶¹ M.B.Eddy, *Poems*, p. 21.

worth. The opening lines present her argument. The elaborate vocabulary - 'monumental', 'dazzling', 'crown', 'sceptered', 'throne', - signifies eminence, dignity and exaltation. When juxtaposed with the final line of the first stanza, 'a happy home', it might appear incongruous. This last line confirms the seat of female authority to be the home. The home is portrayed as a monument to woman. Fulfilling this office, woman's vocation is clear. Her maternal qualities exalt her to divine status. Eve, as the precursor to the multitude of ills associated with woman, has been overshadowed by Mary, the holy mother. Purity as exemplified by this mother, has eclipsed the suggestion of woman as fallen. Woman's virtue has instigated her 'rights'. These 'rights' Eddy lists in each following stanza. Clearly these 'rights' are enshrined in her maternal instincts. It is interesting to note that the very qualities which seemed to subordinate woman on earth, Eddy suggests, authorise her "To point to heaven and lead the way." Eddy's use of punctuation reinforces her suggestion that whilst a 'happy home' is the nucleus, her influence knows no bounds: to emphasise this the full stop is not used until the last line.

Maternal influence

A mother is the strongest educator, either for or against crime. Her thoughts form the embryo of another mortal mind, and unconsciously mould it, either after a model odious to herself or through divine influence, "according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.".....Children should obey their parents; insubordination is an evil, blighting the buddings of self-government. Parents should teach their children at the earliest possible period the truths of health and holiness. Children are more tractable than adults, and learn more readily to love the simple verities that will make them happy and good.²⁶²

The notion of 'self-government' is important in the context of female emancipation. Having been taught to govern themselves from an early age, women will not readily yield to an authority which is patently unjust and

²⁶² *Science & Health*, p. 236.

immoral. Study of the scriptures 'according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount' indicates Christ's *Sermon on the Mount*,²⁶³ which prescribes a disciplined rule for life. The key to a more just and equal society, Eddy argues, is the early assimilation of Truth. In this she mirrors Wollstonecraft: 'It is the irregular exercise of parental authority that first injures the mind, and to these irregularities girls are more subject than boys. The will of those who never allow their will to be disputed, unless they happen to be in a good humour, when they relax proportionally, is almost always unreasonable. To elude this arbitrary authority girls very early learn the lessons which they afterwards practise on their husbands;' ²⁶⁴

Eddy points to the inherent goodness in children, arguing it is the example which is set in the home which blights the early budding: 'If some fortuitous circumstance places promising children in the arms of gross parents, often these beautiful children early droop... like tropical flowers born amid Alpine snows. If perchance they live to become parents in their turn, they may reproduce in their own helpless little ones the grosser traits of their ancestors..... Nothing unworthy of perpetuity should be transmitted to children.'²⁶⁵ Again, this mirrors Wollstonecraft's argument that the 'weakness of women' is largely the result of tyrannical treatment: '..... "if the mind be curbed and humbled too much in children; if their spirits be abased and broken much by too strict an hand over them; they lose all their vigour and industry."²⁶⁶ Eddy identifies: 'The offspring of heavenly-minded parents' as more likely to 'inherit more intellect, better balanced minds, and sounder constitutions', suggesting that teachers of schools be selected 'with as direct reference to their morals as to their learning or their correct reading. Nurseries of character should be strongly garrisoned with virtue.'²⁶⁷

Eddy's arguments effectively contribute, through their linking of education,

²⁶³ *Holy Bible*, Matthew 5: 1-II. Thomas Johnsen in a paper 'Understanding Mary Baker Eddy' presented at a conference of the New England American Studies Association, April 28, 2002, suggests: 'For Eddy, the spirituality of Jesus reflected a deepening of human sensibility, not a sentimental take on life.....' p. 24.

²⁶⁴ *Vindication*, p. 227.

²⁶⁵ *Science & Health*, p. 61.

²⁶⁶ *Vindication*, p. 226.

²⁶⁷ *Science & Health*, p. 235.

sensibility and religion, towards the identification of a mind-set with a powerful reforming potential. Allied to that potential is the reciprocal autonomy it bestows. Through appropriate language she sought to liberate debased womanhood and sanction the 'new woman'. A person who is the legal property of another may become a helpless victim of a dominant influence, and she sought to free women from a subservient state: 'The rights of man were vindicated in a single section and on the lowest plane of human life', she argued, 'when African slavery was abolished in our land. That was only prophetic of further steps towards the banishment of a world-wide slavery, found on higher planes of existence and under more subtle and depraving forms.....God has built a higher platform of human rights, and He has built it on diviner claims. These claims are not made through code or creed, but in demonstration of "on earth peace, good-will toward men."²⁶⁸ Eddy, like Stanton, based her arguments for the abolition of world-wide slavery on a law of God. Covertly condemning those male hypocrites who preached Christianity, while practising a tyrannical rule over their household, each woman used scriptural discourse to confirm and credit her opinions.

Eddy used the power of the word, not only to draw attention to women's spiritual potential, but to make her male readers aware of the misconception they had laboured under, believing woman to be their inferior. True liberty, she argues, makes all men free: 'Discerning the rights of man, we cannot fail to foresee the doom of all oppression. Slavery is not the legitimate state of man, God made man free.....Citizens of the world, accept the "glorious liberty of the children of God," and be free! This is your divine right.'²⁶⁹

CONCLUSION:

'Sensibility is the most exquisite feeling of which the human soul is susceptible: when it pervades us, we feel happy; and could it last unmixed, we might form some conjecture of the bliss of those paradisiacal days, when the obedient passions were under the dominion of reason, and the impulses of the heart did not need correction.....Sensibility is indeed the foundation of all our

²⁶⁸ *ibid*, p. 225.

²⁶⁹ *Science & Health*, pp. 226-227.

happiness.' M.Wollstonecraft.²⁷⁰

'The baptism of the Holy Ghost is the spirit of Truth cleansing from all sin; giving mortals new motives, new purposes, new affections, all pointing upward. This mental condition settles into strength and freedom, deep-toned faith in God; and a marked loss of faith in evil, in human wisdom, human policy, ways and means. It develops individual capacity, increases the intellectual activities, and so quickens moral sensibility that the great demands of spiritual sense are recognized..... M.B.Eddy.²⁷¹

This chapter has drawn attention to the writers' projection of moral and spiritual values upon the cult of sensibility. The chapter has been keen to distinguish between the two versions of this cult in order to identify a mindset with the ability to empower women. It has carefully examined the authors' arguments to identify their representation of the spiritual nature, which they suggest is at the heart of this ideology, and its material resemblance. Drawing on maternal images the writers have associated the feminine with the highest representation of womanhood: the holy Mother. This has allowed them to argue that the essentially feminine qualities at the heart of the cult of sensibility invest women with a special propensity and responsibility for individual and collective moral reform. Having set up a hierarchy of mental qualities, the authors have argued that women draw on intellect as well as intuition in order to achieve their potential, and as Wollstonecraft suggested, they: 'labour by reforming themselves to reform the world.'²⁷²

This reform was to be on the basis of the spiritual sensibility outlined in Hannah More's poem *Sensibility*. Only by a strict adherence to its principles could the cause of female emancipation be advanced: and they were careful to expose the dangers attached to a highly exaggerated or irrational state of consciousness. Education was the means by which sensibility could be rationalised. Eddy's: 'A mother is the strongest educator', reinforces Wollstonecraft's: 'The properest person to form the character of thy children, is thyself.'

²⁷⁰ *Mary*, p.53.

²⁷¹ 'Miscellaneous Writings', p.204.

²⁷² *Vindication*, p. 114.

The chapter has concentrated upon a number of key points: it has attempted to appropriate the authors' didactic tracts as they related to the autonomy of women and whilst acknowledging the power that the cult of sensibility bestowed upon women, it has made clear the tensions which surrounded both the opponents of this cult and those who imbibed its philosophy. It has set forth a clear representation of its transcendental qualities, at the same time emphasising the irreconcilable differences between this spiritual sensibility and its feigned emulation. It has ultimately attempted to press the potential for a society which embraced the morally superior paradigm of sensibility, assimilating, through woman's example, its spiritually virtuous code of conduct.

Masculine opposition has been represented as largely substantiated upon patriarchal religious tradition ('When Eve was form'd....The fatal Rib was crooked and unev'n'). These women therefore challenged masculine *doctrinal* principles, deconstructing their arguments upon the basis they did not live up to the highest Christian ideal. Replacing images of a fearsome God of vengeance, they promoted instead a God of compassion, who was to be viewed as a sympathetic and benevolent parent. This representation further contributed to the promotion of sensibility and the establishment of a religion of the heart; reform was thus to be secured on the grounds of the 'feeling' heart. The behavioural pattern of this 'heart religion' was to be laid down by mothers from the bosom of the home with the result that the private space could effectively become the powerbase from which to 'cleanse from sin' a lost and corrupt world. Inspiring their families with 'new motives', 'new purposes' and 'new affections' they could effectually, as Lyman suggested: - 'hold the reins of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory.'

The chapter has examined how these accomplished rhetoricians appeared to move effortlessly between literary genres: how their linguistic style and expression, as well as encompassing the more usual female conduct literature, included political and religious tracts. Disputing historically accepted hierarchical standards, they argued that intelligent intuitive women were the

bedrock of virtuous society and as More pointed out: 'The rough angles and asperities of male manners are imperceptibly filed, and gradually worn smooth, by the polishing of female conversations, and the refining of female taste.'²⁷³

Whilst the chapter has been keen to distinguish links between the authors' arguments, this has not been at the expense of identifying differences. What I would suggest has emerged from this chapter is that, in spite of the labels which have historically been attached to each woman, 'feminist,' 'anti-feminist,' 'jacobin,' 'anti-jacobin,' 'conformist,' 'non-conformist,' and even their divergent reformative approaches - More and Eddy's promoting of female 'influence' whilst Wollstonecraft and Stanton favoured female 'revolution' - the closeness of their conclusions is impressive.

The next chapter will seek to identify how personal experience sourced a renewed religious sentiment through which they effectively built upon the earlier arguments, and how they sought to contribute towards representation of the spiritual equality of the sexes through revised scriptural interpretation.

²⁷³ H. More, *Essays on Various Subjects* (1791) 5th edn, p. 13.



MRS. HANNAH MORE.

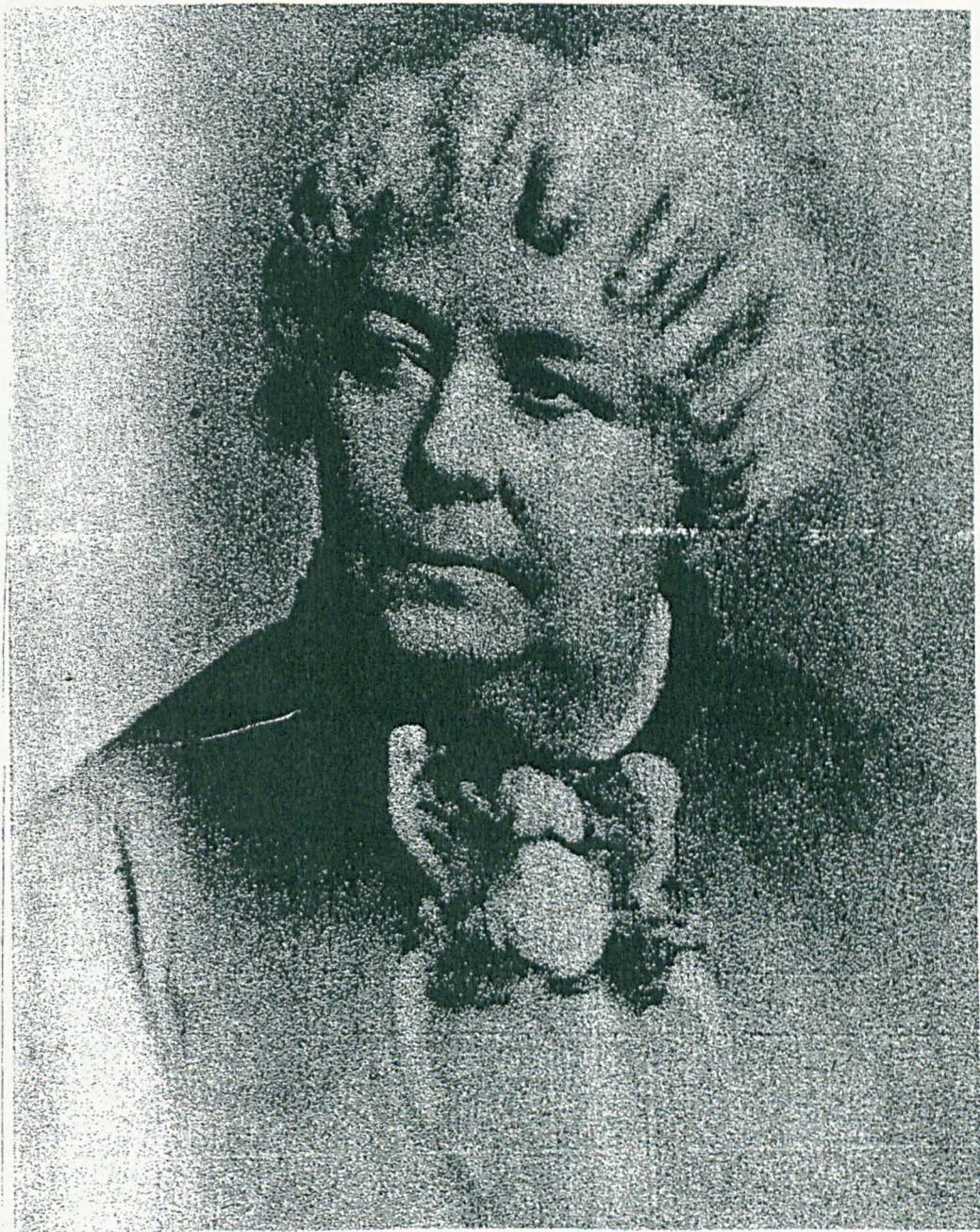
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Marybeth Lady Stanton



Elizabeth Cady Stanton

MARY BAKER EDDY



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MARY BAKER EDDY

CHAPTER FOUR: WOMAN'S RIGHT TO REVELATION:

'The heart is therefore an active center where the ideas and impressions received are transformed into deeds; Not only is the heart the center of moral life, but finally the center of religious life as well....The heart is the secret place of their inspiration....The heart thus becomes the place of divine vision.'²⁷⁴

The subject of 'divine vision' is central to an argument which promotes sensibility as a mental state allowing receptivity to divine signals, and will form the core argument of this chapter. The last chapter differentiated between the material and spiritual representations of this cult; this chapter will examine a burgeoning controversy regarding the opposing definitions of the Deity. Was the nature of the Supreme Being, as had been identified by centuries of theological doctrine, that of a harsh patriarchal dictator, or was it rather the more benevolent and sympathetic matriarchal one being portrayed by these female reformers? If indeed God could be invoked as Mother as well as Father, this feminine representation inevitably sanctioned a spiritual status for women. Barker-Benfield highlights the dissenting opportunities that this portrayal offered, suggesting that: 'Feeling was at the heart of the debate over the face of God' - concluding: 'The reconceptualizing of human nature corresponded to a reconceptualizing of God.'²⁷⁵

Attempts by the authors to 'reconceptualize' God through emphasising feminine aspects of the divine nature, resulted in their being anathematised: Hannah More and Mary Baker Eddy were the subject of public caricaturing - the one by Augustine Birrell - the other by Mark Twain. More suffered at the hands of her tormentors during her lifetime, but Birrell attempted to besmirch her memory: 'To libel the dead is, I know, not actionable indeed it is impossible; but evil-speaking, lying, and slandering are canonical offences from which the obligation to refrain knows no limits of time or place.'²⁷⁶ These were serious accusations, and no doubt if they had been made in her lifetime,

²⁷⁴ E. Mircea (ed in chief), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1987), p 234, vol 6.

²⁷⁵ *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 68-70.

²⁷⁶ A. Birrell. *Collected Essays and Addresses of the Rt. Hon Augustine Birrell*. 1880-1920 (Dent, 1922) , p.254, Vol 11.

she would have responded. A common form of attack and derogation of women intellectuals was in the form of satire, evidenced by Walpole's reference to Wollstonecraft as that 'hyena in petticoats.' Birrell ultimately resorted to this cruel satirical style:

I freely admit that the celebrated Mrs. Hannah More is one of the most detestable writers that ever held a pen. She flounders like a huge conger-eel in an ocean of dingy morality. She may have been a wit in her youth,' he indulgently conceded, ' though I am not aware of any evidence of it....she was an encyclopaedia of all literary vices. You may search her nineteen volumes through without lighting upon one original thought, one happy phrase. Her religion lacks reality. Not a single expression of genuine piety, or heart-felt emotion, ever escapes her lips. She is never pathetic, never terrible. Her creed is powerless either to attract the well-disposed or make the guilty tremble....Mrs. Hannah More' he arrogantly concludes, 'was a pompous failure.'

His pedantic attacking of her literary ability and religious persuasion was questionable, but to suggest she lacked genuine piety and heart-felt emotion was to strike at the very heart of More's lifework and showed a crass misunderstanding of her mission. In summary fashion, Birrell resorted to attacks on her demeanour: 'Hannah More was the first, and I trust the worst, of a large class - "the ugliest of her daughters Hannah," if I may parody a poet she affected to admire.'²⁷⁷ Birrell evidently believed that any woman who stepped outside her sphere forfeited the right to honour or good manners.

Eddy was similarly attacked by Mark Twain whose literary diatribe was likened by Vic Doyno in his forward to Twain's text, *Christian Science*, to 'being operated upon - without anaesthesia - by a hostile, precise brain surgeon while a bulldog tears at your writing arm.' His arguments, according to Doyno are, 'the verbal equivalent of the scalpel, the broad-ax, the rapier, and

²⁷⁷ A. Birrell, *Essays about Men, Women and Books* (London: Elliot Stock, 6a Paternoster Row, 1895), pp. 70-72.

the hammer.²⁷⁸ Using his formidable debating skills, Twain attacked Eddy's literary ability by endeavouring to ridicule her.²⁷⁹ Her writing he described as 'desert vacancy, as regards thought;' 'puerility;' 'sentimentality;' 'confused and wandering statement;' and 'metaphor gone insane;....' He went on to say 'she has never been able to write anything above third-rate English, that she is weak in the matter of grammar, that she has but a rude and dull sense of the values of words', that she so lacks in the matter of literary precision that she can seldom put a thought into words that expresses it lucidly to the reader and leave no doubts in his mind as to whether he has rightly understood or not.²⁸⁰ Twain's vacillating tendencies are in evidence as he also suggests:

In several ways, she is the most interesting woman that ever lived, and the most extraordinary. When we do not know a person - and also when we do - we have to judge his size by the size and nature of his achievements, as compared with the achievements of others in his line of business - there is no other way. Measured by this standard, it is thirteen hundred years since the world has produced anyone who could reach up to Mrs. Eddy's waistbelt. Figuratively speaking, Mrs. Eddy is already as tall as the Eiffel tower. She is adding surprisingly to her stature every day. It is quite within the probabilities that a century hence she will be the most imposing figure that has cast its shadow across the globe since the inauguration of our era.²⁸¹

There can be little doubt that Eddy's achievements, 'as compared with the achievements of others in his line of business' have been quite remarkable, but whether, a century hence, she could be described as 'the most imposing figure that has cast its shadow across the globe....' is not as quantifiable.

²⁷⁸ M. Twain, *Christian Science* (Prometheus Books, 1993) (1907), p. vi. In his paper 'Understanding Mary Baker Eddy' Johnson suggested: 'Mark Twain's savaging of the octogenarian in 1903 was deeply entwined with issues of both gender and class.' p. 5.

²⁷⁹ It is useful to note Twain's remarks regarding Jane Austen. A letter to Joseph Twichell in September 1898 suggests: 'I often want to criticize Jane Austen.... her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader.... Every time I read 'Pride and Prejudice' I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shin-bone.' A letter to W.D. Howells in January 1909 states: 'Her prose is unreadable, even on a salary.'

²⁸⁰ *Christian Science*, p. 157.

²⁸¹ *ibid*, pp. 60 to 61.

Christine Trevett, in her paper 'Woman, God and Mary Baker Eddy' suggests: 'Mary Baker Eddy figures scarcely at all in the writings of feminism. Nor is she given consideration by many Christian writers who are regarding afresh, and forging anew, the language of their tradition.....Unorthodox, provocative and not always consistent Mrs Eddy's teachings might be, but it seems remarkable that they are for the most part disregarded completely by those writers who have been seeking to understand women's views of the Biblical tradition and themselves to forge a new language of theology and of prayer'.²⁸² Her writings, for whatever reason, appear to have lacked the scholarly investigation that this thesis expects to bring to her works.

The chapter will identify the virulent attacks each author was subject to, attempting to evaluate how this opposition, both in their private and public lives, served to focus and intensify their arguments for the rights of women, ultimately through a reinterpretation of patriarchal theological doctrine. It will attempt to expose the change in literary tone which surfaced as a result of personal trauma, noting how each woman became more outspoken with age. The style of the later works tended towards a culmination of romanticism and protestantism.²⁸³ This reflects the 'association of ideas' referred to by Burke in *Sublime and Beautiful*, and portrayed by writers of sentimental literature as a

²⁸² C.Trevett, 'Woman, God and Mary Baker Eddy', *Religion* (1984) 14, 143-153.

²⁸³ The Christian Romanticism which marks Wollstonecraft's writing is apparent in her emphasis on the beauty of nature and its effectiveness in mirroring the divine beauty. Her opposition to the Evangelical doctrine of original sin placed her at odds with More, who embraced this gospel-based movement. More's questioning of Biblical interpretation, however, tends to unite her with liberal Protestantism. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* explains: 'Historically, the scholarly study of religion - as well as the rise of modern hermeneutics-is closely associated with the religious tradition of liberal Protestantism. Schleiermacher, [1768-1834] the founder of hermeneutics as well as of liberal Protestantism, was particularly influential in articulating the outlines of this compromise. He regarded the various religions as culturally conditioned forms of an underlying and universal religious sensibility. Thus he not only moved the locus of faith from belief to experience, but also laid the foundations for a descriptive science of religion....' p 281. Stanton rejected both Calvinism and Evangelicalism, embracing rather a religious philosophy based on Quaker and Unitarian principles. Eddy's recognition of the absolute authority of the *Bible* places her in company with Evangelicalism, though her insistence on man's innate perfection collides with their creed of total depravity. Perhaps her 'Science of Christianity' again positioned her towards liberal Protestantism. The foregoing leads me to conclude that ultimately each woman embraced a Religion of the Heart.

cumulative ascending perception.²⁸⁴ This later writing emphasises the connections between sensibility and a religion of the heart. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* explains: 'the spirit liberated from the passions and the affections is to be replaced with 'the understanding of divine things and the love of God.'²⁸⁵ The problems associated with the somewhat flexible interpretations of the cult of sensibility were overcome by spiritual certainties. *The Bible* became central to their arguments. Opposition served to ignite an intensity of sentiment which in turn inspired an originality of thought. Fresh and innovative argument which appeared to emerge from the very core of their being was quintessential to their zealous reforming initiative.

A clearly identifiable reformist religious register is what marks Wollstonecraft's discourse; it underlies her radical social and political theory, effectively supporting and sustaining her arguments. This chapter will attempt to identify the causes which contributed to the marked change of tone representing a distinctive transcendental nature and a renewed spiritual awakening. Disappointed with the public world of masculine politics and religion and its inability to produce the promised reform, Wollstonecraft submitted to the sublimity of nature. Her *Letters from Sweden* reflect this spiritual awakening; aesthetic and gendered values, identifiable in the landscape and beauty of nature, are expressed in distinctive literary mode. This renegotiation contrasts sharply with the political tenor of *Vindication* and the 'cool eye of observation' with which she viewed the terrors in France. These letters reflect a re-engagement with the sublime and evidence a shift in outlook and tergiversation of thought: 'The majesty of nature elicits an overflow of emotion', she writes, 'in these respects my very reason obliges me to permit my feelings to be my criterion. Whatever excites emotion has charms for me.'²⁸⁶ Letter LX reflects an optimistic note: 'Yes; I shall be happy - This heart is worthy of the bliss its feelings anticipate - and I cannot even persuade myself, wretched as they have made me, that my principles and sentiments

²⁸⁴ 'Radcliffe approvingly quoted Mark Akenside's version: "Lull'd in the countless chambers of the brain/Our thoughts are linked by many a hidden chain/Awake but one, and lo! what myriads arise!/Each stamps its image as the other flies!"' G.J.Barker-Benfield. *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 18.

²⁸⁵ E. Mircea (ed in chief), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 236.

²⁸⁶ *Letters written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, p. 289.

are not founded in nature and truth.... the tightened cord of life or reason will at last snap, and set me free.'²⁸⁷

Hannah More's *Strictures* were published at the height of her career, but her writing of the early nineteenth century reflected a woman chastened. A severe crisis which spanned almost three years from 1799 threatened to undermine her life's work along with her personal integrity. The dispute which began as a local issue between More and the curate of Blagdon, metamorphosed into one of national concern. The controversy, which will be examined in this chapter, was the result of alleged teaching of doctrines at variance with those of the Church of England. Merciless attacks accused More of disloyalty, not only to the Church but to the State also. Her correspondence during this period reflects the severe mental trauma which resulted: a letter to William Wilberforce written in 1801 submits, 'This heavy blow has almost bowed me to the ground.'²⁸⁸ A record in her diary of January 1803 indicates her subscription to the evangelical creed of atonement: 'Lord, do thou sanctify to me the long and heavy trials. Let them not be removed till they have answered those ends which they were sent to accomplish.'²⁸⁹ More's *Practical Piety* reflects this period of rehabilitation and theological transformation and this chapter will identify the change of tone clearly apparent in her later works.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 'reminiscences' track a life dedicated to the empowerment of women. An address in June 1882 presented to the *Emma Willard Seminary* at Troy, New York, evidences a woman who at the age of 67 was emphasising the value of the older woman. With 'the pressing cares of family life ended', Stanton suggests, 'the woman may awake to some slumbering genius in herself for art, science, or literature, with which to gild the sunset of her days'; resulting in 'new inspiration for the work that still remains for us to do.'²⁹⁰ This address and other works will be closely examined in the chapter, suggesting that the writing and lecturing at this period of her life

²⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 422.

²⁸⁸ *Memoirs of the Life & Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, p. 143, vol 3.

²⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 183.

²⁹⁰ E.C. Stanton, *As Revealed in Her Letters Diary and Reminiscences*, p. 344.

explicitly laid the foundation for her prodigious polemic *The Woman's Bible*, which will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis.

As Mary Baker Eddy approached her eighth decade, she was still encompassed by the disputes which had surrounded her foray into the public and masculine world of the Bostonian theological academy. Attempts to publicly humiliate and destroy her lifework emerged not only from patriarchal insecurities but also from jealous associates.²⁹¹ A law suit²⁹² was brought against Eddy by a former student through a certain Frederick Peabody. Peabody was a lawyer who, on behalf of his client, attempted to 'flay Mrs. Eddy in the eyes of the world,' according to Gillian Gill. Gill maintains that the twin aims of revenge and financial reward were at the root of this litigation and she suggests that 'he [Peabody] aimed to bring Mrs. Eddy down and fatally sabotage her movement.'²⁹³ 'Peabody', suggests Gill 'was the chief conduit of information, or misinformation, about Mrs. Eddy' and his failure to secure success on behalf of his client left him 'howling in impotent rage and protest.'²⁹⁴ Attempting to wreak revenge for his public humiliation he supplied damaging and ill-founded documentation to Samuel Clemens, alias Mark Twain and this alliance resulted in 'the most famous collection of essays on Mary Baker Eddy and her religion that has ever been written.'²⁹⁵ Despite the successful outcome for Eddy, the debacle left her facing charges of 'feminine instability' from certain followers who insisted that a masculine 'head' of her sect was the only sensible path to follow. This chapter will examine an important essay that Eddy wrote, but never published, in response to this challenge to her authority.

The chapter will examine the writers' claims that female sensibilities allowed

²⁹¹ See Gillian Gill's chapter 'Mark Twain Fails to Come Calling' in her biography *Mary Baker Eddy*.

²⁹² The background to this lawsuit will not be examined in this thesis, but is fully documented in Gillian Gill's *Mary Baker Eddy* (Reading, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1998), similarly Robert Peel's biography on the life of Mary Baker Eddy gives a clear account. Through three volumes: *Mary Baker Eddy - The Years of Discovery*, *The Years of Trial* and *The Years of Authority* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), Peel acquaints the reader with an appraisal of these different periods of Eddy's career.

²⁹³ G. Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 439.

²⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 445.

²⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 449.

women direct access to their God. It will trace the parallels between their lived experiences and literary arguments, investigating their criticism of masculine values which debased and marginalised the female sex. It will seek to uncover a religious orientation which, drawn from and structured around all that was best in the maternal nature, suggested that patriarchal misrepresentation of the Holy Scriptures was at the root of sexual inequality. It will ultimately confirm woman's right to revelation built on their arguments for a 'reconceptualizing of God.' Valerie Sanders suggests in *Eve's Renegades*: 'In general....women were less interested in the doctrinal side of theology, and seem to have concentrated more on the nature of God and his relationship with believers....'²⁹⁶ These women would appear to be the exception in that, whilst acquainting their readers with the 'nature of God', their reasoned doctrinal arguments augmented their claims for equality.

I believe the argument of the chapter will be better served through pairing Wollstonecraft with Stanton and More with Eddy; this arrangement, while allowing the identification of similarities in their style, is not at the expense of emphasising divergencies. It again draws attention to the feminist/anti-feminist perspectives, whilst accentuating the 'baton' effect of the influence of one generation on the next. Certain chapters will inevitably witness a preponderance of one or the other author's works. Taking the thesis as a whole, however, the balance will re-adjust.

'The grand causes which combine to carry mankind forward'²⁹⁷

The coalition of conviction and purpose so evident in Wollstonecraft's writing had a prodigious and progressive effect in advancing the cause of human rights. Her writings have faced intense critical investigation through the years - her politico-social ideological perspectives have been at the forefront of feminist criticism. I would argue, however, that it was Wollstonecraft's religious ideals which formed the nucleus of her arguments for social justice. This religious thread is the animating spirit which can be traced from her first novel,

²⁹⁶ V.Sanders, *Eve's Renegades Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists*. (Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1996), p. 161.

²⁹⁷ *Letters*, p. 346.

right through to her *Letters*. Referring to the *significance* of which, William Godwin suggests: 'A book of travels that so irresistibly seizes on the heart, never, in any other instance, found its way from the press.'²⁹⁸

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and *View* register her criticism of the restrictive views held by those she refers to as bigoted 'dabblers':

Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears! how has thy clear stream been muddied by the dabblers, who have presumptuously endeavoured to confine in one narrow channel, the living waters that ever flow towards God - the sublime ocean of existence! What would life be without that peace which the love of God, when built on humanity, alone can impart? Every earthly affection turns back, at intervals, to prey upon the heart that feeds it; and the purest effusions of benevolence, often rudely damped by man, must mount as a free-will offering to Him who gave them birth, whose bright image they faintly reflect.²⁹⁹

Her argument is expedited in the *View*, where she suggests: 'We must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin: the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora's Box, and the other fables, too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition..... we shall then leave room for the expansion of the human heart, and, I trust, find, that men will insensibly render each other happier as they grow wiser.'³⁰⁰

This argument would have been deemed 'presumptuous', especially by those theologians who had spent years in doctrinal study: to these conformist preachers she laid the charge of restricting the Word of God to the letter, losing thereby the spirit. She was intent on lifting 'impositions' - what she saw as fallacious teaching - and replacing it with the 'purest effusions of benevolence', demanding a higher and more expansive love in place of the

²⁹⁸ W. Godwin, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Constable & Co. Ltd., 1928), p. 84.

²⁹⁹ *Vindication*, p. 232.

³⁰⁰ *A View*, p. 21.

restrictive practices she considered were responsible for the duplicity at the heart of religion.

The conviction which inspired the writing of Wollstonecraft is evidenced in her attacks on repressive patriarchal ideologies and their construction of a female subordinate. Her literary texts register the complex issues surrounding the representation of women; they also mirror a developing sense of self which was intrinsic to her arguments. Her authorial identity, however, was ambiguous in so far as she wrestled with the cultural and political issues of the day. The tensions between reason and feeling in her texts reflected an accumulation of mental trappings. Barker-Benfield suggests that: 'She connected her adult misery to her own father's treatment of her as a child, she also explained it as the result of the conventional rearing and education of middle-class females, their sensibilities developed at the expense of reason'.³⁰¹ Barker-Benfield observes that 'Wollstonecraft insisted that women toughen themselves by fully entering the world and subjecting themselves individually to all of the experiences possible to men.'³⁰²

Wollstonecraft did 'fully enter the world' subjecting herself in the process 'to all of the experiences possible to men'. She was in France when war was declared on February 1, 1793 and this period had serious consequences for her. This year witnessed the execution of Louis XVI and the guillotining of Marie Antoinette, along with Madame Roland and Olympe de Gouges. An account written in Wollstonecraft's *Posthumous Works* registers her horror on seeing Louis driven to his execution: 'I have been alone ever since; and, though my mind is calm, I cannot dismiss the lively images that have filled my imagination all the day. - Nay, do not smile, but pity me; for, once or twice, lifting my eyes from the paper, I have seen eyes glare through a glass-door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me.....I am going to bed - and, for the first time in my life, I cannot put out the candle.'³⁰³ The overthrow of government and social order, the violence and anarchy, the hopes and despairs are all recorded in the *View*, and it is this text, I would suggest, which

³⁰¹ *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 364.

³⁰² *ibid*, p. 362.

³⁰³ M. Wollstonecraft, *Letters to Joseph Johnson*, p. 364.(vol 6)

marks the beginning of a sea change in her socio-political perspective.

The demand for political liberty and political virtue was the nucleus around which Wollstonecraft's arguments were arranged in the *View*. She viewed the revolution in France as the exemplification of the age-old struggle between light and dark, truth and error; between superstition and the enlightened sentiments. 'The revolution in France', she suggests, 'exhibits a scene, in the political world, not less novel and interesting than the contrast is striking between the narrow opinions of superstition, and the enlightened sentiments of masculine and improved philosophy.'³⁰⁴ The political and public world was the field upon which the battle for reform would be fought. Jane Rendall suggests that it is in the *View* that 'Wollstonecraft's study of these "grand causes" can be most clearly understood through her assumption and exploration of the masculine voice of the philosophical historian.'³⁰⁵ I would suggest further that it was the assumption and exploration of male values and logic which was to crystallize in Wollstonecraft's mind, a need to press for a purity of sentiment, a philosophy of thought which emphasised female values and spiritual ideals.

The faultline at the heart of theological teaching and practice had already been exposed in *Vindication*. It was the unyielding nature of those who pursued these beliefs that drew severe censure from her pen. Vivid textual imagery is used by Wollstonecraft as she sought to highlight rampant spiritual wickedness at work in 'high places'. Referring to the practice of public worship she suggests: 'As these ceremonies have the most fatal effect on their morals, and as a ritual performed by the lips, when the heart and mind are far away, is not now stored up by our church as a bank to draw on for the fees of the poor souls in purgatory, why should they not be abolished?' She refers to the perpetrators of these ceremonies as 'indolent slugs' guarding their 'snug place' by 'sliming it over', thus enabling themselves to eat, drink and make merry 'instead of fulfilling the duties' of their vocation. She points to 'rapacious priests of superstitious memory' as 'idle vermin who two

³⁰⁴ *A View*, p. 6.

³⁰⁵ J. Rendall, "'The grand causes which combine to carry mankind forward": Wollstonecraft, history and revolution.' *Women's Writing*, Vol 4, No. 2. 1997, p. 155.

or three times a day perform in the most slovenly manner a service which they think useless'; concluding that 'Nothing, indeed, can be more irreverent than the cathedral service as it is now performed in this country, [neither] does it contain a set of weaker men than those who are the slaves of this childish routine.' Wollstonecraft is slightly more sympathetic towards 'high mass on the continent' which she concedes 'must impress every mind, where a spark of fancy glows', but juxtaposed with this acknowledgement is a criticism of the 'theatrical pomp' which supports and surrounds a religious devotion that merely 'gratifies the senses.'³⁰⁶

These basic postulations pervaded the political, religious and cultural systems of Great Britain, France and the United States of America,³⁰⁷ but Wollstonecraft identified 'religion' as arguably the *chief* cause in 'The grand causes which combine to carry mankind forward'. The materialism which enveloped the teaching and practice of Christianity was the chief subject, therefore, which needed addressing if society was to be reformed and justice ratified.

A letter Wollstonecraft wrote to Joseph Johnson early in 1793 reflects her deep concerns that the eagerly anticipated 'golden age' was at that very moment fading before her eyes. This led her to question, not the existence of God, but the power of the wiles of the devil to overcome good with evil. The opening paragraph reads:

Before I came to France, I cherished, you know, an opinion, that strong virtues might exist with the polished manners produced by the progress of civilization; and I even anticipated the epoch, when, in the course of improvement, men would labour to become virtuous, without being goaded on by misery. But now, the perspective of the golden age, fading before the attentive eye of observation, almost eludes my sight; and, losing thus in part my

³⁰⁶ *Vindication*, pp. 231- 232.

³⁰⁷ Thomas Paine settled in America 1774 and it is suggested that: 'He brought the spirit of British radicalism with him...' A revolutionary pamphlet he wrote in 1776 sold 100,000 copies within three months. This confirms close philosophical links. See: *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, p. 56.

theory of a more perfect state, start not, my friend, if I bring forward an opinion, which at the first glance seems to be levelled against the existence of God! I am not become an Atheist, I assure you, by residing at Paris: yet I begin to fear that vice, or, if you will, evil, is the grand mobile of action, and that, when the passions are justly poised, [sic] we become harmless, and in the same proportion useless.

Clearly, her cherished hopes for improvement of the race had been dashed during her residence in France; indeed the immorality she had witnessed during this time had worked to erode her utopian vision. It is important to observe, however, that even in this she is careful to emphasise her religious conviction; her faith in God is unwavering. It is her faith in man which appears diminished; moral arousal, enthusiasm for action - none was the panacea she had hoped. There is a trace of anticipation however as she concludes: 'Whether a nation can go back to the purity of manners which has hitherto been maintained unsullied..... I cannot give up the hope, that a fairer day is dawning on Europe.....'³⁰⁸

Wollstonecraft's 'revolution' discourse still *apparently* promotes reason and rationality, over sensibility and feeling, as the route towards an egalitarian society. 'Reason' she explains, 'beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can provide the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion.'³⁰⁹ Use of the word 'theatre' in this context, brings to mind some dramatic performance, adding to that sense of political melodrama. She may well have had in mind also the dramatic public performances being staged on the streets of Paris; the public guillotining, and the dismantling of bourgeois society. Wollstonecraft's writing at this period, however, mirrored her mounting misgivings in a system which appeared to be constructed on male melodrama. Deceit in the corridors of power; dishonesty in the Church; rampant evil stalking purity, virtue, and goodness; these were the torments she wrestled with during her engagement with 'all of the experiences possible to men.' There was another drama unfolding in the life of

³⁰⁸ M. Wollstonecraft, *Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation*, p. 444. (vol 6)

³⁰⁹ *A View*, p. 6 .

Wollstonecraft at this time, however, and it was set to become equally dramatic for her personally, as the revolution had been collectively. This 'experience' was largely responsible for the change in literary tone which surfaced.

Towards the beginning of 1793, Wollstonecraft met Gilbert Imlay, an American army captain whose beguiling manner enticed her completely, saving her from the waves of misfortune which had tossed and agitated her for most of her life. The relationship opened up a new chapter in her life, lifting her spirits, and as Godwin suggests, 'Her confidence was entire; her love was unbounded. Now, for the first time in her life, she gave a loose to all the sensibilities of her nature.'³¹⁰ Tomalin suggests in her biography of Wollstonecraft that she idealized Imlay 'into a worthy recipient for her love.' She explains that 'the pressure of circumstances helped her to do this' and that 'the temptation to adore and cling to him'³¹¹ may well have been a result of the lonely situation in which she found herself at this time. A step by step account of this period will not assist the argument of this thesis: I simply wish to expose how the trauma of the revolution, a period of forced dependency on Imlay and the birth of her first child served to inspire Wollstonecraft with a primitive impulse towards a romantic sublimity.³¹²

Imlay was a disappointment. He publicly humiliated Wollstonecraft with his philandering, and his business acumen left a lot to be desired. However, when he summoned her, along with her child, to return to England, she did so, albeit with a sick heart and a weary soul. It was April 1795, and by June of that year she sought to end her life with a suicide attempt. It was at this low point that a plan emerged which resulted in Wollstonecraft and her daughter leaving England for Scandinavia on an 'errand' for Imlay. Tomalin explains: 'There is an almost sublime effrontery about sending off a discarded mistress, newly recovered from a suicide attempt and accompanied by a

³¹⁰ W. Godwin, *Memoirs of The Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (Penguin Books Ltd., 1987)(1798) pp. 242-243.

³¹¹ C. Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), p. 189.

³¹² The ability to envision the inherent promise within the tangible and material [nature and landscape provided a foretaste of spiritual sublimity] was what marked the romantic movement of the eighteenth-century.

small baby, on a difficult journey into unknown territory, to recoup your financial disasters for you and leave you free to enjoy the company of her rival without reproach.'³¹³ Her *Letters* of this period, however, reflect a re-engagement with the sublime; the beautiful forms of nature reignited the sentiments and nurtured her soul: 'I forgot the horrors I had witnessed in France,' she wrote, 'which had cast a gloom over all nature, and suffering the enthusiasm of my character, too often, gracious God! damped by the tears of disappointed affection, to be lighted up afresh, care took wing while simple fellow feeling expanded my heart.'³¹⁴

The golden age - a utopian vision

A counter-revolutionary nature and insouciance of tone mark these *Letters* which are in distinct contrast to the 'cool eye of observation' heretofore exhibited. The unrestrained enthusiasm emerges from a desire to evoke affection. Her *Letters*, by her own admission, are an attempt to introduce the reader to their tender-hearted author: 'if they do not wish to become better acquainted with me' she suggests, 'I give them leave to shut the book.' The *Letters* are the result of impressions produced on her feelings: 'I found I could not avoid being continually the first person-the little hero of each tale'; but though she tried to correct this 'fault', she admits: 'in proportion as I arranged my thoughts, my letter, I found, became stiff and affected: I, therefore, determined to let my remarks and reflections flow unrestrained.....A person has a right, I have sometimes thought.....to talk of himself when he can win on our attention by acquiring our affection.'³¹⁵

Letter One suggests that the 'golden age', that 'more perfect state' which she referred to in her letter to Johnson as 'almost eluding her sight', may be found by going **back** to the 'purity of manners which has hitherto been maintained unsullied' [letter to Johnson already referred to]. 'Amongst the peasantry' she indicated in this first impression 'there is, however, so much of the simplicity of the golden age.... - so much overflowing of heart, and fellow-

³¹³ *The Life & Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 225.

³¹⁴ *Letters*, p. 247.

³¹⁵ *Letters*, p. 241.

feeling, that only benevolence, and the honest sympathy of nature, diffused smiles over my countenance.....³¹⁶ The civilization she had left behind with its refined culture, its sophisticated enlightenment had left her sad and disappointed 'draining off the nourishment from the vital parts'.³¹⁷ In this *Letter*, she records: 'I walked on, still delighted with the rude beauties of the scene; for the sublime often gave place imperceptibly to the beautiful, dilating the emotions which were painfully concentrated.' These literary images denote a sense perception which sees the hand of the creator in the beauty and sublimity of the landscape. This in turn inspires an expansive emotional response or sensibility in the nature of those who inhabit this pastoral region. References to the 'heart', 'feeling', 'benevolence', and 'sympathy' underscore the power of these feminine characteristics to invoke the golden age - a more perfect state of civilization.

This thesis has already examined Wollstonecraft's mistrust and dislike of fraudulent piety, spiritual wickedness even, in high places, and *Letter Nine* is a vivid portrayal and appreciation of a cult of religious feeling drawn from a utilitarian ideological perspective. Comparing the restrictive religious code of her own country, she observes:

The people of every class are constant in their attendance at church; they are very fond of dancing: and the sunday evenings in Norway, as in catholic countries, are spent in exercises which exhilarate the spirits, without vitiating the heart. The rest of labour ought to be gay; and the gladness I have felt in France on a sunday, or decadi, which I caught from the faces around me, was a sentiment more truly religious than all the stupid stillness which the streets of London ever inspired where the sabbath is so decorously observed. I recollect, in the country parts of England the churchwardens used to go out, during the service, to see if they could catch any luckless wight playing at bowls or skittles; yet what could be more harmless? It would even, I think, be a great advantage to the English, if seats of activity, I do not include

³¹⁶ *Letters*, p. 246

³¹⁷ *A View*, p. 22.

boxing matches, were encouraged on a Sunday, as it might stop the progress of Methodism, and of that fanatical spirit which appears to be gaining ground. I was surprised when I visited Yorkshire, in my way to Sweden, to find that sullen narrowness of thinking had made such a progress since I was an inhabitant of the country..... many of these deluded people, with the best meaning, actually lose their reason, and become miserable, the dread of damnation throwing them into a state which merits the term: and still more, in running after their preachers, expecting to promote their salvation, they disregard their welfare in this world, and neglect the interest and comfort of their families: so that in proportion as they attain a reputation for piety, they become idle³¹⁸

The true religious sentiment which Wollstonecraft witnessed on her travels through Norway and the joyful impressions gleaned in France, juxtaposed with the often misguided enthusiasm of bigoted clergy in England, serves to expose the constructed nature of religious teaching and practice in her own country. 'Observance of forms' indicates the dishonesty and hypocrisy she believes has crept into this simulated religious creed. Gregory Dart suggests: 'Throughout the Letters Wollstonecraft cultivates the language of solitary sensibility as a means of cajoling and berating the conscience of her readers.'³¹⁹ Her *Letters* argue for the re-establishment of natural religion, making a sharp distinction between a faith which inspires a truly religious sentiment and one which is purely ceremonial.³²⁰

Letter fourteen emphasises the value and importance she now places in the 'senses': 'I am persuaded' she records, 'if we wish to render mankind moral from principle, we must give a greater scope to the enjoyments of the

³¹⁸ *Letters*, pp. 287-288.

³¹⁹ G. Dart. *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 135.

³²⁰ It is worth noting that despite her sharp censure of Rousseau, her vision of utopia coincides with his portrayal of the perfect society in *Julie or La Nouvelle Heloise*. A sentiment of virtuous republic is at the heart of the *Clarens* section in his novel: 'Everyone sings, everyone laughs all day long, and yet work does not suffer The sweet equality that reigns here re-establishes the order of nature, it forms an instruction for some and a consolation for others, and a link of friendship for all.' J.J. Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Heloise*, p. 496.

senses, by blending taste with them. Just as dance and exercise in response to a joyous spirit promote a symmetry of form, so the outward manifestation of grace and refinement serves to pacify and settle the inner being, leading, in turn, towards the cultivation of a virtuous soul and an expansion of the heart'. In similar vein, Wollstonecraft argues that whilst nature reflects the beautiful, grand architecture represents the sublime, and both produce an effect on the senses:

The same thought has struck me, when I have entered the meeting-house of my respected friend, Dr Price. - I am surprised that the dissenters, who have not laid aside all the pomps and vanities of life, should imagine a noble pillar, or arch, unhallowed. Whilst men have senses, whatever soothes them lends wings to devotion; else why do the beauties of nature, where all that charm them are spread around with a lavish hand, force even the sorrowing heart to acknowledge that existence is a blessing; and this acknowledgement is the most sublime homage we can pay to the Deity.

Wollstonecraft's perspectives are encapsulated in these few lines of letter fourteen. Architectural grandeur was a physical representation of a noble and elevated thought; whilst a pillar was a column which supported a superstructure, metaphysically it represented that stern resolve and strength of character which upheld virtuous society. These physical representations, just like objects of art, hinted at the creative power of the 'first cause.' In gendered terms, the sublimity of fine architecture could be viewed as a masculine representation, whilst the beauty of nature delineates the feminine. As Ruskin argues in his essay 'Of Queens' Gardens': 'We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the "superiority" of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other.'³²¹

Wollstonecraft's travels enabled her to glimpse the promise behind the

³²¹ J. Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1865), p. 135.

beautiful forms of nature; the landscape was to her a reflection of the Deity,³²² and the senses which were receptive to this heavenly influence were soothed, and soared to reach divine heights. The recognition and acceptance of this earthly blessing, she came to recognise, was the 'most sublime homage we can pay to the Deity.' Coalescence of the sublime and the beautiful and its ideological implications were at the heart of this aesthetic discourse. Wollstonecraft now appears to understand that a pursuit of reason and rationality at the expense of sensibility was not the route towards a more just society. She had already witnessed the demoralisation in the ranks of the established Church, seeing how materialism and superstition had been allowed to take the place of pure religion, and through these *Letters* she endeavoured, as Dart suggested, to 'cajole and berate the conscience of her reader.'

Although conscious that a mind imbued with sensibility *and* reasoned thinking was a powerful instrument for reform, Wollstonecraft instinctively understood that education should be in tune with contemporary opinion. Maternal instinct drove her to protect her own daughter from what *she* had suffered as a pioneering woman, and she was clearly torn between enlarging her daughter's mind at the expense of her sensibility, or vice versa, suggesting in *letter six*, 'I dread lest she should be forced to sacrifice her heart to her principles, or principles to her heart. With trembling hand I shall cultivate sensibility, and cherish delicacy of sentiment, lest, whilst I lend fresh blushes to the rose, I sharpen the thorns that will wound the breast....I dread to unfold her mind, lest it should render her unfit for the world she is to inhabit - Hapless woman! what a fate is thine!'³²³

Wollstonecraft utilizes all the literary tools at her disposal to endorse the eminence of the feminine, drawing on the sentiments of the wits and philosophers. In *Posthumous Works* she expands on and develops

³²² Eddy wrote: 'In our immature sense of spiritual things, let us say of the beauties of the sensuous universe: "I love your promise; and shall know, some time, the spiritual reality and substance of form, light, and color, of what I now through you discern dimly; and knowing this, I shall be satisfied....."' M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works* 'Miscellaneous Writings', p. 87.

³²³ *Letters*, p. 269.

Immanuel Kant's theory that: 'The Fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies the sublime.'³²⁴ Wollstonecraft explicates: 'Mr Kant has observed, that the understanding is sublime, the imagination beautiful - yet it is evident, that poets, and men who undoubtedly possess the liveliest imagination, are most touched by the sublime, while men who have cold, enquiring minds, have not this exquisite feeling in any great degree, and indeed seem to lose it as they cultivate their reason.' She concludes, 'I am more and more convinced, that poetry is the first effervescence of the imagination, and the forerunner of civilization.'³²⁵ Wollstonecraft appears to identify the 'beautiful' as the highest mental state; precursor of intellectual, cultural and moral refinement. This enriched mental state is that best equipped to activate the 'sublime' for the purpose of promoting a more civilised and advanced state of social development.

Letter twenty-three confirms Wollstonecraft's awareness, through personal experience, of the divisive nature of men who become infected with consumerism, losing sight of life's simple pleasures and family values: 'A man, she suggests, 'ceases to love humanity, and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth; as one clashes with his interest, the other with his pleasures: to business, as it is termed, every thing must give way; nay, is sacrificed; and all the endearing charities of citizen, husband, father, brother, become empty names....Why, to snap the chain of thought, I must say farewell.'³²⁶ The 'farewell' could well refer to the severance of her relationship with Imlay, but on another level, severance from a chain of thought which seeks reform on masculine terms. Wollstonecraft's pursuit of this 'grand cause' was no longer ambivalent but unequivocal. No longer was this frame of mind, according to Dart, 'as it was in the *Vindication*, a faculty complicit with the institutions of patriarchy': now it had become 'a utopian principle, an educative force, a symbol of the gap between the present state

³²⁴ I. Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwaite (Berkeley University California Press, 1960), p. 78.

³²⁵ M. Wollstonecraft, 'Hints' [Chiefly designed to have been incorporated in the Second Part of *Vindication*] p 275, vol 5.

³²⁶ *Letters*, p. 342.

of society and one of true liberty and equality.’³²⁷ The negative ‘chain of thought’, the ‘tightened cord of life or reason’ snapped, and Wollstonecraft, as these *Letters* indicate, was set free to envision the golden age and inhabit the perfect state.

The publication of these *Letters* in 1796 was followed some months later by Wollstonecraft’s death. In 1798, Godwin published her *Posthumous Works*, together with letters she wrote to Imlay, which together with his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* served to seal her fate as a corrupt libertine. Godwin’s love and admiration for Wollstonecraft were not shared by a public who came to regard her as the epitome of all that was worst in the female nature. Poems and novels³²⁸ were published using her life’s example as a cautionary tale for other women who were tempted to step outside their sphere. Even in America her reputation was besmirched; publications which portrayed her as representing debauched femininity resulted in her writing being out of print for much of the nineteenth century.

Public rejection, however, was overturned with the emergence of the British and American suffragette movement, which regaled her as a feminist icon. Her influence crossed continents, reaching out and touching those minds which were sympathetic to the cause of women.

In the Image of God Created He Them, Male and Female Created He Them

The challenging of religious bigotry became central to Stanton’s reformist arguments; sharply critical of female subordination, resulting, she believed, from their status in the Bible, she wrote to deconstruct what Wollstonecraft had earlier referred to as ‘fables’, ‘notions,’ upon which ‘priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition.’³²⁹ Connecting the earlier arguments with those of later writers, confirms that ‘baton’ effect already referred to. Mary

³²⁷ G. Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, p. 138.

³²⁸ Examples being Richard Polwhele’s ‘The Unsex’d Females’ (1798); an anonymous poem ‘The Vision of Liberty’, published in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*; *The Vagabond* by George Walker; and *The Infernal Quixote* by Charles Lucas.

³²⁹ *A View*, p. 21.

Daly was clearly influenced by Stanton's arguments: 'Elizabeth Cady Stanton was indeed accurate in pointing out the key role of the myth of feminine evil as a foundation for the entire structure of phallic Christian ideology.....The myth of the Fall can be seen as a prototypic case of false naming.....the myth takes on cosmic proportions since the male's viewpoint is metamorphosed into God's viewpoint.'³³⁰

Stanton laboured indefatigably to identify woman and her rightful inheritance as an equal heir of God. In a tract written in May 1854, a text which remained in print for many years, and advertised as *The Position of Woman as Woman, Wife, Widow, Mother*, Stanton argued with regard to the civil ceremony of marriage: 'the signing of this contract is instant civil death to one of the parties.'³³¹ She savaged the tyrannical behaviour towards woman as wife:

The woman who but yesterday was sued on bended knee, who stood so high in the scale of being as to make an agreement on equal terms with a proud Saxon man, to-day has no civil existence, no social freedom. The wife who inherits no property holds about the same legal position that does the slave on the southern plantation. She can own nothing, sell nothing. She has no right even to the wages she earns; her person, her time, her services are the property of another. She cannot testify, in many cases, against her husband. She can get no redress for wrongs in her own name in any court of justice. She can neither sue nor be sued. She is not held morally responsible for any crime committed in the presence of her husband, so completely is her very existence supposed by the law to be merged in that of another.³³²

This legislative discourse throws light on the incorrigible nature of the legal

³³⁰ M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (The Women's Press Ltd., 1986), p. 47.

³³¹ The nature of Christian marriage was debated in Wollstonecraft's novel *The Wrongs of Woman*, published posthumously in 1798. This text examined the position of women in society in religious and political terms.

³³² *Selected Papers*, p. 246, vol 1.

system as far as women's rights are concerned, and she points to the marriage ceremony as instigator of woman being reduced to 'chattel' status: 'Nature has clearly made the mother the guardian of the child; but man, in his inordinate love of power, does continually set nature and nature's laws at open defiance.' Stanton presses an argument which is hedged about with moral and spiritual law: citing the ancient philosophers, the Christian ethic, human conscience, the love of Heaven, and last but not least, the law of mother nature: 'Would to God you could know the burning indignation that fills woman's soul when she turns over the pages of your statute books, and sees there how like feudal barons you freemen hold your women.'³³³ Appealing to masculine moral and religious sentiment she concludes:

But if, gentlemen, you take the ground that the sexes are alike, and, therefore, you are our faithful representatives - then why all these special laws for woman? Would not one code answer for all like needs and wants? Christ's golden rule is better than all the special legislation that the ingenuity of man can devise: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." [Matt.7:12 and Luke:6:31] This, men and brethren, is all we ask at your hands.³³⁴

Mingling political and religious discourse, she identifies the highest rule of law as that which promotes an inevitable equity and justice: Christ's golden rule. This perspective also emphasises the mutual nature of her argument, a covert criticism of passivity, it is a call for reciprocal action: do unto, as you would be done by.

The introduction to Stanton's *Eighty Years and More*, emphasises: 'Women had an obligation to themselves and to that higher power that had made them to speak out on the basis of what their hearts and consciences told them to be true - about the evils of slavery and sexism, and the congenital narrowmindedness of those men who wrote Reverend and Doctor before their names.'³³⁵ A letter Stanton wrote to her friend Martha C. Wright

³³³ *Selected Papers*, p. 253.

³³⁴ *ibid*, p. 254.

³³⁵ E.Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More Reminiscences 1815-1897*, p. vii.

reiterates: 'If we love the black man as well as we love ourselves, we shall fulfill the Bible injunction.'³³⁶ She was clearly conscious that, whilst women had fought vociferously for the cause of abolition, they were slow to address injustices done their own sex.

In January 1868, Stanton, along with Anthony, founded a newspaper *The Revolution* with the express purpose of becoming a public mouthpiece sensitive to suffrage and humanitarian causes. The title reflected the somewhat rebellious style of its author and its confrontational atmosphere led to inevitable conflict. A violent disagreement with Horace Greeley³³⁷, editor of the New York *Tribune* led to his insisting, 'I have given strict orders at the *Tribune* office that you and your cause are to be tabooed in the future.'³³⁸ This altercation resulted from a certain deviousness on the part of Stanton with regard to a petition drawn up and signed by Mary Cheney Greeley [wife of Horace Greeley]. A Constitutional Convention at which Greeley was to present an adverse report on the question of woman suffrage, also included a petition in favour of suffrage. This petition, headed with the name Mary Cheney Greeley, was subtly changed by Stanton to ensure there might be no mistake over the authorship, thus Mr Horace Greeley's opposition was succeeded by Mrs Horace Greeley's petition of support, resulting in severe embarrassment to the editor of the *Tribune*.

The founding of this newspaper, though regarded by Stanton as one of the happiest periods of her life, nevertheless resulted in much soul-searching. The publication was to be representative of the higher causes in society: 'We said at all times and on all subjects,' she suggests, 'just what we thought, and advertised nothing that we did not believe in.'³³⁹ An editorial from the January 1868 edition makes plain its intent: 'With the highest idea of the dignity and power of the press, this journal is to represent no party, sect, or organization, but individual opinion; editors and correspondents alike, all

³³⁶ T. Stanton & H. Stanton Blatch(eds), *Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in Her Letters Diary and Reminiscences*, p.120, vol 2.

³³⁷ Horace Greeley (1811-1872) Influential abolitionist editor of the New York Tribune.

³³⁸ *Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in Her Letters Diary and Reminiscences*, p. 117, vol 2.

³³⁹ *ibid*, p. 215, vol 1.

writing, from their own stand point, and over their own names. The enfranchisement of woman is one of the leading ideas that calls this journal into existence.....With both man and woman in the editorial department, we shall not have masculine and feminine ideas alone, but united thought on all questions of national and individual interest.³⁴⁰ Much pressure was brought to bear on both Stanton and Anthony from those opposed to their reforming initiatives, and she notes, 'I feel now that our patience and forbearance with our enemies in their malignant attacks on our good name, which we never answered, were indeed marvelous.'³⁴¹ Whilst this literary medium, with its wide appeal, appeared to offer opportunities hitherto unavailable to woman, nevertheless it brought severe censure from many of the leading political figures of the day. A letter written to Susan B. Anthony on December 28, 1869, registers Stanton's strongly held views with regard the title of their newspaper:

MY DEAR SUSAN, - As to changing the name of the *Revolution*, I should consider it a great mistake. If all these people who for twenty years have been afraid to call their souls their own begin to prune us and the *Revolution*, we shall become the same galvanized mummies they are. There could not be a better name than *Revolution*. The establishing of woman on her rightful throne is the greatest revolution the world has ever known or ever will know. To bring it about is no child's play. You and I have not forgotten the conflict of the last twenty years - the ridicule, persecution, denunciation, detraction, the unmixed bitterness of our cup for the past two years, when even friends crucified us. A journal called the *Rosebud* might answer for those who come with kid gloves and perfumes to lay immortal wreaths on the monuments which in sweat and tears others have hewn and built; but for us and for that great blacksmith of ours who forges such red-hot thunderbolts for Pharisees, hypocrites, and sinners, there is no name like the *Revolution*.....This field is ripe for the harvest.....I would not see you crushed by rivals even if to prevent it required

³⁴⁰ *Selected Papers*, p. 125, vol 2.

³⁴¹ *Reminiscences*, p. 215, vol 1.

my being cut into inch bits.....I will wear the yoke a few months longer, bravely and patiently.....³⁴²

Stanton derogates her detractors in similar style to Wollstonecraft, referring to 'galvanized mummies' where Wollstonecraft pointed to the 'indolent slugs' who clogged the wheels of advancing society. Both images highlight a heavy hand of oppression intent on blocking reforming initiative; juxtaposed with this portrayal is one which endorses the active ascendancy of woman towards a position from which to effectively liberate the oppressed. The inauguration of woman to her 'rightful throne' echoes Eddy's allusion to woman's 'dazzling crown' and 'sceptered throne' in her poem *Woman's Rights*. Both use laudatory discourse to appropriate virtue and esteem to womanhood. Biblical imagery reinforces Stanton's argument; drawing attention to the persecution, denunciation and detraction which constituted the 'bitterness of our cup', and 'friends' who crucified them reminds the reader of those earlier Christian pilgrims who suffered at the hands of 'Pharisees, hypocrites, and sinners'. This portrayal works to link female suffering to Christian discipleship; further reinforcing this sense of martyrdom, Stanton concludes: 'I will wear the yoke a few months longer.'

The life of *The Revolution* was not long (three years to be exact), but it brought Stanton to the conclusion that in spite of opposition towards her cause, the field was indeed 'ripe for harvest'.³⁴³ Her own sphere was unconfined, mentally or physically; thus her scope for garnering support was extensive as she travelled freely throughout Europe as well as the American continent. A record in her diary of June 15, 1882, marks her sorrow at the ignorance, superstition and blind belief which, she believes, characterise the great religious denominations. Whilst visiting the great cathedrals of France she always left these monuments with 'a feeling of indignation', this due, she wrote, to 'the generations of human beings who have struggled in poverty to build these altars to the unknown god.'³⁴⁴ The consequence of this ignorance at

³⁴² *Reminiscences*, p.123, vol 2.

³⁴³ *Revelation 14:15* '..... the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.'

³⁴⁴ *Reminiscences*, p. 190, vol 2.

the heart of theological teaching was that: 'The whole performance was hollow and mechanical. People walked in, crossed themselves at the door with holy water, and, while kneeling and saying their prayers, looked about examining the dress of each newcomer, their lips moving throughout, satisfied in reeling off the allotted number of prayers in given time.'³⁴⁵ 'Theatrical pomp' was how Wollstonecraft referred to this automated religious conduct.³⁴⁶

Stanton believed that if the barren nature of the spiritual landscape was ever to become fertile and fruitful again, the myth of the 'Garden of Eden' needed retelling. Woman needed her rightful name and nature restoring to her. This period witnessed, I would suggest, the mental birth of *The Woman's Bible* as a corrective to what Stanton saw as the years of misrepresentation which had resulted in the subjugation of woman. In an 1870 address she explains: 'The Bible, too, is so interpreted as to make woman the inferior and dependant of man. I ask a new interpretation of God's will, that shall make them joint heirs to the riches and fullness of earth and heaven.....When woman holds the lofty position God meant she should as mother of the race, base men will find no woman base enough willingly to hand down their vices, diseases, crimes, their morbid appetites, low desire, their tainted blood, that fire in the veins that consumes the workers of unrighteousness.'³⁴⁷ This argument appropriates to woman what is *already* her 'right' according to Romans 8:16 and 17: 'And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ....'

There is an anticipatory tone as Stanton concludes: 'The day is breaking; it is something to know that life's ills are not showered upon us by the Good Father from a kind of Pandora's box, but that it is His will that joy and peace should be ours. By a knowledge and observance of His laws the road to health and happiness opens before us, and Paradise will be regained on earth' (*Eighty Years*, p 352) (similar terminology again to Wollstonecraft's 'Pandora's box'). A law of God supports Stanton's argument, and it is evidently through an appreciation of God's feminine nature that 'maternity [will]

³⁴⁵ *Eighty Years and More*, p. 346.

³⁴⁶ *Vindication*, p. 232.

³⁴⁷ *Selected Papers*, p. 345, vol 2.

acquire a new sacredness and dignity, and a nobler type of manhood and womanhood will glorify the earth' (*ibid*, p 352). This understanding will in turn lead to man inhabiting this heavenly kingdom here on earth, Stanton explains: 'When, in the new development of the race, we shall have true marriage - a union of the great souls masculine and feminine - love, wisdom, justice, mercy, liberty, equality, fraternity, will gladden our earthly pilgrimage, and the Adams and Eves, so long wanderers in the great wilderness of life, will regain their lost Paradise, and live obedient to eternal law.'

One night on the train from New York to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, I found abundant time to think over the personal peculiarities of the many noble women who adorn this nineteenth century, and, as I recalled them, one by one, in America, England, France, and Germany, and all that they are doing and saying, I wondered that any man could be so blind as not to see that woman has already taken her place as the peer of man. While the lords of creation have been debating her sphere and drawing their chalk marks here and there, woman has quietly stepped outside the barren field where she was compelled to graze for centuries, and is now in green pastures and beside still waters, a power in the world of thought.³⁴⁸

Stanton chose not to rest in 'green pastures' or 'beside still waters', as well she may have done approaching her eighth decade. Rather she launched forth with her revolutionary re-interpretation of the *Holy Bible*. The next chapter will closely examine this radical literary text, *The Woman's Bible* as it propelled Stanton towards becoming 'a power in the world of thought.'

The next section of this chapter will analyse More's later texts, attempting to discover if, as Stanton suggested: 'The tact and intelligence of this woman completely turned the tide of opinion....and the wise ones of her day gloried in her success.'³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ *Reminiscences*, p. 221, vol 1.

³⁴⁹ *Selected Papers*, p. 113, vol 1.

The *Living* Christ and Practical Christianity

Hannah More published *Practical Piety* at the age of 66. It was her writing of this period which Hole suggested had 'degenerated into decline' but which this chapter will argue was eloquent, compelling and influential, a result of her personal conversion experience. Bonnie G. Smith notes: 'there was a religious revival in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with the result that a Christian emphasis infused many lives',³⁵⁰ but she pointed out that religion was a major contribution towards the reinforcement of separate spheres.

More was undoubtedly disappointed with the 'abysmal' (as Smith calls it) state of formal religion in England, especially its inability to confront and correct rampant immorality. The evangelical movement with its religious enthusiasm and emphasis on moral reform, was embraced by Anglicans and dissenters alike in this period in the United States as well as Britain. Biblical interpretation was central to this millenarian vision. The most characteristic feature was the personal spiritual awakening of its adherents which involved probing the heart and searching the soul as a means of individual reform and salvation. This was a period which led to an empowerment of the feminine: 'Woman', suggested a Presbyterian minister in Newburyport, 'was "fitted by nature" for Christian benevolence, "religion seems almost to have been entrusted by its author to her particular custody."³⁵¹ Barbara Welter suggests that the "feminization of Protestantism in the early nineteenth century was conspicuous."³⁵² The doctrine of separate spheres contributed towards a raising of the feminine to an almost sanctified status as her domain became the seat of monocracy.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ B.G.Smith, *Changing Lives - Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington, Massachusetts, Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), p. 210.

³⁵¹ N.F.Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 126.

³⁵² *The Bonds of Womanhood*, p. 132.

³⁵³ Whilst adhering to the traditions of hierarchy in society, the contribution of evangelicalism to feminism is an important point to note. See: *Faces of Feminism, A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* by Olive Banks (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981).

More's purpose as she undertook these later works was 'to plant genuine unadulterated Christianity' in the hearts of her readers, to 'correct mistakes in religion' and through religion 'to give a peace which the world, with all its promises and blandishments, cannot give.'³⁵⁴ A powerful spiritual ethos pervades her discourse and this text was clearly a reflection of a life exemplified; it illustrates, from personal experience, how a 'religion of the heart' impinged upon and exerted influence over the 'conduct of the life.' Authenticity, humility and an instinctive discernment are what mark the tone of this work replacing the panegyric discourse of her late eighteenth-century works. The *politics* of theology through which she had attempted to reform fashionable society had been found wanting in the exigency of personal trauma. More argued that an external conformity to religious practices, even though right in themselves, may be adopted from human motives, and to answer secular purposes: 'It is not a religion of forms, and modes, and decencies. It is' she now insists, 'being transformed into the image of God. It is being like-minded with Christ'. Pomp, pride and ceremony had no place in this religion of the heart: this religion was an 'internal principle' demanding absolute consecration: moreover, she recommended, 'It is the desiring earnestly to surrender our will to his, our heart to the conduct of his spirit, our life to the guidance of his word.'³⁵⁵

More's tortuous path in the immediate aftermath of the Blagdon crisis apparently led her to two conclusions. The first was the inherent potential for cruelty in man, and the abuse of the religious tenet, 'do unto another as you would have them do unto you.' The second resulted from the protracted and malicious attack on her own name and nature which brought her face to face with the need for *individual* reform. She had attempted to initiate social reform on a grand scale up to this point, but it was her own conversion experience which emphasised the need for a personal relationship with God. More feared that the spiritual barrenness she witnessed would eventually lead to the demise of the Church, submitting, 'I too, really think the church is in

³⁵⁴R. Brimley Johnson (ed), *The Letters of Hannah More* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1925), p. 141.

³⁵⁵ *Practical Piety*, p. 3, Vol 1.

danger, though in another and far more awful sense'.³⁵⁶

The Blagdon Controversy, 1799-1802

This controversy will not be examined in detail: the point of introducing it is to shed light on the noticeable change of tone in More's later writing:

Briefly, the dispute began as a local affair in the year 1799; William Wilberforce had encouraged Hannah More and her sisters to extend their community care to include the education of the children of the poor. They had responded eagerly, and a number of schools were established to provide education and moral discipline to the young. The schools quickly became popular and successful, and More was justifiably proud of their achievements. However, an incident occurred at the school in Blagdon which led to More being accused of treachery and disloyalty to the Church and the State. There were many who questioned the wisdom of educating the lower orders at all, but the most serious allegation came in the form of an attack on her religious persuasion. Was Hannah More a Methodist? Were Methodist principles being taught in her schools, and was she contributing to the undermining of the doctrines of the Church of England? The virulence of the dispute became a cause celebre in the early years of the nineteenth century and culminated in accusations that More was pursuing Jacobinical politics as well as Methodist principles. The attacks on her person and writings were merciless and left More traumatised, humiliated and broken in spirit. Her diaries and letters testify the depths to which she plumbed and mark each weary step as she re-emerged.

More wrote to Wilberforce from Cowslip Green in 1801, 'Rachel is still weeping for her children, and refuses to be comforted because they are not instructed.'³⁵⁷ This heavy blow has almost bowed me to the ground.....' A glimmer of hope emerges however, as she continues, 'I doubt not but that he

³⁵⁶ *Memoirs of The Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hanah More*, p. 147, vol 3.

³⁵⁷ This refers to the Biblical character of Rachel, who came through great tribulation to become known as the Mother of Israel. 'Thus saith the Lord; Refrain they voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded.' Jeremiah 31:16.

who can bring much real good out of much seeming evil, will eventually turn this shocking business to his glory; and already a *little* light seems to be springing out of this darkness.¹³⁵⁸

In January 1803, a record in More's diary confirms her faith in redemption: 'Lord, do thou sanctify to me my long and heavy trials. Let them not be removed till they have answered those ends which they were sent to accomplish.....O Lord, grant that I may be more fixed in my thoughts, more frequent in self-examination, more heedful of the emotions of my own mind.....O, Lord, I resolve to begin this year with a solemn dedication of myself to thee.'¹³⁵⁹

The evangelical creed cited punishment as a means of atonement, and More's diaries and letters chronicle the transformation as it took place in her heart. Her diaries record, in Herbert's words, how she 'dressed and undressed her soul' night and day to discover her wrong-doing. In 1804, her atonement was complete, 'I have had a life of so much prosperity that I needed powerful correctiona comfortable evidence of growth in grace, the desert years are over.'¹³⁶⁰

Christianity: An Internal Principle

The preface to *Practical Piety* denotes the mode of expression More has now chosen through which to exert influence; it is far removed from the dictatorial and authoritative tone of the earlier days: 'The writer has endeavoured to address herself as a Christian who must die soon.....She writes not with the assumption of superiority, but with a deep practical sense of the infirmities against which she has presumed to caution others. She wishes to be understood as speaking the language of sympathy rather than of dictation, or feeling rather than of document.'" (PP p xi) Prior to her conversion experience she spoke the *letter* of Christianity, now she expressed its *spirit*, sympathy and feeling having replaced dictation and

¹³⁵⁸ *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, p. 143, vol 3.

¹³⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 183.

¹³⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 213.

document. More is keen to establish a basis upon which true Christian principles may be constructed. She is clearly disillusioned with the superficiality of outward worship and its potential for perversion of true religion, but is aware of her own limitations: 'To point out with precision all the mistakes which exist in the present day, on the awful subject of Religion, would far exceed the limits of this small work.'³⁶¹

Practical Piety is a text which emerges from a chastened heart: 'The Sacred Writings', More suggests, 'frequently point out the analogy between natural and spiritual things. The same Spirit which in the creation of the world moved upon the face of the waters, operates on the human character to produce a new heart and a new life. By this operation the affections and faculties of the man receive a new impulse:.....Genuine religion demands not merely an external profession of our allegiance to God, but an inward devotedness.' (PP p4,5) More's explication credits the heart as an *active* centre of spiritual life, mental and physical regeneration begin with a change of heart, and her clear distinction between genuine and a professed piety mirrors her sensibility argument. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, quoting Pascal, would appear to define More's argument: 'But it is, in addition, the organ that knows an order superior to that of reason: "It is the heart that feels God and not reason: this is what faith is, God susceptible to the heart and not to reason"...Pascal means that reason is not useless, but that it remains insufficient, for it belongs to the natural order, whereas "the heart has reasons that reason knows not."³⁶²

Challenging doctrinairism she exposes the 'pernicious purposes' of the fanatic, and the 'pious error of holy men' in her espousal of 'genuine piety.' (PP p12) More uses this word 'genuine' repeatedly in her text: 'What doctrine of the New Testament has not been made to speak the language of its injudicious advocate', she proclaims 'and turned into arms against some other doctrine which it was never meant to oppose?' (PP p12) The search for 'divine truth' can never be found by what More refers to as 'formal religionists' - those who, she suggests, have 'probably, never sought, and, therefore, never obtained any sense of the spiritual mercies of God', and consequently,

³⁶¹ *Practical Piety*, p.52, vol 1.

³⁶² *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 236, vol 6.

'conclude that there is, therefore, no such state.' (PP p14) A letter More wrote to the Rev Richard Hart-Davis in 1821 usefully portrays her allegiance to the Church Establishment, but identifies her awareness of those who allow pernicious political purposes to outweigh true religion. Acclaiming a work written by her friend, Mr Wilks, joint preacher at Bentinck Chapel, and which he dedicated to Lord Liverpool, she writes: 'Its object to prove the value of a Church Establishment and the vast superiority of the Church of England Establishment. It is a most able, interesting work. The general view very comprehensive;very judicious, the style animated and perspicuous. He is a zealous friend to the Church, but very candid and blessed, free from all party spirit and virulence.'³⁶³

Implicit within the argument of chapter one in *Practical Piety* is the need to get back to a first cause and fixed principles: 'The mistake of many in religion appears to be that they do not begin with the beginning.' (PP p 8) The 'beginning' creative account in Genesis 1 recounts: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.....And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.' Concluding: 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished...' Could More be suggesting that the second creative portrayal, which introduces original sin, is not the place to start? 'It is a very bold charge against God's goodness', she suggests: 'to presume that he had made beings originally wicked, and against God's veracity to believe, that having made such beings he pronounced them "good?"' (PP p9)

The 'original sin' assumption and its locating of female culpability in the fall of man is fundamental to an argument for female approbation. Wollstonecraft grappled with this position, and clearly Hannah More deems it to be an inappropriate and incongruous imputation that a good God could create wicked children *in His image*.

More's 'heart religion'³⁶⁴ reflects that of the Christian East principles, *The*

³⁶³ Part of a letter I discovered in a Hart-Davis family scrapbook at the Bristol Record Office, uncatalogued and as far as I can ascertain, unpublished.

³⁶⁴ The linking of the Culture of Sensibility with heart religion is expanded upon in chapter two of *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 65.

Encyclopedia of Religion explains: 'The discovery of the heart therefore reestablishes human nature in its original state, before the Fall, in rediscovering the energy of the Holy Spirit given by baptism, and in becoming the temple of God once again.'³⁶⁵ Distancing herself from the damaging notion of woman as the source of sin, More effectively uses 'the fall' as the very essence or source of man's redemption:

When we see how graciously he has turned our very lapse into an occasion of improving our condition; how from this evil he was pleased to advance us to a greater good than we had lost; how that life which was forfeited may be restored; how, by grafting the redemption of man on the very circumstance of his fall, he has raised him to the capacity of a higher condition than that which he has forfeited, and to a happiness superior to that from which he fell.

- What an impression does this give us of the immeasurable wisdom and goodness of God, of the unsearchable riches of Christ! (PP p10,11)

The impression left with the reader is that the 'lapse' of woman, if it is she who must bear responsibility for the fall, preceded great growth in grace, ultimately preparing her heart for reception of the Christ child. Walter Gardini argues: 'Mary is transformed into the abode of the Spirit, the place of his presence and his action in the world. The Spirit spiritualizes her and makes her divine to enable her to be the mother of God in the flesh.'³⁶⁶ Restoration and redemption are the keynote of More's brand of Christianity. Her own 'fall' from grace has clearly influenced her spiritual perspective, she now witnesses to the restorative nature of a chastened heart. The strength of humility, the gentleness of mercy and the beauty of virtue are qualities fundamental to this religion of the heart. Taking up the cross requires constant self-examination and self-renunciation on the part of the follower, and these Christly qualities are the nucleus around which More's arguments are arranged. The advancement of women in society depended upon the influence they

³⁶⁵ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 237.

³⁶⁶ U.King (ed), *Women in the World Religions Past and Present*, 'The Feminine Aspect of God in Christianity' W. Gardini, p. 63.

were able to exert as guardians of the nation's morals, and More was intent on giving to this influence a holy edict. Speaking on behalf of those subjugated followers of Christ who had been taught to regard themselves as responsible for the sins of the world, she offered hope: 'We must not, however, think falsely of our nature, we must humble, but not degrade it.' Her claim that 'our original brightness is obscured, but not extinguished' (PP p10), seems to be a covert renunciation of 'original sin' as the putative responsibility of the female. This polemic offers a reading which enables woman to be glimpsed in her original glory. Its argument is from a covert feminist position, and whilst a suggestion of More as a 'feminist' is a rather precarious one, the spiritual sub-text to the arguments she 'humbly' proposes subscribe to the spiritual equality of the sexes. The metier and raison d'être behind More's arguments in this later period of her life, reflect her concern at the injudicious religious advocates whose 'pernicious purposes' have promoted a distortion of true Christianity:

The religion which it is the object of these pages to recommend, has been sometimes misunderstood, and not seldom misrepresented. It has been described as an unproductive theory, and ridiculed as a fanciful extravagance. For the sake of distinction it is here called, *the religion of the heart*. *There* it subsists as the fountain of spiritual life; *thence* it sends forth, as from the central seat of its existence, supplies of life and warmth through the whole frame; *there* is the soul of virtue, *there* is the vital principle which animates the whole being of a Christian.

This religion has been the support and consolation of the pious believer in all ages of the Church. That it has been perverted both by the cloystered and the uncloystered mystic, not merely to promote abstraction of mind, but inactivity of life, makes nothing against the principle itself.

But if it has been carried to a blameable excess by the pious error of holy men, it has also been adopted by the less innocent fanatic,

and abused to the most pernicious purposes. His extravagance has furnished to the enemies of internal religion, arguments, or rather invectives, against the sound, and sober exercises of genuine piety. They seize every occasion to represent it as if it were criminal, as the foe of morality; ridiculous, as the infallible test of an unsound mind; mischievous, as hostile to active virtue, and destructive, as the bane of public utility. (PP p 11,12)

This argument makes a clear distinction between Christ's Christianity - or the religion of the heart, and its 'injudicious' fallacious representation. These basic definitions take More's 'sensibility' argument, examined in chapter three, onto a higher plane, reflecting the ascending argument of this chapter. Constructing a tangible alternative perspective to that 'pious error of holy men', More depicts a womb-like place, a space of origination and development from which flows out an active influence. This 'central seat' could easily refer to woman herself or the private sphere from which emanates this 'life and warmth' of heart-felt (or internal) religion. Spiritual responsiveness was the mark of genuine piety, and honest investigation *from* the pure in heart, allowed the challenging of mistaken or misunderstood doctrine. Subtly nuanced within More's discourse is a hint that the subjugating of *pure* Christianity may not be so far removed from the oppression and hostility faced by virtuous women who fostered these operative spiritual values: 'They seize every occasion to represent it as if it were criminal, as the foe of morality; ridiculous, as the infallible test of an unsound mind; mischievous.....' For 'it' read 'she' and the portrayal begins to sound like that of misogynous writers of the period who portrayed woman in similar terms.³⁶⁷ More's linking of Christianity with sensibility, sensibility with femininity and femininity with spirituality; her connections between the heart as the 'central seat of existence' or source of spiritual life and the mother as the nucleus of family life, compellingly substantiate her argument for the exaltation of women and their equal spiritual status with men.

If the reformation of male manners through female influence was the thrust of

³⁶⁷ See L. Mandell, *Misogynous Economies The Business of Literature in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

her early works, when social reform was to be on the basis of the all-pervading cult of sensibility, she *now* seized the initiative to identify and promote a feminised Christianity. Her distinctive theological naming, so there should be no mistake, of *the religion of the heart*, and the inculcation of the maternal with its compassion, tenderness and fundamental empathy, within religious doctrine, witnesses this. According to More, the 'enemies' of this intuitive spiritual awareness or 'internal religion' would appear to be those 'holy men' who have not only misconstrued 'the Word', but through their ineptitude have allowed the noxious and 'less innocent fanatic' to distort its message.

More's argument in effect highlights the struggles within the Church to enforce orthodoxy. Barker-Benfield suggests: 'The vision of a barbaric and cruel God, worshipped by cruel forefathers, opposed to a benevolent and sympathetic one, worshipped by more refined and humane congregants of people with "native Tenderness" in "their own bosom[s]" corresponded to the struggle between opposing definitions of manhood.'³⁶⁸ More's very visual discourse clearly defines a God of compassion, radiating love and tenderness to His flock, and this definition aesthetically reinforces the Beatitude admonition: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for **they** shall see God.'³⁶⁹ This perception works to consolidate an image of a first parent who as the source of maternal tenderness effectively authorises a definition of manhood which embraces femininity.

Divine revelation, according to More, is a practical, operative principle, and it is revealed not through 'rational persuasion' or 'arbitrary compulsions' but rather 'require[s] the influence of that Spirit which dictated them'; in other words, revelation or the word of God speaks to the heart made ready:

Notwithstanding that all the truths of religion, all the doctrines of salvation, are contained in the Holy Scriptures, these very Scriptures require the influence of that Spirit which dictated them to produce an influential faith. This Spirit, by enlightening the mind,

³⁶⁸ *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 71.

³⁶⁹ *Holy Bible*, Matthew 5:8. (with my emphasis)

converts the rational persuasion, brings the intellectual conviction of divine truth, conveyed in the New Testament, into an operative principle.....A mere historical faith, the mere evidence of facts, with the soundest reasonings and deductions from them, may not be that faith which will fill him with all joy and peace in believing.....
(PP p19-21)

More's identifying of the necessary 'influence of that Spirit which dictated' Scripture, to 'produce an influential faith' works to de-gender spiritual communication; Eddy put it this way: 'The divine Science taught in the original language of the Bible came through inspiration, and needs inspiration to be understood. Hence the misapprehension of the spiritual meaning of the Bible, and the misinterpretation of the Word in some instances by uninspired writers, who only wrote down what an inspired teacher had said.'³⁷⁰

This position became central to the arguments of these women reformers and this intrinsic and elemental standpoint had a dual role: firstly, it allowed the questioning of centuries-old doctrine, dead rites and patriarchal interpretation of Scripture; but secondly, and of equal importance, it emphasised the 'native tenderness' or matriarchal nature inherent in God; and the female as well as male, created 'in His image.' *Practical Piety* is infused with religious argument which reinforces the spiritual worth and hence status of women and whilst the restrictive nature of this thesis makes it impossible to closely examine each chapter, a pronouncement from the preface brings sharply into focus More's identification of Christianity in the feminine: 'Christianity may be said to suffer between two criminals, but it is difficult to determine by which **she** suffers most' (PP pix). Creating strong analogies, More reinforces her argument: onto the dramatic event of the crucifixion she carefully superimposes her perspective. The two criminals *More* referred to were 'uncharitable bigotry' and 'indiscriminate candour.' The first 'disguises **her** Divine character, and speculatively adopts the faggot and the flames of inquisitorial intolerance,' whilst the second, 'by stripping **her** of her appropriate attributes, reduces **her** to something scarcely worth contending for; to something which, instead

³⁷⁰ *Science & Health*, p. 319.

of making **her** the religion of Christ, generalizes **her** into any religion which may choose to adopt her. - The one distorts **her** lovely lineaments into caricature, and throws **her** graceful figure into gloomy shadow; the other, by daubing **her** over with colours not **her** own, renders **her** form indistinct, and obliterates **her** features. In the first instance, **she** excites little affection; in the latter, **she** is not recognized.' (PP p x Vol 1)

More's gendered linguistics are powerfully persuasive in their promotion of a feminised Christianity, and they mark the ascending scale of her reforming arguments. This form of gendered referencing was not unique to More; William Wilberforce was also writing in similar vein, suggesting: '.....Christianity has of late years been attacked. Had **she** not been wholly unarmed for the contest, however, **she** might have been forced from **her** untenable posts, and compelled to disembarrass **herself** from **her** load of encumbrances, **she** never could have been driven altogether out of the field by **her** puny assailants....'³⁷¹ It needs to be acknowledged, however, that this feminised representation was a controversial one; claims that theology was the preserve of the male were typically endorsed by men such as The Rev. Philip Doddridge. His biblical commentaries supported a tradition of female subordination, he argued that because of her contribution to the 'fall' woman should be 'less forward in attempting to be guides to others.'³⁷² More's feminised portrayal of Christianity was also in sharp contrast to that notion of 'muscular Christianity' promulgated by authors such as J.J.Rousseau, William Howitt, Maria Edgeworth and Harriet Martineau among others of the period.³⁷³ As the century progressed, this overt masculinisation of Christianity was to become more pronounced through writers such as Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Thomas Hughes (1822-1896) when "Christian manliness"

³⁷¹ W. Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, p. 1.

³⁷² S. Gill, *Women and the Church of England*, p.26.

³⁷³ See: J.J.Rousseau, *Emile* and G.Redmond, "The First Tom Brown's Schooldays: Origins and Evolution of 'Muscular Christianity' in Children's Literature, 1762-1857," *Quest*, Vol. 30 (Summer 1978): 4-18.

became 'a common Victorian preacher's catchphrase.'³⁷⁴ *Practical Piety* nevertheless pressed the reforming potential of a feminised Christianity and spiritual vision: 'The mists of vanity are dispersed' - she writes in the concluding chapter - 'The films are removed from his eyes' (PP p 274).

A high-minded humility marks More's later literary publications. The pride of earlier years, acknowledged by More herself in a letter to Wilberforce - 'I mean to re-read, for the fiftieth time, your chapter on the over valuing of human-estimation'³⁷⁵ - has been replaced by Christian humility. It could be said that 'The mists of vanity' have indeed been dispersed and More now writes with a spiritual *insight*, which state could not be further removed from the diminution and regression suggested by Hole. To assist an understanding of More's growth in grace, this chapter will now examine some, as far as I have been able to ascertain, unpublished material discovered amongst uncatalogued items at the Bristol Archive Office.

A New Tongue

In June 1824, Anna Victoria Inman, wife of Major Little, wrote to her friend Caroline Swaine (afterwards wife of William C. Bowly): 'The Manuscript of Mrs Hannah More, which I have fastened into this little Book, was obtained for you my dear Caroline under the following circumstances': [Inman had fastened an essay given to her by Hannah More into a small pocket book] This essay which discusses the attributes of the Bible, whilst only a short work, includes a suggestion which I shall argue introduces a valuable and unique proposition. Before examining this work, a record of the circumstances under which it was obtained will be inspected for the purpose of disputing an image of a woman lacking in mental energy. It portrays her rather as a woman who at the age of 79, though suffering some physical decline, is

³⁷⁴ R.W.Davis and R.J.Helmstadter (eds), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (Routledge, 1992), p. 102. Key texts here are Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Donald Hall (ed), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also an essay by Sean Gill: 'Thomas Hughes and Christian Manliness' in *Gender and Christian Religion*, R.N.Swanson (ed), (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1996).

³⁷⁵ *Memoirs of the Life & Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, p. 143, vol 3.

nevertheless kept abreast of current affairs through her many visitors.

On the 20 May accompanied by Miss M W I left Redland for Barley Wood - its venerable and interesting mistress having previously sent me an invitation..... She received us with an encouraging smile of welcome and alluded to her friendship for my late Grandfather in very gratifying terms - but we were scarcely seated, when a large party arrived from Clifton, they were wholly unexpected & appeared to disturb her a little, as she had just told me a Gentleman from London had already been with her and she hoped we should remain uninterrupted. I should before have told you that her Eyes are remarkably quick & searching, indeed her whole appearance denotes great mental activity.....

When the visitors entered, the conversation became general - letters were read from Lord Bexley - Montgomery, the Book etc. etc., - some engravings were handed about. - The Bible Society - family prayer -We withdrew .³⁷⁶

Upon their return, Inman and More spent some time alone, with Inman sharing some lines written by her friend with Hannah More. So impressed was she with these that she insisted Inman take something for the author: "I must send something of my own to the authoress". This record of circumstances gives a valuable first hand account of More, physically and mentally at this late stage of her life. The 'something of her own' was the following essay, signed and dated at Barley Wood, May 1824:

The Bible is with the most significant emphasis called The Book, as containing in itself the sum and substance of all Truth. The Antiquary may admire it as the oldest book in the world; the Divine as teaching the only rational and consistant [sic] scheme of Theology. The Moralist may consult it as containing the only perfect system of Ethics, the man of taste as abounding with the

most sublime and exalted Imagery: the afflicted christian as affording the only source of Consolation. - Other Books may teach us the knowledge of the world, the Bible alone can teach us the knowledge of ourselves. Other Books represent Man according to the peculiar views of the Writer the Bible represents him in his Fall and his Restoration. Other Books may give us the history of the World, the Bible records the History of its Creation, and the prediction of its end. Other Books may teach human Sciences, the Bible alone can teach the Science of Salvation thro' the blood of Christ. Other Books may assist in forming us for this transitory Life; the Bible only, can fit us for that Life which will have no end. Other Books may make us wise for Time, the Bible makes us wise for Eternity. When all other Books shall be burnt up in the consuming fire of the great globe itself, the Bible shall survive, in the Souls of the millions it has saved. Signed and dated by Hannah More's own hand.

This essay confirms that More considers *The Bible* to be the sourcebook for life; its message meeting the needs of all humanity. As a piece of work it is entirely representative of More's religious perspective. However, as the thesis has discovered, More is not averse to secreting deeper meanings which become clear only through close analysis of her texts. Her proposal that: 'the Bible alone can teach the **Science** of Salvation thro' the blood of Christ' (my emphasis) seems to disrupt her portrayal of the intuitive nature of a heart religion. The term 'Science' indicates an organized body of knowledge, a state of knowing or understanding, as opposed to 'belief'. 'Belief' on the other hand is a concomitant of intuition, something unlearned or spontaneous. Could More be suggesting that a pre-requisite to an understanding of the 'scientific' sacred teachings is that intuitive spiritual state of pure Christianity? Her juxtaposing of these apparently opposing perspectives needs closer investigation.³⁷⁷ One explanatory route might be

³⁷⁷ Bearing in mind that according to Morrell and Thackray, nearly all evangelicals 'were hostile to science' and the religious divisions induced by the advancement of any coalition in this area, her proposal needs careful consideration. See: B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 30.

found through linking More's proposal that 'the Bible alone can teach the Science of Salvation' with some of Wollstonecraft's observations: 'Mr Kant has observed that the understanding is sublime', she says, identifying intelligence and judgement in masculine terms. Natural religion or Christianity on the other hand is closer to the 'intuition' or the 'imagination of the beautiful' implicit within the feminine. Taking this argument to its conclusion, More and Wollstonecraft would appear to concur: Wollstonecraft's 'men who undoubtedly possess the liveliest imagination, are most touched by the sublime'³⁷⁸ parallels More's view that: '.....the Science of Salvation' can be reached 'thro' the blood of Christ.' Put another way; science or true understanding, she seems to be suggesting, is illuminated through the inspired spiritual nature at the heart of pure Christianity. This would support More's argument that 'Christianity has exalted women to true and undisputed dignity....equally with men redeemed by the blood of Christ.'³⁷⁹

Seen in this light, More's argument for the spiritual equality of the sexes is effectively reinforced, using *The Bible* as a literary signifier. I would like to suggest that More's purpose was simple yet profound: close reading of her texts suggest that she did indeed intend to represent spiritual equality through a unique religious understanding. What more powerful way to confirm the status of women than through the Book itself: the patriarchal perspective of the Old Testament married to the matriarchal milieu of the New?³⁸⁰; the two Testaments standing in relation to each other as representations of the highest ideals, offering an equipoise which could be achieved through an understanding of their commensurate value. It could be suggested that, as the beauty and sublimity of the landscape were physical representations of their creator, so the Holy Scriptures could be viewed as literary portrayals of the understanding (sublime) and inspiration (beautiful) of their author. If this reading was More's intention, she appears to identify the inspirational thought

³⁷⁸ *Vindication*, p. 275.

³⁷⁹ *Strictures*, p. 33. This idea is expanded upon in "Doctrines on Femininity" in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1830* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 114-118.

³⁸⁰ See: *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life*, by Ben Witherington, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 125,127. Also, Walter Gardini's essay, 'The Feminine Aspect of God in Christianity' where he points to the feminine images which are apparent in the Old Testament but which become 'more explicit in the New....' p. 58.

as the higher state. This exegetical perspective contributes to More's desire to disperse the mists of confusion and restore 'the purity of a perfect law.'³⁶¹ Viewed this way, 'The Book' did indeed contain 'the sum and substance of all Truth.'

'The Scriptures were illumined; reason and revelation were reconciled.....'³⁶²

Sensibility's promotion of woman as a repository of spiritual values worked to challenge arguments for her innate sinfulness, and the chapter will now examine an essay - 'Man and Woman'³⁶³ - written by Eddy in response to masculine claims of 'feminine instability'.

The essay, written in December 1900, will be examined for its particular relevance to the argument of this chapter. It exhibits her careful deconstruction of those critical 'truths' shaped according to gendered epistemological values, and displays her conviction as to her own 'calling' as well as the equal status of the sexes.

Eddy was already an influential figure,³⁶⁴ and this essay was written in response to Judge Joseph Clarkson's attempts to impose patriarchal authority on the religious movement she founded. Clarkson was serving on the Christian Science Board of Lectureship at the time and feared that 'feminine instability' would negatively affect its future development.³⁶⁵ In the light of her achievements, which were considerable - author, lecturer,

³⁶¹ *Practical Piety*, p. 49.

³⁶² *Science & Health*, p. 110.

³⁶³ In September, 1998, the Christian Science Board of Directors in Boston, USA, gave me permission to view an unpublished essay written by Eddy in December 1900. Access to the Archives had been granted to only a handful of scholars over the century. The essay was sent to Eddy's copyright office on 17 December 1900, but subsequently withdrawn.

³⁶⁴ *Human Life*, edited by Alfred Henry Lewis, carried an announcement in February, 1907, edition: 'Since time was, no woman so unique. *Human Life* announces that in this issue begins a series of articles on Mary Baker G. Eddy.....'

³⁶⁵ An entry in Calvin Frye's [Eddy's secretary] diary of December 7, 1900 notes: 'Judge Clarkson dined with Mrs. Eddy today & after dinner tried to convince her again that she was mistaken & the cause was going to ruin & the men were essential to take the lead of the cause of C.S. & to assert their rights without her dictation.' See Robert Peel's *Mary Baker Eddy, the years of Authority* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 162.

publisher, the establishment of a worldwide church and international daily newspaper standing to her credit - his desire to usurp her position would appear to reflect contemporary patriarchal opinion. Eddy, however, was certain she had witnessed a divine order of creation which, when understood, would revolutionise traditional hierarchical arguments. Her intention to publish - 'I know of no greater, more valuable, legacy to give to Christian Scientists.... than the following essay on Christian Science relative to man and woman' - is clear. Why she changed her mind is unclear. It may well have been that she considered her views too progressive for that period. This essay, arguing for the divinely ordained equality of the sexes includes some rather intriguing perspectives:

"Man and Woman" (c. December 1900)

God is All in all. He is masculine, feminine, neuter. He is the Father and Mother of the universe..... The equality of man and woman is established in the premises of this Science. God made them male and female from the beginning, and they were in His image and likeness-not images, but image. In the divine Mind there is no sex, no sexuality, and no procreation; the Infinite Mind includes all in Mind.

Eddy's argument for the equality of male and female is absolute: her declaration is unqualified in its insistence that this is a *divinely* ordained paradigm. There is no room for dissension or negotiation in her perspective. Disputing centuries of religious tradition this revelationist scientifically ratiocates her argument. 'Divine modes or manifestations are natural, beyond the so-called natural sciences and human philosophy, because they are spiritual and coexist with the God of nature in absolute Science.....Inductive or deductive reasoning is correct only as it is spiritual, induced by love and deduced from God.....'³⁶⁶

The essay goes on to say that whilst 'the masculine element has had

³⁶⁶ M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works* 'Miscellany,' p. 349.

precedence in history.....; ' this 'element must not murmur if at some period in human history the verdict should take a turn in behalf of woman, and say, Her time has come....'

At such a juncture I would not dislike to be referee;-I would declare that one was not less, nor more, important in God's sight than the other, and that in the divine order they both originated in One and as one, and should continue thus without taint of sexuality. Why, you admit that God's order has been infringed, and made to represent two sides of a sphere so called, instead of the round whole. This digression came from suggestion, even the lie, and the liar that from the beginning was the father of the lie..... And the question of woman's wrongs and woman's rights sprang from the dire effect of one lie producing another, till the offspring of error mooted these questions to relieve its own creation.....

This is an interesting passage; Eddy could have been forgiven if, as referee, she had favoured the woman over the man, claiming 'Her time has come.' She rather took the opportunity to emphasise their already equal status according to 'divine order' and confirmed this through recourse to that 'Genesis' 1 record of creation: 'Originated in One and as one..' She identifies any suggestion as to woman's inferiority as mythical, built upon a story which was intended as an allegorical one, belief in which had led to discrimination against half the human family. Whilst she clearly favoured an ideology of separate spheres - 'Fulfilling the different demands of their united spheres.....'³⁸⁷ - as her earlier writing has shown, this essay argues that she believes it is ultimately only through an understanding of the simultaneous nature (thus equal status) of creation, that religious bigotry will be diffused. At this point, enfranchisement arguments will have been superseded and become irrelevant.

Now, then, let us return to God, to the divine Principle of the universe including the genus man: - we shall find therein no

³⁸⁷ *Science & Health*, p. 59.

occasion for departure, no occasion for strife, no suggestion of preeminence, or dis-severance of the masculine and feminine elements of God's creating-no question of whom shall be the greatest.....

Eddy's essay has as its goal, the equalising of the sexes; identifying this as a natural outcome of the Divine creative Principle allows her to dismiss any suggestion of hierarchy, but she is not afraid to criticise either sex where she sees the need:

The feminine weakness that talks when it has nothing to say, that gossips, slanders, unwittingly or unconsciously, that envies or scorns where it should only pity, is out of line with being in Science, and in line with the masculine element that robs innocence of purity, and peoples of liberty and life, in the name of the rights of might. These are indeed dark stains on the brighter disk of humanity. But God's dear love washes away these plague spots, and Divine Science makes clean the inside of the platter, unselfs the human, and gives back the Divine. "To err is human, to forgive, divine."

According to Eddy, 'woman's wrongs' or 'woman's rights' were not really the point at issue; she simply took the argument to a higher perspective. She was keen to point out that no one sex had proprietorial rights to divinity. Immoral behaviour whether in the form of feminine weaknesses or masculine cruelty, were 'dark stains' on the human character; absolution could only be obtained through 'God's dear love' which washed away the 'plague spots' of evil. Through scientific argument, Eddy exposed a reading of Scripture which routed that patriarchal doctrine upon which theologians had built their defence of female subjugation. The essay is important in that it allows her to clarify disputed doctrinal issues; but having addressed the wider issues '- the scene shifts' - Eddy now moves to defend her position as leader of the movement she founded.

The sharp distinction between the two faces of the feminine is overtly

emphasised. When comparing 'feminine weakness' [which was what Eddy had been accused of] with the diligent industrious woman who never left her post, but toiled indefatigably to share her message of God's love for humanity, *her* right to *her* seat, she argues, is unequivocal. This 'right' has nothing to do with feminist issues; this 'right' has been earned through a humble and fervent desire for growth in grace. Those Christly qualities of patience, meekness, love and good deeds are what have allowed her to transcend the feet of clay. Having spiritually identified the *woman* of God's creating, Eddy is keen to ratify what she believes to be her own divinely bestowed position:

But the scene shifts, and behold a woman! - The almond blossom upon her head, busy hands and pen, never leaving the post of duty, but week after week, month after month, and year after year, toiling, watching, praying, and sending forth messages of God's dear love over all the earth. No remuneration, save the blessing it brings to mankind, compensates such a life.....³⁸⁸

Why is the woman represented with 'almond blossoms upon her head'? At first reading this may seem a rather fanciful, even frivolous image, but on closer analysis, this figurative emblem is used to authorise and authenticate her appointment. It is drawn, I would suggest, from scripture: the book of *Numbers* records how it is God who appoints and anoints. It explains how the Lord spoke to Moses telling him how *He* will choose those whom He wishes to minister for Him. Twelve rods, one from each eligible family, should be brought to the tabernacle, 'and it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom:' the conclusion to this verse is revealing: 'and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.'³⁸⁹ The chosen rod, Aaron's rod in that case, did indeed bloom blossoms, and yield almonds, and under the circumstances it would seem a perfectly plausible reading of the text to make this assertion.

³⁸⁸ Exhibit No A10142B MBEL.

³⁸⁹ *Holy Bible*, 'Numbers' 17: 5 and 8.

This essay was a potent rebuke to dissenters, to those men who considered that the Church was their domain and required male leadership.³⁹⁰ At the same time it was a powerful proclamation of the equal status of the sexes, a panegyric to woman as a force for good; her right to revelation being an inevitable result of her birthright.

Eddy's conviction resulted from a close personal relationship with her God and with His Word. *The Bible* was central to her research: 'The Bible' she claims, 'is the learned man's masterpiece, the ignorant man's dictionary, the wise man's directory,'³⁹¹ and to confirm its centrality to her perspectives, I include a brief essay she wrote, entitled simply 'Bible':

It is a book of laws to show the right and wrong
It is a book of wisdom that condemns all folly
It is a book of Truth that condemns all error
It is a book of Life that shows the way from everlasting death
It will puzzle the surest most skillful Anatomist and critic
It exposes the subtle sophist, and drives diviners mad
It is the best covenant that was ever agreed to, the best deed that
was ever sealed
It is a complete code of laws, a perfect body of divinity - an
unequalled narrative.

There are close similarities to More's essay: More's description of *The Bible* as - 'containing in itself the sum and substance of all Truth' - is matched by Eddy's explanation of the book as 'wisdom that condemns all folly', 'Truth that condemns all error', 'Life that shows the way from everlasting death', which links closely with More's - 'the Bible only, can fit us for that Life which will have

³⁹⁰ Whilst the chapter has identified feminine as well as masculine opposition, a letter Eddy wrote to Mr & Mrs E.J. Smith in January 1884 points to the gendered nature of opposition. Judith Wellman identifies: 'Working toward a transcendence of gender, Mrs. Eddy nevertheless sometimes encountered resistance based on gender. In 1884, she complained that, at the Annual Meeting of the Christian Scientist Association, "they loaded me with praise but certain gentlemen members tried to get the paper into their hands after I had done the work for it one year with a dollar. I beat them as usual my lady members clapped." J. Wellman. 'Making Connections: Mary Baker Eddy and Women's History', p. 16. *Roadmaps into the Mary Baker Eddy Collections*, May 2003, MBEL.

³⁹¹ *Prose Works* 'Miscellaneous Writings', p. 363.

no end'. More's identification of its appeal to -'The Antiquary...the Divine.....The Moralist.....' - is matched by Eddy's reference to the - 'Anatomist', the 'sophist' and the 'divines'. Most importantly, however, is their equal and unequivocal recognition of its primacy. 'It is the best covenant that was ever agreed to, the best deed that was ever sealed / It is a complete code of laws, a perfect body of divinity an unequalled narrative' says Eddy. More identifies it as the Book which contains 'the only perfect system of Ethics.....the most sublime and exalted imagery...the only source of Consolation.....' This leaves possibly only two key distinguishing features between the edicts: the first is that Eddy's is unpunctuated; as with her poem 'Woman's Rights' (though that work did have a concluding full stop), and this may well have been a strategy to confirm the illimitable nature of her topic. Secondly, and this is a major point, Eddy did not sign the piece with her own name as had Hannah More, but concluded: 'Author - God.'³⁹² Might this have been in acknowledgement of God as author of *The Bible*, or was Eddy pointing to the revelatory nature of its inception, as with her text *Science & Health?* 'The Scriptures were illumined, she wrote, 'reason and revelation were reconciled....No human pen nor tongue taught me the Science contained in this book.....'³⁹³

This is a key issue in terms of the argument of this chapter, building upon that earlier linking of spiritual sensibility with divine vision. This vision or 'right to revelation' according to these authors, is not the prerogative of either sex but rather the result of a spiritual awakening (a genderless spiritual awakening) what More referred to as 'genuine religion'. The sanctioning of a 'feeling' heart effectively authorised these spiritual seers to bring fresh insights to what More identified as 'misrepresented' religion, biased views which had promoted a dereliction of God's feminine side in favour of the masculine.

The importance of *The Bible* to the religious outlook of each author is unequivocal, but their analytical techniques differed; this is most evident in the case of Eddy and Stanton's perspectives. The publishing of *The Woman's Bible* brought a sharp riposte from Eddy in the form of a short literary

³⁹² Exhibit No. A10837, MBEL.

³⁹³ *Science & Health*, p.110.

composition entitled simply 'Womans Bible': 'The woman's man's Bible is the womans bible' she proclaims, 'We cannot have two if the sexes are equal.....'³⁹⁴ These perspectives will be closely examined as the thesis moves into its final chapter.

CONCLUSION:

This chapter has examined the authors' arguments for the deleterious effects of a bigoted religion bound by 'an observance of forms'. Exposing the core masculinity of this dogma, and contrasting its negative influence with the true religious sentiment of natural, revealed religion, the authors have identified a God in the feminine which has allowed them to effectively sanction and authorise womanhood.

The chapter has paid close attention to what appears to be a recurring theme in the arguments of the authors: what they identify as 'wild tradition', 'fallacious and mistaken' doctrine, in terms of accepted religious belief. It has witnessed the challenging of a scriptural interpretation which they identified as being responsible for the subjugated status of the 'mothers of the race.' It has drawn attention to their building upon the sensibility arguments, their authorising of maternal attributes through a feminised Christianity. Deeply sceptical of patriarchal scriptural interpretation which promoted a submissive role for women, and the pomp and hypocrisy which they suggested surrounded religious tradition, they sought to locate a religion pure and undefiled, what More identified as 'unadulterated Christianity'.

Their writing disturbed some of their contemporaries, women as well as men, who believed their foray into the masculine world of politics and theology had gone too far, and as they became more publicly prominent, each woman had to deal with overt masculine disapproval. Even Hannah More, possibly the least contentious of the four, suffered a diatribe of opposition, and the chapter has identified connections between private torment and public discourse, suggesting their religious writing could be identified as a form of spiritual

³⁹⁴ Exhibit No A10873 MBEL

autobiography.

Whilst there is an unquestionable polarity between the authors and their religious and political perspectives, the chapter has identified a similarity in arguments which, taken out of context, would make authorship difficult to determine. A key example has been Wollstonecraft's: 'Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears! how has thy clear stream been muddied by the dabblers.....'³⁹⁵ compared with More's: 'This divine exposition has been sometimes misunderstood. It was not so much a supplement to a defective law, as the restoration of the purity of a perfect law from the corrupt interpretations of its blind expounders.....'³⁹⁶ Stanton's suggestion that 'these degrading ideas of woman', far from being the word of God, emanated 'from the brain of man,'³⁹⁷ reinforces Eddy's recognition of the 'mortal and material sense [which] stole into the divine record..... darkening to some extent the inspired pages.'³⁹⁸ The chapter has identified 'corrupt interpretations' as possibly the chief conduit of misinformation relating to woman and her spirituality.

A New England preacher, Reverend Joseph Richardson in 'A Sermon on the Duty and Dignity of Woman', outlined the privileged confinement of the female sex: 'The world concedes to you the honor of exerting an influence, all but divine; but an influence you lose the power to exert, the moment you depart from the sphere and delicacy of your proper character.'³⁹⁹

The final chapter will examine how Eddy and Stanton attempted to exert this divine influence through their two key reformatory religious texts. Operating outside their 'sphere' but maintaining that sensitivity of character, *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures*, and *The Woman's Bible* will be examined in the light of their linguistic portrayal of a Deity in the feminine, effectively allowing woman, in Irigaray's words, 'to become free, autonomous,

³⁹⁵ *Vindication*, p. 232.

³⁹⁶ *Practical Piety*, p. 49, vol 1.

³⁹⁷ *The Woman's Bible*, p. 8, part 2.

³⁹⁸ *Science & Health*, p. 139.

³⁹⁹ N.F.Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood "Woman's Sphere" in New England 1780-1835*, p. 158.

sovereign.¹⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ P. Lang (ed), *Religions and Discourse 'Towards a Different Transcendence Feminist Findings on Subjectivity Religion and Values'* (European Academic Publishers, Bern 2001), p. 63, vol 9.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOMAN, THE ELECT OF GOD?

'Jesus Christ raised women above the condition of mere slaves, mere ministers to the passions of men, raised them by His sympathy, to be Ministers of God.....there shall arise a woman, who will resume, in her own soul, all the sufferings of her race, and that woman will be the Saviour of her race', Florence Nightingale.⁴⁰¹

This chapter will seek to determine how the arguments in *The Woman's Bible* and *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures* furthered those earlier ones - locating and authorising female spirituality - seeking now even to elevate womanhood to 'elect' status. Undermining centuries of accepted religious doctrine in terms of the status of women in society, these two texts inverted traditional theological argument and created an interpretative space from which to challenge a singular definition concerning creation in 'Genesis', and prophecy in 'Revelation.' Identification of the maternal nature of the Godhead allowed them to represent God in feminine terms, destabilising centuries of historically-accepted patriarchal argument. The writers' identification of 'elect' womanhood in these two books, the first and the last of the *Holy Bible*, will form the nucleus of the argument of this final chapter of the thesis.

Women's suffrage was an important issue in nineteenth-century Boston: and whilst the aim of women reformers was to determine the rights of women in social and political life, there were in fact different groups, and different approaches to this issue, within the movement as a whole. In spite of inevitable connections between the groups, there are nevertheless some key divergences. Possibly the most important of these, for the purpose of this thesis, is that of Biblical interpretation. The Word and its Re-Wordings will be closely examined in the light of the authors' arguments for the 'elect' nature of womanhood, and whilst acknowledging similarities in their arguments, the chapter will not fail to point out significant differences: it is these very contentions, the chapter will argue, which give credibility to their ultimate conclusions.

⁴⁰¹ Florence Nightingale quoted in: J.M.Golby (ed) *Culture and Society in Britain, 1850-1890: A Source Book of Contemporary Writings* (Oxford University Press in association with The Open University, 1986) p.254.

Contemporary public opinion exposes the religious constraints they were subject to: George Keely, an early nineteenth century Baptist minister, defined the political, religious and cultural parameters of female participation in American society when he proclaimed: 'That woman appears to me lost to modesty and prudence, who has boldness enough to teach or exhort where men are present. If she were a relative of mine, I should request her to change her name and remove to a distance where her connections were not known.'⁴⁰² New England preachers chose their Bible texts with care; women were stepping outside their sphere and seizing for themselves an autonomy which some religionists were not comfortable with and in an attempt to re-affirm masculine superiority, they emphasised texts from the Bible which they considered preached female subordination.⁴⁰³

Juxtaposed alongside this restrictive religious perspective a more spiritual cultural era was emerging: the period 1828 to 1865 was known as the American Romantic period, the American Renaissance or the Age of Transcendentalism. Mirroring the philosophical arguments for the inspiration, vision and transcendence that marked British Romanticism, this literary and philosophical movement was centred around Boston. Adherents included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody, and Abrams suggests that: 'In all the major literary genres except drama, writers produced works of an originality and excellence not exceeded in later American history.'⁴⁰⁴ This movement was highly influential in promoting a religious 'feeling' and emotional mood which emphasised 'free thought', and was antipathetical to the rigid religious rationalism which had marked earlier periods. The Transcendentalists believed in 'the validity of knowledge that is grounded in feeling and intuition', and Abrams suggests that Samuel Taylor

⁴⁰² N.F.Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood "Woman's Sphere in New England 1780-1835*, p. 158.

⁴⁰³ If confirmation is needed that the subject of female spiritual equality is still contentious, the reader need look no further than an article in *The Independent* newspaper, dated 10 October 1992, where the Rev. Robert Law suggested: 'we have not expounded the creation of Adam and Eve and the fall correctly unless we arrive at the same conclusion that Paul was moved to write for our learning, namely that women are to be submissive and not to teach or have authority over men, because of man's priority in creation and woman's priority in the transgression.'

⁴⁰⁴ M.H.Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 145.

Coleridge was an 'intellectual antecedent of American Transcendentalism.'⁴⁰⁵ American writing had its roots in European literary history, and the literary arguments of the day mirrored the political and religious debates across the Atlantic. The Transcendentalists believed that a limited human sense could be literally transcended through an intuitive relationship with a divine first cause. The influence of the Romantics on this philosophical literary movement was evident in their arguments for 'original innocence' over 'original sin' and a poetic promotion of the natural world over corruption and materialism. Whilst didactic tracts in a variety of genres had been written by female reformers in their attempts to influence society, it was the moralistic novels of writers such as Frances Hodgson Burnett, Louisa May Alcott⁴⁰⁶ and Harriet Beecher Stowe which were perhaps more representative of American literary didacticism. This somewhat uncontroversial style of writing was deemed a suitable genre for women writers, and allowed the authors to promote their pious ideals through the drawing-room. It did not, however, lift that heavy patriarchal hand of theological oppression. This task required a foray into that more masculine genre of theological discourse, a genre to which few women writers contributed.

Towards a Discourse of Transfiguration

'The Woman Question' and 'The Word of God' form the nucleus of the argument of this final chapter. The thesis has charted the reformative route taken by the four dissenting authors, analysing their linguistic attempts to identify and harness the powerful reformatory influence of Christian women. It has traced their arguments as each woman ultimately concluded that for effective moral and religious reform, it was the 'Word' itself which needed close investigation. Wollstonecraft and More had both challenged Scriptural authenticity: More suggesting that to 'point out with precision all the

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid*, p. 216.

⁴⁰⁶ Louisa May Alcott read *Science & Health*, and visited Eddy twice in 1876. See the magazine published by *The Mary Baker Eddy Library*, Issue No 2, 2001 for further information. *The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity*, 200 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA02115. Frances Hodgson Burnett read Eddy's textbook, drawing on its philosophy for her novels, turning to its healing principles later in life. See: G. Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett, The Unpredictable Life of the author of The Secret Garden* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004).

mistakes...on the awful subject of Religion, would far exceed the limits of this small work.'⁴⁰⁷ Stanton and Eddy also identified the scale of mistakes which had crept into Biblical exegesis: Stanton, quoting Disraeli suggests there were 150,000 blunders in the Hebrew, and 7,000 in the Greek. (WB p12) Eddy referred to 'the thirty thousand different readings in the Old Testament, and the three hundred thousand in the New....'(S&H p139). Had dissenting religious attitudes paved the way for these radical reformers, and was the time now right for the publication of two textual challenges to historical theological interpretation? A key touchstone in dealing with these issues will be distinctions made between 'religion' and 'spirituality', between religious 'belief' and spiritual 'understanding', what Eddy refers to as: '.....the warfare between this spiritual idea and perfunctory religion, between spiritual clear-sightedness and the blindness of popular belief.'⁴⁰⁸

Originality indeed marked the arguments of these two texts, bringing sharply into focus the subtextual implications of earlier works. These works bring covert arguments to the fore as they lay claim to a spiritualised female identity through their challenging of the patriarchal values and meanings of sacred texts. This chapter will follow their attempts to deconstruct discriminatory patriarchal theological doctrine, registering a Protestantism with a unique critique of Biblical history. It will suggest the texts have a somewhat biographical ethos, exposing a perceptive logic *and* religious sentiment.⁴⁰⁹ The religious inclinations of women had received public impetus in the wake of the cult of sensibility, and in spite of attempts to curtail those *bold* enough to teach or preach, their natural endowments and sensibility of disposition made them feel fitted to minister to a society losing its way. *A Woman's Bible* and *a Key to the Scriptures* were, however, by any stretch of the imagination, a radical venture for these nineteenth century authors: they smacked of rebellion and laid them open to charges of heresy. Indeed the titles alone would have been considered provocative: the publishing of a

⁴⁰⁷ *Practical Piety*, p. 52, vol 1.

⁴⁰⁸ *Science & Health*, p. 316.

⁴⁰⁹ Eddy's literary friends advised her against writing such a book; but she considered the book to be 'the outgrowth of my whole life....' and remarked in January or February 1881 - 'I think any one would be interested in the remarkable history of this book and the trials I have passed through since its first issue'. Exhibit No LO2050 (January or February 1881).

matriarchal Bible, and a 'key' with which to unlock scriptural texts, was anathema to some patriarchal theologians. These texts marked a critical strategy which drew on the 'head' as well as the 'heart'; they were powerful in that they reflected the personal struggles and emerging spiritual self-identification of their authors. Their breaking with ecclesiastical tradition reflected a scholarly and academic praxis on the part of their authors.

Eddy spent three and a half years writing *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures*; it was published in 1875 by a small Boston printer, W. F. Brown & Co, who printed and bound the first 1,000 copies.⁴¹⁰ She constantly revised her book over the next few years in an attempt to refine its meaning. In 1889, putting aside her other activities, Eddy spent some two years preparing the fiftieth edition; the book evolved through some 400 editions.⁴¹¹ It is recorded that: 'After the publication of *Science and Health*, Mrs. Eddy sent copies to libraries and various people of note, including Bronson Alcott.....Alcott, well aware of the hardships that fame can bring to pioneering thinkers and authors, visited Mrs. Eddy, saying, "I have come to comfort you."⁴¹² His written response to the text usefully contributes to the argument of this chapter: 'The sacred truths which you announce sustained by facts of the immortal Life, give to your work the seal of inspiration - reaffirm in modern phrase, the Christian revelation.....' Clearly a progressive thinker, he concluded: '.....And my joy is heightened the more when I find the blessed words are of woman's divinings.'⁴¹³ It is worth noting that to date this book has sold some ten million copies, been translated into seventeen languages including braille, and in 1992 was listed by the Women's National Book Association as one of the 75 books by women whose words have changed

⁴¹⁰ Fee Account appended.

⁴¹¹ A biographer notes: 'she often studied for months the origin and meaning of one word and its synonyms before giving it a permanent place in the text book, and in one notable instance she prayed and waited on God concerning a single word for three years.' *The We Knew Mary Baker Eddy Series* (The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1953), p. 43.

⁴¹² L.P.Powell, *Mary Baker Eddy A Life Size Portrait* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 132.

⁴¹³ Letter appended.

the world.⁴¹⁴

Eddy's argument was not an overtly feminist one; she believed, as had Hannah More, that an enlightened understanding of Scripture was the most effective means by which to authorise the spiritual equality of the female. Her critical approach, I would suggest, had more in common with More's *Practical Piety*, than *The Woman's Bible*. The hallmark of *Science & Health* was its innovative use of language. Acknowledging the originality of her diction she declared: 'The liberty that I have taken with capitalization, in order to express the 'new tongue,' has well-nigh constituted a new style of language.'⁴¹⁵ She used *The Bible* as a means of inspiration for her new language, incorporating this into a poetic prose which in some instances imitated the rhythms and cadences of the Scriptures. She pointed to the inspired nature of its inception: 'In following these leadings of scientific revelation, the Bible was my only textbook. The Scriptures were illumined; reason and revelation were reconciled..... No human pen nor tongue taught me the Science contained in this book, SCIENCE AND HEALTH; and neither tongue nor pen can overthrow it.'⁴¹⁶

The Woman's Bible conversely was the production of a committee of women scholars and was in itself a 'scientific' exercise. Focusing on textuality, its purpose was to expose inconsistencies, as it searched for truth and authenticity in regard to female identity. In 1882 Stanton wrote in her *Reminiscences* : 'I tried to organize a committee to consider the status of women in the *Bible*, and the claim that the Hebrew Writings were the result of divine inspiration. It was thought very presumptuous for women not learned in languages and ecclesiastical history to undertake such work. But as we merely proposed to comment on what was said of women in plain English, and found these texts composed only one-tenth of the Old and New

⁴¹⁴ In 1995, Eddy was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame, where it was noted that she had made an indelible mark on religion, medicine and journalism. In 1998, Religion and Ethics Newsweekly named Eddy as one of twenty individuals - and only three women - who have most influenced religious thinking in the twentieth century. *Christian Science Sentinel*, 30.9.2002 publication: 'Mary Baker Eddy - Working woman' by M.C.Jones, (The Christian Science Publishing Society), p.6.

⁴¹⁵ M.B.Eddy, *Prose Works*, 'Miscellany', p. 318.

⁴¹⁶ *Science & Health*, p. 110.

Testaments, it did not seem to me a difficult or dangerous undertaking.' She was to learn otherwise, but was pragmatic as the following confirms: 'Like other "mistakes," this too, in due time, will be regarded as "a step in progress."⁴¹⁷ The idea of collaboration is interesting: Stanton possibly hoped this route might deflect hostile attention to individuals. Stanton's feminist and religious principles were, however, to cost her dearly: her father disinherited her, and the women who had revered her as a leading campaigner for women's rights, ostracised her as author of *The Woman's Bible*. Marla Selvidge points out: 'Unfortunately this critical approach to the Bible caused so much negative criticism that it was never taken seriously by any of the societies within the women's movement.'⁴¹⁸ *The Woman's Bible* nevertheless had a wide readership, going through seven printings in six months, and translation into several languages.

Focusing on these reformist paradigms, the chapter will analyse the texts to discover how the writers constructed a linguistic resistance to religious orthodoxy. It will examine what their language did for female spirituality, as they attempted to participate in what was considered to be a masculine literary preserve. Contrasting their different approaches, it will examine how a discourse of revealed religion combined with scientific reasoning resulted in innovative religious perspectives which challenged negative religious stereotyping of women. The mode of analysis will draw on hermeneutical critical principles, a term which 'originally designated the formulation of principles of interpretation that apply specifically to the Bible...'⁴¹⁹

Woman and the Word

'....the original language of the Bible came through inspiration, and needs inspiration to be understood.' M.BEddy. ∞

Diversity and conflict of opinion have surrounded scriptural interpretation for

⁴¹⁷ *Eighty Years and More Reminiscences 1815-1897*, p. 467.

⁴¹⁸ M.J.Selvidge, *Notorious Voices - Feminist Biblical Interpretation 1500-1920* (SCM Press Ltd., 1996), p. 97.

⁴¹⁹ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 91.

⁴²⁰ *Science & Health*, p. 319.

two thousand years. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* suggests that 'powerful intellectual currents have brought hermeneutics once again to the fore, so that interest in it has burgeoned among literary critics....and students of religion'.⁴²¹ Eddy was clearly a student of religion, but she also exhibited a spiritual awareness and literary acumen which authorised her scriptural interpretation. Expanding on this subject of hermeneutics, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who is widely acknowledged to be the founder of modern hermeneutics, presented a compelling argument. Referred to as the 'Kant of hermeneutics' Schleiermacher argued that: 'the nature of language was the crucial theoretical issue confronting hermeneutical theory, because one could gain access to another person's meaning only through the medium of language.' Under the sub-heading 'Authorial Intention', *Encyclopedia of Religion* explains:

Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theory is organised around two foci: (1) the grammatical understanding of any characteristic modes of expression and the linguistic forms of the culture in which a given author lived and which conditioned that author's thinking and (2) the technical or psychological understanding of the unique subjectivity or creative genius of that author. Both these foci reflect Schleiermacher's own indebtedness to Romantic thinkers who had argued that any individual's mode of expression, however unique, necessarily reflects a wider cultural sensibility or spirit (*Geist*). A correct interpretation requires not only an understanding of the cultural and historical context of an author, but a grasp of the latter's unique subjectivity. This can be accomplished only by an "act of divination" - an intuitive leap by which the interpreter "relives" the consciousness of the author.⁴²²

Spiritual discourse drew on a literary tradition which promoted a transcendency of the human mind as a pre-requisite state. The Romantic poets, Coleridge, Barbauld, Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith evidenced this style of linguistic emotionalism which marked them as poetic intermediaries,

⁴²¹ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 280, vol 6.

⁴²² *ibid*, p. 281, vol 6.

opening the way for a religious idealism built on free thought principles instead of doctrinal religious dictate. Ian Finseth suggests in his thesis 'Liquid Fire Within Me' that in this era: 'Doctrinal niceties and complicated theological disputations gave way to a simpler, more "authentic" form of language that would move people emotionally....' He pointed out that both Transcendentalists and Evangelicals 'participated in a shift from a traditional form of discourse in which language primarily served the function of scriptural exegesis to one in which language operated to spark religious emotion. In this move from linguistic rationalism to linguistic emotionalism, both movements engaged in what has come to be understood as a realignment from an Enlightened to a Romantic understanding of language.'⁴²³ Whilst not suggesting that Stanton or Eddy belonged to either movement, it would seem safe to assume that the Age of Transcendentalism did for their arguments what the Age of Sensibility had done for their predecessors,⁴²⁴ offering in effect, a cultural space from which to challenge a Biblical interpretation that Selvidge pointed to as 'riddled with errors'.⁴²⁵

The problem facing female religious reformers was inevitably one of communication; that women were receptive to divine inspiration had become acceptable, but the linguistic promotion of their religious ideals required a unique, some might say, virgin idiolect. Eddy explained: 'In its literary expression, my system of Christian metaphysics is hampered by material terms, which must be used to indicate thoughts that are to be understood metaphysically'.⁴²⁶ McFague argues: 'The last word as well as the first word in theology is surrounded by silence. We know with Simone Weil that when we try to speak of God there is nothing which resembles what we can conceive when we say that word.'⁴²⁷ The task these women took upon themselves was to develop a vernacular through which to effectively communicate their fresh scriptural insights, what Eddy called 'the language of

⁴²³ I.F.Finseth. "Liquid Fire Within Me": Language, Self and Society in Transcendentalism and early Evangelicalism, 1829-1860. M.A.Thesis in English, University of Virginia, August, 1995.

⁴²⁴ British Age of Sensibility approx 1744-1798, Romantic Period approx 1785-1832. American Romantic/Transcendental Period approx 1828-1865.

⁴²⁵ M.J.Selvidge, *Notorious Voices*, p. 98.

⁴²⁶ *Prose Works*, 'No and Yes', p. 11.

⁴²⁷ S.McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p. 194.

Spirit.' Through this new tongue, they attempted to make the Deity discernible; and to disclose the divine rights of that feminine representation, created simultaneously with the masculine, in the image and likeness of their Creator. Between the years 1866 and 1869 Eddy wrote a 600-page manuscript entitled: 'The Bible in its Spiritual Meaning', and expanding on the question 'What is the language of Spirit?' she explained: 'Certainly it is spiritual. The German talks the German language the Frenchman the French and the Englishman the English....Science has....one tongue namely the idiom of God - the spiritual language of Spirit.'⁴²⁸ Drawing on 'linguistic rationalism and linguistic emotionalism', Eddy's 'language of Spirit' might be identified in terms of what McFague refers to as a 'New Sensibility'. Schleiermacher's identification of 'the various religions as culturally conditioned forms of an underlying and universal religious sensibility'⁴²⁹ supports this theory and contributes to an argument that through clear-sighted spirituality, women could become divine intermediaries. In her text *Models of God* McFague devotes a chapter to 'A New Sensibility' pointing to: '...the value of deconstruction's critique of Western metaphysics for the new sensibility needed to do Christian theology...' ⁴³⁰ Eddy's 'language of Spirit', the chapter will argue, usefully 'does' Christian theology, going to the heart of oppressive theological debate, religious reform being its target. In his paper 'Understanding Mary Baker Eddy' Johnsen suggests: 'Those inclined to take her spiritual perspective more seriously, and patient enough to wrestle with the language in which she labored to convey it, saw something more akin to what the secular writer George Steiner described in the radical twentieth-century French convert to Christianity Simone Weil: "intimations of a common thirst for light on the other side of reason, but rationally urged and somehow communicable, sensible to human thought and discourse..."'⁴³¹

The New Sensibility

There is '...an obvious continuity between her earliest and her latest religious

⁴²⁸ Exhibit No A10320 MBEL.

⁴²⁹ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol 6.

⁴³⁰ S.McFague, *Models of God Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (SCM Press, 1987), p. 24.

⁴³¹ T.Johnsen, 'Understanding Mary Baker Eddy', p. 18.

experiences, as they are reflected in her writing.....' suggests Peel in his biography, 'and she herself felt that in one sense she was only seeing more deeply into the Christian faith she had had since girlhood.'⁴³² Engaging with and expanding then that 'sensibility' debate over the nature of God - that identification of God as sympathetic and tender, rather than a harsh patriarchal dictator - Eddy portrayed God as Mother as well as Father, suggesting even: 'In divine Science, we have not as much authority for considering God masculine, as we have for considering Him feminine, for Love imparts the clearest idea of Deity' (S&H p 517). The portrayal of God's motherhood in these terms allowed Eddy to identify and expand on what she regarded as the spiritual status of womanhood, 'The ideal woman' she suggests, 'corresponds to Life and to Love' (S&H p 517). She wrote to Clara Choate in terms which identified her expectations of this 'ideal woman': 'It is glorious to see what the women alone are doing here for temperance, more than ever man has done.' Confirming her faith in the *religious* reforming potential of women, and in a tone which mirrors that of Hannah More, she concludes: 'This is the period of women, they are to move and to carry all the great moral and Christian reforms.....'⁴³³ Emphasising her sympathies with the movement of women, she is careful to locate their 'rights' in their spirituality: 'Let it not be heard in Boston that woman, "last at the cross and first at the sepulchre," has no rights which man is bound to respect. In natural law and in religion the right of woman to fill the highest measure of enlightened understanding and the highest places in government, is inalienable, and these rights are ably vindicated by the noblest of both sexes. This is woman's hour, with all its sweet amenities and its moral and religious reforms.'⁴³⁴

'This is the period of women'

'This is woman's hour'

'....the right of woman to fill the highest places.... in government, is inalienable'

⁴³² R. Peel, *Years of Discovery* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 1966), p. 198.

⁴³³ M.B.Eddy to C.E.Coate, 15 March 1882. Exhibit No. L04088 MBEL

⁴³⁴ *Prose Works* 'No and Yes', p. 45.

'Women are to move and carry all the great moral and Christian reforms'

These arguments, whilst exuding female potential, are not unlike those earlier ones put forward by both Wollstonecraft and More. The real ideological shift came through a unique identification of women's spiritual and God-given nature, and it was to *The Bible* that Eddy turned for literary confirmation of her compelling alternative to woman's subservient station. Searching for 'light on the other side of reason' she drew on logic and inspiration: 'In this revolutionary period,' she wrote, 'like the shepherd-boy with his sling, woman goes forth to battle with Goliath' (S&H p 268). The analogy is interesting: Goliath with all his male might was deposed by the stone and the sling of a simple shepherd-boy.

'In the beginning.....'

'Genesis' 1: 27. 'So **God created man in His own Image**, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.'

'Genesis' 2: 21,22. 'And the **Lord God (Jehovah) formed man of the dust of the ground....**And the Lord God (Jehovah, Yawah) caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God (Jehovah) had taken from man, made He a woman....' (my emphasis).

Eddy possibly saw patriarchal theological opposition in terms of 'Goliath' proportions; how was she to break down the tremendous weight of opposition to female spiritual equality? Her 'stone', I would suggest, could be likened to her word or expression; whilst her sling might be identified as representing the precipitate launching of her edict or proclamation on a society which oppressed the 'weaker' sex. In *Practical Piety*, Hannah More argued: 'The mistake of many in religion appears to be, that they do not begin with the beginning' (PPp9). Eddy moved precipitately to target and dispute the establishment of an inferior female identity 'in the beginning'. 'The infinite', she writes, 'has no beginning. This word *beginning* is employed to signify

the only....' (S&H p 502). A dictionary definition of this word 'only' is 'unique by virtue of being superior', and this explanation could be applied to her argument for the inimitable nature of the first record of creation which she refers to as 'the spiritual record of creation, to that which should be engraved on the understanding and heart "with the point of a diamond" and the pen of an angel" (S&H p 521). Thus impressed on the sense *and* sensibilities, historically and 'culturally conditioned' religious views could be challenged by the reader in the light of an enlightened discernment, a clear-sighted spirituality. This disposition has the effect of liberating scripture from doctrinal dictate, of shifting the argument from a doctrinal to a spiritually inspired one, confirming distinctions between religion and spirituality. It was to this higher 'sense' that Eddy credited her ability to differentiate between what she considered to be the spiritual, and material, accounts of creation: 'Through spiritual sense you can discern the heart of divinity, and thus begin to comprehend.....' (S&H p 258). She admits: 'Mortal thought does not at once catch the higher meaning, and can do so only as thought is educated up to spiritual apprehension' (S&H p 349).

The thesis has already examined the writers' arguments as they distinguished between the two representations of sensibility: the spiritual with its potential promise for femininity and its material and potentially destructive opposite. The succeeding argument, it could be suggested, mirrors the style of that earlier one. Differentiating between the two representations of womanhood - that made in the image of God, and the allegorical creature taken from man's rib - allows identification of a spiritual hierarchical order, one which legitimises a female elect.

Central to an argument for female election is the authors' explication of the account of creation; there is no doubt that an account in which woman is taken **from** the bone of man and created as helpmeet **to** man, suggests a subserviency. Their 'beginning' arguments will therefore be examined closely; it is worth noting that both Stanton and Eddy argue the validity of the record in 'Genesis' 1, pointing to the strictly allegorical nature of the subsequent account. Deconstruction of historically accepted arguments for

female subservience viz-à-viz, the 'afterthought' nature of her creation, and her culpability in the fall of man, are therefore central to attempts to grant her sanctified status. Their claim is especially interesting in the light of its effective disputation of other authors' 'original sin' arguments; arguments like those in Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judacorum', which sought to blame Adam, as the *source* of Eve's derivation: 'If any Evill did in her [Eve] remaine, Beeing made of him [Adam], he was the ground of all....' (sic)⁴³⁵ Or even Hannah More's 'atonement' perspective: 'When we see how graciously he has turned our very lapse into an occasion of improving our condition.....' (PP p.10). *The Woman's Bible* and *Science & Health*, through a literal and figurative discourse, deconstruct that latter record, the one as the work of a 'highly imaginative editor' whose purpose was to prove woman's inferiority, (WB pVol 1,20-21) the other suggesting: 'Spiritually followed, the book of Genesis is the history of the untrue image of God, named a sinful mortal' (S & H p 501).

Eddy's 'spiritual interpretation' involved that awareness or intuition associated with women, by the cult of sensibility, confirming the 'underlying religious sensibility' as cited by Schleiermacher. Indeed, she writes: 'Spiritual sense, contradicting the material senses, involves intuition.....' (S&H p 298). By its very nature, this argument authorises the feminine on two levels: the first is to emphasise female receptivity to messages from God, the second is that through this higher state of consciousness or spiritual discernment, confirmation of essential religious truths which *support* her supremacy is uncovered. Eddy explains: 'Divine logic and revelation coincide. If we believe otherwise, we may be sure that either our logic is at fault or that we have misinterpreted revelation' (S&H p 93).

'The Scriptures are very sacred.' Eddy writes: 'Our aim must be to have them understood spiritually, for only by this understanding can truth be gained' (S&H p 547). Close attention to sacred texts allows her to develop an argument through which to challenge epistemological 'truths', shaped largely by a historical gendered value system. Exposing a belief system

⁴³⁵ S. Woods, *Lanyer A Renaissance Woman Poet* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 139.

constructed upon masculine values, she identifies a parallel reading through which to legitimise the hereditary spiritual status of women. Explaining the term 'man' as generic, Eddy argues that 'Masculine, feminine, and neuter genders are human concepts' (S&H p 516).

Gillian Gill, quoting from the first edition of *Science & Health*, submits that, 'She [Eddy] distinguishes sharply between Genesis 1 and 2, accepting the former as the word of God, and rejecting the latter as the revisionist work of timid scribes: "they spake from error, of error, and from the standpoint of matter attempted to define Spirit, which accounts for the contradistinctions in that glorious old record of creation" (*Science and Health*, 1e, pp. 252-53). Gill concludes that: 'Mrs. Eddy reads Genesis 1 to say that gender is primary in man since God is both male and female.....Male and female cannot be one in person, but are one in Principle, and if God is a person his gender would be both male and female, these being the likenesses of Him, as the Scripture informs us....Gender is embraced in Spirit, else God could never have shadowed forth from out Himself, the idea of male and female' (*Science and Health*, 1e, p. 236). Gill assumes an incredulous note: 'With even more daring she claims that woman is the higher of the two since she was the latter to be created: "We have not as much authority in science, for calling God masculine as feminine, the latter being the last, therefore the highest idea given of Him" (*Science and Health*, 1e, p. 238).⁴³⁶

The elusive nature of words in conveying higher concepts was of particular concern to Eddy and Gill identifies Eddy's idiolectic use of a semantic code as similar to that of the French philosopher, psychoanalyst and feminist, Irigaray.⁴³⁷ She points to 'the circular, oracular, repetitious, strongly metaphorical progression of Mrs. Eddy's text', together with 'its exploration of the semantics of typography', demanding the reader's 'active participation.' This literary style was in itself antithetical to the rigid stacticity which marked the 'dead rites' of ancient ceremonies and points to a charged

⁴³⁶ G. Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 228. This representation echoes Milton's "Last and best" theory.

⁴³⁷ Gillian Gill is the chief English translator of Irigaray's writing as well as researching the writings of Mary Baker Eddy and Florence Nightingale. See Chapter 12 in G.Gill's *Mary Baker Eddy*.

and vital author/reader relationship. Through fresh and innovative argument Eddy juxtaposed the 'blindness of popular belief' (S&H p 316) with intuitive divine vision, suggesting: 'This Soul-sense comes to the human mind when the latter yields to the divine Mind. Such intuitions reveal whatever constitutes and perpetuates harmony....' (S&H p 85). Finseth's thesis points to the: '....advance of scriptural "higher criticism"' in this period, 'which held that the language of the Bible did not possess absolute authority but, as a product of human endeavour, filtered through the imperfect medium of the human mind, could only approximate those Christian truths which did possess absolute authority. In effect, 'he concluded, 'the evidence of truth was not the words themselves, but the intuitive feeling that what the words attempted to express was truth.'⁴³⁸

'Ritualism and creed hamper spirituality'⁴³⁹

'Human reason and religion come slowly to the recognition of spiritual facts' (S & H p 173) says Eddy, and she considered: 'The Judaic religion consisted mostly of rites and ceremonies. The motives and affections of man', she argued, 'were of little value' (S&H p 59). Interpretation of those 'Christian truths' therefore, through a 'higher criticism', was Eddy's route to spiritual explication: 'Inspired writers interpret the Word spiritually', she argues, 'while the ordinary historian interprets it literally' (S&H p 537). Here we have what is possibly the clearest signal of the state of sensibility necessary to 'do' Christian theology. Drawing on Protestant sensibilities to differentiate between 'religious belief' and 'spiritual understanding', Eddy is careful to distinguish between objective religious truths based on history and patriarchy, and that active vital connection with the Deity, through which spirituality is discerned. If she can successfully portray the *receptive* thought as the highest in terms of its ability to commune with God, her own dissenting arguments will inevitably carry more weight. Clearly, both Eddy and Stanton were of the opinion that a religious sensibility, rather than dead rites and dogma was the route to spiritual truth: 'Even the Christian Church itself is not based upon Christ as a Saviour', says Stanton, 'but upon its own teachings that woman

⁴³⁸ I.F.Finseth, M.A.Thesis.

⁴³⁹ *Science & Health*, p. 234.

brought sin into the world, a theory in direct contradiction, not only to the mysteries, but to spiritual truth' (WB v11, p 209). She argued: 'The canon law, the Scriptures, the creeds and codes and church discipline of the leading religions bear the impress of fallible man, and not of our ideal great first cause, "the Spirit of all Good"....' (WB v1, p13). The foregoing encourages the legitimising of an argument that Scriptural illumination proceeded from a space which transcended the public academic and civic space. Eddy identifies this instinctive state: 'ANGELS. God's thoughts passing to man; spiritual intuitions, pure and perfect....' (S&H p 581). This intuitive state, or transcendental wisdom, Finseth suggests, allowed the speaker to 'act as a kind of organ-pipe for immutable spiritual principle,' concluding that 'since his language took as its reference this principle his auditor would automatically sense its truth.'⁴⁴⁰

Attempting then to recover 'those Christian truths which did possess absolute authority', Eddy strove to distinguish between contradictory Biblical representations of femininity. Juxtaposing Biblical narratives, and sifting between what she understands to be truth and allegory, she suggests that: 'Human hypotheses have darkened the glow and grandeur of evangelical religion....'⁴⁴¹ Linguistic communication of transcendental argument was essential if Eddy was to furnish that theological 'silence' referred to by McFague. She begins this task in logical form and inspirational style, attributing to the Creator and His creation, what she considers to be tangible and identifiable qualities:

GOD. 'The great I AM; the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-acting, all-wise, all-loving, and eternal; Principle; Mind; Soul; Spirit; Life; Truth; Love; all substance; intelligence' (S&H p 587).

MAN. 'The compound idea of infinite Spirit; the spiritual image and likeness of God; the full representation of Mind' (S&H p 591).

In her paper 'God in the Feminine' Mulder points to Feuerbach's description

⁴⁴⁰ I.F.Finseth, M.A. Thesis

⁴⁴¹ *Prose Works* 'Retrospection and Introspection', p. 35.

of God as 'the mirror of man';⁴⁴² Eddy inverts this portrayal, describing man as the mirror of God: 'Now compare man before the mirror to his divine Principle, God. Call the mirror divine Science, and call man the reflection' (S&H p 515). This explanation registers the resemblance of man to God, pre-empts any suggestion of original sin, and effectively sets a precedent for gender equality, the male and female of His creating: 'Note how true', she says,....'is the reflection to its original.'

Ideologies of gender have flourished through acquaintance with the second, rather than the first chapter of 'Genesis', and for the purpose of qualifying the status of woman, Eddy confirms this first record as the unique and 'only beginning.' Operating within an exegetical narrative she illustrates the inevitable equality of man, made 'in our image, after our likeness;' (Gen 1.26) Identifying 'man' as 'the family name for all ideas, the sons and daughters of God.....' she verifies her argument:

God fashions all things, after His own likeness. Life is reflected in existence, Truth in truthfulness, God in goodness, which impart their own peace and permanence. Love, redolent with unselfishness, bathes all in beauty and light. The grass beneath our feet silently explains, "The meek shall inherit the earth." The modest arbutus sends her sweet breath to heaven. The great rock gives shadow and shelter. The sunlight glints from the church-dome, glances into the prison-cell, glides into the sick-chamber, brightens the flower, beautifies the landscape, blesses the earth. Man made in His likeness, possesses and reflects God's dominion over all the earth. Man and woman as coexistent and eternal with God forever reflect, in glorified quality, the infinite Father-Mother God.....The ideal woman corresponds to Life and to Love. In divine Science, we have not as much authority for considering God masculine, as we have for considering Him feminine, for Love imparts the clearest idea of Deity' (S & H p 516,517).

⁴⁴² P. Lang (ed), *Religions and Discourse* 'God in the Feminine', A. C. Mulder. p. 66.
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This figurative discourse identifies the masculine and feminine natures which, Eddy believes, are expressions of God; aesthetic binaries allow her to characterise the masculine and feminine through gendered landscape imagery. This richly descriptive passage is of typically 'romantic' genre and has echoes of William Blake's style: it takes the traditional language of *The Bible* and through pictorial images creates a sensory perception. Abrams identifies Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' as using a 'technique of compressed metaphor and symbol which explode into a multiplicity of references'⁴⁴³ and this metaphorical style of signification is valuable in making the intangible tangible. In her text *Metaphorical Theology*, McFague explains: 'Poets use metaphor all the time because they are constantly speaking about the great unknowns - mortality, love, fear, joy, guilt, hope, and so on. Religious language is deeply metaphorical for the same reason and it is therefore no surprise that Jesus' most characteristic form of teaching, the parables, should be extended metaphors. Less obvious, but of paramount importance, is the fact that metaphorical thinking constitutes the basis of human thought and language.'⁴⁴⁴

'Metaphorical thinking' is an important element in the promotion of Eddy's religious argument. The foregoing passage identifies linguistically 'Love' in feminine terms; unselfishness, meekness, modesty, even silent exclamations, all signify the wife, the mother, the daughter, the nurse. 'The modest arbutus', when contrasted with 'The great rock' that gives 'shadow and shelter', usefully appropriates discourse of the sublime and beautiful, identifying the male and female of His creating and the meritorious qualities of each. Masculinity is associated with 'rocks and mountains [which] stand for solid and grand ideas....' signifying strength, elevation and resolve.

Using nature to illustrate her argument for spiritual reflection she describes: 'The oracular skies, the verdant earth - bird, brook, blossom, breeze, and balm - are richly fraught with divine reflection.....', concluding: 'And how is

⁴⁴³ M.H.Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, p.19, vol 2. See Blake's 'All Religions Are One' 'There is no natural religion' (a and b) for his argumentative style of Divine Vision, p. 26.

⁴⁴⁴ S.McFague, *Metaphorical Theology Models of God in Religious Language* (SCM Press, 1983) , p. 15.

man, seen through the lens of Spirit enlarged, and how counterpoised his origin from dust, and how he presses to his original, never severed from Spirit....⁴⁴⁵. Building on this metaphorical imaging, the 'lens of spirit', could be seen as focusing and dispersing the light of truth, with the prism of poetic interpretation diffusing this light into the spectrum of spiritual understanding. The man of dust, seen through this 'inspirational' lens, is shown to be a deception, allowing the male and female man of His creating to appear, confirming the Bible text: 'Let us make man in our image....and let **them** have dominion....' If 'man' was not created 'male and female' the text would surely have been in the singular: 'and let **him** have dominion.'⁴⁴⁶ Legitimising her unique scriptural perspectives Eddy explains: 'Divine Science is not an interpolation of the Scriptures.....it only needs the prism of this Science to divide the rays of Truth, and bring out the entire hues of Deity, which scholastic theology has hidden.'⁴⁴⁷ It was the rigidity of theological intellectual conformity which Eddy saw as responsible for clothing 'religion in human forms', it was 'superstition and creeds' (S&H p 4) which had allowed gendered discrepancies to flourish; and she was intent on disputing what she saw as a restricting of The Word to the letter. She sought to authorise her argument through spiritual means: 'The lens of Science magnifies the divine power to human sight; and we then see the supremacy of Spirit...'(MW p 194). It was the witnessing of this 'Spirit' that allowed a transcending of material limitations, and was what, I would suggest, ultimately gave authority to Eddy's hegemonic discourse.

Father- Mother God

The marginalisation and suppression of the female sex had been aided by patriarchal analysis of sacred texts. The male as head was intrinsic to their hierarchical order. The portrayal of a masculine God effectively maintained this order, perpetuating an argument for male superiority; and the exclusion of women from theological scholarship preserved a domain in the masculine.

⁴⁴⁵ *Prose Works*, 'Miscellany', p. 129.

⁴⁴⁶ *The Woman's Bible* also examines this particular explanation.

⁴⁴⁷ *Prose Works*, 'Miscellaneous Writings', p. 194. The word 'Science' is used in the context of 'True knowledge.'

One of the earliest challenges to this singular definition of the Deity can be found in the *Revelations* of fourteenth-century anchoress, Julian of Norwich; her argument for a God in the feminine makes an important contribution to Eddy and Stanton's perspectives. In her text *God is our Mother*, Jennifer Heimmel writes: 'Julian of Norwich clearly devoted great effort and creativity to a complete cyclical development of this image of a Christian feminine God for the first time in its long history'. Heimmel identifies her as: 'The fourteenth century woman who was responsible for the great cyclical vision of Christian mother-God.....One further discovers,' she writes, 'that she was also a skillful literary artist whose style is made to faithfully reflect and recreate the near twenty year experience of her struggles and beliefs as though occurring spontaneously within the text.'⁴⁴⁸ The *Revelations* were apparently spiritually inspired, of an instinctive and spontaneous nature, reflecting a true Religion of the heart and her depiction of the Trinity reinforces an image of the feminine in the Godhead: '.....and of the mother "Christ, in whom our party is grounded and rotyd" and "our moder" who is "the/second person of the trynity" (sic) (II,Ch57,p578, IICh.58,p 586)⁴⁴⁹

Some five centuries later, Eddy was to identify God in the feminine:⁴⁵⁰ 'Father-Mother' she claimed, 'is the name for Deity, which indicates his tender relationship to His spiritual creation' (S&H p 332). Eddy's respective mode of identification of God as Mother as well as Father, was an important step in authorising the status of woman. Her discourse consolidates a sense of the inevitable femininity in a God who created 'female' in His image. Eddy was not a feminist per se, but her identification of woman as 'Love', which she understands to be the highest concept of the Deity, is a powerful indication of her spiritual hierarchical ordering. Gendered sanctions which saw female exclusion from schools of divinity may well have worked to women's benefit:

their minds being less doctrinally inhibited, they were more open to divine
⁴⁴⁸ J.P.Heimmel, *God is Our Mother; Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Divinity*, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 55

⁴⁵⁰ A desire to show the "other, feminine side of Christ" was met with charges of heresy and blasphemy in a Passion Pageant Easter 2005. A woman was cast to play the part of Christ, bringing anathema down on the head of its Director. In his defence, he pointed to The Bible: 'In Christ, there is no male or female' further suggesting: 'The dignity of the woman is the purposeful expression of God which she has inherited from her creator.' Full text by B. Johnston, in *The Sunday Telegraph*, March 13,2005. p. 28.

influence, and as Eddy pointed out, through this 'prism of Science', the 'rays of Truth' were divided, allowing her to witness the 'entire hues of Deity.' *The Bible*, as has already been identified, was central to Eddy's study, and it was her close reading of this text which instigated her fresh insight and revelatory new meaning to scriptural language.

In a paper entitled: 'God Language as Two-Way Traffic', and under the subheading 'The Birth of New Meaning,' Kune Biezeveld suggests: 'The task of metaphor is to shock the patriarchal symbolic order.'⁴⁵¹ The concept of 'God Language as Two-Way Traffic' is an interesting one, suggesting an operating in either of two opposite directions, a mutuality: challenging finitude, this idea lends credence rather to the infinite nature of God's Word, which, like spirituality cannot be restricted or confined. This idea effectively opens the sacred texts to different interpretative strategies and Eddy identifies the importance of substituting 'the spiritual for the material definition of a Scriptural word' which, she suggests, allows 'the meaning of the inspired writer' to be elucidated (S&H p 579). Her exposition of those 'allegorical' rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden is remarkable and would undoubtedly have shocked the 'patriarchal symbolic order.'

Eddy begins, not so unusually, by identifying the word 'River' as a metaphor for 'Channel of thought: When smooth and unobstructed it typifies the course of Truth, but **muddy**, foaming, and dashing, it is a type of error.' This explanation brings to mind Wollstonecraft's: 'Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears! how has thy clear stream been **muddled** by the dabblers.' (my emphasis) (V p 232). Landscape imagery was a useful means of substantiating the intangible; but Eddy's interpretation of the different rivers, as we shall see, seems to be quite distinct from conventional metaphorical discourse and the reader might question how she arrived at her unique explanations. In *Prose Works*, she throws some light on her methodology, suggesting: 'The two largest words in the vocabulary of thought are "Christian" and "Science." The former is the highest style of man; the latter reveals and interprets God and man; it aggregates, amplifies,

⁴⁵¹ K.Kiezeveld, 'God Language as Two-Way Traffic' in P.Lang (ed), *Religions and Discourse*, pp. 316-318.

unfolds, and expresses the ALL-God'.⁴⁵² Juxtaposing this idea with More's pronouncement that 'the Bible alone can teach the Science of Salvation thro' the blood of Christ', allows credence to my earlier tentative suggestion that a pre-requisite to an understanding of the 'scientific' sacred teachings is that intuitive spiritual state of pure Christianity. With that in mind, Eddy's interpretation of the four rivers will be examined:

The river Euphrates, Eddy explains, symbolizes: 'Divine Science encompassing the universe and man, the true idea of God.....' The Hiddekel: 'Divine Science understood and acknowledged', and the Pison, as representing: 'The love of the good and beautiful, and their immortality.' Her explanation of the river Gihon, however, is most startling; this river, according to Eddy, represents: 'The rights of woman acknowledged morally, civilly, and socially' (S&H pp 585-593). Nadia Neidzielska, in an essay entitled 'The rights of Woman sustained by divine law' asks: 'Don't these definitions correspond to states of spiritualized consciousness able to bring about improved human conditions?' She points to Eddy's prediction: "Through discernment of the spiritual opposite of materiality, even the way through Christ, Truth, man will reopen with the key of divine Science the gates of Paradise which human beliefs have closed....." (S & H p 171) suggesting: 'Wouldn't, then, the definition of "Gihon" indicate that one of the conditions for attaining this Paradise is the acknowledgement of the rights of women?'⁴⁵³

The foregoing explanation contributes towards a compelling argument that the rights of woman are indeed enshrined in scripture; a paradigm shift in critical theory has revealed interpretative discrepancies to which each writer in this thesis has referred. The 'damaging notion of original sin' and belief that woman was literally taken from the bone of man, Wollstonecraft earlier discredited: '.....yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the

⁴⁵² *Prose Works*, 'No and Yes', p. 10.

⁴⁵³ *The Herald of Christian Science* - Special Issue - 2001. Published by The Christian Science Publishing Society, U.S.A. N. Niedzielska, M.A. 'The rights of women sustained by divine law.' p. 4.

ground....⁴⁵⁴ and Eddy now adds to her argument:

A kind of Man from the Dust of the Ground

Eddy, like Wollstonecraft, did bestow 'serious thought on the subject' of Eve's derivation from one of Adam's ribs, and her disputation of 'accepted' doctrine appears in this case, to register a shift from the revelatory towards a more reasoned argument. Eddy identifies this 'second' account of creation as being merely symbolic and no part of 'the beginning' as already recorded in 'Genesis' 1, it is rather, she argues, 'mortal and material' (S&H p 521). 'Man reflects God; *mankind* represents the Adamic race, and is a human, not a divine, creation' (S&H p 525). The determining, by patriarchal religious authority, of female subordination on the basis of this second creative account, Eddy contests, and having made the crucial distinction between the man of God's creating and the Adamic race, she identifies these beings, created from dust, in the following terms: ⁴⁵⁵

ADAM. Error; a falsity; the belief in "original sin," sickness, and death; evil; the opposite of good, - of God and His creation; a curse; a belief in intelligent matter, finiteness, and mortality; "dust to dust," red sandstone, nothingness; the first god of mythology; not God's man, who represents the one God and is His own image and likeness.....The name Adam represents the false supposition that Life is not eternal, but has beginning and end.....(S&Hp 579).

EVE. A beginning; mortality; that which does not last forever; a finite belief concerning life, substance, and intelligence in matter; error; the belief that the human race originated materially instead of spiritually, - that man started first from dust, second from a rib, and third from an egg (S&H p585).

⁴⁵⁴ *Vindication*, p. 95.

⁴⁵⁵ It is worth noting, that this second account of creation was preceded by mist: 'But there went up a mist from the earth...' 'Genesis' 2:6. Metaphorically, the mist implies the potential for obscurity .

Having distinguished between 'man' and 'mankind' she proceeds, through analysis of syntactical convention and the 'dissection and definition of words', to promote her argument for the untrue image, the progeny of Adam and Eve who, she believes, represent the fallen race: 'The word *Adam*', she explains, 'is from the Hebrew *adamah*, signifying the *red color of the ground, dust, nothingness*. Divide the name Adam into two syllables, and it reads, *a dam*, or obstruction....It further suggests the thought of that "darkness ... upon the face of the deep," when matter or dust was deemed the agent of Deity in creating man....Here *a dam* is not a mere play upon words; it stands for obstruction, error, even the supposed separation of man from God....' (S&H p 338). This argument leads Eddy to the following conclusion: 'Jehovah declared the ground was accursed; and from this ground, or matter, sprang Adam, notwithstanding God had blessed the earth "for man's sake." From this it follows that Adam was not the ideal man for whom the earth was blessed. The ideal man was revealed in due time, and was known as Christ Jesus' (S&H p338).

Eddy presents a credible case in defence of her perspective; adroitly reidentifying the Creator and his progeny, she negotiates a position for woman commensurate with her 'elect' spiritual status. Eddy's claim that woman, whom she identifies as 'Love', was the highest in the order of creation and her proposition that Jesus rather than Adam was 'the ideal man for whom the earth was blessed', marks a radical departure from traditional doctrinal argument. Submissions for the mutual status of male and female are supported by the style of her critical discourse, indeed a key feature of Eddy's writing style is the way her ideological positions seem to be linguistically supported by her adept movement through an agency of 'manly' argument and the aesthetics of a feminine discourse.

Identifying her own spiritual awakening she articulates in 'feminine' style: 'Sweet music' is how she explains this divine influence, which 'ripples in one's first thoughts of it like the brooklet in its meandering midst pebbles and rocks, before the mind can duly express it to the ear, - so the harmony of divine Science first broke upon my sense, before gathering experience and

confidence to articulate it.’⁴⁵⁶ Aidan Day points to: ‘the forms of the material world [which] may be read as emblems of a profounder, spiritual reality transcending nature, time and space....’ He argues: ‘Nature is important insofar as it manifests the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind and at the same time provides an objective, material barrier which allows the individual subject to recognize transcendence without being overwhelmed by it.’⁴⁵⁷ Eddy refers to this divine articulation as ‘Earth’s hieroglyphics of Love’. This literary form allows Eddy to promote what John Witherspoon refers to as nature’s ability to represent a “second book of Revelation.”⁴⁵⁸ Her ‘Voices of Spring’ represent an argument for a natural hierarchical order reflecting the divine, and notably it is to the ‘housewife’ she gives the task of setting the ‘earth in order.’

Mine is an obstinate penchant for nature in all her moods and forms, a satisfaction with whatever is hers.....In spring, nature like a thrifty housewife sets the earth in order; and between taking up the white carpets and putting down the green ones, her various apartments are dismally dirty. Spring is my sweetheart.....Spring passes over mountain and meadow, waking up the world;....The alders bend over the streams to shake out their tresses in the water-mirrors; let mortals bow before the creator, and looking through Love’s transparency, behold man in God’s own image and likeness.....⁴⁵⁹

Discourse of Aesthetics: A Transcendence in the Feminine

Epistemological argument and religious ‘truths’ have historically been shaped by masculine values and gendered discourse. Patriarchal ideologies have therefore held sway, and whilst earlier chapters of this thesis have identified female receptivity to divine signals, the literary expression of these signals or

⁴⁵⁶ *Prose Works*, ‘Retrospection & Introspection’, p. 27.

⁴⁵⁷ A.Day, *Romanticism* (Routledge, 1955), pp. 45,59.

⁴⁵⁸ John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was widely known as a leader of the evangelical or “Popular Party” in the established Church of Scotland.

See: WWW/Companion/witherspoon_john.html.

⁴⁵⁹ *Prose Works*, ‘Miscellaneous Writings’, pp. 329-331.

'revelations' inevitably required a 'new tongue' through which to elucidate its representation. *Religions and Discourse* identifies the need 'for a 'house of language' which is open to the ongoing dialogue about values we want to live by, as well as an example of this dialogue.'⁴⁶⁰ In her paper 'A God in the Feminine' Anne-Claire Mulder identifies the need for feminine terms. Drawing on Irigaray's linguistic and philosophical arguments she explains that 'women need a God in the feminine' (*Religions & Discourse*, p 62). She quotes from Irigaray's 'Divine Women' : 'If women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another.....without a divine which suits her, a woman cannot fulfil her subjectivity according to an objective which corresponds with her. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming.....According to Irigaray', Mulder points out, 'women have to do more than criticize the representation of Woman within the dominant order of discourse in order to become free subjects. They have to construct an identity or images of an identity that present them as free and autonomous subjects.....Hence Irigaray's question 'This God, are we capable of imagining it as a woman?'" (R&D pp 63, 65).

Eddy's 'house of language' has constructed a convincing spiritual identity for woman. Challenging modes of identification which had served to scripturally confirm her subjugation, Eddy's arguments destabilised what she understood to be a prejudiced, hegemonic religious structure. Focusing on 'the beginning' Word, Eddy identified the inevitable equal status of the sexes, created simultaneously, by a first parent who was the origin of male and female. This 'beginning' allows God to be identified, imagined, and understood 'as a woman' thereby effectively answering Irigaray's question.

Achievement of a Nobler Race.....'Home is the dearest spot on earth.....'

Having identified 'a God in the feminine' and thus, scriptural advocacy for the equal status of the sexes, what role does Eddy envision for these new 'heavenly' incumbents? Gill notes: 'The metaphysical and theological notions

⁴⁶⁰ P. Lang.(ed), *Religions and Discourse*, 'Towards a Different Transcendence Feminist Findings on Subjectivity, Religion and Values.' (Intro) vol 9.

of woman's equality with, or even ontological superiority to, man which Mrs. Eddy elaborates in *Science and Health* are echoed on a much smaller scale in the very short and fragmentary chapter she devotes to marriage.....Mrs Eddy', she suggested, 'was no political activist and no worker in the vineyards of female suffrage. Her role, she believed, was to provide with her science a new theoretical and spiritual advocacy for the primary equality of the sexes, and the mother-fatherhood of God.'⁴⁶¹

Eddy's arguments tend towards the upholding of traditional activities for women, reinforcing More's earlier proposal: 'To you, is made over the awfully important trust of infusing the first principles of piety into the tender minds of those who may one day be called to instruct, not families merely, but districts; to influence, not individuals, but senates.....' but there is an added impetus, an urgency and potency to these activities, which results, I would suggest, from the linking of motherhood with the Godhead, from the portrayal of a 'God in the feminine'. Having identified the maternal as the highest representation of Deity, and justified this ideal through textual analysis of scripture, Eddy accords to the space inhabited by this 'new woman' a powerful authority. Exalted and dignified through a fresh understanding of her birthright and relationship to God, 'the new woman' was effectively given permission to stand as a free, autonomous and equal heavenly citizen. A Press cutting from *The New Century*, Boston, February, 1895, one of many at the time, in response to Eddy's newly erected Church edifice, suggested, in eulogic tone: 'We all know her - she is simply the woman of the past with an added grace - a newer charm.....She is the apostle of the true, the beautiful, the good, commissioned to complete all that the twelve have left undone....."The time of times" is near when "the new woman" shall subdue the whole earth with the weapons of peace. Then shall wrong be robbed of her bitterness and ingratitude of her sting, revenge shall clasp hands with pity, and love shall dwell in the tents of hate; while side by side, equal partners in all that is worth living for, shall stand the new man with the new woman.'⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ G.Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 229.

⁴⁶² *Prose Works*, 'Pulpit and Press', p. 84.

The New Woman and the Marriage Covenant

Eddy's radical Protestant teachings resolutely refuted the social and political control, so restrictive to women, which had been enforced through a prejudicial reading of Scripture. Identification of 'Mother' as a synonym for God gave woman's nurturing and sheltering qualities a new authority, and Eddy suggested: 'The masculine mind reaches a higher tone through certain elements of the feminine.....' (S&H p 57). Her arguments, I believe, had tipped the balance somewhat, and whilst apparently supporting an ideology of separate spheres - 'Home is the dearest spot on earth' - she was careful to identify it as 'the centre, though not the boundary, of the affections' (S&H 59). Her chapter on 'Marriage' is notable for its quintessential sensibility: 'Marriage should signify a union of hearts.....Matrimony should never be entered into without a full recognition of its enduring obligations on both sides. There should be the most tender solicitude for each other's happiness, and mutual attention and approbation should wait on all the years of married life' (S&H 59). 'Tender solicitude' and 'mutual attention' point to a relationship in which two equals form a union based on feelings and actions which will bless the other. There is no sense of incorporation, or subjection here, rather she argues the need for compromise: 'Mutual compromises will often maintain a compact which might otherwise become unbearable. Man should not be required to participate in all the annoyances and cares of domestic economy, nor should woman be expected to understand political economy. Fulfilling the different demands of their united spheres, their sympathies should blend in sweet confidence and cheer, each partner sustaining the other, - thus hallowing the union of interests and affections, in which the heart finds peace and home' (S&H p59). Eddy's arguments sit comfortably alongside those earlier ones of More: 'Co-operation and not competition is indeed the clear principle we wish to see reciprocally adopted by those higher minds in each sex'.⁴⁶³ Whilst defining the private realm as that space particularly appropriate for women, Eddy speaks of 'united spheres', pointing to the 'higher tone' of the feminine mind as a beneficial element.

⁴⁶³ *Strictures*, p. 14.

Through a discourse of aesthetics, Eddy's portrayals point to the *power* of tenderness: 'Tender words and unselfish care in what promotes the welfare and happiness of your wife will prove more salutary in prolonging her health and smiles than stolid indifference or jealousy. Husbands, hear this and remember how slight a word or deed may renew the old trysting-times' (S&H p59). However, if the 'old trysting-times' were not renewed, or the 'new woman' found herself in disadvantaged circumstances, Eddy's marked change of tone witnessed a glimpse of the suffrage: 'If a dissolute husband deserts his wife, certainly the wronged, and perchance impoverished, woman should be allowed to collect her own wages, enter into business agreements, hold real estate, deposit funds, and own her children free from interference.....Civil law establishes very unfair differences between the rights of the two sexes.....If the elective franchise for women will remedy the evil without encouraging difficulties of greater magnitude, let us hope it will be granted' (S&H p63). Eddy, as a 'wronged and impoverished' woman, faced tremendous opposition as she sought to reclaim her child, collect her own wages, and hold real estate. Painfully aware of the shortcomings of political feminism, she pressed on for equal rights through divine rights.

In her argument for recognition of the force for good that spiritual women could be - these intuitive earthly representatives of God, receptive to divine signals and at the head and heart of the home - she again coincided with More. More had pointed to this 'important trust' which had been given to women, to infuse 'the first principles of piety' into those offspring.....'. Eddy emphasised: 'A mother is the strongest educator, either for or against crime.....' insisting 'Children should obey their parents;' (S&H p236) and adding to Wollstonecraft's: '....the female voice is, in general, more persuasive and soft, and more easily insinuates itself into the hearts of children.....To you does the pleasing task belong of forming their tempers, and giving them habits of virtue.....'. She points to the domestic ties and awareness of female ability, which: 'firmly attach your children to you, hints from God, that the first formation of their character [belongs to] you.'⁴⁶⁴ These are the 'hints' that Eddy has built upon to promote her argument for female spiritual authority; Eddy's

⁴⁶⁴ M. Wollstonecraft, *Elements of Morality*, p. 11.

emergent sense of spirituality is identifiable as a reflection of her experience as a woman; personal trauma has allowed these 'hints' or whispered intimations 'from God' as mentioned by Wollstonecraft, to become crystallized through Christian conviction.

A linguistic blending of maternal and divine power locates woman in a position of powerful influence, and Eddy's poem 'Mother's Evening Prayer' with its atmospheric resemblance to More's 'Sensibility' confirms this:

O gentle presence, peace and joy and power;
O Life divine, that owns each waiting hour,
Thou Love that guards the nestling's faltering flight!
Keep Thou my child on upward wing tonight.

Love is our refuge; only with mine eye
Can I behold the snare, the pit, the fall:
His habitation high is here, and nigh,
His arm encircles me, and mine, and all.

O make me glad for every scalding tear,
For hope deferred, ingratitude, disdain!
Wait, and love more for every hate, and fear
No ill, - since God is good, and loss is gain.

Beneath the shadow of His mighty wing;
In that sweet secret of the narrow way,
Seeking and finding, with the angels sing:
"Lo, I am with you alway," - watch and pray.

No snare, no fowler, pestilence or pain;
No night drops down upon the troubled breast,
When heaven's aftersmile earth's tear-drops gain,
And mother finds her home and heav'nly rest.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ M.B.Eddy, *Poems*, p. 4.

This devotional verse effectively links spirituality with sensibility; it represents the Deity as a 'presence', a 'gentle presence', whose state of 'being' is epitomised through maternal imaging. A maternal lexicon identifies motherhood as representative of the sheltering promise of the 'mighty wing', what Wollstonecraft identified as: 'The image of God implanted in our nature is now more rapidly expanding; and, as it opens, liberty with maternal wing seems to be soaring.....promising to shelter all mankind.'⁴⁶⁶ Eddy's literary deification of the feminine signals a first parent who incorporates femininity as well as masculinity. Reference to the 'sweet secret' reminds the reader of More's poem 'Sensibility' and *its* locating of a hidden sacredness within the female breast; 'angel' identification works to connect those earthly ministers with their heavenly counterparts, further deifying the nature of the feminine. Eddy's arguments for the strong religious sentiment bestowed upon women by their Creator works to enoble and empower the female sex, and public witness of this conferring is evident in Eddy's naming of her Church: **The Mother Church** was consecrated in Boston on January 6, 1895.

1895 was also the year in which Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* was published. Whilst no communication has been traced between the two women, in spite of Stanton's address being found in Eddy's personal address book, they inevitably had mutual acquaintances.⁴⁶⁷ A review written by Eddy and entitled 'Womans Bible'[sic] reflects her disapproval of the text:

.....The woman's man's Bible is the womans bible. We cannot have two if the sexes are equal and we would not if we could separate the interests of Soul and body from their fraternity in both and give to either prominence of perfectibility beyond the other. Man is the generic term for both men and women and even the most radical suffragist could not cannot ask or would receive a greater emolument than to be made in the image and likeness of

⁴⁶⁶ *A View*, p. 22.

⁴⁶⁷ One such acquaintance was John Greenleaf Whittier, the poet and abolitionist. 'Pulpit and Press' notes: 'About 1868, the author of *Science and Health* healed Mr. Whittier with one visit, at his home in Amesbury, of incipient pulmonary consumption.' M.B.Eddy, 'Pulpit and Press.' p 54.

Religious Revolution.....and the Overturning 'degrading Ideas of woman'

An essay written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and published in the *North American Review* in 1885, entitled 'Has Christianity Benefited Woman?' was a searing attack on the treatment of women in the name of religion: 'The assertion that woman owes all the advantages of her present position to the Christian church, has been repeated so often, that it is accepted as an established truth by those who would be unwilling to admit that all the injustice and degradation she has suffered might be logically traced to the same source.' That woman's subjugated position results from religious misunderstanding has now become Stanton's clarion call; in epideictic style she argues: 'A consideration of woman's position before Christianity, under Christianity, and at the present time, shows that she is not indebted to any form of religion for one step of progress, or one new liberty; on the contrary, it has been through the perversion of her religious sentiments that she has been so long held in a condition of slavery.'⁴⁶⁹

Misinterpretation and misrepresentation are identified in this persuasive proclamation as responsible for female subjugation. Sharply critical of 'accepted' established truths, 'truths' approved at a period in history when the socio-political structure reflected the predominance of men, Stanton sought to dispute what she believed to be distorted dogma: Jewish-Christian traditions, built upon a masculine structure controlled and administered by men. There was always a fear (as Wollstonecraft was quick to counter) of atheistic accusations when criticising religious doctrine, and whilst Stanton is sharply critical, it is not of the 'established truths', rather, 'accepted' interpretations. Distorted and discriminatory perceptions had allowed for female collusion in their enslavement, and the reader can witness the progression in Stanton's arguments, culminating in *The Woman's Bible*. In

⁴⁶⁸ Exhibit No A10873 MBEL

⁴⁶⁹ *North American Review*. Edited by A. Thorndike Rice. No CCCXXXV111, Vol CXL. New York: No 30 Lafayette Place, 1885. p. 389.

this text, her persona, tone and voice all contribute toward a powerful discourse of deconstruction. Her purpose is to challenge 'historically accepted truths': her method is through close critical analysis of *The Holy Bible*, paying special attention to sections relating to women. Stanton and her team of researchers attempted to throw fresh light on male interpretations which history had sanctioned, anticipating a restructured society, based on justice and equality for all, as a result of their 'Re-Wordings.' A powerful ethos reflects an authoritative authorial presence, and Stanton is not afraid to criticise women (as did More and Wollstonecraft before her), weak women who, she argued, could and should have set a pattern for equality at the hearth and in the home: 'If woman had done her duty to her sires and sons, think you it would have taken them nearly one hundred years, after giving to the world a declaration of rights.....to see that a woman has a right to the property she inherits, and to the wages she earns with her own hands?'⁴⁷⁰ Ultimately, however, women's political and social degradation, Stanton is convinced, is 'an outgrowth' of their status in the Bible. An 'entire revolution in all existing institutions' is inevitable, she believes, if woman is ever to gain her independence.

Newson and Ringe suggest in their introduction to *The Women's Bible Commentary*:

Although women have read the Bible for countless generations, we have not always been self-conscious about reading as women. There are many reasons why it is important that women do so. Women have distinctive questions to raise about the Bible and distinctive insights into its texts: our experiences of self and family, our relationship to institutions, the nature of our work and daily lives, and our spirituality have been and continue to be different in important respects from those of men. But there is another reason, too. Because of its religious and cultural authority, the Bible has been one of the most important means by which woman's place in society has been defined..... Increasingly, it is

⁴⁷⁰ *Selected Papers*, pp. 297-300.

difficult for a woman, whether she is a member of a religious community or not, to read the Bible without some sense of the role it has played in shaping the conditions of her life.....During the women's movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there emerged a clear sense of the need for women to read the Bible self-consciously as women. Just over a hundred years ago Frances Willard, president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, made this appeal: "We need women commentators to bring out the women's side of the book....To that end she urged "young women of linguistic talent...to make a speciality of Hebrew and New Testament Greek in the interest of their sex." ⁴⁷¹

It is these 'distinctive insights' the chapter will now endeavour to discover as *The Woman's Bible* seeks to 'bring out the women's side of the book...'. In this text the language of political feminism has been indelibly fused with that of theological feminism. The introduction marks this: 'From the inauguration of the movement for woman's emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the "divinely ordained sphere," prescribed in the Old and New Testaments. The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man. Creeds, codes, Scriptures and statutes, are all based on this idea. The fashions, forms, ceremonies and customs of society, church ordinances and discipline all grow out of this idea' (WB, v 1 p 7). Stanton's argument brings an intellectual matriarchal perspective to patriarchal sacred texts, drawing at the same time, on the inner or private space experiences of women from which to influence the outer public sphere. Her *approach* to Scripture bears little resemblance to Eddy's, which had argued for the inspirational nature of the sacred writings. Stanton argued she did not believe 'that God inspired the Mosaic code, or told the historians what they say he did about woman.....' (WB v 1 p12). Does anyone seriously believe that the great spirit of all good talked with these Jews, and really said the

⁴⁷¹ C.A.Newsom, S.H.Ringe (eds), *The Women's Bible Commentary*, (SPCK, Holy Trinity Church, London, NW1 4DU, 1992), p. xiii.

extraordinary things they report?.....Do they think that all men who write the different books were specially inspired....?' (WB v 1 p 40).

The Woman's Bible was to provoke a diatribe of opposition.⁴⁷² In January 1896 a gathering of the Woman's Suffrage Movement in **The Church of our Father** witnessed this. The tide of opinion had turned with the publication of her latest work and a resolution had come before the assembly in the form of a direct rebuke. The resolution was to distance the members from Stanton's theological publication. In spite of, or perhaps because of the public furore, the book proved to be immensely popular, going through seven printings in six months and translation into several languages. Unsurprisingly, the clergy came out in strong opposition; Stanton noted in her memoirs: 'The clergy denounced it as the work of *Satan*, though it really was the work of Ellen Battelle Dietrick, Lillie Devereux Blake, Rev. Phebe A. Hanaford, Clara Bewick Colby, Ursula N. Gestefeld, Louisa Southworth, Frances Ellen Burr, and myself.' She went on, 'Extracts from it, and criticisms of the commentators, were printed in the newspapers throughout America, Great Britain, and Europe. A third edition was found necessary, and finally an edition was published in England.'⁴⁷³ Fitzgerald notes: 'Stanton's sustained ideological assault on religious orthodoxy, especially her publication of *The Woman's Bible* in 1895 and 1898 represented her last but not least controversial attempt to lessen the influence of what she believed constituted the ideological basis for women's subordination in nineteenth-century America.'⁴⁷⁴ Though 'antichurch' Stanton's religious beliefs and faith in God overshadowed her faith in man, thus her thrust to promote religious reform became central to her argument. As Fitzgerald noted, Stanton spoke 'directly to the more conservative suffragists through the pages of *The Woman's Bible*, arguing that their inability to grasp the importance of critiquing traditional religion was either a sign of ignorance or an act of "cowardice" disguised by talk of political pragmatism and fear of religious opposition.'⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Cullen Murphy suggests: 'It is not going too far to say (as some have suggested) that *The Woman's Bible* is the reason that an image of Susan B. Anthony and not Elizabeth Cady Stanton graces the one-dollar coin that was first minted in 1978.' C. Murphy, *The Word According to Eve* (The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 23.

⁴⁷³ E.C. Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, p. 453.

⁴⁷⁴ *The Woman's Bible*, p. viii.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid*, p. xxviii.

Female Interpretation of Paradisaical Indictment

Sharply condemnatory of interpretation which suggested it was 'woman brought sin and death into the world', woman who 'precipitated the fall of the race,' woman who 'was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced', Stanton was intent on recovering a valid interpretation, and turning this 'object of pity into an exalted, dignified personage, worthy our worship as the mother of the race....'(WB v 1 p 7 &8). 'The canon law,' she argued, 'the Scriptures, the creeds and codes and church discipline of the leading religions bear the impress of fallible manhood and not of our ideal great first cause, "the Spirit of all Good"....'(WB v 1 p12). Female emancipation she now believed to be impossible without a credible feminised scriptural exegesis, and to this end, she and her committee of feminist scholars scrutinised the Scriptures. Firmly convinced that the root cause of female subjection was misinterpretation of the Old and New Testaments, Stanton resolved to reverse this perverted application. Where she led, other activist women followed and Murphy notes: 'This conception of the nature of the Bible's challenge - that the problem was not the document itself but errors in the reading and application of it - was in fact explicitly endorsed at the Seneca Falls Convention in these words: "*Resolved*, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her ...'"⁴⁷⁶

Chapter one critically analyses the first account of creation in 'Genesis': 'Here is the sacred historian's first account of the advent of woman; a simultaneous creation of both sexes, in the image of God.' Close textual analysis leads her to argue:

It is evident from the language that there was consultation in the Godhead, and that the masculine and feminine elements were equally represented. Scott in his commentaries says, "this consultation of the Gods is the origin of the doctrine of the trinity."

⁴⁷⁶ C. Murphy, *The Word According to Eve*, p. 27.

But instead of three male personages, as generally represented, a Heavenly Father, Mother, and Son would seem more rational.

The first step in the elevation of woman to her true position, as an equal factor in human progress, is the cultivation of the religious sentiment in regard to her dignity and equality, the recognition by the rising generation of an ideal Heavenly Mother, to whom their prayers should be addressed, as well as to a Father.

If language has any meaning, we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine. The Heavenly Mother and Father! "God created man in his *own image, male and female.*" Thus Scripture, as well as science and philosophy, declares the eternity and equality of sex....The masculine and feminine elements, exactly equal and balancing each other, are as essential to the maintenance of the equilibrium of the universe as positive and negative electricity, the centripetal and centrifugal forces, the laws of attraction which bind together all we know of this planet whereon we dwell and of the system in which we revolve. E.C.S.(WB v 1 p14,15).

This logical exegesis invokes a number of disciplines in its attempt to credit an account of creation in which male and female are equal: science, philosophy, theology, language, history, even the laws of physics are used to emphasise this important first principle. It is notable, however, that whilst Stanton insists on ratiocination and 'pure reason' in her interpretation, it is the notion of sensibility which marks the paragraph, demanding recognition of the dignity and equality of woman. 'The cultivation of the religious sentiment' she insists is 'the first step' towards the elevation of woman and a pre-requisite in the acceptance of an image of God as Heavenly Mother as well as Father: again we see in evidence a key element in the argument for sexual equality. A representation of God as 'Mother' is at the heart of authorising the feminine and is of primary importance as Stanton proceeds to unravel 'accepted'

theological perspectives:

In the great work of creation the crowning glory was realized, when man and woman were evolved on the sixth day, the masculine and feminine forces in the image of God, that must have existed eternally, in all forms of matter and mind. All the persons in the Godhead are represented in the Elohim the divine plurality taking counsel in regard to this last and highest form of life. Who were the members of this high council, and were they a duality or a trinity? Verse 27 declares the image of God male and female. How then is it possible to make woman an afterthought? We find in verses 5-16 the pronoun "he" used. Should it not in harmony with verse 26 be "they," a dual pronoun? We may attribute this to the same cause as the use of "his" in verse 11 instead of "it." The fruit tree yielding fruit after "his" kind instead of after "its" kind. The paucity of language may give rise to many misunderstandings.....(WB v 1 p 15).

Semantic criticism is brought into play as Stanton draws attention to the potential for misunderstanding due to the limits of language, but even bearing in mind the 'paucity of language', her argument is entirely sustainable in its recognition of the simultaneous creation of male and female. Masculine pronouns were an inevitable result of patriarchal historicism and tend to obfuscate the principal argument. 'The above texts', Stanton proclaims, 'plainly show the simultaneous creation of man and woman, and their equal importance in the development of the race.' A clear understanding in the premise of the equal status of male and female is essential in highlighting the dubious nature of conclusions drawn from a subsequent account. 'As to woman's subjection,' she fulminates, 'on which both the canon and the civil law delight to dwell, it is important to note that equal dominion is given to woman over every living thing, but not one word is said giving man dominion over woman.....' Her conclusion: 'No lesson of woman's subjection can be fairly drawn from the first chapter of the Old Testament' (WB v 1 p 16).

E.B.D. adds her contribution in Comments on 'Genesis.' This account as well as being critical of literary interpretation, points out practical and historical problems which contribute to misunderstanding:

The most important thing for a woman to note, in reading Genesis, is that that portion which is now divided into "the first three chapters" (there was no such division until about five centuries ago), contains two entirely separate, and very contradictory, stories of creation, written by two different, but equally anonymous, authors. No Christian theologian of to-day, with any pretensions to scholarship, claims that Genesis was written by Moses. As was long ago pointed out, the Bible itself declares that all the books the Jews originally possessed were burned in the destruction of Jerusalem, about 588 B.C.,.....When it is remembered that the Jewish books were written on rolls of leather, without much attention to vowel points and with no division into verses or chapters, by uncritical copyists, who altered passages greatly, and did not always even pretend to understand what they were copying, then the reader of Genesis begins to put herself in position to understand how it can be contradictory. Great as were the liberties which the Jews took with Genesis, those of the English translators, however, greatly surpassed them. (WB v 1 ps 16,17).

E.B.D.'s contribution illustrates the differences in strategy and style between *The Woman's Bible* and *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Eddy's - 'Inspired writers interpret the Word spiritually, while the ordinary historian interprets it literally....' (S&H p 537) - is typified by the voice of the reasoned historian, as she dismantles patriarchal sacred texts; but again, this reinforces that coalescence which emerges through each perspective. Important historical and philosophical detail is introduced in the above passage, which, through critical analysis of the book of 'Genesis' reveals not only a literary ambivalence, but works to throw doubt on its authorial authenticity. This critical route allows seeds of suspicion to germinate as the

writer concludes: 'Now it is manifest that both of these stories cannot be true; intelligent women, who feel bound to give the preference to either, may decide according to their own judgement of which is more worthy of an intelligent woman's acceptance.....' There is certainly a notable lack of that revelatory, inspirational style, as she resorts to personal judgement: 'My own opinion is that the second story was manipulated by some Jew, in an endeavour to give "heavenly authority" for requiring a woman to obey the man she married' (WB v 1 p 18). My opinion is that this rhetoric jars rather with the intellectual theological and scholarly argument, detracting somewhat from the more convincing nature of her earlier exposition.

What I would suggest is particularly intriguing about the arguments of *The Woman's Bible*, is the multifarious nature of their literary trajectory. The comments of L.D.B. introduce another stratum in the dismantling procedure, allowing the reader to become conscious of the intricate, interwoven nature of their critical approach to this first book of *The Bible*. The different threads of the events and circumstances of the accounts of creation are woven into a linguistic tapestry which exhibits a totally different design from that time-honoured patriarchal picture. L.D.B.'s very visual argument is profound in its simplicity, yet its conclusion has far-reaching implications:

In the detailed description of creation we find a gradually ascending series. Creeping things, "great sea monster," (chap. I, v.21, literal translation). "Every bird of wing," cattle and living things of the earth, the fish of the sea and the "birds of the heavens," then man, and last and crowning glory of the whole, woman. It cannot be maintained that woman was inferior to man even if, as asserted in chapter ii, she was created after him without at once admitting that man is inferior to the creeping things, because created after them. (WB v 1 p19).

The simple logic of the foregoing argument, I would suggest, is especially persuasive; it succeeds, where allegory and metaphor might struggle, in representing an ascending hierarchical system which credits the sovereignty

of the feminine. The clarity and lucidity of the arguments in *The Woman's Bible* work on a number of levels to dispute any suggestion of female inferiority. The power of this text emerges through the passionately held beliefs of its authors as they deconstruct doctrine detrimental to the female sex.

Stanton and Eddy do agree on the allegorical nature of the 'creation' account, so long used as a means of identifying a secondary status for women:

As the account of the creation in the first chapter is in harmony with science, common sense, and the experience of mankind in natural laws, the inquiry naturally arises, why should there be two contradictory accounts in the same book, of the same event? It is fair to infer that the second version, which is found in some form in the different religions of all nations, is a mere allegory, symbolizing some mysterious conception of a highly imaginative editor. (WB v 1 p20).

'There is something sublime' Stanton writes, 'in bringing order out of chaos; light out of darkness; giving each planet its place in the solar system; oceans and lands their limits....' - and her syntactical strategy in this passage, I suggest, works to reinforce this ideal. Use of the word 'harmony' in relation to the first account of creation, and the linking of this creative order with science, common sense and natural law have the effect of stabilising, arranging logically, disordered and disruptive propositions. Juxtapose the word 'harmony' with the word 'contradictory', however, and a sense of disruption is immediately introduced. Why would a Creator whose work was complete in terms of the universe, solar system and the creation of mankind in His image, need to resort to what she refers to as a 'petty surgical operation to find material for the mother of the race'? As it accords with neither science, natural law nor common sense, it must, she argues, be an allegorical representation: 'It is on this allegory that all the enemies of women rest their battering rams, to prove her inferiority.' Mirroring the logic of L.D.B's argument in pointing to the fact man was not 'first' in the order of creation, Stanton introduces an

enigmatic tone: 'Accepting the view that man was prior in the creation, some Scriptural writers say that as the woman was of the man, therefore, her position should be one of subjection. Grant it, then as the historical fact is reversed in our day, and the man is now of the woman, shall his place be one of subjection?' (WB v 1 p20).

Literature which argued a moral or religious doctrine, expounding its theme by allegory and example, became known in this period as 'propagandist literature'. Writing women made an immense contribution through persuasive rhetoric towards this form of literature. Abrams suggests that this species of didactic literature was 'written to move the reader to assume a specific attitude toward, or to take direct action on, a pressing social, political, or religious issue of the time at which the work is written.'⁴⁷⁷ Close critical analysis of Stanton's epic work (and I don't think 'epic' is too strong a word to describe this text, embodying as it does the conception of a nation's religious history) reveals a language and style intent on provoking 'direct action.' Difficult issues and technical terms are effectively transposed through the innovative use of linguistic strategies: epithets with previously designated connotations are renegotiated. Sensitive analysis of the written word combined with the challenging of historically defined gender parameters, results in textual evidence which reveals palpable discrepancies in exegesis. Chapter V concludes: 'But that the Scriptures, rightly interpreted, do not teach the equality of the sexes, I must be permitted to doubt. We who love the Old and New Testaments take "Truth for authority, and not authority for truth"' (WB v 1 p142) P.A.H.

'Truth for authority, and not authority for truth.....'

It is no wonder that woman's true relation to man and just position in the social fabric has remained unknown.....Their religious nature is warped and twisted through generations of denominational conservatism;.....So long as they mistake superstition for religious revelation, they will be content with the position and opportunities

⁴⁷⁷ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 45.

assigned them by scholastic theology (WB v 1 p143).

'The Bible', this polemic argues, 'from the beginning to end teaches the equality of man and woman, their relation as the two halves of the unit, but also their distinctiveness in office. One cannot take the place of the other because of the fundamental nature of each. The work of each half in its own place is necessary to the perfect whole.' The writer suggests further that 'unintentionally women have been and will continue to be bigoted until they allow a higher ideal to penetrate their minds; until they see with the eye of reason and logic, as well as with the sentiment which has so long kept them the dependent class.....' The argument is clear: 'woman's sense of duty and religious sentiment have been operative according to a false ideal.....' (WB v 1 p 144).

Working then to replace this 'false ideal' of 'authority for truth' with that higher one of 'truth for authority', *The Woman's Bible* expands: 'Like the tables of stone the Bible is written on both sides.....' This is an important idea, and not unlike Johnsen's argument when identifying the spiritual perspectives of Eddy: 'intimations of a common thirst for light on the other side of reason.....'⁴⁷⁸ This portrayal links well with a suggestion made earlier with regard to Hannah More's essay 'The Bible'. More's apparent linking of the patriarchal perspective of the Old Testament with the matriarchal milieu of the New and her identification of *The Bible* as 'the sum and substance of all Truth', allows credence to a suggestion that the sacred text be viewed as a literary signifier of sexual equality. *The Woman's Bible* builds on this suggestion, attempting to recover 'an interior spirit or meaning', from the 'letter which is its exterior', and this is explained in the following terms: 'The exterior or male half is outermost, the interior or female half is covered by the outer. One is seen, the other has to be discerned.....' (WB v 1p 144). The text goes on to suggest: 'The man has more prominence than the woman in the Bible because the masculine characters in their succession represent man as a whole - generic man.' A suggestion, however, that: 'The book of Genesis is the substance of the whole Bible, its meaning is the key to the meaning of the

⁴⁷⁸ T. Johnsen, 'Understanding Mary Baker Eddy', p. 18.

whole....' needs closer investigation: 'The book of 'Genesis' says *The Woman's Bible* 'is the skeleton around which the rest is builded.' It concludes that: 'If the remainder of the Old Testament were destroyed its substance could be reconstructed from Genesis. As the bony structure of the physical body is the framework which is filled in and rounded to symmetrical proportions by the muscular tissue, so Genesis is the framework which is symmetrically rounded and filled by the other books which supply the necessary detail involved in basic principles'(WB v 1 p 144).

Using metaphoric symbolism, this passage seems to suggest that for the purpose of identifying 'truth for authority' over 'authority for truth', the 'beginning' argument needs clarification and confirmation. Identifying *The Bible* as a textual representative of the male and female of God's creating builds upon the 'separate sphere' ideology, arguing the necessity of the two halves of the whole, each fulfilling its unique purpose. It symbolically equates the *text* to 'the exterior or male half', the half which is visible, but which is effectively hiding within its *pages* an interior female half, something which has to be discerned. Identifying the 'harmonious relativity' of the two halves of the whole which make up 'man', it works to effectively confirm the validity of the feminine aspect in the *understanding* and *explaining* of the text or outerpart. The book of Job 38:36 locates wisdom: 'Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts?' - and confirmation can be found in Proverbs 4:10: 'Get wisdom, get understanding.....Forsake **her** not, and **she** shall preserve thee; love **her**, and **she** shall keep thee...Exalt **her**, and **she** shall promote thee..... Hear, O my son.....' This gendered referencing promotes the qualities of wisdom and understanding in feminine terms, and the masculine is instructed to pay careful attention. U.N.G. corroborates, suggesting:

The first chapter of Genesis is not the record of the creation of the world. It is a symbolical description of the composite nature of man, that being which is male and female in one. The personal pronoun "He" belongs to his exterior nature; and the characters which illustrate this nature and the order of its development are men. The pronoun "She" belongs to the interior nature, and all

characters-fewer in number-which illustrate it, are women. "Male and female created he them" (WB v 1 p 144).

F.E.B. argued: 'And now that we are coming to understand the Bible better than to worship it as an idol, it will gradually be lifted from the shadows and the superstitions of an age when, as a fetich, [sic] it was exalted above reason, and placed where a spiritually enlightened people can see it in its true light' and, she continued, 'in view of the rapid steps which we are taking in these latter years, we can almost feel the breath of the new cycle fan our cheeks as we watch the deepening hues of the breaking dawn.' There is a palpable anticipation, excitement even as this writer goes on to portray woman 'on a perfect equality in the Godhead.' The 'breaking dawn' suggests a new beginning, a 'genesis' through which 'a spiritually enlightened people can see it [the book] in its true light.' This religious requisition of old dogma and superstition, thus allowed the 'stately Hebrew Kabbalah, hoary with antiquity', to sanction this insight: 'For better authority than that one can hardly ask' (WB v 11 p 112).

Had dissenting religious attitudes paved the way for these radical reformers, I questioned at the beginning of this chapter, was the time right for the publication of two textual challenges to historical theological interpretation? The *Woman's Bible* identifies: 'The close of this century has long been pointed to by scholars, by writers and by Prophets, within the Church and out of it, as the close of the old dispensation and the opening of the new one.....' (WB v 11, p 112), and the arguments of these two texts lead me to suggest they have made an effective, and timely, contribution to the opening of this new and more spiritually enlightened dispensation.

Re-Veilings

The Woman's Bible has pointed to: 'The book of Genesis [as] the substance of the whole Bible.....', its meaning the key to the whole, and the foregoing arguments have promoted compelling evidence that 'the beginning' creation account does accord equal status to woman. The thesis has hinted that

through More's treatment of the New Testament, it might be viewed as a literary signifier for the feminine, and the chapter will now examine how the arguments of Stanton and Eddy support this theory.

'Does the New Testament bring promises of new dignity and of larger liberties for woman?' asks Stanton (WB v 11 p 113). Certainly it offered, through the life of Christ Jesus, a route through which the native qualities of the female could be appreciated; his tenderness, humility and ministrations to those in need were all representative of the maternal nature. His radical questioning of religious dogma brought him into dispute with those who claimed the name without the nature of pure and undefiled religion. An anonymous writer in *The Woman's Bible* notes: 'Jesus was the great leading Radical of his age. Everything that he was and said and did alienated and angered the Conservatives, those that represented and stood for the established order of what they believed to be the fixed and final revelation of God' (WB v 11 p 114). This passage could also have referred to Stanton; she alienated and angered the Conservatives, those men who 'represented and stood for the established order', and her challenging of the 'fixed and final revelation of God' led to accusations that her ideas were the work of Satan.

The Book of 'Revelation' makes a considerable contribution to an understanding of the power and authority of the female in the scheme of things. Feminine imagery is used to confirm woman's spiritual powers, *The Woman's Bible* suggests: 'It is a purely esoteric work, largely referring to woman, her intuition, her spiritual powers, and all she represents. Even the name of its putative author, John, is identical in meaning with "dove," the emblem of the Holy Ghost, the female principle of the Divinity'. It points to the proper title of this book as 'Re-veilings' and suggests: 'It is not then strange that such a profoundly mystic book as Re-Veilings should be so little understood by the Christian Church as to have been many times rejected from the sacred canon' (WB v 11 p 176).

'And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet'

Clothed with the sun, woman here represents the Divinity of the feminine, its spirituality as opposed to the materiality of the masculine; for in Egypt the sun, as giver of life, was regarded as feminine, while the moon, shining by reflected light, was looked upon as masculine. With her feet upon the moon, woman, corresponding to and representing the soul, portrays the ultimate triumph of spiritual things over material things, - over the body, which man, or the male principle, corresponds to and represents.

"There was war in heaven." The wonderful progress and freedom of woman, as woman, within the last half century, despite the false interpretation of the Bible by the Church and by masculine power, is the result of this great battle; and all attempts to destroy her will be futile. Her day and hour have arrived; the dragon of physical power over her, the supremacy of material things in the world, as depicted by the male principle, are yielding to the spiritual, represented by woman. The eagle, true bird of the sun and emblem of our own great country, gives his wings to her aid; and the whole earth comes to help her against her destroyer. And thus must Re-Veilings be left with much truth untouched, yet with the hope that what has been written will somewhat help to a comprehension of this greatly misunderstood yet profoundly "sacred" and "secret" book, whose true reading is of such vast importance to the human race. M.J.G. (WB v 11 p183).

These are complex issues and this descriptive passage provides an original perspective on matters which were of such relevance to women. Rational argument and sympathetic symbolism identify her spiritual supremacy - 'Her day and hour have arrived' suggests this writer, linking well with Eddy's pronouncement - 'This is woman's hour'. Both writers believed that the promotion of virtuous womanhood through religious metaphor and confirmed

by sacred text would lead to a recognition of the 'divinity of the feminine.' Woman, this text argues, would be responsible for the ultimate triumph of the spiritual over the material. Mistaken Biblical interpretation had promoted masculine power at the expense of woman, and the 're-veiling' of this book allowed the divinity of the feminine to be identified and acknowledged. This effective and authoritative argument identifies the 'war in heaven' as prophetic of woman's liberation, pointing to the futility of attempts to destroy her.

The Woman's Bible promotes an ideal that, far from the female sex being subordinate to the male, 'true reading' of this 'greatly misunderstood yet profoundly "sacred" and "secret"' text reveals the opposite, and whilst this was undoubtedly a controversial proposition, the writers' close textual analysis of St. John's vision or prophetic transcript supports this perspective. 'Here,' Stanton suggests: 'is a little well intended respect for woman as representing the Church. In this vision she appears clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, which denotes her superiority, says the commentator, to her reflected feeble light of the Mosaic dispensation' (WB v 11 p 183).

Eddy and the Apocalypse

Eddy wrote a manuscript of seven chapters which dealt with a number of key doctrinal issues relative to her religious movement. Chapter V was entitled 'The Interpretation of Revelation': and it was suggested that this chapter was written in response to contentions that Eddy 'viewed herself literally as the Woman of the Apocalypse...' ⁴⁷⁹

'The Apocalypse' she suggests, 'like all holy vision, when left to mortals' interpretation of application to identify its meaning, is susceptible of abuse owing to one's ignorance of another's mood and mode of thinking. I am not capable of applying St. John's far-reaching thoughts only as type and shadow', and marking the ephemeral nature of St. John's vision, she goes

⁴⁷⁹ See: *In My True Light and Life - Mary Baker Eddy Collections* (The Writings of Mary Baker Eddy and The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity, 2002), p. 627.

on, 'I would as soon undertake to catch a sunbeam in my hand..... I have but a glimpse of the full meaning of his sublime vision....' This glimpse nevertheless, witnessed through an intuitive state or divine inspiration, allows for explanations which contribute towards a fresh and innovative interpretation of this text. Runge points to: 'The classic line of literary theory [which] has hardly acknowledged the existence of two sexes, let alone the possibility that women might read and interpret.....in some way of their own.'⁴⁸⁰ Eddy's apocalyptic argument, whilst acknowledging 'the existence of two sexes,' identifies a hierarchical system dependent, not on gender, but on mental states. She points to a system which extols and honours matriarchal virtues as the highest, yet these characteristics, she is clear, are not the sole prerogative of either sex: 'Love is impartial and universal in its adaptation and bestowals' (S&H p 13).

Her interpretation of 'Revelation' makes plain that this 'vision' does *not* refer to her as an individual, or even woman collectively: 'What St. John saw in prophetic vision and depicted as "a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet" prefigured no specialty [sic] or individuality.' She explains: 'His vision foretold a type and this type applied to man as well as to woman.' It was this explanation which ultimately allowed her to identify the superiority of the feminine. The 'type' she refers to, is the quality or character of 'purity', it was this pure state, of which the highest representation of motherhood, the virgin mother, was the exemplar: 'The character or type seen in his vision' she suggests, *illustrated* purity.' (my emphasis) The reader is witnessing, through Eddy's argument, a weakening of rigid religious belief systems through innovative spiritual ideals, which work to effectively shift and re-shape the boundaries of prohibitive religious gender identification. 'I say what I mean' she writes, 'so far as I can express my meaning, and I am careful to say what I understand and perceive spiritually.'⁴⁸¹ A key issue in Eddy's argument, is her identification of a 'higher nature' rather than a 'higher sex', and this represents the great point of departure between her argument and Stanton's. Just as the quality of 'sensibility', so associated with the feminine, has been identified as the highest mental condition, so the state of 'purity' has

⁴⁸⁰ L.L.Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism*, p. 165.

⁴⁸¹ Exhibit No A10407.MBEL

been promoted by Eddy as the highest representation of the Deity: this line of argument does confirm a hierarchy, but it is a hierarchy of mental qualities, available to be claimed by either sex.

'The Woman in the Apocalypse' Eddy writes, 'symbolizes generic man, the spiritual idea of God; she illustrates the coincidence of God and man as the divine Principle and divine idea. The Revelator symbolizes Spirit by the sun. The spiritual idea is clad with the radiance of spiritual Truth, and matter is put under her feet.' Effectively lifting the veil of obscurity, or re-veiling the revelation, Eddy points out: 'As Elias presented the idea of the fatherhood of God, which Jesus afterwards manifested, so the Revelator completed this figure with woman, typifying the spiritual idea of God's motherhood. The moon is under her feet' (S&H p 562). The argument, it could be said, has come full circle, as the man of 'Genesis' and the woman of 'Revelation' are both identified in generic terms.

An article written by Eddy and published in the *Boston Herald* articulates conclusively her redefining of historical gender divisions: 'Look high enough, and you see the heart of humanity warming and winning. Look long enough, and you see male and female one - sex or gender eliminated; you see the designation *man* meaning woman as well, and you see the whole universe included in one infinite Mind and reflected in the intelligent compound idea, image or likeness, called man, showing forth the infinite divine Principle, Love, called God - man wedded to the Lamb, pledged to innocence, purity, perfection.'⁴⁸²

CONCLUSION:

'Woman was not made in the image of God.' Gratian.⁴⁸³

'Come, come, my conservative friend, wipe the dew off your spectacles, and see that the world is moving. Whatever your views may be as to the importance of the proposed work, your political and social degradation are but an outgrowth of your status in the Bible... E.C.Stanton⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² *Prose Works* 'The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany', pp. 268-269.

⁴⁸³ *Women in the Worlds Religions*, p. 57.

⁴⁸⁴ *The Woman's Bible*, p. 10.

This chapter has paid close attention to the disputation and literary deconstruction of scriptural argument which, the authors suggest, has been responsible for the subjugated status of the female. It has witnessed a marked change of literary style, the beginnings of which were identified in More's *Practical Piety*. A close study of their texts has revealed that ultimately each woman identified Biblical interpretation as probably the chief obstacle to recognition of the equal status of women. The two texts examined in this chapter were, I believe, an inevitable consequence of those earlier ascending arguments.

The chapter has examined the distinctive critical means by which Stanton and Eddy challenged accepted doctrinal beliefs. It has paid close attention to analytical religious discourse which called into question the credibility of time-honoured religious interpretation. Both women concluded that the first account of creation in which God created man, *male* man and *female* man, in His image, was the authentic one, each identifying the second account as being merely allegorical. The chapter has pointed out how these authors effectively stepped into the masculine practice of theological criticism, constructing an idiolect through which to identify female spirituality. The precedent for linguistic conversion of transcendental knowledge was set by the Romantic poets, and the chapter has drawn attention to linguistic strategies which drew upon argument *and* innovative poetic symbolism. It has suggested that the movement of Transcendentalism acted in a somewhat similar fashion to that earlier cult of sensibility, its opposition to rigid religious rationalism creating a space from which orthodoxy could be challenged.

Whilst pointing out similarities in their arguments, the chapter has identified key divergencies, and through close study of their argument, it becomes evident that their ultimate goals were indeed quite different: as Stanton pursued reform *outside* the church, Eddy's reforming impulse was directed towards religious reform. Her motives, she said, had always been to introduce a system 'that should include all moral and religious reform.'⁴⁸⁵ Identifying the distinctive nature of each text and its author, I would suggest,

⁴⁸⁵ *Prose Works*, 'Retrospection and Introspection', p. 30.

adds further credibility to simultaneous conclusions.

The chapter has suggested that whilst 'religion' was the umbrella or aegis under which grouped those believers in a supreme controlling power, 'spirituality' was the active agency which made it proactive and practical. This was a power beyond belief, and it was accessible to those minds which were receptive to divine inspiration. This pervading influence, with its innate power for moral and religious reform, has been identified as a feminine consciousness by each writer in this thesis. Stanton and Eddy's texts have simply taken the argument to its ultimate conclusion in their search for Scriptural authority for women's equality. Reason and revelation merged in their quest for 'Truth for authority', and their scriptural exegesis came to light through a unique idiolect not provided for by earlier examples.

Despite the 'rapid steps' towards the 'new cycle' and the 'breaking dawn' referred to in *The Woman's Bible*, these women were pioneers, and as Eddy suggested: 'It is the task of the sturdy pioneer to hew the tall oak and to cut the rough granite.....A book introduces new thoughts', she wrote, 'but it cannot make them speedily understood.....Future ages must declare what the pioneer has accomplished' (S & H p vii). These women undoubtedly wrote ahead of their time; even in this 'future age' some of their revolutionary religious perspectives might be deemed controversial, though it needs to be acknowledged, not as controversial as when the author of this thesis started her research. The recent publication, by the Catholic Church, of a new teaching document *The Gift of Scripture* is a clear indication of the doctrinal shift taking place: 'Modern insights about the nature of language' this text suggests, 'have explored and clarified the potential of the written word to give rise to new meanings and insights.....' Whilst identifying 'the dignity and equality of men and women made in the image of God', (in accordance with Genesis 1) the subsequent religious stories it suggests 'could not simply be described as historical writing.' It goes on to argue that: 'Though they may contain some historical traces, the primary purpose was to provide religious teaching.....' concluding that 'in order to understand the word of God in

Scripture we should seek to know the intention of the human author.’⁴⁸⁶ The locating of that intention has been an integral part of this thesis.

A further key aspect of this chapter has been the identification, by these women, of a ‘feminine element in the Godhead’, their representation of God as Mother as well as Father usefully contributes towards answering that question posed by Irigaray: ‘This God, are we capable of imagining it as a woman?’ Both writers identify the inevitable existence of this ‘feminine element’, inevitable that is, if He created male and female in **His** image; and if their identification of woman as equal to man resulted from their reading of ‘Genesis’ 1, their revelatory re-veilings of the book of ‘Revelation’ uncovered a perspective which was to bequeath an ‘elect’ status on the feminine. Language which celebrates the visionary heavenly city was represented through a vernacular of particular relevance to woman; pointing to her implicit connection with spiritual power, it marked her as a ‘chosen vessel’ and it was this identification that Stanton and Eddy proposed should finally result in some ‘well intended respect for woman as representing the Church’ (WB v 11, p 183).

⁴⁸⁶ *The Gift of Scripture* (Published by The Catholic Truth Society, 2005) pp 19 to 25. See *The Times* of October 5, 2005, for a full review of this document.

THESIS CONCLUSION

'Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears! how has thy clear stream been muddled by the dabblers', M. Wollstonecraft. ⁴⁸⁷

The aim of this thesis has been to understand how four distinctly different women attempted to publicly shift ingrained prejudices with regard to the spiritual status of woman, through identification of what they believed to be, her divinely ordained place in society. It has traced their arguments as they drew on multiple literary genres to locate and promote the worth of women. It would be naive to suggest that they all fit neatly into some pre-planned pattern, they do not. What has emerged, however, throughout my research, has been an image of four intellectual women whose humanitarian spirit led them to challenge political and religious ideologies which they believed denied liberty to certain sections of society. Their conclusions as to the source of these disparities have been quite remarkable, and their valiant attempts at redress most courageous.

A study of the life and writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Baker Eddy has revealed the means through which they attempted to re-shape political, cultural and ultimately religious history for the purpose of identifying the innate spirituality of women. The thesis has traced their literary attempts to rectify negative notions of femininity and shift parameters, so restrictive to the influence of women in the public world, and affairs of society. Critical analysis of their writing has allowed, not only identification of the cultural and political interrelations between Britain and America, but the philosophical legacy passed from one generation of female reformers to the next.

Examination of the formative years of these authors has allowed connections to be made in their familial and religious experiences; there is a strong case to suggest that patriarchal religious influences initiated their unique style of dissenting Protestantism. Conforming middle class principles were

⁴⁸⁷ *Vindication*, p. 232.

challenged as they were confronted with the social and political implications of inequities between the rich and poor, black and white, male and female. Emerging non-conformist attitudes can be witnessed in their earliest writing as they challenged a patriarchal religious order which, they believed, allowed injustice to flourish.

These women used literature as a reforming tool, and the thesis has identified the cult of sensibility as a key element in raising public awareness of the benefits female Christian reformers could bring to reforming male manners, societal inhumanity, and injustice. This cult created a literary space, a female space, which effectively mirrored the 'private sphere' values of women. Through panegyric discourse, female instincts and characteristics were eulogised in an attempt to elevate womanhood and distance it from negative and derogatory stereotyping.

The didactic writing of their early years, whether in the form of poetry, short story, political tract, or indeed any of the different genres they employed to exert influence, had a powerful proselytising effect. Fusing sensibility with evangelism they instigated a humanitarian reforming zeal which undoubtedly contributed towards the abolition of the slave trade, Barbauld suggesting: 'nothing...for centuries past, has done the nation so much honour.'⁴⁸⁸ American sensibilities were appealed to through arguments which linked private affection with public virtue, and for the purpose of establishing some level of effectiveness, a remark from Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, is useful. Barton said that she "looked upon Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy as the one person, regardless of sex, living to-day, who has done the greatest good for her fellow-creatures."⁴⁸⁹

Building upon success in their abolition campaign, the authors turned their attention to redressing damaging notions of womanhood, and chapter two witnessed a merging of the twin campaigns: abolition and emancipation.

⁴⁸⁸ A.L.Barbauld, *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, p. 285.

⁴⁸⁹ Viola Rodgers, "Christian Science Most Potent Factor in Religious Life, Says Clara Barton." *New York American*, Jan 6, 1908, reprinted in *The Christian Science Journal*, February, 1908, p. 696.

Political arguments targeted the perpetrators of barbaric codes and practices; Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* drawing attention to what she viewed as the spiritual poverty at the heart of the public sphere, responsible for corruption and inhumanity. The thesis has identified religious argument as running like fine threads through all their writings, whether in their demand for the freedom of black slaves, better conditions for the poor, or emancipation for women; this religious emphasis has been maintained throughout.

The cult of sensibility proved to be pivotal in the argument for female equality. The writers' identification of the 'spiritual' nature at the heart of this cult, so closely associated with the feminine, allowed them to propagate an image of saintly sisterhood and a veneration of womanhood. Appropriating the fine intuitive qualities of this cult to the feminine allowed them to effectively promote and authorise women, underpinning their reformative roles with spiritual authority. Through a language of sympathy and feeling, they linked private affections and the home with sensibility and spirituality. Challenging those male writers who promoted an image of woman in 'Eve' terms - as subversive, subtle temptress - they identified rather the qualities of purity, virtue, meekness and love as epitomised by the Holy Mother. Through their arguments, motherhood and that private sphere of the home became the powerbase from which to effect the reform of masculine manners and morals in the public space. The authors nevertheless recognised the need for women to improve their minds, and through educational tracts and texts emphasised the importance of an 'intelligent' intuitivism.

Their attempts at reform, the thesis has pointed out, were continually hampered through a 'glass-ceiling' of religious orthodoxy which accorded an inferior and secondary status to the female sex. Thus, whilst their abolition and emancipation efforts offered them some semblance of authority and respect in certain quarters, masculine officialdom challenged their burgeoning nonconformist arguments. Personal trauma and public opposition have been recognised as key elements in the literary shift witnessed in their later writing. Disappointed with the hypocrisy they observed in the public sphere of politics and religion, their later writings marked the emergence of a Christian

romanticism; language which drew on nature to articulate spiritual truths effectively furthered a feminisation of Protestantism.

Deep personal spiritual conviction was reflected in arguments which ultimately challenged not only scriptural interpretation, but the representation of God in purely patriarchal terms. A 'feeling' heart and 'divine vision' became the criteria through which true spirituality could be recognised, and this identification challenged centuries of patriarchal religious doctrine. The rights to spiritual revelation, their arguments concluded, were not gender-dependent. The qualities of purity and clarity - 'Religion, *pure* source of comfort.....how has thy *clear* stream been muddled by the dabblers....' - and a higher spiritual sense, were those necessary if woman's true relationship to God was to be identified and confirmed through Holy Scripture.

Religious prose and didactic discourse were common genres through which women writers of the period attempted public reform; what distinguished these authors from their peers was their intensive interest in the doctrinal aspect of theology and their ultimate pressing of arguments which were at distinct odds with contemporary theological opinion. Each author pointed to what she believed to be misinterpretation of Scriptural texts which allowed, promoted even, female subservience. This suggestion provoked a diatribe of opposition for the American reformers, and those earlier writers would have been deemed dangerously controversial. Wollstonecraft's arguments were indeed considered provocative, but More's political conservatism, as reflected in her writings, had tended to identify her as a more reactionary than revolutionary figure. The arguments of *Practical Piety*, the thesis has suggested, allow her to be re-identified in 'religious revolutionary' terms.

Stanton's suggestion that 'revolution' was the only route left to female reformers, resulted in *The Woman's Bible*, and this text, along with *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* challenged traditional perceptions of womanhood. The final chapter of the thesis has exposed the critical theoretical routes through which they uncovered Scriptural authority for the pre-eminence of the feminine. Through opposing interpretative strategies,

each author identified God as Mother as well as Father; distinguished between truth and allegory in 'Genesis'; and through 'reason' *and* 'revelation', identified the 'elect' status of woman in St. John's prophetic vision.

Each writer whose works have been examined had an agenda, and the thesis has been careful to identify ambiguities as well as affinities in both their writing styles and arguments. Their life-time achievements were notable and their legacies reflect a common commitment to societal reform: Hannah More and Mary Baker Eddy, who have both been identified as anti-feminist, left tangible evidence of their public influence, More has been described as 'the most influential female philanthropist of her day,'⁴⁹⁰ with the establishment of Sunday Schools for the children of the poor to her credit, whilst Eddy, who became one of the most well known women in the United States, founded a worldwide religious movement. Mary Wollstonecraft, as one of the earliest feminists, became recognised as the founder of the British women's rights movement; her arguments for sexual equality resonating through the centuries. Leader of the American Women's Rights Movement was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and her life-time commitment to reform is legendary.

The thesis has paid close attention to their linguistic contributions to reform, concluding that, in spite of, and possibly because of, their multifarious perspectives and different literary devices, an argument for 'Woman's Right to Revelation' is sustainable, as Eddy puts it: 'This is the period of women, they are to move and to carry all the great moral and Christian reforms....'⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Internet site: www.infed.org/thinkers/more.htm. 14.01.2005

⁴⁹¹ M.B.Eddy to C.E.Choate. Exhibit No L04088.

VENERABLE HEROINES OF AMERICA.

States, Educators, Poets, Reformers Who Have Helped Revolutionize the World and Who Have Lived to See Immense Success—All Now Over 80.

JULIA WARD HOWE, Poet.

ANNE WHITNEY, Sculptor.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY, Reformer.

MARY BAKER GLOVER EDDY, Religious Leader.

MARY A. LIVERMORE, Author.

FANNY J. CROSBY, Hymn Writer.

EDNAH DOW CHENEY, Educator.



MARY A. LIVERMORE
BOSTON, DEC. 19, 1821



MARY BAKER G. EDDY
BOW, N. H. JULY 16, 1821



SUSAN B. ANTHONY
SOUTH ADAMS, MASS
FEB. 15, 1820



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NEW YORK, MAY 27, 1819
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BOSTON
JUNE 27, 1824

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BS7 8HF

Ms Arleen M Ingham
The Beeches
5 Raincliffe Avenue
Scarborough
North Yorkshire
YO12 5BU

2 January 2002

Dear Arleen

Many thanks for your letter of 3 December. I am delighted to hear that you have had a good time researching in Bristol. If ever anyone tells me what happened to the letters from Hannah Moore to Richard Hart-Davis I will try and remember to let you know.

All the best for the rest of your thesis.

Yours sincerely

Adam Hart-Davis

I am now on Radio 4 on Monday mornings at 11am for the rest of January.

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June 19, 1905.

Mrs. Mary D. K. Glover Eddy,

Concord, N. H.

My Dear Mrs. Eddy,-

I find your name on our Suffrage books way back in the olden time and I believe you must be still interested in the subject. I know many of your followers are friends of the cause, so I take the liberty of sending you Vol. IV of the History of Woman Suffrage. If you do not wish it yourself, will you put it in some high school, normal school, or public library?

I remember of hearing you speak in the Chicago World Hall a good many years ago; that is the only time I remember of seeing you.

Very sincerely yours,

Boston, Oct. 30 1875

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pleasure of further interchange
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Very truly yours,

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Mrs. Howe,

Accept my thanks
for your remarkable volume,
entitled "Science and Health,"
which I have read with
profound interest. and, let
me add, the journal has
awakened an earnest desire
to know more of yourself.
Sincerely,
A. Bronson Howe

The sacred truths which you
 announce sustained by facts
 of the Immortal life, give
 to your work the feel of
 inspiration - respect in
 modern phrase: the Christian
 revelation.

In times like ours so full
 in prospect. I feel with
 my ever speaking in
 spirit and for God and
 immortally. And my prayer
 is: hasten the work when

his the spirit with one of
 woman's drawings.

But I have more space
 than this paper allows to
 speak of personal things &
 your joy and services.

May I then enquire if
 you would deign a reply
 from me an importune?

If not, and agreeable to
 you, will you name the
 day when I may expect
 the

Concord January
17 1876

Mrs. Glover,

Accept my thanks for your remarkable volume entitled "Science and Health" which I have read with profound interest, and, let me add, the perusal has awakened an earnest desire to know more of yourself personally.

The sacred truths which you announce sustained by facts of the Immortal Life, give to your work the seal of inspiration - reaffirm, in modern phrase, the Christian revelations.

In times like ours, so sunk in sensualism, I hail with joy any voice speaking an assured word for God and Immortality. And my joy is heightened the more when I find the blessed words are of woman's divinings.

But I need more space than this paper allows to speak discriminatingly of yourself and Science.

May I then enquire if you would deem a visit from me an impertinence? If not, and agreeable to you, will you name the day when I may expect the pleasure of fuller interchange of views on these absorbing themes.

Very truly yours,

A. Bronson Alcott

Mrs. Mary Baker Glover /